

DIALOGUE AS PRACTICE AND UNDERSTANDING IN  
CONTEMPORARY ART

**Appendices**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for  
a practice-based doctorate for the degree of

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## Appendix 1: The research journey

**Figure 1 The research journey**

<u>The research journey</u>	<u>Key</u>
	Contribution to field
	Continuing professional development
	Development of thesis
2008 Feb. 'Greenhouse Britain', Presentation by Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison at Mediamaker, Shrewsbury.	
	2008 Apr. Spoken art work for <i>The Institute of Psychoplasms</i> , an aas project curated by Pil and Galia Kollektiv, Pumphouse Gallery London.
2008 Apr. 'Tacit knowledge' workshop by Prof. David Smith, University of Wales Institute Cardiff.	
	2008 Apr. Artist interview.
	2008 May. 'Dialogue in contemporary art and the mis-en scene' public dialogue at 'Dialogue in the arts and humanities conference', Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham.
	2008 July. <i>An invitation to dialogue</i> as part of 'Searching Beyond', Howard Garden's Gallery, Cardiff. Presented a paper, 'An Invitation to dialogue' at a Wales Institute for Research in Art and Design symposium, Cardiff.
2008 Aug. Received travel grant from the Centre For Fine Art Research, Cardiff to conduct as series of interviews with artists in the USA.	
	2008 Sep. Series of artist interviews, USA.
	2008 Oct. Series of artist interviews, Great Britain.
	2008 Nov. Review of the literature 'on autonomous art'.
	2008 Dec. <i>An invitation to dialogue</i> at Kirkgate Market Leeds.
2009 Jan. Chaired The University of Wales Institute Cardiff poster symposium.	
	2009 Jan. Commissioned dialogues for the artist Richard Layzell. Three dialogical pieces in response to the artist's exhibition <i>The Manifestation</i> .
2009 Jan. 'Ethics for counselling or counselling for ethics', lecture by Dr Suzanne Gibson, University of Newport.	

Figure 1 continued

	2009 Jan. Commissioned dialogue for the <i>12am project</i> New York, a collection of artists' writings.
	2009 Feb. Attended Liam Gillick's Lecture Deutscher Pavillon, Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin.
	2009 Mar. Attended Ian Wilson's <i>Discussion</i> , Van Abbemuseum Eindhoven.
	2009 Mar. Workshop on language and pragmatics, Leeds Metropolitan University.
	2009 Apr. Oulipo readings and talk, Pierogi Gallery Williamsburg, New York.
	2009 Apr. Lecture on 'Conversational and dialogical art practices', MFA, Montclair State University, New Jersey, USA.
	2009 Apr. New York, series of artist interviews.
	2009 Apr. WIRAD 1st National symposium for emerging art and design researchers, Wales. Hammersley, J. (2009). Case study of An invitation to dialogue Kirkgate Market, Leeds, 2008. In <i>The draft proceedings of the 1st national symposium for emerging art &amp; design researchers</i> . Newport: Wales Institute for Research in Art and Design.
	2009 Apr. Commissioned dialogue: Hammersley, J. (2009). A dialogue with a design course. In <i>81 People</i> . Available from The Graphic Design Department, UWE Bristol, Kennel Lodge Rd, Bristol, BS3 2JT.
	2009 May. Participated in Mountains and Lacunæ, a discursive artwork by Simon Pope and Sarah Cullen, Danielle Arnaud Gallery, London. Commissioned participant case-reflection.
	2009 June. Symposium on 'Autonomy, gender, and counselling', University of Newport, Wales.
	2009 June. 'Every Thousand Words tells a Picture' presentation of a case study of <i>An invitation to dialogue</i> , and dialogical texts at Le Salon, Chapter Arts Centre, Market Road, Cardiff.
	2009 June. TRIPS research talk, 'A snowball's chance in New York, reflections on data collection in the big apple', Centre for Fine Art Research, Cardiff School of Art & Design.
	2009 June. <i>An invitation to dialogue</i> , for OpenEmptySpaces, Cardiff.
	2009 Jun-Aug. Dialogues with the creative producer of the Sherman Theatre Cardiff, exploring ensemble and dialogical theatre work.

Figure 1 continued

2009 July. Presented paper on dialogical approaches to interdisciplinarity at 'Interrogations' AHRC conference at Loughborough University.  
Hammersley, J. (2009). A dialogical approach to interdisciplinarity in practice based fine art research. In *Proceedings of Interrogations: creative interdisciplinarity in art and design research, AHRC postgraduate conference*. Available from Loughborough University.

2009 Aug. Provisional review of the literature.

2009 Aug. Convened and chaired a discussion panel on 'The aesthetics of conversation' at the 5th annual SEP/FEP conference at Cardiff. Chaired discussion panel on Foucault and Power.  
An invitation to dialogue commissioned for the conference.

2009 July-Sep. 'In association with...' Research residency at VIVID Birmingham. Exhibition of collaborative artwork, 100 possible understandings of this.

2009 Nov. Commission of An invitation to dialogue for The Event.  
Associated texts:  
Hammersley, J. (2009). A snowball's chance in New York (Hell's Kitchen). *An Endless Supply*. Available from An Endless Supply, 123 Highbury Rd, Birmingham, B14 7QW.  
Hammersley, J. (2009). Lo studio del dialogo. In *L'Atelier est Mort, Vive l'Atelier*. Available from Springhill Institute, springhill\_institute@yahoo.com

2009 Nov. The university of local knowledge, artist's talk by Suzanne Lacy, Arnolfini, Bristol.

2009 Dec. 'Theory versus anti theory: applied philosophy and the rejection of tradition.' Prof. Phillip Cole, University of Wales, Newport.

2010 Feb. Conversational dynamics workshop for Art & Philosophy students at Duncan Jordanstone College of Art and Design, Dundee.

2010 Feb. Dundee Contemporary Art, artist's lecture, a case-reflection of An invitation to dialogue.

2010 Apr. Review of classical dialogical literature.

2010 May. Lecture and seminar on 'Dialogical art practice', Fine Art MA and MFA, The University of Wales Institute Cardiff.

2010 May. Lecture 'Dialogue as practice', Contemporary Art Practice MA, University of Glamorgan.

2010 May. Presented a case study of An invitation to dialogue, Leeds 2008 at seminar for Welsh and Southwest postgraduate researchers at the University of the West of England, Bristol.

2010 May. Review of dialogical art literature.

Figure 1 continued

2010 June. Invited associate artist of PLaCE the landscape and context interdisciplinary research group at the University of the West of England, Bristol.

2010 July. 'Moving Between the Lines', Art, place and landscape UWE conference on talking and walking as interdisciplinary field study. Artist's reflection: Hammersley, J. (2011). A fable of a researcher learning to swim on a walk. In Adams, S. (Ed.) *Moving between the lines*. Bristol: Wild Conversations Press.

2010 July. Artist respondent as part of 'The lost object, on gesture and psychoanalysis in the work of Bourgeois and Zitko', Arnolfini, Bristol.

2010 July. Invited artist participant for audience forum at Arnolfini, Bristol.

2010 June-Aug. Dialogues with the Arnolfini Director, discussing one-year research residency, commissioning of a series of public dialogues, and dialogical focus groups at Arnolfini.

2010 Sep. Annual international qualitative research conference at Bournemouth University. Dialogues with sociologists investigating activist art as sociology, and researchers interested in the evocation of the voice of others in qualitative research.

2010 Oct. Masterclass on coding and presenting qualitative data and gathering peoples' ideas and opinions. Bournemouth University.

2010 Nov. 'Instructions for initial conditions', exhibited two spoken instructional text works, group show at Drift station, Nebraska USA.

2011 Feb. 'When Natural Differences Substitute for Constructed Oppositions: Towards a World Culture', lecture by Professor Luce Irigaray, Arnolfini, Bristol.

2011 Mar. 'Research ethics, One size fits all', lecture by Professor Tim Bond, Bristol University.

2011 Mar. Lecture 'emergent research methods for MA and PhD research', The University of the West of England, Bristol.

2011 June. Commissioned by Creativity Works to deliver a professional development dialogue for the artist Deborah Aguirre Jones.

2011 Aug. Commissioned texts and posters as part of 'Anti-curate', Midlands Arts Centre, Birmingham. Reflection on the tension between dialogue and curating. (see appendix 12.)

2011 Sep. Commissioned 'Dialogue with drawing' for 'Drawing Together' exhibition publication by Deborah Aguirre Jones.

**Figure 1 continued**

2011 Dec. 'The unmaking of art' Walter Benjamin lecture for the Museum of American Art, Arnolfini. Lecture on the construction of art history.

2012 Jan-Feb. Commissioned voice artwork for Cult of Quatermass by aas and Pil & Galia Kollektiv. Xero, Kline & Coma, Hackney London.

**2012 May. Review of constructionist dialogical literature.**

2012 Dec. The Dialogic group seminar: Danielle Arnaud Gallery, London.

2013 Mar. The Dialogic group seminar, The School of Arts, Loughborough University.

2013 May. The Dialogic group seminar. 'Documenting and recording the practice of dialogue in contemporary art', Ruskin School of Art, Oxford.

2013 June. Participant in Forward Back Together, dialogue on public art, VIVID Birmingham.

2013 June. Commissioned to write participant case-reflection of Forward Back Together, dialogue on public art. VIVID Birmingham.

2013 Nov. Plymouth Arts Centre, artists talk with City Edition Studio, 'Shadow Dialogues and collaborative production of dialogical artist's texts'.

2013 Artist's writing:  
Hammersley, J. (2011). Reflection on anticurating. In *What does the word curate mean to you?* (Pitt, T. Ed.). (2013) Birmingham: Midlands Arts Centre & A3 Gallery.

2014 May. The Dialogic group seminar, 'The dialogic and the art school', Birkbeck London.

2014. Sep. A dialogical reimagining of the contemporary artist as vulnerable. Presentation for the 17th Biennial Conference for the International Society for Religion Literature and Culture. Leuven, Belgium.



## **Appendix 2: An invitation to dialogue – five case reflections**

### **Reflection 1: *An Invitation to Dialogue* as part of the exhibition Searching Beyond at Howard Gardens Gallery Cardiff, September 2008**

I think that today this organic connection between art and its environment is so meaningful and necessary that removing one from the other results in abortion. Yet the artists who have made us aware of this lifeline deny it; for the flattery of being “on show” blinds them to every insensitivity heaped upon their suddenly weakened offerings. There seems no end to the white walls, the tasteful aluminium frames, the lovely lighting, fawn grey rugs, cocktails, polite conversation, (Kaprow, 2003, p.18).

#### **Introduction**

An Invitation to Dialogue 2008 was a process artwork I produced as part of a group show of research artists from the Wales Institute for Research in Art & Design (WIRAD). The group show titled “Searching Beyond” also included video installations, ceramics, photography, and performance related work by seven other artists. The show ran from 11 July until 2 August at the Howard Gardens Gallery in Cardiff. The purpose of the show was to present research as arts practice in a gallery context and in the words of Clive Cazeaux (2008, p.2) to ask the viewer to, ‘search beyond what you see’, and attempt to reveal the thought processes behind the

artworks. In the case of *An Invitation to Dialogue* it was to explore the problems and questions arising from presenting research dialogues as artworks.

## **Context**

The work *An Invitation to Dialogue* was created specifically for the un-curated group show by PhD students and was discussed at symposium during the exhibition. The work was located in a number of critical and historical contexts; firstly, in the tradition of dialogical artworks as identified by Kester (2004, p.1) who sees dialogical artworks as those by, 'contemporary artists and art collectives that have defined their practice around the facilitation of dialogue among diverse communities.' Kester also describes these artworks as often being socially engaged and meaning-generating, and providing context rather than content. A key example of this type of practice is the work of the Austrian arts collective WochenKlausur which presents dialogues as interventions into socially contentious situations. Secondly the work was located in the context of presenting conversation and research in the gallery context such as in the work *Gallery Space Recall* by Simon Pope and *Indexes 01 and 02* by Art & Language.

In *Gallery Space Recall* 2006 the artist Simon Pope invited curators and other associates along with members of the public to, 'recall, from memory, a walk through a gallery space, and explore the spatial, social and professional relations contained within it' ([www.chapter.org/7088.html](http://www.chapter.org/7088.html)). Art & Language's *Index 01*, *Index 02* were metal cabinets, filled with index cards which held references to Art & Language texts from the journal of the same name. The *Indexes* were an evaluative

system intended to allow visitors to cross-reference fragments of text through a code which was placed on the wall (Dreher, 2005). The work was felt by members of Art & Language to be a place for reflection (Dreher, 2005). In the work's creation, the exchanges between the two transatlantic halves of Art & Language became a kind of conversation and texts in response to the *Indexes*, written for Artforum and the Art & Language journal, extended the dialogue beyond the immediate dialogue of the *Indexes* (Dreher, 2005).

Although differing in form from the Art and Language *Indexes* and focus or intention from the works of WochenKlausur and Pope, *An Invitation to Dialogue* parallels the context provision of WochenKlausur's interventions, Simon Pope's conversational gallery space which highlighted social and professional relationships, and the presentation of reflective research in *Indexes 01 and 02*. These different works all explore social bonds, existing relationships and their respective forms. In these works, relationships are presented as both artworks and *real world* objects, such as the relationships between politicians and social workers as in some of the works of WochenKlausur, between collaborating artists such as with *Indexes 01 and 02* and between curator and artist amongst others, as in Pope's *Gallery Space Recall*. Such artworks have an ambiguous status and are what Nicolas Bourriaud terms 'operative realism' (Bourriaud, 2002). They are ambiguous because it isn't clear if they are authentic relationships or aesthetic art objects.

*An Invitation to Dialogue* was conceived against a background of a number of theoretical notions other than Bourriaud's 'operative realism' including various philosophical interpretations of dialogue such as those of Hans-Georg Gadamer

(2004), Martin Buber (1970) and Mihai Sora (see Craiutu, 2007). Gadamer's model of dialogue as conversational understanding offers an important emphasis on dialogue as a mode of understanding which goes beyond consensus and which is based upon a prior common-ground or agreement which can be understood as recognition of the other. This emphasis on recognition as a formative dimension of dialogue is also important in the work of Buber, which draws a distinction between authentic dialogue and pseudo dialogue. This theme of authenticity is further extended by the ideas of the Romanian philosopher Mihai Sora who describes authentic dialogue as possible if we remain reflective (cited in Craiutu, 2007, p.618), 'existentially attentive and vigilant in our choices.' Thus the work was set against a background of dialogical artworks, criticisms of pseudo or inauthentic dialogue, the above mentioned philosophical interpretations of dialogue and wider criticisms of dialogue as part of the cult of conversation (Boor Tonn, 2005) and as a technique for social manipulation (Dolinski, *et al.* 2001).

### **What was observable**

The work mostly took place in an alcove 350cms wide and 270cms deep. In front of the window at the back of the alcove were a table and two office chairs borrowed from rooms above the gallery. The chairs were placed around one corner of the table. At eye height on the boards at the open end of the space facing each other were one blue and one white poster. The posters stated, 'This is an invitation to dialogue', and included a short explanation of the invitation and an abstract, which included an email address. During the exhibition I was only present in the space for arranged dialogues.

Figure 2. Poster for Searching Beyond



### **The conversations**

Participants were invited to take part in a dialogue either by email, posters or in person. There were no direct replies to the posters by email but they acted as a bridge to some who met me in person. Two dialogues were not held face-to-face with participants but were done by computer using Skype chat and call software. Another two dialogues took place away from the gallery where people who had heard about the work or seen the invitation in the gallery approached me. However most of the dialogues took place in the gallery. The conversations took place with a range of strangers, acquaintances and friends.

The dialogues lasted from a few minutes in length at the private view to up to two hours. They were done during the day after 9.00am and no later than 6.00pm. There was no set topic or list of questions although the posters provided some contextual frame for strangers. The conversations were open ended and stopped when I felt that the conversation had reached a natural conclusion. I did not timetable more than one conversation in a morning or afternoon period although sometimes they naturally occurred in close succession when visitors to the gallery stopped for a dialogue.

### **Contents and process**

The contents and feel of each conversation differed significantly between those with strangers, acquaintances, or friends. In conversations with strangers often the conversations started with a getting to know you process where I asked general questions about the other person. In conversations with acquaintances this bridge building stage of the conversation was much shorter and it was largely absent in

conversations with friends. However, in conversations that were conducted through the use of Skype software, conversations often started with a mutual checking of the technology or agreement on the form of the exchange. Perhaps unconsciously, where I was able to draw comparisons between my experiences and those of participants, more personal information and reflections were shared. Many of the longer conversations went on to discuss quite personal issues that arose naturally as part of the conversation.

Often the work of *An Invitation to Dialogue* was mentioned in the starting stages as a way into a more open conversation or as a concluding reflection, such as how surprisingly organic a Skype text chat had felt, or how open and *un-shouting* the invitation had seemed. In conversations with artists who revealed that their work held resonance with the theme of dialogue, I attempted to avoid asking questions used before in interviewing protocols for formal interviews as part of my wider research in case I wished to later invite them to participate in formal interviews. Two participants agreed to participate in interviews at a later date.

## **Outcome**

Other than the typed Skype dialogue, the conversations were not recorded.

Participants were not photographed however some photographs were taken with stand-ins as a pseudo record or what Bourriaud terms ‘a trailer’ (Bourriaud, 2002).

After each conversation I wrote down a reflection on the conversation. At first these reflections were quite short and focused on a key theme or idea that had emerged from the conversation. As more dialogues were completed the length of the

reflections increased and included more comments on the links between what had emerged in the conversation and how it resonated with dialogical themes in my research, such as generosity, openness and authenticity.

As more dialogues were completed, I gained more confidence and felt more at ease in the work. This was in part due to positive outcomes and feedback from the first few participants who often expressed that they had enjoyed the dialogue or found it interesting. In one dialogue the participant asked how the work was changing my understanding and what I was gaining from them. They also suggested that collectively through the dialogues a conceptual layering might be taking place where ideas were repeated and extended. I felt this was evident in some of the reflections.

The reflections were not published as they may become data for identifying themes in dialogue in future works. As mentioned above the posters and photographs of the space are what Bourriaud terms ‘trailers’ rather than the artwork (Bourriaud, 2002). They function as adverts for a possible future event or re-happening of the work. Thus the outcome/s of *An Invitation to Dialogue* do not exist as fixed objects but as what may have changed in the understanding of the participants including myself. Moreover the outcome might be considered to be what has changed between the participants and me in relational terms as I feel that relationships have been developed through the presentation of this work and some participants have expressed an on-going interest in my wider research and work. The main outcome may be understood to be a relational and conceptual one as I have extended my understanding of dialogue in the context of art/research.



### **What people said to me**

Common responses from participants focused on a few key unexpected outcomes in the work. Firstly two or three people commented on how open the invitation seemed, not shouting, and that ‘people found me.’ Others had been surprised that they had later learned that I was not one of the people in the space at the private view. Others felt that the dialogues were very organic and open-ended commenting that I didn’t chase the dialogue. In particular one participant said she had been worrying on the way if she should have asked what we were going to talk about but then she told me that she was annoyed with herself for this thought as she realised that that was the point; to come and relate. A second key theme that emerged in the conversations was the tone of voice or as one participant expressed it, ‘the danger of sounding like an authority.’ This sensitivity to the objectifying voice also came out of the reflections on how I had felt during certain conversations or dialogues, for example when people commented on how much younger I was or made assumptions about the nature of the work as research. The last theme was the use or purpose of the dialogues as some participants were interested in how the work might contribute to my other research and practice and some expressed an interest to follow what might come from the work.

### **The work in the context of the artist’s previous work**

Between 2000 and 2008 I produced a number of works exploring site-specific meaning, context as significant content, notions of understanding and interpretation, and photography and the everyday. In works such as *No offence intended* Intervention 2001 I explored the instrumentalism of artistic interventions in

community settings and more recently in *Selected works, unselected doesn't* 2006 I had begun to think of the exhibition and artist's talk as in some way dialogical. *An Invitation to Dialogue* was important in that it combined understandings gained from these years of work with an abandonment of the art object in favour of the relationship as object. It represented a significant step in confidence as the work resisted a window dressing approach, through not using coffee or other paraphernalia as a *mis-en scene* as this was felt to be too manipulative and unnecessary. This shift to relational artworks meant that although I had sent out approximately forty invitations I did not value the work in terms of the numbers of participants but by the depth of engagement and resulting shift in my understanding. As such this work represents my first major work presenting dialogical research as art and is significant in my step forward into a new realm of understanding and evaluating my changing practice.

### **What I think the work says**

As Clive Cazeaux (2008, p.2) points out, 'We think we see what's there, what's "in the world"'. But in this exhibition, you won't. Because there is always something more, something beyond what is there...' The illusive something more was especially important with *An Invitation to Dialogue* where the art object was not always there or guaranteed. There was an invitation but the work came into being through participation, through the opening up of participants to rethink or to understand anew through dialogue. As mentioned above, it was not about approaching the artwork with a fixed prior idea of what the work of art would say but about meeting to relate anew, listening for the human voice speaking through the

work of art, as Buber (1970) might suggest. In being shown alongside other artworks and objects by other artists it created a space in the exhibition, which emphasised a dialogical and relational approach to all the artworks. In so doing it affirmed art's connection and contribution to the social world knowable through language. Perhaps most importantly it suggests that the meanings of art, like language always contain the possibility of something beyond themselves, an outward momentum that points beyond the meanings of their immediate discourse as well as an inward refining force that reinforces the density of a discourse's meanings such as fine art.

### **How successful the work is at conveying its message**

The variety and length of many of the conversations that formed this work revealed that some people were comfortable with the idea of a participatory work that goes beyond the tradition of fixed objects in the gallery space. This participatory approach locates the meaning or the message in the tradition of process artworks. As the work comes into being through participation, the meaning of the work is formed through a participation of both artist and others, thus its message is open ended.

Judging the success of the openness of the message is difficult but the fact that very little of the conversation was dedicated to talking about the artwork as dialogue is an important success as the artwork avoided being merely self-referential. Furthermore participants seemed comfortable to a degree and often shared personal and sensitive information in the conversations emphasising the relational potential of the work.

But to think of the message as purely content to be grasped and taken away would be a failure of the spirit of the work. As mentioned above two or three participants commented on the emergent subject of the conversation, the message that the

meaning of the work is there to be formed through participation was thus conveyed to some extent.

### **Limitations of the work**

There were both practical and interpersonal limitations to the work. Practically the conversations were not recorded as data for the artist's wider research project as the gallery context could not constitute a confidential space. What was said in the space must be understood as potentially moderated because of this, although the gallery was very quiet during many of the conversations. The quiet time of year for the exhibition also meant that the numbers of people with no prior relationship or acquaintance to the artist accepting the invitation was probably limited.

Interpersonally, my persona might also be thought of as a limitation in one sense as some participants commented on how I intone in conversation and speak in a very deliberate manner which lends me the tone or voice of a teacher or academic. In this work I am also in the role of researcher and in the context of my understanding of dialogue sensitive to being authentically myself by being sensitive to others. The work is thus limited by participants' projections onto the roles of artist, researcher and John. However in the context of both qualitative and quantitative research the researcher is always understood as a limitation of the research to the extent that the researcher is aware how their projected identity and personal approach shapes their understanding of the world and the process and thus how it might shape others' perceptions of them and their work.

### **Searching beyond art**

This work has highlighted the problems in the tradition of dialogical works that they may be understood as instrumentalist and paternalistic forms of knowing where the artist uses dialogue to steer others to a solution of a perceived or real social problem. It attempts to answer this critique by proposing an authentic and more radical mode of dialogue than consensus building or a Bohmian (Nichol, 2003) dialogue. In this way the artist exposes him or herself to the possibility of a newer understanding and having their prior understanding or assumptions rethought through in the dialogue.

### **Searching beyond dialogue**

In attempting to engender or achieve a Gadamerian fusion of horizons (Gadamer, 2004) or transcendent understanding where the subject itself might emerge from the dialogue, I have come to understand that the potential of authentic dialogue is in the disposition of all participants to recognise the other person as authentic, what Buber (1970) might term an I/You. Thus dialogue might be limited to some extent by the potential openness or self-awareness of participants. For example, social observations and comments about age differences occurred significantly in conversations, which felt awkward. If there was an exchange or new learning in these dialogues it was often in the mode of teaching. This work has revealed an emotional dimension to dialogue that is perhaps tied to the concept of recognition and how perceptions of social roles such as artist and researcher may problematise the possibility of dialogue.

### **Searching beyond research**

Every conversation has contributed to my understanding of dialogical artworks and dialogue itself. It has highlighted how difficult it is to 'be yourself', be self aware as researcher or as Craiutu (2007, p.618), expresses it, to 'remain existentially attentive and vigilant in our choices in order to be authentic.' It thus contributes to how I as researcher will approach future dialogues such as interviews and to my awareness of the possible emotional and to the some extent unknowable interpersonal dynamics that hinder the possibility of productive newer understanding and authentic dialogue. Above all it has highlighted that the value of dialogical research cannot be measured in terms of numbers of dialogues but by the reflective depth or authenticity achieved in dialogue.

## **Reflection 2: *An Invitation to Dialogue* at Kirkgate Market**

**Leeds, December 2008**

### **Introduction**

*An Invitation to Dialogue* was first produced as a participatory work in the summer of 2008 at Howard Gardens Gallery Cardiff as part of an on-going series of dialogues. This series of dialogues explores and reflects on the experience of seeking, offering and achieving an authentic dialogue as a work of art and forms part of an investigation into dialogue as practice and understanding in contemporary art. An authentic dialogue is one where interlocutors understand each other and thus themselves reflectively in an open way. As Craiutu (2007, p.618) argues, in Sora's view, 'we must always remain existentially attentive and vigilant in our choices in order to be authentic.' For Sora to be authentic is to be reflective and understand what assumptions inform our choices.

In this manifestation of *An Invitation to Dialogue*, a poster invited people to join me in a conversation On Sunday, 7 December 2008, at stall 133 -134 of Kirkgate Market. The use of conversation in this work parallels my wider research technique of interviewing although conversations undertaken as part of the artwork are never recorded, as the context is not considered private or confidential. An invitation was also emailed to art students and staff at Leeds Metropolitan University, which parallels the snowball sampling technique used in my wider research whereby participants and other members of the research community recommend other potential participants, thus expanding the subject field.

Conversations as artworks and as models of meaning production in artworks have a contested place in contemporary art. This tradition is often one of neo-conceptual and process based artworks. Grant Kester (2004) offers as examples of dialogical artworks, projects by social activist artist groups such as the Austrian collective WochenKlausur and the American couple the Harrisons. Many of these groups use dialogue as a central *modus operandi* asserting a social engagement through dialogue and placing conversation at the heart of their artistic practice. Kester (2004) sees in this tradition a continuation of the *avant-garde* project's aims to activate the potential of human consciousness, what Rajchman (as cited in Kester, 2004, p.152) calls modern art's attempt 'to free sensation... from clichés.' Problematically perhaps, social activist artworks present the artist as expert social negotiator or facilitator of dialogue, creating a hierarchy or scepticism towards the notion of equal participation.

Dialogical artworks have also been criticised as potentially conservative, consensus building, instrumentalist, didactic, or as Bishop argues, a sacrificing of the aesthetic in favour of a focus on ethical social change (Roche, 2006). Bishop's notion of the aesthetic here draws on Rancière's concept of the aesthetic as the ability to think contradiction (Roche, 2006), presumably the ability to oppose or assert the opposite of what is being said, literally to speak against.

However, *An Invitation to Dialogue* is influenced by other more understated conversational artworks, which although social in a participatory sense offer a less obvious activist agenda. For example, in *Conversations* 1981 Richard Layzell waited in the Acme Gallery offering conversations which were deliberately



understated, awkward and which sought agreement for him to film visitors to the gallery in some way (Levy, 1998). In the work *Listening Post*, the American artist Peter Snyder invites people through social online networking sites to meet with him on a Sunday to talk. Located in a New York park or at dining concourses Snyder's work is like the latest manifestation of *An invitation to Dialogue*, also situated in public spaces. Snyder (<http://listeningpost-peter.blogspot.com>, 2008, p.1) offers this work because he, 'simply believes in the power of face to face communication.' Snyder's work emphasises the listening role of the artist and connects with the non-art practice of Allan Kaprow as part of the conceptual frame of his work.

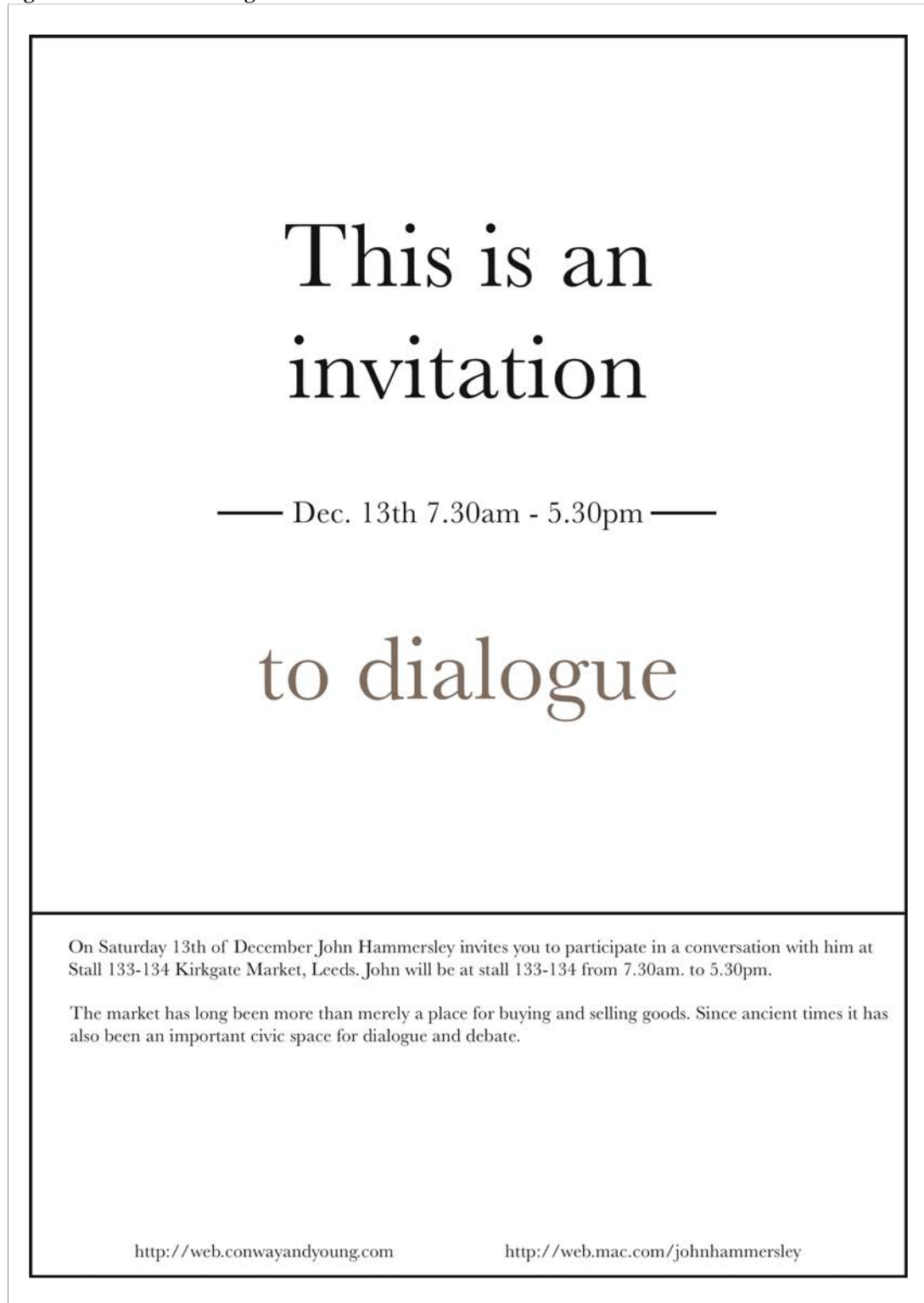
### **Kirkgate Market: every day except Sunday**

The conversations were held at Stall 133 – 134, which sits amidst many closed and struggling stalls on the threshold between the lower end of Kirgate Indoor Market and the outdoor market in Leeds. The stalls are covered by a 'temporary' thin metal roof, which resembles that of an aerodrome hanger. Cold and clammy in winter and reportedly unbearably hot and sticky in summer, it shelters a frequently cracked and in patches dangerously worn-out 'non-slip' floor, apparently in need of perpetual repair. Stall 133-134 is a stark contrast to the thriving and listed Victorian upper-end of the indoor market.

On a glass window was placed a poster, which read, 'This is an invitation to dialogue. On Saturday 13th of December John Hammersley invites you to participate in a conversation with him at Stall 133 - 134 Kirkgate Market, Leeds. John will be at Stall 133 - 134 from 7.30 a.m. to 5.30 p.m.' Inside were three plastic

chairs and a long paint splattered table borrowed from the university. The space was not chosen as a location conducive to dialogue, such as is sometimes the case in the work of groups like WochenKlausur, but as a space for understanding the difficulties for achieving dialogue in public as opposed to private space.

Figure 3. Poster for Kirkgate Market Leeds



### **The market as site for dialogue**

The meaning of the market as a public space for dialogue can be attributed to the Greek agora or market. It was in the agora of Athens that Socrates is said to have held his debates. Although Flacelière (as cited in Carter, 2002, p.125) observed, 'that the political assemblies and dramatic festivals originally held in the agora were soon pushed out', by commerce. The resonant potential of the agora has been elaborated upon through Carter's (2002) recent reinterpretation of the term agoraphobia. He uses the notion of agoraphobia to discuss different ways in which spaces that foster meeting can be created and offers agoraphobia as a type of paralysis, which stems from a desire for new spatiotemporal connections.

An agoraphobic paralysis or desire for connections may reflect a feeling of a lack of connection to a new social space, as to move into such a space may be akin to stepping into a new community as a stranger or newcomer. Being a newcomer then is a process of becoming new to oneself, a regression to a state of stranger, which might thrust an individual into a position of needing to relate and make new connections. Through the process of becoming strange to oneself, an individual may come to understand oneself anew achieving critical distance. A view supported by Kierkegaard's dictum (as cited in Carter, 2002, p.11), 'Becoming is a movement from some place, but becoming oneself is a movement at that place.'

## **The conversation**

I had eleven conversations lasting up to an hour and a half. What I observed was that many conversations started with questions. ‘Do you know what’s going on next door tomorrow, a lecture or something?’, ‘Is it to do with language, Yorkshire dialect and all that?’ Sometimes questions were merely icebreakers, ‘Who is John Hammersley?’ Others tried to establish my relationship to the market, ‘Are you letting?’ However, most questions asked what the conversation’s subject was about.

Indeed, one woman asked, ‘What’s the conversation about?’ ‘Well, what’s any conversation about?’ I replied. ‘Life and stuff like that’, she said. This open topic or subject represents a possibility for authentic dialogue. To participate in a dialogue is to ask, ‘What is any conversation about?’ It is to allow for the subject itself (*Die Sache Selbst*) to emerge as an unexpected outcome (Gadamer, 2004). This emergent subject is the possibility of new understanding that the works sets out to explore. Thus these dialogues propose the artist as co-learner in a dialogue rather than an expert teacher offering solutions to problems. This co-educative model of dialogue differs from problem solving, consensus building or instrumental models of dialogue and is resonant with a Freirean dialogue (1996).

## ***Die Sache Selbst* - the emerging subject**

What I found emerging from many of the conversations was the theme of the struggle of life in the middle market. I learned that some families had been part of the life of the market for generations and how stalls had changed and adapted but had

weathered fires and previous financial crises. There had been plans to redevelop the middle market but these had in effect paralysed the place.

Some stallholders had been there for so long that the council couldn't afford to buy them out and couldn't overtly force them out so rents had been rising. The poor maintenance of toilets and other facilities was further evidence of a strategy to make the business in the middle part of the market untenable. Although the council had made improvements to some aspects of the environs such as a non-slip floor, stallholders felt that even this had involved little consultation and subsequently been proven an expensive waste of money. In past run-ups to Christmas, the whole market used to attract coach loads of shoppers from as far as Newcastle. Yet in recent years this had dropped off considerably and just a couple of weeks before Christmas it was very quiet, further evidence of the dying appeal of the middle market.

Although the commercial difficulties of the market might have been in part due to its run-down feel and rent pressures allegedly resulting from council plans for a redevelopment, they might also have been in part a result of the credit crunch. However, the wider financial climate had led to a widespread belief that plans for a redevelopment had been put on hold. Yet the council's future plans for the middle market were far from clear and many stallholders felt that they could get no answers from market committee members, managers or councillors. Many stallholders said that they might not be there in the New Year as the effort of running the stall was no longer worth the little return. Market work was hard but the hardest stallholders felt powerless and de-actualized.

### **The conversation as affect**

During the course of the conversations I noticed two dynamics. Firstly I mirrored experiences that other people had shared, saying that I had similar memories when I couldn't be sure if they were genuine or not. I also subconsciously picked up and later used local idioms such as 'like as not'. These phenomena felt like taking on the speech of the other. This might be what Janaway (2005) sees as a function of mimesis or poetic impersonation, as seen in an example Plato gives us from the *Iliad* when Homer tries to convince us that the speaker is an old priest and not Homer. He argues this is a false voice that seeks to convince the other that the speaker resembles someone they do not authentically represent. Janaway (2005) asserts that for Plato the consequences of this false voice are significant as making oneself appear like some other character leads to one becoming more like that person in real life. If however, this process of coming to speak like another person happens as a natural outcome of dialogue, this could be a further suggestion of authentic dialogue and not merely dialogue as a technique of manipulation (see Dolinski *et al.*, 2001).

Secondly, I was beginning to consciously identify with the attitudes of the stallholders. The frustration at the silence from authorities over the uncertain future of the middle market meant that I felt a sense of shared sadness and anger. Initially I had been concerned about whether art students or staff might come and talk about the art but this self-interested worry about the status of the art was quickly replaced by my identification with the stallholders and the market community. Through open listening I became involved in the life of the market and felt an ethical sense of responsibility that I should act in some way. On one hand I felt a desire to react to the conversation of the stallholders and on the other I recognised that the situation of

the market may be inevitable. I felt paralysed, caught between an urge to shrink back from acting or rush unthinkingly into it.

### **Concerns for this dialogue**

My agoraphobic paralysis or concern at the end of the day expressed itself as a doubt over what my next move or action should be. By opening up dialogue I had brought the difficult issues and problems to the surface. I had felt ethically responsible towards the other through dialogical participation and being recognised by them. Yet I had not sought to frame the dialogue as a social problem solving technique in the social activist tradition. I was also concerned about the process or honesty of mirroring as potential mimesis or subconscious manipulation. Had I manipulated others using similar or familiar patterns speech as a conscious or subconscious technique of manipulation (see Dolinski *et al.*, 2001)? I felt I had entered into dialogue openly without a sense of seeking problems to solve. Instead I had entered into this work with the anxiety of an agoraphobe seeking connection through conversation and unexpected subjects. Through the work I felt changed by my new understanding and my desire to act.

### **The limitations of this work as an open dialogue**

A remaining concern of the work as social manipulation is that the artwork may be perceived as an attempt to manipulate or use others to reinforce a status as expert/artist. I had sought to avoid approaching the space as expert/artist. Yet the poster, which functioned as a 'trailer' (Bourriaud, 2002), advertised me as a singular



person using my full name. This statement, I am a singular person may be perceived as akin to 'I am an artist' and may be a barrier to dialogue as a process amongst equals as it doesn't seek to recognise the other first but seeks recognition of the artist's or individual's identity first; this perceived 'artiness' was reported by one person as a barrier to participation in the work as they felt sceptical towards art in general. This was a blind spot in the work as it is not possible to know what or how many conversations were not had because of this dynamic.

The second limitation of the work was that between conversations I wrote reflections. Although not verbatim notes on what was said the image of someone taking notes may be suggestive of managerial-ism. A record is visibly being made and in a wider social context taking notes may be understood as part of an assessment or audit exercise. Looking down at the page I was not open to the possibility of recognising someone looking to participate. The appearance of taking notes like a manager is also counter to the possibility of participating in authentic dialogue as equal authentic selves. But perhaps most importantly, if you are planning to take notes you may remember small details but miss the wider emergent subject.

### **The artist as expert – a problem for authentic dialogue**

If conversational artworks are 'operative realist' as Bourriaud (2002) suggests they may not only create artworks which are liminal with the everyday but also a liminal identity as artist; one which is just one of a whole range of aspects of a wider elusive perhaps mobile authentic self. Kaprow (2003, p.126) argues that, 'Replacing artist

with player, as if adopting an alias, is a way of altering a fixed identity. And a changed identity is a principle of mobility, of a going from one place to another.' Such a mobile artistic identity at play in conversation contrasts a more definite artist/expert identity and resonates more with the understatement of Layzell and Snyder, than with the social activism of groups such as WochenKlausur and the Harrisons.

Kaprow's (2003) non-artist may then better exemplify an equal or 'listening other' able to participate in the more mobile conversation or dialogue. By avoiding possible fixed positions of the artist as expert activist or expert educator the artist might be able to participate in a more productive dialogue that relies on a movement away from certain beliefs in order to relate anew. This notion offers the dialogue as art as an educative transformative 'participation with', where the expert artist/teacher is replaced by equal teacher/student. This turn from artist teacher to non-artist teacher/student does not represent a contradiction but is instead a position from which to achieve dialogical or new understanding. As equals in dialogue we may transform our own ethical understanding of our connectedness to each other and thus how we act on the social world.

## **Conclusion**

This case study briefly discusses the problems of offering an authentic dialogue as artwork. In reflecting on the work *An Invitation to Dialogue* at Kirkgate Market Leeds it located the work in the complex tradition of social activist and dialogical artworks as described by Kester (2004) and criticised by Bishop (2004). For Kester

(2004) these works aim to actualise the potential of human consciousness but Bishop sees this as at the expense of contradiction or a critical voice.

Through opening up a stall at Kirkgate market my identity as artist became less fixed as knowing expert. The market wasn't chosen as an ideal location for dialogue but instead as a problematic and everyday location of dialogue. This understanding goes back to the notion of the Greek agora as public space for dialogue and debate and draws on Carter's (2002) poetic notion of agoraphobia as a longing for connections in time and place. In order to feel less anxious and become more myself I sought connection with the place through conversation.

Many conversations started with questions, which reflected the need to establish my connection to the place. 'Was I letting?' for example. Other questions asked what the subject of the conversation might be. This revealed the nature of subject in *An Invitation to Dialogue* as an emergent subject explored through participation in dialogue. This is akin to a Gadamerian (2004) dialogical understanding that differs from dialogue as problem solving or oppositional debate of opinion. In his view of dialogue, self-contradiction is explored as the possibility of new understanding. This proposes that the artist is not involved as teacher, there to educate or lead people to a solution or the right opinion but as a co-learner or seeker of an emergent subject (*Die Sache Selbst*) which is also a new understanding of our self.

The dominant subject or emergent theme was the uncertain future of the market.

There had been plans for a redevelopment, although since the credit crunch there had been no communication from committee members, managers or the council about the

immediate future of the market. In limbo, the middle market was run down and shoppers had stopped visiting. Many stallholders seemed paralysed between the choices of continuing to be part of an uncertain diminishing market community or losing their connection to the place by moving on.

I also noticed that I said things that I felt uncertain about, perhaps led by a need to feel recognised by stallholders or connect to their experiences. Subconsciously I also repeated local idioms I had heard in earlier conversations. This made me consider if participating in dialogue might lead to the adoption of a false voice or a misrepresentation of the self in a desire to find common connections or experiences.

The second effect of the conversation was that I felt a frustration and anger at the situation of the stallholders. I had forgotten my worries about whether art students or staff might turn up to discuss the art and had felt a growing identification with the life of the market. I was angry that nothing was being said about the future of the market and that councillors seemed to be avoiding the difficulty of speaking with people or hearing how they felt. This sense of responsibility to act in some way, to make the conversation be heard was matched by guilt at being able to retreat from the everyday difficulties of the market. For me this revealed how dialogical and participatory works might lead to activism but how difficult it is to act as an expert on a situation you are able to retreat from.

There were further limitations for the proposition that this artwork might achieve a dialogue of participating equals in an attempt to avoid manipulation. The posters advertised my singular name, which identified me as in some way other or special. I

also made notes between conversations, which may have made me appear in some way professional when I had attempted to approach as an equal. This arguably put some people off from participating. Future posters and dialogues may only offer my first name and may seek to deal less with recorded detail than the possibility of a more significant emergent subject.

A future approach to this work may lie in adopting Kaprow's (2003) notion of 'player' in a conversation as opposed to artist. This may offer a better model for listener in a process of dialogical transformative learning. Through participating as equals in the play of dialogue, artists may understand their connectedness to others and vice-versa. In seeking to change how they relate to the world they offer up the possibility of changing the world, through as Snyder (2009, p.1) describes it, 'the power of face to face communication' to change our perception of each other, ourselves and thus the world.

The drive to action that participating in dialogue may generate reveals the lure of activism. It also reveals how difficult it is to maintain an authentic voice. Yet with action we might only enter into talking about issues reducing dialogue to what Freire (1996) sees as verbalism.

In continuing to strive for a more understated listening model of dialogue that positions the artist as co-learner rather than as an expert other, greater self-critical reflection might be achievable, and a realisation of how difficult it is to speak or recognise the truth of a situation. As Freire (1996, p.87) states, 'as we attempt to analyze dialogue as a human phenomenon, we discover something which is the

essence of dialogue itself: the word.’ In his view, to speak a true word in dialogue is to change or transform the world. An inauthentic word cannot change the world as its power is split leaving only its constitutive elements of verbalism or activism. The question remains unanswered as to whether *An Invitation to Dialogue* led to a critical reflection on the part of other participants in Leeds or a resulted in any enhancement of action (actualization) for participants, even if only to finally break from a perceived limbo of Kirkgate market

**Reflection 3: *An Invitation to Dialogue* at Blackweir Bridge, Cardiff for Open  
Empty Spaces, June 2009**

We can try to envisage the flow of life in terms of the changing environment or see it, with Heraclitus, as seeming, but not being, the same, as seeming both many and one. But, however much we try—by some special effort—to experience the flow and strengthen our awareness of it, we are subject to the law of life itself according to which every observed moment of life is a remembered moment and not a flow; it is fixed by attention which arrests what is essentially flow, (Dilthey, 1986, 151).

**Introduction**

From the 5–12 June 2009, a poster on an A-board stood next to a bridge by a river in a park. It read, ‘This is an invitation to dialogue. You are invited to participate in a conversation on the Blackweir Bridge over the River Taff in Cardiff. John will be participating in conversations on Friday June the 19th from 9.00am until 6.00pm. Please feel free to join John for a while if you wish to participate.’

Figure 4. Poster for Blackweir Bridge





Between the banks spanned by this bridge, grey-green waters from the valleys rushed complaining as they met the engineering works of the salmon leap. Downstream was Cardiff Bay and behind me the river tucked itself back into a bend. The bridge was a popular route through Pontcanna fields and Bute Park, which cut a swathe through Cardiff and linked the trendy middle class neighbourhood of Pontcanna with the city centre and Cardiff University. Commissioned as part of the site-specific curatorial project Open Empty Spaces, this was my third *Invitation to Dialogue*.

### **Context and background**

Open Empty Spaces aimed to create temporary, non-gallery exhibition spaces in the public realm. The curators hoped to bring contemporary art to new audiences and create debate about the space that contemporary art inhabits.

In response to the themes of the project's title, Jennie Savage (2009) described openness as suggestive of inclusivity and availability, openness to interpretation and meaning, and as a sense of waiting for an assignation. Empty conjured thoughts of empty physical spaces that bring out collective fears for physical and mental safety. However such fear of outside spaces is for Savage possibly a metaphor for inner emptiness; a state which we attempt to distract ourselves from by engaging in activities, a state that she (2009, p.1) describes as, 'a crushing tide of existential crisis, a fear of nothingness.' Such spaces are different from place as Savage (2009, p.1) argues, "A sense of place" is what architects strive to achieve when they open shells of concrete and glass to the public.' Savage proposes that spaces are a blank

canvas for the artist to draw on free of meaning and association, or the messiness of emotion.

I conceived of the artwork *An Invitation to Dialogue* as a naturalistic conversational encounter in a public place. The work of art and possible dialogue is continued through case reflection. Multi-site case reflections are an auto-ethnographic social science method where the researcher reflects on their experience and writes a narrative account of it. In particular a researcher reflects on the relative success or problems with the work or activity. Stake (2005, p.445) states multisite case reflections may be used so that, ‘a number of cases may be studied jointly in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition.’ Here I attempt to investigate the general conditions for and constraints to dialogue in this work of art, in particular focusing on what is said in or emerges from the conversations. In proposing this work as potential dialogue I identify with Gadamer’s (2004) notion of real dialogue, which is one that leads to new understanding through questioning. Gadamer (2004, p.360) states:

As the art of asking questions, dialectic proves its value because only the person who knows how to ask questions is able to persist in his questioning, which involves being able to preserve his orientation toward openness. The art of questioning is the art of questioning even further—i.e., the art of thinking. It is called dialectic because it is the art of conducting real dialogue.

To participate in real dialogue a participant must remain open to yet more questions. I seek to remain open to new questions in part by continuing the dialogue on the bridge through this case reflection, which is part of the on-going dialogue or continuing questioning of a series of works titled *An Invitation to Dialogue*. This reflection also forms part of my wider investigation into dialogue as practice and understanding in contemporary art.

As part of this wider investigation into dialogue in contemporary art I understand *An Invitation to Dialogue* to be part of a recent tradition of neo-conceptual conversational artworks such as Snyder's *Listening Post* (2009) and Pope and Cullen's *Mountains and Lacunae* 2009 which emphasise a more personal conversational exchange between artist and other participants. Snyder (2009) says his motivation for *Listening Post* stems from his simple belief in the power of face-to-face communication. Pope and Cullen's (2010) *Mountains and Lacunae* proposes dialogue as a collective picturing or dialogue as foregrounding of memory. *An Invitation to Dialogue* shares more with the intimacy of Snyder's one-to-one face-to-faceness and the recall of personal memories through conversation of *Mountains and Lacunae* than with larger scale public conversational performances such as Tino Sehgal's *This Progress* 2010 or more social activist works such as Suzanne Lacy's *Code 33* where the artist organises conversational encounters but may not participate and thus is literally not answerable in the work.

In this *Invitation to Dialogue* I participated in fourteen open-themed conversations throughout the course of the day. I stood in the centre of the bridge, which passed over a salmon leap, which was under construction. An area around the bridge had

been fenced off for the construction machinery and materials. Just downstream from the bridge a line of large boulders had been placed in the river to mark out a roadway for dumper trucks shifting concrete and rocks to the salmon leap.

### **The conversations**

A well-dressed man stopped and asked, 'Is bird song a dialogue?' I said dialogue could be reflective or an act of recognition and not simply a semantic exchange, so if I felt recognised by the bird or its song provoked a mental conversation then I thought it could be understood to be dialogue in some sense. He thought recognition was important. He had already had a dialogue while approaching me and had asked himself, 'What do I think of this guy? How is he dressed? What can I tell from his body language? Is this someone I feel safe approaching?' and, 'What is he after?'

Later another man asked pointedly, 'What is the conversation about?' 'What is any conversation about?' I said. 'That is no good' the man said, 'you don't invite someone to dinner and then ask them what's for tea.' 'But you can invite someone to dinner and ask them what they would like to eat' I said. 'Was I getting paid for being there?' I said I didn't accept payment for the work. 'That isn't the same as saying that you can't see any reason why anyone would pay you. You are taking the moral high ground' he said. I agreed, but I still couldn't see any good reason why someone should pay me for doing this.

A while later he returned to tell me what he really wanted to know was whether I 'pulled' doing this. He usually went to the pub to talk about sex, sport and take the

piss. Apparently remembering some distant conversation, he said he wanted to share a beautiful phrase he had heard about a Northern Soul dance. 'The tension blossomed' he said. That was not the only time that I heard mention of pubs that day.

During a long pause between encounters, I measured the bridge, counting one hundred and eleven planks to its span. I was still wondering about the use of such an observation when a woman stopped to talk. She told me the theatre where she worked had recently staged a piece in which the audience was invited onto the stage to sit one-to-one with young people at tables. Other performers moved around the tables whilst the audience member and the performer had a conversation. 'Do you live in Cardiff?' I asked. Yes, but she wasn't sure she really 'lived' there, even after fourteen years. 'It's a Welsh thing. I'm English.' She changed the subject saying I had picked a good location for talking to people. I wasn't sure I belonged. As if noticing me out of place the foreman came up and asked why I was there. I am having conversations I told him. He was more used to people asking about his work, its costs and progress. As if to fit in, I asked about how long the leap would take. It was a rush to try and complete the salmon leap before the season at the end of September. Some people had complained about the site and they had had to make concessions moving fencing to allow sunbathers access to a pier.

I was trying to imagine anyone wanting to sunbathe next to a construction site when three women asked if I was John. Wasn't it nice that I wasn't wearing a label? It seemed everything they went to involved wearing a label. 'Was I an art piece or an artwork?' I said I was John. 'You haven't asked us our names' they said. After

introductions they told me they were annoyed the council hadn't restored Pontcanna fields after last year's Eisteddfod (festival of Welsh culture). The festival's marquees, vehicles and foot traffic had killed the grass. 'Parks are owned by the public and only looked after by the council' they said.

A couple with a double buggy stopped and asked, 'Is this the art conversation?' They were taking a walk with the kids but had recently got back from an Antarctic expedition. 'The Antarctic was like a snowy Cambridge, all flat and white.' Now that they were back they felt everyday routine and life with the kids was tiring and mundane. Once the kids were in bed they were ready to switch off. I asked them what they thought art was. They mentioned something about creativity. They did not see themselves as very creative but they did enjoy seeing the world afresh through their kids' eyes and laughing with them.

I sat down to rest and listen to the birds and the water. Two young men stopped, undressed down to their underwear and I stood up, a little uncomfortable and unsure. They then climbed on to the side of the bridge and jumped. I was surprised and remember thinking that the water didn't look very deep. As they came back I asked, 'How did you know the water was deep enough?' They said they had jumped there before. They did occasional work in Birmingham and driving to Cardiff had seen people jumping off the bridge at Monmouth. 'The bridge is much higher there though' they added. They asked if I would watch their clothes, as their friend wouldn't. I hadn't noticed him in the distance and asked why he wasn't jumping. He was worried they would throw him in with his clothes on. 'Wasn't it a bit cold?' I asked as they climbed up again. 'Yes, but it kills the time until the pubs open.'

The park was busier now and Joggers passed, sealed off from the sound of the river and birdsong by MP3 players. An angler stopped briefly to talk about salmon poaching and the cost of fishing licences. 'It still costs about £7. 50 a day from the post office but you have to fill in every detail' he told me. In the last hour, a young man with prominent piercings and tattoos pulled up on a bike. I thought back to what someone had said earlier about the prior dialogue and appearance. He gave me his name and said he was a performer. He was interested in the physical rather than the theatrical side of circus and wanted to take what he had learned from street performance away from the stage which he felt protected him and other performers. 'It's the unpredictability of being close up with the audience member. It's more demanding, more rewarding,' he said. 'On stage you can hold back or maybe you can be more self-contained.' At six I retreated to a pub tired from being open to conversation and wanting to capture something of what was still speaking to me from the day's conversation.

## **Openness**

That potential participants obviously reflect on my appearance, my dress, body-language, and whether they feel safe approaching me demonstrates the dimension of trust necessary in this dialogue. This work is open to whoever approaches me, but it is open enough for people to change their mind or simply not to participate. I ask myself similar questions of whether I feel safe with participants but this work is about vulnerability and exposure.

To engage in dialogue is to be exposed. This is not just physically exposed to others but in dialogue our motives may be exposed, drawn out by the conversation. The risks of exposure may necessitate self-protection, as Rokeach (cited in Hayakawa, 1978, p.233) states:

Psychologically... all human beings are engaged simultaneously in two tasks: (1) they seek to know more about the world, and (2) they wish to protect themselves from the world—especially from information that might prove upsetting. As the need for defence against disturbing information gets stronger, curiosity about the world gets weaker.

Dialogue may place the individual in the dilemma of seeking to know more about the world through engaging in conversation with others whilst at the same time having one's own view of the world challenged by different perspectives.

The notion of generous openness in dialogue, symbolised by a relinquishing of control and acceptance of the possibility of emergent themes was questioned when one participant asked what the conversation was about. When I asked back what is any conversation about? He replied that that was no good, as you 'don't invite someone to dinner and then ask them what's for tea.' My response was that it seems possible to invite someone to dinner and ask them what they would like to eat. This exchange led me to question the extent to which interlocutors are ever truly self-effacing, so open to the other or altruistic so as not to wish to lead the dialogue? For Nietzsche the notion that altruism was an absolutely selfless act was impossible (Schacht, 1983). In acting in a manner that appears to put the needs of others first



the individual gains recognition and social esteem for being a team player. But I am clearly doing this in my search to know more about the world of dialogue and so this work is clearly not a self-less act in that sense. But what may be learned in dialogue may transcend my (self) understanding. For Gadamer (2004) the understanding that emerges or is 'unfolded' through dialogue is a truth that is neither my interlocutor's nor mine but transcends individual understanding and opinion. The openness may be the place from which we are able to depart from self-interest towards interest in the other.

But the motivation of seeking new knowledge about the world still seems a noble motive, a Socratic quest for enlightenment. What about baser motives and appetites? 'Have you 'pulled' doing this?' the man asked. 'Not yet,' I said. 'Was I getting paid for being there?' I said, 'I didn't accept payment for the work.' 'That isn't the same as saying that you can't see any reason why anyone would pay you. You are taking the moral high ground,' he said. This work may be an appeal to the group for the status of artist as moral team player. For Bakhtin, dialogue is intrinsically moral as in our face-to-face encounter with each other we become answerable for our actions and opinions. Bakhtin (1990) argues art is answerable to life and vice-versa. I am perhaps identifying with this moral perspective, as I do not wish to be absolved from responsibility for my being, or indeed for being an artist.

I mistrust the moral 'get out of jail card' of absolute artistic autonomy. Mistrust however seems to work against dialogue. For example, the women were angry at the council for not repairing the Pontcanna fields after Eisteddfod. I felt they mistrusted the council for profiting from the event but not accepting the cost. They felt the

Pontcanna fields were borrowed from the public but the council appeared unanswerable for their damage. Political answerability may be increasingly difficult however as Boor Tonn (2005) recognises that politicians have often appropriated the language of conversation, healing and dialogue in order to mitigate against criticism and garner support. This may contribute to a wider mistrust of politicians but also of the language and instrumentalism of dialogue.

Dialogue may also be mistrusted as its patterns of language hold potential for manipulating and making others more amenable to agreement as Dolinski *et al.* (2001) recognise. The bridge jumpers' friend wouldn't come on to the bridge as he didn't trust them not to throw him in with his clothes on yet after talking with me only briefly they asked if I would watch their clothes and mobile phones. The openness and trust necessary in dialogue thus seems a delicate balancing act of judging when it is safe to learn more about the world and our capacity for risking the security of what we feel we already know. At some point though, dialogue may be a leap of faith into a stream of uncertain depth.

### **Emptiness**

In these conversations, I was struck by the process of filling. The tension filled the atmosphere, blossoming at a dance. I imagined an empty dance floor about to fill. People fill their time in pubs with conversation. But the bridge jumpers didn't fill time, they killed time until the pubs opened. Time thus seems a threat, a threatening void and emptiness to be filled. We fill the threatening void of our lives with the promise of blossom on the dance floor, cycling and jogging around parks and

jumping from bridges. Is conversation a compensation for those not active enough to dance or play sport? Does it allow us to participate vicariously in 'Strictly', the football or share the activities we never quite got around to last holiday? Or is it just an activity sufficient to fill the void?

A full daily routine didn't seem to satisfy like the flat white emptiness of the Antarctic. There isn't an empty space in the day until the kids are put to bed, by which time parents' energy reserves are running empty. Without something killing or filling it, time seems like something troubling or irksome, much like the wearisome monotonous daily routine of taking kids to school. Spare time seems to be experienced in much the same way as the daily routine. Both a full day and spare time seem to lack something or need to be escaped from.

In this theme I read echoes of Kierkegaard's criticism of modern boredom. The aesthete's assumption that boredom was a tedium of the world rather than a deficit of the bored subject (Dalle Pezze & Salzani, 2009). These conversations speak of a boredom with life, a wider aesthetic attitude, and a taste for experience set apart from the sameness of modern living. Modern boredom has been seen as a by-product of the increased pressures on time, which make it increasingly difficult for individuals to develop adequate value systems for leading a meaningful life (Dalle Pezze & Salzani, 2009). Yet people had enough time to stop and talk. Is conversation a filler, a distraction from the emptiness of modern living or are we paradoxically too busy for full dialogue, our lives too full to stop and take time to consider its meaning?

## Space

I counted one hundred and eleven planks of wood. My stage? Was I sharing the stage through conversation? All the participants in *An Invitation to Dialogue* shared the immediate stage and were visible and on show. But where did the space of the work start and stop? Where does the stage or context of dialogue start and stop?

The bridge, the riverbanks, Bute Park, Pontcanna fields, Cardiff itself and the previous artworks of Open Empty Spaces all define the space and the dialogue.

Kwon (2004, p.11) believes that the space of art can no longer be a *tabula rasa* or blank slate but must be considered a real place where the work of art or event is, 'to be singularly and multiply experienced in the here and now through the bodily presence of each viewing subject, in a sensory immediacy of spatial extension and temporal duration (what Michael Fried derisively characterized as theatricality), rather than instantaneously perceived in a visual epiphany by a disembodied eye.' In Kwon's account, place and space seem to collapse into a total context of space and time. But is this collapse mere theatricality?

One participant felt the physical work of being in the space of a circus was different from the theatrical work. Paradoxically he felt the stage as a space protected him. I can only imagine being drawn from the audience onto a theatre stage must be quite intimidating yet I find I am increasingly comfortable with staging and being drawn into this work. Being physical, occupying space was, the performer suggested, more demanding than theatricality. The space of a stage allows the self to be contained. You can hold back. Without the stage the self is not contained, things are a little more unpredictable. Physical participation goes beyond the passive Brechtian and may be closer to the physicality of Antonin Artaud's Theatre of Cruelty (Bishop,

2006). This may be necessary to consider the work as dialogical as Debord (cited in Bishop, 2006, p.12) argues, 'The spectacle is by definition immune from human activity, inaccessible to any review or correction. It is the opposite of dialogue.' Yet for Ranciere, spectatorship is not passivity waiting to be transformed into action. Instead it is our normal mode of learning, acting and knowing (Bishop, 2006). But Ranciere's active spectatorship, a spectatorship of active interpretation might as Debord suggests only unite us by emphasising the space that separates us. Perhaps it is dialogue that can bridge such a space.

### **Limitations of this work**

The values of truth and trust, and my identification with Bakhtin's notion of answerability in this invitation to dialogue speak of a quasi-religious tone of this work. It argues for an orientation towards openness, but dialogue favours people who are naturally assertive, outgoing or articulate over the shy or reticent (Boor Tonn, 2005). An orientation towards openness may thus be an attitude or capacity afforded by my family and education background, which both place great importance on open and free conversation and articulateness. Openness for others may however leave them open to being manipulated or coerced.

This dialogue also suggests that some people kill time until they are able to render themselves inebriated. For others it can take such a radical stepping back from routine as a trip to Antarctica to reveal the monotony of our daily life. Both lack of employment and being busy employed by parenthood seem to speak of an emptiness. Yet boredom can also be interpreted as referring to a kind of "blind" introspection or examination of a person's thoughts and emotions (Dalle Pezze & Salzani, 2009).

This work seem to disagree with Socrates' assertion that the unreflective life is not worth living, or perhaps this study overlooks that to be able to live a more worthwhile or more reflective life might actually require the prior resources to do so. Time or the tools to reflect may increasingly be a luxury afforded to artists, philosophers and a few privileged researchers able to empty their heads of everyday concerns to think more meaningful thoughts.

### **Further questions**

Doing away with the notion of the bound stage is more than a mere act of theatricality. Participants may find themselves having to ask where does art end and everyday action begin, or vice versa. This may locate the work not so centrally in art but in the art of living, what Bürger (2006) describes as the praxis of life.

I think this work begins to ask to what extent dialogue may offer a means for thinking and acting through a theory of what artistic lives may mean. Might dialogue offer a way out of isolated subject-hood or solipsism and a means of maintaining and strengthening our curiosity about our everyday lives without becoming fearful of disturbing information? If dialogue reinforces our curiosity and openness about the world, protects against fear of inner emptiness and lack of meaning in our lives, what are the spaces where this potential might be productively realised? And how best might we weigh up the dangers and gains of dialogue?

**Reflection 4: *An Invitation to Dialogue* at the joint annual conference of the Society for European Philosophy and the Forum for European Philosophy (SEP/FEP), Cardiff 2009**

‘He who is not acquainted with foreign languages has no knowledge of his own’ (Goethe, cited in Ostler, 2010, p.7).

**Introduction**

This is an account of *An Invitation to Dialogue* at the annual conference of the Society and the Forum for European Philosophy in 2009. The conference took place at the University of Wales Institute, Cardiff from 27–29 August. Over 200 continental philosophers and artists from all over the world came together for the three days of parallel sessions, participatory artworks and keynote presentations. This account weaves together conversation from the work *An Invitation to Dialogue* with comments from a parallel session on The Aesthetics of Conversation. It discusses some of the interpretive contexts of the invitation, before offering a description of this manifestation of it. Lastly I reflect on what I make of the ‘conversation’ as a whole, what the limitations were in this work and what I have learned.

**Background of parallel session on ‘The aesthetics of conversation’**

In addition to offering *An Invitation to Dialogue*, I convened a preceding discussion session on The Aesthetics of Conversation. For this session I invited the

philosophers Nicholas Davey and Gideon Calder and the artist Simon Pope to offer something of their understanding of the conditions of conversation.

Nicholas Davey proposed conversation as dependent on exchange, openness to risk and argued that conversation is an aesthetic and hermeneutic event of withholding and disclosing. This risk, Davey (personal communication, 2009) argues, ‘entails a willingness to entertain critical and insightful transformation with regard to an interlocutor’s self-understanding, the participatory understanding of the unfolding path of the conversation itself and a substantive alteration of the effective reality of the subject-matter of that conversation.’ Thus by participating in the unfolding of conversation, speakers are exposing themselves to the risk of having their understanding of themselves and reality changed.

Gideon Calder (personal communication, 2009) proposed all practices directed towards audiences are analogous to conversation, and ‘shaping the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of delivery as well as responding to that which is delivered.’ He argued that philosophy has traditionally focused more on the work or labour of the speaker. Yet, he suggested that listening is ‘un-controversially, a necessary condition of the particular kind of thing that conversation is.’ Thus he argued, a particular kind of relationality between participants is a condition of conversation that might be prior to its aesthetics.

Simon Pope reflected on his experience of how landscapes enable and interrupt this particular kind of relationality. As he noted (personal communication, 2009), ‘When walking in mountain landscapes, the intrusions of scree, scrub and rock remind us of



the awkwardness of our being together, despite our best intentions. Conversations are forced open as the land over which we move vies for our attention.’ For Pope, the terrain has agency and thus might be thought a condition of conversation, permitting or interrupting conversation.

### **Context and background of the work, *An Invitation to Dialogue***

*An Invitation to Dialogue* is a conversational encounter offered in various locations through which I seek to reflect on the possibilities and difficulties of achieving ‘authentic’ dialogue. Authentic dialogue in Bruns’s (cited in Davey, 2006, p.209) interpretation of Gadamerian dialogue, ‘is possible only in our participation in the give and take of the argument as it occurs in the situations in which we find ourselves.’ Thus the, ‘critical and insightful transformation with regard to an interlocutor’s self-understanding’ Davey refers to, is possible only through participating in and reflecting on the various situations of this work.

I also reflect on this work as part of a tradition of conversational and dialogical artwork. Such conversational and relational works have been variously described as neo-conceptual works that offer context instead of content as work of art (Kester, 2004), ‘operative realist’ in that they exist in tension between art and everyday practices (Bourriaud, 2002), and permitting of dialogue when they allow a person to enter into them and exist in the space of the work (Bourriaud cited in Bishop, 2004). Bishop (2005) has also argued that such works are often uncritical of the relationships central to them, vulnerable to instrumentalisation and inaccessible to scrutiny and evaluation by critics and historians.

In *An Invitation to Dialogue* I combine the action of encountering and speaking with others, with later reflection, through which I seek further insightful transformation of my understanding of dialogue and myself. The re-articulation of this case reflection in talks and seminars exposes my understanding to further dialogue and potential re-understanding through participation in what John McLeod (2001) terms the research conversation, a feeding back of the conversation to a community of interest.

However, this *Invitation to Dialogue* took place directly at a conference, which meant experiences and insights from discussion panels (McLeod's research conversation) are folded into the conversation gleaned in breaks between sessions as part of *An Invitation to Dialogue*.

### **The work**

The conference program read, 'Artwork 1. John Hammersley, *An Invitation to Dialogue*. Artist John Hammersley invites you to participate in a conversation during breaks between papers today. If you are happy to take part in a conversation with John, please feel free to approach him.' Conference delegates were reminded of the invitation by a poster on an A-board that read, 'This is an invitation to dialogue' and the conference chair announced the artworks, adding that I had asked him not to refer to me as an artist. Although the conference programme listed the work as taking place during one break between parallel sessions, the timeframe of the work was expanded by the poster, programme, and this reflection.

Figure 5. Poster for SEP/FEP Conference



The poster and discussion session both acted as a flooding of the conversational terrain, a means of introducing concerns into later conversation (Branney, 2006) and this reflection may act in a similar way opening up future conversation. There was also little discernable difference between the breaks labelled in the programme as Artwork 1 and breaks between other sessions, other than its framing as the moment of the artwork in the programme.

The parallel session on The Aesthetics of Conversation had raised notions of intimacy and prior relationships in conversation. One person wondered if intimacy might be banal for some people. People also questioned privilege and manipulation and one speaker asked whether Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital was useful for understanding conversation. For another speaker conversation was full of tension and problems. They argued that, 'the problem of liking art is also the problem of wanting to be able to talk about it.' As the session approached its end, it increasingly became a discussion between two philosophers who seemed to represent an irresolvable tension between an ideal mode of conversation as a sort of transcendental play and more instrumental language game interpretations of conversation.

In the coffee break of *An Invitation to Dialogue* I stood watching others come into the canteen. A familiar face approached and asked what the conversation was about. I told him that I had been asked a similar question earlier that summer. I had said, 'what is any conversation about?' and in reply a man had said that that was no good because 'you don't invite someone for dinner and then say what is for tea.' The philosopher said 'such self-effacement was too dilettante and Italian a mode of

dialogue, not like the Gadamerian spirit at all.’ He added that, ‘for Gadamer, the inviter always brings a dish to the table.’ As I thought about how to reply two others joined us distracting me. They were artists who had recently finished studying. They told me that they felt isolated now their course was over and that it was difficult to sustain their research without the access to university facilities. It was as if their conversation had come to an abrupt halt and now they felt left out. I asked if there were ways of sustaining their connection and conversation with research but they said there was little help from the university once they had completed their courses. ‘But aren’t you here to sustain your research conversation?’ I asked. ‘Yes, but we expected more artists and following the philosophy is quite difficult.’

People started to head back for the next parallel sessions during which one presenter argued that ‘rapprochement enables dialogue.’ He spoke of we, ‘we are beings that understand. Understanding is our being. It is the *teleos* and condition of our being. Being is shared, and in sharing being we understand and are understood. This allows us to recognise ourselves in him or her, but to seek the spirit of we. Commonality is not sameness. Thus a disposition and willingness to understand, is not the same as to understand completely.’

In the next break another person came up and asked, ‘is something always left unspoken? And are you proposing that this work is the labour of art?’ I said I was interested in reflecting on the meeting of artists and philosophers and what might be the difficulties of achieving dialogue. I guess I am considering whether the meeting of art and philosophy is a possible ground for dialogue. He wondered where the work started and ended. Perhaps he in part answered as he left.

I went to get a coffee and said hello to a philosopher who had earlier talked about Sartre's analogy of the waiter and 'bad faith'. I asked him what Sartre said about the waiter. He explained that Sartre describes the waiter as acting too eager to please or appear like a waiter, and that this can come across as inauthentic. The waiter is not merely the 'object' of serving waiter but also authentically himself. He said he was trying to write a script for the waiter in Sartre, but had wanted to break the script by playing football in the restaurant.

I noticed someone looking at the A-board and walked over. 'Are you here for the invitation to dialogue?' I asked. 'I heard about it. I wasn't sure. Philosophers are not always comfortable speaking with practitioners.' 'Artists aren't always comfortable speaking with philosophers in my experience', I replied. 'In this, where is the art?' he asked. 'Isn't there a danger that it might not be recognised as art?' 'Yes. Inevitably, but this work is the work of recognition at one level. The work of art as the recognition of the work of art.' 'Isn't it in the framing of it as art? Are you saying the artwork is workful? Was Heidegger right? Is the work a play of different economies?' 'I don't know' I said. 'The image is ontologically relational. Is your movement away from representation a move towards non-representation?' 'Aren't I representing myself?' 'I suppose, but there is never the question of getting the image right though?' 'Isn't there', I asked. 'Well what about judgement? Judgement about how something works as work of art? Judgement is grounded in ontology. I suppose when we talk about relational ontology we still need to talk about this and that,' he said. 'Well, I think this work is about judgement and re-judgement, and relies often on talking about our experience of what is to hand, the this and the that.'

### **What I made of the conversation**

‘This work is self-effacing.’ In introducing *An Invitation to Dialogue* to conference the chair had said, ‘John has asked me not to refer to him as an artist.’ This introduction to delegates obviously effaced and rejected the role of artist instead of simply leaving it unsaid or open to question in the encounter itself. As one participant commented, ‘Isn’t there a danger that it might not be recognised as art?’ This risking of the understanding of this work as art may be too self-effacing, but for me this may be a rapprochement necessary for dialogue as art, as the person said, ‘artwork is workful.’ But framing dialogue as art may as Simon Pope suggests like any landscape, intrude and create awkwardness. Perhaps the interpretation of art is the work to be left to dialogue.

I was also self-effacing and seeking rapprochement when I said that not all artists are comfortable speaking with philosophers. Here I recalled my prior awkwardness speaking with philosophers, an awkwardness that this work set out to question and critically transform. This recognition of my own awkwardness was in response to one person’s comment that philosophers are not always comfortable speaking with practitioners. Using the third person plural of artists and philosophers allows us to refer to ourselves without addressing the awkwardness that exists as a potential barrier to dialogue. The recognition of shared awkwardness perhaps becomes a common ground (or a spirit of ‘we’) from which the possibility of dialogue may emerge. Such self-effacement is not a Levinasian feminine silent demeanour, (Bernasconi & Wood, 1988), nor a resistance to eluding the grasp of the other (Vasseleu, 1998). I read this self-effacement as a gentle humorous recognition of the

awkwardness that unites, what Shaftsbury identifies as a virtue of social intercourse akin to sympathy (cited in Gadamer, 2004).

However is this work too dilettante? This suggests an amateurish mode of conversation and dialogue, effacing the expert status of speaker in inviting others to share co-responsibility for speaking. What may be effaced is the cultural capital of artist as conversational or dialogical expert. Gideon Calder recognises that philosophers (like academic conferences) may traditionally confer more status, cultural or academic capital on speaking rather than listening, on having something to say rather than seeking to understand. Understanding may require no less familiarity with academic speech codes and vocabulary, however. Yet the short time allowed for questions and the rehearsed defences of speakers at conference both make the possibility of pursuing the conversation, and clarifying possible misunderstandings in coffee breaks valuable. Perhaps such breaks aided by the conviviality of refreshment offer a less formal space where an individual's expert academic capital is less at risk.

What one philosopher reminded me of is that they sometimes feel awkward talking with practitioners. I reflect that many artists also feel exposed talking with philosophers. What seems at tension is an awkward relationship between technical expert language and a practical language borne out of experience. Artists are no less sensitive to which code has wider cultural capital but some people may fear losing touch with an intuitive practical language through the learning of more formal academic language. This is not simply a problem with art but with the academy *per se*, as Barratt (2011, p.145) argues, 'learning the prestige variety of English is for



some students like learning a second language, and hopefully the first language, the first variety of English is not being lost in the process.'

### **The problem of liking art**

It was a philosopher who told me that 'the problem of liking art is also the problem of wanting to be able to talk about it.' Liking art for this philosopher seems bound up with having the language tools or the opportunity to talk about (and thus share) the subject of our appreciation. As if in agreement, two artists had come to the conference because they felt left out of art conversation after they had finished their research degrees. Here the second problem of wanting the opportunity to talk about art with philosophers became a problem of the artists lacking the philosophical language tools or vocabulary. More recently philosophers like Groys (2010) have expressed a motivation to talk with artists as artists, to art on its own terms. This may reflect a similar belief in the increasing difficulty of communication between separate codes. As Flusser (2002, p.18–19) argues:

A small elite of specialists dialogically elaborate information, through codes that are becoming increasingly difficult to learn. This elite tends to divide into mutually incommunicable groups. The information thus elaborated is communicated discursively through almost equally difficult codes to a smaller number of elite receivers. These discourses have mostly scientific and artistic messages, and ideological messages tend to disappear.

There is a historical precedent for the increasing difficulty of art's linguistic code. Peter Osborne (1999) recalls a period when part of conceptual art as he describes it, almost totally identified with philosophy. This he terms exclusive conceptualism. Softer approaches to philosophy and ideas in conceptualism he termed inclusive conceptualism. Exclusive conceptualism chose to use the language of the philosophy of art as a polemical weapon against other voices in art. Osborne suggests that the inclusive conceptualist tradition may have continued and emerged as more inclusive neo-conceptual art practices that continue to attempt to engage non-specialist audiences. It was exclusive conceptualism that Osborne argues appealed most to critics.

### **Un-Gadamering this dialogue**

This work may also be un-Gadamerian in spirit. One understanding of how *An Invitation to Dialogue* might be un-Gadamerian is in the analogy with what the inclusive conceptualist Kaprow (2003) terms the un-artist. Kaprow (2003, p.104) argues, 'An un-artist is one who is engaging in changing jobs, in modernizing.' Thus being un-Gadamerian is perhaps a modernising or a changing of jobs in the work of *An Invitation to Dialogue*. There may be similarities here with Groys's (2010) notion of a Borgesian conceptual artist that resembles a philosophical existentialist who is concept driven. Groys's interpretation of conceptual art, 'demands the invention of ever newer rules that then become future sites of artistic interventions, critical interest and theoretical elaboration' (Jackson, 2010, p.179). Thus it may be necessary not to tie this work to a singular or rigid interpretation of Gadamerian dialogue in order for it to achieve the Gadamerian goal of transformed self-

understanding. And rather than method as a rigid protocol for dialogue, it may represent method as the continued invention of newer rules for this work of un-art.

This *Invitation to Dialogue* has reinforced my interest in the challenge of Gadamer's notion of authentic dialogue as seeking an emergent or new understanding. This is what Nicholas Davey proposed as conversation's dependence on exchange, and openness to risk which, 'entails a willingness to entertain critical and insightful transformation with regard to an interlocutor's self-understanding, the participatory understanding of the unfolding path of the conversation itself and a substantive alteration of the effective reality of the subject-matter of that conversation.' The subject matter in discussion at one point was the apparent vagueness of the subject of *An Invitation to Dialogue*. For one philosopher this lack of assertiveness was un-Gadamerian in that I appear not to bring something to the table. I however feel that we cannot avoid bringing all that we are to the table of dialogue, and a less assertive spirit might also facilitate the unfolding path of the conversation itself.

What I have come to re-understand is that participants do not have to be experts in dialogue to participate, nor do I have to be an expert in Gadamerian philosophy for me to profitably allow his writing to speak to me in my interpretation of this work. Thus I have come to rethink the value of being an expert in dialogue, which for me increasingly has overtones of Socratic dialogue (and dialogue as rigid method or technique). More problematic for me is Socrates' notion of an expert as someone who cannot err in their specialist field (Brickhouse & Smith, 2009), which would seem to negate the possibility of critical self-transformation, for if we cannot err how can we make mistakes to learn from? Yet Gadamer (2004, p.18) argues that, 'with

the renaissance of classical philosophy and rhetoric, the image of Socrates became the countercry against science, as is shown, in particular, in the figure of the *idiota*, the layman, who assumes a totally new role between scholar and wiseman.’ Perhaps it serves to remind me that Socrates is at best understood as a changeable literary character whose utterances are arguably put into his mouth by Plato and that dialogue may remind us to remain attentive to when we become the mouthpieces of others.

### **Limitations of this work**

Gideon Calder reminds us, conversation and the prior relationships it requires involve both speaking and listening. Calder argues that philosophy has traditionally focused more on the labour of the speaker. Both speakers and listeners in this *Invitation to Dialogue* were exclusively male. Women were amongst some of the most vocal participants in the parallel session on The Aesthetics of Conversation but were fewer in number at the conference. Perhaps the linguistic tone or code of *An Invitation to Dialogue* is a reflection of what Luce Irigaray sees as the male domination of language. As Irigaray (2008, p.8) suggests, ‘A single gender marks philosophical discourse in its form, its content, the definition of the subject, the relation to the world, the limits of the horizon.’

A second limitation of this work comes from what I assume is the need to secure the cultural capital of artworks at a philosophy conference and subsequent heavy framing of their status as art. In contrast to one person’s concern, there seems little danger of the work not being recognised as art, but such risk of understanding the

work as perhaps something else, or having my assumptions as to why this work might or might not be a work of art challenged seems hugely reduced. Without such risk, this dialogue takes on the comfortable appearance of decorative conversation, a *divertimento* amongst the more serious conversation of philosophical presentations. No wonder one participant thought the work too dilettante and Italian a mode of conversation. Art seems increasingly dependent on the recognition and status referral of more serious and technical subjects such as philosophy.

## **Learning**

What I realised I hadn't done in this work was have a conversation with the conference organisers about what their assumptions and hopes were for this work. They had already generously accepted my proposed discussion panel on The Aesthetics of Conversation, and I wonder if this flooding of the territory might not have been a different way of introducing the work. Flooding the terrain of a conversation to come seems a more fluid analogy than the rather rigid framing. Neither had I realised until afterwards that I had not spoken with any women. Yes, a woman had been very vocal in the discussion on the aesthetics of conversation, it seemed she had felt the need to fight her corner, and I can only wonder at what new understanding might have emerged if there had been a woman offering their position statement amongst my invited interlocutors. This work thus reminds me to be more attentive to how the landscape of dialogue might already favour the voices of some, and silence the voices of others.

## **Reflection 5: An Invitation to Dialogue at The Event Birmingham, November**

**2009**

Lo studio del dialogo

Lo studio è un “altro” che cambia che richiede il duro lavoro del riconoscimento. Quando rifletto sul mio studio, vi sono immerso, situato nel qui ed ora; il qui e là; faccio spazio ad una nuova comprensione. Il mio studio mi usa per comprendere l’ “altro” in me. Quando rifletto sul “che cosa” del mio studio, ‘studio’ e quindi cambio. (Hammersley, cited in Springhill Institute, 2009).

### **Introduction**

As part of Birmingham’s artist led contemporary art festival The Event, I was commissioned to produce *An Invitation to Dialogue*. This work combines a face-to-face encounter in a common public place (*communibus locis*) with an invitation to participate in a conversation. I interpret this work as part of a neo-conceptual and conversational art tradition, seeing parallels with elements of various artists’ dialogical or discursive work including, Simon Pope, Peter Snyder, Richard Layzell and Ian Wilson.

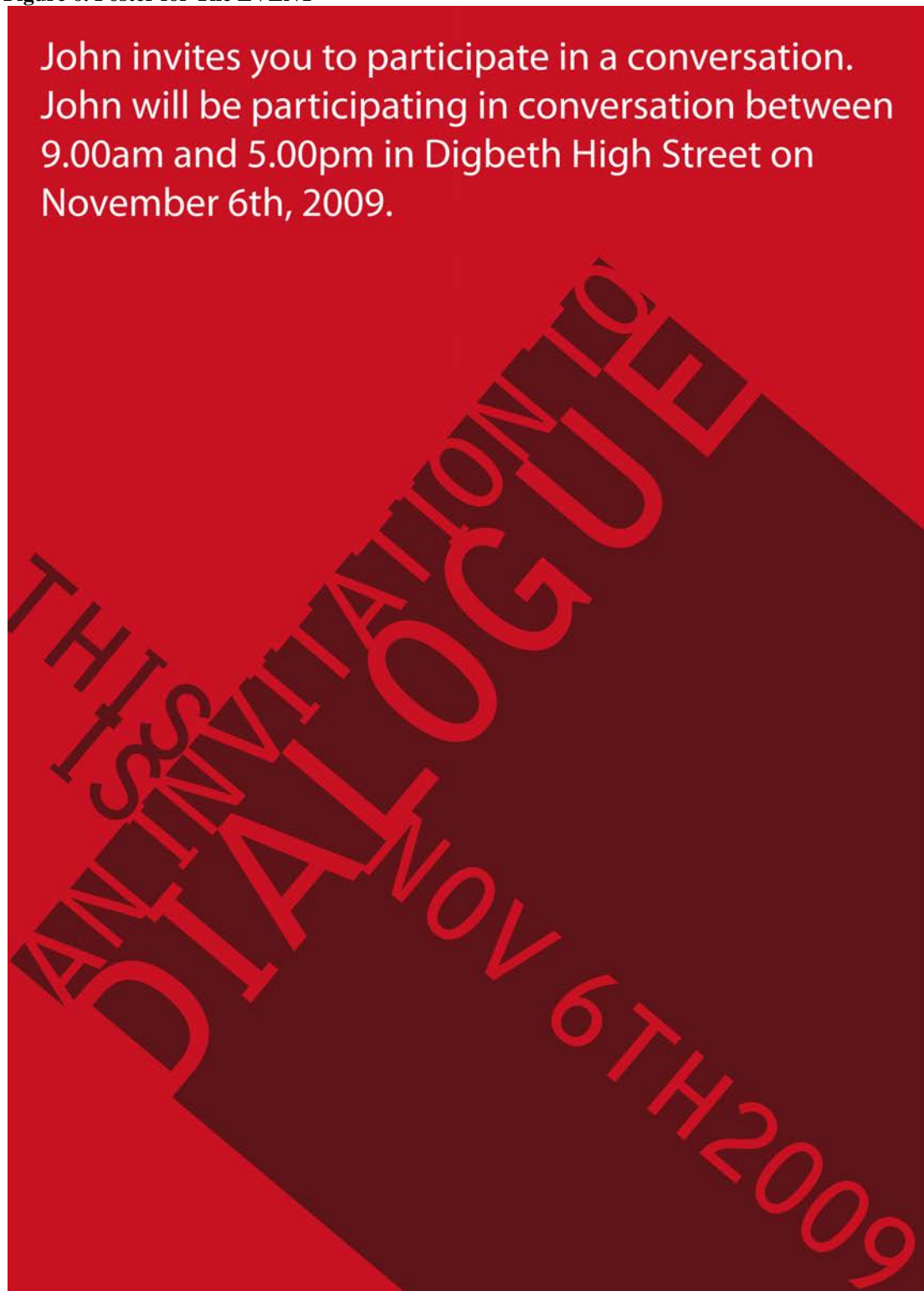
I reflect on the encounter and the extent to which it may be understood as an authentic dialogue that leads to new understanding. This includes an interior dialogical reflection on the dialogical encounter through multisite case reflections.

The artist Simon Pope describes multisite case reflections as an itinerant method through which the artist researcher is open to new contexts and actively seeks them. Each case examines the possible emergence of theory from the researcher's account or story of their experience (Pope, personal communication, 2010). In this way multisite case reflection may be thought to echo the emergent dialogue of social constructionist grounded theory and its emphasis on theory that emerges from the research dialogue with others in the lived or social world.

### **Background and context**

*An Invitation to Dialogue* took place on a staggered pedestrian crossing in the middle of the Eastside arts quarter in Birmingham. On both sides of the crossing's railings, facing inwards were tied two invitation posters that said, 'This is an invitation to dialogue. John invites you to participate in a conversation. John will be participating in conversation between 9.00am and 5.00pm in Digbeth Highstreet on November 6th, 2009.' Other posters with the title of the work and the web address of The Event were flyposted around Eastside. Details of the invitation were also included on Facebook and Twitter, announcements by The Event, and in handouts for visitors. The general location of where I would stand was included on a small-scale map of Eastside.

Figure 6. Poster for The EVENT





The Event is Birmingham's contemporary art festival in Eastside that brings together artists, artist-led projects and curators, as a showcase for the best and most challenging artworks that the second city has to offer. In 2009 the second manifestation of The Event ran from 4–8 November. Eastside has seen a lot of arts led regeneration in recent years, with renovation and development of many former industrial buildings such as the Custard Factory, various artist spaces and galleries such as Eastside projects, Ikon and VIVID, and on the other side of the High Street new apartments and office complexes.

The Event was accompanied by a series of talks, which explored the role of artist led festivals within contemporary art practice. In particular exploring the role of artists' consortia and artists working within regeneration. Above all, these talks questioned the autonomy of artist led activities in wider political contexts. The Event was also becoming more recognised nationally as Osbaldestin (2009) asked if The Event might be about to become more established as a new Biennial for Birmingham. Much of the press about The Event however focused on the industrial spaces that the visual art was presented in rather than the work.

The Event included work by over 90 artists, organisations and artist spaces some of which I have previously worked alongside and collaborated with. I also completed my masters in fine art at what is now The City of Birmingham University. For many years I worked in Birmingham and lived in its commuter belt and it was in this context that I was eligible to participate in the Event as a West Midlands' based artist. Accompanying the Event were two artists' publications. For *An Endless Supply* I included a research paper about the snowball sampling method for

qualitative interviewing and for *L'Atelier est Mort, Vive L'Atelier* I wrote a micro dialogue about *The studio of dialogue* (see above). The text in *An Endless Supply* located my conversations in the wider context of qualitative research. The text in *L'Atelier est Mort, Vive L'Atelier* written in Italian, sought to emphasise the interpretative nature of dialogue as well as suggest that dialogue is a movement between inner and outer spaces, the mind and the world. This text also distances my practice from more fixed perspectives of art practice associated with studio practice, and rigid interpretations of site-specific work (see Kwon, 2004).

### **The work**

I waited a long time before the rush of traffic was interrupted by the call of a crow. A woman and a daughter are walking up and down the road with a camera looking for something. I decide not to wave. A builder with a cup of tea in hand stops and reads a poster right by where I am standing. He ignores me and walks on. Someone I used to know walks past without saying hello. I am not sure if I feel embarrassed or simply fear being ignored.

A notice above the Irish community centre says 'eat, drink, meet'. I recall The Event curator and I rejecting the community centre as a venue for the work, perhaps because of the kitsch in its shop window, or perhaps because of its conviviality. Some students cut the corner of the crossing bypassing me on the way to the South Birmingham College. A leopard skinned girl from *Grand-Theft-Auto* and a woman, in high heels, knickers and a bra, stare blankly at me from stickers on the traffic light.

A group of visitors on tour round The Event approaches and stops on the crossing. The crowd stands slightly apart from me providing some shelter for each other from the wind. Some faces look expectant and the guide gives me an encouraging look before introducing me. I try shouting yet my voice is drowned out by the wind and the traffic. I joke about hoping for exposure as an artist. I get one or two cold laughs. Faces, some I recognise, stare back at me. They look uncomfortable, and disinterested. I ask, 'Is it possible to have a dialogue with a crowd?' I struggle on for a couple of minutes before thanking people, feeling something like a fool and a failure. As they begin to leave a man hangs back to ask about the location. 'Why did you choose to do it here?' he asks. Leaving the crossing for a while I walk with him in order to try and answer his question. I mention the vulnerability and exposed nature of the crossing. I explain that it is inbetween the more residential area and the art galleries of Eastside and I am interested in observing if I feel there is any dialogue between the two sides of Eastside. 'Who is the public for The Event? Are artists its prime audience?' I ask. He says he might come back at the end of the day, and apologises as he dashes to catch up with his group.

An elderly man exits the Irish Community Centre. He passed me earlier, on his way in. He says rather cryptically, 'she said I should run but I can't with me leg', and then he was gone. A few minutes later he was crossing back. 'How's the leg?' I asked. 'Oh, it's the cold. It'll be okay when I get in', and he was gone just as quickly.

A smaller tour group arrives. I am able to ask people what they do. One is a tourist, another a blogger. 'What is blogging and why do you blog?' I ask. 'Blogging is a

way of discussing, questioning, and thinking about things. A way of exchanging ideas with other people with similar interests', he says. 'It sounds like a good explanation of this work,' I say. A student mentions Facebook. I ask, 'but what about numbers, how many friends do you have in Facebook?' 'Two hundred and fifty but I don't write to them all.' 'Two hundred and fifty?!' The blogger interjects, 'Well, they're not friends. It is just the term used by the creator of Facebook. Its meaning changes, you can't treat it semantically now. It's out of context. It doesn't mean friends anymore.' 'Well that is kind of like dialogue,' I say. 'Artists use the word dialogue all of the time but I am not sure what it means anymore.' Changing the subject the blogger says 'I am interested in the duration of your work. The eight hours, it's like photography.' 'Well exactly, just like Jeff Wall,' I say, not sure exactly how just like Jeff Wall, but sure nonetheless. 'I saw you earlier when I passed,' the blogger adds. 'But did you know that you had seen me?' 'No, I just thought there is a bloke.' I tell the group that I am more interested in the kinds of conversation that might be achievable between friends, 'You know how you sometimes go over the same ground with friends but somehow it's kind of new?' 'Like a routine?' one man asks. 'Well, not exactly. You get something new but...' 'Well it can't be new all of the time. That'd be exhausting.' 'Exactly, but perhaps the new is a very slight thing.' 'Most of what we do with art is go over the familiar for that slight newer understanding.'

A woman from The Event stops with soup for me. We talk briefly before she heads off. She is working also. An Arabian woman stares down from a billboard. She is averting her eyes, as do the Muslim women who pass me on the crossing. Some artists I know stop and offer me a tasting of some food they have made. They know

me. I am participating in their work. I wonder if I am still doing my work? They are in costume but I am not. A van stops at the lights and the driver leans out and shouts, 'Can I join in?' The traffic heads off. One artist says, 'I will leave you with something. What is the difference between discussion and conversation?' I am left alone thinking about this for a while until the director of The Event brings me a cup of coffee. She doesn't know that someone else has brought me soup. People are thinking of me. People are thinking of the cold and people are supporting me.

Two builders stop, 'sorry to bother you but we couldn't help noticing that you have been standing out here all day. What you up to then?' 'I am doing a conversation as a work of art. I was wondering what you were doing moving all that tea back and forwards,' I say. 'So you've been out all day?' 'Yes, I am doing nine-to-five today.' 'Oh we're clocking off. We've got nothing to do.' 'What is it that you do?' I ask. 'We're plumber's over there.' 'But it doesn't look finished. What do you mean you have nothing to do?' 'Well, we're hanging around. We put stuff in then we get told to take it out again.' 'Haven't you got an architect?' I ask. 'That is the architect. It's like he tells us to put stuff in and then he decides he doesn't like it. He changes his mind and we take it all out again. It is not like it used to be, where the architect would design it and we would do it. It's more like we are designing it with the architect.' 'Sounds very expensive,' I say. 'It is. Should've been finished in September and it won't be done before Christmas.' The builders look keen to get off. 'Well cheers for stopping and talking,' I say.

It is almost five o'clock as two men come onto the crossing. 'You have not picked a great day for this,' they say. 'How did you know I was doing this?' I ask. 'I was on

the tour Wednesday,' one says. We are designers and work with some of the art organisations and The Event.' One presumably notices my surprise at their dress. 'I don't normally wear a suit. I had an event on in town,' he apologises. 'I like it that you had an event and wore a suit and I am here for The Event and I'm fairly understated.' 'Well you are well dressed for it,' the other says. 'Well, it started out grey and cloudy but I've been surprised by how productive the conditions have been.' I wait on a short while past five looking for the man who said he might return. Eventually I give up and head off for a hot drink.

### **What I made of the work**

'What is the difference between discussion and conversation?' My feeling is that discussion conveys more official and technical talking about a subject and conversation a more informal and everyday talking with another subject. This *Invitation to Dialogue* represents a tension between the two in dialogue. Short unexpected exchanges such as, 'she said I should run but I can't with me leg' although from a stranger and seemingly awkward, have the familiarity of conversation with a friend. In contrast my efforts to talk with the first large tour group was reduced to a rather feeble attempt to talk about the work. The relationship of one talking with a group facilitated discussion and 'talking about' more readily than 'conversation with.' Only when someone allowed themselves to be separated by falling behind the tour group or as in the second smaller group, stepping closer, did conversation with other subjects become more possible.

One person explained that they blog, to discuss. This involved questioning and thinking about subjects being talked about, much like I propose happens in a

dialogical encounter with another subject. However blogging as talk seems mediated differently and our subjecthood less exposed than in a face-to-face encounter. What blogging seems to involve less is an immediate grounded context in which the talk is also what Bakhtin terms 'interlocation', as well as interlocution. Conversation as dialogical encounter is for Bakhtin an interlocation in which the other is understood against the background and context against which they are encountered. As Holquist (1990, p.xxvi) explains, 'The interlocative self is one that can change places with another—that must, in fact, change places to see where it is. A logical implication of the fact that I can see things you cannot, and you can see things that I cannot, is that our excess of seeing is defined by a lack of seeing: my excess is your lack, and vice versa.' In dialogue this is both a literal and metaphorical exchange of each others excess of understanding among mutually lacking individuals (Bakhtin, 1990).

Blogging seems a more technical discussion about a subject. Technical communication was criticised by Gadamer and Habermas as instrumental. As Bernstein (cited in Dostal, 2002, p.272) argues, 'both Gadamer and Habermas are deeply concerned about the ways in which the varieties of technological, means-end, or instrumental rationality are infiltrating and distorting the forms of everyday life.' For Bernstein, what is at stake for both thinkers is people's individual ability for responsible decision-making. A concern I transpose into a concern for people's individual ability and responsibility for meaning making in dialogue and art. While blogging involves questioning and thinking, like Facebook it may distort everyday relationships and decision-making. Lacking what Bakhtin (1990) argues is the demand of answerability embodied in face-to-face dialogical encounters, blogging and Facebook might emphasise means-end and instrumental relationships over

practical relationships which place different (perhaps more direct) ethical demands and responsibilities on us.

In the sixties Steinberg (1972) tried to promote a functional notion of a contemporary art public as one which wasn't merely public as appropriation or a designation of particular people separate from artists but instead a role people find themselves in when experiencing art. In response to this work I was surprised how many people asked how many conversations I had had. Even The Event asked me to evaluate the number of conversations and participants, yet few asked about the experience. It seems as if publics are still a technical means to an end rather than individuals who share the experience and work of art. *An Invitation to Dialogue* invites individuals to consider the possibility of excess understanding in interlocative dialogical encounter as the possible gain or outcome of the co-work of dialogue (conversation with) and art.

The excess of meaning or new understanding possible in a dialogical encounter is context dependent. A pedestrian crossing might seem like an odd location for this invitation. As one person asked, 'Why did you choose to do it here?' The artist Matt MacKisack commented that the location seemed to have resonance with Augé's (1995) notion of non-place. Often people pass through non-places and have no territorial attachment to them, and instead people relate to them through words and signs (MacKisack, 2009). I certainly sought to avoid a territorial attachment to galleries, the recently converted industrial art spaces, and the pubs and cafes with their specific communities. Instead I chose the pedestrian crossing which I assumed



the inhabitants of Eastside would move through, located as it was in-between the arts organisations and venues of The Event and the new apartment developments.

The location played an unexpected and revealing part in shaping what emerged from this work. The artist Pope argues that landscape has agency in conversation, and the landscape of this work demanded a spatial immediacy as well as a temporal immediacy in conversation. An echo of what Tomlinson (2007) characterises as the current culture of immediacy that has come to be associated more with a technological and communicative abandonment of distance and separation. Matt MacKisack (2009) recognised the location's emphasis on an intimate immediacy necessary to be heard over the wind and traffic. In choosing this location I also sought to catch people who might have been going to or returning from work, such as the designers and plumbers, to catch people on a ground that might reveal their territorial attachments or immediate 'web of relations.'

The context was not just spatial however, as one participant commented, 'I am interested in the duration of your work.' Like other workers I aimed for a nine-to-five day. But I hadn't expected one person to say, 'The eight hours, it is like photography.' I replied, 'yes, Just like Jeff Wall', without really knowing why. Perhaps like Jeff Wall's street photography the duration of this work encompasses extended periods of stillness with brief events of movement. The long periods of stillness invite being noticed by others such as the plumbers, or even re-cognition; a shift from being just a bloke in the landscape to a figure who invites the question, 'what am I doing?' and offers a possibility for new-understanding, however slight. Attempting to represent something of this new understanding this reflection perhaps

suffers the same difficulties as a photo and can only offer a snapshot of experience and thus more is lost than can ever be conveyed. Perhaps another resonance for me can be found in Snauwaert's (cited in Wall, 2007), recognition of Jeff Wall's insistence on the presence of the human body in addressing complex meanings in neo-conceptual art. Perhaps because as Groys (cited in MacKisack, 2009) observes, it is difficult for the individual work of art to force others to look at it and to assert its presence. What this *Invitation to Dialogue* reveals is that in any event it may not be necessary for the artwork of individuals to be assertive and shout to be seen, but that the invitation to dialogue present in all artworks may be noticed given enough space and time.

Lastly, I feel the extended space and time of a work of art may constitute its immediate surface through which the work of art is encountered. As Thomas Hirschhorn (2010, p.1) argues:

Creating a platform enables others to come in contact with the work. I want all of my work works to be understood as a surface or a field. This field or surface is the upper surface that enables access or contact with art. The impact or friction takes place on this upper surface, and through a contact, the other can be implicated. This surface—my work—must be a locus for dialogue or for confrontation.

### **Limitations of this work**

In this work I initially lacked the confidence just to appear, supported only by the two poster invitations. The many ancillary posters advertising The Event in similar

visual language to my invitation possibly detracted from the invitation and the work of being noticed (too many notices for me to be noticed). This work does not require extra unnecessary noise and I should be more attentive to the work's surface in future rather than to making visual noise marketing and announcing the work to come.

Secondly I assumed or rather appropriated two publics for this artwork in its proposal to The Event rather than remaining open to encounter the public that emerged. These assumptions perhaps make the work of recognising the uniqueness of individuals who do take up the invitation to dialogue more difficult. Assuming this work's public had one or other group identity made me less attentive to the uniqueness of those that I did encounter, and perhaps less engaged with what they said.

## **Learning**

In offering this work in future I think it may be important for me not to propose an a-priori public of the work before the experience of the work. This work relies on a more functionalist notion of public, those that might enter into the relational encounter with the work. As a consequence I feel I should also be attentive to not expanding the poster invitations. The two posters seem more in keeping with the work of noticing. I am not surprised that unknown people took many of the extra Event posters down. I put up so many, it might have felt like I was invading someone else's turf. I wonder if promoters and fly posters for the many nightclubs in the area might have taken them down. There is a possible future reflection or inquiry to be done on the relationship or non-relationship between the different cultural venues of arts organisations and nightclubs in Eastside. The extra posters were not

needed as the unspectacular nature of this work is I feel an important part of my growing understanding of the work of dialogue. Dialogue may be less about appearance than presence. And this makes me consider that in future I might be less concerned with the online marketing of the work (as emails and Facebook, like advertising fliers and posters, can demand too much attention). Instead I may focus on being more present and open to encounters with others enabling access or contact with the work of art or dialogue instead of demanding it.

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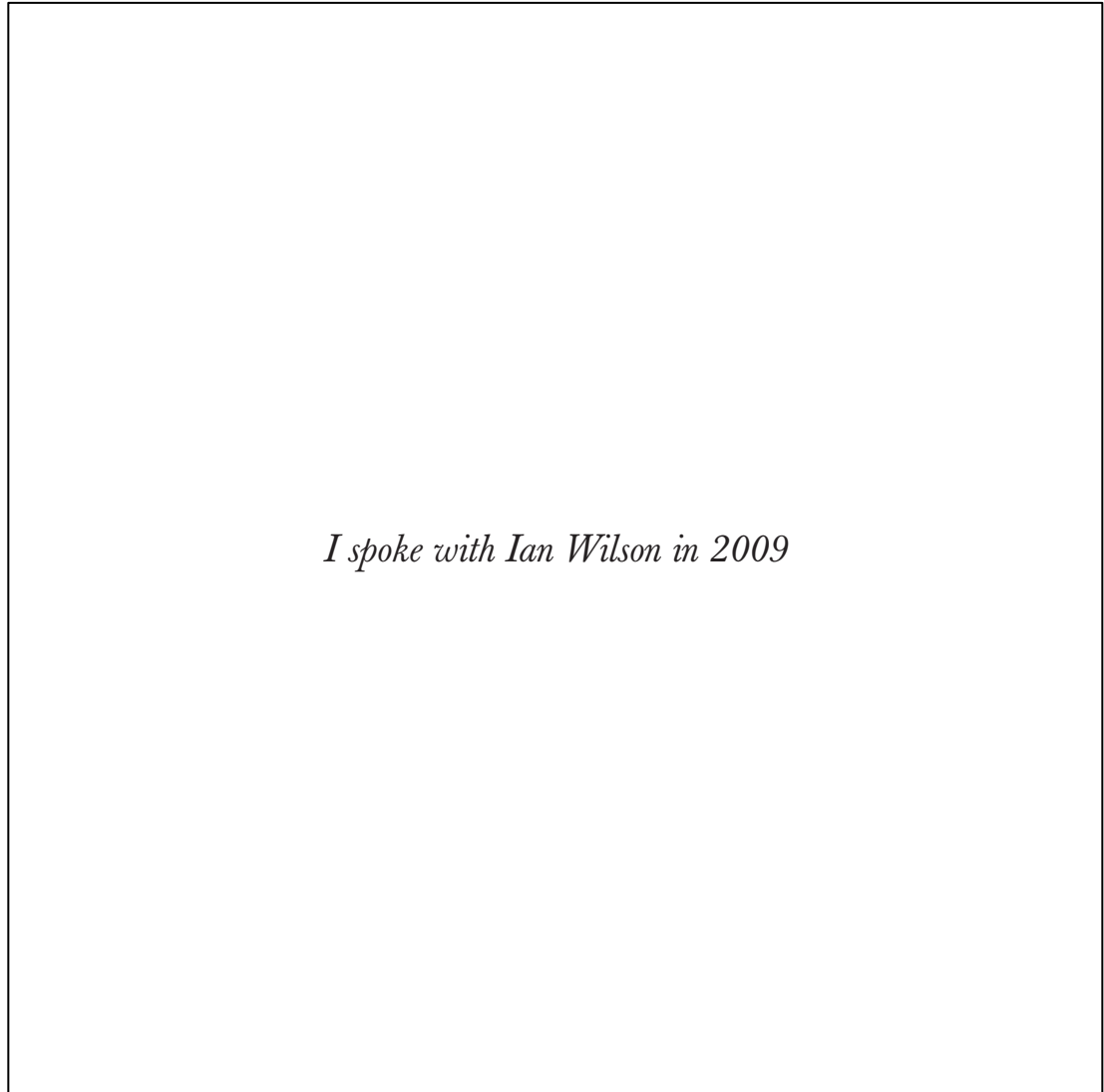
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### **Appendix 3: Interview protocol**

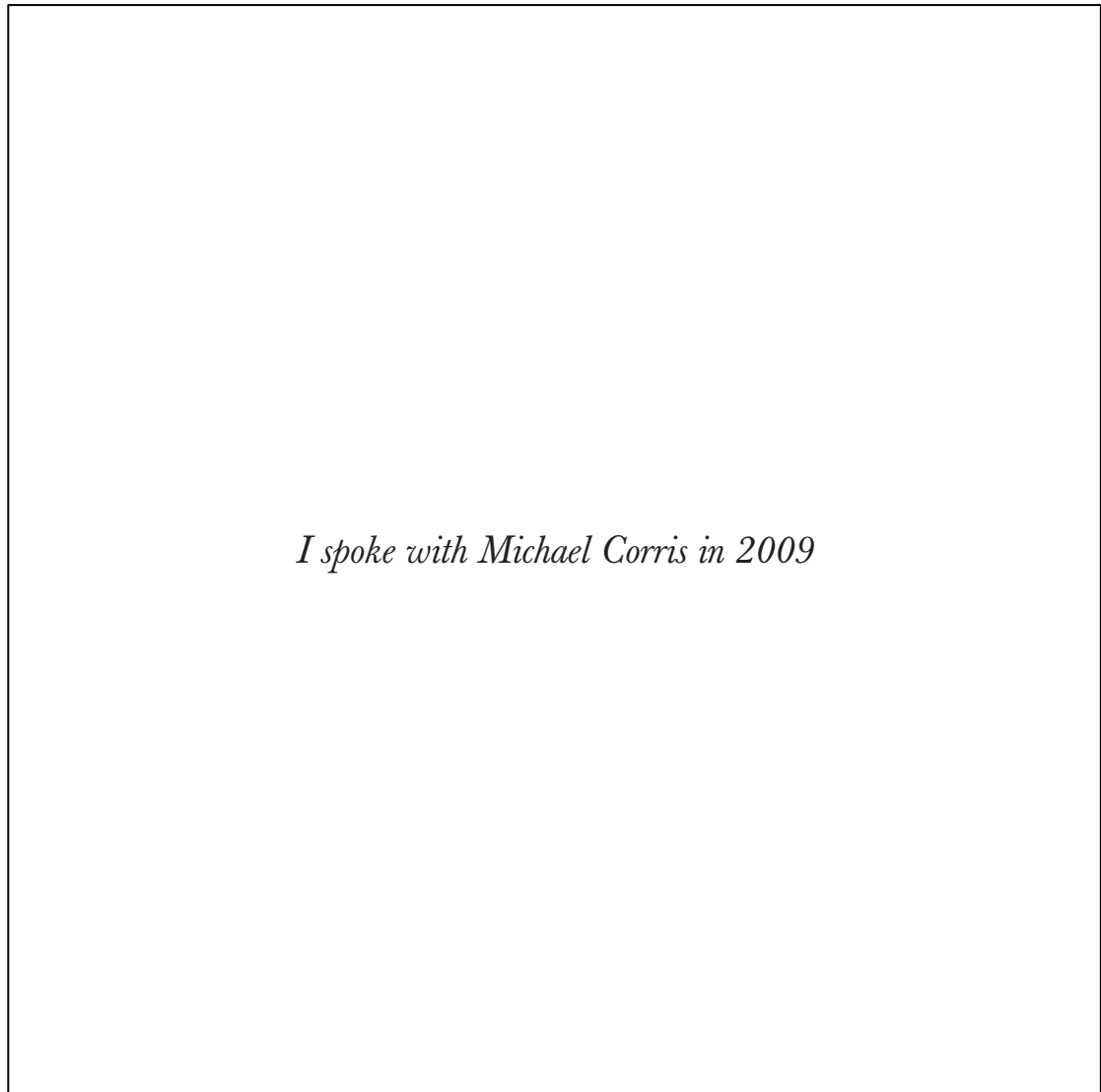
- How would you describe the art that you do?
- Where do you draw inspiration?
- Does the meaning of your work change in the process?
- What does your work mean to you when you have finished it?
- What do you make of the meanings other people give to your work?
  - How do other people respond to your work?
  - How do you gather information about how they interpret your work?
  - How do you interpret the meaning people give to your work?
  - Does their response have any impact on how your work evolves and changes?
  - If yes, could you tell me more about it? If no, why not?
- Which three artist' work today do you find means most to you?
- In what way is their work meaningful to you?

#### Appendix 4: Appropriate interlocutors

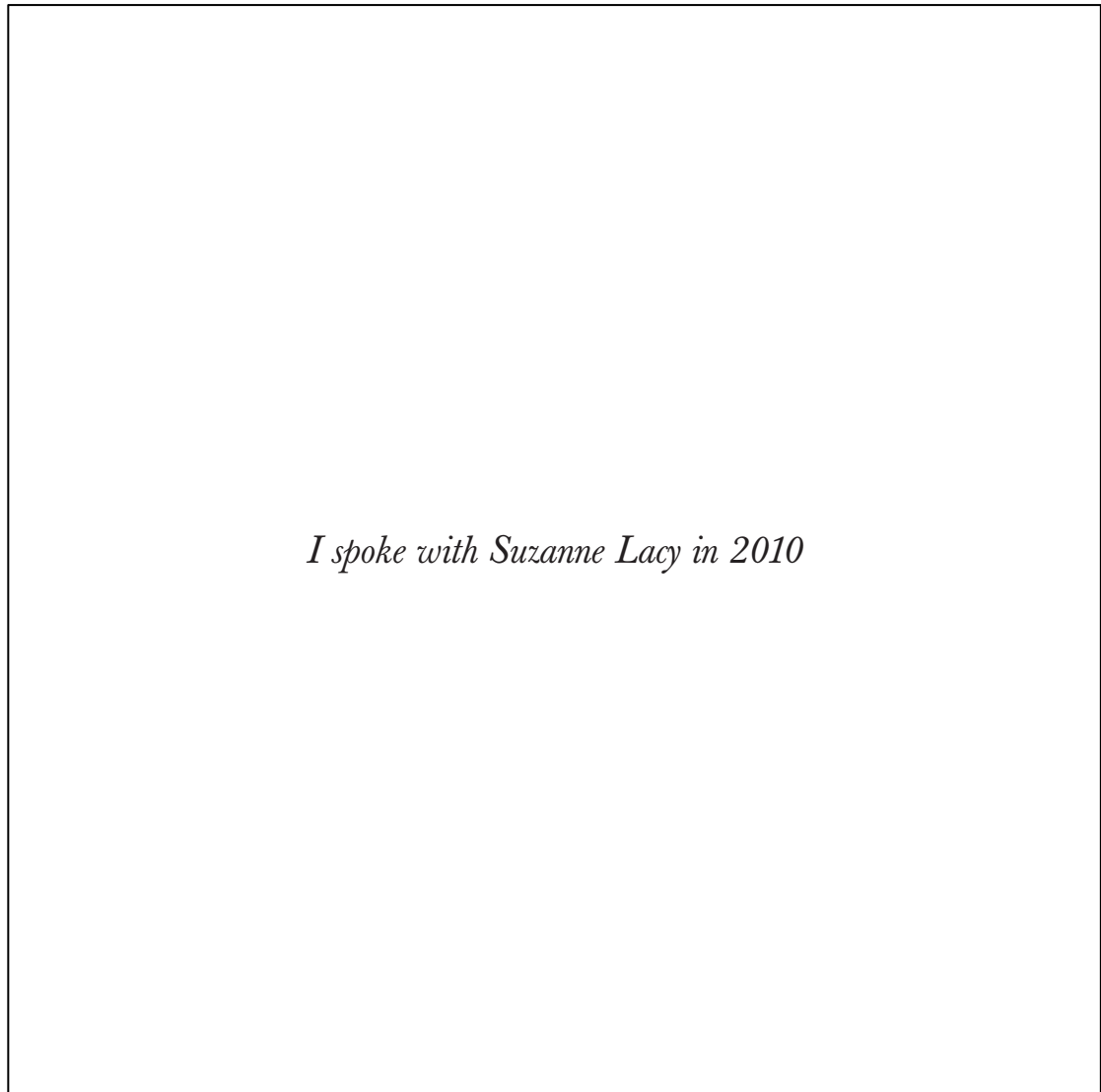
**Figure 7: Design for *Appropriate interlocutors*, Ian Wilson**



**Figure 8: Design for *Appropriate interlocutors*, Michael Corris**



**Figure 9: Design for *Appropriate interlocutors Suzanne Lacy***



**Figure 10: Design for *Appropriate interlocutors*, Luce Irigaray**

