

Presencing Place: An enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices.

Joanna E Thomas (2013)

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Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices.

Jo Thomas

PhD Awarded by Oxford Brookes University

This practice based research and accompanying commentary is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of Doctor of Philosophy.

July 2013

Contents

A list of gestures

45 gesture sheets forming the practice based research

A commentary on the enquiry

Please note: some images differ to printed versions of the gesture sheets

Abstract

Presencing Place: An enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices.

This practice based research examines ways of working in local everyday places that enable shifts from the 'non-place' to the re-discovery of the particular in everyday places, amplifying and enhancing ways of knowing and sensing through presencing place. A series of forty-five gestures, expanded art practices, form the enquiry. These gestures have a phenomenological and holistic outlook that highlight the potential of small actions to confirm and enhance the quality of our connections with the world we are part of and through which we can experience a sense of interconnectiveness. Most take place close to my home in Reading, UK. Gestures include: standing in a local water meadow with others to witness dawn *Gesture 19 Dawn Walk 6.30am*; walking through two periods of abrupt climate change 183ma (million years ago) and our current time, *Gesture 28 Intersections of time*; or gilding the shadow of a small weed with gold leaf at solar noon, *Gesture 45 Solar Noon Shadows*.

The commentary introduces the territory of *presencing place* with reference to Otto Scharmers Theory U and a creative approach of *letting come* born out of Heidegger's central concern Being or 'Dasein'. The approaches to practices are then described through methods of tuning into place, the potential for a better place that is embodied in the field of social sculpture and the possibilities of liminal knowing to connect in place. Processes of engaging with others and getting into a position where the world conspires to help you are considered with the work of carefully selected artists. The gestures focus on three areas of enquiry: first, into the physicality of place, secondly, into the non-physicality of place and, thirdly, finding ways of shaping an experience of place with and for others. The gestures become understood as moments of compassionate connection in the poetic action of a small stitch, an act of loving the world. The research concludes by discussing the gestures as a family of strategies and methods that offer ways of presencing place that enhance possibilities of connection in place through expanded art practices. It will be of use to those interested in public facing work and place.

Jo Thomas (July 2013)

presencing place: a research journey

Jo Thomas

presencing place is a research journey into the knowing and shaping of place undertaken as a practice based PhD at the School of Arts, Oxford Brookes.

This series of gestures formed the enquiry.

- Gesture 1 *Soft Boundary*
- Gesture 2 *Landscape Gesture*
- Gesture 3 *Birdwatching*
- Gesture 4 *Frequencies*
- Gesture 5 *The Shape of Day and Night*
- Gesture 6 *Landscape Gesture 2*
- Gesture 7 *Where feels good here?*
- Gesture 8 *Wallstone*
- Gesture 9 *Choirs past and present*
- Gesture 10 *Choir*
- Gesture 11 *Where feels good to be here? Arena*
- Gesture 12 *Where feels good here? Ovada*
- Gesture 13 *Presencing Instruments*
- Gesture 14 *Hereabouts x Project Overview*
- Gesture 15 *Viewfinding*
- Gesture 16 *Platform Building*
- Gesture 17 *Viewfinding 2*
- Gesture 18 *Viewfinding by Car*
- Gesture 19 *Dawn Walk, Sunrise 7.27*
- Gesture 20 *Hereabouts x Sunset Walk*
- Gesture 21 *Afternoon Walk*
- Gesture 22 *Equinox Dawn Walk, Sunrise 7.41*
- Gesture 23 *Interventions Environment Gallery*
- Gesture 24 *Hereabouts Walk, Sunset 5.41*
- Gesture 25 *Hereabouts Walk, Sunset 4.34*
- Gesture 26 *Hereabouts Walk, Sunset 4.39*
- Gesture 27 *As if it really matters*
- Gesture 28 *Intersections of Time*
- Gesture 29 *Material of Thought*
- Gesture 30 *Sieved Earth*
- Gesture 31 *Coal*
- Gesture 32 *Whitley Art Trail Overview*
- Gesture 33 *Litton Road*
- Gesture 34 *Axbridge Road*
- Gesture 35 *The Whitley Cup*
- Gesture 36 *Dawlish Road*
- Gesture 37 *Restoration Centre*
- Gesture 38 *Apple prints*
- Gesture 39 *Conversations with an Apple Tree*
- Gesture 40 *Solar Noon Shadows*
- Gesture 41 *Presencing Place Research Space*
- Gesture 42 *Presencing Walk 1*
- Gesture 43 *Presencing Walk 2*
- Gesture 44 *Winter Solstice 12.12.12*
- Gesture 45 *Equinoctial Action*

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture I Soft Boundary



Overview	Placing a cushion on a wall beneath a Norway Maple Tree.		
Intention	To offer a comfortable place to rest in the town centre and watch the world go by.		
<p>Description</p> <p>From 2007 - 2010 I watched a Norway Maple that grew in the graveyard opposite my studio window and the life in and around it. There were regulars that sat on the wall and under the tree. One summer's day rain fell, straight down, leaving a dry circular area beneath its canopy. People paused in the dry.</p> <p>The area is one of the few green areas you can pause in the town at no cost. Having watched for a long time I finally sat on the wall. It was winter, the wall was very hard and cold even in the bit of sunshine that was there.</p> <p>This action was the last in a series of works in which I had watched carefully, at a distance, what might be happening in place. From here on I began to become part of the complexity of place, self amongst others.</p> <p>This is a graveyard with trees which is surrounded by activity of the town. It is a place of meeting, waiting, small pauses. A place apart from the business of the town centre.</p>	Place	St Mary's Graveyard, Town Centre, Reading.	
	When	November 2008.	
	Who	Passers-by.	
	Where	Where people often sit, wait, meet, under at tree, seen from my old studio window.	
Action	Intervention, offering, noticing, contemplating.		Presencing <i>being in place</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 2 Landscape Gesture



Overview	A walk from Whitehorse Hill to Wayland’s Smithy wearing soles made of copper (closest to the ground) and lead (closest to skin) tied to feet with cloth bandages.		
Intention	To collect a raw presence of place, an earth energy.		
Description	Place	The Ridgeway, Nr Uffington, Oxfordshire. From the Whitehorse of Uffington and Wayland's Smithy. Approximately one mile walk.	
	When	Sunday morning, 13th September 2009. Two hours approx.	
	Who	Ann Rapstoff and Darla Oglesby taking photographs, passers -by included: walkers, cyclists, partygoers, rave organisers, police.	
	Where	A prehistoric path made of chalk, a deep path on the ridge. It is dry, about a mile above the spring line.	
Action	Walking, conversations, tying and retying bandages, thinking about the earth, feeling the hardness of the surface through the soles of my feet, imagining all the people who have walked here.		Presencing <i>being in place</i>

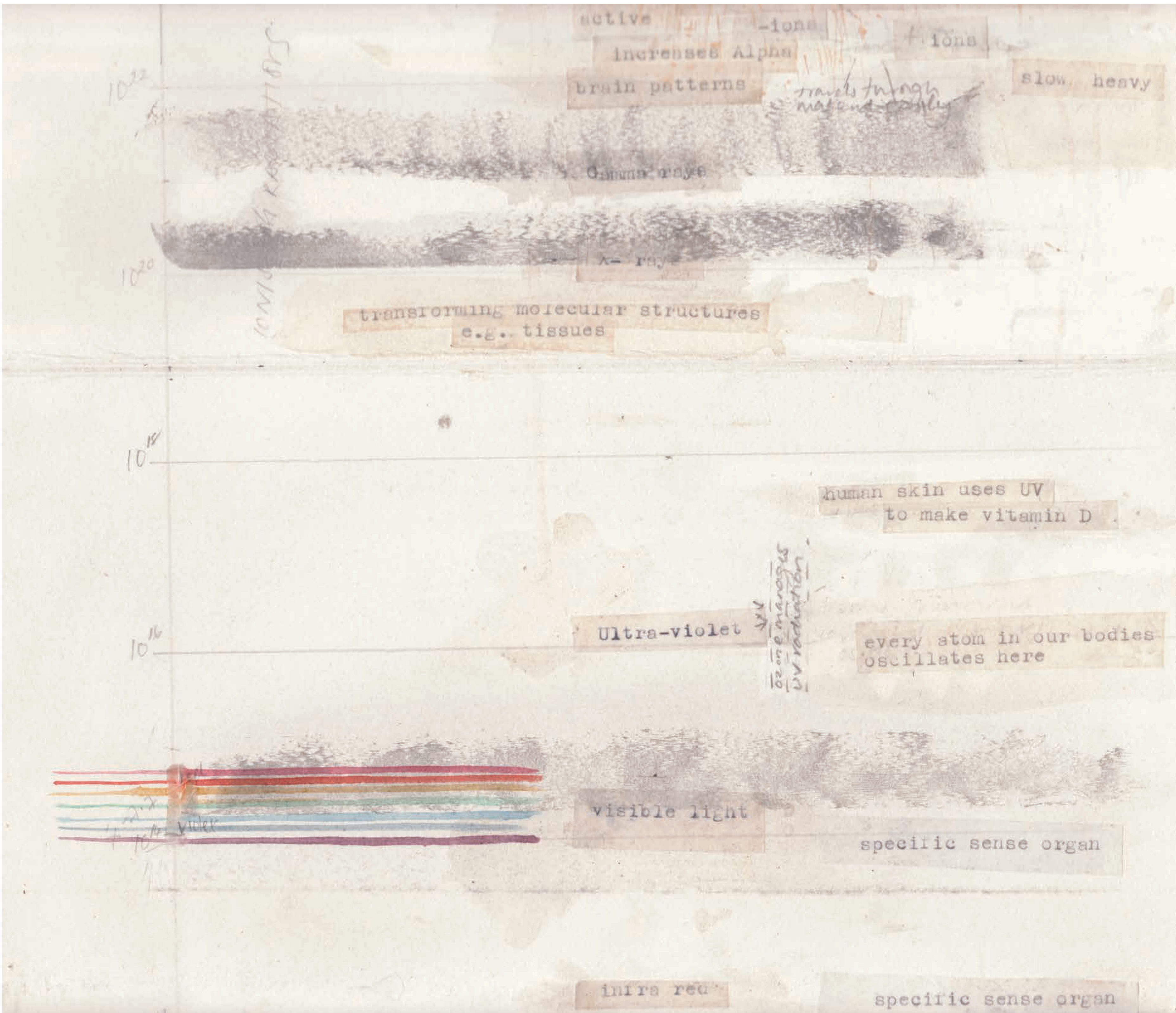
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Gesture 3 Birdwatching



Overview	Sitting on benches drawing birds on town centre benches; looking north, south, east and west.		
Intention	To notice the place of pigeons in the town centre.		
Description <p>I sat on benches that faced north, south, east and west initially bird spotting, this became pigeon spotting. Noticing their habitation of a town centre, the vacant upper floors, on the windowssills behind broken panes of glass.</p> <p>If people approached, I would invite them to join in the bird watching. I had a box with a bird guide, binoculars and a long scroll of paper. As I drew the drawings lay in front of me so people could see without having to approach closely.</p> <p>In each direction I looked in, I could see the birds were successful. I became aware of the human population, those that also inhabit the town and people watch in the day. A young man and his carer introduced me to albino pigeons. At night it is empty of people.</p> <p>Through birdwatching I was able to chat to people, to practise ways of connecting with people in place and begin to listen to their stories.</p>	Place	Bracknell Town Centre.	
	When	September 2010.	
	Who	Passers-by and resting on benches.	
	Where	Benches in shopping centre, rundown, waiting for so long to be renovated.	
Action	Drawing, watching, chatting, listening, sitting.		Presencing <i>being in place, connecting</i>

Gesture 4 Frequencies



Overview	A drawing gathering frequencies.		
Intention	To visualise some of the range and qualities of energy that exist in place only some of which we have the capacities to perceive.		
<p>Description</p> <p>A drawing collecting information on frequencies from a range of sources, layered together. Through this drawing I have reflected on what we consciously perceive, what we may perceive but not know that we perceive and all that might be happening around us that we do not directly experience. What we may know conceptually but may not be able to grasp experientially. What may affect us that we are not aware of.</p> <p>Considering perceptive capacities as evolving and not fixed. Forms of sensing are species or life form specific and evolve. How full of energy everything is. What might we learn to perceive? How can we become more sensitive, expand our capacities? From shaping our own capacities through brain waves and mindfulness to dowsing to experiencing beyond our current possibilities to sense.</p> <p>So much to sense.</p>	Place	Anywhere on earth.	
	When	Ongoing.	
	Who	People.	
	Where	Here.	
Action	Imagining and wonder.	Presencing	connecting

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 5 *The Shape of Day and Night*



Overview	Drawing the shape of night and day.		
Intention	Reflect on different types of time and light in place.		
<p>Description</p> <p>Using sunrise and sunset data for Reading, UK I plotted the flow of sunrise and sunset times over a year. Each square of the graph paper represents an hour. A fairly strong line delineated night from day. Full moons were indicated bringing the lunar monthly cycles into the calendar year.</p> <p>The marks reveal an elegant curve of expanding days and then growing nights that are witnessed from a particular place. This curve is disrupted by the clocks going back and forwards that emphasises the contrast between two different types of time. Our human working time and the underlying universal movement of things.</p> <p>Through the process of drawing this I become more aware of the enormity and wonder of the patterns we exist within. It also reassures me when I am tempted to sleep more in winter and less in the Summer.</p>	Place	Reading, UK.	
	When	30th May 2010 to 30th May 2011.	
	Who	Anyone.	
	Where	Reading.	
Action	Locating in place, understanding, illuminating.		Presencing <i>connecting</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 6 Landscape Gesture 2



Overview	Exhibiting Gesture I Landscape Gesture in a new context.		
Intention	To share work that has happened in another place.		
<p>Description</p> <p>A map with a pencil line showing the route walked below a photo of feet wrapped in bandages from the walk. The original soles were laid on the floor with the bandages. They could be touched.</p> <p>In this work I began to consider the relationship between what happens in place and how something may be shared in a new place. How anything that does happen is re-presented in another location, specifically exhibition spaces. Is work remade in a new location? How much of the old work is embodied in this new form? And how hard do I ask an observer to work?</p> <p>If something is reshaped for a new place a new set of questions arise. These new questions can confuse earlier intentions relating to the original gesture. The gallery be seen as a surrogate place for things from other places. I have come to understand these representations as secondary forms.</p>	Place	Staff Exhibition, Reading College, Kings Road, Reading.	
	When	Autumn 2009.	
	Who	Exhibition visitors, new and returning students.	
	Where	On the floor and wall, simply placed. In an old studio room before renovation.	
Action	Re-presenting, placing.		Presencing <i>being</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 7 Where feels good here?



Overview	People were invited to take a beer mat showing a plan of the pub and mark where felt good ‘to be’ for them. The marks they made on the beer mats were gilded with gold leaf.		
Intention	To reflect on place and where we locate ourselves within it.		
Description	<div>BEING HERE Where do you like to be here? You are invited to use a beer mat, marking where you are and any other information you may wish to share. Please include your favourite spot to be in the Retreat.</div> <p>Initially I researched in the pub, making rubbings of surfaces touched by people in the bar, in particular a metal pole that had layers of paint and chips from being held as people waited to be served. Whilst doing this I chatted with people. I also spent time in the town library looking at old maps.</p> <p>The beer mats are a series of monoprints, one side showing a plan of the front bar, the other the back bar. The dot is the pole. This question <i>where feels good here?</i> begins to direct the senses towards an awareness of place. It focuses on being in place and makes the assumption that we can feel place; that we tune into the best place for us to be in and that we can be conscious of this.</p> <p>Some responded in relation to their historical or habitual use of place others, intuition. For example: Jane marked her favourite spot as sitting outside in the sun, others liked to be close to the band. I visited at different times to gild the marks on the beer mats with gold leaf. These were then displayed in the pub and people could be take them home.</p>		
	Place	The Retreat Pub, St Johns St, Reading.	
	When	April and May 2010.	
	Who	Jane Marsden and Bernie Whitten (landlords), pub regulars, art visitors, Anne-Marie Carroll (pub curator).	
	Where	A small, homely terrace pub in a side street with a community of regulars with ale, sometimes live music, films and art, others quiet.	
Action	Having a drink, considering place, being, sitting, gilding bar mats, being open to conversation, listening to live music, listening to the jukebox, being one of many, being one of few.		
	Presencing	being here	

Gesture 8 Wallstone



Overview	Bringing an old wall stone from the gents toilets into the bar.		
Intention	To make visible hidden histories of the pub.		
Description	Place	The Retreat Pub, St Johns St, Reading.	
	When	April and May 2010.	
	Who	Jane Marsden and Bernie Whitten (landlords), pub regulars, art visitors, Anne-Marie Carroll (pub curator).	
	Where	The back bar of a brick victorian terrace pub in a crowded side street.	
Action	Making visible, having a drink, considering place, being open to conversation, listening to live music, listening to juke box, being one of many, being one of few.	Presencing	being here

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 9 Choirs past and present



Overview	An enquiry into the relationship of a choir within a church.	
Intention	To reflect on song and the voices of people singing being absorbed in place.	
Description	Place	St Andrew's Church, Caversham Reading. for <i>Maybe</i> an exhibition curated by Bithja Moor.
	When	April / May 2010 (Centenary of the church) in the time of Paul (the current organist).
	Who	Choir and Organist of the Church 2010.
	Where	The room behind the organ where the choir changes, flowers are prepared and cleaning equipment is kept. And the main church.
Action	Noticing, listening, rubbing, recording, transcribing, remembering.	Presencing <i>being here</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

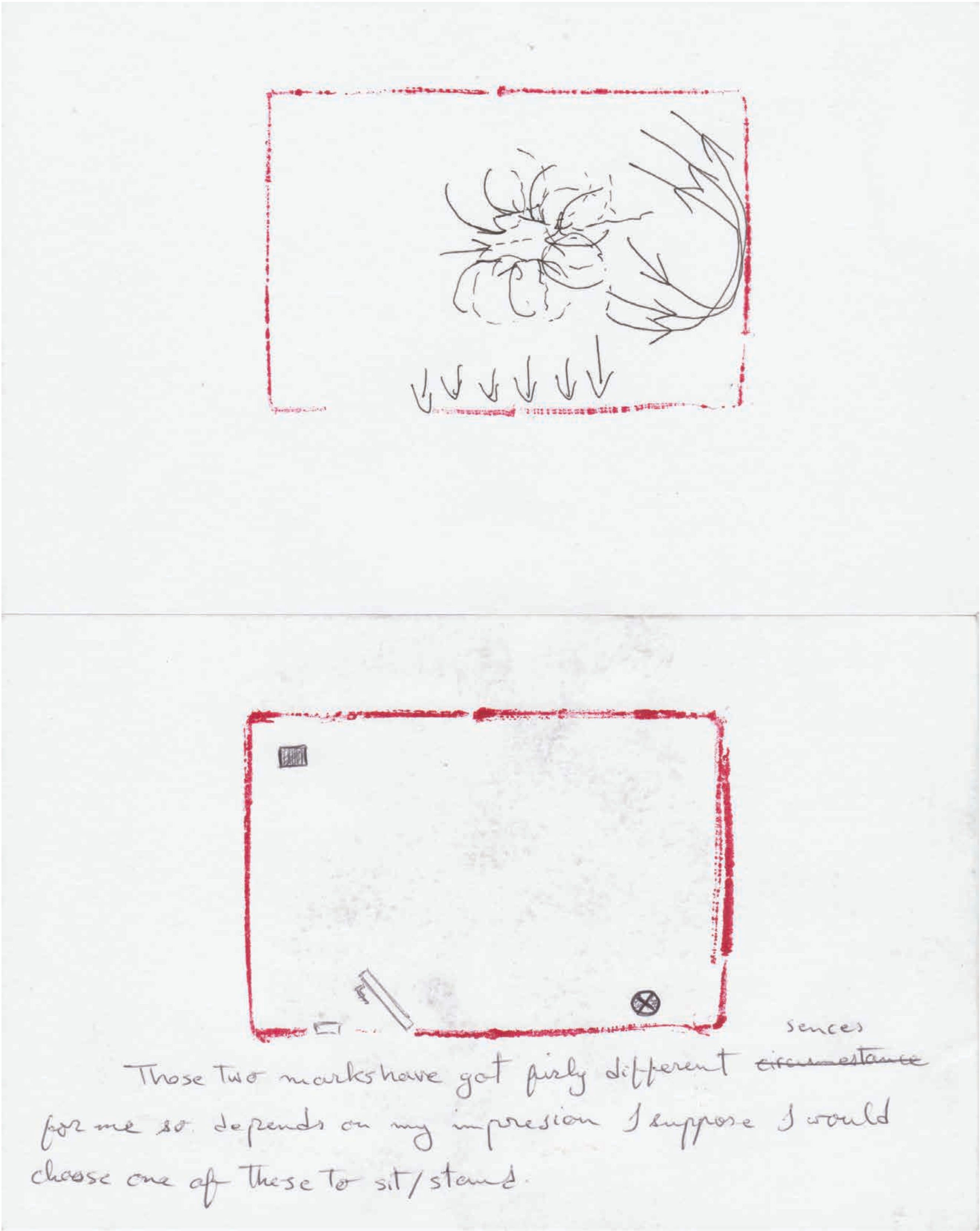
Gesture 10 Choir



Overview	A film showing how the hymns to be sung are selected in a particular church and showing that film in that church.		
Intention	An enquiry into the relationship of song within a church.		
Description <p>This gesture is part of several actions that took place at St Andrew's Church in Caversham. This emerged from Gesture 9 when one of the choir mentioned that they never chose the hymns they sung.</p> <p>So often song emerges from mood, memory etc. I wondered <i>how does a hymn get chosen?</i> Initially I thought it would be fun to introduce a system of hymn selection where the choir and congregation could request the hymns they wanted to sing. I soon learnt that the intricacies of religious year made this a challenging proposition.</p> <p>The vicar, Nigel Jones chooses the hymns. He agreed to be filmed whilst choosing the hymns for a Sunday service at the beginning of May. This film was projected in the area of the church where the choir rehearseas alongside the slides and recordings of the choir rehearsing.</p>	Place	St Andrew's Church, Caversham Reading.	
	When	April / May 2010 (Centenary of the church, built in 1910).	
	Who	Choir of the Church 2010, Vicar Nigel Jones, congregation and other visitors to the church.	
	Where	The area in the church where the choir practice and the vicarage office.	
Action	Noticing, listening, recording, filming, chatting.		Presencing <i>being in place</i>

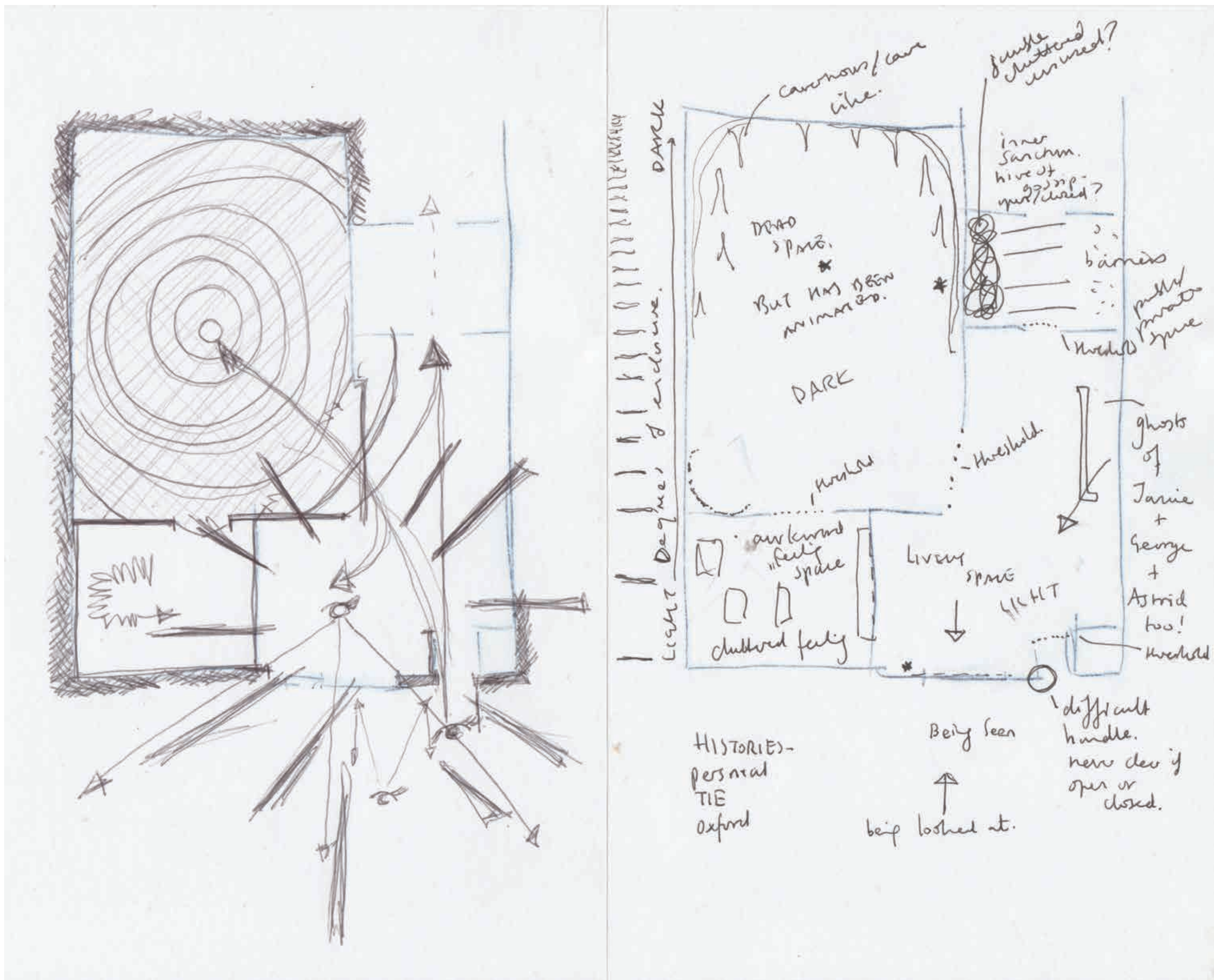
Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 11 Where feels good to be here? Arena



Overview	Presentation and action where people were invited to mark their responses to place on a small card showing a simple plan of the place.		
Intention	To generate discussion about our relationships to place and to consider what we feel in place.		
Description	Place	The Arena, Richard Hamilton Building, Oxford Brookes University, Oxford.	
	When	19th February 2010.	
	Who	Participants in a Social Sculpture Research Forum (this forum was open to all research students).	
	Where	In a basement room of the same building and later the Arena.	
Action	Imagining, intuiting, dowsing, marking.		Presencing <i>being in place</i>

Gesture 12 Where feels good here? Ovada



Overview	People were invited to mark their responses to place on a small card showing a simple plan of the place whilst upstairs in the place.		
Intention	To consider what we might understand in a familiar place.		
Description	Place	Ovada Gallery, Gloucester Green, Oxford.	
	When	May 2010.	
	Who	The Ideas Exchange (TIE) An artist group I was part of that met at Ovada from 2006 to 2010.	
	Where	In the upstairs room that used to be a dance studio and was a general store/backroom where we met each month.	
Action	Reflecting, imagining, remembering, intuiting.		Presencing <i>being in place</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 13 *Presencing Instruments*



Overview	Playing with potential presencing intruments in place.		
Intention	To develop ways of presencing place.		
Description Over three weekends working alongside friend and artist Shelley Montague within set times in place. Trying things out in place alongside others making their own enquiry. Thinking and watching being in place. Playing without promised outcome. My own enquiry was about gold leaf on glass and looking at the sun and how we then perceive its blueness. Reflecting that we are on a blue planet. Away from taking part in live events and exhibitions but in a public place. Thinking watching being in place. Playing without a promised outcome. Working alongside another it is easier to feel private in a public space. What role might these instruments play in place. Later some of these were used in the hereabouts project. They helped clarfiy my interest in the immediate and its proximity to the sun.	Place	Caversham Court Gardens, Reading.	
	When	May 2010.	
	Who	Public using the park.	
	Where	On the grass, under the tree, an old mulberry tree, a sequoia and a recently restored garden.	
Action	Playing, constructing, looking, trying out.		Presencing <i>being in place, connecting</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 14 hereabouts x Project Overview



Overview	A commission to produce an event for an Arts Festival in Whitley Reading and work with the public.		
Intention	To create an opportunity to watch sunset from water meadows with others.		
Description	Place	In and around Whitley Reading.	
	When	June - November 2010.	
	Who	For Whitley Arts Festival.	
	Where	In community centres, local area, in town centre.	
Action	Meeting, eating lunch, discussing, imagining, going out to meet, trusting, gathering stories of place.	Presencing	being, connecting, crystallising, kinwork

Gesture 15 Viewfinding



Overview	Carrying a chair, selecting locations, looking at the view.		
Intention	To consider what changes when we sit in places that we tend to walk through.		
Description <p>I carried a <i>viewfinder</i> walking in and around Whitley pausing occasionally to sit. Carrying a <i>viewfinder</i> created light-hearted opportunities to chat with passers-by and invite them to join in. Through discussion, often reminiscing, views or places of interest were pointed out and I walked, either alone or with others, to look at particular views.</p> <p>When carrying a <i>viewfinder</i> it felt more a part of me than of place. Once a view was selected it became an instrument to embed in place.</p> <p>Placing a <i>viewfinder</i> and to sit is a commitment <i>to be</i> in a place for a length of time. Even if this time is very short. Giving your weight to the chair as you sit can be a means of meeting place. There is a stilling of the body and simultaneously a focusing of attention forward. Our eye level drops to a height more associated with children or being at rest; looking below the sign posts and dipping out of the action to consider a view.</p>	Place	In and around Whitley, Reading, the Restoration Centre in Dawlish Road and the Water Meadows.	
	When	Summer / Autumn 2010.	
	Who	Visitors to the Restoration Centre, community groups, passers-by and self.	
	Where	Everyday round the corner locations. Often suggested over lunch in the Restoration Centre.	
Action	Listening, carrying, walking, sitting, observing, noticing.		Presencing <i>being here</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 16 Platform Building



Overview	To witness sunset in a piece of land that often has beautiful skies.	
Intention	To work through layers of ownership and permissions and let things come, trusting in the kindness of others to access the fields and watch the sunset.	
Description <p>Early stages involved connecting with place and the people in and around place, identifying ownerships and repeated attempts to make the footpath passable in order to access the water meadows. A patient determination to gain permissions encouraged a strategy of <i>imagination in bureaucracy</i>. This is a valuing of the opportunity to discuss sunsets and meadows in institutions that shifted my understanding of where an audience or participant might exist.</p> <p>There was a sense of getting into a position where the world conspires to help. The generosity and enthusiasm of those who became involved lifted the project into the place.</p> <p>The importance of <i>being</i> in the field with others and of bringing attention to the place led to the construction of a low platform made from found and gifted materials. The platform became an instrument of presencing sitting within the place.</p>	Place	Fobney Water Meadow and surrounding area.
	When	Summer/ Autumn 2010.
	Who	Farmer John Bucknell, Stockman, Adrian Lawson, Reading Borough Council, Ed and Anna Harcourt and the blue van. Adam, Andy and the Scouts, Dan and volunteers from youth group.
	Where	Meadows and public footpath amongst last grazing cows as water begins to soak in.
Action	Getting to know, chatting, playing games, persisting, letting go, trusting the process, dowsing, viewfinding, patience, imagination in bureaucracy.	Presencing <i>kinwork, deepening and connecting</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 17 Viewfinding 2



Overview	Carrying a chair, selecting locations, looking at the view.		
Intention	To consider what changes when we sit in places that we tend to walk through.		
Description	Place	In and around Whitley, Reading, the Restoration Centre in Dawlish Road and the Water Meadows.	
	When	Summer / Autumn 2010.	
	Who	Visitors to the Restoration Centre, community groups, passers-by and self.	
	Where	Everyday round the corner locations. Often suggested over lunch in the Restoration Centre.	
Action	Listening, carrying, walking, sitting, observing, noticing.		Presencing <i>being here</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 18 Viewfinding by Car



Overview	Viewfinding by car.		
Intention	To share a view remembered.		
<p>Description</p> <p>During lunch at the Restoration Centre J mentioned her favourite view looking from Cressingham Hill. She used to enjoy the view with her mother. Although it was not far when I asked if she wanted to walk there with a viewfinder she said no. She was keen to share the view so she drove me and a young woman who had also been discussing views. We parked at the top of the hill but did not go far from the car and had a look. We then drove looking at the view. She said the area had changed a lot, lots more buildings.</p> <p>She was insistant that I return later to see the lights of Whitley in the dark. When I did with the viewfinding chair I reflected on the separation from place and apparent protection/disconnection of a car. The windscreen like a viewfinder but separate from place.</p> <p>Through this action I came to value the many small acts of sitting in place as attempts to connect in place in the everyday. I reflected on the stories of areas especially those based in fear and the impact on the people that happen to live there.</p>	Place	Restoration Centre to Cressingham Road and back again.	
	When	September 2010.	
	Who	Me and J and H.	
	Where	Where J used to come with her mother known as Cressingham Hill.	
Action	Giving a lift to a stranger, being a passenger, looking, sharing.		Presencing <i>being in Place</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 19 Dawn Walk Sunrise 7.27



Overview	Dawn Walk Sunrise 7.27 am.		
Intention	To walk with others and witness dawn in Fobney Meadows.		
Description <p>I hadn't considered dawn walks until a conversation with H, a volunteer at the Restoration Centre. She had interpreted the sunset walk times as sunrise times and was keen to do a sunrise walk. So we arranged one.</p> <p>A gentle walk (20 mins) from Restoration Centre to Fobney Meadow, leaving in the dark to arrive just before dawn. Standing in the meadow (no platform yet) looking towards the east, across the town and drinking red tea. This first walk with others was tentative, the footpath still overgrown and the meadows were full of high autumn reeds. Arriving in the dark exaggerated the unknownness of the place, a faint smell of cattle and the possibilities of disappearing into place.</p> <p>There was an outward looking openness especially on the return as it began to get light. Local encounters revealed most of us had made a slight time shift from our habitual actions. On this and all the walks there was a gentle sense of friendliness even when the numbers were larger. This was encouraged by offering minimal instructions or guidance in favour of creating conditions to be oneself in place.</p>	Place	Restoration Centre to Fobney Meadow and back again.	
	When	Meet 6.30am 8th October 2010 Sunrise 7.27am.	
	Who	8 people 5 dogs, fishermen, binmen, school children and other passers-by.	
	Where	In the yellow street lights, damp air, darkness of the meadow into the light of the morning.	
Action	Meeting, walking, chatting, drinking red tea, pathfinding.		Presencing <i>being in place, kinwork</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 20 Hereabouts x Sunset Walk



Overview	A journey to witness sunset in the water meadows with others.		
Intention	To offer an everyday holiday and enjoy the whereness of here.		
Description	Walking instructions	Place	Whitley, Reading, Fobney Meadow, the land west of Rose Kiln Lane. This was developed in place for Whitley Art Festival Major Commission 2010. www.whitleyartsfestival.co.uk
	be here	When	Friday October 15th 2010 meeting 5.15pm at the Restoration Centre arriving at the Fobney Meadow to witness sunset at 6.11pm and then arriving in the town centre at 8pm.
	presencingplace	Who	Local people who had become part of the project, art visitors and friends and family of all. 60 people approx.
	smell touch taste on the air surfaces dampness watch shifting light traffic and birdsong feel	Where	Local streets to urban edges, superstores, car parks, footpaths, in the water meadows, on the river Kennet.
Action	notice	Presencing	being in place
	the whereness of hereabouts		
As visitors gathered I gave them each a card with the above words on it and said that we would be leaving shortly. There was an unsaid motion of people. We made our way westwards, through the suburban edges of Whitley at an easy pace. Through Morrisons' carpark and out towards Rose Kiln Lane, across the mini roundabout and then the A33. The traffic lights can take up to 5 minutes in this direction to allow pedestrians to cross the road. And then along the freshly cut public footpath and into the meadow. We stood on a platform fairly still, occasional chatting, watching as the sky darkened. At around 6.30pm we left, returning the way we had come and then along the towpath to a canal boat. The boat took us downstream to Reading town centre.			

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 21 Afternoon Walk



<i>Overview</i> An art event for children from a local school to draw in place.	
<i>Intention</i> To bring local children into the meadow to be in place.	
<i>Description</i> As part of the hereabouts x we were able to engage with local children. Restrictions of the school timetable meant we were not able to witness dawn or dusk however one local school was willing to let the children walk to meadow, be on the platform and spend some time drawing before returning for the end of the school day. The children all came to the Restoration Centre and then we walked to the watermeadows where we stood on the platform to witness the place. This walking gesture emphasised all that promotes dawdling, being interested by what catches your eye and not doing, being. There was a real sense of 'being hurried' due to the requirements of the school day that butted up against an edge of free enquiry through being. Even this brief encounter opened an awareness of smell, mud, insects, and grasses in the immediate area.	<i>Place</i> Restoration Centre to Fobney Meadow and on to Whitley Park Junior School.
	<i>When</i> October 2010 leaves 2.00pm.
	<i>Who</i> 40+ children, 3 teachers/assistants.
	<i>Where</i> Local streets to urban edges, superstores, carpark, footpaths, in the watermeadows.
<i>Action</i> Allowing, not allowing, walking, drawing.	<i>Presencing</i> <i>being</i>

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Gesture 22 Equinox Dawn Walk, Sunrise 7.41



Overview	A walk to witness dawn in the watermeadows.		
Intention	To walk with others and witness dawn and the time between moon setting and sunrising.		
<div>Description</div> <p>When no one turned up for this walk, sleepily, I considered going back home.</p> <p>In waterproofs with brolly and wellies I trudged towards the water meadows. As I walked a real freedom grew, being in place by myself with the purpose of being.</p> <p>I was able to watch and be. To sit knowing that from this place at this time the sun and moon are visible (behind the clouds). How the light changed, how weather shifts across the sky, how wet. This was a very different experience. There is something in the planning and undertaking that makes it different from simply taking a walk early. It was connected to the other walks. There was a building of awareness of place with others and alone through the repetition and getting to know the place. And also building capacities to be aware in place.</p> <p>There was a vulnerability and enhanced attention I felt being on my own that contributed to bringing the sense of whereness to the fore.</p>	Place	Restoration Centre to Fobney Meadow and back again.	
	When	Meeting 6.45am on 23rd October. Sunrise 7.41am Full Moon sets 8.19am. Autumnal Equinox.	
	Who	Me.	
	Where	Local streets to urban edges, superstores, carpark, footpaths, in the watermeadows.	
Action	Walking, being, noticing, watching, waiting, drinking red tea.		Presencing <i>being, connecting</i>

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Gesture 23 Interventions Environment Gallery



Overview	A range of interventions in the Green Space Environment Gallery in the Museum of Reading.		
Intention	Bringing a sense of the <i>hereabouts</i> x projects to the Environment Gallery in Museum of Reading.		
<p><i>Description</i> Many of the exhibits in the Green Space, Environment Gallery are local, often coming from the area where <i>hereabouts</i> x took place.</p> <p>This was the opportunity to bring the project to a new place. Inserting photographs, films, maps and drawings into the space. The stuffed deer and hare here were part of the wildlife of the meadow. During Gesture 16 Platform Building a deer was spotted at dusk. This was a combining of life happening in place now with that in the gallery. The <i>Viewfinders</i> were left out and people used them to sit where they wanted and often leaving the chairs in positions that signalled to <i>look here</i>.</p> <p>For those involved with the project it brought an awareness of the wildlife in the area and an invitation to go into town. An earlier walk with Adrian Lawson, a keen conservationist, pointed to the wildlife supported in the area and the reduced diversity in the meadow. His intimate knowledge of the place revealed the trees where the owls lived, the areas where the grass snakes hatch and shifts of the Kennet flow that will happen. The Green Space documents and reminds us of the life in and around that we glimpse if we are lucky and that in some cases is lost.</p>	Place	Green Space Gallery, Museum of Reading, Blagrove Street.	
	When	26th October to 7th November 2010.	
	Who	Catherine Roberts and Elaine Blake from the Museum with volunteers, museum visitors.	
	Where	Amongst stuffed animals, dried plants, rocks and seeds. Amongst display cabinets.	
Action	Being in a new context, considering secondary forms.		Presencing <i>Being, connecting.</i>

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Gesture 24 Hereabouts Walk, Sunset 5.41



Overview	Hereabouts Walk, Sunset 5.41		
Intention	To witness sunset in the watermeadows.		
Description	Place	From the Restoration Centre to Fobney Meadow and back again	
	When	Meeting at 5pm. Sunset at 5.41pm.	
	Who	One other and one lost in football traffic.	
	Where	Local streets to urban edges, superstores, car parks, footpaths, in the water meadows.	
Action	Walking, standing, watching, noticing, floating, slowing.		Presencing <i>being in place, connecting</i>

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Gesture 25 **Hereabouts Walk, Sunset 4.34**



Overview	Hereabouts Walk, Sunset 4.34		
Intention	To witness sunset in the watermeadows.		
Description	Place	Meeting at the Restoration centre and walking to Fobney Meadow and back again.	
	When	3rd November 2010 Sunset 4.34pm.	
	Who	6 Adults and 1 child	
	Where	Local streets to urban edges, superstores, car parks, footpaths, in the water meadows.	
Action	Walking, standing, watching, noticing, floating, slowing, bringing people together.		Presencing <i>being in place, connecting</i>

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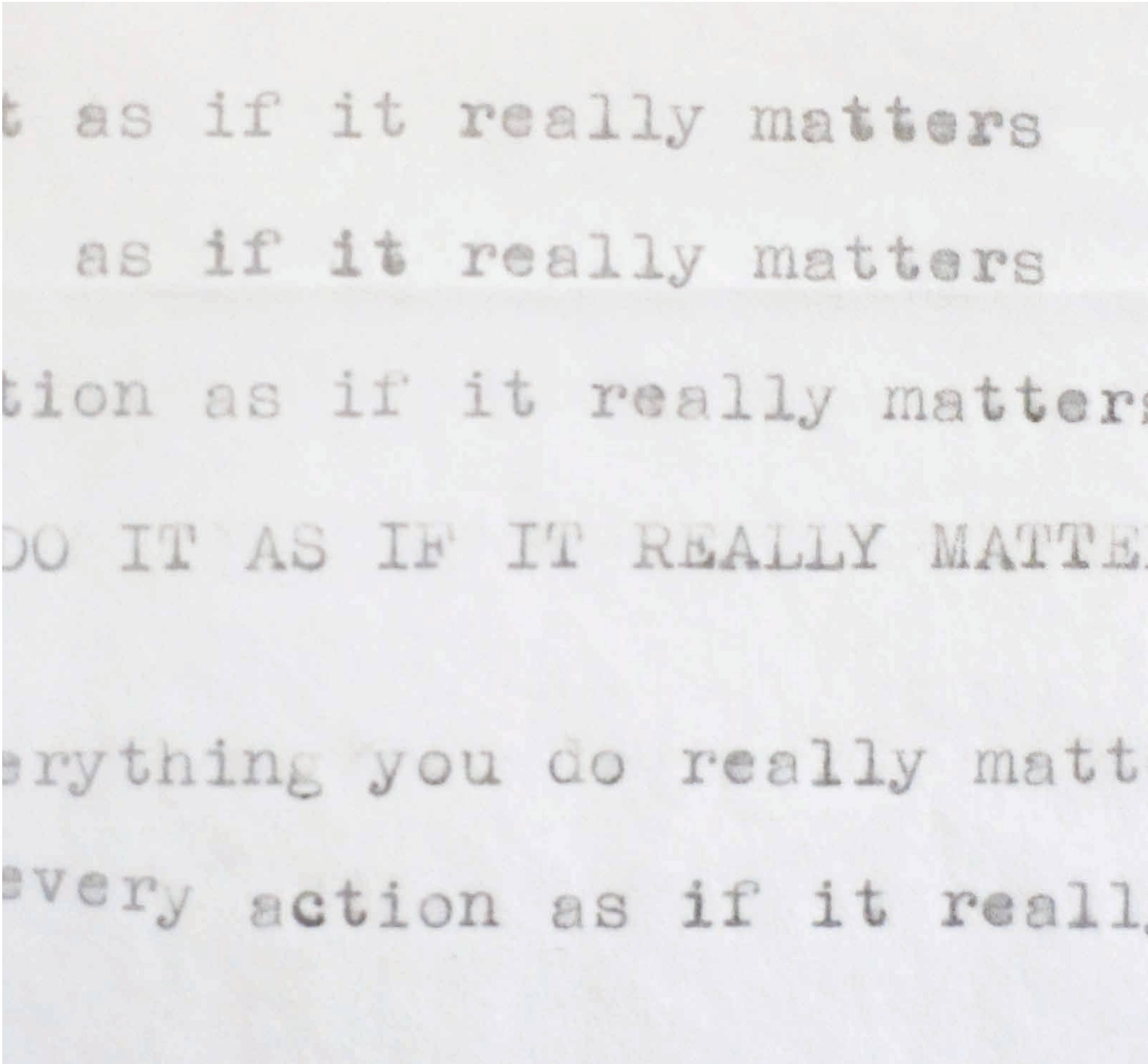
Gesture 26 Hereabouts Walk, Sunset 4.39



Overview	To witness sunset in the watermeadows from the platform.		
Intention	To walk from the town centre to the edge of town beside the water to the water meadows and witness the sunset.		
Description On this route I tried to follow the edge of water. Along Holybrook and then the Kennet towpath where we crossed the A33 into the meadows. It had been raining and the water rising. It was a relaxed easy walk. As we approached, a helicopter flew overhead we assumed there was a football match on. Emergency vehicles were parked by field gate. We walked through tentatively. The increased water levels contributed to a hidden, floating sense when on the platform in the meadow. As we sat drinking red tea, a policeman made his way along the wooden slats path and advised us not to wander off the platform. They had located two dog walkers stuck up to their chests in the mud and were attempting to rescue them. If they hadn't had their phones they would not have been located. This reminded me of a story told be the dad of one of the scouts' dads of a man dying here. We later left with a sense of the power and aliveness of the place. Its' responsiveness to the world around. Its capacity to hold water protecting the town centre.	Place	From Reading Museum to Fobney Meadow and back again.	
	When	Meeting at 3pm. Sunset 4.29pm.	
	Who	One other and a policeman.	
	Where	Through Saturday shopping into the quieter places in urban edges, along the river Kennet superstores, car parks, footpaths, in the water meadows.	
Action	Walking. sitting, wondering. watching.		Presencing <i>being in place</i>

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Gesture 27 *As if it really matters*



Overview	Small sheets of tracing paper with the words: <i>as if it really matters</i> repeatedly typed on them, focusing on the intention embodied in the words as they were typed and left in a range of locations.		
Intention	To reflect on the relationship between thought, form and the embodiment of intention.		
Description		Place	Home, Studio, St Andrew's Church, Caversham, Reading and selected locations.
		When	April 2011 ongoing.
		Who	Unknown.
		Where	Quiet, still places, places of contemplation.
Action	Typing repeatedly with the intention - as if it really matters.	Presencing	<i>deepening and connecting</i>

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Gesture 28 Intersections of Time



Overview	A journey along a piece of cliff seen in a photograph.		
Intention	Wearing a piece of jet and trying to comprehend the intersections of two periods of abrupt climate change at Hawsker. 183ma and now.		
Description	Place	Coastal footpath from Robin Hood's Bay to Whitby, Yorkshire.	
	When	Between high tides, in sunshine and April showers. April 2011	
	Who	Passers-by, lady in the Jet shop, bus queue, people on train.	
	Where	Bays of rocks and fossils, along the cliff edge, grassy paths, clay ground, small streams, water flowing.	
Action	Observing textures, conversations, fossil hunting, walking, wondering, photographing.		Presencing <i>being in place</i>

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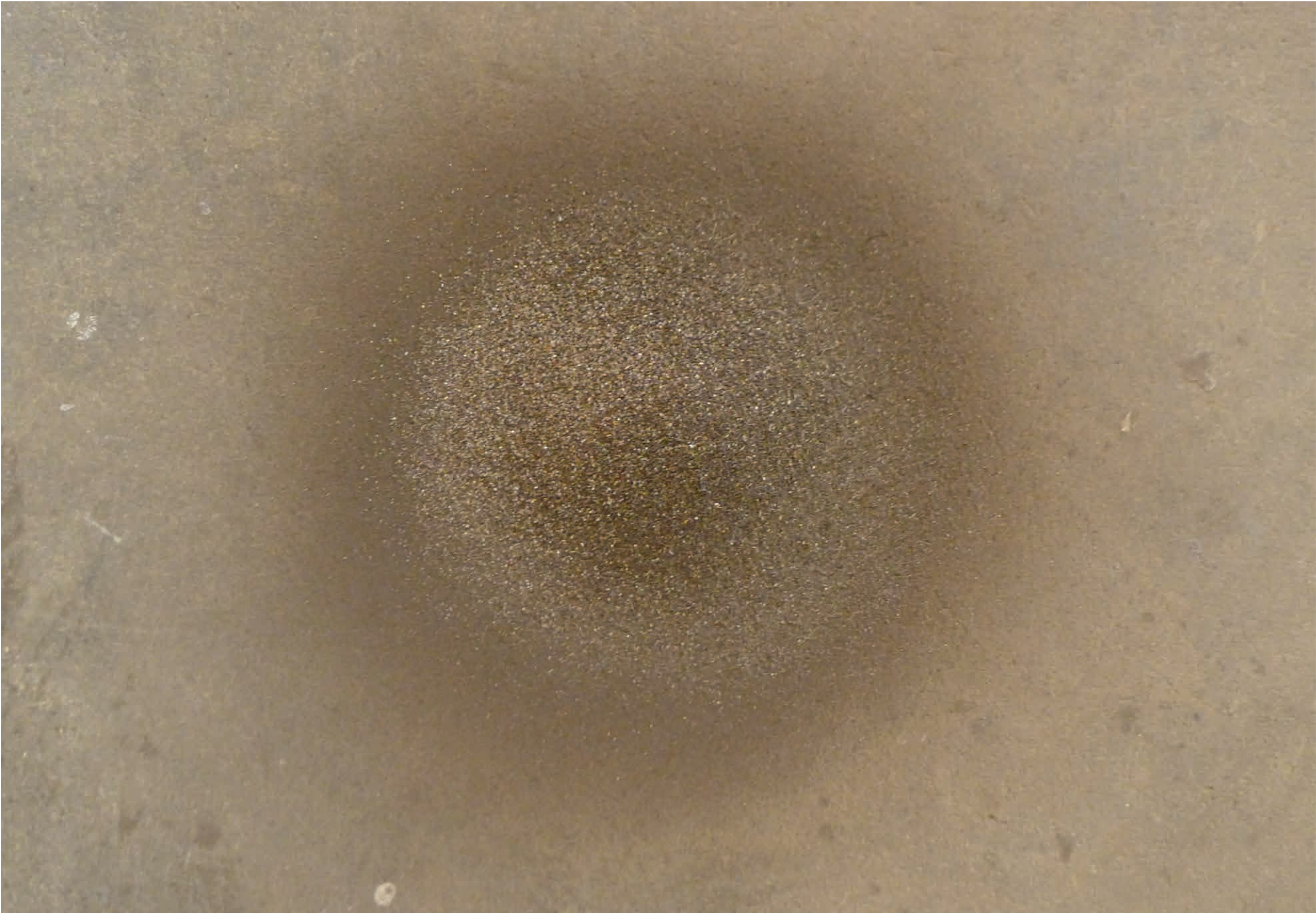
Gesture 29 *Material of Thought*



Overview	Drawing the words ‘material of thought’ with crushed coal and gum arabic.		
Intention	To draw attention to transformative potential of all things.		
Description <p>A discrete action in a church that concerns prayer and the possibilities of transformation that inspire that prayer.</p> <p>A reflection of my thinking about the transformational cycles between wood, coal and energy. The power of belief.</p>	Place	St Andrews Church, Caversham Reading	
	When	May 2011	
	Who	Exhibiton visitors and church goers.	
	Where	On the back of a wooden pew, at the head height if someone knelt to prayer.	
Action	Marking.	Presencing	<i>connecting, crystallising</i>

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Gesture 30 Sieved Earth



Overview	Dry and refined earth placed near a font.		
Intention	To look for connection in dry earth.		
Description	Place	This time - An exhibition. St Andrew's Church, Caversham, Reading.	
	When	May 2011.	
	Who	Exhibition visitors and churchgoers.	
	Where	On the ground by the font.	
Action	Collecting, sieving, carrying.	Presencing	connecting, crystallising

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Gesture 31 Coal



<i>Overview</i> Crushed coal laid and lit by halogen light	
<i>Intention</i> To reflect on the transformation of material and evolution.	
<i>Description</i> The coal is crushed into small pieces, laid out in increasing size of the small pieces. The largest pieces closest to the halogen light. This was placed beneath a church window. A space to reflecting on different time scales, geological time in contrast with religious time. The transformation of coal into the light coming from the halogen light. This coal was formed before religious time began.	<i>Place</i> St Andrews Church, Caversham Reading.
	<i>When</i> May 2011.
	<i>Who</i> Exhibiton visitors and church goers.
	<i>Where</i> On a wooden floor, where the children play during services and beneath a church window.
<i>Action</i> Bringing together, reflecting.	<i>Presencing</i> <i>connecting, crystallising</i>

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Gesture 32 Whitley Art Trail Overview



Overview	An art trail where I curated the work of five artists in four homes and a community centre for a one night event. Mark Aerial Waller . TRIPOD . Steve McPherson . Martin Creed . Ann Rapstoff		
Intention	To work carefully with people creating opportunities for the work to integrate with peoples home and lives.		
<div>Description</div> <div>Whitley Art Trail focuses on bringing art and people together through the everyday actions of walking round the corner and down the road; visiting neighbours.</div> <div>Where possible each household had the chance to live with a piece of work in the few days running up to the event, to draw their own conclusions about the work and to have the opportunity to discuss, share and enjoy the work they were hosting. As well as experiencing the artwork this event brings attention to the relationships we all have in our communities and our perceptions of those relationships. This is apparent in the works and also in the development of the project as whole. One artist, Mark Aerial Waller, already had a relationship with the place. The generosity and trust of those who shared their homes for the evening. At the end of the trail people came together for soup in the Restoration Centre.</div> <div>Curating these works helped me to reflect on how these different artists related to place through their practise in this instance. How they themselves get involved and where the work takes place.</div>	Place	from Torrington Road, Whitley, Reading for Whitley Arts Festival 2011.	
	When	Friday 28th October 2011.	
	Who	Those living in their homes, visitors, volunteers, artists neighbours and passers by.	
	Where	Round the corner, up the road, in living rooms, on the street, in the community centre.	
Action	Visiting, conversation, being welcomed, visiting neighbours, hosting, walking round the corner and up the road.		Presencing <i>being, kinwork, connecting, crystallising</i>

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Gesture 33 Litton Road



Overview	Screening of the film Karpouzzia by Mark Aerial Waller on the tv in a local living.		
Intention	To bring work home with family and in place with other back into a family after several years.		
Description My curatorial role was to bring this work into the home. Mark Aerial Waller: 'The film Karpouziaaaa documents a saturday in 2009 and shows a live and relaxed portrait of the amazing characters and community of the area.'. He set up a fictional' fruit and vegetable mobile shop.. 'When people were prepared to volunteer to take part, they were like actors, but when we started to trade, and money exchanged hands it seemed to us all that it was real, an actual shop, rather than a play shop... the service we put on that day.. could continue into the future as an alternative economy, organised within a community like Whitley'. This film was shown in the home of some of the 'actors' and was left with that family for a few days before the trail for their own viewings. Mark Aerial Waller came along to the trail.	Place	Whitley Art Trail.	
	When	September to February 2012 (28th October 2011).	
	Who	Mark Aerial Waller, Ed Harcourt, P and family.	
	Where	A living room in Whitley.	
Action	Returning, watching, sitting, being, chatting, sharing.		Presencing being, connecting, kinwork

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Gesture 34 Axbridge Road



Overview	Bringing a performance concerning contemporary rioting called ‘Ghost in the Machine’ into a local street.		
Intention	To question what shifts when an audience shifts from arts specialist into an everyday street.		
<div>Description</div> <p>TRIPOD describe this performance as sending ‘up the panoptic spatial practices of contemporary riot policing. Held in formation by riot headgear-turned-architecture, and thrust upwards on killer heels, the three of us function as a human tripod for a camera too high for surveillance. This work playfully probes the ways in which political demonstrations in the public realm are challenged, conditioned and contained, and highlights how the spatial itself is at stake in urban political confrontations’.</p> <p>This was the first time they performed this work in an everyday environment. It has been adapted to its new context, to engage with residents and visitors to the event. Children mimicked their movements, and wanted them to go to their homes.</p> <p>TRIPOD operated from a van at the end of the street where they took periods of rest. There was a sense of theatricality, as the artists emerged from the van to perform that suggests a disconnection from the place they share with riot policing.</p>	Place	Whitley Art Trail.	
	When	September to February 2012 (28th October 2011).	
	Who	TRIPOD is ‘Leah Lovett, Katy Beinart and Helen Rawlings’, Ed Harcourt, John and family.	
	Where	A street in Whitley. In the pigeon fanciers front garden and surrounding area.	
Action	Arriving, provoking, disconnecting, connecting.		Presencing <i>being, connecting, kinwork</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 35 The Whitley Cup



Overview	Bringing the work of Steve McPherson into a local living room.		
Intention	To imagine the life in the home from an archaeological perspective.		
<p><i>Description</i></p> <p>Steve McPherson has had an intimate yet distant relationship with the home that hosts his work. Based on a personal donated object (a small airfix airplane – slightly damaged), Steve McPherson has created and presented the findings of an archaeological record of the living occupants and the home. In the Whitley Cup Steve weaves fact and fiction to take us to new understanding of the original object and the inhabitants.</p> <p>His summary text gives a potential identity and history to the reconstructed object in the display case.</p> <p>Steve reveals in subtle ways through the use of text, content and aesthetics, that truth, history and information are questionable and relative to our perception and use of it. He reminds us of the things in all our lives, things that may outlast us and on which our archaeology will be built.</p> <p>This work has been shown and discussed at John's Age Concern Group and displayed in Reading Museum.</p>	Place	Whitley Art Trail.	
	When	September to February 2012 (28th October 2011).	
	Who	John and family. Photograph Ross Hale.	
	Where	A living room in Whitley and a studio in Margate.	
Action	Collecting, imagining, documenting, displaying, believing, not believing, giving, conversation, posting.		Presencing <i>being, connecting, kinwork</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 36 *Dawlish Road*



<i>Overview</i> Showing work by Martin Creed in everyday environment of a living room.	
<i>Intention</i> A lighted hearted questionning of what is contemporary art and how does it work in the home?	
<i>Description</i> Work No. 88 A crunched up sheet of A4 paper in an unlimited edition. Martin Creed's work manages to snag our imaginations in friendly yet perplexing ways. When he first sent Work No 88 to carefully selected people many of the works were simply thrown away. Another was carefully flattened out. In the home his work slips easily in and out of everyday life. In the run up to the art trail we invited people to make their own <i>Work No. 88</i> creating discussions, about the environment, the qualities of a scrumpled piece of paper and what is art. Patrina took a strong interest in the work and etiquette of gallery owned art. By the end of the evening I was faced with two <i>Work No 88s</i> and momentarily wondered which to return. The children had made a welcome sign for the front door.	<i>Place</i> Dawlish Road, Whitley.
	<i>When</i> September to February 2012 (28th October 2011).
	<i>Who</i> Patrina and family, including puppy. Art Trail visitors, Hauser and Wirth, Ed Harcourt.
	<i>Where</i> Living room.
<i>Action</i> Meeting, introducing, inviting.	<i>Presencing</i> <i>connecting, kinwork</i>

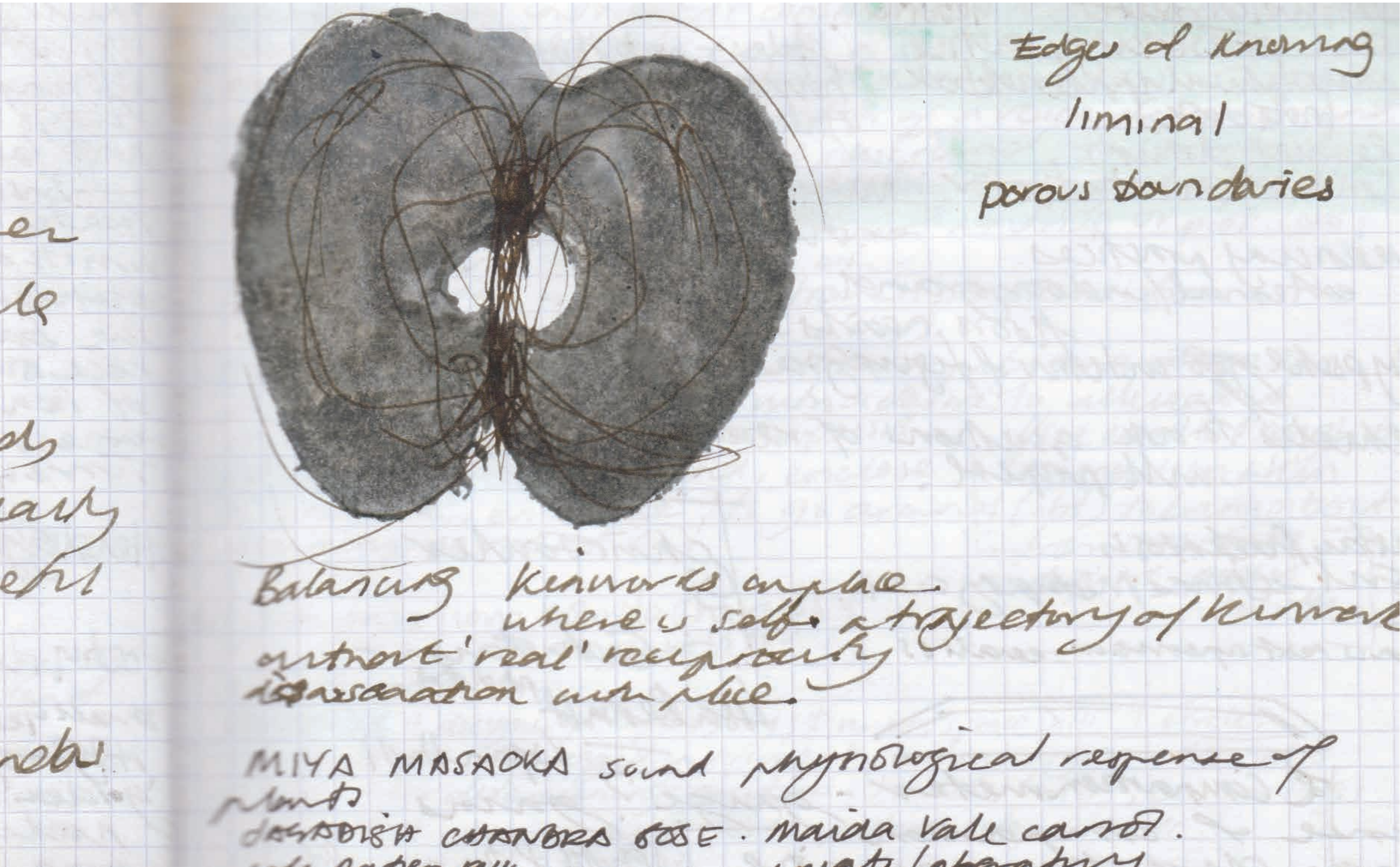
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Gesture 37 Restoration Centre



Overview	Bring the work of Ann Rapstoff to the Restoration Centree, Whitley.		
Intention	To draw attention to the Restoration Centre as a place of care.		
<p><i>Description</i></p> <p>Office for the Dissemination of Sympathy (ODS), is a research organisation committed to mobilising altruistic activities. The ODS mission is to explore dialogue, and the possibilities that might arise from offering a metaphoric 'helping hand'.</p> <p>ODS is interested in the value of intimacy and ephemeral gestures of goodwill, kindness and exchange through the supply of a service. It aspires to promote mood change using strategies of performance, play and dialogue.</p> <p>ODS offers sympathetic responses to the needs of each member of the public who attend.</p> <p>Come along and meet the ODS representative in her office.</p> <p>Ann visited the centre several times before hand meeting visitors and volunteers. There was a real desire to get to know and understand how her work would sit with cafe and the centre.</p>	Place	Restoration Centre, Reading.	
	When	September to February 2012 (28th October 2011).	
	Who	Ann Rapstoff and all at the Restoration Centre, Art Trail Visitors	
	Where	Studio.	
Action	Meeting, introducing.		Presencing <i>being, connecting</i>

Gesture 38 Apple Prints



Overview	Repeatedly making monoprints from a range of apples.		
Intention	To understand the energy of place and what my enquiry is finding in place		
Description	Place	Studio.	
	When	Spring 2012.	
	Who	Me.	
	Where	Place of confusion, wonder and thinking.	
Action	Repeatedly touching, squashing, waiting from apple colour to emerge.		Presencing connecting

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 39 Conversations with an Apple Tree



Overview	Talking to the apple tree		
Intention	To create possibilities for a conversation with an apple tree and some staff and students.		
Description	Place	Padworth College, Pardworth, Berkshire.	
	When	March 2012, a cold day.	
	Who	Staff and students.	
	Where	An old orchard, near a church, a private school, once a village destroyed by the black death in the sixteenth century.	
	Action	Dowsing, presenting, talking, listening, imagining, watching, sensing.	
		Presencing	being, connecting

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 40 Solar Noon Shadows



Overview	Gilding the shadow of small plants growing through tarmac at solar noon each day for a two week period at midsummer. Dandelion, Buttercup, Herb Robert, Yarrow, Ribwort Plantain, Clover, Barley Wheat, Wild Carrot, Cow Parsley.		
Intention	An action of valuing these small persistent plants that survive and thrive amongst the cracks in the tarmac. To connect these apparently small shifts in place with the cycles of the year.		
Description <p>Each day at solar noon (weather allowing) I gilded the shape of a shadow of a small plant with gold leaf at the point where the sun is most directly above the weeds growing in tarmac.</p> <p>The process involved brushing the area around the plant very lightly and then tracing the shadows with gilding medium. Waiting a few minutes, breathing on the surface before floating the gold leaf into position. It would then be pressed into the hard surface. As I brushed the area again removing any excess gold, small wisps of gold would float in the air and end up in the crevasses, revealing other sites of micro cultivation.</p> <p>As this series of gestures developed there was a ritual of keeping an eye on the weather. Each day selecting a different sort of weed in the area. Observing the quality of the shadows. Being ready to mark a shadow in the minute or so of bright light at solar noon, if it occurred. The marks are still in place. The plants have grown or been weeded and the days have shortened and are lengthening again.</p>	Place	Openhand Openspace Gallery, Oxford Road, Reading For Cultivation Field, an exhibition curated by Kate Corder, a research student at Reading University. www.cultivationfield.org.uk	
	When	A series of solar noons either side of midsummer 2012, a very wet summer. Solar noon is approximately 1 hour after midday in Reading, UK during British Summer Time.	
	Who	Exhibition visitors and passers-by.	
	Where	By the fire exit, an area of tarmac often used as a short cut to the street behind.	
Action	Awareness of time and weather, valuing, marking, selecting, honouring.		Presencing <i>being, connecting, crystallising</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 4 | Presencing Place Research Space



Overview	Bringing together research ideas in a different place.		
Intention	To make visible unseen energies in place.		
<div>Description</div> <p>On entering the space I dowsed the existing energies and main findings were checked by a friend/dowser. At the end of my time in the space I dowsed the same area to note what had changed in the intervening time.</p> <p>The presencing space had been used as a base to observe the life in and around the space.</p> <p>During the week I placed a bag of meadow flower turf from the opening ceremony of the London Olympics. This acted as an introduction to wildflowers. From this we discussed local plant life. People brought in books, samples and began to discuss what they had seen on the way.</p> <p>The space also contained samples of local wild plants.</p>	Place	Bracknell Town Centre.	
	When	August 2013. Just after Olympics.	
	Who	ME. Artists at ReOrsa,	
	Where	Presencing Place Research Space centre.	
Action	Dowsing, marking, discussing, identify flowers.		Presencing <i>being, connecting, kinwork,</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Gesture 42 Presencing Walk I



<div>Overview</div> <div>A very slow, very short walk closely examining the wildlife in the local area.</div>	
<div>Intention</div> <div>To reveal the diversity of life.</div>	
<div>Description</div> <div>Earlier Marlies Boydell had walked with me around Bracknell Town Centre sharing her knowledge of local diversity. I had been drawn to these areas by the garish butterfly signs saying Blooming Diversity, occasionally planted in verges.</div> <div>This walk included Marlies, her colleague at the council responsible for Bracknell In Bloom, an annual competition and myself. There was a marked contrast between the natural understanding of the environment and the presentation of place for competition. Also the walk gave the opportunity to see the subtle yet vital diversity of the hanging baskets and borders. The verges are cared for and there is a long term strategy to enhance the local diversity.</div> <div>Bracknell was designated a New Townin 1949 as part of the post war regeneration and built in the 50's and 60's. It now (now struggling). Local diversity is compromised of imported soils from different areas of the country, supporting different life. The Met Office moved away from this area in 2003 with rumours of sick building syndrome.</div> <div>There was something deeply reassuring to find so much quietly thriving in the area.</div>	<div>Place</div> <div>Bracknell Town Centre.</div>
	<div>When</div> <div>August 2013.</div>
	<div>Who</div> <div>Marlies Boydell Environment Manager and the Bracknell in Bloom</div>
	<div>Where</div> <div>Within 200m of Presencing Place Research Space.</div>
<div>Action</div> <div>Noticing, walking, naming, watching, listening.</div>	<div>Presencing</div> <div>being, connecting, kinwork,</div>

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Gesture 43 Presencing Walk 2



Overview	A very slow, very short walk closely examining the wildlife in the local area.		
Intention	To reveal the diversity of life, plant life in particular.		
Description	Place	Bracknell Town Centre.	
	When	August 2013. One hour approx.	
	Who	Marlies Boydell Environment Manager, 8 visitors and passers-by. V Vergou filming.	
	Where	Within 200m of Presencing Place Research Space.	
Action	Noticing, walking, naming, watching, listening.		Presencing <i>being, connecting, kinwork,</i>

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Gesture 44 Winter Solstice 12.12.12



Overview A walk to the platform in the water meadows at the end of Mayan Calendar.	
Intention To notice what if, any shifts with the change of calendar. To be in place	
Description Returning and reconnecting. The slow crossing of the road allows for a stilling, coming into place. visiting the platform. Reflecting on Wandering Wolf the current Mayan Council leader talking of an 'earth out of balance and times of great pain for humanity if we are unable to change out ways'. www.ShiftoftheAges.com To be in a place for a particular time. Noticing the shifts of time through the year. Noticing the holding of water. Noticing and knowing what may come through next. A platform floating. The sound softened going towards the gate. Inaccessible. I walk around perimeters of flood water, looking in. There is a bit of sunshine.	Place Fobney Meadow, Reading
	When Winter Solstice, 12.12.12 11.12am
	Who Many birds, sea gulls, coots, people driving by.
	Where Layby and footpath, bright sunshine, cold, sound of traffic and birds.
Action Standing still, waiting, walking slowly, watching, listening, being, noticing, imagining the compassion of place, trying to reach the platform.	Presencing being, deepening and connecting

Gesture 45 Equinoctial Action



Overview	A walk to the platform in the water meadows to collect water at the spring equinox.		
Intention	To imagine compassion in place through the spring equinox to midday on the platform in the water meadows. To collect some water from the meadow to bring its aliveness to the Glass Tank in Oxford.		
Description	Place	Fobney Meadow, Reading.	
	When	Spring Equinox, 20th March 2013 (11.02), 11am to midday.	
	Who	Vicky Vergou filming, many birds, sea gulls, coots.	
	Where	By the layby and footpath, so cold, damp, grey, windy, sound of traffic and birds.	
Action	Standing still, walking slowly, carrying, holding, watching, listening, drinking warm red currant tea, collecting water, noticing qualities of ground beneath water.		Presencing <i>being, deepening and connecting</i>

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and
shaping of place through expanded art practices.

Jo Thomas

PhD

Awarded by Oxford Brookes University

This commentary accompanies the practice based research.
It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the award of
Doctor of Philosophy.

July 2013

Documents to be found in this submission

45 Gesture Sheets

A list of gestures

A written commentary

Appendices

- . A list of 45 Gesture Sheets
- . Glossary
- . A timeline of the research period
- . Heat Generators - An interview with Shelley Sacks, 14th May, 2012.
- . Notes from a conversation
- . A DVD showing Gestures 10, 13, 20, 41, 42, 43 and 45

presencing place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices

Jo Thomas

Presencing Place: An enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices.

This practice based research examines ways of working in local everyday places that enable shifts from the 'non-place' to the re-discovery of the particular in everyday places, amplifying and enhancing ways of knowing and sensing through presencing place. A series of forty-five gestures, expanded art practices, form the enquiry. These gestures have a phenomenological and holistic outlook that highlight the potential of small actions to confirm and enhance the quality of our connections with the world we are part of and through which we can experience a sense of interconnectiveness. Most take place close to my home in Reading, UK. Gestures include: standing in a local water meadow with others to witness dawn *Gesture 19 Dawn Walk 6.30am*; walking through two periods of abrupt climate change 183ma (million years ago) and our current time, *Gesture 28 Intersections of time*; or gilding the shadow of a small weed with gold leaf at solar noon, *Gesture 45 Solar Noon Shadows*.

The commentary introduces the territory of *presencing place* with reference to Otto Scharmers Theory U and a creative approach of *letting come* born out of Heidegger's central concern Being or 'Dasein'. The approaches to practices are then described through methods of tuning into place, the potential for a better place that is embodied in the field of social sculpture and the possibilities of liminal knowing to connect in place. Processes of engaging with others and getting into a position where the world conspires to help you are considered with the work of carefully selected artists. The gestures focus on three areas of enquiry: first, into the physicality of place, secondly, into the non-physicality of place and, thirdly, finding ways of shaping an experience of place with and for others. The gestures become understood as moments of compassionate connection in the poetic action of a small stitch, an act of loving the world. The research concludes by discussing the gestures as a family of strategies and methods that offer ways of presencing place that enhance possibilities of connection in place through expanded art practices. It will be of use to those interested in public facing work and place.

Preface

Presencing Place: an enquiry into the knowing and shaping of place through expanded art practices.

This written commentary presents and reflects on this five year research enquiry. It accompanies the practice based thesis which consists of forty-five gestures that took place. These gestures are documented in a set of gesture sheets. The commentary should be read in conjunction with these.

The research began in October 2008. There has been a combination of self-generated work, commissions and invitations to exhibit. There were two larger scale projects commissioned by Whitley Arts Festival; a Major Commission in October and November 2010 and a further commission to curate work for the Whitley Art Trail in 2011.

In the summer of 2011, I transferred from part-time to full-time research. This allowed me to enjoy a new quality of focus and capacity for thinking about and through practice. The thesis consists of a series of gestures that are brought together in chronological order in the accompanying gesture sheets. A selection of these was shown in an exhibition 'Presencing Place: A Research Journey' in the Glass Tank, Oxford Brookes University in April 2013.

There is a timeline of activity in the appendix.

Contents

Abstract	3
Preface	4
Contents	5
Illustrations	7
Acknowledgements	9
Introduction	11
Aims of the research enquiry	13
1. Presencing, Place, Gesture.	15
1.1 Presencing	17
1.2 Place	21
1.3 Gesture	23
1.4 The accompanying set of gestures sheets	25
2. Approaches to practice	27
2.1 Tuning into place	29
2.2 Being	33
2.3 Perceptions of better place	35
2.4 In the field of social sculpture	39
2.5 Liminal Knowing	43
3. Participation	45
3.1 Who is involved.	47
3.2 Imagination in bureaucracy	49
3.3 Where the world conspires to help	53

3.4 How selected artists work with others.	55
4. Themes of the Enquiries	61
4.1 Compassionate Practices	63
4.2 Connecting, a Small Stitch	65
4.3 Intention	67
5. Conclusions	69
5.1 A Taxonomy of Practice	71
5.2 Final exhibition	73
5.3 Conclusion	77
6. Afterword	81
Bibliography	83
Appendices	87
The Gesture Sheets x 45	89
Glossary	91
Bibliography for glossary	95
Timeline	97
Heat Generators - An interview with Shelley Sacks	105
Notes from a conversation	111
DVD	115

Illustrations

Figure 1 Drawing based on Theory - U.	16
Figure 2 Drawing based on Theory - U.	18
Figure 3 Olympic Meadow and flowers brought in by visitors.	37
Figure 4. An early conversation at The Restoration Centre.	53
Figure 5 Margate Walking, preparations.	55
Figure 6 Margate Walking, leaving the Marine Pool.	56
Figure 7 The Beer Garden Project by Sarah Lewison.	59
Figure 8 Presencing Place, Exhibition in the Glass Tank Gallery.	73
Figure 9 Presencing Place: A Research Journey. Exhibition in the Glass Tank Gallery. Photograph: Frank Dumbleton	74
Figure 10 Presencing Place: A Research Journey, Exhibition in the Glass Tank Gallery. Photograph: Frank Dumbleton	75
Figure 11 Viewfinder in Presencing Place: A Research Journey, Exhibition in the Glass Tank Gallery. Photograph: Frank Dumbleton	75

Photographs and Drawings: Jo Thomas unless otherwise stated.

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There have been numerous, wonderful conversations with friends, participants, colleagues, artists and the occasional stranger that have sustained, challenged and enlivened this enquiry. In particular my going dialogues with Roxana Tohaneanu-Shields on expanded arts practices and philosophy. Discussions with fellow research students at Oxford Brookes and at other universities.

Many local arts and other organisations have helped make this work possible including Whitley Arts Festival, ReOrsa, Open Hand Open Space, Ovada, Jelly, Museum of Reading and The Restoration Centre. Other groups I have been part of: The Ideas Exchange and Figure Ground. Prof. Max. de Gaynesford for allowing me to join the undergraduate Heidegger 'Mind and World' Lectures at Reading University.

Filming / Photography: Vicky Vergou. Also, Frank Dumbleton, Ross Hale, Shelley Montague, Salvo Toscano, Janet Curley Canon, Alex Buhagiar, Ann Rapstoff, Darla Oglesby.

And especially all my friends, family and the cat who have helped me out and kept me going in so many ways.

Presencing: A blend of words 'presence' and 'sensing'.

Presencing: 'signifying a heightened state of attention
that allows individuals and groups to shift the inner place
from which they function.

When that shift happens people begin
to operate from a future space of possibility
that they feel wants to emerge.'

(Scharmer 2007p1)

I began the research seeking an in-depth understanding of presencing by reading: *Presence: Exploring profound change in People, Organisations and Society* by Peter Senge, Otto Scharmer, Joseph Jaworski and Betty Sue Flowers (Senge 2005). They discuss Joseph Jaworski's experience in Baja California in Mexico, specifically, an experience of being connected to animals and the species gap that we generally experience. They talk about a profound sense of separation and how this visit (a retreat) gave an experience of breaking down these boundaries that formerly he (Jaworski) was unaware existed. Otto Scharmer goes on to say that, 'these boundaries form the architecture of our everyday reality,' and 'this architecture seems 'more real' than 'the miracles'...experienced in Baja-until that boundary breaks'(Senge 2005 p.68). The loss or lack of connection, the apparent separation, and boundaries all point to a sense of oneness which is explored in some areas of spirituality, philosophy, eco philosophy and scientific thinking. Oneness is often expressed through profound connection. Scharmer goes on to say that there is an immense sadness in the state of separation that we generally exist in.

The description of Joseph Jaworski's visit to Baja and his amazing experience in a beautiful idyllic landscape struck me. I had a strong

reaction towards it. I really wanted to have that experience (I still do and imagine it would be amazing). It made me question whether this sort of experience is possible in our everyday places. It can be argued this sort of experience at that level of intensity is not generally available.

Can we be in our everyday places with a sense of connection or oneness with the world? Does it become easier if we go far away? Why is it perceived more difficult to experience here, where we happen to be? What can expanded art practices offer this sense of connection in the everyday?

This research concerns our local places and our life in them. The expanded art practices as developed are about stepping into and directly experiencing places just round the corner or over the road; places that are part of our everyday lives. These practices seek to deepen our connections with the world around us.

The methodology is embedded in this research based art practice. This approach aims to ask the research questions through the work and leaves the shaping of work for audiences beyond the place where the work happens until after this study. The methods and strategies were shaped by the process of enquiry (see Section 2: Approaches to Practice). They can be identified on the gesture sheets in the forms of presencing (being, connecting, crystallising and kinwork) and in the actions that formed the gesture, for example watching walking, listening, meeting. These intuitive and phenomenological approaches draw on Bortofts' reading of Goethean science (Bortoft 1996) and practices by Isis Brook (Brook 1998) and contributes to an in depth detailed engagement with place and the life in it.

Initially I set out to uncover the potential of the 'particular in place' as a means of better inhabiting and engaging with the world we live in. To achieve this I aimed to:

- Evolve a set of strategies and connective practices that amplify, expand and reveal forms of knowing place, as well as the gesture, substance and temporality of particular places.
- Explore and develop approaches to engage with place in holistic and creative ways.
- Explore notions and practices of presencing in relation to place in order to develop new ways of being in and shaping our relationship to particular places.

Three insights relating to this practice emerged early on: kinwork, individuals as organs of perception in place, and temporality:

- *Kinwork* is my approach for engaging people and developing new work in place. Guattari writes in the Three Ecologies that in those instances when 'kinship networks tend to be reduced to a bare minimum' the result is the 'deterioration of human modes of life' (Guattari 1989 p.27). I see kinwork in my arts practice as countering this reductive tendency through small acts of kindness that enrich such 'human modes of life'.
- Individuals can be considered as *organs of perception* in place. For Goethe 'we are the organs of nature's self revelation. The world itself is evolving through our growing understanding' (Bortoft 1996). Conversely, as we become more disconnected in society it is conceivable that we can become organs of perception for each other that illuminate our connections, understanding and presence in place.
- *Temporality*. An enquiry into the vibrations and frequencies (including seasonal shifts) and different relative times that may be experienced in place including the value of longer term investigations.

Kinwork and *individuals as organs of perception* highlight the emergent importance of shaping our relationships with others in place,

In the later stages compassion, intention and role of self became central to the enquiry.

- *Compassion.* What part does compassion play in presencing place?
- *Intention.* How does intention become manifest in gestures?
- *Self.* How does one maintain an authentic and consistent sense of self and everyday attitude when developing work with others?

I. Presencing, Place, Gesture.

In this section I will examine three key words used in this commentary *presencing* and *place*, as they define the territory of this research, and the word *gesture* as this is the form of my actions in these territories. This word appeared in the very first gesture I undertook, *Gesture 1 Landscape Gesture*. The word, *gesture*, was forgotten until the final stages when it became a means of seeing the whole body of research. A series of other words and phrases have accompanied me offering moments of illumination and clarity. They are described where appropriate in the text and in the glossary (see Appendix).

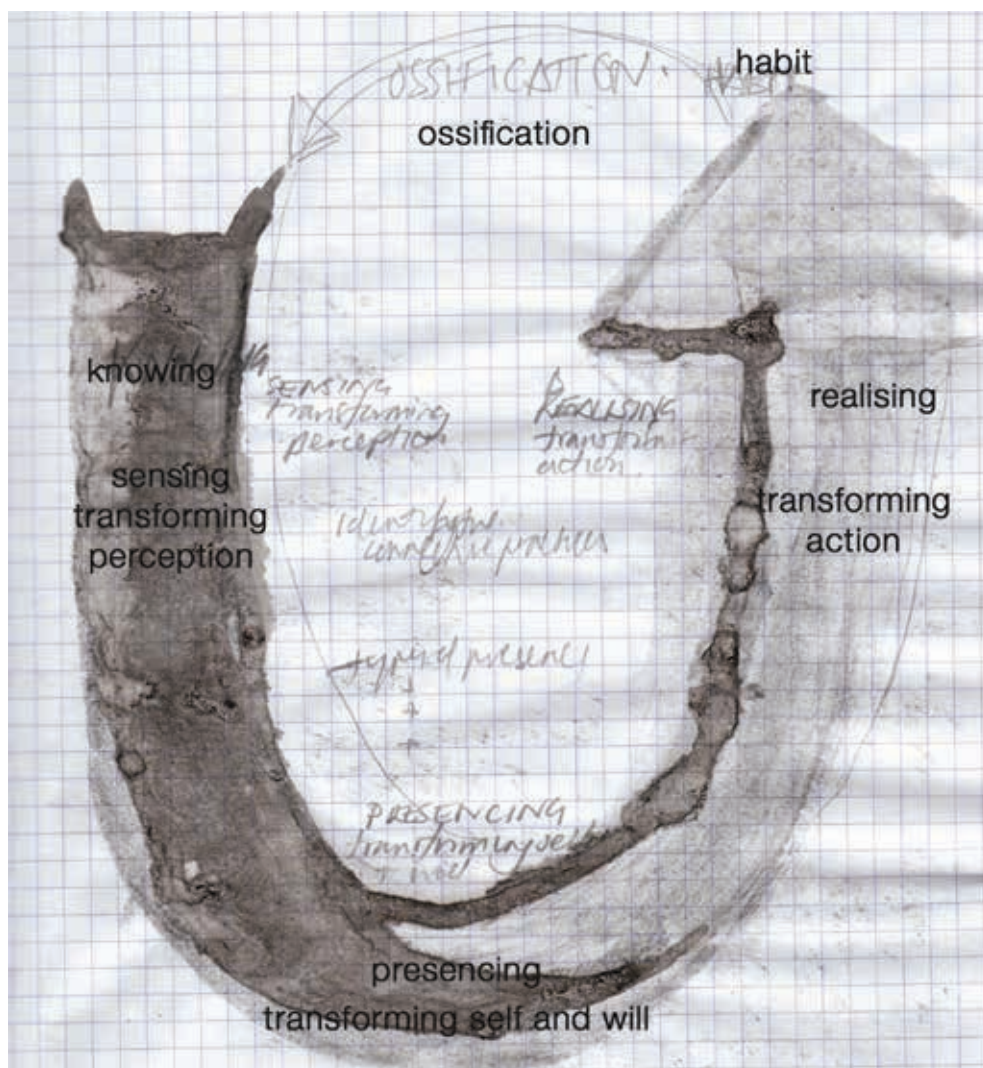


Figure 1 Drawing based on Theory - U.



For Peter Senge *presencing* is 'Letting come and consciously participating in a larger field for change'. His understanding starts with presence as being 'fully conscious and aware in the present moment' and it becomes '...deep listening, being open beyond one's preconceptions and historical ways of making sense, letting go of old identities and the need to control; and making choices to serve the evolution of life' (Senge 2005 p.13).

Presencing has also started to be used in archaeology principally by Chapman and Gaydarska at Durham University (Chapman and Gaydarska p.417). They use the term presencing to express bringing to the fore through fragmentation in an archaeological context. This approach draws attention to the way objects / materials that are used in an action / performance can be seen as being imbued with a special presence. They claim that there is also an interchangeability of what might be absent, whether this is a person or an object.

Otto Scharmer describes presencing as 'A blend of words 'presence' and 'sensing'.

Presencing can be seen as 'signifying a heightened state of attention that allows individuals and groups to shift the inner place from which they function. When that shift happens people begin to operate from a future space of possibility that they feel wants to emerge.' (Scharmer 2007 p.1)

Scharmer's process of presencing for organizational transformation seeks new business models that can be institutionalized. This is achieved through the creative processes described as Theory-U (shown above). There is a strong focus on innovative leadership as part of a wider community. In these expanded art practices I have brought place to the fore and worked with who is part of that place. I have developed ways of making place central to the presencing. I am interested in the opening out, deepening and renewal of our relationships in and with place. Their research has been an invaluable introduction into ideas of presencing.

My understanding of presencing has also been informed by the

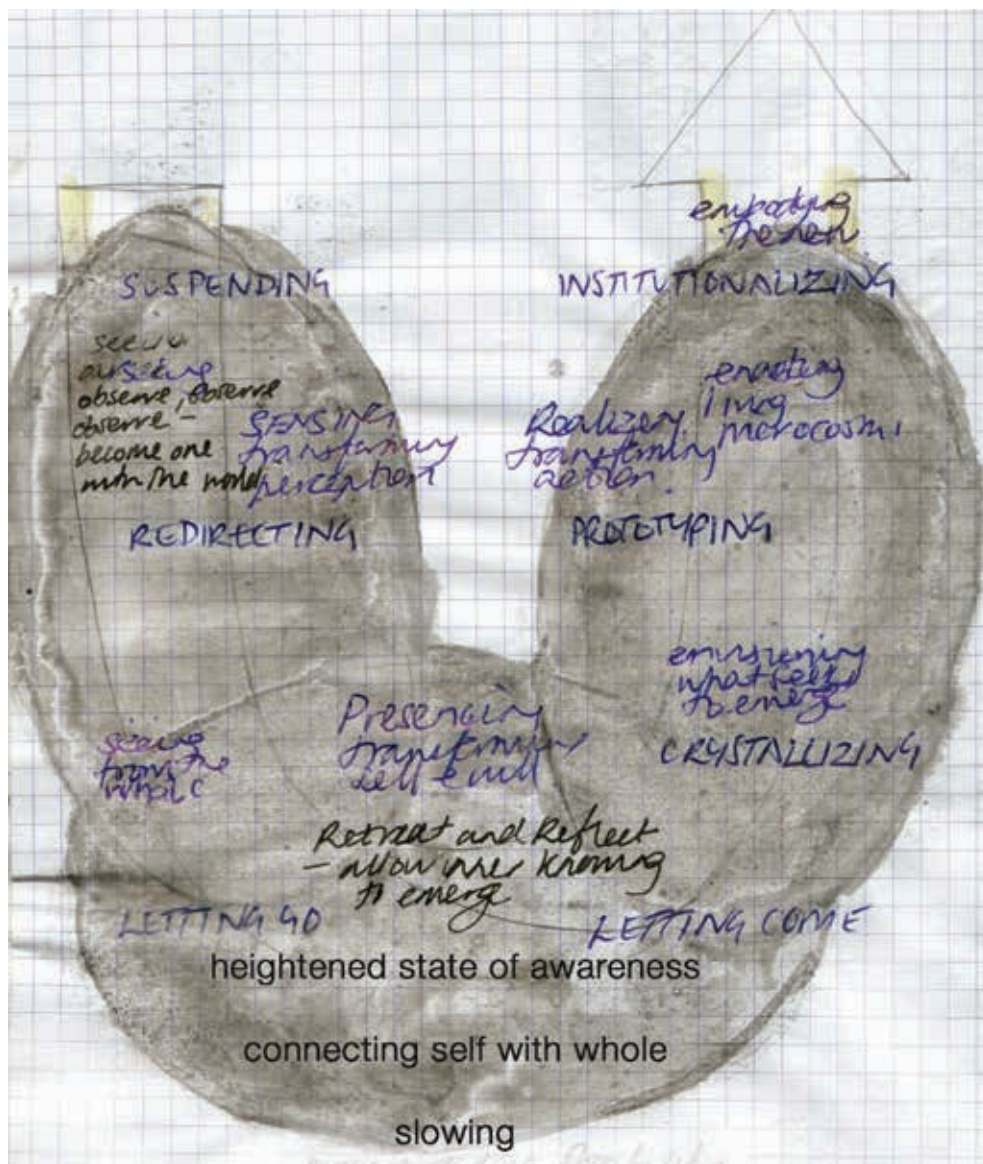


Figure 2 Drawing based on Theory - U.

contemplative inquiries of Arthur Zajonc, Zen Buddhism and spiritual practices like meditation. The qualities of our Being in place are considered phenomenologically with methods informed by Martin Heidegger's thinking about Being and social sculpture practices.

I am most interested in the base of the U (see drawing opposite). It is the moment that Being in the world enables a sense of letting come, or presencing that connects closely with the intentions in my practice. Heidegger wrote at length about Dasein or Being¹ in the world and for him Being and presencing are intrinsically linked (May 1996 p.23). My presencing is closely bound to the quality of Being described by Heidegger in *Being and Time*.

Being (Dasein) and Presencing (Anwesen) are phenomenological and existential preoccupations of Heidegger. Ontologically speaking, I have been making arts practices deeply bound with compassion that I have identified as being an integral part of place. To be here, is to be bound up in place and all its complexities. Philosophy informs practice and as such shall be examined in Section 2.2 and this has been key to creating the role of intention in the gestures.

Although his personal life is problematic I am trying to overcome this to concentrate on the philosophical concerns in particular *Being and Time*. It is known Heidegger was familiar with the writings of Laozi and Zhuangzi as well as Zen Buddhism (May 1996p101). He continued conversations with Chinese and Japanese scholars over many years² (May 1996). Many areas of these philosophies resonate with Heidegger's concerns: being and nothingness, letting come, authentic, anaesthetic (or tranquilized), alienated, entangled (idle talk/gossip/curiosity). This has given me a poetic understanding of his work that reflects my ontological reading of his writing.

1 There is a convention of capitalising Being in Heidegger texts.

2 Tanabe Hajime, Miki Kiyoshi, Kuki Shuzo, Nishitani Keiji, Tezuka Tomio.

The majority of the work took place in Reading (within a four mile radius of where I live), in local everyday places. There were several gestures outside this area. They took place in Bracknell, on the Ridgeway and in Yorkshire.

All the locations are generally understood as public and publicly accessible even if they are not in public ownership, and are free to enter. They are the everyday places that are often overlooked and some could be described as 'edgelands' (Shoard 2002 p.117) on the edge of the urban, but not in the countryside. They include social and physical places and tend towards a state of got away with it so far where a gentle state of neglect and making do has enabled the balance of their existence to continue. These places can hold a balance of human and non-human interests. They include a water meadow on the outskirts of Reading town centre, a small back street pub in a terrace, a tree in a town centre graveyard and an old orchard. In the case of the water meadows, *Gesture 17 hereabouts* x, people haven't found a way of building on them yet. As in medieval times cattle graze in the meadow during the summer. The meadow is often flooded for the rest of the year. The flooding in the meadow helps protect the town centre from flooding. Other types of place hold a balance of independent attitudes and everyday freedoms. The Retreat pub *Gesture 7 Where feels good here?* and *Gesture 8 Wallstone* is a small community pub that encourages and supports local arts and music.¹ All these places are in flux.

'The great disease of our times is meaninglessness. If fresh wellsprings of hope are to be found, we must first cut through the collective hallucination that 'there is no alternative' to nihilism. We must dig where we stand. We must get beneath the grass roots of popular culture and down to the eternal tap root. Here new life can grow from ancient stock. But to make blossoming possible, we must embrace our losses. We must face the reality of a brokenness of heart that is both personal and of the world.

¹ After 10 years as custodians of the pub they found it impossible to balance the demands of the brewery and the need to make a living and gave up in late 2012. Milward, D. (2012). Jane and Bernie are leaving the Retreat. The Evening Post. Reading.

Surprising that when we discover the pain is the mantra: the very suffering of the world can be what repeatedly calls us back to the imperative of its healing. If we can persist and sit with the reality, not running from it, a music may eventually be heard. The fetters of destructive control loosen. Life's dance resurges. And there is joy in spite of everything.' (McIntosh 2004 p.2)

The slogan Dig where we stand encouraged me to work locally in the everyday and find value of the whereness of these places that we are often close to.

The use of the term gesture arose because I wanted to describe my practices without classifying them as an art work, piece, performance, action, sketch and so on. I made a shift from creating a 'work' that explores a question, to primarily trying to respond to the question 'how we come to know and shape place?' through the practice. Many of the actions may have been considered as sketches or experiments. The term gesture has enabled me to continue to focus on the questions rather than on the classification of my activities. Each gesture, regardless of its form, has value as an expanded arts practice in the context of the research. Ways of enquiry that might otherwise appear insubstantial, confused or out of place are represented and valued in the context of the research questions.

The word, gesture, carries the potential of gestation and a suggestion of Gestalt psychology where the whole can be more than the sum of the parts. In Hubert Klosser's essay 'Gesture and the Object', he refers to Flusser, saying that for him the gesture or gestural is 'man's active presence in the world,' (Schimmel 1998 p.236) . Nancy Ann Roth¹ says Flusser tentatively defined the word 'gesture' as '...a movement of the body or of a tool connected to the body for which there is no satisfactory causal explanation'. She goes on to say that Flusser saw them as 'a form of evidence. Such movements let us look at phenomenological *intention*, the name phenomenologists give to consciousness in conjunction with a specific object.' (Roth 2011). The phenomenological intention corresponds with the aims of this research enquiry and the embodiment of intention revealed within the individual gestures. I have come to define the parameters of a gesture as:

- A gesture may or may not constitute a full piece of work.
- A gesture may combine with other gestures to constitute a new gesture.
- A gesture may or may not be repeatable.

The research questions are being asked through the gestures. The

1 Nancy Ann Roth is currently translating Flusser's texts on Gestures into English for Minnesota Press

gestures generated seek ways of *presencing* in our everyday places and entering into conversation with the world around us. Most gestures happen physically in a local environment however a few take the form of drawings. These drawings are a means of sitting with complexity and gathering a sense of comprehension, often of macro / micro experiences. There are small evidences or fragments of knowledge that are visualised to enable comprehension, often an illuminating whole. The drawings are instruments for contemplation and meditation. In *Gesture 5 The Shape of Night and Day* a sweeping curve was generated through plotting sunset and sunrise times across the course of a year.

Each of the 45 gestures is presented on a gesture sheet that includes an image and text in a table. The table is used to describe the gesture, the intention of the gesture, who was involved, where it took place and what was used. It reveals approaches to presencing place relevant to that gesture. These main approaches to presencing place are outlined below.

The creative methods and strategies are identified in the gestures. They all engage with one or more ways of presencing place. These creative methods and strategies are grouped in four main categories. They are:

- being in place, inviting an experience of letting go and letting come
- connecting and deepening engagement
- crystallising and realising
- kinwork

The first three relate to Theory - U as described previously.

being in place, inviting the experience of letting go and letting come to get to know through absorption, being open. They encourage an openness gained through the slowing of time. The slowing is achieved through actions in the work including: sitting, resting, walking, listening, watching, contemplating, dwelling, viewing and chatting.

connecting and deepening engagement. The (qualities and ways of) connections have evolved and clarified as the research has developed and have included active imagining, phenomenological musings, doing intently, finding a point of tuning, resonating and amplifying. There are forms of slowing, as well as ways of encountering the time of place and loosening the constraints of our time. Slowing to a point of holistic insight becomes the action of presencing.

crystallising and realising

Envisioning what seeks to emerge. This was done alone and with others. The activation gestures include: rubbing, relics, seeking (informing action) gilding, bringing together, collecting, dowsing, noticing, seeing, marking, understanding, illuminating remembering, reminiscing, reminding, relocating, mapping, recreating, disrupting. These forms of engagement though active in one sense can be forms of stilling.

And the fourth

kinwork This is a term I have evolved to describe working gently with other people. Kinwork can include being in place with others, embedding events in and with others, getting to know, reminiscing and reflecting. Kin have included scouts, local authority officers, locals, farmers, householders. Often people came together by chance.

primary and secondary gestures

The gestures are generally experiential, happening in selected places. Sometimes it is useful and necessary to share the work in other places, for example: exhibition venues. Where this has happened, and the individual gesture was shaped for this new situation, I refer to them as secondary gestures. (*Gesture 6 Landscape Gesture 2*). The gesture sheets are a means of sharing gestures in new situations and providing consistent information about each one in preference to shaping the original or primary gesture into secondary forms. The use of gesture sheets is discussed further in Section 5.1.

2. Approaches to practice

This section reflects on the approaches that lead to the methods and strategies in the practice.

2.1

2.1 Tuning into place

In this section I consider how tuning into place informs ways of recognising and feeling the web of life we are part of. It is an attempt to see deeply, be enveloped by the experience of place. I tried different ways going into place, imagining place, listening to it, attempting to sense its entirety, its discord, its familiarity, its history, its motion and time. Letting it wash over.

There are four different approaches in practice I have used to engage in place, all involve a sense of 'tuning'. They evolve in the practice as strategies of presencing that are being, connecting, crystallising and kinwork. Initially they were enquiries into:

- Experiencing my own being in place,
- Experiencing the physicality of place,
- Meeting people in place,
- Entering into conversation with place.

Being in place

First, attempting to be in place, to be open in place with or without others. Being in place. This may be understood as attempting to authentically be in place. It may be through gaining permission or being allowed to be in place. This permission may be granted through local authorities or similar or may be given to oneself. For example, on the platform in the water meadows (*Gesture 20-24 hereabouts* x), the experience of being in place was very different when shaping the experience for others in place and when simply being and experiencing on my own or with one other. This is examined further in Section 2.2. This comes close to my understanding of Heidegger's idea of Being (see Section 1.1).

The physicality of place

Secondly, I focused on the physicality of place, listening to the earth, as in *Gesture 1 Landscape Gesture* a poetic action described as follows. I sought to gather material influenced by the place by looking at (or in) the

surface skin of the earth. I attempted to absorb earth energies in through copper soles tied to my feet during the action of walking on the chalk ridgeway. Each footstep was a further physical interaction with place. The layer of lead (a second sole), sandwiched between my bare feet and the copper, acted as an insulator. This was to ensure the copper was infused with energy from the ground up rather than body down. I was aware of the ancient nature of that particular path as I imagined all the people who had walked here. I wondered if an essence of them might be drawn to the surface and become embedded in the copper soles.

People in place

Thirdly, there is tuning into place by meeting the people of that place. This is a way of seeing and understanding place through others experience and knowing. In its simplest form this approach was used in some of the viewfinding gestures, *Gesture 17 Viewfinding*. On these occasions listening to generated the viewfinding work.

Conversation with place

From this emerged the fourth approach of seeking a conversation with place. The intention embedded in each gesture points to a desire to communicate with place. This works best when people reach a point of letting come¹ place by Being in place.

As in *Gesture 41 Presencing Place Research Space* where the place was dowsed at the opening and closing of the Research Space. Although there was a corroboration from another dowser about the changing energy perceived, the question remains (to many people) was the response real or imagined. That there is a response at all suggests an impact of our actions

1 See Figure 2 Theory - U at the bottom of the U.

in place. For some 'the imagined' is real.

On reflection there two ways of looking at the gestures: one is through a deepening of knowledge which could be understood as part of a larger conversation with life, and the other is they offer strategies for future work by selecting a range of appropriate gestures to shape responses with place.

2.2

2.2 Being

I use one main philosophical idea as an instrument to inform my intention in practice: Dasein.

Heidegger was one of the first western philosophers to insist that we cannot exist without Being in place. He uses the word 'Dasein', explained simply it means 'being here'. We exist in place. We did not exist first and then place manifested itself. We exist in place. Dasein was an eighteenth century translation of Latin word praesentia (Collins 1999 p.52) generally meaning existence. The term Dasein was first used by Husserl.¹

Heidegger refers to Being as an enigma and therefore a provisional word that he wonders if it was originally 'presencing' (May 1996 p.24).

Being	Nothing
Sein	Nichts
Presencing	Unconcealedness
Anwesen	Unverborgenheit

He suggests presencing means to come to and endure in unconcealedness. Presencing occurs only where unconcealedness holds sway. I recognize this approach of letting come in Theory - U and the contemplative enquiries of Arthur Zajonc. Heidegger sees 'nothing belongs ...as absence to presencing'. (May 1996 p.25) For Heidegger there is a clear distinction between empty nothing that we might find in nihilism and true nothing that belongs to presencing. This true nothingness can be understood as the nothingness of Tao. To let presence means to reveal, to bring into the open. Through presencing we can strive to reach the authentic where the world discloses itself.

Heidegger claims that : Being the beings we are, we are constantly liable to fallenness (being inauthentic). He sees this as inevitable for us. Our fallenness happens through three main ways. These are:

¹ Introduction to Heidegger - 'Mind and World' Lectures at the University of Reading. Philosophy Undergraduate Course. Prof. Max. de Gaynesford (Spring 2012).

1) ambiguity

2) anaesthesia

3) curiosity (idle talk).

Fallenness results in tranquilisation, alienation, entanglement, insulation and disconnection: in one word the inauthentic.

Fallenness is countered by our desire and efforts towards authenticity. The authentic is bound in place, in a sense of connection with place, when we notice the whereness of place we can begin to perceive place in a state of unconcealedness. By attending to moments of connection we can deepen the quality of our attention. The attention is a means of valuing. Through this valuing we shape our relationships, and deepen our connections to place. This method is repeated throughout the work.

2.3

2.3 Perceptions of better place

In this section I look at distinct qualities places have that can lead them to be considered as aesthetic places (as opposed to anaesthetic) in which we can sense a connection with the web of life we are part of.

It can be argued that places can be split into those of the natural environment or acknowledge it and others that are designed to separate us from the natural environment (artificial). This can be expressed as places and the anthropologist Marc Augés term, 'non places'. The anthropologist Marc Augé tells us we are often lost 'gliding from place to place, where phenomena of sameness, commonality without distinctiveness (airports, motorways) ... surround us', (Augé 1995) effectively anaesthetising contemporary society. These human centric environments separate us from the wider environment in an attempt to reduce the unpredictability of the world and time. Jon Jerde promotes a sophisticated concept of 'placemaking' as architecture. The Jon Jerde Partnership aims for pioneer placemaking that 'reinvents the authentic urban experience that has often been lost by modern planning.' (Jerde 2013). This type of architecture practice shapes places, often shopping centres, for the existence of people in place through large scale construction. In a more ad hoc way, the extraordinary lengths taken in town centres to drive pigeons from buildings through nets and spikes is remarkable. As is the increasing ingenuity of the pigeons. (*Gesture 4, Birdwatching*). Often the range of demands in a town or city are predominantly human although concessions are increasingly made for other life forms.

There are places found within the everyday built environment that connect us to wider cycles of life and give us a sense of richness and depth. We live with them on a daily basis although they often go unnoticed as we go about doing our daily actions. I encourage a sense of richness and depth through creating the possibility of experiencing a wider awareness in gestures I have produced in the everyday. They offer a step away from the disconnectedness of busy life towards a sense of connection. This sense connection is challenging to hold in the everyday when much of our surroundings are designed to disconnect and our immediate more prosaic

needs demand attention. It can also be something we assume we know (conceptually) and therefore have no need of doing. There is a world of difference contemplating a flower as it grows in the world and picking that flower to contemplate it.

In a similar way in the Presencing Place Research Space in Bracknell I wanted to show wildflowers that could be found locally in the gallery, however to pick these flowers and put them in the space was complex. This prompted ethical and practical issues related to my intention. The decision to pick a flower is to isolate it from the complexity of its particular place. If I picked flowers and told other people they couldn't, that would be unfair. If people are invited to pick flowers there is a risk to the continued existence of the flowers, especially the orchids which are still establishing themselves. In this instance I was able to create two hanging baskets and a planter with cultivated wild flowers. The project happened at the time of the Olympics in London in 2012. I located, by serendipity, the supplier of the turf for the opening ceremony and they were able to supply me with a few square metres of the blooming meadows. On collecting the turf I couldn't believe how beautiful it was. This created a focus to discuss flowers, both the flowers in this *Olympic Meadow*, and those seen by people on the way to the project space. It meant that anyone coming into the project space had time to reflect on those flowers and relate them to those that they saw in paths close by. In contrast to *Gestures 42,43 Presencing Walks*, the Olympic Opening ceremony directed by Danny Boyle presented an idealism which suggested a confused nostalgia of place, history and nationalism. Although this was a unique celebration that brought an idealised British landscape to the fore with Glastonbury Tor and meadows, my interest is to reveal the nature that most of us come across in our daily life. This is found in the wildlife of the verges of Bracknell rather than the Olympic 'green and pleasant land' set inspired by William Blake's poem Jerusalem. In the presencing walks with others it was interesting to walk locally and reflect with others which flowers really grew in that area. For example: Some wild flowers in the Olympic mix were American, not

indigenous, equally some of the wild flowers in the verges were garden escapees. (Californian Poppies).

Belonging to the web of life, we are part of an interconnectiveness however odd or sad the area of the web we access has become when we notice it.

‘What we need most to do is to hear the sounds of the Earth crying’

Thich Nhat Hanh (Macy 2007 p.95)



Figure 3 Olympic Meadow and flowers brought in by visitors.

2.4

2.4 In the field of social sculpture

In this section I will describe how social sculpture is contributing to this study.

The current Social Sculpture Research Unit (SSRU) website states that the term 'social sculpture' 'is increasingly being used as a generic term to refer to any work that has an emphasis on imaginative, participatory practices; to relational or connective aesthetics; and to works that involve people in a transformative process and have a social dimension or focus'. (Sacks 2012)

Throughout my research I have been part of the Social Sculpture Research Unit, engaging in dialogue with fellow researchers, although I avoided describing myself as a social sculptor. This has made it important for me to reflect on how it relates to my practice. I have often felt social sculpture is complex, dense and compelling.

'Every human being is an artist,
a freedom being, called to participate
in transforming and reshaping
the conditions, thinking and structures
that shape and inform our lives.' Joseph Beuys¹

(Eernstman, van Boeckel et al. p.206)

Beuys first introduced the phrase 'everyone is an artist' in the 1970's. I have come to understand that as an 'artist' I can also be an artist (freedom being). I found this semantic shift difficult. In my experience those coming from other disciplines into social sculpture enrich these disciplines through social sculpture whereas within the arts I misunderstood this as replacing one sort of artist for another sort of artist. The challenge I sensed within social sculpture was not about social sculpture but about coming into the field of social sculpture with integrity. I perceive a sincere belief within

¹ www.socialsculpture.org/2.2 now removed

social sculpture practices that these practices are helping to transform the world into 'a better place'. This ambition can seem out of place in comparison with some contemporary art practice for example much of the art seen in commercial arts fairs like London's Frieze Art Fair ². The freedom of a 'freedom being' is about our responsibility and ability to respond in the world rather than in the artworld³.

The Social Sculpture Research Unit (SSRU) is homed in the Art School at Oxford Brookes not in the Social or Health Care Departments. This keeps imagination, intuition and inspiration at the fore of the work as essential means of transformation. I interviewed Shelley Sacks about her work 'Heat Generators' (see Appendix). This work was produced when the term social sculpture was just being coined in the early seventies and my subsequent account of it was a breakthrough, for me, in gaining a sense of the practice of social sculpture in the world.

Social sculpture has provided me with a vocabulary that acknowledges the spiritual and ethical dimensions in practice and helps me to understand the practices. The vocabulary is a resource and indicates methods within the work: responsible participant, scratching on the imagination, field of transformation and connective practices. As my study developed I noticed a correspondence with some of the terms and methods of social sculpture and those found in some spiritual practices, especially terms related to transformation. They both find ways of articulating seemingly invisible work, shifts both in our selves and the wider world.

Connective practices are a central strategy I use in the gestures. Sacks defines 'connective practices' (Sacks 2012) as 'those that bridge the gap between information and real awareness, information and action: practices that begin with our thinking and our values, with the world around us and

2 There are many examples that counter this: Activist Art and projects like Cape Farewell and Jeremy Deller exhibition at the Venice Biennale in 2013 are at the forefront of making art that is concerned with our world.

3 'Responsibility' and 'our ability to respond' is a regular discussion point in Social Sculpture Fora.

with our everyday lives as starting points; practices that connect inner and outer worlds’.

The emphasis on integrity and intention in my work was made possible by my engagement with social sculpture. It supported my critical and sincere engagement with the research questions and encouraged me to go further, openly trusting processes in the gestures for example dowsing, meditating and letting come. A step by step defence of basic concepts would have disrupted this flow.

At this time I do not consider the work as social sculpture but as expanded art practices informed by the field of Social Sculpture. The close relationship to social sculpture is apparent in the processes developed, in particular the participatory process of kinwork (Section 3.1) and the strategy of getting into a position where the world conspires to help you (Section 3.3). It is also seen in the phenomenological methods throughout.

2.5

2.5 Liminal Knowing

This section looks at the use of dowsing to inform the knowing of place.

Are we able to instinctively know place? What do we know that we aren't necessarily aware we know about place? These questions lead me to several intuitive actions with others: *Gestures 7, 11 and 12 Where feels good here?* People were invited to mark their responses to places, known and unknown. These gestures explored our perception and notions of subtly perceived energy that we might acknowledge.

I am fascinated by dowsing particularly as an indicator of a human responses or knowing, that we do not normally acknowledge, recognize or understand. In *Gesture 39 Conversations with an apple tree*¹ I dowsed the aura of the tree and earth energy close to the tree to help open out discussion of what we might understand by being in place. Later In *Gesture 41 - Presencing Place Research Space* I dowsed the space on the first and last day of the Gesture. There were differences in the responses of the dowsing rods that when marked out formed a transformed different shape on the floor that might be considered a response to actions in place.

Marco Pocacnik, a Slovenian Sculptor and Earth Healer, has a clear methodology yet the spiritual language can serve to mystify the uninitiated. His work involves 'lithopuncture' which is similar to acupuncture. The needles in this case are carved stone sited in a specific location that can direct earth energy. He has worked extensively across Europe including Hawkswood College in Stroud. This is a crystallised form of arts practice that offers action in place where fee paying participants enable work. Dowsing is found in a growing number of artists work. Dowser and Feng Shui expert Vicky Sweetlove² was involved in tracing the path of the Walbrook River which culminated in a mass walk through London with artist Amy Sharrocks (Sharrocks 2009) and more recently she was involved in the River Runs Project at Modern Art Oxford by Urbonus Studio with

¹ I have a trained as a dowser during this research and am currently a member of the BSD. The British Society of Dowsters (BSD) in UK formed in 1933.

² Sweetlove also teaches. I attended her courses on Foundation Dowsing and Earth and Environmental Energies.

Tracy Warr. (Urbonus Studio 2012) Both projects use dowsing to trace unseen water.

Dowsing is widely used as a means of knowing. If you can think of the question there is an answer, and wishful thinking does disrupt. Accuracy relates to the clarity of mind of the user. It is used in healing, geology, archaeology. In this research I have concentrated on the possibilities of knowing in place. Dowsing is also used as a means of harmonising or changing energies which is not within the breadth of these gestures.

3. Participation

The section describes who became involved in the gestures. It explores how these people came to be involved and the strategies that arose through their participation. Approaches to participation are then considered in a selection of other artists work.

3.1

3.1 Who is involved.

In this section I reflect on noticing who is part of place.

The interactions with people were generated from being open to people who happen to be in place. In practice the engagement went beyond this and was more complex. I found that being with others, whilst being present, aware and open, is essentially an action that invites connection with place and the life in it. Many of the gestures became possible because of the interest and kindness of those people who became involved. They could be anyone with a relationship with or interest in the place, for example, they may live in the place, fund a project, work for the local authority, have a business in the area, cut through on the way to school, be a volunteer and so on. This may suggest 'stakeholders' but this is not the case here. There are mutual responsibilities and trust, and there is always the freedom to step back from a gesture. Involvement may last a couple minutes or may continue through several gestures. I am concerned to maintain everyday honesty exchanges. The strategy of *being* in these practices leads to the *kinwork*.

The word *kinwork* arose through these processes and embodies the ideas of working with others in place. The sense of *kin* found in *kinwork* is the result of people connecting through the expanded art practice and the *work* is making things happen with others. In this sense everyone can be kin, becoming kin through interest and actions rather than through family ties, becoming a family of place and enriching the life in place. The practice of *kinwork* arises from noticing who is part of *whereness* of place.

3.2

3.2 Imagination in bureaucracy

Gestures begin in the imagination (Section 2.5) and kinwork is a means of enabling things to happen in place with others. These combine in the *imagination in bureaucracy* which can be seen as a means of 'letting come' through administrative frameworks that are part of these places as an invitation to become involved. Even if a proposed idea does not get support or permissions required, it becomes part of the imagining in the bureaucracy. To hold in the imagination is to begin to transform, create new ways of seeing and new possibilities; and even to build new neural connections (Alvaro 2005 p 377).

Occasionally it is about accepting that it is not the right time to complete a particular gesture and that for the time being it will live in the imaginations of those involved. Like a lid jammed on a jar, the action of trying to loosen it unsuccessfully will leave it, seemingly and inexplicably, looser for next time. This contrasts with 'taking on' the bureaucracy, or going ahead anyway. Christo says to discuss the image is to 'bring it into being'. He and Jeanne-Claude spent many years realising work. For me this process is part of the 'art work'. Their projects are funded through the sale of their art work. He is quoted in an Icon Magazine article saying: " We borrow space and create a gentle disturbance for a few days. And we inherit everything that is inherent within that space - the politics and ecology" (Icon 2011 p.178). They have spent decades gaining permissions through courts, parliamentary sessions and public hearings. Christo finds "Opposition enriches the process, expands interpretations..... the work of art gathers its own identity." People discuss the work for years before it exists. The 'Over the River' project started in 1992 gained approval in Colorado and there continue to be delays in realization due to appeals¹ (Claude 2013).

¹ The Bureau of Land Management in Colorado approved the project in 2011 but it cannot go ahead until the authority issues a Notice to Proceed. Currently a lawsuit has been filed by the Rags over Arkansas River (ROAR) against Colorado's Division of Parks and Wildlife. No court date has yet been fixed. In June 2013 an Appeal was upheld in Christo's favour but there are two more lawsuits pending. Claude, C. a. J. (2013). "Over The River." from <http://www.overtheriverinfo.com/>.

For me to work in place is to notice all that 'is' in the place; to sit well as part of the place. It is not a disruption, it is deepening enriching and understanding of the place. My strategy of letting come encourages the easy way, for example to help find a gentle and appropriate way into a gesture. To work with presencing is a positive insinuation into place: this can be seen as bringing the gesture carefully into a relationship with the whereness of place.

In *Gesture 20 hereabouts* x I needed to seek permission from local authorities to gain access to the proposed site that was blocked by an overgrown public footpath. One of the first actions was to walk around the area with Adrian Lawson, a former environmental manager in the area who maintains a strong interest in the area. It was an opportunity to listen to years of experience and gain some insight into the human and natural systems in the place. This strategy of finding an appropriate approach can save misplaced effort and knowing when to persevere. This led to my imagining that people can become organs of perception.

The access to Fobney Meadow where *hereabouts* x would take place was an overgrown footpath. I adopted a patient and friendly approach that involved telephoning and emailing the Environment Department at the local council repeatedly. At times it did feel like a one woman campaign. There were questions I needed to answer: Who maintains the public footpaths? Who owns which parts of the meadow? Who sublets the meadow? Are there always cows here? Each time I came back to describing standing in the field witnessing the sunset and inviting them to enjoy the image in their imagination. Eventually I received a phone call from Reading Borough Council inviting me to meet them in the field so they could better understand my request. Once we met face to face in the meadow we were able to find ways of unravelling ownership, access and get a sense of how we could work together. The overgrown path was cut back as part of a Community Service² project to the point where we could

2 This was the only occasion where individuals were obliged to be involved. It was part of their community service.

access the field. Further work on the path was also work carried out by a local youth group.

My original proposal for a later work, *Gesture 40 solar noon shadows*, was that it would take place in the pedestrianized main street in Reading town centre. After gaining some agreement and support (Reading CIC, town centre manager, curator) the gesture in its proposed form was halted as the local council would not grant permission. Reasons mentioned included: gold leaf on a pavement may incite vandalism and may be a slipping hazard. Later I suggested alternative materials such as graphite but concern about water shortages was raised as this meant the pavement could not be cleaned if they chose to remove it. As it turned out, it was very rainy in June.

On this occasion the final decision was with the Highways and Byways department as the Arts Development Team was no longer in existence. At the time I did not understand this refusal to grant permission as approval to use the same materials had been given to me by two different local authorities (Oxfordshire and Bracknell). I did wonder if there were other issues relating to the proposed gesture that were unvoiced.

3.3

3.3 Where the world conspires to help

One of the early conversations I had with Ed Harcourt, Director of Whitley Arts Festival, who commissioned the work, took place beside the road overlooking the site where the reeds were taller than us and the smell of cows wafted over. I explained that I had an impulse to bring people to this meadow, to pause and witness the sunset as part of the festival. I would work towards it although I did not know if it was feasible or achievable within the time we had. I suggested that we could stand by the edge of the road imagining that we were being in the field on a platform as the sun goes down. To his credit he said, “Fine, let’s go ahead.”

The project was formed through noticing and valuing emergent properties. There were opportunities for the project to shift and be open to others. For example, the father of one of the scouts, who was involved, was a lorry driver and offered to drop off some pallets. Later on, one of the volunteers at the crèche in the Restoration Centre misunderstood the invitation to the sunset walks saying she was sorry she couldn’t come that morning but would really like to. From this, she and I arranged a sunrise walk a week before the sunset walk and she was able to come along for the sunset walk too. It became the impetus for making more walks possible. This approach encourages a position of future possibility.



Figure 4. An early conversation at The Restoration Centre.

In the run up to and during working in the Whitley area I went to the Restoration Centre every Wednesday. A place for a bowl of soup and a chat. Here I met many local people. I developed a relaxed approach and generally listened. I ate soup and made notes; if anyone wanted to talk I was open to joining conversations. To hear someone's story is a special experience, and that act of listening and hearing is an active and activating experience. I was not fully sure how receptive or interested anyone might be. When there were meetings about the project we tried to have them at the centre. The Restoration Centre gave the project a local home in the community that was not art based. The willingness of those who were part of the centre, visitors and volunteers, was an essential part of shaping the projects in the area. It is a place I returned to often during this research and will do in the future.

Alongside this I visited many community centres in the local area from Age Concern, Youth Groups, Walking Groups and Schools often taking part in their chosen activities before inviting them to become involved in other things. In this I was helped by Ed Harcourt and others. In the Whitley Art Trail it came to knocking on doors, not only to ask for help but to let people know what was happening so they could choose to be involved or not.

In the section I reflect on ways of working with others through other artists' work and my own. I will reflect on how participants were valued in a work by Hamish Fulton; how the behaviour of individual participants appeared to change in the work of Marina Abramovic; and finally 'moving on' from a residency in the work of Sarah Lewison.

Hamish Fulton - Margate Walking 2010

In March 2010 I took part in a new work by Hamish Fulton 'Margate Walking'. Through this experience I was able to study how Fulton is working with mass participation in this slow meditative walk. On a very cold day 198 people arrived at Margate Marine Pool to walk around it. The act of walking was being filmed and photographed so that could be presented in Turner Contemporary for his solo exhibition in 2012.

'Seen from the promenade, over 200 walkers traced a continuous line on



Figure 5 Margate Walking, preparations.

the beach by completing seven circuits around Margate's Marine Bathing Pool. Participants kept a meter distance from each other and described the experience as being "*peaceful*", "*meditative*" and "*serene*"... (Fulton 2012)

The before and after communication by email provided an invitation to be involved beyond the event itself and enjoy the hidden treasures of



Figure 6 Margate Walking, leaving the Marine Pool.

Margate. There was a sense of being cared for, for example, the offer of hot chocolate after the walk. However, as people arrived on the day we were instructed in groups by megaphones that felt impersonal and distancing from proposed poetry of the event. Once everyone was in position, Fulton came forward to lead the walk.

It was very useful to consider this experience in shaping encounters with others in my work. The qualities I find essential in my approach have been to find ways of bringing together a means of gently redirecting of attention to presencing place. In the *Gesture 32 Whitley Art Trail*, Dan made soup for everyone coming into the Restoration Centre after the walk. This was a continuation of the day to day activity of the centre and on the evening it was the venue for Ann Rapstoff's work 'The Office for Dissemination of Sympathy'. This created a relaxed environment that provided an

opportunity for visitors to share their experiences of the evening and to warm up.

At the start of the largest walk, *Gesture 20 hereabouts* x, I very carefully underplayed my role. There were no announcements, I wandered from person to person in advance giving them a card to read. We left slowly. I was at the front, setting a slow pace, although sometimes others went ahead. If people have made the effort to arrive at a start their awareness will allow them to note when there is a sense of leaving, arriving, being, travelling on and resting. Some people joined as we went along. This was accepted as a natural part of the walk. The places and shifts of time were distinct enough to support this approach, for example as sky darkened people naturally started to move on. I was concerned that the place itself might be overlooked as people chatted to one another but chose not to ask people to walk silently. On an earlier walk I observed that often people were talking about the place. They were sharing their knowledge and experiences of the place with each other. The card with instructions also helped to keep the place in the foreground with a subtle focus.

Marina Abramović - 'The Artist is Present'

'The Artist is Present' by Marina Abramović in took place at Moma in 2010. 'Visitors were encouraged to sit silently across from the artist for a duration of their choosing, becoming participants in the artwork.' I experienced the work through a documentary¹ (Dupre 2012) that shows this durational performance by Abramović. She sits opposite a member of the audience, one at a time. The substance of the performance appeared to shift as it continued. Over a three month period the actions of the public changed. In the first phase there was an almost reverential or a spiritual exchange with the artist whilst in the latter part there were more challenges to the

¹ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01ndj7d>

A documentary that follows the Serbian performance artist as she prepares for a retrospective of her work at The Museum of Modern Art in New York.

artist and the participant taking their few minutes of the spotlight from the opportunity. It made me consider my approach in maintaining an everyday presence with myself and with others in the gestures in order to be in place. This was confirmed during a talk by Susan Trangmar² about her project 'A Play in Time' that took place in a Brighton public park (Trangmar 2008). She was asked if it was difficult to engage people. In her experience she said that when people were aware of being filmed they often performed for the camera.

Sarah Lewison and at the Lijiang Studios³ in China

This work brought to the fore some of the ethical responsibilities of an artist; not simply concerning producing work 'about' issues but how that work might have an impact on people and place. It highlights the possibilities of working in an area of concern for or with others beyond the residency itself.

I came across Lewison's work at a seminar I attended entitled 'Disruption and Experience'⁴ (Studio 2009). It aimed to discuss how residences might disrupt personal practice with special reference to Lijiang Studios in China. As the seminar opened out we were drawn to discuss the potential impact of residencies in the local area of Yunnan Province which was referred to as 'paradise' by Ernesto Salmeron⁵. There was an acknowledgement of the deeply complex changes in the local environment and lives of the inhabitants of the area. This discussion encouraged me to explore the

2 Close to Home: artists reconsider the local, East Street Arts, Leeds. 20th July 2012

3 <http://www.lijiangstudio.org>

4 Organised by Petra Johnson, PhD Practice Based Researcher, Oxford Brookes University 24th April 2009.

5 This echoes my observations about experiencing place in Joseph Jaworski's visit to Baja in the Preface.



Figure 7 The Beer Garden Project by Sarah Lewison.

value of working on my doorstep and notice the differences between these approaches.

One of the residency projects we discussed was 'the Beer Garden Project' by Sarah Lewison that responded to local issues in Yunnan. A form of this work was included in the exhibition Cultivation Field in 2012 (Corder 2012). I had a conversation⁶ with a visitor whose life and family is deeply involved in the issues highlighted in the work. The visitor had connections that he was willing to offer that could further the work and I encouraged him to come along to a talk that Lewison was giving the following week.

The opening up and closing of art work presents a range of possibilities for artists when that work affects the lives of people and it is happening in place with others. Lewison's work was inspired and informed by the local place and the knowledge of the people working in Yunnan Province. In this exhibition it drew attention to issues relating to the place. I had assumed

6 See appendix: Notes from a conversation.

that the artwork was still in the active present and that the introduction was coming from a place of future possibility. There is also a difference between work intended to draw attention to an issue and those that intend to affect those issues. Clearly there is a value in both.

What are the legacies of the work and those who become involved within the work, when that work is embedded with people in the place? In my experience people tend to be very kind, giving and open.

This experience inspired me to make explicit my position to this incident through an analysis of the perceived responsibility of the artist and the elements of caution I embed in my practice. There are responsibilities of Being in world and making art with other people. My awareness of Lewison's work gave me the opportunity to hear this story. If, as artists, we become involved with place, and the people in that place, where do our responsibilities begin and end? I was left with an awareness of the potential for exploiting already exploitative situations in the advancement of our careers.

Whatever happens in the art practices, the people in the place continue to live and care about their lives there. Working in my local area allows me to come and go within the area. There is always the chance to bump into people in the supermarket or town. It emphasized the importance of valuing people, building durable relationships with a strong sense of trust. These actions do take time and become interwoven with real lives. There needs to be a sense of ongoing care and interest. For example: the trees in Bracknell Town Centre are cut down where the ant were farming aphids; or when *Gesture 25 The Whitley Cup* we were able show the cup in the museum and J (the resident) and I took it to the local Age Concern Group.

4. Themes of the Enquiries

This section examines the main themes in this enquiry. What is the value of compassion in this work? What am I trying to achieve through these expanded arts practices? What is the underlying intention in the work? Why am I making this visible?

In the Artful Ecologies 2 symposium in 2008, filmmaker Andrej Zdravic gave a presentation called *A Sensitized Comprehension of Nature* in which he spoke of ‘the physical and mental violence that is spewed out by the media – whose reach, impact and sheer volume is increasingly devastating and numbing society at large. If nothing else, it is about a purely physical, objectively measurable, overload of the senses. It is amazing, actually, how little public debate and analysis there is on this important subject. It appears that the first step towards healing the earth would involve the healing of society by cutting down on these media ‘emissions’.’ (Zdravej 2008 p.77) After hearing Zdravic speak, I avoided TV and media for a few weeks and found I experienced the news as more harrowing when I hadn’t seen it for a while. It’s a useful means to occasionally reset my senses to the world and to feel. To take the time to sense the world around us is a risk and, ‘Even among ecologists and environmental activists there’s a tacit sense that we’d better not let our awareness come too close to our creaturely sensations, that we’d better keep our thoughts buttressed with abstractions, lest we succumb to an overwhelming grief, a heartache born of our organism’s instinctive empathy with the living land and its cascading losses. Lest we be bowled over and broken by our dismay at the relentless devastation of the biosphere.’ (Abram 2010 p.7)

Thoughts concerning compassion have shadowed the research, as has the word, compass. A compass is an instrument to help find direction in the world and, also, to show the path of an arc. To encompass is to go around or to surround. A compass points to a direction. The compass, also relates to pace, to pass, in step. To be in step with others. To encompass, we go around, compatible, compass, circle. Compass, a pattern coming together, compassion a feeling of sorrow, pity for others, for or with fellow feeling, with feeling with others, compassion. There is a suggestion of finding or sensing a way in place with others in these words, like birds and some mammals have compasses to navigate the world such as the demonstration that African Dung Beetles orientate themselves via the Milky Way (Dacke, Baird et al.). Can we have compassion with place in

the same way as we have compassion with others, compassion with all sentient forms or beings? Through these mixed etymologies I imagine that compassion can be our internal compass. These words suggest a territory of being in place.

Gesture 0 the compassionmeter. For a long time I was attempting to create a compassion-meter. This was intended to be an instrument to carry in place, an evolution of *Gesture 10 Presencing Instruments*. As I developed this idea the word meter troubled me, how can we measure compassion? The concept of measuring compassion seems to run counter to an experience of compassion? The compassion meter became a compassioner, an instrument that would resonate with compassion.

In my various attempts to find an appropriate form for the compassioner I created imaginative objects that tended to illustrate my concerns, rather than embody them. These included, a gilded hyacinth jar and an adapted compass. I didn't believe them. Through this process I gradually reached an awareness that the gestures are all forms of the compassioner. I am seeking to resonate compassion in the work and there is not one instrument but gestures are developed for particular places. The last gesture, *Gesture 45 Equinoctial Action* was an attempt to consciously be in compassion with the particular place after visiting and revisiting it. The act of presencing in these gestures is compassionate.

'Compassion is rooted in the experience of interdependence. My freedom is inseparable from your freedom...We are one human community that must find a way of living harmoniously with each other and with other creatures and life forms on this planet. Interdependence reaches far beyond the human species.' (Zajonc 2009 p.91).

4.2

4.2 Connecting, a Small Stitch

Each action or gesture had a secret intention, a small stitch, that connects us to with the world we exist in. The idea of a stitch or suture emerged from small actions, working towards minimal actions in place. A stitch brings two edges together; an exact position, where we can grasp a knowing of place; bringing together lightly and holding; a moment of stillness. This stillness can be seen as a non violent defibrillation of time and place. The need for slowness towards a point of stilling time can be understood as a moment to reset and reconnect with place.

This act of connection is an attempt to bring the planet and ourselves together, echoing the way a stitch is used to enable healing processes to start. It confirms our interconnectedness. Fritjof Capra expresses ecological as a referring to 'a fundamental inter connectedness and interdependence of all phenomena by the fact we are embedded in the cyclical processes and depend on those processes. Through this understanding a holistic world view is in fact an ecological world view'(Boas 2000p 72). This is expressed in Deep Ecology¹ which is understood as 'based on the awareness of being embedded with nature, being part of nature, being part of the web of life and being dependent on that web of life'(Boas 2000 p.72). It is this interconnectedness that we are part of.

These practices are all impulses towards the authentic. I have been working with everyday connective practices based on things we all share and can be understood as universal and can anchor our Being in the world. They remind us of and enable things that we forget that we can do anyway and that are free to all, like witness dawn or watch the world go by. There is often an illusion that we are separate from the world through means of disconnection. Even within this disconnection, in virtual worlds, there is research into inventing an illusion of presence, especially in the computer gaming². These gestures anchor us in our wider environment

1 Deep Ecology was coined by Arne Naess

2 Google Scholar search 'presence place virtual' gave over 2,000,000 responses (Jul 2013)

reminding us of Heidegger's ideas of Dasein; 'Being in the world' and our tendency towards the inauthentic. This might include our attitudes of disconnection of hurrying and, also our fear, or everyday physical disconnections such as: earphones, mobiles, cars, air conditioning, tarmac, pain killers etc.

These actions, like prayers, have come through the questioning in the practice. My conceptual understanding of the practices as I originally planned has now been informed by the actual doing. For example by sitting on a roundabout and being. By observing pigeons and being open to who or what was passing by. To type *As if it really matters* as if it really matters repeatedly was a powerful action to do. There was an embarrassment of belief that art can make the world a better place and a wariness of the perceived ego of an artist. These gestures are quiet everyday actions; not as bold as carnival or activism but part of that family. The gestures are precise, a careful bringing into being, a tuning into place and letting come. In *Gesture 28 Intersections of Time* there is a desire to bring comprehension at the fore. In *Gesture 45 Equinoctial Action* I collected a tank of water with the intention of bringing the life of the water meadows into the Gallery. There are very old traditions that water takes on the form of our thoughts, of our intentions. This may be a prayer spoken to the water in a bowl before the patient is washed in that water to help them regain their health (Senge 2005 p.247) or the blessing with water at christenings and baptisms, offering protection in many religions and there are also the experiments of Masaru Emoto in which he examines the effect of words on water (Emoto 2006). Similar faith, trust and protection is seemingly embedded in more solid material. Such as in a 'Charmed Life: The Solace of Objects'³ in which artist, Felicity Powell displayed a collection of amulets.

3 Exhibition at Wellcome Trust, October 2011 to February 2012.
The amulets were from a collection of Edwardian amateur folklorist Edward Lovett.

There is a growing spiritual dimension in my practice that was previously hidden or overlooked. This stems from studying the contemplative inquiries (Zajonc 2009), regular yoga and meditation practices that were not in place at the start of this body of work. This work on the self has had an impact on the arts practices, on clarifying the content and ways of working in the present.

The intention within the enquiry has become clearer as the research has continued. Clarifying my intention has aided the intuitive processes. This is combined with greater skills in articulating my practice developed through the research processes and confidence in my philosophical concerns. Sometimes the philosophical understanding is held within the intention. There may be multiple intentions, the one selected in each gesture is that which aligns most closely to the research questions. Identifying the intention helped to articulate and value the more spiritual concerns in the work and apparent simplicity of the gestures. In the gestures I am asking the same question repeatedly but each time there is a different approach. The intentions split broadly into three areas: firstly, a direct enquiry into the physicality of place, secondly, enquiries into the non-physical nature of place and, thirdly, finding ways of shaping an experience of place for and with others. There is a shift of interest from the physical to non physical intention through the research.

At the start of the research I wanted to develop artistic practices that avoided the persona or special presence often associated with an artist, by being my everyday honest self in the everyday, being present and resilient in that present. It is a flexible process of trial and error. In the *Presencing Walks* I was barely visible in the event itself, whereas the *hereabouts sunset walk* was led, albeit in a very gentle way. In early gestures the intention was identified retrospectively. As the body of work built I was able to identify the impulse and refine that impulse into a clear intention. In the final two works *Gesture 44 Winter Solstice 12.12.12*, *Gesture 45 Equinoctial Action* I was attempting to hold the intention in my mind whilst the work was happening. In this case there were no other

participants which enabled my attention to be fully with the intention. The intention shifted from being in the moment to being in the moment and actively imagining, focusing outwards.

Plasticity is an obligatory consequence of all neural activity (even mental practice), and environmental pressures, functional significance, and experience are all significant factors (Alvaro 2005). Studies examining changes in our brain through meditative practices (Lutz 2004) and (Zylowska 2008) show we all are transforming beings and have a transformative potential through imagination and other forms of mental practice. Philosophy has been used to help clarify my understanding of Being in the work and is part of the practice of allying mental processes in the work.

5.1

5.1 A Taxonomy of Practice

The *gesture sheets* enabled a comprehensive examination of the body of work produced in this research. The process of producing the sheets forced an honesty and thoroughness in my analysis and reflection. There are a total of forty-five gestures identified in the Gesture Sheets, numbered in chronological order. Each gesture is described through one image and table of text. They serve as a means of communicating the practice, not as secondary forms of the individual gestures but as responses to my research questions. This process challenged me to consciously find ways from outside the practices to articulate methods and strategies within the gestures. This enabled me to reengage with work produced up to five years earlier and served to hold the body of work simultaneously together, a complex as much as an enlightening process. A seemingly diverse body of work is thus brought together through this framework that offers a democratic means of representing the different gestures. It both embodies the questions in this enquiry, and reveals the shifts and subtle insistences of the enquiry. There were art practices I was undertaking that were private, slight, fledgeling activities in which I was developing approaches and strategies pertinent to the research that could easily be overlooked in the context of larger scale projects. There were other gestures that I undertook that were essential to deepen, strengthen and clarify ways of thinking and understanding that appeared messy and incoherent. (In particular *Gesture 43 Presencing Place Research Space* and associated work.) An observation¹ that some of the work would be easier to write about than others for example, *Gesture 20 hereabouts x*, a large project, would be easy to write about whereas, *Gesture 40 Solar Noon Shadows*, a gesture gilding the shadow of weeds, might be more difficult. This confirmed the value of this approach. The sheets were all produced in the final stages of this study.

I had a self-imposed expectation of producing an epic outcome as the culmination of five years research (a combination of part time and full time research). This counters the intuitive emergent methodologies I employ

1 Social Sculpture Research Forum in Winter 2012. Will McCallum

and the strategy of getting into a position where the world conspires to help. The exhibition of the gesture sheets provides an understanding of the research journey in keeping with the research.

The main forms of presencing found in the taxonomy were described in section 1.4. Categories gradually arose, shifted and found form through the reflective evaluation of the gestures most of these are self explanatory. *Intention* emerged as a distinctive category to examine and highlight the questioning embodied in the gestures in this enquiry. The category *whereness* was differentiated from place to enable the qualities of place to be valued.

The use of the gesture sheets has also helped to keep the real thesis, the art practice, at the core of this commentary. This was an important consideration in view of the examination requirements and the recent trends towards educational institutions publishing research online. My enquiries have revealed in many cases that the art practice is often subsumed by the accompanying commentaries. I do note that there are varying proportions of practice and written research depending on the researcher and university. Many systems (e.g. Ethos) do not have an option to search for practice based or written research, suggesting that all research is primarily written. This means that accompanying written texts can be accessed but the practice based research is not so easily found. The gesture sheets are a representation of the practice based researches that can be engaged with these formats (e.g. pdf).

5.2

5.2 Final exhibition

An exhibition showing the research journey was installed in the Glass Tank exhibition space, at Oxford Brookes University, 29th April to 3rd May 2013. The exhibition consisted of large scale versions of the gesture sheets pinned onto the walls. A boxed set of smaller gesture sheets was positioned on a table and three viewfinding chairs were in the gallery. A fourth viewfinding chair was placed under a tree just coming into bloom that could be seen through the gallery window. Objects and instruments relating to the individual gestures were piled under and by the table. A film showing several gestures was also projected in the space. The complete boxed set of forty-five gesture sheets and DVD of the film accompany this commentary.



Figure 8 Presencing Place, Exhibition in the Glass Tank Gallery.

I selected ten of the forty-five gestures and produced large copies of them and twenty-five of the gesture sheets were in the accompanying box of gesture sheets. This presentation of the gestures required an observer to spend time concentrating and reading as well as looking at the image. Visitors were free to relocate the viewfinding chairs inside and out of the gallery. Initially I placed one of these in front of *Gesture 15 Viewfinding* as an invitation to slow and sit with the work. The box of gestures sheets on the table offered a further more intimate way of engaging with the content.



Figure 9 Presencing Place: A Research Journey. Exhibition in the Glass Tank Gallery. Photograph: Frank Dumbleton

The exhibition space exuded a quality of quiet and calm conducive to spending time with the gesture sheets and other exhibits. It was very different from any of the places I had worked with as part of the research. The gesture sheets were presented in a clean, uniform and precise manner. This created clear opportunities for individuals to carefully engage with one sheet at a time and gain an understanding of that particular gesture. I made no attempt to make the gesture sheets into secondary art forms evolving from each of the original gestures. The sheets are documents of the gestures and make possible an experience of those gestures.

The research exhibition brought a selected range of gestures to the fore. It was about communicating the research practice beyond the individual original contexts. The viewfinding chairs brought a life to the exhibition diverting attention to the place of the exhibition to, for example, a tree that came into blossom during the exhibition. In earlier versions with the



Figure 10 Presencing Place: A Research Journey, Exhibition in the Glass Tank Gallery. Photograph: Frank Dumbleton

viewfinding chair they were labelled with instructions, on this occasion there was no instruction: *Gesture 15 Viewfinding* was on display; visitors had no hesitancy in moving the chairs to new locations.



Figure 11 Viewfinder in Presencing Place: A Research Journey, Exhibition in the Glass Tank Gallery. Photograph: Frank Dumbleton

5.3

5.3 Conclusion

In this study I set out to uncover the potential of the 'particular in place' as a means of better inhabiting and engaging with the world we live in. I developed expanded art practices that aimed to encourage a sense connection or oneness with the world in our everyday places and make it easier for us to experience the place we find ourselves to be? These expanded arts practices are contained in a set of forty-five gestures that can be understood as *presencing* place. They offer a sense of connection with the everyday in three main ways:

First, the accumulation of our daily 'touches' with the world through our small interactions in everyday places, both physical and non-physical.

Secondly, the gestures bring people into simple, straight forward experiences of the day to day wonders of the world where a holistic experience might be perceived in place or occasionally through a drawing.

Thirdly, they operate from a position of intuitive compassion through Being in place that is intended to bring us towards an authentic experience of Being in the world which I have described as a small stitch.

The gestures that constitute these expanded art practices are formed through a range of strategies and methods. The main approach of *letting come*, as a means of *presencing place* arose from developing ways of Being, inspired and informed by the thinking of Heidegger and *presencing* research found in the theory - U. This evolved into an open participatory method when working with others that I call *kinwork*. Two other specific creative strategies I use in these practices that involve people are *people as organs of perception of place* and *imagination in bureaucracy*.

There is a general creative strategy of *getting into a position where the world conspires to help you*. This relies on trusting the processes and remaining open and inclusive in the generation of these art practices. This extended period of research has offered me an opportunity to step back

from artwork driven by exhibitions and residences, and this has allowed me to focus on the aims of this enquiry with less short term and time bound criteria. It has resulted in a general slowing in my arts practice as a whole.

These strategies and methods are supported by softening the 'special presence', often associated with an artist or performer and bringing this presence into everyday ways of being. This is combined with a sensitivity (listening, being open etc.) to place and people in place.

These expanded arts practices highlight many of the small, everyday disconnections we can experience in place and confirm the possibility of the interconnectedness of our lives as part of the natural world. The emergent themes of compassion, connecting through a small stitch and intention serve to reveal connection and interconnection in place. My unique contribution to knowledge is realised through this body of creative methods and strategies for presencing in our everyday environment.

The practices offer ways of working that can now be brought into new situations and places for example in projects relating to wildlife or the natural environment. Those practices that happened in place can be continued to examine their potential over a longer duration such as the repeated actions in the water meadows. Similarly the actions with people such as those generated through kinwork might continue in the same local communities and the methods and strategies can be applied with groups of people in other new communities. This research can also be shared in practical workshops for artists and communities who want to find ways of responding to place. The direct relationships with real people generated as part of the practices will be of benefit to artists and academic researchers interested in public facing work.

The work contributes to the field of art in public places and participatory practices and offers careful reflections on working with the whereness of our everyday places. The individual gestures can now be shaped into new forms for new audiences. Clusters of gestures can also be brought together around specific themes for exhibition such as works relating to

our capacities to locate ourselves in place or viewfinding.

The gesture sheets remain instruments to connect with the original work. Their form is specific to this enquiry and the questions posed. However, this approach to analysing and reflecting on practice has become an essential tool for me.

My continuing interest in other disciplines (such as: environment, ecology, geology, spirituality and mindfulness) as well as arts practice with similar concerns has given me a clear understanding of the territory this research can contribute to. The production of articles based on themes in this commentary could contribute to this area. For example my interview with Shelley Sacks about her early work or a review of artists working with dowsing and other forms of liminal knowing could constitute the basis of the production of such articles.

This body of creative practices come from a place of small action 'as if it really matters'¹ that are embodied in art actions with conscious intention and a merging of life and art. The strategies and methods in these gestures hold the potential to charge the smallest actions with integrity and seek authenticity in place.

6. Afterword

These creative strategies and method in these practices can be used to reveal the fragile flux in everyday places that hold a potential for deepening that connection.

I sympathise with Susan Sontag when she writes in *Regarding the Pain of Others* that 'Compassion is an unstable emotion it needs to be translated into action, or it withers. The question is what to do with the feelings that have been aroused; the knowledge that has been communicated. If there feels there is nothing 'we' can do - but who is that 'we'? - and nothing 'they' can do either - and who are 'they'? Then one starts to get bored, cynical, apathetic. Moral or emotional anesthesia are full of the feeling of rage and frustration.

And is not necessarily better to be moved. ...It is passivity that dulls feeling. The states described as apathy, moral or emotional anesthesia.'(Sontag 2003 p.90)

Many of the gestures concentrate on knowing in place and through that knowing the shaping that has occurred as a consequence our Being in place is revealed. We cannot separate ourselves from the whereness of here, from the sum of everything that forms our experiential understanding of a particular place. I am now considering how we might reflect on the impact of our Being in place and ask how expanded arts practices can enable healing actions in place and with people in place. This would start with the small stitch and develop ways of amplifying the connective compassionate potential in these practice.

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A list of 45 Gesture Sheets

Glossary

A timeline of the research period

Heat Generators - An interview with Shelley Sacks, 14th May, 2012.

Notes from a conversation

A DVD showing Gestures 10, 13, 20, 41, 42, 43 and 45

presencing place: a research journey

Jo Thomas

presencing place is a research journey into the knowing and shaping of place undertaken as a practice based PhD at the School of Arts, Oxford Brookes.

This series of gestures formed the enquiry.

- Gesture 1 *Soft Boundary*
- Gesture 2 *Landscape Gesture*
- Gesture 3 *Birdwatching*
- Gesture 4 *Frequencies*
- Gesture 5 *The Shape of Day and Night*
- Gesture 6 *Landscape Gesture 2*
- Gesture 7 *Where feels good here?*
- Gesture 8 *Wallstone*
- Gesture 9 *Choirs past and present*
- Gesture 10 *Choir*
- Gesture 11 *Where feels good to be here? Arena*
- Gesture 12 *Where feels good here? Ovada*
- Gesture 13 *Presencing Instruments*
- Gesture 14 *Hereabouts x Project Overview*
- Gesture 15 *Viewfinding*
- Gesture 16 *Platform Building*
- Gesture 17 *Viewfinding 2*
- Gesture 18 *Viewfinding by Car*
- Gesture 19 *Dawn Walk, Sunrise 7.27*
- Gesture 20 *Hereabouts x Sunset Walk*
- Gesture 21 *Afternoon Walk*
- Gesture 22 *Equinox Dawn Walk, Sunrise 7.41*
- Gesture 23 *Interventions Environment Gallery*
- Gesture 24 *Hereabouts Walk, Sunset 5.41*
- Gesture 25 *Hereabouts Walk, Sunset 4.34*
- Gesture 26 *Hereabouts Walk, Sunset 4.39*
- Gesture 27 *As if it really matters*
- Gesture 28 *Intersections of Time*
- Gesture 29 *Material of Thought*
- Gesture 30 *Sieved Earth*
- Gesture 31 *Coal*
- Gesture 32 *Whitley Art Trail Overview*
- Gesture 33 *Litton Road*
- Gesture 34 *Axbridge Road*
- Gesture 35 *The Whitley Cup*
- Gesture 36 *Dawlish Road*
- Gesture 37 *Restoration Centre*
- Gesture 38 *Apple prints*
- Gesture 39 *Conversations with an Apple Tree*
- Gesture 40 *Solar Noon Shadows*
- Gesture 41 *Presencing Place Research Space*
- Gesture 42 *Presencing Walk 1*
- Gesture 43 *Presencing Walk 2*
- Gesture 44 *Winter Solstice 12.12.12*
- Gesture 45 *Equinoctial Action*

Being relates to our existence and can also be our essence or presence in the world. 'Being' is synonymous with 'being here'. We exist in place. We did not exist first and then place manifested itself. It refers to Heidegger's philosophical thinking on Being.

Connective practices are interdisciplinary methods and forms of engagement. 'They bridge the gap between information and real awareness, information and action: practices that begin with our conscious awareness and reflection on our thinking and our values, with the world around us and with our everyday lives as starting points; practices that connect inner and outer worlds'. (Sacks 2012)

Dowsing. It is traditionally used in locating water and minerals. Often two L- shaped rods are held and will swing in response to a question asked by the dowser. There is a consensus that a reaction can take place but there has been insufficient research to confirm the exact nature of the phenomena being dowsed. The underlying principle in all forms of dowsing are 'some form of recognisable sensing, an identified location: meaningful coincidence of sensing and location; and a use or purpose for all this' (Graves 2008) . My understanding and use of dowsing was informed by the research of the dowser Hamish Miller into earth energies (Miller 1994).

Everyday is very much my everyday. The day to day life that is close to hand, easy and it can be considered ordinary. In this study it is culturally specific to Reading, Berkshire, UK.

The **everyday me** tries not to engage with any role and in order to enable unmediated experience for others and consciously not to engage with the special presence relating to a performer. This is to develop a consistent approach before, during and after a gesture.

Everyday places are familiar or ordinary. They are culturally specific, and found in an individuals' local environment without special effort being required.

Expanded art practices are part of Beuys' expanded concept of art that goes 'beyond space and time, and is active in the spiritual and mental forces of every human being' (Kurt 2008 p15). To my mind these practices include connective practices as well as draw on many art approaches and can include arts and non arts related disciplines.

Interconnectedness A sense that everything is connected to everything else. For example 'We are all embedded in the cyclical processes of nature and depend on those life processes' (Boas 2000p 72). I understand this as empowering and hopeful that our actions and intentions make a difference.

Kinwork is an approach I developed for engaging people and developing new work in place. Guattari writes in the Three Ecologies that in those instance when 'kinship networks tend to be reduced to the bare minimum' the result is 'the deterioration of human modes of life'. I see kinwork in this arts practice as countering this reductive tendency through small acts of kindness that enrich such 'human modes of life'(Guattari 1989).

Knowing is how we come to information, knowledge and understanding. Knowing gained by direct means such as intuition or the sensuous (Abram 1996) as well as the phenomenological approaches informs this enquiry, alongside other ways of knowing from secondary sources including historical and geographical records.

Liminal - 'threshold of consciousness'. I use the term liminal to describe the threshold beyond which we have not developed the capacity to perceive and as such can be described as a frontier of perception. I imagine this boundary as a territory between what we can sense and what we cannot sense, where we might sense but not fully know what we sense. As transformative beings our capacities to sense shift and these shifts are the result of where we are active and give our attention to.

Oneness a sense of unity, of being part of something much larger than ourselves. It can include a comprehension of the interconnections we are part of.

Place for Edward Casey can be a by product of activities or it can be produced as a goal. We may come across it as a place for action to occur

(Casey, 2009). For Jodie Berland 'place is more and more demonstrably the outcome of social practice, people determine its shape and meaning' (Bennet 2005p258)). As Yi Fu Tuan says in Space Place and Topology a place can be 'a comfy arm-chair' (Tuan 1977). In this study I concentrate on those places we come across that tend to be public, freely accessible and shared. For Heidegger 'place is a phenomenal particularization of "Being in the world"' that informs my approach to this study. (Casey 2009).

Types of **place**

- **Slowed** place refers to those places that may appear permanent or timeless. Places that can be considered in a state of equilibrium.
- **Gesture of place** 'shifting from what the place is saying to what can be developed here' (Brook 1998) or noticing the tendency to absorb water and dampness in a place and then intuiting how to work with that place.

Presencing For Peter Senge presence is 'Letting come and consciously participating in a larger field for change'. His understanding starts with being 'fully conscious and aware in the present moment' and becomes 'deep listening, being open beyond one's preconceptions and historical ways of making sense, letting go of old identities and the need to control; and making choices to serve the evolution of life' (Senge 2005).

Presencing is 'a blend of words 'presence' and 'sensing'. Presencing signifies a heightened state of attention that allows individuals and groups to shift the inner place from which they function. When that shift happens people begin to operate from a future space of possibility that they feel wants to emerge.' (Scharmer 2007)

Shaping is based of transformations. From walking through a place and carving a path into the ground to drawing attention to a view and expanding / enhancing ways of imagining a place or situation, to the growth of neural pathways in response to our interconnections (Alvaro 2005).

Spirituality 'a way of thinking and acting that extends beyond mere reason to create connectedness and commitment, and is derived as much from science as from art' (Kurt 2008)

Tuning is actively sensing and seeking a resonance in a situation or place.

Whereness is the sum of the everything in that place that forms an experience of that particular place and could be understood as relating to the atmosphere of a place, everything that is part of a place or exerts an influence on that place 'an increasing substantiality of the phenomena examined' (Brook 1998)

Web of Life. A fundamental interconnectedness of all phenomena by (based on the fact) the fact we are all embedded in the cyclical processes of nature and depend on those life processes. (Boas 2000)

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Timeline

An overview of activity in this 5 year period.

timeline	GESTURE	TITLE	BROOKES	talks/exhibitions/events	workshops	conversations	work	life	timeline
			Start MPHLL Part Time						
				Would you give art to a dying man? Middlesex University			part time lecturer Reading College		
							Ongoing 3 days a week		
							Of Birds and Bees (illustrations)		
	1	Soft Boundary				Lucy Andrew	poems by AFHarrold		
November 2008		On Our Watch – Exhibition	From Paradise... Wolfgang Zumdick	Roger Horns – Art Angel Project				November 2008	
				Janet Cardiff – MOA					
				Creativity and Place in Berkshire – Richard Wentworth, Jo Thomas.					
December 2008								December 2008	
January 2009								January 2009	
February 2009				Flux Dinner – Willem de Ridder, Baltic				February 2009	
			Tracey Warr – Writing with Artists						
March 2009								March 2009	
			Seminar – Braziers International residencies and Residencies China						
			Ernesto Salmeron	Mythologies – Haunch of Venison					
April 2009						The Ideas Exchange (TIE)		April 2009	
May 2009									
					Marko Pocacnik (Salisbury)		FIGURE GROUND(FG) Brighton		May 2009
June 2009							FG Bracknell/Milton Keynes		June 2009
				R Beau Lotto, RSA. The Ecology of Mind					
July 2009									July 2009
August 2009								August 2009	
	2	Landscape Gesture				FG Chatham			
	3	Birdwatching		Simon Faithful Hayward Gallery					
September 2009									September 2009
	4	Frequencies							

timeline	GESTURE	TITLE	BROOKES	talks/exhibitions/events	workshops	TIE	work	life	timeline
October 2009									
							FG /White Nights Brighton		October 2009
	5	The Shape of Day and Night							
November 2009									
			PhD Forum Presentations Mary Lou Barratt, Ruth Harvey Regan				FG Chatham		November 2009
December 2009									
January 2010				Earth Exhibition – GSK					start yoga practise – compassion
									January 2010
February 2010			PhD Forum presentations	Arctic mapping Dr Marc St Onge					February 2010
	6	Landscape Gesture 2							
March 2010			PhD Forum presentations	Hamish Fulton – Margate Walk					March 2010
					Bristol Arnoldini				
					Anthony Gormley – Sutra				
April 2010	7	Where feels good here	Arthur Zajonc – seminar – the place of contemplation in education (Merton College)						April 2010
	8	Wallstone							
May 2010	9	Choirs Past and Present							May 2010
	10	Choir							
	11	Where feels good here? Arena							
	12	Where feels good here? Ovada							
June 2010	13	Presencing Place Instruments							June 2010
	14	Hereabouts x Project Overview							
July 2010			Radical Nature at Barbican				Street Party – film 1977 recited		July 2010
August 2010	15	Viewfinding							
	16	Platform Building						root chakra	August 2010
	17	Viewfinding 2							
September	18	Viewfinding by car							
	19	Dawn Walk, Sunrise 7.27							September 2010
	20	Hereabouts x Sunset Walk						sacral chakra	

timelime	GESTURE	TITLE	BROOKES	talks/exhibitions/events	workshops	work	life	timeline
October 20	21	Afternoon Walk						
	22	Equinox Dawn Walk, Sunrise 7.41					solar plexus	October 2011
	23	Interventions Environment Gallery						
	24	Hereabouts Walk, Sunset 5.41			Anselm Kiefer - Baltic		heart chakra	
November	25	Hereabouts Walk, Sunset 4.34						November 2010
	26	Hereabouts Walk, Sunset 4.39						
				Nuit Blanch Reading				
December		sun set projections						December 2010
							Lundy Island	
January 2011		Transfer exhibition		Ice Music (Somerset House) and Ice Volcanoes – Geological Society	Shelley Sacks, Janice Howard and Hildegard Klode	cultural partnership meeting FG visionini	throat chakra	January 2011
			Re-thinking Sustainability – Dr Maritta Koch-Weiser				throat chakra	
February 2011		Transfer interview		Aesthetic Education and Poetic Imagination – Wolfgang Irmidick		FG visioning	crown chakra	February 2011
			Knowledge as a Process of Transformation – Alex Arteaga				Nice, France	
March 2011		What has the notion of sustainability got to do with an expanded understanding of art – Hildegard Kurt					Reeth, Yorkshire	
		Arran Stubb – Ecological Citizenship & Peter Gingold – Tipping Point			Research Presentation (Reading College)			March 2011
		25/3 transfer to PhD		Geological Evidence for the Earth's Future (Geological Society)	FG planning			
		PhD Forum – all researchers		Steve Reich – Drumming (Royal Festival Hall)		FG LightShip 1		
April 2011	28	Intersections of Time		The Cave of Forgotten Dreams – Werner Herzog	FG visioning -			April 2011
	27	As if it really matters				FG LightShip 2	Newcastle/Hawsker	
		What now? Landscape of the arts and how to survive it			FG Bristol – Place	Ian Biggs		
May 2011	29	Material of thought		5 in academia training – Careers Office				May 2011
30		Sieved Earth						
31		Coal	PhD Forum		FG Portsmouth – Phil Smith			
June 2011				Richard Long – Haunch of Venison		Voluntary Redundancy	move house	June 2011
			-		FG Fernynwood		France	
July 2011								July 2011
							mice	
			Folkestone Triennial – Stretching Boundaries new participation		FG Hackney Wick			
August 2011		Careers training – follow up		Mentor Training with Susan Diab	Workshops Whitley Arts Festival			August 2011
					Glastonbury Healing Festival			
			Transfer to full time		Portland Stone Quarry – Hanrah Sofaer		Whitehorse Hill	
September		Whitley Art Trail	Research Skills Summer School				move studio	September 2011
			Time Management Training	Cultivation Field Symposium		FG Book launch at Bookart Bookshop		
							work at home	
October 2011				Dowsning Workshop – Earth energy (BSD Dorking)	FG Fernynwood			October 2011

timeline	gesture	title	brookes	talks/exhibitions/events	workshops	work	life	timeline
November 2012			Brookes	Deepak Chopra – Spiritual Solutions Seminar			November 2012	
						dowsing home of M		
December 2012							December 2012	
	44	Winter Solstice 12.12.12.						
January 2013							January 2013	
February 2013			Social Sculpture Forum	Resurgence / Deepak Chopra initiative meeting				
							February 2013	
					Sebastian Wittstock	journeyman carpenter	heron on wall	
March 2013			Indesign training					March 2013
	45	equinoctial platform visit						
		artspeak research presentation at openhand openspace studios						
April 2013				Shirley Pegnas presentation in house, Bristol				April 2013
				Kate Corder presentation University of Reading			neighbour angry at heron	
May 2013		Exhibition of Gestures in Glass Tank						May 2013
		Presencing Place: A Research Journey	Art and Art History Research Conference	Reading University				
June 2013		research commentary		Buddhist Talk on Time, Hampstead, London			new bathroom	June 2013
				Training – The Healing Trust			neighbour shooting air rifle	
							police	
July 2013							fence	July 2013
timeline		title	Brookes	talks/exhibitions/events	workshops	work	life	timeline
gesture					conversations			
		Overview of activity during this research period with approximate dates						

Heat Generators - An interview with Shelley Sacks

An edited transcript of a conversation with Shelley Sacks
about her work *Heat Generators* (1978).

Unpublished

May 2012

Heat Generators

An interview with Shelley Sacks

by Jo Thomas. 14th May 2012

In the office of artist and social sculptor, Professor Shelley Sacks there is an intriguing jam jar on top of the bookshelves. Apparently inanimate it has been *scratching on my imagination* during supervisions with Shelley as a doctoral student since Autumn 2008. Recently I asked Shelley to tell me about this strange and compelling object. As she talked she held the jar in her hands.

JT First of all I'd like to know what it says around the base of the jar.

SS It says "garbage equals warmth condition" and then it says "our cities are the breeding place of the new social warmth body". It was produced in 1978 long ago, how long was that thirty two, thirty four years. There is a tiny hole on the top. When it was produced it was at least half full of pitch black liquid and stuff, now maybe the stuff remains. The liquid



Shelley Sacks office in Social Sculpture Research Unit at Oxford Brookes University 2012.

was only vegetable waste that had gone black. I was working very much with the image from alchemy of the *nigredo*, this black substance that in a way is like the black gold, the inverted gold. If we know how to work with what we think is waste, what we think is garbage, we end up with this amazing rich fertile soil. It is the humus. We end up with the stuff that can become the social gold. We could, if we could look at the problems, the mistakes, the disasters in our society as a resource, instead of dismissing them as the crap, just like we do with waste vegetable matter or with crap itself. .. Julia Kristeva's ideas about the abject that we push everything away that is difficult, dark, dangerous unknown smelly etc. And they are called *Heat Generators*.

(Julia Kristeva – Bulgarian-French philosopher currently Prof at University Paris Diderot.)

JT So what lead you to make the Heat Generators; you say, them, how many were there?

SS There were a hundred and fifty and they all had a stamp on top, (you can still see a little bit of the stamp) and they were an edition from the Free International University which we were developing in Cape Town.

JT And, what lead me to make them?

SS I suppose I was very involved with the darkness as something, so that was one motivation. That the darkness is something people tend to fear or do not value enough. Everybody is into reason and the light of day and clarity and not seeing that there's another space; where there's another kind of thinking, clarity, and understanding that is in the shadows of this light, daylight of reason. For years, my whole life I've been super-interested in darkness and the light in blackness and so, the alchemical idea of the *nigredo* but, it's also on a totally physical level. I suppose what's always fascinated me with coal and with trees is how a tree takes the light of the sun, this golden ball and transforms it through its green crown. Over thousands of years it becomes black coal and coal becomes diamond and so we've got another form of light. So there is this process all the time between light and dark. In western society we've negated the dark, we've negated death, we've negated difficulty, we've tried to negate... they all start with D. There had been a lot of denial of the dark, denial of death, denial of difficulty. Especially, also, in the South African situation. I suppose I really wanted people to see. I never had this phrase social sculpture at that time. I was hardly using the phrase, Beuys had just coined it. I'd just come back from three months at the Honey

Pump when I had probably started working on this. (*Honey Pump in the Workplace* – Joseph Beuys took place at Documenta 6 – Kassel 1977.) I was certainly starting to translate this little book (*Action Third Road– building up initiatives or the Red Book*) in '78. One version of the book was linked to these *heat generators*.

So I was trying out what has also become central to my work now. I was trying out this relationship.. but I also didn't have the language for it then; I was trying out this relationship between making strange with the jar, instead of just handing out books and giving lectures on the *third road social model*: trying to link up the role of this object that would provoke and scratch on the imagination and make strange and open up a space for looking at what a new social body might look like and seeing all the difficulty as a possibility for that.

So the other phrase that I was about to say that I didn't have at the time was this idea that *social sculpture is a field of transformation and no one is outside*. In a way, these *heat generators* show that nothing that is going on needs to be wasted, it can be transformed.

This was in the midst of the uprisings in South Africa; the really major uprising started in '76 when I had first come back from my first three years in Germany and I was working very actively in political groups and organisations but all the time trying to look for the role of imagination. I remember working with a very active youth group from the townships at one point who were all just wanting to go out and throw stones at the tanks, to act and join this revolution. I wasn't planning to stop them (I was not much older than them, they were probably 20 and I was 25 or 26) but just saying "*isn't thinking already a form of action*". That has also carried on right into my work to this day.

I suppose finally was the sense of people were talking about the horror of cities and how cities were really anathema to a kind of *sustainable future*. I think the term sustainable development had in fact been coined by then, in the 70's, I'd never heard it, but there was certainly a sense of an *ecological future*. I remember I was so taken by Beuys; it was really his idea that the cities, I don't think he used the phrase '*were the breeding places of the social warmth body*' but he was definitely talking about warmth work and warmth bodies. I remember going back (to South Africa) and everyone was talking about riots and this terror of cities and I was thinking, no, actually we have to look at what

and they are called heat generators..



"garbage equals warmth condition" and then it says "our cities are the breeding place of the new social warmth body".

is - and that was also in his thinking. That human beings have come together like this, offers a special set of possibilities, this intense being and coming together that creates huge problems but has intense possibilities. Half the world's people, more than half, I think, live in big cities. Now we see with available development thinking that actually 'big cities', if we can find solutions to them; it's better than people using up the whole planet.

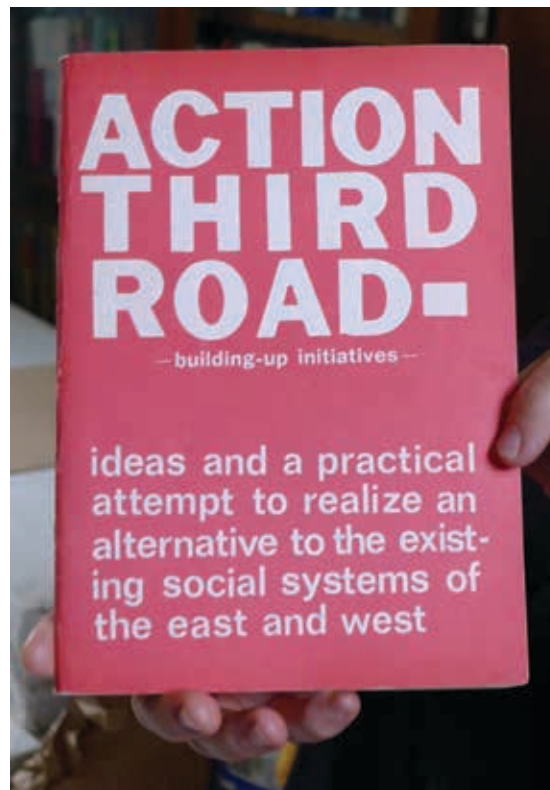
JT So, you have about 150 of these jars, how did you actually use them?

SS I used them by piggy backing initially on our political meetings, where there'd be a meeting of one of the democratic organisations and I'd say I have this new social model. It was very difficult; I was trying not to sell ideas but I definitely wanted to open a space, another kind of future in South Africa I mean. I remember standing on the stage in an old school hall where there were kind of green velvet curtains and me and the red book and the jar of rubbish or beautiful black liquid that I loved

so much and half the people were like *what's this?* and *why don't we get on with our meeting?* And now here is this funny person, who some people knew and trusted. So it is partly that, anyhow, and they were 150 jars and I think we printed a few thousand of these (Action Third Road) and I think I've only got this and one other jar left. We sold some of the jars, well not sold them, people could make a contribution. So there was my ex husband who was a yoga teacher then and still is now and had a little vegetable shop for organic vegetables. It was early days. They were bakers and there's an interesting set of transcribed discussions I had with them over a six-month period about how to set up a bakery collective according to The Third Road lines. The Bakery Tapes are myself in discussion with all of them about how you have enterprise, it was really early forms *cooperative social enterprise*. How you have a social enterprise that makes surplus, not profit. The surplus was going to the Free International University because they all loved it, they loved Beuys' work, they loved my work and they were trying to find ways to create surplus. The bread baking cooperative which eventually did happen and the little vegetable shop in an empty shop on the corner of a street, near the art school also had these bottles in-between the vegetables that people could buy - I think it was very cheap if they were poor and they had nowhere so - they could contribute, it was a way of creating funding, like crowd funding, for the Free International University's work.

JT This sounds like quite an intense period of work. How long did it continue for?

SS It went on for about a year, maybe two years. The last bit of it was an extraordinary event where I - I didn't have the jars with me, I think but where I had the little red book and - I met with a guy called Beyers Naudé who was a famous priest, activist who was at that time under house arrest and I remember we met, I don't know how, I think it must have been someone else. I think it was my wonderful ex art teacher (who was also William Kentridges ex art teacher in Johannesburg) who must have told Beyers Naudé about this or something. But somehow I came into contact, because he was under house arrest, he was not having contact with people. I remember speaking to his wife and arranging - they were old by then, quite old and - arranging this meeting in a park, and he and I met in park, and looked for spies and thought there was probably no one. I remember showing him this book



Joseph Beuys publication Action Third Road. Funded by money from sales of 'toilet rolls'

and he looked at the book and said "No, this is really important.". I told him a bit about Beuys, and what the whole group in Germany were doing. The Green must have just launched. And he arranged a meeting with five guys whose names I never knew. They were nameless and we met in a safe house and they had come from Tanzania. They were the ANC in hiding. In exile and what we then discussed was how to transform this into a blueprint for South Africa as a blueprint for cooperative development.

But really these bottles for me were partly inspired by the Honey Pump. I was really trying to analyse if the honey pump does anything - if it works in a way; not the ways we normally regard as a working, what does it do? There's mad honeys flowing around all the time in a room where people are having discussions about anything and everything. What role does it play? And I think the insight I brought to the whole situation was really partly from this idea of Brecht's about making strange, that I then also thought aha that's similar to what Beuys must mean when he talks about not explaining and scratching on the imagination and developing parallel process work. So it was a real conscious attempt at linking. I was often linking these processes of decay with processes of new life. If we could look at what was

rotting in a different way. One thing I particularly love about this work is the way it hovers with you. It wants to be here. The way you are actually holding it now, warming it in your hands. Did they become warm. Were they warm literally? They were hot. They were hot. Well in my house, it was so fantastic because in the corridor, I remember having about ten or fifteen buckets of rotting vegetable matter at all different stages of decay. I was collecting from neighbours. So that was amazing with the kind of hot process in the house, it was quite smelly.

There is actually a drawing of a later development of this but I've never tried hard enough to get funding; where I was trying to make a conference around democracy. There would be a big giant tank in the middle filled with the decaying vegetable matter. This was in 1994, I made this proposal, it's a lovely image and text developing on from these heat generators. There would be a giant glass tank, huge, high tank in the middle of a room, a giant space with a copper bench around it, bench with copper head pads on this tank. I realised these were homeopathic remedies, I think by 94, I'd done the Thought Bank with the water - so there's a kind of heat - it's all about potentiating as well. So I realised that if people could put their heads to this glass where this black rotting vegetable matter was then becoming alchemical liquid, they could put thoughts and ideas that they got from this public symposium in it. It was about becoming part of a symposium and people realising that their thoughts are important and they do count and they'd come to them through some kind of consensus process. It was also about consensus decision-making and through consensus people would agree. Groups of 20 to 30 people would put their thoughts in the glass tank and then the thoughts would be decanted into heat generator bottles that everybody could have all over; that grew out of this place for democracy. So it's a mad idea but I would love to do it one day, it's kind of a real place for generating democratic homeopathy thoughts.

JT Just to finish this off, but I think you've answered this one, what keeps this jar beside you, on that book shelf.

SS I suppose it's got a life of its own, I feel for me it is a place for me, it's a place that honours the abject and I always want to honour every day. It's kind of a jar of not forgetting that everything transforms everything is amazing as a process; it's always possible and we just have to recognise it. It's about recognition. So for me it's a kind of meditation

object as well. It's the first kind of instrument of consciousness. I think instrument of consciousness is also a form of meditation on this apparent waste or disaster or mess or danger; it's like the lotus flower that grows out of the mud, a kind of lotus, it's a kind of lodestone for me. Some people notice it, but no one really asked me so much about it. It's a lovely question that you've asked me.

Yeah, so, it's a kind of my lodestone I could probably live without it. I would love to, if I had more time, I would make thousands, I would go all over and open up conversations with them, so maybe you want to join me one day.

I think things like this really can open up conversations that get people into thinking about how we live our lives. It's not just using them, people often say, oh it's just a catalyst then or things like this, no they're not, they are integral. It's not just a tool to be used for another and then it's not necessary. It's the real thing, it's got its own value.



from a conversation on May 14th 2012

For further information on 'instruments of consciousness' and the language of social sculpture developed by Shelley Sacks, Joseph Beuys and others, as well as details of recent publications please contact *Social Sculpture Research Unit* at Oxford Brookes University.
www.social-sculpture.org

*Jo Thomas / Shelley Sacks ©
Photographs Jo Thomas*

July 2012.

Jelly Artpad, Butter Market, Reading.

Some days you have an amazing unexpected conversation; someone you know at a profound level, but have never met, arrives and there is the time and space to share a story. Then you both carry on in different ways. This was one of those conversations.

An estate agent and his client came into the jelly artpad¹, where I was working to show the client the space. The client asked if he could take a couple of photos. I said it should be fine as he was not concentrating on photographing the artwork but the space. He took a couple of photos. They left.

After a few minutes, the buzzer went and the man returned. An hour later and he has just left.

His business made small figurines of important moments in life, for example a small sculpture of you and your partner getting married for the wedding cake. He carefully pointed out that they were made from clay and that the colours go right through the material, and do not stay on the surface. He is a Buddhist from China. This is part of the story he told me:

Growing up, he had no identity, so the other children would not play with him. He went into the fields and nature and spent much time there. He said he enjoyed Rob Carters² work (a film showing vegetation gradually overwhelming centre court at Wimbledon) because he knows the voices of nature. He grew up talking with plants and nature. He knows the earth. As the third child of his Miao mother in the mid 80's in the last century his

1 A temporary artspace in Reading (one of the venues in Cultivation Field, an exhibition, which included Gesture 40 Solar Noon Shadows)

2 Cultivation Field. Rob Carter. www.cultivationfield.org

mother tried to abort him with herbs and was unsuccessful. He was taken to a village and was loved.

Looking out of the gallery windows he commented on the buildings. We have these buildings 200, 300 years old. They disappear, may be after 20 years. Once we change the earth (soil) it's gone, for 1,000 years 2,000 years, it's gone. The people have always worked with it. In China at the moment – it's happening now. I know it because I come from a village.

The village I come from is known for it's cooking. The taste is gone. It is subtle with delicate flavours. They are being lost. The cooking relies on the subtle flavours of local food.

The fishermen are having to travel further away into disputed waters to catch the fish. The further they travel the less taste the fish have.

The earth came from nothing to this blue world. It is not about protecting the earth, it will continue; it is about protecting the human in the world.

I described Sarah Lewison's work 'The Mushy Ground: World Heritage Beer Garden Picnic' to him. Work from this project was located in the other exhibition space. We discovered that his fiancée's family come from the Yunnan Kunming Province the area this work is concerned with. The sources of many rivers are there, including the river that feeds the village that he grew up in.

He talks of the industry mainly cigarettes and growing tobacco and the expansion of buildings. There are many tourists and many different peoples who live here. It is close to Tibet, Burma and Vietnam. His fiancée's mother is a well known agricultural journalist in the Province of Yunnan and works for the main newspaper³. She regularly accompanies the vice chairman of the province who is responsible for agriculture.

His father, they are quite a big family, rents a mountain and keeps chickens there. They go and collect eggs. They grow vegetables on the roof of their home in the city (I think he said it was a block of flats)

He said he had come back to look at the exhibition because he had felt something special here.

I said I am doing some research and could I quote him. He said that it was all there, it is in the world and shared. He thanked me for the opportunity to talk. I invited him to a talk Sarah was giving the following Thursday.

A DVD that documents some of the Gestures

It indicates the kind of activities in the gestures and can be watched alongside this commentary

