

DIALOGUE AS PRACTICE AND UNDERSTANDING IN
CONTEMPORARY ART

By

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Abstract

Dialogue as practice and understanding in contemporary art

This study investigates how social constructionist dialogue as art demonstrates a layered mode of practical inquiry, which weaves together interactive and explorative, re-presentational and reflective modes of dialogue in the performance of knowledge. Recent art debates present dialogue as a relational, collaborative and situated mode of meaning-making, and an alternative to traditional constraining frameworks of art. However, artists have been criticised for idealised interpretations of dialogue, which present it as something essentially good and democratic, for insufficiently scrutinising dialogical relationships, and for not providing adequate process accounts for secondary audiences.

This study's multi-layered performance of knowledge draws on thematic insights developed through fourteen interviews and five field conversation artworks from 2008 onwards. Research material from conversational encounters was combined and presented as three constructed written dialogues, which reflect the tensions and questions that emerge out of enacting such a layered mode of dialogue as art. These tensions are re-presented, and discussed in three central thematic chapters, which frame these themes as issues of context, competing characteristics of meaning-making and relating. The constructed written dialogues provide a platform for further discussion and reflective analysis, which in turn are proposed as an invitation to continued dialogue and socially grounded interaction.

The central implication of this study's contribution to knowledge is that such an approach to practice-led inquiry articulates how dialogue may contribute to the increasing shift in critical art practices towards to more imbricated, uncertain, and performative approaches to knowledge, and provide an alternative to essentialised and foundationalist interpretations of dialogue.

Chapter 1: Prologue

This prologue presents the rationale for the underpinning focus on social constructionist theory and dialogic approaches to art study and practice, through setting out the development of my intellectual and practical disposition. What has informed my identification with and development of a constructionist research approach to dialogical practice in contemporary art? Like most artists who enter into research practice I come with a diverse set of prior experiences and practices, which led me to undertake the inquiry in this way. Maxwell (2005) believes that personal experiences and goals play an important part in research studies, in particular sustaining a researcher's motivation to see through what can be a demanding and challenging process, but also informing a researcher's disposition. Reflecting on my prior experience has been important for me and sustained my commitment to such an approach. In this manner, a reflection acts as a point of re-orientation valuable because entering into the complex debates provoked by alternative dialogical approaches to art practice has at times been a bewildering experience.

Such a personal and reflective approach to practice may be more familiar to ethnographic approaches to art but such a disposition is not without its critics. Foster (1996) has criticised reflective dialogical practices, which he characterises as an artistic self-othering and accuses of representing a detached narcissism. However Foster also notes in an interview with French *et al.* (1997) that art's co-option of psychoanalytical theories through philosophy often ignores the continuing

contribution and changing understanding of those concepts within psychoanalysis and psychodynamic practice.

Many relational and socially engaged practices draw on philosophical and anthropological notions of the dialogical self, which construct the self as already an other, an I/Thou. Self-othering is also not necessarily negative and is an understood and necessary dynamic of the psychology of learning. The dialogical self, an I/Thou is variously described in the work of Buber (1996), Levinas (1991) and Bakhtin ([1919] 1990) amongst others and informs contemporary psychodynamic notions of the plural or evolving self (Kegan, 1982) less apparent in contemporary art's discourse. The criticisms of ethnographically disposed and reflexive art's practices may thus be limited by less than contemporary conceptualisations of self-understanding and development in psychoanalytic and psychodynamic perspectives.

However, this prologue aims to acknowledge the prior influences and biases that shape and inform human and interpersonal research. This prologue also acknowledges that in interpersonal inquiry the researcher is construed as the instrument of the research (Maxwell, 2005) and method a reconstruction of the artist-researcher. With research that adopts a complex constructed method, personal reflection on the researcher's prior experience can also provide a useful interpretative resource for readers. My intention is to highlight how my prior experiential knowledge may have contributed to my methodological decisions and dispositions, without necessarily aiming to summarise these into a grand theory label or perspective.

It seems a long way back to start a reflection on why I choose to investigate dialogue and my PhD journey, but I want to start with the context of my birth. Being born in Jamaica yet growing up to all intents and purposes a white middleclass Englishman was an interesting education in otherness and sensitisation to the reduction of socially grounded meaning to black and white arguments. After independence Jamaica experienced a prolonged backlash by the majority against minorities in Jamaica, in a rebuttal of the nation's founding motto, 'out of many one people'. I am other to most Jamaicans not just because I am white and sound like the middleclass public school educated British person I am, but because I left and have maintained little connection with its current day to day life, politics and culture. Neither am I recognised as Jamaican by most British people because I am the 'wrong' colour and don't have the 'right' accent. Any suggestion that I feel in any way slightly Jamaican is often dismissed as ridiculous, or somehow attention seeking. This informs my sensitivity to reducing people and social reality to simplistic black and white perspectives. It has also contributed to my identification with the notion of the plural self (Kegan 1982), complicated and constantly in a process of coming to an understanding of themselves through a dialogue with the world; a world from which they may also find themselves constantly alienated. I believe my experience and the cultural horizon of my birth inevitably contributes to my identification with and attention to the importance of the meaningfulness of otherness, that is already part of who we are, whilst simultaneously steering me away from grand postcolonial perspectives and agendas.

My art practice reflects my attachment to the idea of the plural self or subject. My practice has been informed by the integration and contribution of many discourses

and perspectives. Early interest in social geography developed into an abiding interest in psychology, currently expressed through my interest in psychodynamic theories and how they might contribute to dialogical art. My first degree was in illustration. However, I felt the course narrowing and superficial in its interpretation of art, in its discourse and in its educational approach. In response I took part in a European exchange to Berlin seeking some broadening of horizons. This enthused me with a greater interest in twentieth century German art, and the historical importance of Berlin for understanding the significant experiences of crisis and loss for both individuals and the arts especially during the first half of last century.

Through writing I reflected on the work of the German printmaker Kathe Kollwitz and the variable political interpretations of her work by different national art histories. Kollwitz's work was interpreted by western European, East German and American art communities as pacifist, socialist, anti-fascist, and feminist. Whilst in her early career Kollwitz produced overtly political works many of her later and more recognised works are full of resonance with the loss of her infant children in birth, and adult children in both world wars. The varying treatment of Kollwitz's work contributed to my understanding of the contingent nature of art history, and perhaps a suspicion that psychological aspects and dynamics that contribute to the emergence of themes in art are played down in light of wider political interpretations by art history.

After my degree I took a lecturing job in a Chinese Art Academy in Malaysia. I taught illustration, graphic design and fine art. This was during the first Gulf War and in predominantly Muslim Malaysia I witnessed flag burnings, army curfews,

interracial and interreligious attacks and experienced some fairly direct racism. Perhaps due to the increasingly tense political climate of Malaysia at the time, I was warned against pursuing work with political themes and representations of Malaysian politics by colleagues. Whilst I felt uncomfortable with Malaysia's authoritarian regime, everyday cultures of corruption, and transparent subjugation of ethnic minorities, the experience made me realise that my European self-confidence and rather straightforward moral compass ill equipped me for coping with the complexities and risks of artistically exploring political situations which were so foreign to me. This has informed my feeling that it is very difficult for me as an artist to produce politically activist work in contexts where I have little understanding of, or connection to the social, racial and political complexities and vulnerabilities of everyday life. More often than not politics as I have experienced it, has been played out in the interpersonal power relationships of art education that has been my dominant social world since leaving school.

After returning to the UK and with the intention of funding further study I completed a certificate in teaching English to speakers of other languages. I went to Italy to gain practical teaching experience, which for much of my contact time was done as one-to-one immersive conversation with adults. I was struck by the pragmatic manner of adult second language learning, which differed from the proscriptive and abstract frameworks often designed for school learners. Learning a second language in this manner was about learning language use in a grounded sense rather than language as an abstract information system or set of rules. Teaching English as a foreign language informed the dialogical and conversational work of the American artist

Peter Snyder and it has obviously had a direct influence on adoption my conversational method and grounded methodological frame.

After returning from Italy I started a masters course in fine art. The course encouraged my inquiry into the relationship between psychoanalytical theories and notions of image and identity. My practical work began to draw influences from the text art of conceptual and neo-conceptual contemporary artists and movements such as the transatlantic group Art & Language. Encounters with the work of Art & Language's work suggested that art education struggles to recognise that discourse and writing were also varied modes of contemporary art practice, but also that art remained resistant to questioning the deeper construction of its paradigmatic choices (Ramsden ([1972] 2004)). My masters introduced me to *avant-garde* perspectives that propose that art as learning is a process of leading individuals to a more authentic critical consciousness. This has informed my concern that in educational contexts contemporary art often tacitly assumes that artists produce work to illustrate the key concept/s of art's increasingly narrow and administered philosophical doctrine (Kester, 2013). This subordination of practice to an illustration of theory has contributed to my decision to consider a practice-led approach to research, and my sensitivity towards philosophical determinism prevalent in contemporary art education and practice.

After my masters course I continued to teach both English as a foreign language and on various arts courses. I took a counselling skills and communication training course to enhance my understanding of conversational dynamics and to support my work as an international student support tutor. I exhibited my masters work, which

had explored the blurred boundaries and problems of representing dual nationality, and a complex sense of identity. I noticed that many international masters courses encouraged students to find a unique aspect of their identity to mine as an authentic brand and frame for their work. I was concerned that my work appeared to adopt a similar approach and didn't fully address my concerns about the theory practice relationship in art education.

I returned to thinking about the second thread in my masters work which had been language use in contemporary art. I participated in artists' video and new media research residencies and laboratories. I produced a series of experimental video works, which explored the linguistic construction of the video camera, and the linguistic framing of works. Interpreting these works through the conceptual lenses of Heidegger and Gadamer, I became frustrated with what I saw as the technological rational bias of video; the division into either or logic of in or out of focus, and the privileging of vision over sound in constructing interpretive frames of meaning. In thinking through the rational bias of method and technology I read the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004) and was interested in his dialogical framework for understanding and its contribution to less positivistic methodologies.

At that juncture, I felt that my practice had lost a sense of self-understanding and its conceptual frame. I hadn't identified with the philosophically determinist approach apparent on my masters course, and I had found that new media and video art hadn't provided me with a framework for developing a practical understanding my practice. I had lots of loose ends, language, text, relationships, the everyday, but no sense of how they might connect other than wondering loosely if dialogue might provide a

unifying thread to my practice. I joined an artist's residency scheme at the University of Worcester and presented an eclectic mix of works in exhibition. This was accompanied by a conversational presentation as part of an arts and humanities seminar series. The seminar was chaired by a philosopher who had met Gadamer. I was later to meet him again during my dialogue at a philosophy conference. The latter encounter provoked interest in how philosophers construct the art-philosophy dialogue. The former encounter was instrumental in helping me realise that my work held interdisciplinary interest and possible affinities with perspectives within the art and humanities.

As part of my practice at this time I interviewed some practitioners and asked for texts in response to the themes of inbetweenness, softness and dialogue. I collated these in a publication titled *Concrete Flux*. My interview with the archaeologist Dr Jodie Foster revealed that the worldview of archaeology courses differs tremendously depending where on the continuum between objective science and interpretive practice a course has formed itself over time. Through this encounter and various conversations with practitioners in other fields I found a lot of common ground between the preoccupations and questions emerging from my practice and apparent in theirs. This has informed my commitment to contemporary art as an interdisciplinary practice, and my continuing contribution to inclusive research groups. Throughout this present study I have continued this dialogue. In 2010/2011 I was an associate artist with a landscape and context research group in Bristol, and currently I participate in *The Dialogic* a discussion group open to researchers and practitioners from a wide range of fields whom are interested in dialogue. The *Dialogic* affirms the idea that through dialogue art may contribute to other

disciplines and subjects in an economy of open exchange that may transform respective disciplines. This is a reflection of my hope for my inquiry, that through entering into dialogue with it, others may find useful resources for their own understanding and practice.

My hope is thus that this prologue may provide interpretive resources for readers to enter into a dialogical reading of this study, and to convey the sense that this inquiry has emerged out of a longstanding engagement with art practice and dialogical themes of communicative exchange, provisional meaning-making and relating. My prior experience has sown the seeds of many of the themes and issues touched upon and realised through this inquiry. The realisation of long-standing and often unconscious preoccupations through practice may be a productive dynamic and aspect of dialogical inquiry. To enter into dialogue is to read into discourse one's own preoccupations (Burke, 1997). It is only through my dialogical encounter with others in the unfolding of this study the past threads, concerns and insights of my practice have been revealed as still present and meaningful in my current engagement with and enactment of dialogue as mode of art practice. I feel the confluence of my particular past experiences with the specific inter-subjective encounters of my study contribute to what is unique about how this mode of inquiry has taken shape.

Chapter 2: Introduction

In this introduction I set out the aim and the key objectives of this study.

The aim of this investigation is the construction of a position between both dialogue in/and/as art practice and social constructionist approaches, leading to denial of grand narrative and scepticism about claims to knowledge. This locates this thesis in an area where flux is construed of as the normative characteristic. In turn, this implies epistemological and ontological uncertainty in the practice being explored, and the artist-researcher is presented as a co-participant in the performance of knowledge who aims to sustain tensions between multiple selves and perspectives without collapse into absolute agreement or alienation.

The principal argument of this thesis is that a social constructionist approach to dialogue as art demonstrates a layered mode of practical inquiry which weaves together interactive and explorative (*maieutic*), re-presentational (mimetic) and reflective modes of dialogue in the on-going performance of knowledge. The dynamic relationship and tension between these three modes of dialogue presents practice as a method for understanding and presenting a form of knowledge. This dialogical practice is presented in the mode of a social constructionist grounded theory thesis which embodies the questions and tensions confronted in that practice. Particular emphasis in this dialogical mode of art research emphasises this practice's contribution to an understanding of knowledge production by demonstrating knowledge as being performed.

This thesis draws on the terms mimetic, *maieutic* and reflective to describe the layering of dialogue. These reflect three layers of Platonic dialogue apparent in his development and exploration of the form (Gill, 1996). Firstly, the term mimetic dialogue is used to refer to a representation, poetic characterization and imitation of oral exchange between co-participants (Gill, 1996). Secondly, *maieutic* dialogue refers to both conversational and textual communicative exchange that seeks to sustain different perspectives and facilitate the emergence of new associations or insights through inducing active co-participation by interlocutor or reader (Leigh, 2007). Lastly, this study refers to reflective dialogue as a process of mental contemplation (Gadamer 2004), which acts as a reiterative expression, or conversation with earlier assumptions (Gill, 1996) and reflexive dialogue as a process of emphasizing what has been contemplated (Wittgenstein, 1958).

The aim of the combined layering of *maieutic* and mimetic forms in the textual presentation of dialogue is to prevent representations of dialogical interaction being seen as mere dramatic conversation focused on conflict and character development (Leigh, 2007). It is applied here as a means of offsetting the reduction of dialogical interaction to a monological authorial conclusion.

The terms inter-subjective and co-production also appear throughout. In the development of this thesis the term inter-subjective is drawn from Bourriaud's (2002) 'Relational Aesthetics'. Bourriaud interchanges this term with, and uses it to refer to inter-human encounters and exchanges which contribute to the construction of social phenomena. This inter-human inflection is a move away from the more problematic associations with Cartesian rational subjects, and postmodern notions of

inter-subjectivity towards a more social constructionist notion of softer self/other relations and interpersonal encounters and exchanges (see Hosking, 2008) that contribute to a co-productive process of meaning-making. Co-production thus refers to the collaborative construction of meaning.

Of central importance within the contribution of this thesis is the relationship between how this study's mode of dialogue is performed and other dialogic practices outlined in art critical debates. Although this study draws on relational (Bourriaud, 2002) and socially engaged (Kester, 2004) models of dialogical art practice, the aims of this study's mode of practice are to de-centre definitions and concretions and to provide alternatives to essentialised or synthetic interpretations of dialogue. If we consider the positions of the main protagonists in debates about dialogic art we might discern the risk of adopting models of practice that overly privilege or essentialise particular desired characteristics over others.

The positions of the main protagonists in debates on dialogue in art

In the work of the critic and theorist Nicholas Bourriaud (2002) we can see a position that proposes the continuing emergence of a 'Relational Aesthetic' framework for current art. This model construes dialogue as the starting point and goal of many relationally and dialogically disposed art practices. He also identifies relationships as increasingly the prime concern of contemporary art. In his view open inter-human relationships act as both the setting and goal in dialogical works of art, and successful dialogical works are those that sustain and affirm unique yet co-existing

worlds of difference. In broader relational terms however, his position is that dialogically orientated practices reflect art's changing relationships to its past modernist context and other frameworks of meaning. In this view relationally and dialogically orientated practices can be understood to be a means of reconstituting art's relationships, both on an interpersonal level and at a discourse level.

In 'Conversation Pieces' the American art critic and historian Grant Kester (2004) highlights a range of activist and socially engaged art practices which he terms 'dialogic' or dialogical art. In his view such dialogical art practices emphasise a connected mode of knowing and meaning-making grounded in the experience of creative collective interaction (Kester, 2011) which offers potential transformation and expansion of participants' critical consciousness. An emphasis on connected knowing draws attention to more local and popular knowledges and offers artists an alternative to more traditional modes of oppositional meaning-making which continue to dominate and constrain much art discourse.

The British critic and art historian Claire Bishop has offered the most sustained criticism of dialogical practices and perspectives as they have been promoted by Bourriaud (2002) and Kester (2004). She sees dialogical practices as overly generous and critically naïve. Her position is that on the one hand relationally orientated dialogical works separate the labour of art from the tensions, conflicts and power struggles of everyday contexts. While on the other hand, they threaten traditional critical dispositions and risk rendering artists vulnerable to political instrumentalisation. In contrast Bishop (2004) promotes a more antagonist disposition which seems to reflect her concern to preserve the singular privilege and

authority of traditional art history and criticism against the continuing diffusion of critical authority within contemporary art; a diffusion which is fuelled by increasing interest in dialogical practices and perspectives within art.

Dialogical art practice as a multi-layered activity

This thesis is about dialogical art practice, and the manner of construction, and re-presentation of this study's dialogical art practice as a written thesis emphasises the potential of dialogue to be understood as a multi-layered activity which performs knowledge. The multi-layered approach highlights the movement of the performance of knowledge from on-going socially grounded conversation and interaction (co-participatory *maieutic* dialogue), through re-presentation as constructed written dialogues (mimetic dialogue), and onto discussion and reflective analysis (dialogue as reflection), which in turn are construed of as a platform for continued inductive, *maieutic* and socially grounded interactive dialogue.

This layering of dialogue questions the division between the many socially grounded practices interpreted as dialogue and dialogical art, and highlights the many tensions that arise as a result of enacting art as layered mode of dialogue. Dialogue may be understood as a complex process of meaning-making that weaves together and holds a tension between description and ideal definitions in the ongoing co-constructed understanding of meaning (Maranhao, 1990).

Beech (2010) provides a working definition of dialogical art as the discursive interaction located in a context of recent critical debate between perspectives presented and developing out of Kester's (2004) framework of socially engaged art practice, Bourriaud's (2002) relational framework and Bishop's (2004) politically antagonistic model. The discursive space of dialogical art risks offering ideal prescriptions for artists, rather than the on-going labour of seeking to continue their conversation through practice, in a manner which continues to question how artists characterise dialogue in art.

Although I offer the two operational definitions above for the aid of readers, my position has been to seek to avoid operational definitions in favour of describing familial resemblances or characteristics of dialogue. This presents my position in this mode of practice as one that blurs the separation between dialogue and dialogical art by seeking to sustain tensions, and recognising similar characteristics that may be shared between dialogue and dialogical art.

The primary objective in the construction of the thesis is to reflect the tensions and questions that emerge out of enacting such a layered mode of dialogue as art. These tensions are re-presented, and discussed in the three thematic chapters which frame these tensions as issues of context, and competing characteristics of meaning-making and relating. A useful example of this tension is highlighted in the chapter on context, where I state (p.131), 'In my practice I move between situated and interpersonal modes of dialogical exchange and presentation, and shift into written modes of dialogical presentation of knowledge collaboratively performed through conversational interaction in multiple sites.' This highlights the challenge of

presenting knowledge generated through collaborative interpersonal exchange as a monological textual thesis. My response has been the use of mimetic dialogues alongside more singular reflective modes of written dialogue in a manner intended to blur the separation between spoken and written modes of performing knowledge.

The tensions apparent in the layering of contexts are represented as an interplay between the discursive context of dialogical art which reflects an increasing desire amongst artists for the incorporation and recognition of alternative, more imbricated, critical perspectives and traditional art contexts which privilege and promote a detached critical framework for art. This tension is reiterated as an increased interest in social-science methods and perspectives, a striving for a reconfiguration of art's relationship to its historical past (Kester, 2011), and a desire for recognition of approaches which may better address the preoccupations of artists in the present (Bourriaud, 2002). These dialogical impulses question the traditionally dominant homogenizing perspectives of current critical discourse. They question how such perspectives continue to privilege the detached context for art as a site for the production of objects and their dismissal of attempts to reconfigure art's historical context as a continuation of its modernist aims. This tension is played out in this study's layering and interweaving of a socially grounded methodological framework with interpretive art critical perspectives that have expressed concerns about shifts towards socially grounded dialogical contexts in recent art (see Bishop, 2004; Foster, 1996).

The various dynamics apparent in the meaning-making processes of dialogue highlight tensions between perspectives that favour more collaborative, interactional

exchange in everyday contexts, and more traditional critical perspectives which favour works constructed by individuals detached from everyday sites of artistic interaction. On the one hand collectivist interactional perspectives seek to promote recognition of the contribution of multiple co-participants and reflect a concern that dialogue address more connected modes of knowledge production (see Kester, 2004, p.14–16) while on the other hand concerns are raised that such processes are not readily expanded and opened up to critical appraisal and evaluation by others.

This tension is maintained in this inquiry through the layering and presentation of research material generated through communicative exchange with multiple participants in everyday contexts, with discussion and reflection by the artist researcher. The contribution of multiple participants is sustained in the constructed nature of the mimetic (representational) dialogues which do not reduce concerns or themes to a singular authorial goal. The layering with later discussion and conclusions based on analysis by a single artist-researcher highlights the tension between the generative performance of knowledge by multiple participants in the field of study with research reports constructed by a single person. Singular research reports can be thought to respond to academic expectations that privilege the performance of knowledge through individual authorship. However, collaborative everyday processes diffuse the subject matter and critical authority of art, creating tension with perspectives that seek to maintain the traditional privilege of detached individual authorship.

The tension between the collective and singular performance of knowledge is most apparent in this inquiry in the layering of constructed representations of multiple

dialogical interactions, alongside the reflective discussion of the author as one amongst many co-participants. In chapters 4, 5 and 6 this layering risks tipping the balance of appearance of this inquiry in favour of the production of distanced summative judgements such as those traditionally performed by detached critics. Such a risk however is adumbrated by a stance which presents criticality as an act of justifying decisions acted on in the on-going life and work of art. In this approach any critical resolution is construed as merely symbolic. The artist-researcher offsets resolution and the concretisation of meaning-making through expressing a commitment to opening any judgements up to renewed questioning through participation in socially grounded dialogue. This has the effect of rendering what may appear assertive judgements of meaning, paradoxically provisional as soon as they have been expressed.

Lastly I draw attention to contrasting dispositions that emerge out of this study's conversation and reflection on preferred modes of relating and engagement in current art. These dispositions parallel tensions between collectivist and individualistic perspectives discussed in the chapters on context and meaning-making. In a relational context, generally speaking, collectivist perspectives promote more immediate modes of encounter such as face-to-face conversation. In contrast, more individualistic perspectives reiterate historical warnings about the potentially violent, disruptive and instrumentalising potential of immediate relational encounters between artists and others. What individualistic perspectives promote instead is a continuation of the historical relational disposition of art symbolised by the relationship between author and reader, distanced but mediated by artwork as text.

Tension remains as these historical concerns about the potential harm of immediate interactional relationships, and their representation by artist-researchers in dialogical artworks are seen as too absolute in defence of traditionally privileged relationships of power in art. In contrast immediate conversational interactions as mode of relating in art and research are seen as not necessarily violently disruptive, or instrumentalising as they can also provide increased conceptual resources for the support of co-participants' sense of self, and interactions in the world. Furthermore, representations may not simply symbolise a mining of resources from others but instead reflect the generosity of the contributions of others in the give and take of dialogical exchange. Tension is thus enacted in seeking to balance the potential gains of increased understanding against the possible harm and risks involved for participants. This is reflected in this study's proposal that artist-researchers entering into socially grounded dialogue develop a more provisional, and ambivalent disposition towards expertise and the performance of knowledge in order to offset the potential harm of expert self-assertion in the production of knowledge which may act as claims to power.

Concerns regarding theoretical administration of practice

Part of my motivation to conduct this research was the intuition that theory debates often reduce and constrain interpretations of practice and attendant themes along predictable and predetermined lines. In conversation with many artists, I had the sense that their understanding of dialogue was much more nuanced, complicated, and diverse than theory debates described. Stiles (1996) argues that dialogue in

contemporary art is often reduced to a textual practice that blurs the boundaries between theory and art and occupies an uncertain space between artistic and literary genres. This present study similarly blurs the division between theory and practice, blurring the boundaries between conversational art as dialogue and written dialogical genres. However by weaving these practices and grounding them in an on-going framework of socially situated conversation (Rorty, 1980), I demonstrate how dialogue can offset reduction to textual outputs and the retreat back into art as a mode of production of finished objects. The artist Dave Beech (2012) has commented that the critical debate about dialogical practices has further reduced the conversation to very narrow political and institutional perspectives. Administrative and academic categories can too easily become the objects of study leading researchers to predictably identify them in the practices of the setting (McCoy, 2008). Instead it is suggested that researchers begin theory building outside of administrative academic categories as much as possible (McCoy, 2008).

I address these issues through my practice, and discuss them through the on-going debates about dialogical, relational and antagonistic practices, as well as other perspectives. Beech (2010) suggests that the increasingly narrow debates between dialogical, relational and antagonistic art perspectives point at the need for a broader socially grounded framework of art practice. My practice-led inquiry recognises the imperative of such a new framework as dialogue and that the dialogical artist may no longer be conceptualised in the traditional ways. This study examines what other insights may emerge from the practice of dialogue in the social world, and not merely as an intertextual exercise, and whether such new conceptualisation may contribute to an expanded understanding of dialogue as mode of contemporary art.

Methodological disposition of this study

This study bears methodological similarities to other socially-grounded and quasi-ethnographic contemporary art practices and exposes itself to critiques such as Foster's (1996) concerns about the status of quasi-ethnographic art. Foster's critique is I believe part of a more general crisis of representation, which led to anthropologically orientated practices making texts more reflexive. Methodological responses to this problem saw the abandonment of notions of researcher-observer and grand narratives (Leavy, 2009). Such a move has led to research texts increasingly becoming an extended method of field inquiry where texts emerge from practice in the field, move through intermediate and later stages and are brought together finally as narrative research texts (Leavy, 2009) such as this thesis.

Like other constructionist researchers (e.g. Holstein & Gubrium, 2008a) I question my conceptualisation of human agency and attempt to describe the social contingencies at play when people directly or indirectly make statements and claims about meaning. This asks how we can understand dialogue as both practice and understanding in the context of contemporary art. I adopt and adapt a blend of conversational art practices including interview and conversational encounter, and interpret these dialogical methods as part of the on-going work of art. I adopt interpretive case studies and narrative fiction in the reflection and interpretation of my understanding of the agency of dialogue.

I am adapting and reusing art dialogical practices as tools of inquiry. As Leavy (2009) argues, researchers using art as method are not discovering new tools but

‘carving’ and fashioning them out of existing methods and practices. This often involves a merging of interests in the creation of knowledge based on resonance and understanding, in my case on the resonance for me between certain conversational and dialogical contemporary art practices and social constructionist perspectives.

The presentation of this thesis

This thesis sets out a description of the on-going project of dialogue as practice-led research in contemporary art. It is presented as a social constructionist grounded theory in five further chapters, a methodology-method chapter, three thematic chapters organised into the themes of context, meaning-making and relating, and a discussion-conclusion chapter. These are followed by references and appendices.

In the next chapter I describe the methodology and method of this inquiry. I highlight this study’s emphasis on the notion of language games and the everyday use of language in situated interaction. Adopting such an approach diverts my practice away from art’s traditional sense of separatedness. However I outline how this inquiry answers calls for the expansion of contemporary art’s framework of meaning to include more socially grounded approaches and perspectives.

In the second half of the next chapter I set out the method of this practice-led inquiry. I emphasise that socially engaged practice and inquiry is frequently non-linear and does not have a rigid order in which research tasks must be completed (Maxwell, 2005). This is the case in this inquiry which brings together multiple methods,

materials, perspectives and contributions from co-participants. I aim to convey a sense of provisional psychological unity in the interpretation and representation of a complex research experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) and at the same time try to sustain a sense of the complexity and richness of socially engaged inquiry. I explain the ethical disposition of my practice, and describe the three main stages of this inquiry. These start with the generation of material, move through a stage of analysis and synthesis of themes, and finish with presentation and discussion.

In examining the presentation and discussion of material, I highlight the influence of the movement of forms of dialogue through Plato's work and the manner in which research material is presented as a mimetic dialogue or imitation of communicative exchange. These dialogues are supported by the use of tag clouds which provide an additional interpretive resource for readers, and act as a bridge from the mimetic dialogues to a thematic discussion of the literature, and finally to a reflection of how the interaction between the mimetic dialogue and the literature contributes to new understanding in this inquiry.

In the following three chapters I present the emergent thematic constructions of this inquiry. These are organised into chapters on Context, Meaning-making, and Relating. Each chapter begins with a mimetic dialogue which presents a woven assemblage of research material which contributed to the construction of provisional themes. This presents the dialogues as a puzzle to the reader to be entered into, and participated in.

I provide tag cloud visual summaries of the thematic groupings, before discussing how the provisional themes connect with debates about dialogue in art literature. Each literary discussion of provisional themes is followed by a reflective discussion which examines how these themes intersect with this inquiry, and what new understanding they contribute. I go on to discuss how my approach to dialogue facilitates the emergence and construction of an adaptive framework for dialogical practice, which maintains a tension between different methods of performing knowledge, and develops an alternative characterisation of artistic expertise. These findings are carried forward into three statements of this inquiry's contribution to practice as a mode of dialogue in contemporary art.

The discussion-conclusion chapter begins with a re-articulation and reflection on how this inquiry was enacted and is followed by three statements of this study's contribution. The first emphasises how this inquiry facilitates the construction of an alternative socially grounded disposition towards artistic inquiry. The second argues this inquiry demonstrates a method of weaving situated talk and textual practice in the performance of knowledge, which strives to sustain continued participation in socially grounded talk and interaction. The third highlights how this approach to dialogue presents the artist as a person as one willing to share the risks of dialogical learning through artistic interaction in the social world. The discussion of the contribution of this inquiry is underlined by a final reflection on the limitations of this study, a comment on where I am taking this research in the immediate future, and a reflection and statement of the positive transformation achieved through conducting this study.

Chapter 3: Methodology and method

Methodology

This chapter presents the methodology of this thesis alongside the method by which the inquiry was constructed. The methodology presents dialogue as both subject of inquiry and method of inquiry. This section describes the broad contexts of this inquiry, the artistic influences, and provides an account of this study's methodological disposition towards meaning-making, practice and learning.

Firstly, this study is located in the broadening discursive and practical field of contemporary art, it highlights art's stylistic and paradigmatic bind (Ramsden, [1972], 2004), and the on-going struggles to recognise more fully the flux of its social reality (Margolis, 1999). This provides a background against which the discourse around dialogue in contemporary art is discussed. This section locates this inquiry in recent debates about the critical disposition of current art by Bourriaud (2002), Kester (2004) and their most significant critic Bishop (2004). I highlight how these debates have influenced this study's stance of critical reflexivity and lay out how this stance informs my approach of developing the themes of this inquiry through engagement and conversation in the field. Thus art practice is framed by a discourse that manages a tension between the artist as expert and the artist as one who struggles to negotiate the ways in which contexts constrain the possibilities of meaning-making in art practice.

Secondly, I introduce the art practices which provided interpretive resources for the construction of this thesis, and a description of their influence on this inquiry. In her art practice Lozano (Birrell *et al.*, 2006/07) presents dialogue as relational and communicative work that can facilitate the re-conceptualisation of artistic frameworks for practice and research. In his art practice, Wilson's (Rorimer, 2008) varying oral works of art highlight how differing modes of conversation address the subject of art in contrasting ways. I also note how the work of Art and Language (Kear, 2011) conveys a sense of art practice as an on-going conversation grounded in the interactions of social life.

Thirdly, an account of the disposition of this inquiry is provided. I highlight the ontological and epistemological assumptions which led to the decision to develop a socially constructed framework of inquiry. This is followed by a description of how my chosen framework informs my approach to dialogical art practice as research. Particular emphasis is placed on the notion of language games (Wittgenstein, 1958), which contributes to the selection and development of method in this inquiry. I highlight how this notion informs the inquiry's practical stance towards meaning making, and co-participatory mode of learning. Presented through the lens of social constructionist interpretations of Wittgensteinian (1958) language games, this practice takes the notion of language beyond spoken discourse and into a realm of symbolic relationships in tension with practical language use.

Contemporary art's near past and emerging present

Contemporary art is informed by the past but has a sense of what is emerging or to come (Smith, 2009). It is characterised as an increasingly intellectualised and discursive field of knowledge production. A proliferation of artistic debate and writing within contemporary art has been accompanied by a diversification of artistic values, media, intentions, and perspectives (Stiles, 1996). It is no longer a novelty to be presented with interventions into social and political institutions (Kester, 2004), public events such as meals (Kreuger *et al.*, 2009), artists' writings (Kear, 2011; Beech, 2012, Layzell & Sofaer, 2008; Gillick, 2009) and even conversation as art (Lozano, n.d.; Rorimer, 2008; Mot, 2008; Pope & Cullen, 2010). The production of contemporary art knowledge is similarly presented in a diverse range of conversational modes including meetings, lectures, readings, presentations, performances and encounters (Hlavajova *et al.*, 2008).

The diversification of practices and values in contemporary art has led to increased debate about how artists construct their frameworks of understanding, attendant methods and practices, and theoretical strategies. This has been evidenced by the rise in conferences and talks fuelling such debates, such as BAK's 2006 conference titled Concerning 'Knowledge Production' (Practices in Contemporary Art).

It is a common conception that in the past art had a fairly unified and given framework. In the narrative of art history the modernist is associated with a belief in objectivity and progress through rational reason (Stiles, 1996). Yet there are significant counter elements within the modernist period that objected to these

beliefs, found them deeply questionable and held a different worldview. One only has to think of Surrealist and Dadaist reactions to the hegemony of linguistic rationality, and loss of faith in the progress narrative. Yet art's modernist past presented historically appeared to offer a singular coherent framework or perspective (Stiles, 1996). Artists whose work did not fit within the modernist framework or worldview are often defined as reacting to the dominance of such a framework, and any different perspectives subsumed into the modernist narrative and worldview.

With time however, reactions to this modernist worldview led to the emergence of the postmodern perspective often associated with contemporary art. With the emergence of postmodern perspectives, a modernist belief in objective truth was replaced with a plethora of different worldviews ranging from radical relativism, to more modulated and negotiated concepts of truth, all characterised as postmodern (Stiles, 1996). One consequence was that believing in art's objectivity could no longer be grounded in fundamental or universal values, or rely on independent objects and texts.

Another implication was that art's historically progressive narrative came to be seen simply as a fiction to lend coherence to art as it changed over time (Stiles, 1996). In the postmodern worldview, art became a diffusion of practices interconnected with other discourses in the cultural sphere. Art's diffusion reflected a wider blurring of discourse boundaries within the cultural sphere, which Denzin and Lincoln (2005) believe is continuing to lead to the emergence of new approaches and innovations in inquiry across a range of disciplines.

According to Stiles (1996) contemporary artists' loss of confidence in the art history project, and the instability brought about by the diffusion of postmodernism led to a turn towards critical theory as a potential new framework for the artistic project. This move further contributed to the new interdisciplinarity in contemporary art (Stiles, 1996), as art theoretical approaches brought together Marxist, psychoanalytical, feminist, anthropological, and social history perspectives, with post-structural philosophical critical theory critiques of the Enlightenment underpinnings of Modernism (Horkheimer & Adorno, 2002; Habermas & Levin, 1982). Despite the fashion for postmodern, post-structuralist, and critical theory perspectives in contemporary art, Kester (2004) argues that the contemporary art world still functions with an often unacknowledged modernist paradigm and set of assumptions.

Art continues to suffer from a modernist stylistic bind (Ramsden, [1972] 2004). This limits artists to a process of describing individual works, rather than articulating frameworks, or even questioning the current conservative and dominant paradigm (Gillick & Weiner, 2005/2006). The modernist-postmodern paradigm presents an autonomous notion of art in which artists are free from everyday constraints (Ramsden, [1972] 2004), yet from which they are not free to deviate. Art's autonomous paradigm is reinforced by the increasing specialisation of art practice turned discourse within academic contemporary art, which risks presenting this paradigm as a natural fact rather than a negotiated or accepted construct (Ramsden, [1972], 2004).

A significant implication of this bind is that artists may be bound to a modernist self-image or postmodern reaction to what it means to be an artist, or how artists should

construe meaning. Yet the meta-narratives of modernism and postmodernism may exert an obscuring influence on artists' framework of meaning. For example, in an interview with French *et al.* (1997), Foster suggests art's continuing prioritisation of modernist thinkers such as Marx and Freud, re-appropriated as postmodern philosophy, limits our conceptualisation of other discourses and in particular art's understanding of psychoanalysis. Foster (1996) sees psychoanalysis as the *prima lingua franca* of contemporary art practice and critical discourse. Yet his implication is that some concepts may be interpreted without much sense of the practices they are derived from. This has implications for contemporary art as psychoanalytic concepts exert a significant influence on our interpretation of modes of relating, meaning making and conceptualisations of subjectivity, in dialogical and socially grounded art practice. Politically inspired antagonistic models (Bishop, 2004, 2006b) draw on Lacanian inspired notions of fractured self (Watson, 2005), and *avant-garde* perspectives posit art as having a therapeutic power, to shock people out of naïve, unhealthy shared understanding and consensus (Kester, 2004). Psychoanalytic perspectives have also been drawn upon to critique the rational communicative bias of practices that draw on Habermasian notions of discursivity (Kester, 2004). Yet I suggest that the postmodern appropriation of modernist psychoanalytic concepts, may detach this understanding from the practices and perspectives in which it was conceived, and is currently being reconceived through practice (French *et al.*, 1997).

The persistent influence of the argument between the modernist objectivist and postmodern relativist worldviews promotes extremes whilst reminding us that artists may no longer be able to rely on any immutable structures, foundations (Margolis, 1999) or frameworks. Perhaps because of this bind, Margolis (1999) feels that

contemporary art still has not been obliged to fully recognise the flux and change of lived socially constructed reality.

In contrast, this study adopts a methodology which investigates dialogue as a layered mode of meaning-making and mode of performing knowledge. This is an alternative to the construction of knowledge through oppositional argumentative reasoning. Instead it seeks to enact a critical disposition which sustains tension and addresses the Dilthean (1985) problematic of how to grasp meaning in the flow of lived experience. In so doing, this study adopts a more Heraclitean (Lesher, 1998) paradoxical disposition and worldview that proposes that tensions produce events which express how contrasting component elements of the world paradoxically contribute to the success of their opposites, on-going change and the continual operation of the world. This translates into a mode of practice which seeks to describe and sustain some of the tensions enacted through the layered practice of dialogue.

My use of the terms ‘grounded theory’ and ‘language games’ is as metaphors in line with my mode of meaning making, which is based on resonance. In the Wittgensteinian (1958) inflected spirit of this practice, metaphor implies a ‘use’ of language, and that language games and grounded theories are different activities every time they are performed. This allows for comparisons with other instances of language games and grounded theories, and the thesis is my means of embodying and representing examples of these metaphors. It is important to note, however, that this social constructionist expression of grounded theory is very different from Glaserian (1992) grounded theories. Charmaz (2008, p.401) highlights that many

social constructionists distinguish their strategies from grounded theory's positivist antecedents such as Glaser, to emphasise that such approaches are 'not routes to knowing an objective external reality' that may be discovered without problems.

My use of the term metaphor to refer to grounded theory reflects that it is an ambiguous and contested term that is used to denote both a family of research processes and the result of research inquiries that ground theories in research material (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). In my interpretation the theory is a constructed network of ideas used to account for or justify actions and processes. Each researcher has their own interpretation or set of ideas about what precisely constitutes a grounded theory method, and as Bryant and Charmaz (2007, p.11) argue, 'these specific (idiosyncratic) ideas form a family of resemblances in much the same way as Wittgenstein describes' in that grounded theories are based on ideas that do not easily lend themselves to exact definitions. I emphasise my use of the metaphor of grounded theory in particular as on the one hand I believe like dialogue it reflects a set of ideas which resist precise definition, and it makes a contribution to the development of my art practice as dialogue as it is a useful conceptual tool for providing an account for the layering of dialogue. This is because as Bryant and Charmaz, (2007) suggest, grounded theory is as an adaptive approach to inquiry, which permits the blending of interactive processes in the generation of research material with emergent analysis and reflection in the construction of a theory.

Charmaz (2008, p.397–398) argues that, 'Grounded theorists adopt a few strategies to focus their data gathering and analyzing, but what they do, how they do it, and why they do it emerge through interaction in the research setting, with their data,

colleagues, and themselves.’ In contrast to narrow and rigid interpretations of grounded theory processes, I adopt a more nuanced social constructionist disposition, which Charmaz (2008, p.398) argues, ‘encourages *innovation*’ [emphasis in the original] and allows researchers to ‘develop new understandings and novel theoretical interpretations of studied life.’

My practice acts as a method for understanding and presenting a form of knowledge as dialogue. Presented in this thesis, this practice manifests the questions and tensions confronted in that practice. The central element of this practice which embodies the tensions sustained in this thesis is the mimetic dialogue. The thesis utilises mimetic dialogical texts to reflect the perspective that representing research material such as interview transcripts for example, is an act of construction, presentation and simulation, not a mirror of actual events (Rhodes, 2000). The dialogues are offered as one of many possible accounts. They contribute to the emergent understanding of this inquiry and illustrate this inquiry’s demonstration of an alternative mode of dialogical practice which weaves situated talk and textual practice in the performance of knowledge. The practical aim is to sustain multiple perspectives and voices, whilst anonymising speakers to offset the appearance of a dramatic exchange that converts real people into heroic artistic characters. These dialogues aim to offset the objectification of knowledge and the retreat of meaning-making in art back into a process of contemplating finished objects through not presenting a clear outcome. As in Plato’s (1989b) *Phaedrus* I do not put forward the starting point as a conclusion (Burke, 1997). Instead, The dialogues act to symbolise the tension between the different oral and inscriptive practices embodied in this

thesis through acting as an invitation into the conversation of the research through promoting a more active reading and consideration of the text.

These methodological tensions are approached through the construction of a grounded theory as dialogical mode of inquiry and presentation. In my construction, I layer socially grounded interaction and oral communicative exchange (interpreted as language games), with textual representations of research material generated through those interactions, and more written reflective interpretive discussion. The resulting tension between generative oral and representational and reflective textual modes of dialogue is sustained through a commitment to renewed socially grounded dialogue.

The discourse surrounding dialogue in contemporary art

Amongst the many new practices of contemporary art, a broad range of socially engaged, relational and more antagonistic approaches have been interpreted through the prism of dialogue. Dialogical practices and perspectives continue to provide a fertile ground for addressing the questions and preoccupations of contemporary art. Dialogical discourse continues debates about the singular and collective nature of meaning making started by Barthes and Foucault. Barthes' (1977) work, *The death of the author* shifted the priority and authority of meaning making from the singular author to language itself, and emphasised the authorship of the reader. Foucault (1977) presented a more dialogical perspective that the author was subsumed in the interplay and exchange of discourse. Barthes' and Foucault's unsettling of the

authority of the author reflect our psychological need for the singular author to offset fears and uncertainties about the instability and proliferation of meaning (Kear, 2011). Similar anxieties may be provoked by constructionist interpretations of dialogue that emphasise open-ended, paradoxical and/or provisional interpretations of meaning in contrast to more traditional assertive and definitive articulations of authorship in art and research.

Artists entering into the realm of dialogue as art practice are, as Foucault (1977) suggests, subsumed in the existing discourse surrounding dialogue in contemporary art. This discourse has centred on the perspectives of the critics Bourriaud, Kester and Bishop. The construction of the thesis draws on positions of these three key interlocutors as points of orientation, and leads to a re-orientation, emergent disposition and renewed relationship to their perspectives and their debates.

The relative positions of these three key figures broadly emphasise or promote interpersonal and relational, interactive meaning-making, and sceptical antagonistic dispositions towards dialogue in art. Bourriaud's (2002) position has been to assert the growing importance of inter-human activity as a means of reconfiguring artists' interpersonal relationships within the work of art and their relationship to art discourse as a whole. Within this perspective dialogue is considered both a starting point and goal of relationally preoccupied current art. Kester's (2004) position has been to emphasise more the connected knowing and meaning-making aspects of some dialogically orientated works. Grounding dialogical works of art in collective action is presented as one key means by which artists are seeking to reconfigure their relationships, and to expand their conceptual framework beyond the constraints of

current art criticism which remains dominated by post-structural and postmodern perspectives, almost to the point of becoming accepted as canonical. Bishop (2004) however, offers important criticism of dialogical practices and perspectives, arguing that they can tend towards overly generous and critically naïve interpretations of relationships, or present dialogue as intrinsically something good while ignoring the complexity, conflicts and power struggles of everyday interactions. Instead, she asserts that an antagonistic disposition is a more effective mode of generating a critical art practice.

The contribution of Bourriaud, Kester and Bishop's positions to this thesis

In constructing my thesis, I draw on and make use of Bourriaud's (2002) emphasis on the relational and dialogical work of art as a multilayered inter-actively constructed form of life, and his belief that increasingly artists working with such a disposition can no longer sustain a position of critical exteriority. Bourriaud's (2002) relational perspective underpins this study's resonant identification with social constructionist grounded theory interpretations of language games as multilayered interactively constructed forms of life, in which the artist-researcher is necessarily construed as an imbricated co-participant.

The imbricated social grounding of this study is developed further through identification with Kester's (2013) articulation of how the continuing constraints of art's thematic concerns by dominant critical and philosophical perspectives can be offset by more socially grounded and connected forms of knowing. This inflection of

meaning-making contributes to this study's interpretive association between connected forms of knowing, and social constructionist free-associative approaches. Both modes seek new thematic concerns and insights through communicative interaction and exchange with multiple perspectives instead of merely accepting institutionally administered thematic concerns. Thus Kester's (2013) articulation provides a rationale for this thesis's articulation of the *maieutic* layer of dialogue commencing with socially grounded communicative exchange and interaction.

I also draw on the important warnings provided by Bishop (2004), whose contribution has been to caution against idealised interpretations of dialogue. She argues such idealisation frequently presents dialogue as too detached from everyday contexts and assumes it is essentially something good. Moreover, she is concerned that such perspectives emphasise interpersonal exchange at the expense of opening such exchanges up to critical reflection and exterior scrutiny of one sort or another. Thus Bishop's position acts to reinforce the need for a movement and layering of dialogue. Such structuring moves dialogue beyond mere collective communicative exchange, and seeks to make itself available to continued critical reflection on the various relationships and dispositions enacted through such interactive work. Importantly such movement also resists the temptation to adopt idealist and essentialising interpretive prescriptions of dialogue.

My position relative to these three perspectives is to recognise the important caveats that Bishop (2004) offers, whilst remaining cautious that such warnings do not merely act to sustain traditional positions of power and privilege accrued under traditional relationships between artists and art historians, critics and their discourse.

I adopt a more affirmative position of the imbricated meaning-making through dialogue than Bourriaud (2002) who still retains an investment in the notion of the validating role of critics. I go further in rejecting any position of critical privileged exteriority. In so doing, I identify with Kester's (2004) emphasis on dialogue as a means of collectively co-producing meaning. Such an approach seeks to give voice to, and sustain multiple perspectives and more diffuse thematic concerns than may be presented by critical discourse alone. Collectively these perspectives contribute to my position that social constructionist dialogue may reflect a mode of meaning-making in art which offsets essentialising and constraining tendencies within art discourse and practice through the layered performance of knowledge.

Developing themes through engagement and conversation in the field

Critical reflexivity involves attentiveness towards how the themes and concerns of artistic practice-led research may be predetermined and biased by power relations within the institutional research framework and self-motivated perspectives, rather than allowing perspectives to emerge from the interactions of the socially grounded process of art. As McCoy (2008) suggests, researchers should be cautious of the bias of administrative and academic categories. An over-identification with such predetermined administrative categories can easily make them the objects of inquiry and lead artists to predictably identify with them in the practices in the setting.

This thesis demonstrates the socially grounded process of art through a prolonged engagement and conversation in the field. This dialogue as practice-based research

has involved me seeking out and speaking with other artists about their understanding of their practice. It has involved negotiating a web of relations which reflect my situatedness in the world of contemporary art. This recognition of the artist-researcher's participation in a social world reflects a reflexive stance towards inquiry (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995) and the social influences on method. Table 4. (Appendix 1) highlights key moments of my participation in differing contexts throughout this inquiry.

Artistic practices which provide interpretive resources for the construction of this thesis

Alongside and as a result of my socially grounded interaction I have identified three artistic practices which functioned as useful points of navigation and re-navigation in my inquiry. In this section I identify how Lee Lozano's (Birrell *et al.*, 2006/07) process orientated practice presents dialogue as a mode of enacting relationships, and facilitating the exchange of ideas for the conceptualisation of alternative frameworks for art practice and research. I identify how Ian Wilson's (Rorimer, 2008) informal and formal spoken works of art address the subject of conversation as art in different ways. His informal conversations propose the subject of art is 'reason' realised through spoken language, whereas his more formal conversational work investigates how discursive deliberation can problematise attempts to reduce dialogue to ideal forms through an open-ended quest for new perceptions and understanding. Lastly I acknowledge how the practice of the transatlantic art group Art & Language has informed my understanding of the possible conceptualisation of art practice as an on-

going conversation and process of collaborative production grounded in an interplay of psychological and social life.

The work of Lee Lozano expresses an alternative tenor for artistic research (Birrell *et al.*, 2006/07), where individual works achieve significance through their contribution to the on-going production of a socially grounded framework for artistic practice.

This presents an alternative tone of art research as a framework for artistic-life and locates practice as part of the on-going process of artistic life (Birrell *et al.*, 2006/07) grounded in the lifeworld of the artist-researcher. Lozano saw the development of her framework as a process of transformational change through which she hoped to unify her public and private consciousness. In Lozano's process orientated approach, material pieces are only afforded significance when they further the dialogical goal of sharing ideas and information and contribute to the development of her framework.

One such work is *Dialogue Piece 1969*. In this work Lozano (n.d.) insisted that the definition of dialogue remain open, yet she acknowledged her goal of conversational communicative exchange, and intense talk for the exchange of ideas. Lozano's priority for this work was speaking with as many other people as possible to present dialogue as a relational process, which enacts a web or network of relationships, and part of a conceptual art tradition that conceptualises and represents these relationships (Lippard, 1997).

Wilson's spoken art departed from materialist practices developing art as spoken language in an effort to break with art's traditional objective rationality, and its

emphasis on precious objects (Rorimer, 2008). His informal spoken works explored his thematic preoccupations with particular concepts such as circle and time (Mot, 2008) and propose the subject of art is 'reason' realised through spoken language. Wilson's informal participatory method however highlighted the idea that informal conversational artworks could be done by anyone.

In contrast, in his formal *Discussions* the form is more important than what might be said. These works raise questions about the respective relationship of participants, as Wilson sees his role as that of a lead interlocutor and catalyst for dialogue (Rorimer, 2008). Wilson cites his interest in Plato's (1989a) dialogue the *Parmenides* which presents dialogue as a never-ending process of collection and division (Brickhouse & Smith, 2009) and problematises any attempt to reduce dialogue to an ideal form. Yet Wilson asks that these works not be recorded as he believes such events can't be faithfully recaptured in a written form (Rorimer, 2008) reflecting concerns about writing's lack of answerability that are also apparent in Plato's dialogues.

The artist group Art and Language conceive of the work of art as an on-going reflexive conversation which revolves around abiding themes, preoccupations or concerns. These thematic preoccupations emerge from a questioning of the artists' assumptions, and relationship to the process of knowledge production and learning (Kear, 2011). Their work is grounded in the production and interplay of psychological and social life which they translate through a description of the material and historic conditions of their artistic production. Their hope is that a descriptive and reiterative practice might develop a critically reflective educational process (Kear, 2011) and generate a dialogical dynamic for art.

Their descriptive work is often presented as textual accretions which only present the illusion of complete or closed meaning. This has been interpreted as a reflection on the situated and contingent nature of knowledge production in their practice (Kear, 2011). The presentation and exhibition of descriptive text as art is conceived as a possible dialogical encounter for readers and viewers but also as part of a multifaceted dialogue between resurfacing themes and motifs. The notion of dialogical encounter proposes the relationship of readers and viewers to their work as one of collaborative production (Kear, 2011). This emphasis on a collaborative process of meaning production contrasts more traditional perspectives that emphasise singular authorial presence and distances their work from traditional conceptual structures of learning, which separate participants into experts and non-expert learners.

Influences of these practices on my approach

The approaches of Lozano, Wilson and Art & Language provided me a sense of what has already been done and what is therefore possible in art practice and research. My practice-led research as language game has resemblance to these preceding language games of dialogue as art. These practices allowed me to acknowledge that I wished to recognise that my artistic research stems from a grounding in my life-world as an artist, rather than epistemological debates. This also helped me to realise the importance of the psychosocial conditions of production and inquiry in dialogical practice-led research.

Perhaps even more important is a broader emphasis on the production of an artist's framework of practice and understanding. This allowed me to come to terms with placing less significance on individual artworks and not seeing them as distinct valuable objects but utterances in the conversational construction of my framework of practice and understanding.

Also of help is the suggestion that artists may adopt a Lozano inflected approach which simultaneously presents their conceptual preoccupations as both method and subject of inquiry in a manner that does not require prior definition of the subject or theme (in my case dialogue). Instead the subject is revealed through a variable and open-ended discursive process of description (in a manner similar to Wilson's *Discussions*). In the spirit of Lozano, a definition of dialogue is held off in favour of provisional goals of an exchange of ideas and the enactment of new relationships. In this I see the possibility of a new relationship of learning between me as an artist-researcher and others, which encourages me to recognise the contribution that all others can potentially make to my 'expertise' as an artist researcher.

Developing a socially constructed framework of inquiry

In the section that follows I describe how I developed my socially constructed framework. Firstly I highlight my ontological and epistemological assumptions and how they reflect the diversification of art practice, and a shift towards more

contingent forms of knowledge production. I then discuss how this informs my identification with and interpretation of a constructionist framework.

Next, I reflect on how my framework informs my approach to dialogical art practice as research. In particular this study recognises the important contribution of Wittgenstein's notion of language games as a process of meaning-making which emphasises a practical use of language. This assumes that such an approach may better reflect changing practices and understanding in the social world of art, and resist overly proscriptive interpretations of practice. Lastly the possible implications of adopting such an approach are discussed. In particular, examining how this inquiry presents the artist as a co-participant rather than detached observer in a process, which emphasises the inter-subjectivity of meaning making, and the presentation of knowledge as part of a web of relations and different logics.

Multiple realities and multiple practices

An inquiry into dialogue as practice and understanding is preceded by the questions of what a researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions are. I assume and am committed to a relativist ontology, which acknowledges that there may be multiple realities. The implication for me is that there may be multiple realities of dialogue in contemporary art. The constructivist paradigm does not set out to reduce the multiple realities but represents them and their tensions and this is an important alternative perspective to the contested positions and models of dialogue

outlined by writers such as Kester (2004), Bourriaud (2002), and Bishop (2004) amongst others.

The notion of differing yet coexisting jointly-constructed realities provides a relativist knowledge or epistemology. Such a perspective reflects a move away from the study of objects and the production of objective knowledge towards more socially contingent forms of production and knowledge. In art this is a shift away from materialist practices to socially related and constructed practices. Dorn (2005) suggests that a socially constructed notion of art is comprised of its social actions, symbolic and contextual relationships, and linguistic messages. These elements converge in the notion of dialogue as conversational encounter, which is a central element of my interpretation of social constructionist practice.

I make a conscious connection between my ontological and epistemological beliefs and the broad social constructionist worldview or framework. In this identification with a constructionist worldview the artist-researcher is presented as co-creator in the description of a worldview, which shapes his or her artistic strategy and methodological framework of practice. This is not an agreement with a predefined constructionist model, or a rigid set of methodological procedures. It is an on-going process of forming and testing a framework and worldview through a set of socially situated practices and the socially-constructed knowledge they produce.

How my chosen framework informs my approach to dialogical art practice as research

Meaning as I construe it, is grounded in social reality, which is comprised of social communicative interactions and meaningful actions in what Wittgenstein (2010) termed language games. In this perspective meaning-making is like a game in which language achieves meaning through being used. The implication of such a perspective is that concepts like dialogue, or dialogical art do not have a clearly definable meaning, they only achieve meaning in their constant use. This implies that should a concept or word cease to be used it falls from meaningful use. But it also suggests that concepts don't have to be clearly defined in order for them to achieve meaning.

There is a need for practitioners invested in contemporary art to have a shared understanding of meaning unless we are willing to accept the notion of absolutely separate and individual art practices, each with their own private language. What I am suggesting is that many different practices, which may have aspects in common, can share what Wittgenstein (2010) refers to as a familial resemblance. We can talk about dialogical art practices then as having aspects in common as well as being different. In this manner, the language of the community of practice is open to reflect changes in practice and understanding within the community, rather than proscribe an ideal and rigid definition, or edit practices that do not fit neatly within narrowly conceived criteria.

Such a conception of language use identifies the maker of meaning as a participant and not a detached observer, or spectator (Medina, 2005). Talking or theorising about something is connected to the same activity in a meaningful or constructive way. From this Wittgensteinian perspective, the use of language is not detached from the activities (language game) of dialogue. Art practice seen through the lens of Wittgenstein's language games, and its attendant theory of language use and meaning-making, suggests that to use the word dialogue meaningfully is a situated activity. Thus using a word is learning to use a word meaningfully in a given context, which in this study implies learning the normative meaning use that the word dialogue has.

In such a methodological perspective interlocutors in the language game of dialogue can be understood to be participants in a practice. In this thesis the artist is a co-participant in the practice of dialogue as art, or the language game of dialogue as art. The artist-co-participant works to learn, acquire and demonstrate a sense of how it is meaningful to talk and act dialogue as art. Other people in the language game are members of the community of 'practice', those participating in contemporary art. This conception of co-participants constructing meaning contrasts with postmodern perspectives as it involves identification with the notion of the inter-subjectivity of language and its social grounding.

The concept of inter-subjectivity underpins a social constructionist belief that meaning can provisionally be established by studying how people use concepts in their ordinary or natural languages. This is a practical matter. As a strategy for meaningful art practice, dialogue can be seen as the practical study of different logics

or logical structures which make up the language game of dialogue as art. In this conception any study of dialogue as practice or understanding in art is not an attempt to identify the foundations or essential qualities of dialogue, but is a description of what resembles dialogue within the context of contemporary art. In this manner knowledge of dialogue is presented in a web of relations that in the situation of the research or language game makes it meaningful to speak of dialogue (Weinberg, 2008).

How the philosophical notion of language games contributes to my selection and development of method

The metaphor of language games is a model of meaning-making which underpins the family of methods and practices described as grounded theory (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). Grounded theory approaches have been used for understanding creativity and art practice (Mace, 1998) but are less well understood as a model of creative or dialogical art practice.

I adopt a pragmatic bricolage approach to language games, fashioning and adapting methods out of existing practices (Leavy, 2009) to collect and present material in a manner described as assemblage (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Language games (Wittgenstein, 1958) propose meaning-making as a practical situated activity, a form of life, and a co-participatory learning process (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008b). This approach presents this study's mode of dialogical art as one possible assembled form

amongst a complex network of practices with overlapping similarities or familial resemblances (Bambrough, 1966).

Language games are construed of as situated meaning-making which in this study is emphasised as bodily presence (see Kwon, 2004) and face-to-face communicative exchange. Such contextual immediacy is increasingly an emphasis in contemporary art (Dorn, 2005) and reflects a continuing shift away from art's traditional focus on detached contexts (Bueti, 2011). The immediate situated disposition of language games contributes to my abandonment of the notion of artist-researcher as separate observer (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008a).

Moving into and engaging others in inhabited sites is enacting a form of life (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008b). This presents the artist-researcher as an interactive co-participant in the on-going forms of life of others. Co-participation in socially grounded interaction and discursive exchange produces the social reality of the artist-researcher and potentially contributes to the social reality participated in (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008a).

Like many participatory art practices (Bishop, 2006a), language games possess an educative dynamic. They are proposed as co-participatory interactive transformational educative exchanges (Faubion & Marcus, 2008) through which co-participants not only produce meaning but may assess it as well. They can reveal the construction and relative valuing and devaluing of subjects (themes) and co-participant identities (Wortham & Jackson, 2008) and highlight institutionalised

processes which constrain the practical conditions for talk and interaction (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008a).

One implication may be that language games unsettle traditional constructions of artists in a manner resonant with Kaprow's (2003) notion of players involved in the game of art altering the fixed identity of artist. Another implication is that such an approach may alter conceptualisations of relationships between artist and audience, or teacher and learner, presenting identities as similar to functionalist roles that people enact (Steinberg, 1972). The implication for dialogical art as learning experience however is that language games emphasise local forms and interests (Hosking, 2008) which may contrast with and problematise traditional evaluative approaches in art education (Bishop, 2005; Watson, 2005). They may require a more Freirean (1996) interpretation of dialogical co-participants as occupying interchangeable roles of learner/teacher, in contrast to more rigid and hierarchical conceptualisations of artist-expert and expectations of the assertive artist-researcher.

Method

The practice of socially engaged inquiry is often non-linear and does not have an unchangeable order in which research tasks must be completed (Maxwell, 2005). This is reflected in my pragmatic approach in which I bring together the multiple methods, materials, perspectives and contributions from participants in this study. This construction of method reflects the multiple layering of practice in the dialogical performance of knowledge. Firstly, it is presented through the construction of interviews/conversations offered as a practical enactment of dialogical communicative exchange in search of emergent insights. Secondly, the layered method highlights the construction of mimetic dialogues and tag clouds as a process which re-inscribes research material generated through encounter. Thirdly, it sets out how these mimetic dialogues are offered as a means of facilitating and introducing the thematic concerns as they are explored through a discussion of the literature (as a demonstration of re-performed *maieutic* dialogue). Finally it offers them up for dialogical reflection by the author, and reader.

In the method section of chapter 3, I convey a sense of provisional psychological unity to the interpretation and representation of a complex research experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) whilst simultaneously seeking to sustain a sense of the complexity and richness of socially engaged inquiry. This complexity is partially a reflection of the challenges I have experienced developing a practice which negotiates the demanding technical concerns associated with interactional and discursively produced research inquiry within my chosen framework. It is also a

reflection of the intimidating complexity of the conditions that have defined and shaped my interactions within the social realm of contemporary art. After a brief explanation of my preparation of an ethical framework intended to draw attention to the concern of considering not only the well-being of participants (including the researcher) but also the need to protect sponsoring institutions, I lay out my method broadly in three key stages, the generation of material, the synthesis and analysis of that material, and finally its presentation and discussion.

The description of the generation of material outlines how a snowball sample of participants was established, and a characterisation of that sample is provided. Then I discuss the approach to interview, and the eventual expansion of the conversational method to include field study conversation. Following this is an explanation of the use of case reflections to record insights from conversational encounters and how emerging ideas were tested through representation to various communities of interest. The second stage sets out the process by which research material was synthesised and analysed in this inquiry. I describe the analysis of findings and the development of a bricolage (woven representation of findings). The four main stages of this process are discussed examining how extracts from transcripts and case studies were arranged into broad organisational themes, interpreted and coded, regrouped into broader provisional themes, and finally how they were simplified and reordered for presentation as a bricolaged dialogue. This highlights for the reader the process by which the mimetic 'dialogues' as artefacts are constructed from multiple interviews and other discursive and verbal interactions.

Lastly, the presentation and discussion of the material as a research text is discussed. I outline the influence on this inquiry's approach of Plato and the movement of forms of dialogue through his work. Firstly a mimetic dialogue or imitation of communicative exchange is presented. Then these dialogues are offered for exchange with readers. I describe the use of tag clouds to provide an additional interpretive resource for readers and a link with the literature. The mode of dialogue moves on to a reflective discussion of the mimetic dialogue and a reading of the themes through the lens of various literatures.

Preparing an ethical framework

Once I had decided that I wanted to interview human participants I applied for ethics approval from the university. Approval was given which required that I provide individuals with participant information and consent forms. One participant I approached in person agreed to speak with me and seemed bemused and a little offended when I produced a participant consent form, which I asked him to sign. He commented that he had already given his consent. Christians (2005, p. 147) believes that mandatory informed consent is, 'incongruent with interpretive research that interacts with human beings in their natural settings.' It was instead intended for the study of human participants in laboratory contexts. This early encounter led me to recognise that the process of seeking verbal consent and then asking for a signature can turn an interpersonal encounter into a bureaucratic process which may have unforeseen implications on the nature of any subsequent conversational interaction.

The ethical emphasis of much dialogical art, informed by institutional ethical agendas, has been questioned by Bishop (2006b). Roche's (2006) interpretation of Bishop's concern is that the aesthetic of much dialogical art work is sacrificed in favour of a narrow and conservative interpretation of social change. The implication is that artistic considerations are subordinate to institutionalised ethical evaluative concerns. Yet all research including practice-based arts research is subject to practical, social and ethical constraints, and an artist's decision to work with dialogue may be understood as a tacit acceptance of the challenges of working within certain constraints, in exchange for the benefits of inquiry at a potentially deeper level of relational or social engagement.

Institutional ethical frameworks have been criticised as serving to protect institutions before research participants and researchers (Christians, 2005), and the frameworks of consensual dialogical art that Bishop (2006b) criticises omit interpretations of dialogue that believe conflict and risk are an intrinsic and potentially valuable dynamic of dialogue (Baxter and Montgomery, 1996). Stake (2005) argues that licence from institutional ethics review boards cannot outweigh the possible harm to people exposed through dialogue. In recognition of this concern I adopted a more feminist and communitarian ethical perspective that promotes the concepts of beneficence and care and proposes that ethical principles must be felt as well as performed as a means of guiding the researcher's conduct in the world. I attended talks on ethics for practitioners in counselling in 2009, and a lecture by Professor Tim Bond in 2011 on the limitations of current research ethics frameworks.

My approach differs from activist models of dialogical art, such as that practised by the socio-political activist group WochenKlausur (n.d.) whose model of intervention into social worlds is based on a problem/solution model of research which proposes the artist as a creative solver of the social problems of others. Their *modus operandi* however involves trickery and deception and so might be thought incompatible with the guiding ethical principles of care for all participants. Nevertheless I identify with the broad ethical approach outlined in Kester's model (2004) which proposes ethics as practical negotiation of the compromises of power, difference and interplays of identity through dialogue. My adoption of a practical ethical disposition of dialogical vulnerability shares similarities with Kester's (2004) interpretation of the ethical position of the artist Adrian Piper. This proposes the artist-researcher in dialogue as a person open to having their preoccupations challenged and transformed through a process of mutual education. However, Kester's account of such a framework suggests an incompatibility between openness and defensiveness, whereas I believe an ethics of vulnerability in dialogue also requires an attentiveness to the necessity of psychological defence (Kegan, 1982), including a critical reflexivity of one's own vulnerability in the research process. I elaborate this difference in my discussion of findings.

The generation of material

Through my interactive and intercommunicative participatory works I generated a substantial amount of textual research material such as field notes, memos, case-reflections and interview transcripts. Naturalistic methods and description can be

misunderstood as an attempt to reflect a naturalised reality. However, naturalistic approaches in the constructionist interpretation produce descriptions of social realities which transform the world into constructed representations (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008b). In this study I am co-constructing a mode of life of dialogue as art practice. This construction involves a movement through different modes of dialogue familiar to socially grounded research practice. Conversations and writing in the field of inquiry emerge from primary experience, and move through intermediate and later works and transcriptions, to be resolved as reflexive narrative research texts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). I digitally recorded primary exchanges of interview, but made field notes and research memos (See Maxwell, 2005) of *An invitation to dialogue*. These in turn are re-inscribed as case-reflections and latterly as dialogues which blend data from multiple sources.

In this section I outline how I established a group of interview participants. Then I lay out my approach to interview, and the eventual expansion of my conversational method to include field study conversation. This expansion required an alternative approach to recording material to that which I used in interviews. I describe the broadening of my approach to include the use of case reflections to record insights from these conversational encounters. I then cover how I tested these emerging ideas through representation to various communities of interest.

The snowball

I used the snowball method to build a group of co-participants and interlocutors in this study because of its pragmatic and socially grounded focus. The snowball is sometimes called the referral or reputational sampling method and can resemble naturalistic methods of networking and recommendation (Gray *et al.*, 2007). I selected this method to facilitate interview with a range of members including elite members of the social field of contemporary art. Schutt (2006) advocates such an approach for researchers who do not have a sampling frame. I planned to supplement this method if required, by advertising for interview participants in the art press. This was not needed however as after fifteen interviews I reached a point of saturation. I felt if I did more interviews I would be unable to identify and process new themes as they emerged and I would risk the study becoming impracticable.

I interviewed fifteen people in the United States and Europe between 2008 and 2010 at a location of their choosing. The first interview was with a European artist. I used an interview protocol to guide and facilitate my conversation (Appendix 3). The last two prompts of my interview protocol were:

- Which three artists' work today do you find means most to you?
- In what way is their work meaningful to you?

I asked him if he knew these artists as I would be interested in interviewing them also. He mentioned an internationally famous American artist as important to his understanding of dialogue, but he said that he didn't know him personally. My second participant recommended that I approach an artist and academic that I knew

in the United States as he felt this would create connections, which could help with approaching the famous American artist. This academic agreed to contact this artist and advocate participation in my project.

The influence of individual participants on the overall sample is not equal. For example the participants Jason and Ben hugely contributed to the success of my snowball. Jason acted as a gatekeeper to the New York art community and facilitated six recommendations. Further recommendations were made by one of these six, contributing to the momentum of the snowball method. Bernard (2000) recognises that the snowball can facilitate access to ‘hard-to-reach’ members of a community. I felt that the participation of Ben was very important in helping to secure interviews in the United States where my institution and many of my European participants were less well-known. Another facilitating factor, was the inclusion of participant four in my study. This person impressed other artists and was a significant motivating factor in securing the co-participation of artists less connected to other members of the sample.

The method of establishing a sample or participant group through recommendation is familiar in the dialogical and conversational work of Lee Lozano (such as *Dialogue Piece*, 1969) and Andre Cadere 1972-1978. Cadere in particular identified a fundamental aspect of his work as addressing contemporary art’s networks (Luckraft, 2013). However through interview my study examines fourteen cases collectively and not the relationships between the participants in the manner suggested by the work of Cadere. Schutt (2006) notes that studies examining relatively few cases do not generalize interpretations or claim they represent the total population of interest.

The snowball led to an unanticipated development in my conversational method and sample. As a result of an invitation to present my work in a gallery context, I broadened my mode of engagement into a multi-method approach combining interview and field conversation. Initially I conceptualised this pragmatic development as a response to the potential limitations of using a singular method. To some extent such a reflection is a tactical methodological stance in response to criticisms of monological methods that may reinforce overly positivist perspectives incompatible with my approach. However, one implication of this development of method is that it further complicated a research process that was already a complex and messy interaction with the social world. On reflection, this development also contributed to a deeper understanding of the complexities of the social reality with which I was engaging.

The incorporation of public encounter dialogues alongside interview also expanded my understanding of the networking sample method's contribution to my inquiry. This was because the five field conversations were developed in response to commissions or invitations to produce the work from peers and practitioners. The first, third and fifth *Invitations to dialogue* were the result of interviews with, or referrals from practitioners in contemporary art and or research field. The second dialogue was an invitation from practitioners I had worked with previously, and the fourth was as a result of an invitation to submit a proposal from curators with connections to my research institution. In this case, the institutional connection is in effect a reputational referral.

There were unanticipated consequences of expanding the participant group sample. For example, random public others encountered through the work of art in various contexts blurred the distinction between artist and ‘public other’ in contemporary art. As a result I adopted a dual conceptualisation of public. Firstly Gerz (2004, p. 651) argues that, ‘any conception of what public is emerges through dialogue and conversation.’ Secondly I identify with Steinberg’s (1972) functional notion of a contemporary art public, which recognises that publics may co-participate through entering into varied roles and that artists are often the first audiences of other artists’ work.

Description of interview participant group established through the snowball

Due to the increasing diversity of the social world of contemporary art I provide a summary of the co-participant group from interview to illustrate the scope of the snowball method and to provide a possible connection for the reader to the social contexts and horizons of co-participants that provided research material presented in the mimetic dialogues. My co-participants included people at various career stages within contemporary art. What I know about my participants is mostly gleaned through interaction with them but I this is augmented by some online inquiry in advance of interviews.

Table 1: Research participants

Participant	Brief biography.
Peter	European based mid-career artist, represented his country at Venice Biennale, winner of international artist award as member of artist collaboration. Established academic and research profile. Diverse practice, including, artists writing, relational, conversational, video, and walking projects.
Andrea	European early to mid-career artist with extensive international exhibition record, catalogue essays by Nicholas Bourriaud, and minor artists prizes. Diverse practice including performance, video, photography and sculpture.
Dirk	UK based established artist with international exhibiting and research profile. Diverse practice including, performance, video, sculpture and writing.
Stuart	American emerging early career artist interested in long duration conversational, relational and socially engaged artworks.
Nguyen	US based established International artist, curator and publisher. Long standing member of the Manhattan art community. Practice includes interviewing, drawing and installation.
Jane	Established American artist with extensive international exhibiting record, long standing member of the Manhattan art community and extensive experience of teaching on Masters programmes in the USA. Mixed media visual artist.
Nadia	Established European artist, who represented her country at Venice Biennale, and has extensive record of international projects and exhibitions. Socially engaged practice and artist video.
Suzanne	Established mid-career international artist and academic at premier American University, with video and new media art practice.
Tracy	Emerging American early career artist with some international exhibitions and developing profile in the United States. Practice includes photography and writing.

Jason	American based academic artist and researcher with record of international exhibitions, practice includes artists writing and lens based site-specific work.
Alex	Senior academic at premier university in the USA, former member of international artist collective who produce hybrid architectural art.
Luke	US based established artist and lecturer with international exhibiting record in public art and sculptural.
Ben	An internationally acclaimed American artist, with works in major international collections and well represented in the art historical literature. A collaborator in works by Art & Language and Ian Wilson. Diverse practice including artist's writing, sculpture, video, installation, architecture and public art.
Nina	US based member of artist duo with international socially engaged project and exhibition profile.

The participant group is a partial reflection of my social world as an artist and this description reveals the influence of particular perspectives on me. For example, of the five women and nine men in this participant group ten were based in the USA, two in the UK and two in Europe. The dominance of American participants may be reflected in the particular horizons that have emerged through this inquiry. Although it may be difficult to make specific interpretations, in part because their art practices are diverse and reflect the postmodern diversification of international contemporary art practice. Their practices include drawing, photography, live art/conversation, video, sculpture, installation, writing, walking, sound, public arts, teaching and architecture.

The sample, however, also reflects my own social context in academic art and the continuing connection between the academy and contemporary art. Twelve participants have Masters degrees and two are doing doctoral study. Five participants are lecturers or academics. Four are associate or full professors. This is not to say that this is the only context in which participants are active though. Thirteen exhibit internationally, three do consultancy, three are members of artistic collectives, four curate, and two work for an art institution other than a university. I decided not to go through a biographical checklist with participants in interview. In part this was because my focus was on seeking full conversation, but also because providing more detailed biographical descriptions of participants would make them more easily identifiable and compromise the protection afforded by anonymity.

The interview process

When I met interviewees I gave them a participant information sheet and a consent form. I explained my interest in dialogue mentioning that I was interested in insights that might be gleaned from a dialogue with them about their practice and understanding. In two instances I had an extended conversation about my interest in dialogue and my study with prospective participants. This felt like both a test of my seriousness and the seriousness of my study. These initial conversations were not recorded, but I digitally recorded all subsequent interviews. The interviews lasted typically between sixty and ninety minutes.

Despite mentioning to participants that I wished to record interviews, I think my lack of experience as a researcher, perhaps some participants' unfamiliarity with research interviews, and other practical constraints on participants' time meant that a number of interviews were conducted in cafes, where background noise affected the quality of recordings. One artist was visiting London and agreed to meet me, but said he wished to do the interview while walking and travelling across London, as he had things he wanted to do. Other interviews were split as participants arranged to talk between teaching classes.

As agreed with the university ethics committee all contributions required informed consent and anonymisation. Wiles *et al.* (2008) explain that anonymity can involve managing the presentation of research material to prevent the identification of participants. The provision of anonymity proved an important aspect of the process for one participant. She agreed to speak in a restaurant near to their university but checked to see if any of their students might be in the restaurant before we started. She also confirmed that their contributions would be anonymised mid interview when She started criticising her institution. It was my assumption that participant anonymity was an understood and common aspect of much human interactional research yet I noted what I interpreted as surprise or curiosity within the art faculty at my decision to anonymise research material and some interviewees may wish to be identifiable. This may be because such an approach is less common in art historical and theory interviews common in art journals. Securing an interview with a famous artist might be seen as an important status symbol and signifier of the credibility of a research study for an emergent researcher. The naming of interlocutors was part of the interpersonal conversational exchanges of both Lee Lozano and Ian Wilson. This

need to capitalise on the status of conversational exchange with other artists is apparent in Wilson's private discussions with other artists. Early on in this series of conversations he started producing certificates at the suggestion of one of his interlocutors despite his concerns about recording such works in the written word (Berndes *et al.*, 2008). I produced a series of text works ambiguously titled *Appropriate Interlocutors* (Appendix 4) which reflect the uncertain value of such certificates. I also realised their limited contribution to this study, as I could only produce text works for conversational encounters with people who had not participated directly.

The anonymising of conversational exchange locates my dialogue in different contexts from the idealised dialogical spaces of many gallery based dialogical works such as those designed by Liam Gillick and described by Bourriaud (2002). Such works attempt to construct physical spaces and architecture to facilitate dialogical exchange. The context of interview is also different to the closed and private contexts of activist led dialogues such as those by the group WochenKlausur such as their 'dialogue on a boat' (see Kester, 2004). The group discussions of WochenKlausur are more akin to focus group exchanges and thus public, whereas interviews, even if conducted in cafes and public settings are paradoxically still considered private. The private exchange of interview is closer to the more interpersonal and micro- interactional context of the dialogical works of Ian Wilson; although his approach contrasts in other important ways such as certification of the name and date of an encounter with other artists (as mentioned above).

I used an interview protocol (a set of provisional questions) for semi-structured interview (Appendix 3). This was designed to support the development of free flowing conversation with interlocutors and provide some thematic orientation to aid the analysis process. I aimed for free flowing conversation as it is proposed as a more associative and creative exchange of ideas, rather than a more conscious and perhaps constrained exchange of information. Lee Lozano regarded successful dialogue as intense talk with an exchange of ideas (Lippard, 1997) but conversation can be intense in different ways. Locke (2007) proposes the free flowing conversation aimed for in grounded theory approaches is a more generative and reflective mixture of conscious and preconscious mode of thought which pervades our everyday lives. I prioritised this approach towards everyday language use as it is a characteristic quality of Wittgenstein's notion of language games, and the philosophical disposition of this inquiry.

The protocol was a useful support at first as I found research interviews an intimidating and pressurised experience. With practice however, I found the interviews were generating rich and extended conversational exchanges and I relied less on the protocol. In later interviews, the protocol served as an informal checklist of key thematic territories. This returning to recurring themes through repeated discursive exchange is a feature of dialogically resonate discursive approaches of Ian Wilson and Art and Language.

Artists such as Wilson and Lozano who conducted micro-interactional exchanges like my interviews make no mention of using guiding notes, protocols or proformas and their approaches to mode of thinking in conversation may differ from my own.

Whilst Lozano regarded successful dialogue as intense talk with an exchange of ideas (Lippard, 1997) her aim was interaction, and to engage as many people as possible in dialogue (Lippard, 1997) rather than to produce a transcript or body of material.

Not all my interviews felt free flowing or naturalistic. My interview with an important and famous American artist felt at times more like a private lecture than an exchange of ideas and I found it difficult to interact in a more natural conversational manner. It was certainly an intense encounter, but there may be a number of reasons for this. There was an obvious difference in status and power between myself and my co-participant. This may translate into different expectations of speaking roles, and the assumption that an interview may be an exchange between one who knows and one who wishes to know. Or it may have been due to tiredness and jetlag as the artist had just returned from the Middle East.

It is difficult to draw comparisons with Wilson's private conversational exchanges as I have not been a participant. I did attend a Discussion at the Van Abbemuseum. I felt at the time that the conversational exchange seemed very formal and disjointed. In the *Discussions* Wilson adopts a more formal Socratic dialectical approach or exchange of question and answer. His method did not appear to be too naturalistic conversation. Other attendees with whom I spoke commented that his discussion did not seem very dialogical. I said that I felt that we were having the dialogue between us and I wondered if the formal exchange might be a means of facilitating less formal or secondary dialogue, generated by the exchange with Wilson.

Another tension was created by my decision to anonymise participants, and not offer the transcripts as distinct art objects. This also seemed to challenge viewpoints that prioritise a version of art that produces valuable objects. Like Lozano the value of art objects in my approach is their contribution to a framework of practice and understanding (Lippard, 1997). Anonymising participants also prevents me from turning the snowball or network into another objectification of others and offsets the risk of reducing dialogue to simply being a means of establishing social capital and status. This is reflected in my thought experiment *Appropriate Interlocutors* (Appendix 4) which recognises the problematic tension between gaining insights and gaining social advantage and prestige through interaction with others. The approach this inquiry adopted to interview was an attempt to come to a better understanding and reflection of the dynamic of co-learning and co-participation represented by Wittgenstein's (2010) notion of language games. Instead of focusing on objects and objectives I prioritised free-playing interpersonal and conversational exchange of ideas as a means of developing an open-ended framework for the practice and understanding of dialogue in contemporary art.

How I constructed my field study conversation

The field study mode of practice emerged out of an invitation to demonstrate my research practice alongside other artist researchers in a gallery show. My approach was to offer my mode of naturalistic conversation presented as dialogical art practice in the gallery setting. Dialogical gallery based works have been criticised by Bishop (2004) as being too detached from everyday contexts; but like Simon Pope's

“Gallery Space Recall’ I interpreted the gallery as one site amongst many in which public conversational exchanges take place. In appearance, however, the work differed from collective gallery based conversations such as *Gallery Space Recall*, or Tino Seghal’s *These Associations* 2013. In its emphasis on an invitation to have a one-to-one conversation the work appears closer to Richard Layzell’s *Conversations* 1981 in which the artist waited in the Acme Gallery offering improvised, more understated, and awkward conversations (Levy, 1998).

My goal in these conversations was to participate in free-flowing conversation that explored the possible emergence of new understanding and insights in a manner similar to that described in the previous section. At the time I felt that as these conversations in the gallery would take place in a public space which was a thoroughfare for the university there was no possibility of privacy and so I decided not to record conversations digitally but to record reflections on my experience of the conversations through case-reflections (Appendix 2).

I conducted five of these field conversations titled *Invitations to dialogue*. Each was a response to an invitation or a commission to produce the work, so can be understood as a response to an invitation to dialogue. I produced *An invitation to dialogue* in a gallery, at a market, on a bridge in a park, in a canteen at a conference, and on a pedestrian crossing. The consistent elements of the work were that I stood in a place next to two posters which stated, ‘This is an invitation to dialogue.’ The duration of each work depended on the context, for example at the conference I spoke with people in breaks between sessions, but extended the frame of my

reflection to include conversations in presentations and in particular from a discussion panel on conversation I had organised at the conference.

In the gallery, market and philosophy conference I made notes after conversations, and in the other two works at the end of the day. I moved away from taking notes immediately after conversations as I realised that in the context of the market, the process of making notes may appear to be an auditing or administrative exercise which I now feel inevitably affected whether some people chose to approach me or not, and how others may have spoken with me. Like Pryce (1979) I made notes relying on my memory of what was said which contributed to the written case-reflections.

In writing notes I focused mainly on what had emerged from the conversations with others, but I also included reflections and observations of context. I had previously worked as a teacher of English and found I was able to recall many turns of phrase as well as the themes of what was said. Pryce (1979) believes that with practice the memory can be surprisingly efficient in conveying tone, flavour and even the emotion of conversational exchanges. I found reflecting on how I had felt during exchanges helped my ability to re-voice the conversations.

The intensity of the work and reflection on *An invitation to dialogue* continued for some time after I had considered the work had come to an end, but I subsequently realised that such work leaves one with a sense of still being ‘in the conversation’ for some time afterwards. This could be quite disorientating and made me vulnerable as I was physically, mentally and emotionally tired after many of these works. On

reflection I wondered whether such dialogical exposure can reduce a person's psychological resources and limit their awareness of their immediate situation. For example, after the dialogue at The EVENT 2009 I was speaking with someone who asked me how the work had gone. I reflected that at times the process had felt like an instrumentalising marketing conversation rather than the more open exchange I had hoped for. I was not aware that the art festival's marketing officer was nearby and I was concerned that she had taken this as a criticism of her work.

The effects of conversational exchange continue away from the site of the primary conversation and can impact on later conversational exchanges in unpredictable ways. This was also apparent in my dialogue in Leeds which exposed the commercial struggles and what I saw at the time as a lack of political answerability towards market stallholders whose future was uncertain. I came away from the dialogue feeling that I had to do something, to be an activist in response to my heightened critical awareness of the situation. Yet I was concerned that I had not spoken to any managers, members of the market management committee and had only heard perhaps one perspective repeated. Whilst thinking about my feelings and what action was required, I felt guilty at not reacting and this feeling grew with time. This experience resonated with similar themes in interview participants' conversations. Pryce (1979) notes the complex dynamics of identification and acceptance in participatory research, which may lead to an expectation of advocacy for the values and concerns of participation groups. This early experience highlighted a risk to me that I hadn't foreseen at the outset. I entered into complex relational and psychologically charged situations through dialogue with little training to understand the vulnerabilities that such exchange can entail for the researcher, as well as for

other co-participants in such work. As Pryce (1979, p. 293) commented on his dilemma, 'the problem was it was impossible to remain a mere observer among in-betweeners.' In his work with the Afro-Caribbean community of Bristol, Pryce found that one of the social groups he interacted with, the in-betweeners, expected him to advocate for on their behalf and draw attention to their concerns. This led Pryce to realise the impossibility of maintaining the stance of objective observer-researcher, when one is participating in the social world one is investigating.

The use of case reflections

I used case reflections to record research material, build and test theories and as a way of integrating the artwork of *An invitation to dialogue* into my analytical and evaluative framework. Bishop (2006b) has expressed concern that participatory dialogical works do not readily make themselves available to external scrutiny and evaluation. The contribution of dialogical works, however conceived, is limited if evaluation is only possible through immediate participation. I used multi-site case reflections to produce reflective and generative narrative accounts of my conversations in the field and open them up to continued dialogical critique and scrutiny. I decided not to produce audio recordings of the conversational exchanges but instead kept a record of field notes of what was said, and reflections on context and the exchange. In Holstein and Gubrium's (2008b) constructionist perspective such field notes are not a literal reproduction of reality but an inscription which unavoidably transforms witnessed events. Such inscription involves selection, and interpretation through conventions, framing and preconceptions, but this can be

valuable as my multi-site case reflections also act as a record of my changing assumptions and understanding.

Writing case-reflections opened up theory questions, and helped me identify new themes in a process I interpret as ‘thought experiments’. Like Lave and March (1975) suggest, I found them useful in highlighting and making explicit my experiential knowledge as an artist. I noticed also that some of the understanding and themes which I reflected upon in case-reflections resurfaced in later dialogical exchanges in what Crapanzano (1990) terms a ‘shadow dialogue’. Crapanzano (1990) recognises that insights and perspectives resurface and are reiterated in a parallel or on-going process of dialogue and can be conceived of as the voicing of an absent interlocutor or horizon in a current conversation. This reflects the blurred boundaries of dialogical exchange and expanded duration which Kester (2004) notes is a feature of many dialogical art practices. Dialogical exchange may no longer be thought of as limited to any individual encounter or communicative exchange but continuing and moving beyond such moments in a quasi-conscious manner. As Stake (2005, p.454) argues, ‘enduring meanings come from encounter, and they are modified and reinforced by repeated encounter.’

I structured my case reflections to reflect the conversational focus of my field dialogues as practice. Carr and Kemmis (1986) also suggest case reflections are a useful method for researchers wishing to reflect on dialogical field encounters. I rejected more poetic narrative approaches such as Sarah Cant’s (2011) case studies of tango, and instead adapted Davy’s (2006) model for counselling due to its focus on conversational exchange. I was concerned about the balance between poetic and

descriptive approaches in case study reports. Cant's (2011) approach was more overtly poetic and abstract whereas Davy's model emphasises a naturalistic approach to what was said and a structured approach to contextualising such exchanges. I felt a more naturalistic approach to case reflection made the possibility of combining and blending data and insights more practical through a grounded theory approach. Stake (2005) notes that multisite case study work has been combined with grounded theory approaches in research informed by sociological approaches. Multiple case studies blended with performative interview are also a feature of the practice based arts research of Sophie Hope (2011).

In each case reflection (Appendix 2) I commented on the conceptual and situated context of the work *An invitation to dialogue*. The contextualisation of these works also highlights their connection with both the literature and tradition of dialogical art practices as described by Bourriaud (2002), Kester (2004) and the work of artists such as Simon Pope's Gallery Space Recall 2006 and Art & Language's *Indexes 01 & 02* (Dreher, 2005). I offered a description of the site of encounter and an account of what was said during the on-going conversation of the work. This was followed by a brief analysis, evaluation and reflection on emergent learning including possible interpretations of the relative success or problems of the work.

Art practices which have adopted approaches such as case reflections and field work more familiar to ethnography and social sciences have been criticised as appearing like self-interested and idle *flanerie* by the critic Hal Foster (1996). Lee Lozano applied scientific constraints to her method of self-observation to offset accusations of self-indulgence (Birrell *et al.*, 2006/07). Like Best (2008), I believe that

researchers cannot avoid importing their preoccupations and interests into interactions and their records of them. Instead I recognise that any account of interaction is just one of many possible interpretations (Best, 2008). I presented case reflections at talks and symposia reintroducing interpretations back into inter-subjective exchange, where others may present contrasting interpretations of the work. This allowed me to analyse my report and the choices I made in the field exposing assumptions which I may have taken for granted (Best, 2008).

I presented case reflections of *An invitation to dialogue* in different contexts including:

- Searching beyond, Cardiff School of Art & Design, research seminar, 2008.
- WIRAD 1st National Symposium for Emerging Art & Design Researchers, Newport Wales, 2009.
- Interrogations: Creative Interdisciplinarity in Art and Design Research Conference, Loughborough, 2009.
- MFA lecture at Montclair State University New Jersey USA, 2009.
- Every Thousand Words Tells a Picture at Le Salon, Chapter Art Gallery Cardiff, 2009.
- Presentation of my work at Dundee Contemporary Art, 2010.
- A seminar for Welsh and South-West postgraduate researchers at the University of the West of England, Bristol, 2010.

These presentations exposed this work in a range of locations in the UK and USA, and in academic and art institutional contexts. The presentation and discussion of case-reflections and my approach also exposed others' assumptions about this work and elicited challenging responses to my methodological stance which required further reflection.

After presenting my case study of *An invitation to dialogue* in the gallery setting I was approached by a member of staff at Cardiff Metropolitan University who challenged me, saying that their work was research also, and what was so special about me, why would anyone want to talk to me? At the time I was more surprised by the intensity of her anger as I had not really spoken to her before. In attempting to deflect the anger I was less able to explain that part of my approach was to theorise and consider possible reasons for wanting to enter into dialogue with a stranger, but also that my approach recognised that people may not want to participate. The anger of this encounter may have subconsciously influenced my decision to de-emphasise reference to John Hammersley the artist and instead present the work as an opportunity to participate in conversation. For example, on posters for later dialogues (Appendix 2) I used the phrasing 'John will be participating in conversations' rather than participate in a conversation with John. This recognises that the work may continue between others without my participation, much like in Wilson's informal dialogues (Mot, 2008).

After other presentations I also experienced angry responses from other artist-researchers engaged in more material practices. They felt that my interpretation of knowledge production threatened the veracity of their objectivist and materialist

worldview. I attempted to explain that we had different worldviews and epistemological assumptions but this did not seem to satisfy them. The constructionist approach proposes that no particular interpretive perspective can be proved to be superior to another, which I accept. This however reflects the notion that the criteria for artistic judgement are social constructions (Best, 2008). Supposedly elite evaluative standards for art may act as a form of domination of one class of knowledge production over others (Best, 2008), or the attempt to preserve historically derived privilege within art's knowledge economy. These exchanges exposed my assumption that other researchers accept there are different ways of conducting research and that researchers working in other approaches do not need to be corrected.

Interpretation, synthesis and analysis of research material

The section below discusses the process of synthesis and analysis of this study's research material. It gives a description of how findings were analysed and developed into three constructed dialogues. This involved the interpretation and arrangement of extracts into organisational themes for the dialogues. Then I talk about how the interpretative process contributed to the construction of open-codes. Next, the way in which open-codes were grouped into provisional themes is discussed. Finally an outline is given of the process by which themes were simplified and ordered into conversational threads for the three dialogues.

Description of analysis of findings and development of constructed dialogues

The development of constructed dialogues from extracts from the interview and field studies involved four stages of analysis. For the purpose of replication studies, these stages are outlined below. Stage one involved arranging the fragments into the broad conceptual groupings or organisational themes (Maxwell, 2005; Dey, 2007) of context, relating, and meaning making. These themes are a pragmatic and interpretive means of dividing extracts into manageable groups for presentation and discussion. Stage two involved the interpretation of individual textual extracts from transcripts and case studies, and the construction of open-codes. This involves interpreting and highlighting key words which convey the sense of extracts. These key words are then recorded as open-codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In stage three the open codes are grouped into categories termed provisional themes for discussion. This is done by grouping codes with familial resemblance together. As this can lead to an increased complication and diffusion of provisional themes, stage four involved the simplification and ordering of provisional themes. This entailed aligning the language of the provisional themes to reflect the language of the open codes as far as possible. The four stages for the section ‘meaning making’ are described below.

Stage 1 Arrangement of extracts from transcripts and case studies into broad organisational themes

I divided paragraphs from transcripts into themed groupings or organisational categories of context, relating and meaning making. I chose these groupings as they

had emerged as three broad perspectives in the data from a conference panel I had convened on the subject of conversation. I felt they represented a flexible and open framework for interpreting dialogical themes, and I didn't feel they were overly narrow categories. I created a list of fragments for each theme in a new document.

Stage 2 Interpretation of extracts from transcripts and case studies leading to the construction of open codes

I read each document and underlined the key words in paragraphs. For example in the meaning making document (which contained a list of fragments I provisionally interpreted as relating to meaning making) I underlined the following words in the first three paragraphs:

'I know exactly what I'm thinking when I'm making each photograph but yet I don't necessarily know if the audience, the viewer understands that or sees that, or necessarily grasps my intent.'

'I actually in my art make something. In my photographs the same thing and I call them *Becoming* because in a lot of ways I'm trying to become art.'

Q: But the vision isn't the same as talking about it and trying to fix the meaning?

'Definitely not! A fleeting glimpse. And you have to act it out in order to crystallise it and then when you do, you create something, you write a book, you make a work of art, it dies the moment you finish it. And then you go

back to that perpetual confusing state of having that glimpse again and you have to deal with that and bring it to a greater clarity. And you can only do that when you make things, through the process.'

I then added these words at the side of each paragraph as an informal open code (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

'I know exactly what I'm thinking when I'm making each photograph but yet I don't necessarily know if the audience, the viewer understands that or sees that, or necessarily grasps my intent.'

Exact knowing

'I actually in my art make something. In my photographs the same thing and I call them *Becoming* because in a lot of ways I'm trying to become art.'

Trying to become

Q: But the vision isn't the same as talking about it and trying to fix the meaning?

'Definitely not! A fleeting glimpse. And you have to act it out in order to crystallise it and then when you do, you create something, you write a book, you make a work of art, it dies the moment you finish it. And then you go back to that perpetual confusing state of having that glimpse again and you have to deal with that and bring it to a greater clarity. And you can only do that when you make things, through the process.'

Perpetual confusing state of making

Stage 3 Grouping of open codes into provisional themes

Once I had coded all the paragraphs I looked for a starting point for the development of provisional themes. Themes reflect or construct relationships between different elements in the data, and aim to portray a meaningful picture of an aspect of the core category of dialogue (Charmaz, 2006). This is an interpretive process and involves becoming familiar with the extracts. The aim is to intuit common characteristics. Particularly rich extracts may act as a starting point for the development of provisional themes. For example, in the list of extracts from interviews and case studies themed ‘meaning making’ I identified a paragraph from a case reflection on the discussion panel, which I had used as an organisational category. I used this also as a starting point for looking for resemblance between points. The paragraph read:

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.

I wrote the key words from the above paragraph (Openness to risk, hermeneutic event, withholding, disclosing, critical transformation, participation, unfolding, and changing subject matter) in a column on the left hand side of a piece of paper. These were my starting point for provisional themes to help me group open-coded extracts from interview and case studies.

I then read through the list of points from the document titled ‘meaning making’ and grouped the open codes alongside thematic groupings. I looked for resemblances amongst points. A resemblance is any conceptual association, a similarity which strikes us (Wittgenstein, 1958). This is a very broad and open criterion and allows the researcher to make interpretive conceptual associations across a broad range of frames of reference in keeping with the interpretive bricolage approach. For example, alongside the theme ‘critical transformation’ I grouped the following codes:

Table 2: Grouping of codes: Critical transformation

Critical transformation	<p>Making it strange</p> <p>Ludicrous subversion</p> <p>Making it foreign</p> <p>Transformation – deep reading</p> <p>Refracted use/meaning</p> <p>Effecting others</p>
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The interpretation of critical transformation that I worked with relied on the original association between the word critic and judge, and thus the transformation of judgement. For example, ‘making it strange’, and ‘ludicrous subversion’ are both artists’ descriptions of their process of purposefully making things appear strange or absurd, apparently transforming things or making the everyday seem strange and ‘other’ presumably as a means of provoking others to alter their previous judgements. This is a similar dynamic to ‘making it foreign’ although the artist is describing other people’s reactions to his attempts to make their familiar world appear foreign.

‘Transformation and deep reading’ describes the belief that people already familiar with the visual world and practising artists are better able to read and appreciate the kinds of transformations of the familiar and the everyday mentioned above. Another artist describes their hope that people who see their work are transformed and effected by their work, whereas the last artist emphasises their feeling that what is important for him is that when people use or view his work, this refracts the works meaning back to him in a manner that facilitates a critical rethinking.’ The interpretive resemblance in this provisional theme is thus the idea of the possibility of changed thinking, perception and judgement.

Stage 4 Consolidation and ordering of themes

I adjusted the language of the provisional themes if I felt they shared common resemblance and could be consolidated and grouped further, or if I felt they were not

sufficiently reflective of the language of the open codes. A category (described here as a provisional theme) is formed of different events that have corresponding features (Dey, 2007). Category labels often only aim to reflect a general aspect of an organisational theme but may not be particularly informative (Kearney, 2007). Categories are termed provisional as categorisation is always provisional and approximate, and categories are hypothetically open to further observations and revision (Dey, 2007). I went through six steps in simplifying and reordering the themes for the construction of the dialogue on ‘meaning making’. These are outlined in table 3 below.

Table 3 The six steps of simplifying and reordering themes

Step 1.	I simplified and rephrased the theme of ‘hermeneutic event’ of ‘withholding’ and ‘disclosing’ to ‘knowing / participating in understanding’ as it was a better resemblance of the language of extracts.
Step 2.	I divided ‘openness to risk of change’ into themes of ‘changing world’ and ‘changing self’ as I felt these were better reflections of the language of the extracts, and there was sufficient contrast between these two groups of extracts.
Step 3.	I simplified ‘critical and insightful transformation’ to ‘transformation of meaning’ as this was a better resemblance of the transcript extracts.

Step 4.	I simplified knowing / participating in understanding to ‘knowing and understanding’ as this was a better reflection of the transcript extracts.
Step 5.	I simplified ‘unfolding subject matter’ into the theme of subject matter.
Step 6.	<p>I reordered the provisional themes into a discursive thread for the bricolage.</p> <p>The discursive thread reflects the narrative thread of grounded theory approach as Maranhão (1990, p.15) argues, ‘narrative and represented dialogue are two sides of the same coin. I rejected the idea of trying to present them in the order the extracts were produced as I felt this was impractical. Instead, I started with what I felt were generally broad themes and followed with more specific themes. For example, I started with knowing and understanding as a broad description of how ‘meaning making’ might be understood. I followed with ‘subject matter’ as this closely relates to the meaning making process. I intuited that ‘subject matter’ connects to the theme ‘transformation of meaning’. I felt that ‘transformation of meaning’ connected with and led into the last two themes, of ‘changing self’ and ‘changing world’.</p>

Presentation and discussion of material as research texts

In the presentation and discussion of research material I continued a bricolage approach that sustained the multiplicity of voices and perspectives (Kincheloe 2001, 2005), emphasised the collaborative meaning making process, and aimed to facilitate reflective learning. In my early approaches to the organisation of research material, I had adopted a more mechanistic and list like mode of presentation. I changed my approach as I felt the adaptive and blended bricolage approach better reflected the blurring of empirical and interpretive methods in my inquiry and more importantly the creative and imaginative aspect of the presentation of my formal research (Kincheloe, 2001). This enhances the conceptualisation of this bricolage research text as dialogical as it seeks to promote active participation by readers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

In structuring the presentation and discussion of textual research material, I was influenced by Platonic and artistic modes of presenting dialogue in written form. Gill (1996) identifies three forms of dialogue in Plato; a mimetic dialogue that represents conversational encounter and exchange, a dialogical exchange with readers, and reflective authorial dialogue. The movement of Plato's dialogue reflects the different dimensions of dialogue in my own study, from situated encounter to collaborative meaning making through to reflective learning process. I adapted the three forms of Platonic dialogue in my own approach. This is an original interpretive contribution of my inquiry.

In the following section I discuss the three phases that reflect the three forms of Platonic dialogue. Firstly I discuss how I constructed mimetic dialogue as an imitation of communicative exchange. Phase two covers the development of tag clouds as an interpretive resource leading to a discussion of the literature, and a description of how I designed the tag clouds. Lastly I outline the process by which I developed the *maieutic* dialogue read through the lens of various literatures, into a reflexive dialogue.

Phase 1. How I constructed mimetic dialogue

In the first stage, I present an imitation of oral dialectic between characters. Extracts from speech encounters with research participants are woven into a fictive conversation. Plot is used as a unifying device in narrative research approaches . Drawing on Ricoeur, Polkinghorne (1988, p.49) explains that plot facilitates integration of a ‘variety of explanatory forms’ into ‘one intelligible whole.’ In my study, narrative plot is replaced by the thread of conversation in dialogue in an attempt to integrate different discursive material into a more intelligible whole (Dey, 2007). Such an approach resembles art works such as the Arpanet Dialogues, Simon Pope’s dialogue with André Cadere (2008), and Richard Layzell’s Cream Pages (Layzell & Sofaer, 2008). Like Plato and Richard Layzell (Layzell & Sofaer, 2008), I weave extracts from conversational encounters with real people into fictive dialogues. Weinstein & Weinstein (1991) argue bricolaged texts are emergent constructions. I aim for an imitation of naturalistic dialogue that reflects both the

manner of the interview conversations from which insights emerged and Plato's *Parmenides* (1989a).

Step 1. This step follows on from the re-organisation of provisional themes into a discursive thread mentioned above. I typed the provisional themes as subheadings in a column down a page. I then copied and pasted extracts from transcripts, and case reflections into groups under the thematic subheadings. The selection of quotations from transcripts and presentation for interpretive reading is common in the presentation of interview texts (Rhodes, 2000). In front of each extract I added a pseudonym for each co-participant. The pseudonyms help to distinguish between anonymised speakers.

Step 2. I started each of the three dialogues with a summary of an extract from my case study of *An invitation to dialogue* at the philosophy conference. I did this because I felt the positions outlined by the three speakers in my conversation panel served as a useful introduction to the themes in the following dialogue. As in Plato's (1989b) *Phaedrus* these starting points of conversation are not construed of as a goal (Burke, 1997).

Step 3. I arranged extracts into an order that I intuited conveyed a sense of naturalistic spontaneous conversation. Where extracts did not flow or link very naturally I added prompts, or added linking words or clauses. In the *Phaedrus* Plato (1989b, p.481) uses similar discourse prompts, such as 'and observe this...' or 'Again, if...' I kept these additions as minimal as possible in order to prioritise interview extracts. My aim was to construct a compelling account of the research

conversation woven from the unique network of experiences of myself and other co-participants. As Rhodes (2000, p.521) argues, however, 'the interview is not taken to correspond to some external truths but, rather, is a way of creating one of many possible accounts.' Thus I rejected concerns about a right or wrong order or structure, in favour of what I hoped would be a compelling narrative or flow and one possible account.

Step 4. I rewrote extracts from case reflections in a more conversational manner to fit with a more conversational style of exchange. I checked the extracts from case reflections and where I was reporting on written contributions to what was said in works, I introduced a comment that I was referring to notes. For example, 'I've got some notes I made here.' Such an interjection blurs the question of the addressee, and prompts the suggestion that the text addresses the reader, as well as interlocutors in the mimetic dialogue.

Step 5. I indented sections from transcripts and case reflections to distinguish between material generated through communicative interaction and solely supporting material. I make this distinction to reinforce my perspective that representing interviews for example, in such a textual manner is an act of construction, presentation and simulation, not a reflection of actual events (Rhodes, 2000).

Phase 2. The development of tag clouds leading to a discussion of the literature

The second stage is the presentation of my mimetic dialogues for an exchange between text and reader. This transforms imitative mimetic dialogue into participatory *maieutic* dialogue, sustaining co-participation. *Maieutic* dialogical texts transcend mere dramatic dialogue and presents text as a puzzle inviting participation (Leigh, 2007) by supplying further interpretive resources. I developed tag clouds to reiterate the thematic thread of each dialogue and provide readers with an interpretive resource for continuing their dialogue.

Tag clouds are a common method of visually presenting groups of words and socially organized information (Bateman *et al.*, 2008). Words are selected by a common rationale and intended to represent a feature of the group, such as frequency of use (Rivadeneira *et al.*, 2007). I use them to represent how the words of the open codes are grouped around provisional themes. This is a general rather than specific thematic picture of the dialogues in subsequent chapters. This is because tag clouds typically function to present and facilitate the seeking of general rather than specific information (Sinclair & Cardew-Hall, 2008).

The dual function tag clouds are presented at two points in this thesis. Firstly they are included below as an introductory interpretive resource for the reader but not as a proscriptive ‘road map’. They are not presented immediately prior to each dialogue as this might negate the reader’s interpretive work of entering into dialogue. Secondly the tag clouds are presented at the end of each dialogue and before a review of the literature. At the end of the *Phaedrus* Plato (1989b) reminds the

audience of a dialogue's main points. The tag clouds also remind the reader of the general themes which are the main points but the visualisations also act as a general introduction to the discussion of the literature which follows each dialogue.

The mimetic dialogue is followed by a discussion of how the literature intersects with the themes that are represented in dialogue form. I seek to sustain the plurality of perspectives and voices in the mimetic dialogues, discussing themes from art, philosophical and constructionist perspectives. Such multi-perspective interpretive discussion of research material is understood as an interpretive bricolage (Kincheloe, 2005) and is intended to offset narrow or overly reductive interpretive perspectives. However, as Beech (2010) advocates, I start the discussion of themes by focusing on how they intersect with interpretations of dialogical practice by three key interlocutors in recent debates in art, the critics Bourriaud (2002), Kester (2004) and Bishop (2004).

How I designed the tag clouds

Step 1. I arranged the provisional themes centrally down a page. In the relating dialogue I presented the themes of engagement and transformation and ethics and representation alongside each other. This was because the second theme in these pairs was an elaboration of the first and acted as a digression away from the flow of more substantial themes through the dialogue.

Step 2. I arranged the subordinate themes (derived from the open codes) around the provisional themes. I alternated between blue and green to distinguish between groupings that were closely spaced on the page. Arrangements of groupings do not reflect a strict order of progression of themes as they may be read in the dialogues. This is because the cloud is intended to present a general impression of themes and thematic relationships not a specific information structure.

Figure 1. Context tag cloud

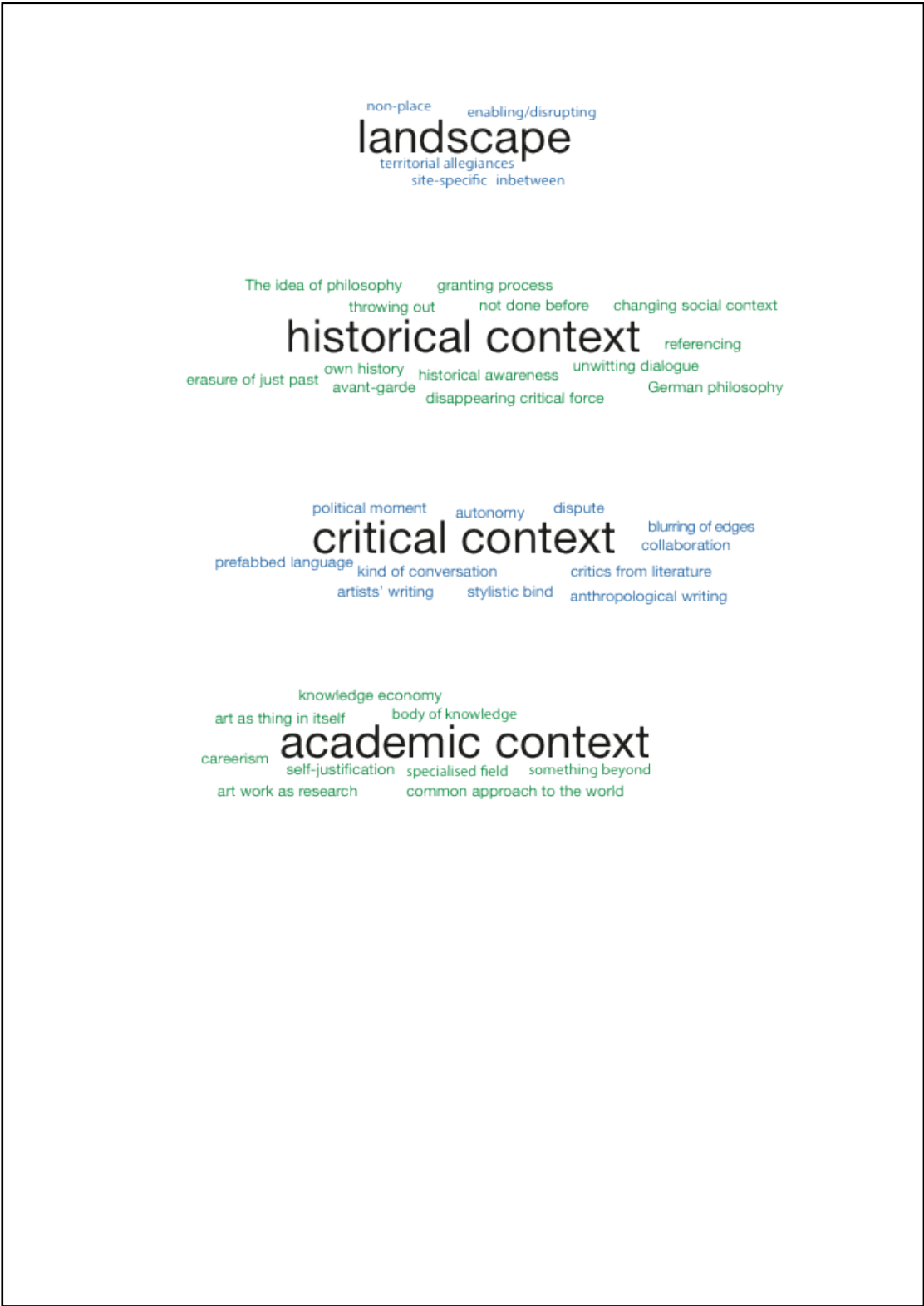


Figure 2. Meaning-making tag cloud



Figure 3. Relating tag cloud



Phase 3. How I developed *maieutic* dialogue into reflective dialogue

Lastly in stage three, I offer a discussion as reflexive dialogue. I discuss the intersection of the themes, and interpretative perspectives within the literature and how constructionist perspectives might connect with critical and philosophical perspectives. These perspectives reflect the unique web of relations of my practice and reflect Kincheloe's (2005) advice that interpretive bricolages include psychological, social, and cultural perspectives in tension with philosophical points of view. The tripartite dialogical structure (mimetic dialogue, discussion and reflection) is adopted for the three main thematic chapters. Presentation through such dialogical structuring is intended to offset the reduction of dialogue to a monological singular authorial perspective and present only a symbolic resolution to dialogue (Cossutta, 2003).

The final part of stage three is a synthetic discussion-conclusion. I consider how the process of dialogue may have changed my prior understanding and what the implications might be for art practice. This discussion addresses my broad question of how constructionist research can contribute to dialogical understanding and practice in contemporary art.

Chapter 4: Context

This chapter demonstrates the construction of dialogue by presenting a series of layers organised around the theme of the context of dialogue. Firstly, a constructed dialogue invites the reader to participate in the communicative exchange of perspectives with the aim of generating new insights, whilst simultaneously avoiding the reduction of dialogue to a quest for a singular goal or outcome. The reader is then presented with a tag cloud representation of the varied thematic tensions made apparent in the constructed dialogues. These tag clouds highlight the abstract constructed nature of thematic concerns and act as a bridge to the next layer, the discussion of the themes of the dialogue on context. In this discussion I outline the current landscape of contemporary art as a context of dialogue, talk about shifts from ideal to everyday spaces, art's altering relationship to its history, the shift away from historical projects, the disruption of critical contexts and narrow frameworks and discuss attendant shifts in our understanding of learning in the academicised context of art. The aim of the discussion is to convey a sense of how dialogical art practices are changing art's relationship to its past and to its critical contexts. Such change is related to the increasing academicisation of contemporary art and the resulting implications of definition, constraint and scholarly power which begin to suggest growing tensions between these contexts. This discussion provides a background for a dialogical reflection by the researcher on the implications of these tensions for this inquiry and mode of study, and an articulation of how this contributes to understanding and the performance of knowledge. I discuss and consider how

dialogical practice may be one means of recognising artists' imbricatedness in multiple contexts and means of sustaining tension between contexts through blending different modes of inquiry in the performance of knowledge in a manner that proposes dialogue as itself an emergent, and adaptive framework and context of practical inquiry.

Context dialogue

Mark: In one of my invitations to dialogue, the artist Simon Pope wrote about how landscapes enable and interrupt the particular kind of relationality associated with conversational exchange. Let me just read it, '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.' And I was reminded of the dialogue I did in the middle of a dual carriageway. Where someone asked me why I choose to do it on a pedestrian crossing. I mentioned the vulnerability and exposed nature of the crossing. It felt inbetween; inbetween residential areas and the art galleries, and I was interested in who would relate to the work, in the sense of who the public for The Event was and whether artists were its prime audience?

Matt: Yes, I saw the pedestrian crossing or context as maybe a non-place, and I blogged about it, 'the middle of a busy road, which has multiple semantic effects. Being one of the least conducive places for a conversation although to be heard above the traffic noise forced some intimacy, and meant that the content of speech was sometimes lost.'

Mark: Non-place?

Matt: '...a non-place as Marc Augé defines them... somewhere that inhabitants normally pass through, without territorial allegiances, in which they locate themselves primarily through relations with words.'

Mark: But that's context in a site-specific sense, maybe I'm interested in the context of contemporary art in an expanded sense. How might dialogue relate to the terrain or context of contemporary art maybe? Or is it, how might contemporary art permit or interrupt conversation? But when, 'we started talking before ... about my assumptions about contemporary art and this idea of dialogue, and immediately you picked up upon precisely one of the assumptions that I wished to explore with people like yourself, which is this idea of how contemporary art relates or doesn't relate to its own history, and I wonder if you could say a little more about that.'

Jane: 'I'm struck right now by the lack of an historical awareness. But from season to season almost, whereas people have always nodded at other people, Rauschenberg's erased De Kooning for example, but interestingly he thought to use De Kooning's name in the title. Whereas I particularly, and even in late sixties and seventies internationally there was the reinvention of different ways of making art, but the equivalent maybe to the turn of the century, with the shift of all the 'isms' and nobody was afraid to let us know what they were throwing out...'

Mark: 'In what sense? In the idea?'

Jane: '...for example, what occurs to me are people like Vito Acconci and that whole crew doing body art and it wasn't cold performance, there were these intimate self

portrait-like pieces, that were very dramatic and now we call them time-based self-referential blah-blah-blah. But they were just tough and they were intimate and Vito's grand poetry, for example, his early videos and then he started making these 8 mm films and then showed the stills from them, with personal comment etc. So this whole way of making art has now become a kind of style, to quote Marx 'in the air.' And part of the sense of meaning was that it hadn't been done before; it hadn't been tried before in that real way. And I think it really meant something at the time, to build a platform, set up a sound system, and masturbate for two weeks as an invisible piece. And if that meant something that now when you see someone nude in the gallery living the quotidian existence it feels like a revival of an earlier piece, so that people automatically, in a knee-jerk way respond and say, ah the *avant-garde*. But if you think about it that is thirty-five years old.'

Mark: 'You seem to be suggesting that with the generation of artists like Vito Acconci there was a sense of the importance of the historical context of contemporary art, but also something new, they were referencing beyond just the visual arts, for example poetry.'

Jane: 'They weren't referencing it. I think *that's* the difference. They were just... it was a kind of group force, not looking at anything else, and doing what they damn well pleased, and it is a different attitude, whereas now I think there is a sense of... there is something in the air that makes it *ok* to do, because it's been done before, so it's not quite so ferocious anymore. And yet it's important to have that guise of that original ferocity... So it is one of the things that I think keeps contemporary artists unwittingly in dialogue with history, because it's been there and been accepted. So it's ok to do, in the sense that installations now are an accepted form even... and something like that becomes a category in a granting process, you know that it's not invented.'

Mark: It's given by tradition? But there is a suggestion that tradition is not inventive? 'Can I ask you a question about this past time and recent time?'

Ben: 'Just past, yes. That comes from the Walter Benjamin. Walter Benjamin says that there is always a near something – like now we have a near sixties, – and that erases the just past which gives you some sort of true history. Because you have to make connections with what just happened in the past to have a continuity of history.'

Mark: 'Do you think that is important for how contemporary artists like the artists coming from the Slade and Goldsmith's – how they think about work – do they – do you think they can collect the things from the just past and forget about the history?'

Ben: 'No – I think they have this neo-sixties idea of – that some of them – but actually Art and Language talked about the *French disease* – I think there is the *English disease* which is linguistics, but I also think that Victor Burgin, who has become popular again... took a lot from the *French disease* – so I think that there's a conflict between the French... and of course the French – everyone is forgetting that the French took all their ideas from German philosophers. And of course that's hard

for the English to understand how important French philosophy is. And Sartre was the secretary – he spoke German because he was from Alsatia – he was the secretary of Heidegger.’

Mark: ‘Really, O.K. I’m particularly interested in the German roots as well.’

Ben: ‘Also in terms of Bertold Brecht – he took a lot from Russian formal empiricist critics like Todorov and Shklovsky.’

Mark: ‘So there’s really been this journey from German idealist philosophy through French to English.’

Ben: ‘Well, the English were fascinated, Art and Language were fascinated by Lacan and French philosophy. Lacan took a lot, first from Sartre and Sartre took a lot from Hegel and Heidegger.’

Ben: ‘But this is where I think, to answer your question [what is my work about] most of my work comes from my own readings, of my own... and not on Critical Theory. But also humour, anarchistic humour, and this is where I met the Art and Language people. Terry Atkinson, I thought... he said he was a science fiction writer. I thought the whole thing was like a kind of science fiction idea. I didn’t take it seriously at all. I actually was in the first number of *Art and Language*. The first number of *Art and Language* and I put him in touch with Sol Le Witt in the first issue. But then they came back two years later and then I met this asshole person who actually, he made up work, he didn’t do work until ’68. He was a student of Robert Mangels. Mangels told him of my work and he used to stalk me. He followed me to On Kawara’s. He told me that I was doing things in the magazine pages for free, he said you should actually do paintings and then tell everybody you are going to do magazine pages. He was totally Machiavellian, and Seth Siegelaub and people who were his partners just picked my brains and wanted to make it a big movement. The idea of philosophy is so pseudo-serious, I really hated it. I was closer to the work of On Kawara and Stanley Brown. In other words anarchistic humour was important. And I think that later Art and Language got very involved in humour but I think in certain ways they were very career driven in the beginning.’

Mark: Someone talked about contemporary artists being in dialogue with history, and one of my assumptions about dialogue is that it renews, it extends and it’s transcendent. But the sense that I’m getting about your feelings about a lot of contemporary artists that, maybe I’m drawing a parallel that isn’t there between that brute force, that newness, and that’s what’s kind of lacking, that on-going life energy, it feels contained and it feels repeated.

Jane: ‘Well, I’m sure there is an extension of what was before, because the context is so different right now, socially, and with computers etc., etc. but I do think that it has become much more of a marketing ploy, a commercial packaging, of what art, I don’t want to oversimplify it but, what art looks like and should be about, and now it’s become packaged in a certain way.’

Mark: So the context of art is how it is packaged? 'Do you mean the rise of things like frieze and art fairs, biennials, which seem to me to dictate the style that we should be producing or what's the current theme – there seems to be a relationship between style and theme.'

Jane: 'I also think that with the gradual disappearance of a critical force, and critics... kept the dialogue alive. I think very powerfully. And I saw it disappear, because critics then became advertisers as opposed to being political partisans and passionate, as Bob Blair would have them be. They became marketing agents, and then as they moved away from that centre, the curator seems to have moved in there.'

Mark: 'You're suggesting contemporary art had a critical context? And what do you mean by critical. Because there's the word 'critic' that we might also want to talk about 'criticism' in that sense.'

Jane: 'I'm not sure about all this terminology, but I remember when Art Forum was a powerful force, and it allowed dispute within its ranks and it was not tied at all really to the marketplace, and it was much more 'did you hear what so-and-so did?' that kind of a conversation.'

Mark: The context of contemporary art was a conversation. But in a number of things you said, 'there has been this idea of the difficulty of progression and refinement and almost that might parallel the idea of what we have now which is the refinement of style, what I think Ramsden called art's Modernist stylistic bind. I think it was Ramsden.'

Jane: 'I don't know his name.'

Mark: 'Mel Ramsden, he was part of Art and Language.'

Jane: 'Oh yes.'

Mark: I think he was talking about the academy's role, because the academy seeks autonomy and refinement, and so I wonder if... I wonder how you understand critics to have existed in that time.

Jane: 'Critics were not generally academics back then, most of them, for example, David Levi Strauss, who's a good friend of mine, has a Masters in literature, he doesn't have a PhD. Almost everyone I know writing does not have a PhD and they were not part of an academic formation. Laurence Salway, when he was around. And so I think the critic was maybe from literature or something else but not trained like these new programmes now coming up.'

Mark: 'Yes, but implicit in that idea is that art can be discussed by people outside of art, that art wasn't at that moment an entirely autonomous thing, and art isn't entirely an autonomous thing.'

Jane: 'I think there have always been people from literature writing, being critics of art. I think there is a long tradition of that. I think what's perhaps different that happened from say the seventies, is it's possible to have people from marketing now and business writing criticism, and business guiding criticism. And more recently... and I think fortunately we have anthropologists writing which is quite a useful tool.'

Mark: But was it just critics writing?

Jane: No, 'I think my generation of artists frequently wrote about what was going on and so did the people before, like Don Judd, Robert Morris all those people. Theirs were more dogmatic or doctrinaire writings I would say and certainly the conceptual people, Art & Language had a voice for what they were doing.'

Mark: But you were saying something about the conversation including different perspectives the literary, the critical, even anthropological. Did that have an influence on practices?

Jane: Well, 'I did study in Italy in the early seventies and there was a blurring of edges so I worked with conceptual architects and scientists, there was this idea of working together and collaborating and doing something no-one had ever seen before. For the fun of it. That was the criterion. For the fun of it. I was living in Florence and hanging out with..., it was a very political moment also, in the world, and in Italy.'

Mark: The political seems consistently part of the contemporary art context. The dialogue I did on the crossroads was part of The EVENT, which was accompanied by 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... and these talks questioned the autonomy of artist led activities in wider political contexts. But it seems like a political contextualising, as opposed to a political moment. But you weren't doing politically motivated works?

Jane: Well, 'In Florence in the early seventies, there was this desire to...there was a group of architects, Superstudio working in Italy, it is the post Archigram groups that were flourishing, a bunch of student types still, and we got this idea of putting up a big inflatable over the glorious night scene of Florence; and then we projected slides, and no one knew what anyone was bringing, and we projected them onto this big inflatable over the city, and it was marvellous apparition which was filmed and everybody photographed and probably a drug moment too, I don't really remember but there was no reason to do it, [except] "wouldn't that be fun to see what it looks like" and there wasn't the idea we're doing an art piece, let's get the press there, there are some art dealers there.'

Mark: 'The sense that it wasn't necessarily an art piece, in that sort of period and with artists like Vito, is it talking about art that is the problem? It seems to be

somehow that you are suggesting when you start try to refining it that's almost like marketing it, that's like trying to fix the meaning.'

Jane: 'Well I think for me it depends for me on the motives, and I guess I find the language being used, to talk about art prefabbed right now and obfuscating in general. I mean I spent moments with Andre discussing this too where someone will say "will you contextualise that please" and actually my friend Leah had just done a whole big essay on this, various contexts in which you can discuss one detail in a painting.'

Mark: So art has multiple contexts. But you seem to be suggesting, there is still a sort of *lingua franca* of discussing art, maybe art as research, or as knowledge production?

Peter: Well, 'in an academic context you know that as researchers you share something in common at some point. Once you opt into this way of working at some level there is a common approach to the world, even if it is only the sequencing of events. And an understanding that you will have specialism, first of all you operate with a specialist language and set of tools on the world. And the world responds to you in a particular way when you do that.'

Nguyen: Yes but, 'You talk to artists today, young artists, you get so bored. They never read a book. Forget about poetry. They obsess about their careers as artists. They bore me to tears. You have no idea. I am very supportive of them. Those I like, I always try to get them to read poetry and see art from the past, encourage them to go to museums, things like that. A specialised field is deadly.'

Mark: But a second ago, there was mention of common approaches and ways of working? Does the context of art represent some kind of common ground, increasingly perhaps between different economies of practice and research?

Jason: Hmm, 'My former chair of my department said that he absolutely considered our work to be research. This is the chair of an art department, which is bizarre and unthinkable in the UK, and I tried to say well, it's not exactly the work, but it's the way you frame it and the way you consider it and how you can actually determine the meaning that comes out of that. How you disseminate that and by that you can begin to fit that inside a fellow body of creation of knowledge, which is un-disseminated, even before you start to hit all the problems about speaking about the body of knowledge.'

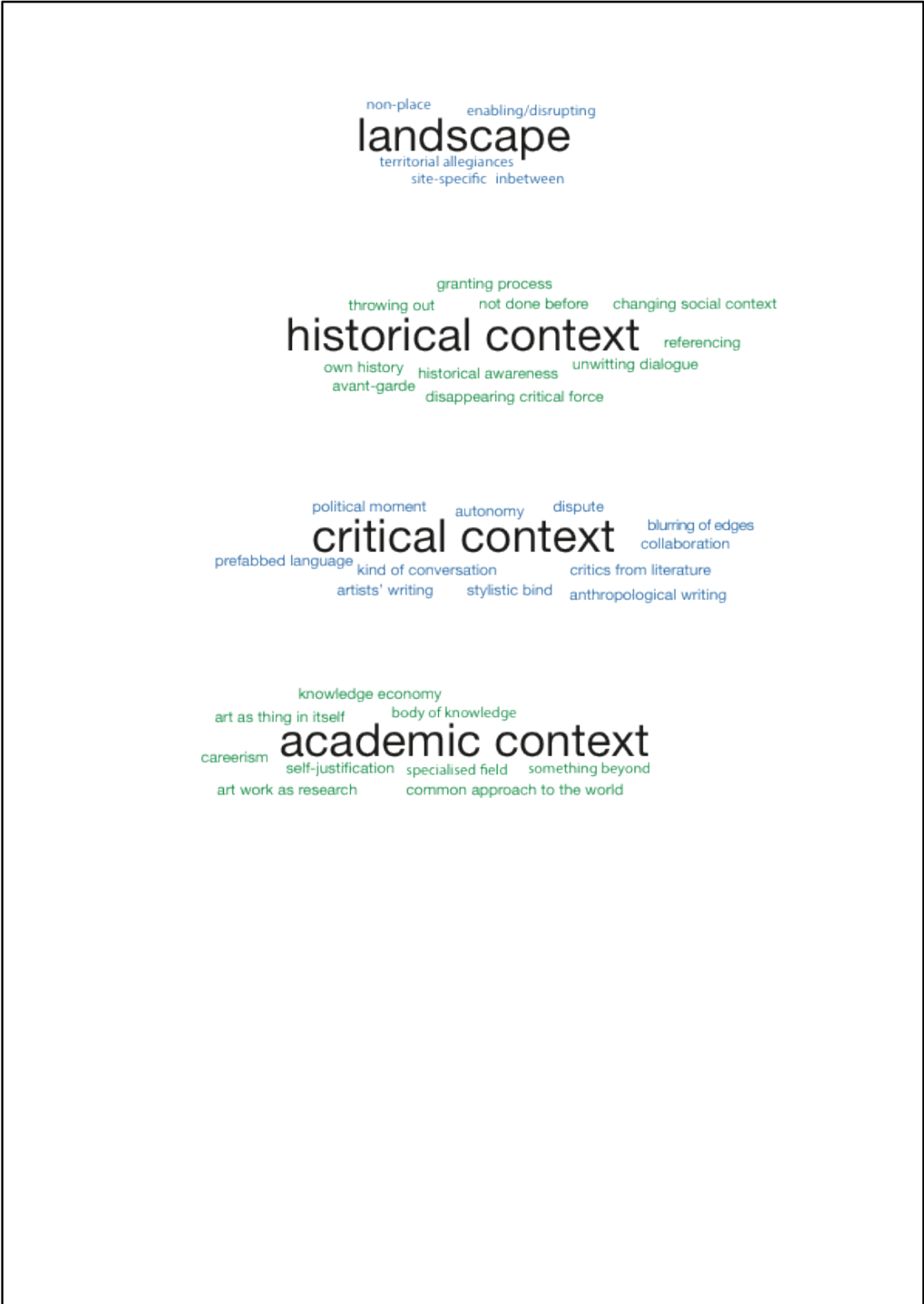
Mark: 'You trip over the body?'

Jason: 'He didn't even want to see the body. There was no elephant in the room. And then on another level a colleague who would very much view it in terms of, that it's not research, that art is a thing in itself. It's self-justifying in a way. You know the value of art lies in the art. It doesn't lie within its attribution as being an elder within a knowledge economy for example. And I think that's partially influenced by

the fact that we are here in New York where we don't need a research economy. We've got a perfectly bloody good economy.'

Mark: '*Had* a perfectly good economy.' But I find the idea of art as a thing in itself tricky and that it's unknowable. I think I identify somewhat with something Clive Cazeaux (2008) wrote, '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...'

Figure 4 Context tag cloud



Contexts: A discussion of the literature

The context of dialogical art emphasises situated meaning making, changing historical relationships, disrupted critical perspectives, and an increasingly academicised landscape. In this section I discuss four contextual characteristics for the interpretation of dialogical art practices. Firstly, I discuss the shift towards practices of situated meaning-making in the current landscape of contemporary art. Secondly, I look at how dialogical art is changing contemporary art's relationship to historical contexts. Thirdly, I talk about how such practices are disrupting the critical context of contemporary art. Lastly I address how such practices shift our understanding of learning in the academicised context of current art. My discussion draws significantly on the work of Bourriaud (2002, 2004), Kester (2004, 2011) whose work has been fundamental in expanding debates about relational, and dialogical art practices since the 1990s. The work of these two authors is offset against their most important interlocutor, Bishop (2004, 2006) who is broadly critical of dialogical practices, as insufficiently antagonistic and oppositional in their critical outlook.

The current landscape of contemporary art as context of dialogue

In the 1990s the practical sphere of art became seen as increasingly relational, socially engaged and imbricated in the contested realm of the everyday. The traditional notion of art's separate status was seen as preserved only by modernist art

institutions (Kester, 1997). Increasingly the social turn in art which had been on-going since the 1960s, presented art in a Bourdieuan perspective as merely one social arena amongst many, defined by power struggles and attempts to preserve and change the social world of art practice (Bourriaud, 2002).

In the more relationally focused realm of art, inter-subjective relationships were proposed not only as the environment and setting for art, but increasingly the prime concern of contemporary art practices (Bourriaud, 2002). In his influential book, 'Relational Aesthetics', Bourriaud (2002) argues art's new relational perspective is inextricably linked to open and democratic dialogue as both a starting point and goal of relational artworks, and an ideal relational context. Shortly after 'Relational Aesthetics' the critic Grant Kester (2004) used the term dialogic to characterise more activist works. These socially engaged art works, also termed new genre public arts by the artist Suzanne Lacy (2010), were proposed as a more egalitarian collective process of meaning-making, and the transformation of micro-social relationships of art in a manner that reinforced the contemporary social bond.

Many of the practices brought together under Bourriaud's (2002) relational framework were criticised as too detached from everyday contexts, and overly generous in their goal of consensual coexistence (Bishop, 2004). Relational aesthetic works often sited in gallery contexts, sought as Bourriaud (2002) suggests, to contribute to our understanding of artistic behaviour. So conceived, exhibitions as relational and dialogical spaces Bourriaud (2002, p.16) argues, 'encourage inter-human commerce that differs from the restrictive and imposed communication of everyday human-inter-relations.' This presented the context of dialogue as akin to a

Habermasian ‘ideal speech situation’ and thus lent credence to Bishop’s (2004) criticisms that such practices remained too detached from the tensions, conflicts and power struggles of everyday contexts. Such practices idealised dialogue as a democratic site, whereas Bishop (2004) proposed activating critical democratic participation required a relational landscape of antagonism and conflict in contrast to the naïve, vulnerable, politically instrumentalised context of ideal dialogue.

The shift of dialogical practices from ideal to everyday social spaces

Many practices that operate more directly in everyday social spaces have been characterised as activist and dialogic art by Kester (2004). In this activist disposition, artists increasingly address social and political problems through facilitating a dialogical and collective meaning-making process aimed at activating the creative and transformational potential of art. Such practices reflect a shift in contemporary art towards the everyday as site of collaborative, collective and participatory approaches (Stott & Kester, 2006). Dialogical practices transform and establish new relationships between artists, the social world, and other fields of knowledge within contemporary art (Kester, 2013). Bourriaud (2002) notes however that this is how contemporary art converts relationships into predominantly a political issue.

Socially engaged practices located in more everyday contexts were characterised as quasi-ethnographic by the critic Hal Foster (1996) who was concerned about their transformation of the site of art. He argued that such practices functioned with a quasi-ethnographic paradigm which assumes the site of art is a site of political

transformation, and is located elsewhere and in 'the field of the other.' This motivates artists to move on to new and supposedly other places which symbolise freer access to the truth, and the possibility of more authentic and political interaction. Foster's (1996) suggestion is that artists take 'art truth' and deliver it elsewhere to sites conceived of as outside art and as authentically true. In Foster's (1996) view the near total globalisation of the social realm meant that art increasingly required a greater sense of its complex imbrication instead of a paradigm constructed on a sense of 'outsidedness', and a splitting between the artist, their knowledge, wisdom and insight, and 'them others' that need it. Foster's critique however ignores quasi-ethnographic constructionist perspectives which reject a stance of outsidedness.

The articulation of a more complex sense of artist's imbricatedness was enhanced by Miwon Kwon's (2004) reappraisal of the meaning of site-specificity in contemporary art. Kwon (2004) recognises that postmodernist perspectives had increasingly emphasised local particularities in opposition to the homogenising and colonising dynamic of modernist globalised capitalism. This meant that the location of contemporary art was increasingly being viewed and presented through site-specific practices as an 'intertextually coordinated, multiply located, discursive field of operation', (Kwon, 2004, p.159). The intertextual emphasis elides the sense of bodily imbricatedness.

The conceptualisation of the context of dialogue as separate from the constraints of everyday relating and communication (Bourriaud, 2002) promotes a view of the relational landscape of dialogical art as rational and aimed at political agreement,

whilst simultaneously playing down the emotional, and vulnerable psychological aspects of dialogical relations. Later emphasis on sites of political activism and transformation by socially engaged practices (Kester, 2004) has led to criticism that artists split the contexts of dialogue and ‘unwittingly’ find the art meaning in sites of more authentic other meaning. Kwon (2004) however argues that the emergence of an alternative contextual frame for dialogical practices which can convey a more imbricated, local and situated sense of the site of artistic practice is limited by the current dominance of the postmodern, post-structural and critical theory context of contemporary art.

Dialogical practices alter art’s relationship to its historical context

Dialogical art represents artists’ changing relationships to historical frames of meaning. These changes are reflected in debates which oscillate between a preoccupation with art’s relationship to its modernist past and concern about art’s expanding relationships which are a feature of its present cultural situation (Bourriaud, 2002). In this view, dialogical and relational discourse can thus be seen as the re-construction of art’s relationship to its recent past, and historical narrative. One of the main implications of this re-construction is a shift away from the notion that art is a realm governed by the mechanical progress of history (Bourriaud, 2002), perhaps in part because postmodernism has encouraged artists to become sceptical of linear historical narratives (Kester, 2004).

A useful account of current art's changing historical relationship is offered by Bourriaud's (2002) relational perspectives. In this view, art's modern era is seen as based on conflict, separation and contrast. Broadly speaking, modernist artists and theorists are characterised as critical of the dominance of collective community over the individual, and emphasise the new through a linguistic subversion of old forms. These criticisms were driven by the values and desire for the emancipation of individuals and opposition to utilitarian and authoritarian perspectives. But within modernism these aims were sought through two contrasting routes. Either people would be liberated through rational technological progress which would result in less ignorance, or people would be liberated through irrationality and spontaneity (Bourriaud, 2002). Whilst technological progress was associated with means end rationality some *avant-garde* perspectives rejected an art based in the everyday, as they associated this with the means end rationality of the bourgeois (Bürger, [1974] 2006). Other 20th century *avant-garde* movements such as Surrealism and later Situationism preferred the second emancipatory path of liberating spontaneity and irrationality. The *avant-garde* has limitations as an interpretive lens of current dialogical practices as it is largely 'based on opposition between mind and body, reason and desire, and somatic and cognitive experience', (Kester, 2004, p.89), which convey a reductive model of dialogical discursive interaction.

The preoccupation with modernist perspectives has not receded however, as modernist values have not disappeared but been adapted (Bourriaud, 2002). For example, the Surrealist practices of montage and recontextualisation continue today as a *modus operandi* in many conversational practices (Kester, 2004) and Situationist perspectives are played out in continuing disputes about the alienating effects of

spectacular representation (Bourriaud, 2002) versus supposedly more direct and dialogical modes of artistic engagement.

Current art may however be witnessing a gradual distancing from modernist perspectives fuelled by current dialogical and interactional modes of art which Kester (2004, p.6) suggests are ‘antithetical to dominant beliefs in both modernist and postmodernist art and art theory.’ In particular dialogical artists reject the modernist *avant-garde* belief that collective and shared discursive systems are necessarily violently objectifying, and that it is the role of artists to shock and dislodge people from existing modes of representation and any stable sense of self (Kester, 2004). These two pillars of modern art theory reflect modernist art’s broad anti-discursivity. This opposition towards discursive systems led artists to adopt either a stance of ambivalence towards discursive understanding, or a negating disruptive and corrective stance. The latter stance was based on the assumptions that recipients of the work of art have an intrinsically flawed conceptual and perceptual apparatus and artists are superior critical beings better equipped to penetrate and remedy the confusion of being a modern subject (Kester, 2004). While artists may develop an expert understanding of specialist themes and issues through practice, the dismissive assumption that other participants in the meaning making process of art are intrinsically conceptually flawed has not been assigned to the historical scrap heap.

Dialogical practices shift away from rather than oppose art's historical project

Bourriaud (2002) suggests a less oppositional relationship among some postmodern artists who continue to locate their practice in the residue of art's tradition of historical modernity. His view is that artists are not trying to repeat the forms of modernism, or its claims, neither are they working towards a complete revolution in the inter-human realm. This represents a shift away from the historical progressive task of completely reconstructing the world through the development of new, imaginary utopian realities. Postmodern artists may simply make minor adjustments, much as Lyotard (1992) argued (Bourriaud, 2002). Making minor adjustments allow artists to focus on learning better ways to manage the demands of the present world (Rorty, 1980). Thus some contemporary artists are shifting away from identifying with historical hopes for large-scale revolutionary change as these are now seen as impossible and illusionary. Instead postmodern artists adopt imitative strategies that seek to create temporary, nomadic and awkward micro-utopias in a manner proposed by Guattari (1984) (Bourriaud, 2002).

This however is one of the limitations of the postmodern framing of such practices by critics. Framing artists' aims for dialogue as seeking to create micro-utopias sustains the idealistic rhetoric of marginality which has been characterised as regressive by postmodernism. Another limitation of the debate is the characterisation of dialogical practices as imitative strategies. In this view works which do not adopt a grand spectacular presentation are interpreted through the lens of poor and experimental art of the 1960s and '70s (Bourriaud, 2002) which they appear to resemble and reconnect with. As Kaprow (2006, p.102) noted, historical expectations

can cripple the vitality of works and ‘render them crude representations of past formats, rather than reflecting on possible new experimental insights, or changes to the way the work of art may be perceived.’

Artists seem stuck in a historical trap, for to attempt to reconfigure their relationship to art’s historical past can appear like a disqualification of the past in preference for the future which was a feature of Modernist art (Bourriaud, 2002). Neither can a reframing of relationships to art’s historical context be productively expressed as an end of art and art history in the sense that an idealistic view of history presents it. Hegel’s declaration that art was a thing of the past simply reflects the significant devaluing of art, and its shift of priority from projecting religious aura to projecting capital aura (Groys, 2010). What dialogical practices may bring to an end is the idealistic view of history. As Shusterman (1987, p.659) suggests, abandoning the narrative of the globalised historical progress of art ‘both the need for convulsive revolutions of progress and the threat of art’s end evaporate.’ What takes its place is the game of constructing the meaning of art, the constant re-enactment, and renewal of art in pragmatic, constructionist and discursive ways by artists and others (Bourriaud, 2002). It is through this expansive process that dialogical and relational art activates concerns about art’s ever-diverging relationships, and its diffuse relationship to its recent past self. Instead of dealing with art as a past figure of style, relational and dialogical practices shift the emphasis of art onto a process of grappling with our understanding of events and relationships in the present (Bourriaud, 2002). Each new social setting in which art is enacted announces a new form of life within the on-going game of art which in turn alters conceptions of art history. The linear narrative of art’s historical progress narrative shifts into a

conversation about the endless expanding set of inter-human relationships illustrated by different classes of objects and practices (Bourriaud, 2002). Or as Kester (2011) suggests, art history becomes merely another interpretive resource in competition with the myriad interpretive resources various participants who have lived through the experience of works of art, have at their disposal.

Within art's current expanding framework, increasingly many artists do not rely on or present their practice as the re-interpretation of a particular past artistic movement or project (Bourriaud, 2002). Historical reference becomes one vocabulary amongst many in the language game of contemporary art (Bourriaud, 2002). Nevertheless, the use of historical vocabulary can create the same limiting and transference expectations that Kaprow (2006) warned against. Relational art as Bourriaud (2002, p.44) construes it, 'is not the revival of any movement, nor is it the comeback of any style. It arises from an observation of the present and from a line of thinking about the fate of artistic activity.' This stance does not ignore that the sphere of human relations as site of the work of art was a prime preoccupation, theoretical tool and alibi of modern artists. It is simply the understanding of human interactivity is seen as the main characteristic, starting point and goal, of current artistic activity which seeks dialogue (Bourriaud, 2002).

The debate about how the context of dialogical practices alters art's historical relationship and sense of self seems paradoxically bound up with the tendency to ground everything in historical terms. In this light postmodern interpretations of such practices seem merely a historical tweaking and watered down imitation of modernist agendas and aims. Bourriaud's (2002) bold suggestion that historical

reference is merely a discursive ingredient and part of a present day vocabulary risks sustaining the postmodern trap, and keeps artists bound to transferential expectations of art. What may remain is an on-going and uncertain transformation of art's relationship with its historiography, which may parallel similar uncertainty and change in artists' relationship to theory and critical frameworks (Kester, 2011).

Dialogical practices disrupt the critical context of contemporary art

Dialogue as discourse and practice has not only led to changes in artists' relationships to their historical context, it is also disrupting the critical context of current art. Bhabha (1998, p.40) an early proponent of conversational and dialogical art, argued that the practice of art 'requires acknowledgement in the language of criticism.' Yet more recent critical perspectives around dialogical practices suggest the reverse might increasingly be true, the language of criticism requires acknowledgement in the practice of art. As Kester (2011) notes, this may be more and more the case as dialogical and relational artists seek alternative critical perspectives to the current homogenising critical framework of much contemporary art. Specifically, he expresses concern that current art critical discourse, dominated by postmodern and poststructuralist perspectives, has 'achieved near canonical authority in the contemporary art world' (p.65). It remains unclear whether artists turn to dialogue because of cultural shifts within criticism itself, or because contemporary artists are adopting alternative critical and theory based approaches to practice (Kester, 2011). What Rogoff (2008) observes, however, is the beginnings of a shift in criticism towards to a more uncertain, imbricated and performative critical

frameworks which are doing away with an earlier distinctions between the creative, productive, applicative and critical processes of knowledge production (p. 143).

Much of the current critical context of dialogue remains a space in which art critics and historians import theories from varying traditions as a set of provisional principles for the interpretation of contemporary works of art (Kester 2013). Within this contemporary critical domain, writing on art, remains dependent on continental philosophy and critical theory for new ideas and interpretive themes (Kester, 2013). Postmodern perspectives however, have disrupted the notion of aesthetic judgement (Bishop, 2004) leading to a shift in contemporary art from a formal to an ideological medium (Kester, 2013) which has seen political, moral and ethical interpretive preoccupations displace more traditional aesthetic concerns (Bishop, 2004).

The postmodern literary critic of art as ideology adopts the role of disrupting and estranging in order to confound any suggestion of closure or naturalisation of meaning (Kester, 2013). In so doing they adopt a stance similar to the *avant-garde* artist tasked with disrupting the ideological constraints and normative assumptions of the recipient of modernist art. In this transference of roles the artist assumes the position of hapless individual of constrained perceptual ability. The irony is that this postmodern stance towards criticism is increasingly assumed to be the natural condition and framework of criticism. Yet Kester (2013) sees this textual critical paradigm as reductive as it offers overly behavioural, mechanistic and rationalist conceptualisations of the dialogical work of art as a process of meaning making. Kester (2013, p.7) argues ‘when we are dealing with projects in which the viewer or participant answers back and in which those responses have the potential to reshape

and transform the work itself over time, we require a more nuanced understanding of reception', and production.

Tensions arise however as artists adopting relational and dialogical practices seek alternative critical frameworks. This may be a move by artists to free themselves from conceptual constraints. Although Bourriaud (2002) proposes relational artists seek first to free themselves from the constraints and ideology of mass communication first, and through this to develop alternative critical models.

The framework of 'Relational Aesthetics' reaffirms a belief in the necessity of the acknowledgement of art by critics, and Bourriaud (2002, p.7) maintains that it is the critic's task of recreating 'the complex set of problems that arise in a particular period or age' and evaluating the various answers that art practice proposes. Yet the framework of relational art has been criticised as watering down critique, conflating an artwork's openness to reinterpretation with a radical instability of the work of art (Bishop, 2005). The constant flux and changeable identity of the work of art challenges the notion of critical discernment of art works (Bishop, 2004) as it destabilises and throws open the criteria of judgement and taste. Similarly problematic is relational art's avowal of openness, which opposes the belief that contexts must have demarcated, fixed and specific limits (Bishop, 2004). Clear and restrictive contextual and critical boundaries maintain a dynamic of exclusion and are necessary for the facilitation of antagonism, Bishop's (2004) preferred critical dynamic for socially engaged artworks.

Foster (2004) is similarly concerned that discursivity in relational art tends to leave contradiction out of dialogue in favour of overly convivial interpretations of dialogue. The suspicion of 'Relational Aesthetics' and its dialogical discursivity is that it is a move towards a post critical culture of art after theory (Foster, 2004). This assumes however that all criticism is naturally based on a logic of contradiction, which cannot permit paradox. Gillick (cited in Baldessari *et al.*, 2007) suggests whether one leans towards interpretations of art as based on contradiction and dissent may simply depend on how comfortable a person is with the dominant logic of art's critical discourse. Concerns about a 'post-critical' culture might simply reflect parallel concerns about the end of art, and may be a reflection of an end to traditional monopolies of meaning making due to changing fashions. As Eagleton (2003) observes, we are seeing an end to the age of high theory as critical practices change and seek new thematic occupations. Foster's complaint conveys the sense that the forceful authority of traditional art criticism is being disempowered as artists move away from seeing themselves as subjects of the separate realm of art meaning governed by distant critics and more as inhabitants of the eclectic critical landscape of culture (Bourriaud, 2002).

Culture is eclectic as it is not one singular context but multiple intersecting contexts. Artists who conceive of themselves in a broader more eclectic cultural context than the traditional separate realm of art, may seek to work in and understand how these contexts intersect. Dialogue is used by artists as a means of constructing a new art context within existing social and community contexts. This approach draws on the Bakhtinian notion of dialogical conversation as an overlapping context, and locus of exchange of different points of view and meanings (Kester, 2004). Yet some activist

dialogical works construe the context of dialogue as art as a way of facilitating communication, which frees participants from the communicative demands of their habitual institutional or official contexts. Such dialogical contexts are proposed as insulating participants from immediate media scrutiny in a manner reminiscent of Habermasian ‘ideal speech situations’. In such works, the media occupy the external locus of evaluation that Bourriaud (2002) sees as the place of the critic tasked to judge the answers to questions that art proposes. Yet the characterisation of dialogical and conversational contexts as neo-ideal speech situations isolated from external critical scrutiny has limitations. Firstly, ideal speech situations convey an overly idealistic interpretation of dialogue as the site of rational consensus. Secondly, it is questionable whether such contexts can ever fully isolate participants from uncomfortable critical exposure. Thirdly, the isolationist perspective reinforces rhetorical demands for external critical evaluation by excluding critics in attempting to insulate participants from potentially disruptive critical participants.

Dialogical methodologies disrupt narrow critical frameworks

The methodologies traditionally employed by exterior art criticism may struggle to fully grasp certain aspects of dialogical projects (Kester, 2004). This claim is not simply recognition that dialogical works may not satisfy the critic’s sensibilities or desire for sensory or cognitive stimulation, nor is it a defence against such works being dismissed as non-art (Kester, 2004). Often the political and activist dimensions of dialogical works are privileged over traditional aesthetic criteria. This may result in critical interpretations adopting narrow evaluative political criteria of a work’s

political effect, or identifying a work's political complicity with other political agendas as a means of dismissing its propositional claims (Kester, 2004). It may be in the self-interest of critics to reduce debates about recent dialogical practices to narrow concerns of ideal modes of political communication (Kwon, 2004). What is lost however in such narrowed critical debates is the sense of complexity, doubt and uncertainty that characterise the experience of artists working dialogically in such field-based projects (Kwon, 2004).

In contrast to the acknowledging and validating role ascribed critics by Bourriaud (2002) dialogical works are better served by a close analysis of the interrelated moments of interaction and discussion within dialogical projects (Kester, 2004). Enacted through a co-participatory approach this might create something closer to Gerz's (2004) notion of public authorship which is a discursive critical context that may include artworld ideas, but does not directly address 'artworld' critique. Instead, public authorship seeks to involve a lot of people in an on-going dialogue, whilst remaining open to the appeal of artworld cultural meanings. Gerz's (2004) public authorship suggests a critical context in which the work of criticism is shared with participants in discursive dialogical interactions. Such moves towards soliciting the interaction and critical access of publics to works of art have been met by hostility by modern critics (Kester, 2004). For example, Bishop (2005) is concerned that works that rely on direct participation and experience for critical interpretations question the validity of historical evaluations of dialogical works.

These problems of the relative validity of written history are at least as old as Herodotus. The fall-back position for critics is to reiterate the traditional anti-

discursive point of view which highlights the compromises in all attempts to communicate or represent external or shared realities (Kester, 2004). The effect in highlighting the flawed nature of communication is to promote the need for authoritative critical interpretations for an uncomprehending public.

Kester (2004) argues for the development of alternative methodological approaches, which would reconfigure the critical frame of dialogue and challenge the limitations of abstract theorisation. A more situated methodology would highlight the perspective that the theorist is also a socially and politically situated participant, albeit one in the expanded conversational sphere of such works (Kester, 2004). Such a critical reconfiguration may be happening, which is beginning to force critics to recognise their own imbrication in cultural moments and projects, but also forcing them to recognise the performative nature of critical actions and taking a stance towards a work of art (Rogoff, 2008). Dialogue is shifting criticism by binding it up in the complex process of dialogical meaning making and creativity. The implication is that criticism moves from the sense of finding fault to a more uncertain ground of examining the underlying assumptions at play in critical creativity (Rogoff, 2008). The provocative suggestion of such a shift is that critics may increasingly appear to occupy the position of artists. The process of change may yet be obstructed by people who assume the exterior and destabilising criticism prevalent in postmodern and poststructuralist critical perspectives is the natural essence of art's critical context. Dialogical perspectives must sustain the sense that change is possible and remind artists that traditional as well as the dialogical critical frameworks of analysis are only potential frameworks of meaning amongst many available to contemporary artists (Kester, 2004).

Dialogical practices shift our understanding of learning in the academicised context of current art

Dialogical practices are altering conceptualisations of the sites of learning of contemporary art, and emphasising tensions within art's increasingly academicised landscape. This is leading to changes in art's relationship to academic and learning contexts and but also altering our understanding of how dialogical art may effect learning and its contexts.

Relational art practices which stem from and aim for dialogue, question the traditional art institutional maintenance of the perspective that art objects are most important and excuse all methods, and the goal of art justifies questionable ethical means and petty intellectualism (Bourriaud, 2002). This past attitude of art is preserved in academic attitudes which cling to obsolete forms and signs (Bourriaud, 2002). Dialogical practices question this attitude through furthering art's shift away from the preoccupation and goal of producing and analysing objects of traditional academic art. Kester (2011) suggests this shift in preoccupations, means that dialogical projects increasingly need to adopt non-traditional methodologies and techniques such as, field-research, participant-observation and interviews. These in turn may require analytical frameworks that go beyond those developed for traditionally visual art (Bishop, 2012).

The problem arises that many of the methodologies, frameworks and techniques associated with dialogical art are often associated with the social sciences. Art practices that have sought to incorporate social-science frameworks have provoked

anxieties about the interdisciplinary diffusion of art. This leads to a sense of a conflicted relationship towards such perspectives. For example, Bishop (2012, p.7) argues that ‘from a disciplinary perspective, any art engaging with society and the people in it demands a methodological reading that is, at least in part, sociological’ and an engagement with concepts more familiar to the social sciences. Yet Bishop (2012) still privileges the abstract reflections of political philosophy, which she finds a more valuable framework for critical evaluation of dialogical projects.

Foster (1996) has argued for art’s critical and interpretive practices to adopt a framework which reflects a greater sense of imbrication, yet he has expressed strong concerns about what he characterises as the development of quasi-ethnographic art. Artists seeking to develop a practice of critical fieldwork grounded in the everyday increasingly identify with anthropological perspectives, but for Foster (1996) this is the external seduction of art with potentially unrealised consequences. As art increasingly spills over into the traditional preserve of anthropology, the expanded field of culture, Foster (1996) suggests artists face two risks. Firstly, art’s quasi-ethnographic critiques are vulnerable to co-option by cultural institutions and community organising institutions wishing to promote their own ideal values. The second risk is that such practices evade critique of institutions altogether (Foster, 1996). The concern of such critical perspectives seems to be that art practices and inquiry in the cultural sphere, which identify with ethnographic methodologies, risk sidelining postmodern art and its critical perspectives. Post-modern art and criticism compete with anthropology over definitions and interpretations of the cultural sphere. Yet it is anthropology which increasingly arbitrates in the interdisciplinary field of cultural work (Foster, 1996). The turn towards other disciplines in the

development and analysis of socially orientated art practices is seen as necessary, yet Bishop (2012) believes the interdisciplinary momentum must be motivated by the aims and content of art. This ignores the sense that much academic art is already imbricated and interwoven into interdisciplinarity at an institutional level, so assessing how interdisciplinarity would be motivated solely by art perspectives in isolation seems an impossible question.

The turn towards the ethnographic in dialogical art may be less a matter of seduction by other perspectives, than a reflection of art's growing interdependence and exchange with the rest of the academy, and Kester (2011) argues, the wider institutionalisation of theory. Yet this process of embedding theory into wider social institutions places artists in a conflicted position relative to the wider dominant social order. On the one hand, artists are dependent on the social order for its financial patronage of academic and cultural work, while on the other hand, artists and academics are conceived of as occupying an external stance of critical distance towards the normative conventions of dominant social orders (Kester, 2011). Within this bind the academic artist may face conflicting expectations and roles, reinforcing the institution and its authority within the dominant social order, while being expected to act as an external critic of the system and its normative conventions (Kester, 2011).

Yet within the system of contemporary art, the dominant postmodern and poststructuralist art critical perspectives critical of normative conventions have themselves become so normalised to the point of seeming to naturalise their foundational assumptions (Kester (2013). This reduces art to either an illustration of

a particular theoretical concept and core value of the dominant theoretical perspective, or limits art practice to constrained expressions about discourses of power through narrowly proscribed tools (Kester, 2013). Despite this Bishop (2004) argues that many academics still seem reluctant to shift debates away from the narrow political agendas, and dismiss art that veers off topic as superficial or naively complicit.

The expansion of the educational context and its perspectives in art has been fuelled by increasing numbers of courses and the adoption of pedagogical modes of presentation in dialogical works. This expansion of educational perspectives has led to the reignition of debates about the form of knowledge production in art (Groys, 2010). The increasingly academicised landscape of art creates tensions with traditional *avant-garde* conceptualisations of art and its rejection of the notion of mastery of a specific form of knowledge. The conflict of academic and specific art knowledge versus unspecific practices, which reject the notion of command of a particular skill or knowledge questions how artists should operate as professionals (Groys, 2010) within an academic context. This is leading to less heroic, and more ambiguously conceptualised notions of art as an educational sphere. An ambiguous articulation of art as process of educational access allows participants to develop their own questions and preoccupations in a manner that co-produces the field, rather than forcing artists simply to react to questions imposed by current rhetoric (Rogoff, 2010). Interpreted in the extreme however, this would seem to propose a continuing relativising of the art educational sphere.

This change in the educational sphere of art enacted by dialogical approaches is leading to shifts in the learning process of art, and the displacement of a traditional style of art education. The traditional approach to learning in art reflects what Freire (1996) characterised as the banking style of education. Kester (2004, p.10) interprets this mode of education as a process ‘in which the artist deposits an expressive content into a physical object, to be withdrawn later by the viewer’. Instead dialogical projects enact a more collaborative, performative, interactional, process of negotiated learning. This negotiation reflects the potential for dialogical learning in art projects to be simultaneously self-reflexive and yet compromised by dynamics of power and difference that they struggle against (Kester, 2004). This conveys the sense that the production of knowledge is co-dependent on power relationships and so can only be realised through a process of being imbricated in the co-dependent relationship of knowledge and power (Holert, 2009).

In arguments about the teaching process of contemporary art, hierarchical differences of power between teachers and students have been dismissed as irrelevant by teachers who adopt a more Socratic stance of ignorance. Ranciere (1991) instead argues for the shared authority, appeal to reason, and collaborative exchange of ideas of reading. This promotes the authority of the textbook as ideal mode of the exchange of ideas rather than oral instruction by authoritarian teachers. My sense is that the textbook is his conception is the product of critics and theorists. For Ranciere (1991) the book is better at assisting people to develop autonomous meaning as it permits a more creative interpretive dialogical exchange. The debate continues to separate and privilege visual and textual reading over oral collaborative exchange as a preferred process of dialogical learning. This reinforces a longstanding academic

bias and shift in the performance of knowledge from oral to written modes of presentation, especially in academic research (Barnacle & Mewburn, 2010). In academic contexts knowledge is often presented as a written thesis, yet the performance of that knowledge has often taken place through interaction and association with many people beyond the context in which the thesis is presented or encountered (Barnacle & Mewburn, 2010). The prioritisation of interpretive textual dialogue over oral exchange risks reinforcing academic bias and priorities.

Moreover, Ranciere's (1991) attempt to isolate reading from continued encounter and oral communicative interaction seems a move to recreate another isolated space for dialogue, free from the constraints of power. Bishop (2012) highlights Freire's (1996) belief that dialogue is not a space free from hierarchical and power influences, which presumably is also true of reading as part of dialogical educational processes. This is because as Bishop (2012) argues 'dialogue takes place inside some programme and content.' How we read a text is affected by our goals for reading that text, which are influenced by encounters and expectations of others in both formal and informal educational programs. Increasingly what influences a student's goals of learning, and thus by extension their goal of reading a text is the increasingly commercialised landscape of academia, and research.

Two concerns have emerged about the commercialisation and increasing market influence on academic art. Kwon (2004, p.156) argues it has led to a 'logic of nomadism', where art is deemed successful in academic terms if it is in demand elsewhere. This inculcates a sense of ungrounded transience and nomadism, leading to concerns about the alienation of academic artists. The second concern is that art

education increasingly reflects a management ideology of control and objectification (Dorn, 2005). Artists incorporating pedagogical approaches into their dialogical practice may be unwittingly transferring the educational characteristics of management control and objectification into dialogical projects. Beech's (2010, p.52) concern is that the managerialisation of social contexts including education is part of a process that proposes an expert for 'every aspect of life, every anxiety, feeling and problem.' This privileges knowledge, creates the public and ideal image of artist as certain social expert, and reinforces the authority of the academy.

Instead, dialogical works in an academic or educational context can function to promote a greater awareness by artists of how art uses pedagogy to reinforce consumerist art values, and reinforce the dominance of its managerial rationality (Beech, 2010). The thrust of his argument is, that in order to do this, artists may need to adopt alternative academic stances and characters, which characterise the expert as one who is skilled in uncertainty, ignorance and secrecy, and who is able to sustain a resistance to a kind of characterisation of the artist as narrow minded knowing-self.

Discussion of the characteristics of context in dialogue

In this discussion I summarise my understanding of the contextual characteristics of dialogue that have emerged through this inquiry. In particular I describe how my study connects with the four main characteristics of context discussed in the preceding review of the literature. Then I examine two key points that contribute to the construction of this inquiry.

In the summary I highlight the dominance of postmodern and post-structural perspectives in the discourse landscape of contemporary art and reflect on how art's current style is dominated by these critical perspectives. Then I look at contemporary art's shifting historical relationship leading to more ambiguous uses of historical vocabulary in the construction of a current understanding and practice. Thirdly, I talk about the enfolding of the critical context in dialogical practices and how dialogical practices are changing the critical context of art. Lastly, in this summary, I look at the influence of the academic context on the construction of the contemporary artist and the practice of dialogue. After the summary, I highlight and re-examine the increasing tension and contest between postmodern textual and anthropologically situated realms and worldviews. Lastly, I address how my practice locates me in the contested social realm between anthropologically orientated and post-modern critically orientated perspectives and discuss how this social constructionist approach draws on the perspectives and practices of both, but does not correspond fully with the worldview of either.

The dominance of the post-structural and postmodern landscape

Contemporary art has become constrained by postmodern, post-structural critical philosophical perspectives (Bourriaud, 2002) which limit what ‘art looks like and should be about’ to borrow the suggestion of one artist I spoke with. Increasingly current art appears to be an illustration of reoccurring themes, philosophical ideas or texts that underpin the dominant perspectives of art discourse. Artists may adopt past *avant-garde* styles, which may be deemed appropriate to these perspectives consciously or unconsciously. Consciously they may want their work to look like the dominant current style. Unconsciously they may simply absorb these styles as the natural look of current art, or receive them as part of the enculturation of art education.

Despite the social landscape changing hugely since the 1960s and 70s, art still retains and builds on aspects of its recent past. However, the adoption of past styles, modes of presentation that coincide with dominant critical preoccupations has increasingly become a marketing ploy, as one artist I spoke with suggests. Artists package their work to meet expectations of what postmodernist and post-structuralist criticism tells us ‘art looks like and should be about’ not necessarily what forms artists wish their work to take or which preoccupations they would like to address. The post-structuralist and postmodern perspective has come to be accepted almost as a natural condition and reality of art, instead of a constructed worldview, ideology and social reality. I came to my practice and inquiry conscious of this worldview but also aware of other frameworks of meaning. This may in part be an aspect of my current situatedness in a British context of contemporary art, for through engaging in

dialogue in other social contexts of art I have begun to question the extent to which the historical concerns and agendas of post-structuralism, and postmodernism still dominate and constrain my dialogical practice.

At a broad level I am struck by the concern that my inquiry has elicited when it has appeared to deviate away from the preoccupations and articulations of dominant critical discourse. As Beech (2012) points out however, the themes of dialogue remain dominated by the themes criticism tells us artists should be preoccupied by. This results in the narrowing of interpretations and themes that dialogical art is thought to address. At a much smaller practical level I recall the concerns my practice has provoked amongst traditionalists at the lack of objects that appear like past art. Part of the issue may be that the informal conversational works of artists like Ian Wilson, and Lee Lozano that contributed to the construction of my practice are not recorded and documented in a manner that addresses their appearance. I did however produce posters as part of *An invitation to dialogue* for The Howard Gardens Gallery, in part motivated by concerns of the work being presented alongside ceramic pots, photographs and more traditional art objects. I did not conceive of these posters as the work of art initially but as a 'trailer' (Bourriaud, 2002) and advert for an event to come. In the second poster for a dialogue at a market, the mode of presentation became more straightforward and almost ambiguous in style. However, in producing posters for the dialogues at a philosophy conference and art festival I redesigned the posters in a manner which 'unwittingly' echoes disruptive *avant-gardist* typography (Appendix 2). I say unwittingly, for it may have become an instinctive response to package things to look more like art in certain contexts.

The problem of stylistic influence on the design of minor elements leads to realisation of the tendency to fall back into reproducing styles acquired through art education. What is difficult is to develop art practices that construct alternative vocabularies, concerns, styles of discourse and which do not start by assuming that the post-structuralist/postmodern worldview is the natural condition of art. As Gillick and Weiner (2005/2006, p.12) suggest, the question may be whether ‘artists have lost their ability to have an antagonistic relationship to dominant discourse’ in art. This might imply adopting alternative frameworks, and accepting less proximity to fashionable perspectives, and easily packaged styles. This alternative cannot be established through and in the language of opposition and argument against post-structuralist and postmodern perspectives as this keeps the artist bound to the rhetorical style of such perspectives. In this way artists remain stuck in a modern/postmodern stylistic bind (Ramsden, ([1972] 2004). Instead I adopt a Wittgensteinian (1958) approach of setting aside intractable conversations (Rorty, 1980).

Dialogue is changing art’s relationship to its historical narrative

Art’s relationship to its historiography is being transformed by a shift towards more uncertain perspectives (Kester, 2011). Adopting a relational and dialogical approach to practice, I ground my practice in the uncertain and diffuse interaction and communicative exchange of the everyday social world. This is motivated by my identification with a constructionist worldview, and is not a continuation of art’s historical movement from one ‘ism’ to another. Nor is a constructionist framing

entirely akin to 1960s and 70 attempts to reinvent art by throwing stuff out, as one artist I spoke with characterised that period. The constructionist approach is not the abandonment of historical awareness but the transformation and cultivation of a more diffuse and historical awareness through dialogue.

Speaking with artists who experienced recent art history, not only through interview but also attending talks and presentations, reminds me that art's recent past is a vital and living part of its present. Dialogue in the present expands my historical awareness, as it exposes me to potentially overlooked connections, but also allows marginalised or unheard perspectives and accounts to emerge. These accounts may be ironed out by the grand art historical narratives which can appear an attempt to present diverse and diffuse practices such as those termed conceptual, as monolithic coherent historical projects (Corris, 2004). My approach is not grounded in these historical narratives but recognises that historical perspectives provide a vocabulary for present practice even as constructionism reminds us that the actions and meanings of social practice evolve and change over time (Best, 2008).

The critical context becomes less distant and abstract in dialogue

Dialogical practices are changing the critical landscape of art, challenging the limitations of abstract theorisation and highlighting that the critic is also a situated participant (Kester, 2004). Art as practice-led research involves rejecting the traditional separation between practice and theory/criticism, but many artists already take this stance in their work. However, when criticism is bound up in the

complexities of dialogical processes it places the individual on more uncertain ground.

Early in this study I assumed it was part of the role of artist-researcher to decide which theory model was correct and which was wrong, and to establish what the correct definition of dialogue as art is. Later, after immersing myself more deeply in the research material, I began to see a different relationship and an alternative critical understanding began to emerge. In this approach the perspectives of critics provided another vocabulary and interpretive resource for examining my assumptions in the creative process, in much the same way that Rogoff (2008) describes.

However, it is very easy to get diverted away from the conversation at hand, and become swept up in abstract disputes in the literature between critics. Speaking again to participants in this study and ‘critical friends’ (see Costa & Kallick, 1993), I began to discern a detachment from critical discourse and other artists suggested that they felt criticism and art critical journals increasingly made less contribution to their practice and understanding. Instead critical journals may increasingly be perceived as more like an inward conversation of critics, rather than a dialogue with artists’ and their practice. As one artist suggested to me, critics appear to have ceased sustaining dialogue and dispute between artists, and instead appear to be advertising their own brands of knowledge. This may contribute to artists looking for new critical perspectives and voices. As that artist added, ‘it’s possible to have people from marketing now and business writing criticism, and business guiding criticism. And more recently and I think fortunately we have anthropologists writing which is quite a useful tool.’

The shift in the critical context and perspective of this inquiry has been away from the traditional approach of distanced art criticism towards a stance more akin to critical constructionism (see Latimer, 2008). In this perspective the critical approach is not the implementation of a critical and exterior model, nor the corrective analysis and objective evaluation of an end project. Instead it is a continual engagement with theory, the pulling together of different perspectives and understandings to examine the assumptions at play in the process. The critical constructionist approach involves remaining open to different disciplinary perspectives, and reinforces the sense that contemporary art is a social site like many others which is formed and shaped by contested power relations. Critically this inquiry does not attempt to provide a monolithic account of these power relations, but instead works at conveying an understanding of how these critical positions of power contribute to my construction and practice of dialogue as mode of art.

The increasingly academicised context of art

The fourth significant context that shapes this dialogical inquiry is the increasingly academicised context of art which has led to the expansion of art as research. The academic context of art contributes to the construction of dialogical art practices. My study demonstrates qualities now normalised and valued as symbols of academic ‘success’. For example, in following referrals from artists and going to speak with other artists based in and around New York, I demonstrated an academic nomadism which Kwon (2004) argues responds to academic expectations of research being international and mobile. Presenting myself as an artist-researcher facilitated greater

reception of the invitation to participate in interview. However, an unexpected bi-product of conversations in the American academic context was how it acted to reinforce and refract my self-image as an academic artist. In the USA, doctoral research in art practice is still relatively new. While on the one hand presenting myself as an artist-researcher facilitated interaction with some artists, with many others it eliciting concerns from artists already within academic contexts about how art practice might be changed in a programmatic manner by the research agendas.

For one British academic artist the programmatic academic context increasingly acts as a consensus reality or common ground for artists, shaping how I and other artists see ourselves and how others see us. As they suggested:

Once you opt into this way of working at some level there is a common approach to the world, even if it is only the sequencing of events. And an understanding that you will have a specialism, first of all you operate with a specialist language and set of tools on the world. And the world responds to you in a particular way when you do that.

This can lead others to respond and to expect the academic artist to project the image of a self-knowing, social expert in a manner that reinforces the authority of art and the academy (Beech, 2010). For me this is one of the important gains of moving into and out of dialogue in academic and institutional contexts. During *An invitation to dialogue* at Kirkgate Market in Leeds (Appendix 2), I started by making notes in between conversations, and not considering the extent to which I appeared part of a system of management control (Dorn, 2005) of the market. In my approach I have become more sensitive to how my work reflects ideologies of control and

objectification common to both cultures of management and academia. At the micro level in works such as *An invitation to dialogue* it has influenced my decision to do away with labels such as artist/participant, something commented on in the dialogue on Blackweir bridge, but at a wider scale it has made me consider how dialogical approaches may be important for questioning the objectification of all people including artists in the process of academic research, and for questioning the programmatic assumptions and transference of the academic art context.

New understanding: a reflection on context

In the second half of this discussion I examine and discuss the increasing tension and contest between postmodern textual and anthropologically situated realms and worldviews. It is possible to see this contest as another expression of what Bourriaud (2002) argues is the historical struggle for singularity (detached singular author) against collectivist perspectives in art (collaborative authorship). However this relativist/objectivist opposition is also a reflection of art's modernist/postmodern bind and its difficulty coming to an understanding of the flux and change of social constructed reality (Margolis, 1999). Dialogical inquiry in contemporary art seemingly expects an artist to take sides and state where they stand within the power struggles that shape art's social reality. For me, this is the question of how I locate my social constructionist inquiry and practice within the competing perspectives of art's social context.

Maintaining tension between different modes of performing knowledge

This inquiry represents the struggle to integrate an understanding of the different approaches reflected in the tension between anthropological and postmodern worldviews. This is highlighted by the various different performances of knowledge in this study. In my practice I move between situated and interpersonal modes of dialogical exchange and presentation, and shift into written modes of dialogical presentation of knowledge collaboratively performed through conversational interaction in multiple sites.

For a long time academia has privileged written modes of presentation, and this is transferred into expectations of outputs of academic research (Barnacle & Mewburn, 2010). However this dialogical inquiry has revealed the complex problem of presenting knowledge generated through collaborative interpersonal conversational exchange in the mode of monological textual thesis, and outputs presented as the result of a production process of singular authorship.

My approach begins to blur the separation between spoken and written modes of performing knowledge. In this study writing begins as a textual practice of inscription situated in the field, with note taking in the market place in Leeds, and latterly writing research memos. In interview exchanges, the inscription of conversation begins with audio recordings and continues away from the sites of production through transcribing, and coding analysis. Both inscriptive processes produce written interpretations, which are blended, presented as bricolaged dialogues, and finally edited and represented as research material as a thesis of the

practice of dialogue as mode of art. The increasing abstraction of the performance of knowledge through writing is offset by re-presenting texts as invitations for continued socially grounded conversation. In this approach the tension between different modes of knowledge production is sustained by conceiving of textual practice as part of a social practice alongside talk and interaction (Potter & Hepburn, 2008). This approach promotes a tension between textual practices and situated talk by bringing postmodern perspectives into a social realm of practice, which has been assumed the traditional sphere of ethnography and anthropology.

Constructing an emergent, adaptive and dialogical framework of practice

Artistic approaches which orientate themselves to inquiry in the field have been characterised as part of a quasi-ethnographic turn in art and a move away from traditional art (Foster, 1996). A social constructionist framework is not imported from elsewhere but is constructed through practice. In Finley's (2003) view such a socially grounded disposition has been part of art's dialogue since the 1970s and increasingly part of its interdisciplinary aspect. However I recognise the tendency of increasing recognition of anthropological perspectives and its traditional role as arbitrator in interdisciplinary practice (Foster, 1996) may contradict the worldview of some postmodern philosophers and art critics that aspire to dominate interpretive perspectives of artistic and cultural practices. The framework of this inquiry is not a process of being seduced away from more authentic art perspectives as Foster (1996) suggests but the construction of a framework of art that is more authentic to my local situation, perspective and a set of practices developed over a number of years.

Reflecting on my prior experience as an artist contributed to the recognition of my worldview as characteristically social constructionist.

Social constructionism is connected to ethnographic and anthropological perspectives but not synonymous with them. Within the cultural contest between postmodern and anthropological perspectives my practice is more ambiguous and undecided as a framework. It situates me in the 'inbetween', in the relationships, exchanges and dialogue between contexts. To postmodernists, my situated discursive interaction in non-traditional sites and my informal conversational methods may lend my practice the appearance of anthropology, and promote a belief in a social reality that postmodernism strives to negate. From traditional anthropological perspectives my novel theoretical stance and approach to generating and recording research material aligns me with postmodern perspectives and textual practices.

The tension between these contextual perspectives informs and emphasises the constructed nature of my disposition towards acting and thinking through dialogue (Faubion & Marcus, 2008). By that I mean that both contextual realms, postmodern and anthropological worldviews have contributed to the construction of my dialogical practice. How I have enacted and interpreted dialogue as art has involved a struggle to integrate the different modes of thinking and feeling of these different worldviews. This has led me to construe talk and textual work as different yet overlapping language games in the practice of socially situated dialogue.

The implication of such a constructed framework is that a social constructionist approach to dialogue may not be recognised as normative or conventional artistic

inquiry as it does not seek to reinforce the claims to power of the artist within dominant artistic or academic contexts. Yet I do not act as an *external* critic of art and its normative conventions. Instead I emphasise dialogue as a collaborative process through which I examine the shaping influence of the artistic and academic contexts in which I act and construct meaning. In this manner developing a social constructionist context for dialogue as practice-led research in art produces an alternative, more uncertain disposition of academic artist. This, I argue, is much closer to Beech's (2010) proposal for an alternative academic artistic expertise; which characterises the artist as a person able to demonstrate skill in uncertainty, ignorance and secrecy, and resist the construction of a narrow minded artistic self-knowing.

Chapter 5: Meaning-making

This chapter sets out the layered construction of dialogue as a series of dialogical elements organised around the theme of meaning-making in dialogue. The first layer is a constructed dialogue intended to facilitate active readership and participation in the communicative exchange enacted in the text, while seeking to avoid the presentation of dialogue as an instrumental tool for leading readers to a singular goal or determined conclusion. This is followed by the presentation of a tag cloud identifying the thematic tensions present in the constructed dialogue. Tag clouds emphasise the constructed nature of thematic concerns and serve as a link to the discussion of the themes of meaning making in dialogue, which is presented in the next layer.

The discussion of literature shares an acknowledgement that dialogical practices are enacting shifts away from art's traditional framework of meaning-making, leading to the emergence and construction of alternative frameworks of meaning-making through practice. These shifts relate to the on-going diffusion of subject matter and critical concerns in art and I acknowledge how this diffusion might in turn imply an acceptance of artists changing their self-understanding and relationship with the world in the process of performing knowledge. The literature discussion provides interpretive resources for a dialogical reflection by the researcher and reader on the possible implications of these tensions for dialogical practice and inquiry. This reflection is followed by a further reflection of how these conversations connect to

imply that dialogical practices are enacting an on-going shift away from oppositional modes of argument, which may further fuel the diffusion of thematic concerns within art.

Meaning-making dialogue

Mark: I am thinking about dialogue and conversation as a process of meaning making. In a discussion panel on conversation Nicholas Davey said that conversation is dependent on exchange, openness to risk. He saw conversation as an aesthetic and hermeneutic event of withholding and disclosing. Let me check my notes. Yes, but the risk of conversation involved '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.' I saw this as suggesting that by participating in conversation, speakers expose themselves to the risk of having their understanding of themselves and reality changed. In my invitations to dialogue I've said that I've been interested in the kinds of conversation that might be achievable between friends, like you know how you sometimes go over the same ground with friends but somehow it's kind of new. But I think the friends thing is misleading. Maybe because one guy asked me if I thought conversation was 'like a routine.' That wasn't it, exactly. And this other guy said 'it couldn't be new all of the time because that'd be exhausting. And I guess I wondered if perhaps the new was a very slight thing. That guy felt that most of what we do with art is go over the familiar for slightly newer understanding. How do you lot see meaning making?

Tracy: 'I think you know a lot of times looking at these objects, these historic objects and documents you realise how through time things are very different but they are very much the same... Just how a hundred and thirty years separated my birthday with this woman's and yet a lot of the things in her life... even though she lived in this different time period and had different life experiences, certain things are universal and history makes us understand that.

Mark: Is that in the project you did with the found civil war photos and letters?

Tracy: Yeah. And, 'so much time has past and people... the penmanship alone in these letters for instance, on computer my students don't write in complete sentences, they prefer symbols and codes and instant messaging and such. But in a way things change but often don't change and I find that sort of struggle and that sort of juxtaposition of time to be very fascinating.'

Mark: But that can be subtle and slight, or can it be boring?

Nguyen: 'You can't always go high. It's like walking in the museum for instance. If every work of art was brilliant and great you'd get bored. You need bad works of art in there in order to see the good ones. You need relationships. Just as when you are on the high you need the low to balance it out. It is like Baudelaire said, "if you don't know how to be ugly, you are not beautiful."'

Mark: I wasn't saying your work was bad, but you raise the spectre of relationships or the relativism of meaning...

Peter: 'I heard someone the other day say, "These people did this amazing thing and I thought they were going to be doing it in my performance but they were doing this other thing and I just couldn't predict it and it was amazing." Then you think they invest so much in the improvisation that their audience does, that actually you start to think what the work was. If you never imagined this was going to happen and you never accounted for it then I think I am describing the work in terms of physical and mental labour. Actually the person that came and did that, that's where the site of the work is, and you should probably back off and start looking at that, which might be quite interesting. That they've come to your situation and busked it, improvised to such an extent that they have done, you know. Because you could lay claim, otherwise you can just lay claim to the world as it passes by.'

Mark: You're saying something like meaning can be observing the improvised or unexpected responses, but we can still predict or expect these, and that's maybe where the site of the work is. But I wonder how that relates to the artist as writer, or researcher... I'm not sure where I'm going with this but I'm thinking of you, because 'your interest in the artist as writer is not the same as the artist as critic?'

Ben: 'Exactly! I think that is an academic misnomer, certainly Judd's best writing was not *Specific Object* which was a very bad article but his reviews.'

Mark: 'Right, so?'

Ben: 'And also I wrote to support as homage to support other artists and as homage to other artists. And I think in Europe you have the idea of the polemic, whereas in America it was a kind of creative journalism, and Judd's reviews are so... Judd's favourite artist in his reviews was Chamberlain, and he raked up a lot of ideas from Chamberlain, see in his critical studies.'

Mark: That's an interesting contrast. But can I just pick up again on something you were saying about not necessarily knowing if audiences understand or necessarily grasp your meaning. I'm thinking about how Jennie Savage wrote about the theme of openness in a site-specific project I did, a dialogue on a bridge, and she interpreted openness as inclusivity and availability but also an openness to interpretation and meaning. Because I know for example that Bourriaud has written about your work without seeing it and I wonder what do you make of the meanings other people give to your work?

Andrea: 'Ah no it's always fine.'

Mark: 'Really?'

Andrea: 'Always fine, yes!'

Mark: 'So whatever the interpretation, whatever the response you're comfortable with it?'

Andrea: 'Yes. I mean if it's completely wrong then I think that there's a... that their reading is suggesting that I was not capable to control my, the meaning that I wanted to, the work to tell about, to speak about.'

Mark: 'Can you always control the meaning?'

Andrea: 'I don't know. Always control the meaning? You can certainly control a lot. The response of the audience to your work but you can also be very relaxed about that and leave a lot of freedom to the viewer. What I tend to do is never to distrust what the viewer sees in my work.'

Mark: 'But how do other people respond to your work?'

Andrea: 'They... I don't know, they are in front of something and they want to judge it, to talk about it, they want to remember or forget it, I don't know. It's just like talking about this plant here or this fence, it's just like any other thing which can be described or translated into words.'

Mark: 'So you see your work as an act of description?'

Andrea: 'No, no, no, I'm saying that my work can be described through memory or through words or through feelings by someone experiencing it.'

Mark: What about you? ...because I've participated in a few of your works which have involved description. How do you understand it in your recent works?

Peter: 'Well what I have been doing in a few works has been asking people to, it's really the idea of conjuring up or summoning up that artefact for someone who has never seen them or never touched or whatever, seen actually, seen that artefact. So they use whatever technical language they bring from their disciplines so in one instance, with the walking and memory piece they have been people who have had languages actually that they can describe depictions of trees quite easily, quite readily, so they are novelists, they are poets, they are art critics, or they're academic writers. So they all do bring ways of describing to bear on this thing and describe it in different ways. They all go through the process of standing in front of this painting as well so they are all faced with that moment of thinking, "if I just stare at it long enough, it's just going to you know..."'

Mark: 'So all their committing to memory is based on, well not so much their committing to memory but the way that they share that, is it based on the understanding they have from who they are?'

Peter: 'By dint of them being who they are obviously they can bring association to the description of the thing and again I am trying to think of what the hook is, what this produces for people. I have asked people not to bring association or particular points of reference in to the description. So not to say, "ah yes it's identical to the Vermeer that I saw in this museum in Antwerp". So it is not having those secondary sources. Trying to use the technical language to describe what they see, what's in

front and what they see. And mostly people can do that although it is a kind of alien thing for some creative writers and it's a challenge for them, they manage to do it.'

Mark: I still think that relates to what one of you was saying just a while ago, something about controlling or being relaxed about meaning, but what about assumptions about artists' control of meaning?

Peter: 'I think it is akin to the idea of doing a painting and saying it is what it is, make of it what you will and that's a commonsensical role or position that artists can adopt. And complicit with that is an audience that thinks that that is okay. There is a sort of stand off isn't there. There is an acknowledgement that the artist is going to be bolshy enough and is meant to be the genius/nutcase that is allowed to say that. And then our act of good faith is to say, okay yes, alright yes, you have just released this thing to us, we won't guess what you tried to do here. We'll just look at it and imagine and come up with something and fulfil our part of the bargain.'

Luke: 'If we know too much about what we do, it's kind of deadly – it's almost like we're working and making things we almost don't want to know, we don't to be too much of an expert when we're building things. Like if I make something I want to make up why I'm doing it or what the use of it is, and I want to be a little bit insecure about what's happening. I'm confused, why am I doing this? What's does this mean?'

Mark: 'That seems a very important idea to me this idea of, it's more than letting go, it seems more forceful than that. A giving up of certainty or a detachment from it.'

Luke: 'A willingness to give up certainty – and a willingness to detach yourself from yourself, from the things that you produce to actually have them come back to you in a new form, to actually develop that patina, that patina not just of oxidation but of the patina that is incrustated around an object because of the curator or critic or an occupant or an observer – those things are kind of developing new patina over the surface of the object that you place out there and comes back again and you say why! I love the colour of that now. I love the way it's aging. So it's a kind of, I think this is a really important thing, the giver and the giving back again.'

Tracy: 'I kind of like that sort of ambiguity that the image has and I can say it does tell a story but it tells it in a much more open-ended way.'

Mark: but isn't how images communicate fairly well understood?

Nguyen: 'You don't think Cezanne painted the apple because it has symbolic significance, although that is enough of an observation in a Freudian way, interpretation, which is what made those apples so great. It is like Roger Fry I think who did that show in which he coined the term Post-Impressionism. I think it must have been in 1914. Quite early on or 1921 I can't remember the date now. D.H. Lawrence showed those wonderful Cezanne apples and he said that Cezanne's apple was like a moon because there is an unseen side. So there is mystery there too but I believe that Cezanne was compelled, driven by painting the space between the apples.'

Mark: I was once asked in a dialogue if ‘something [is] always left unspoken’, and I wonder if ambiguity relates to that.

Stuart: ‘I purposely put in an ambiguous line because I am a big fan of the very late Kaprow work where he refused to call it art or define it as anything else. It is powerful because it is in an ambiguous space. So, like, is this social work? What is this? What are you doing? Is this anthropology? What are you doing and how can you justify this as artwork? But it is in the Beuysian sense and a lot of other much larger senses.’

Mark: I’ve wondered about meaning making in dialogue in contrast to defining, even the ambiguity of dialogue. I’ve always assumed conversation was more than about defining, or maybe not really about defining. Maybe defining seemed too much an end point, too definitive. It’s like there is always something beyond...

Nina: ‘It is kind of interesting because sometimes it is more than we intended. Sometimes people say something we definitely meant but we didn’t think about it. We say whatever we want to say visually or ideas. I am always open and like to listen to what people think, because people give me hints what works or not. You know, what we actually achieved in our work and if what we wanted to say was clear. So it is kind of a learning process when I hear someone’s reaction. It is learning for the future.’

Mark: ‘Do you see your art practice as a learning process?’

Nina: ‘Yes, definitely. For us.’

Mark: ‘So, do you see your role when you engage with the public as a teaching process?’

Nina: ‘No. I think not teaching for sure. I think more an exchanging process.’

Mark: Yeah, exchange. I’ve wondered if it’s a bit like blogging, a way of questioning and thinking things through, maybe sharing ideas with others with similar interests, but not necessarily the same as defining. Questioning doesn’t always seem like a breaking things down to definitions, often it’s more about establishing if there is some kind of shared interest, or even making a connection, like we do in everyday conversations, but mostly with strangers. In the market piece I did, I was asked what was going on, if the invitation is something to do with language and whether I was letting. So at that seemingly trivial level it’s a process of sharing or I think Nicholas Davey said something like conversation is a process of ‘disclosing’. But is that different, I mean that’s not necessarily with other artists or within the institution of the artworld and research. Is it something you’ve encountered in your work?

Peter: Yeah, my gallery based piece ‘captured it through conversation actually, so it produced kind of anecdotes and these things were sometimes captured on camera as documentation. Initially I was just looking for people moving in space and talking to

each other about or describing other gallery spaces, as a descriptive kind of... mostly in the third person. And then in some cases you would capture someone saying well, "I was a gallery director or I was a curator here and while I was here the space of the gallery contracted because we sacked half of our staff", and so they start to think of it in an institutional space and in some cases that was captured but not in all cases. So I can relay this, but it wasn't captured as documentary. There is no evidence. There is no documentary evidence.'

Mark: So it's relayed through anecdote and memory? Which can be problematic for some.

Tracy: 'I guess the way that I sort of use objects as this enhancement of memory or this sort of even something subconscious that you don't necessarily... or déjà-vu experience that is sort of something that brings something in your past life to the present and I don't mean past life like another life but something in your past.'

Mark: But that's more like your reflective conversation. Maybe I'm simply wondering about what is said, or whether what is disclosed is different with artists and non-artists?

Peter: 'Yes, I think it is inevitable that there's, the interesting thing is people always presume that as an artist that the only other people you speak to are artists. They forget that your mum phones you up or they forget that you stand in the playground at nine o'clock every morning and people come up to you and say, what are you up to? And you have to say I am doing this and you ask them what they are doing, and so people do forget that you actually do talk about your work with people that aren't your peers in your field. So you are always aware that there are people that might know your work but at least they will know the context that you are operating in, they will know, historical and contemporary points of reference and you might work with those people, you may be in shows with those people, they may be writing about you, they may be your gallerist or whatever it might be. And then there are people that have absolutely no idea of any art history, you know they know what they see on the South Bank Show maybe, but probably not. And so you are very aware that there are people that ascribe meaning to that work which is probably, they probably think through the work in ways that I think through the work in a way and we know that our culture of being artists that are currently practising, we are all constantly thinking about work, reading reviews and seeing work and talking to artists and talking to students. So you know you are just vigilant and you know that there are other people being as rigorous as you about your work as you are about their work. So personally I am quite happy, glad and happy that that state exists. That is a public that's produced by the art world that we all kind of talk the same language, we have the same points of reference and then there are people that are more or less familiar or understanding of those languages and practices and histories of practices. You know, you accept that there is an ever-loosening grip on people's kind of understanding, whereas people with less of an understanding of what you do are doing other things.'

Mark: 'Is it that people have less of a grip on what you do or that people have less of a grip on understanding more generally?'

Peter: 'No because I think I can talk to people of other disciplines or gardeners or people who work in the stables up the road or whatever. I know they know and understand their practice really thoroughly. It's a reflective practice, it's seen as deeply historical, there are technical precisions in it, they've got the language to talk about it. It is the same as me basically. It's the same process, as me to some extent. People make innovations within processes, people break traditions, they consolidate practices, they turn it into business they do all the things that happen in the art world. Those things happen in other bits of the world.'

Mark: At a philosophy conference I was asked if I saw dialogue as the labour of art. At the time I guess I was thinking about dialogue between artists and philosophers, and what the difficulties might be of achieving dialogue. One guy asked me if I was saying the artwork is workful and was Heidegger right? Was the work a play of different economies? I didn't follow entirely because I guess I was thinking more about how or whether the meeting of art and philosophy was a possible ground for dialogue. But at the time the conversation felt a little like an interrogation. Like there was a checklist of questions and there were right and wrong answers. Have any of you had 'interesting' conversations with participants in projects?

Nina: 'We did this project in the deli across the street and usually nobody local works in a deli, but... [this historian] pointed us to Duane park, it was his idea to do Duane park which had never had a building or a road on, and it was the history of the eighteenth century.'

Mark: 'So that historian's idea of history and the thing he pointed you to was the thing that doesn't change.'

Nina: 'Right, it doesn't change. Yes, and it was like two hundred years ago and it was just like stable and never built on. Because it didn't change it was kind of special you know.'

Mark: 'An interesting tension.'

Nina: 'Yes, yes. I didn't think about it. But when he first told us about it, and said there are no immigrants there in New York City, I said come on, everybody knows it and I couldn't even say anything because... and he understood our idea and the language barrier everything, and he just thought it was the wrong city to do it in. We said, in the wrong city? Oh my word, Tribeca? And he said maybe you should go to Brighton Beach to do this project, because there were some Russian immigrants there you know. But Tribeca he's like you know, Oh Richard Serra lives there, Robert De Niro lives there, all these people. But who is working there? They don't live there. I think they don't live there but everyone works there.'

Mark: Yes, I've interpreted that kind of thing as like being pointing or redirected to the answer. It's like people shift the conversation to their preoccupations. Like at that conference a guy asked where the art was and wasn't there a danger it might not be recognised as art. And that was almost like the first thing he said.

Peter: Well, what was your answer?

Mark: Well yes. 'Inevitably, because the work is the work of recognition at one level. The work of art as the recognition of the work of art.' But it came back to that question of the frame. 'Isn't it in the framing of it as art?' It felt like I was being bounced from one point to the next. The guy then told me that the image is ontologically relational and asked me if my movement away from representation was towards non-representation. I'd thought I was representing myself. But he said there was never the question of getting the image right though. I put some of this stuff in a case reflection, and it's interesting it reads a little bit like a list there. But he asked about judgement, and sort of then answered. You know, the judgement about how something works as a work of art. 'Judgement is grounded in ontology' and he thought that maybe when we talk about relational ontology we still need to talk about this and that. I thought that work *was* about judgement and re-judgement, because conversation often relies on talking about our experience of what is to hand, the *this* and the *that*.

Nina: But 'everything you hear influences you in some way, in an unconscious way..., and I think especially when it is related to your artwork or something you are really engaged in. Maybe unconsciously it all has an effect, negative and positive or any comments.'

Mark: So judgement might be unconscious as well. And stuff I heard there has probably influenced my understanding unconsciously, but it's not just philosophy, and not all my references in my conversations are necessarily philosophy and art.

Suzanne: 'It's very rarely that I source my inspiration from art. It's usually something, it could be something that I read, could be a film I've seen, could be you know, usually it's like strange. I could be walking in the woods and have some thought that pops into my head. It's typically engaging in life and paying attention.'

Mark: But its not like that for some artists, there were two I spoke to who'd gone to the conference because they said they felt isolated because their course had finished and they were finding it difficult to keep going without the access to the university.

Suzanne: 'For many years I participated in an artists' collective in Philadelphia where there are a group of female artists and we would meet regularly once a month, once every two months, and we would give each other feedback on our current work, offer guidelines and suggestions. So that was really integral because once you're out of school you don't [get] the regular feedback – you know when you are in school you have the weekly crit and you get the feedback on your work all the time, and then you're out of school and you have no support systems.'

Mark: But don't we get feedback from publics?

Jason: 'On a 'very practical level... it's much harder to get feedback from those people. I'm not sure in some ways how they would come across my work. You know

they can come to exhibitions but on the whole people don't comment, in books or scarcely even that. I speak to people generally about my work who are not in the art world and most of them find it confusing I would say. In that regard I do not think, I think artists are... I'm not entirely comfortable with this one, it's funny, that is after the PhD, or during the PhD I accepted this quite happily, but art is essentially specialists speaking to other specialists. I'm not entirely as comfortable with that now. This is undoubtedly the effect that America has had on me, partially because I'm not engaging in that European research community as I once have.'

Mark: But it was like they didn't even have that research collective either, and I got the sense they felt left out. They'd gone to the philosophy conference to kind of sustain things but it was interesting because they'd expected more artists, and they found following the philosophy quite difficult. And the conference made me think about whether that type of theory conversation is kind of defining all the questions and answers or just another part or something we can engage in in life and pay attention to. I still wonder about that because in my last dialogue, Matt MacKinsack wrote that he thought my dialogues blurred theory and practice, but in a more speculative manner. I mean art practice which is blurry?

Peter: 'It is like the conversation we are having now. You are probably not necessarily concerned with what I am going to make of this conversation, although I know it has value, you know it has value for you and it has other value for me. And I am interested in a conversational, increasingly interested in conversation as a form to make work in. Because there is a significant engagement and your work mobilises my attention if you like. So I am paying attention and it is also transforming me in some way that you haven't expected and that I haven't expected.'

Mark: 'So extending that, the artwork or your artwork mobilises the attention of the audience. It kind of extends and draws them in some way?'

Peter: 'Yes. And because I did have a practice in new media and in design, so, I am aware of ideas like the attention economy which was a big idea in new technologies, at the turn of this century. Everyone admitted that you had a supply and demand of attention and that there are things that you could, you know you could wave a big flag off a roof for two seconds or there are other ways of getting people's attention. And tending not to work spectacularly, I'd rather go for maybe significant longer term, a relationship rather than an immediate, you know, it used to be called sticky eye balls. The idea that you just had eyeballs on your product for two minutes or had a hit on a web site or whatever and I am just not interested in that so...'

Mark: But what about going further and sharing authorship? Is that something that's important?

Suzanne: 'There was a 'particular project, which is certainly a project that I was – it was all about dialogue and it was all about collaboration, and the women that I was interviewing and presenting their stories and then people were responding to their stories and other stories, all about this communal dialogue surrounding the taboo subject of abortion. I would say that with some of my later work, some of it is so collaborative, for example, last year I collaborated with a couple of other artists to

make a short piece that was inspired by a 1901 Thomas Eddison film on the first women boxers in the United States. It's performative and it was responsive and it was humorous and do I think it's changed people's lives? Probably not! But it was responding to the ideas of early film, responding to issues of gender, and performance and gender roles in our society using humour as a way, so there's still a dialogue that goes on within the piece. It isn't necessarily dependent upon the viewer then to bring back and maybe change, or I hope the viewer engages with those ideas, that is less of a dialogue I think.'

Mark: So its maybe not an absolute separation between participant and viewer but maybe that the dialogue is somehow more...

Peter: 'Mostly funders judge things by how many people saw something or listened to something and I have thought, well you know, it kind of plays into that idea of just throwing something out there. Either you throw something out there and you think I hope a million people see this or you use the common sense idea of marketing and targeted marketing, which supposedly you shoot at people whether conscious or not. It's the Michael Warner idea of, one way of thinking about an audience is whether they are asleep or awake, you still claim them as an audience so someone could come into a play and nod off at the back and because you have clicked them through the door you count them as audience. But actually what you are looking for is significant attention where they are only engaged with you, then I'd rather have ten people that were transformed in some way and paid significant attention, than having hundreds of people that slept through my you know.'

Mark: I think that's where my thinking was going in my last dialogue. The engagement was about noticing, as two builders said they couldn't help noticing that I had been standing out there all day, and then asked what I was up to. They didn't seem surprised when I said I was doing a conversation as a work of art. And someone else in the same work said they were interested in the duration of my work. They thought the eight hours was like photography. And I thought of Jeff Wall and agreed but wasn't sure why. But the guy said he had seen me earlier when he had passed. And I was interested whether he had known that he had seen me. But he had just thought there was a bloke. Which interests me, that noticing and shift. And it kind of raises the question I was once asked in a work about where it starts and ends. I mean we have the conversation, but is it ever finished?

Peter: 'I have sometimes thought that things were finished. I have sometimes thought that my motivation to keep something alive has fallen away and has been dissipated or whatever and quite often things will become dormant for a period and then they will find an opportunity that will spark my interest or re-motivate me or I can kind of reignite the work and it will carry on.'

Mark: I'm interested in how dialogue maybe carries on, or as Nicolas Davey suggested unfolds. That's been part of how I understand my invitations to dialogue and their multi-site case reflections because Simon Pope once told me he saw that as an itinerant method, which moves from context to context, but in each case I'm

examining the possible emergence of theory from my account or the story of my experience. And I think that was there in what I chatted about with other participants, like with Facebook and the meaning of friends and when I asked this other guy about his two hundred and fifty friends, He said they' weren't really friends its just how the term is used, and you couldn't treat the word semantically because the meaning changes when its out of context. And I thought that that was maybe like dialogue, artists use the word dialogue all the time but I am not absolutely sure what it means anymore. So it's like I move from context to context, and as someone else said, my dialogues are very organic and open-ended and they liked that I didn't chase the dialogue. Is that something with making...

Tracy: 'I actually in my art make something. In my photographs the same thing and I call them *Becoming* because in a lot of ways I'm trying to become art.'

Mark: That sounds organic, or uncertain at least, the process of making art.

Nguyen: 'It's quite unpredictable because I don't know it either [with the journal], what will end up in the next issue. I like to keep it that way. That's why we do the whole thing, the whole production takes place in the last four days and we print it in two days. So that is six days or five days. You know, they are going to leave around ten and then a new crew comes around ten thirty, two or three and tomorrow is the last day and we put it to bed by four o'clock. Then comes tomorrow and I like it at that pace, that urgency, that kind of quick moving spontaneous and at the same time frantic... You know it's both control but it's chaos. I don't like it when it's all controlled.'

Mark: But if you're making or producing things, isn't there an expectation of control?

Jane: For me, 'there is a certain consistency actually. This curator came over and was looking at my drawings that clearly take two weeks, and he said how do you remain emotionally in the same mood to make it a cohesive drawing and I suppose I don't think about it because I'm in the drawing and it continues so its not so much...'

Mark: 'You're not outside controlling it. Do you feel inside being controlled by it?'

Jane: 'Always, but you know frequently this image that I'm trying to excavate and get at, over and over again, it's as if it's there and I have to get it right, so...'

Andrea: 'I have always found the work ahead of me, in the sense that there is maybe a concept or an idea or an atmosphere that I want to put into my work but then my work escapes my original... idea.'

Nina: Yeah but 'in conversation, first of all you try to be clear because you are trying to tell your idea to someone else. You kind of filter your ideas so it is more understandable. Then it is like you talk with somebody who could be from a totally different background and experience. You always see the reaction. You try to communicate and in communication, the more you talk about an idea the clearer it is.

Like the longer you talk about it, so I think every time you tell it, every time, you crystallise it in some way.'

Nadia: 'I mentioned before that I think in terms of posing questions, so for me the work is finished when I have a question. If I don't have a question then there is no work in it. There were a few projects that I just kind of put aside because I couldn't come to the question even though you know I had like a good base to do it. But Something went wrong, so for me the project is finished when there is a question. For me work starts speaking and in that way is finished when there is a question in it.'

Peter: 'Yes, I think the tension in it is at the moments when, let's say I think it is because as an art practitioner you are allowed to, you allow your practice, you allow your work to be led by either a structured approach or a kind of, It can be just a, I don't want to use the word play actually, but it is a less directed, you are sensitive to questions that are emerging so through doing whatever your everyday art practice might be then I suppose, it is not necessarily something I have, some people draw everyday as an excuse to look into the world, some people write poetry as a way of just ordering thoughts and seeing what will come out. And I have had this kind of walking as an everyday practice and I have been sensitive to that as a practice to let questions emerge from that as well. As well as seeing walking as a method that is actually used quite explicitly having used a research like structure in order to find a question. So there is some kind of priority between theory and practice at different moments I suppose it takes primacy.'

Mark: 'But it all seems to be secondary to you engaging with the world?'

Peter: 'Yes. Primarily that is what this whole endeavour is I think. It's the way of making sense of the world. You know there is an engagement with the world. And I suppose looking for a kind of consistency; it's actually looking for a consistent approach to emerge as much as anything. So it is not like you take something from day one and you just apply it to the world and I am only going to work like this, I am only going to draw, every morning I am going to get up and draw for an hour and that is my mode of engagement, it is actually something that matures actually, it takes time to find the way of working and it is partly out of habit it's partly out of very practical reasons, practical things like where you live, what your daily habits are, what things are, what other habits or schedules or whatever might determining how you live your life. You know it is through those things that's where a meaningful and sustainable way of working will emerge and I have got to admit actually, I think it is only kind of recently that those things have become kind of coherent for me and I can look back on the work that I have made in those five years and I think yes, actually I can see the thread now. So it is a kind of revision and when you are talking about methodology as something that does get revised and gets reflected upon and it gets sharpened or at certain points you are looking to expand or extend that way of working. Or you will enter a new experimental phase when you will try something out habitually or in my case it may be the idea of what conversation is and passing conversation into memory has become actually quite key to the way I have worked. But you know five years ago that was maybe something I saw as maybe, well to give you an idea, maybe the idea of conversation and

interview as we are doing now I saw as a structured formal research method and then I have realised that actually my position in relation to that means that its formality has changed slightly and it becomes my working method now is maybe committing conversations to memory. Actually that working method becomes the practice becomes the work actually. So that becomes my way of working.'

Mark: 'So the work is the way of making the work, not the thing that ends up at the end necessarily?'

Peter: 'Yes, I would say it's a kind of, I suppose people would have used to call it process based but then you have got the idea that there is a physical material maybe or time based manipulation of something over time, but actually I think these are sometimes kind of intangible, material but intangible processes that do operate over time. That you start to recognise, they start to become coherent, they start to become transferable. You know so you can repeat them and you can sustain them. Yes, then that becomes the way of working, that's where the work might be actually, it might not produce work, that might actually be the work.'

Dirk: Yes, after the residency 'I left the company and the company went through some regrouping and consolidation and it got smaller; and now it is only in the Gunderson Building. I had completely forgotten about the name of it and I went back for a kind of ten-year anniversary and there is this plaque and it just gave me such a shock. That this was in a kind of way an on-going intervention

Mark: Yes I'm interested in the looking back and revision as part of an on-going process of understanding as opposed to something more argumentative...

Suzanne: 'I've really looked at challenging existing ideologies or critiquing some aspect of culture. I would say that over the last few years my work in a sense isn't as polemical as that, it's subtler, so that some of these experimental videos are exploring aspects of contemporary culture, or exploring aspects of how media technology is affecting us. So conceptually those ideas are always really present and important in the work.'

Mark: The ideas are present but my assumption or my sense from what's been said is that the conversation of practice unfolds, moves on and the subjects, themes or ideas change, like you were just suggesting, they escape our original ideas. But I'm thinking of responses to my own work here, it was in that Matt MacKinsack response to my invitation to dialogue, and he said the image of dialogue I present in my work is less portentous than other conceptual conversations. And in my earlier dialogues I often responded to questions of what the dialogue was about, by asking what any conversation is about. A few people said life and stuff like that, but one guy who was a librarian said you don't invite someone to dinner and then ask them what's for tea, and its funny I can remember this conversation really well, because I replied, but you can invite someone to dinner and ask them what they would like to eat. I went back to that at the philosophy conference, where a philosopher who knew my past interest in Gadamer said my approach was too dilettante and Italian a mode of dialogue. In Gadamerian dialogue the inviter always brought something to the table. So for me, there seem these two spirits, one which is seen as conceptually

monumental and serious philosophical even, which involves the inviter setting the theme, and another which is mode of dialogue which I hear echoes of in what's already been said, maybe its not linear or direct, or it's readily dismissed as maybe banal or not serious enough, but it involves maybe escaping original concerns or thematic concepts maybe.

Tracy: 'You know, for instance I spent seven years photographing my grandmother's house and she passed away this summer. I photographed the same places that I photographed and empty without the possessions and then this idea of now going to photograph all the objects from her home where they have ended up, where they are now, sort of this reinvestigation of these things. In a way it's just a cycle of life and the cycle of history.'

Nina: 'In some way you are not so afraid to be so banal, so everyday, because it is normal. Even if as an artist you always, it is like stupid you know, but a lot of artworks try to say something original. And this originality is supposed to be individual you know? But it is personal experience. It is fine.'

Mark: 'So you are quite interested in the mundane and the everyday?'

Nina: 'Definitely.'

Mark: 'And you said something like this is actually quite special.'

Nina: 'Yes, it is like real life. It is like your life, you know? I am special. I had one conversation with one person I know, and she is a psychologist, and she said the American dream, there is nothing special in those answers, and I said, yes there is nothing special. But maybe you ask the wrong question [she said], and she is also an immigrant and so I said, Marian, what would you answer? And she said, oh I am a very complicated person, it is going to be a list of things. I said okay, if you just give me the top of the list. And she said I escaped anti-Semitism. And we get a lot of that. So even though, it is like real life. We want basic things, even if you think you have something special, it is not so special. And be happy! Everyone can relate to that.'

Mark: So is that portentous enough for theory or research?

Jane: 'I did a piece in which you saw the same image six times but with different information about it. It's two round pieces based on the same structure with different overlay. And [this woman] she said, "what is your referent? Photography always has a referent" and I said "Photography may have one but there are so many things that I have in mind that I cannot give you a referent." And she said, "There must be a referent" and she kept insisting like a dog with a bone. And I said finally, "James Bond movies." I mean I had no sense of where to take that... If she cushioned her comments with it reminded me or made me feel, so that the burden was her feminism, that she reads as part of a feminist dialogue. That's cool.'

Mark: 'So you are suggesting that one of the problems with contemporary discussions is how often the speaker or writer forgets their own horizon?'

Jane: 'Well I think that very often they employ the art as illustration for their own project or idea or construct that they want to impose, and I think systems and constructs and putting things together can be very useful, but...'

Mark: 'As systems, as constructs.'

Jane: 'But if you leave the artwork and just take that one aspect of it that seems to fit in this category, and personally I've been doing similar work for thirty years, thirty some years, and I mean it's evolved but I have been called a surrealist, a postmodernist, a conceptual artist etc., etc. and it goes on, a painter...'

Mark: 'But you are all these things to them.'

Jane: 'To who ever is doing it at the time. So that I'm doing the same thing and the rug keeps shifting beneath me by whatever is fashionable, or it is current discourse.'

Mark: 'Isn't there, isn't that the truth though, that any reading of you is this multidimensional – even in a dialogue, it's multidimensional.'

Jane: 'I think it is presented that way – but this aspect of this person's work could be read in many different ways, but it's not.'

Mark: Things are getting read in the same way again and again and meanings aren't being changed much?

Luke: 'In fact the receiver is also reinterpreting this in returning back again in the form of commentary perhaps or in the form of use and so in a way there's also the curator and the critic and the commentary and all that which is, I think essential in the process and that's one reason I think, as I've said before, I think we all need to get our work out of the privacy of our studies and studios and into the world. Because I think we are all desperate to have that use ourselves, reflected back to us in a new way. You know, not necessarily reflected but refracted back to us, if we are really good. Although there are people who would like to see themselves reflected back very clearly, but I think more likely the more reflective artists and the really great minds want to see their work refracted back to them. So they rethink what they've done.'

Mark: But it seems slight, the refraction as change in understanding or...

Luke: 'I want to go beyond the surface – it's just that this is everyday material and utensils and things that are very familiar so by making these simple transformations people appreciate them and it makes them think differently about their own existence, but in a kind of intellectual way, they are not really reading deeply into what I am trying to do, whereas other architects see it in a different way than friends who are not in the field, in the visual world.'

Mark: 'So what seems to separate people beyond their labels of artist, architect or mere viewer, member of the public? Is it [their] attitude towards understanding?'

Luke: 'Yea, and that in fact we're working with the same focused area of the world, we're almost in the same team.'

Mark: 'Do you think it's also about that depth of perception or sensitivity to things beyond the front door of what you see, that maybe that's part and parcel of the function of art, that we've given up on that for an audience and now art may become that function for artists. Do you get a sense of what I'm getting at?'

Luke: 'Almost.'

Mark: 'I think that what you have described is that the familiarity of the everyday is about our human activities, and for example, the public's everyday existence and it's almost as if you present something that is slightly refracted of their everyday experience.'

Luke: 'Yea, that's a good way of saying it.'

Mark: 'But you've also suggested that whilst they might appreciate something of it, often it's a very surface appreciation, or surface understanding [of your work].'

Luke: 'Yea, it is, but that surface understanding is transformative of their experience in the world outside of this stuff, when they go back to their world.'

Stuart: Yes, 'I set up as situation which is contrived and is kind of ridiculous. It's like a kind of 'Waiting for Godot', almost a waiting for people to show up... sometimes I become a kind of novelty act for a while, like this is weird, what are you doing? Because it is weird... But it's a bit strange in the manner I am doing it on purpose because I purposely want to make it a little bit strange or ridiculous, the way I am doing it, to emphasise the fact that all these really weird conditions could really be happening with you or your family or your co-worker or anyone else.'

Mark: That seems similar to that video work I saw in your show.

Dirk: 'It is sort of like a relationship to colour or absence of colour or whiteness in the world or where it began in a Greek village where everything is white anyway. This is an act of ludicrous subversion to be painting the already white or touching up the walls without any permission.'

Mark: But how do people react to, well to things which are a bit strange, or maybe making what seems familiar weird, is that subversive? ...to attempts to transform meaning I guess.

Peter: 'It has been important for me to gauge whether someone feels like something about them or something about their understanding of the world has been transformed by what I have done. Especially in this last work that I made. I was asking someone to do a pretty simple thing, which was look at a painting, remember it, go out for a walk, recall it and there were some quite disturbing things and quite profound things that happened to people. People would stand in a field and realise yes actually I can summon up an image of something which is twenty miles away

and I can actually describe it with such kind of force to someone else that they can also imagine it and together we can see this thing in front of us that's patently not there, physically not there and that memory and mind is powerful enough to overcome the physical or the physics of the situation. And then I would meet people six months later and they would say, "I still can't get that thing out of my head", you know, "I still remember it, I close my eyes and I can still see it or I can recall it or whatever. And so that matters to me that that's had that effect on even, albeit on five or seventeen people in that case.'

Mark: But that's like with collaborators or participants and agreed isn't it? What about people from different cultures or responses from critics or art authorities... Didn't you have an awkward portfolio review recently in response to your American photo series? Responses from Canadians and Americans, particularly Canadians and Americans that almost transferred to the conversation with you, seeing you as the meaning of the work, maybe they recognise that this work is about understanding you, or your relationships?

Jason: 'The things I remember from portfolio review or people I've spoken to and I'm thinking of these Canadians that I spoke with at Rhubarb Rhubarb, it wasn't, I mean maybe it was their irritation at the fact that I was trying to render America foreign. It might be that but it wasn't because of me. It may be just simply because of the reason that they stated, they didn't like the work, they just didn't like the way I photographed things, they didn't like what I was doing, they were not seduced, appeased or otherwise informed by this field that I have. But I think fundamentally it's easier for people not from America to have a sympathy towards an understanding of America. Canada I'm lumping in there as well because for all its wanted differences it shares much more in common than it does in difference.'

Mark: I wonder about the possible connection between photography we like, and being seduced, appeased or informed. What might that suggest about photography and meaning making?

Tracy: 'Where once I wanted to write books about women's history, now I feel like using photography as my language is more subtle, more personal, more meaningful. It describes things in a way that when you use language, it's problematic, because it's leading and it's when you write you're sort of stating your opinion, you're sort of telling your story. It's much more literal. And I think what I like about photography is that you can translate ideas and it's not necessarily the way that you see it. It's perceived by others, and I like that sort of lost in translation aspect of it. I like the idea that especially this project that is so particular and so scripted. I know exactly what I'm thinking when I'm making each photograph, but yet, I don't necessarily know if the audience, the viewer understands that, or sees that, or necessarily grasps my intent. But a lot of times what I like is how they create their own narrative from these images, which I think takes them out, takes photography to a different level in terms of the photography means one thing but the viewer then brings their own interpretation into that and it becomes meaningful to something in their life or something that they think about, and the photograph means something completely different.'

Mark: That phrase lost in translation kind of resonates with ‘my assumption about a certain generation of American artists, [having] a resistance to fixed meaning or resistance to trying to provide fixed meanings?’

Nguyen: ‘But we all do. You know what I mean? The minute you know yourself you may as well be dead. The minute people pigeon hole you, you may as well quit. That’s not why you do it! You know what I mean? It’s not about business. It’s not a god damn business you know. Most of the time we don’t know why the fuck we do what we do’ that’s why it is so exciting. Really!

Mark: ‘That brings it back to “do it” rather than “think about it”.’

Nguyen: ‘Well, Sir Walter Scott once said, “Vision to be but action to do”, and I added to that quote. “Vision without action is no gain, and action without vision is lost.” You need both.’

Mark: ‘So in artistic making there has to be the process of almost like a circle of vision and action?’

Nguyen: ‘Yes.’

Mark: ‘But the vision isn’t the same as talking about it and trying to fix the meaning?’

Nguyen: ‘Definitely not. A fleeting glimpse! And you have to act it out in order to crystallise it and then when you do, you create something, you write a book, you make a work of art, it dies the moment you finish it. And then you go back to that perpetual confusing state of having that glimpse again and you have to deal with that and bring it to a greater clarity. And you can only do that when you make things; through the process.’

Mark: ‘So the making is almost the answer to the constant dying of meaning?’

Nguyen: ‘Yes Absolutely!’

Mark: ‘But it is also the rebirth of meaning?’

Nguyen: ‘Absolutely! Truth is a Sisyphean process. And you know, good artists, good writers trust that process. It’s their dutifulness to go to great heights and fall down with such steep decline and then they transform through that.’

Mark: They are transformed? But in conversational the process is speaking and listening?

Nina: As I think I said before, ‘I am always open and like to listen to what people think, because people give me hints what works or not.’ And ‘our art changes because the photographs are our art, but they change how we perceive our own work, the change based on the conversation we have had with a stranger.’

Mark: But listening suggests the role of artist as learner rather than knowing expert doesn't it?

Luke: 'The way we learn is not with the attitude of expertise but the attitude of not, the attitude of the lack of knowledge, with an open mind.'

Mark: The attitude of not expertise, isn't that like ignorance though? 'What is ignorance?'

Nadia: 'Ignorance is like not being open enough to consider and encounter the other, whoever this other is, like your neighbour.'

Mark: Can artists insist on openness from others, for that encounter or whatever?

Suzanne: 'I hope that my audience and my viewers will be able to engage... on some level, like, in my delusional thinking that my art will really change the world, now it's not, I don't know that my art is making a difference, so to speak, in a way that teaching has a really specific tangible, you know you really are, I think, making a difference. I questioned how affective art could be. One hopes that art can be that, but I don't know that you are able to necessarily measure that.'

Mark: 'You hope that your art has like a teaching function?'

Suzanne: 'Not that it has a teaching function, but that it would enrich people's lives on certain levels, or that it makes a difference in someone's life, you know. But I think qualitatively it is really difficult to measure that – whereas in teaching I think it's easier to maybe see the results of that.'

Mark: '...It's not that you don't hope that art practice is effective in some sense, but you wouldn't make claims for what you hope teaching does, which is transformative?'

Suzanne: 'I think art can be transformative, but that wasn't the question you asked me; you asked me about my art. And I'm not going to make a claim that my own art is transformative, transforming someone else's life or even makes a difference in someone else's life. I mean, I hope that certainly by putting my work out there that people are able to engage with it and somehow they have an experience that makes them think about something, or respond. But I can't make a claim personally that there's transformation.'

Mark: But you teach art as well?

Suzanne: 'So I teach various things, you know, and it's not necessarily just art but I think what's important to me is, I hope I am able to make a difference, it's not about just paying bills, but I really look upon that relationship as a thing that keeps me really stimulated, even on the yoga side of it, you know, you can see the rewards, the rewards of teaching and knowing that you have made a difference in someone's life.'

Luke: 'One of the reasons I teach, is because it gives me the opportunity to get out of the privacy of the studio and talk to other students and see what they are doing and have this kind of dialogue. That's really important to me. I'd be afraid to give up teaching because the work in which I do a lot of architecture as normally I choose to work privately in most cases – I mean I do public art and I'd do commissioned stuff occasionally but that's why the teaching is so important to me because it gets me out and then occasionally I do discuss work with students but never at the beginning of the semester – it's always towards the end that I'll show work because I do not want my work to influence them so much.'

Mark: 'Interesting how you talked about art as being pedagogical in teaching and how teaching is implicitly or necessarily a part of your art work, part of this wider conversation.'

Luke: 'Yes, and you said before, the word social-sculpture. And I was saying before the tape recorder came on, that teaching is one of the great social sculptures, and the way we put together curriculum and the way we have people interact with each other in the classroom and in the studio, it's all a kind of personalities, of ideas, because we're trying to get the best work out of students, the best thinking so that they will grow and become really great people out there. Or they'll be really happy individuals working under someone else. I don't mind that either. They might make change even at the scale of a small community rather than global change, and change is totally important if you're an artist but it doesn't have to happen at the global level, it can happen within the community, within the street, within the home, on a one-to-one basis, and I always talk about that. The degree of change is not critical it is change. That's all that matters. We need to change. An artist's responsibility is to change the world and to make, to change the world or some aspect of it.'

Mark: 'Can that be to impose his will on the world or can it also be to change himself as a way of changing the world?'

Luke: 'Yes, it's changing attitudes as much – because then you don't need to physically change the world, you can change a person's attitude towards looking at the world, or the artist's attitude to looking at the world.'

Mark: 'So how might that relate to the idea of the imperative for artists to change the world? Because if we act – how can we act in a way that allows the world to change for itself?'

Luke: 'Well it's really not so much – I think it's less important to actually change the world but to change people's attitude towards the world. The world is definite – that's – maybe the world I'm talking about is the individual's understanding of the world – that's what I'm hoping we can change and that understanding or appreciation that we can try as artists to make the everyday special – to be corny – or to take everyday life into that theatre and that's you know – that's what's very important I think – is that the artist's role is to make – to not – it's not about changing the physical world – you're absolutely right – I mean sometimes it is – it can sometimes be changing an attitude.'

Mark: 'But still you don't seem to be proscribing that – you seem to be offering a more open possibility that change per se is good. That we can arrive at that attitude...'

Luke: 'The tools through which someone can change the world – themselves – in their own way.'

Mark: 'Change their own attitudes – so it isn't necessarily a question of the right or the wrong attitude – but maintaining the possibility of changing your attitude to something that – that's interesting.'

Luke: 'I think of the work artists do or designers as educational – I really like that word, and it's pedagogical – I'm not embarrassed to say the work is pedagogic, you know what I mean, I'm out to teach, not necessarily directly, but I'm out to make people see the world in deeper ways, at every level. So when I said that I appreciate the feedback I get from both realms, the public as well as the people working within my field of expertise. You know I find both important.'

Mark: But and sorry to come back to this, I'm thinking again back to what you were saying about changing the *status quo* of relationships, in that company residency you talked about. In effect you have really changed how the company sees itself?

Dirk: 'Yes and that was why I was a success there. I was there for some years and yes that was exactly what it was about.'

Mark: But isn't that also changing the world?

Peter: 'I am trying to think of an example. I think it is this realisation that looking at a number of works and trying again to really understand what or how have I changed the world by doing what I have done, what has transformed? By setting a process in motion and kind of unleashing these processes and people going through them you know, transforming themselves or producing something. I did start to realise through talking to people that the idea of people taking things into their memory, of taking responsibility and ownership of things, actually that was a thing that was common across lots of works and I hadn't set out to build a series of works that tested or produced this. Looking back on the consistent thread, one of them seems to be that there is now this population of people in the world that have been through these processes.'

Figure 5 Meaning-making tag cloud



Meaning-making: A discussion of the literature

In this chapter I discuss how the literature on dialogical art practices connects with the themes which emerged from the research material in this study. The discussion is divided into three sections.

Firstly, I highlight changes in art's knowledge, understanding, and its framework of meaning-making. These shifts present dialogue as a practical process of use and interaction rather than reflection and contemplation. Dialogue thus acts as a response to the immediate demands of life, generating a connected mode of knowing, which may draw attention to marginalised and overlooked perspectives and concerns.

Then I talk about the diffusion of subject matter in art. I note how relational approaches engage with the diffuse thematic concerns encountered in the sphere of inter-human relations, and chaos of daily life. Dialogical practices shift the thematic concern of the work of art towards what is revealed by language and conversation as the topic at hand.

Lastly, There is a discussion about how these shifts imply a focus on changed self-understanding, and/or relationship with the world. The shift towards meaning-making through a process of encounter is away from art's traditional exercise of distanced summative judgement. This transforms meaning-making in art from a game of practical judgement to the co-creation of shared lifeworlds. The implication of such a co-constructive process is that dialogue offers an alternative relationship to

the possibility of change which transforms meaning-making in art into the possibility of continual development through continued conversation and coming to new understanding.

Dialogical practices are leading to shifts away from the traditional framework of meaning-making in contemporary art

Dialogical art practices exist in tension with more traditional perspectives based in art's modernist and *avant-gardist* past (Kester, 2004). Modernist *avant-gardist* frameworks of meaning were a reaction to the perceived oppressive and hegemonic control of administered, technological and alienating means end rationality over modes of life in the everyday social world (Bürger, [1974] 2006). The *avant-garde* response to the alienation of administered rationality proposed that people could be liberated by creativity and works of art that resisted rational modes of communicative exchange (Bourriaud, 2002). The 'authentic' work of meaning-making in this traditionalist perspective is located in two separate sites. Firstly, the artist is liberated from means-end rationality through the autonomous creative process. Secondly, the viewer is liberated in a separate encounter with the artist's work which presents a challenge to interpretive meaning (Kester, 2011).

This traditionalist disposition towards meaning-making in art is sustained in post-structuralist perspectives which dominate the critical discourse on meaning-making in art. Post-structural perspectives maintain art's traditional withdrawal, and resistance towards objectifying forms of knowledge production in the everyday

world (Kester, 2011). Everyday structures of knowledge production are seen as the means by which traditional structures of power are maintained. The on-going transformation of contemporary art from material practice to an ideological one only serves to reinforce the dominance of art's ideologically driven withdrawal from everyday sites of meaning-making. Kester (2011) argues that this withdrawal is from interactional meaning-making in everyday sites into isolated textual interaction. This serves to continue the *avant-gardist* opposition to and subversion of normative modes of meaning-making in the everyday social world (Kester, 2011).

The post-structuralist perspective aims to subvert normative meaning (Kester, 2011, p.46), but this critical perspective has itself come to dominate the meaning-making discourse of contemporary art and suppress other approaches to meaning making. Sedgwick (2003) argues this is because the dominant critical mode of meaning-making is a paranoid mode of knowing (Kester, 2011, p.52). It exemplifies a suspicion, mistrust, antagonistic opposition and persecution of other perspectives and modes of meaning-making. For instance, reparative knowledge is dismissed and disparaged by post-structural perspectives as insufficiently sceptical and naively complicit in working with the very systems of meaning-making which oppress (Kester, 2006).

Post-structuralist perspectives are also dismissive of pluralistic situated approaches towards meaning-making which are seen as transgressive. This is because dialogical practices reverse art's withdrawal away from everyday sites of administered and oppressive rationality (Kester, 2011). The *avant-gardist* perspective within the practice of art criticism dismisses dialogical projects as productive of banal,

proscriptive and alienating meaning. For example, artistic practices that engage with everyday sites of meaning-making have been criticised as lacking in serious purpose (Foster, 1996). Bishop (2006b) also complains that collaborative works of art cannot be judged as failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring, as they are all deemed equally necessary to the task of strengthening social relationships and meaning (p.180). Labelling something as boring may reflect modernist aesthete's disposition and point of view that thing before them in the world is tedious and boring (Dalle Pezze & Salzani, 2009). Labelling things as boring can in contrast be construed as a characteristic modernist attitude of the sophisticated bored person (Dalle Pezze & Salzani, 2009). This modernist attitude portrays everyday life as boring, and argues for a wider aesthetic attitude, which promotes a taste for experience set apart from the sameness of modern living.

Dialogue contributes to an alternative framework of meaning-making

Conversational art practices question what type of knowledge we expect from art and examine how conversational approaches might alter artists' understandings of their relationship to others, the cultural experience of art, and possibly contribute to the social transformation of the world (Bhabha, 1998, p.40–41). In particular, conversation as an art practice challenges the visually grounded notion of truth as accuracy of representation (Bhabha, 1998). This is not an opposition to reason, but an unsettling of oppositional and argumentative reason as the foundational value and origin of social and cultural meaning. Instead Bhabha (1998) argues that conversational art adopts a more Rortean disposition towards meaning making which

conceives meaning-making as the process by which we justify and answer for the decisions we make in response to life's contingent demands (Bhabha, 1998).

Relational practices see conversational approaches as part of a wider framework of meaning-making which is emotional, behavioural, and inter-subjective. In inter-subjective meaning-making decision-making is not an autonomous rational process but is compromised by dynamics of manipulation. In this view, the meaning of art is not a fact produced by an autonomous author, but is seen as the product of interaction between artists and other co-participants in the process of the work of art (Bourriaud, 2002). The relational perspective construes meaning as an aspirational constructive process rather than as achieving knowledge of the world (Bourriaud, 2002). The shift in the approach to meaning-making in art in a relational perspective is away from a traditional emphasis on individual authorship and more towards meaning-making as a practical and collaborative process of use rather than process of reflection and contemplation, (Bishop, 2004).

Dialogical practices similarly emphasise the collaborative process of meaning-making, but Kester (2013, p.113) proposes that such a process reflects a 'connected form of knowing.' Connected knowing involves a different mode of speaking and listening which is more caring and nurturing towards the other (Miller, 2008) and which produces a very different dynamic of knowing to administered rationality, and oppositional modes of argument. Oppositional argument constitutes a tradition of assertive speech (Fiumara, 1990), which has dominated art, western philosophy and society. It produces a dominant logocentric culture which privileges speaking and informing (Kester, 2004). In the modernist art tradition, everyday life and work were

seen as sites of objectifying rationality. In this view the knowing and instrumentalising dynamic of everyday language were what necessitated a withdrawal away from discursive interaction in everyday sites into processes of opaque and inaccessible meaning-making (Kester, 2004). Yet Fiumara (1990) argues that art and philosophy remain sites of objectifying knowledge production.

Culture remains dominated by logocentric discourses, which exert control over meaning-making in art and everyday life by sustaining opposition and struggle (Foucault, 1980). Connected knowing voices marginalised discourses, and draws attention to local and popular knowledge (Miller, 2008) such as private anxieties, and public decisions which do not receive sufficient attention and thus never become public issues (Mills, 1959). Connected knowing differs from the oppositional argumentative approach to meaning-making of dominant discourse, as such an approach aims at understanding the perspectives of the other interlocutor/s, recognising the social context from which they interact and communicate, and their relationship to positions of cultural, social and political power (Kester, 2004). Rather than opposing dominant discourse, which only sustains the *status quo*, connected knowing examines how we might be simultaneously complicit in, and attempt to resist discourses of power (Miller, 2008). As a mode of meaning-making in art connected knowing does not aim towards a universal or foundational ground for knowledge. This shifts the emphasis of meaning-making in art away from the categorisation of facts about the production of the work of art towards the generation of a more provisional, uncertain or consensual knowledge grounded in the experience of collective interaction (Kester, 2011) which functions as a description of the on-going project of the work of art (Groys, 2010).

Dialogue diffuses the subject matter of art

The increase of situated, interactive, constructive and responsive modes of meaning-making in relational, conversational and dialogical practices are leading to a diffusion of the thematic concerns in contemporary art. Relational practices in particular are proposed as separating relational forms, problems, and trajectories, from notions of style, iconography and stylistic thematic concerns (Bourriaud, 2002). Relational practices instead share a practical and theoretical framework that simply reflects a diffuse thematic concern with meaning-making in the practical and theoretical sphere of inter-human relations.

Although all art practices are arguably grounded in the sphere of inter-human relations, Bourriaud (2002) asserts that relational art practices remain removed from a thematic preoccupation with administrative structures of thought and their constraining rationalities by drawing inspiration from flexible processes, which organise our daily lives. This risks presenting relational art as thematically engaged with the banal, and secondary to the political and revolutionary concerns of *avant-garde* and traditional art perspectives. Traditional *avant-garde* perspectives remain today as a conventional preoccupation with overcoming the oppressive and alienating modes of thought, labour and action assumed to be norm of quotidian reality (Kester, 2011). The thematic openness of relational practices suggests an engagement with trajectories of thought running through the chaos of daily existence rather than an engagement with a thematic *teleos* or goal. The thematic subject of art thus construed, is at best a sense of chaotic existence, rather than a reassuring pre-

established entity, or authoritative guide to making sense of the chaos of reality experience through art (Bourriaud, 2002).

The chaotic subject matter of relational art raises problems for evaluation as it has an erratic and unpredictable relationship with the structures that such themes might orientate us towards in dialogue (Bishop, 2004). It makes the question of how to relate to the work of art heavily dependent on context, and the literal engagement of the viewer (Bishop, 2004). Dialogical perspectives open up and pluralise the authority of the thematic interpretation of the work of art in a manner reminiscent of hermeneutics (see Dilthey, 1985). In the interaction between co-participants and contexts in the work of art, dialogue shifts the thematic concerns of art to what is revealed by language and conversation to be the topic at hand (Freeman, 2011). Bishop (2012) does not disagree entirely, but argues in dialogical works, the ideas and their possibilities are more important than the status of multiple authorship.

The danger of open thematic structures is that dialogical works can tend to invert the identities of participant communities turning them into the thematic content of work in a manner that reifies social issues and overly objectifies community identities and social issues (Kwon, 2004). In this manner, dialogue can fall back into predictable thematic concerns with participant identities, rather than pursuing the more difficult goal of emergent thematic understanding. Gerz (2004) believes that emergent understanding can be generated through public dialogue and collective meaning-making processes (what he terms 'public authorship'). In his (2004) approach the process of art should be orientated towards processes of everyday conversational exchange rather than meeting the expectations and demands for institutional

terminology and administrative themes. However, it may be difficult for artists to relinquish control over the thematic content of the works of art, especially in bureaucratic and administrative contexts that expect such linear discursivity. Weiner (in Baldessari *et al.*, 2007) argues however that it can be important for control of the conversational direction of art practices to be taken out of the hands of artists in order to avoid the trap that all artists frequently fall into of steering conversation into something that interests them.

Dialogue implies changing our understanding of our selves and/or changing our relationship with the world

The transformation of the meaning framework of art by relational and dialogical practices has been fore-grounded in arguments by Bourriaud (2002). Dialogical practices shift the focus of meaning-making towards a process of encounter, rather than presenting the meaning of art as an exercise in distanced summative judgement. This transformation of art's meaning cannot be reduced to traditional modernist criteria of newness, or the next new thing. He argues such framing is unhelpful, and evokes desires of modernist utopian futures to come when the suggestion is that relational and dialogical practices are grounded more in the here and now. They focus on understanding meanings changing in the current social sphere of art, in an attempt to grasp what has already changed, and is changing. In this sense the meaning of art has just recently been transformed, and in the social sphere it is already no longer new (Bourriaud, 2002). The problem for the artist is how to

grapple with the transformation of meaning in the flow of social reality in which the artist participates (Margolis, 1999).

Dialogue is proposed as one such approach and means by which the artist negotiates what is just past, and handed to them through their interactions in the work of art (Bourriaud, 2002). Such interaction plays a constructive role in shaping the world (Hosking, 2008). The dialogical and interactional work of art is construed as the bundling of relations that represent the possibility or proposal of living in a shared world (Bourriaud, 2002). The proposal is that such constructive approaches transform the meaning of art from versions that construe the work of art as the sum of historical and aesthetic statements and judgements made by the artist in the process of production, to co-constructed and shared worlds of meaning. Bourriaud (2002) characterises this as the transforming of the meaning of art from language games (see Wittgenstein, 1958) of trivial historical criticism to an act of productive dialogical encounter. The form of relational artworks are realised in the meeting of two different realities constructed from different relations to space and time. The dialogical encounter of the work of art transforms meaning from a game of practical judgement to the joint creation of relating anew, which creates the sense of a shared lifeworld (Charmaz, 2008).

If we examine this notion of meaning making as encounter in the context of the production of traditional art objects this encounter with other realities, bundles of relationships, reveals the difference between what the artist thought he was making or doing, and what they did (Bourriaud, 2002). The transformation of meaning however is not immediately obvious to the artist. It is realised through encounter, in a

manner akin to the psychodynamics of transference (Jacobs, 2006), enacted by the reactions of the other to the artist's doing and/or making. Bourriaud (2002) characterises this process as a mysterious osmosis, and his language of encounter seems to privilege the visual encounter with inert artistic material rather than encounters with others and their realities. This notional transformation of the meaning of art still remains emotionally attached to the experience of encountering objects that meet conventional expectations of the work of the traditional material and object as a work of art.

The idea of the transformation of meaning through encounter is taken further, by considering dialogical encounter as an interpersonal collaborative practice in which all participants may have their existing conceptions challenged (Kester, 2004). Interpersonal dialogical encounters are proposed as transformational in a number of ways (Kester, 2004). Firstly, dialogical encounters allow different participants to come to situations anew. Secondly, they may permit people to perceive relationships or ideas in fresh ways, and challenge embedded thinking. Thirdly, they may even question the preconceptions that artists have about their own function or role within the work of art. Dialogical encounter thus represents the potential for the generation of new insights amongst collaborative participants.

In contrast, dialogue has been criticised as too harmonious a mode of encounter for rethinking our relationships with each other. Bishop (2004) argues instead for a relational antagonism aimed at exposing what is repressed in sustaining the appearance of harmony in the *status quo*. Bishop's (2004; 2005) perspective assumes that maintaining the semblance of harmonious relationships is intrinsically unhealthy

and that only an antagonistic polemical attack on the *status quo* of existing self-understanding is sufficient to rethink our relationship with the world and each other. The sense is however that an antagonistic perspective aims at the disruption of self-understanding in others, yet does not address the double bind of when such a disposition itself becomes the *status quo* of how a person relates to the world. It echoes the traditionalist's assumption that divides the participant roles in art into critically privileged artist and naïve complicit notional public other (Kester, 2004).

My suggestion is that antagonistic encounters as artworks replicate the modernist impulse to change the world of others. This impulse reflects the traditional point of view that assumes it is the artist's role to make others see the world from their perspective and not the other person's perspective (Kester, 2004). Antagonistic and disruptive encounters are addressed to mass publics, but not as a means of the artist attempting to explain themselves. Antagonism addresses the masses in an attempt to direct them, without the masses understanding (Kester, 2004). This can present antagonistic encounters as behaviouralist instruments that deal with artistic publics as a herd to be steered. An alternative interpretation is that such works embody a modernist disposition towards encounter which is not an attempt to address the public now, but the attempt to call forth new publics, art, social forms and institutions, which would collectively serve to transform the social reality of art and create a new world (Beech, 2010). Such an attitude however seems more dismissive of publics, characterising them as an obstacle to the desired for change.

This may be why some contemporary artists seek to distance themselves from the efforts of previous generations (Bourriaud, 2002). One notable example is Tiravanija

who often goes as far as asserting that much of what he does is not art at all (Vidokle, 2011). Yet Tiravanija's meals have been interpreted as a reflection on the artist's reverence for the everyday and an attempt to address alienation from work through valuing not working (Vidokle, 2011). This illustrates the tendency of interpretations to so readily constrain the meaning of works of art to the preoccupation of previous generations. The transformation that relational and dialogical art seeks most is a change in the artist's relationship to transforming the world and achieving social change. The problem is how to enter into a different relationship as an artist without it being seen as a continuation of past (modernist and *avant-garde*) attempts to create new worlds. This relational shift may be seen as a move away from future orientated utopian agendas, towards the effort of seeking provisional solutions in the present (Bishop, 2004). Instead of the meaning of art being the quest to transform the world and its meaning, the artist enacts dialogue in order to change their relationship with the world and attempt to cope better with its chaos. For example Gillick's work is not a critical attack on current social institutions and ways of thinking, but an attempt at negotiating and thinking through the extent to which critical encounter and transformation is possible (Bishop, 2004).

The alternative may be to adopt a pessimistic stance towards the artist's relationship to change, a stance exemplified by Santiago Sierra whose work addresses the oppressive social systems in which artistic production is inextricably bound. Sierra responds to the contradiction of the artist's engagement with such systems and structures but admits a fatalistic inability to change anything (Bishop, 2004). This translates artistic practice into a self-justifying reality, which appears to excuse the artist from the possibility of changed self-understanding. The contrast to this sort of

fatalistic abandonment of the modernist hope for changing the *status quo*, is as Groys (2010, p.109) suggests, to recognise that ‘change is our *status quo*. Permanent change *is* our only reality.’ To do otherwise, for artists to abandon the notion of change altogether is as Gillick and Weiner (2005/2006) argue, to look to find a sanctuary within existing structures and become trapped in the belief that art is not about continual development and continuing a conversation.

Discussion of some characteristics of meaning-making in dialogical art

This discussion summarises how my practice connects with the themes of meaning-making outlined previously. It talks about how dialogue can develop an alternative framework which shifts away from art’s traditional construction of meaning. I argue that my social constructionist grounded theory framework, presents meaning-making as a practical process of asking further questions rather than as a pathway to producing objective knowledge of reality. Then it highlights how this approach emphasises listening to and considering the perspectives and insights of others in a manner which diffuses the subject matter of art. I note how such an approach to dialogue may draw out assumptions of what dialogical art should be, and draw participants out of a hermetically sealed artistic worldview. This leads to a consideration of whether such an approach to dialogue implies changing our understanding of ourselves and/or our relationship with the world. Lastly, I consider the possible implications of a dialogical approach which displaces the disciplinary framework of art by opening it up to a socially situated and conversational frame of

meaning-making, and how this inquiry's approach strives to sustain the transformative learning potential of dialogue.

The second half of this discussion draws out and reflects upon the possible implications of two aspects of meaning-making. Firstly, it looks at how dialogue can offer an alternative to traditional artistic modes of meaning-making and reasoning based in oppositional argument, developing a more a descriptive mode of inquiry. I highlight how my descriptive approach develops out of the attempt to grapple with the transformation of meaning in the flow of social reality. Secondly, I examine the diffusion of thematic concerns by dialogical practices again and emphasise how adopting a language game approach might challenge the view of art as a totalising reality, and question the assumption that artists know what is best for others.

Dialogue shifts away from art's traditional construction of meaning-making

The traditional framework of art tends to separate the creative process into autonomous artistic liberating creativity and reconstructed challenging yet liberating interpretative labour. Art in this view is seen as potential liberation from everyday processes of objectifying rationality and thought. The traditional perspective draws on post-structuralist philosophical rhetoric to rationalise the artistic withdrawal from everyday sites of direct social interaction and collaborative processes of meaning-making.

Artists withdraw into processes of disruptive, opaque and inaccessible meaning-making. Yet in the traditional framework art and its dominant philosophical discourse remain sites of objectifying knowledge (Fiumara, 1990) because they reinforce the dominant logocentric and rational discourses which dominate culture through their opposition to them, and function as a hegemonic rationality oppressing and constraining other approaches to meaning-making in art.

This self-marginalisation of traditional art and opposition to normative and restorative processes of meaning-making in everyday life sustain a double bind between dominant art perspectives and those discourses thought to dominate everyday sites (Foucault, 1980). This double bind serves to maintain the belief that the preoccupations and perspectives that inform the construction of this double bind between everyday discourses and art's exterior opposition are the true concerns of art worthy of thinking about and discussing.

In contrast my practice like many dialogical art practices shifts towards a shared conversational interaction and co-constructed framework of meaning-making. This approach attempts to understand concerns about the objectifying dynamics of knowledge production in art, while striving not to convert that understanding into objects of knowledge. In shifting away from traditional perspectives I draw on social-constructionist perspectives that contest art's traditional quest for objective truth, and its belief in being grounded in fundamental or universal values. Instead of this objective world, I construe art as consisting of many interconnected worldviews, which provides a more relativist framework of meaning-making. I adapt a constructionist framework of meaning-making which draws on Wittgenstein's (1958)

notion of language games to propose dialogical art as a process of social actions, communicative exchange, and symbolic and contextual relationships (Dorn, 2005). In the social constructionist grounded theory framework, meaning-making is a practical process of asking further questions of the material generated by interactive artistic practice, not a pathway to producing objective knowledge of reality (Charmaz, 2008).

Dialogue diffuses the subject matter of art

The constructionist grounded theory approach involves listening to and considering the perspectives and insights of others in a manner akin to connected knowing (Kester, 2004). Recorded as a process of research, what is conveyed is a re-inscription of material generated through the process of on-going dialogical exchange. In re-inscribing co-constructed material, I expose my own assumptions and my connection to discourses of power. This is a move away from processes of objective knowledge production, as the framing of dialogical connected knowing in a process of language games (Wittgenstein, 1958) offsets universal, foundational, and objective claims to knowledge. What is produced by research inquiry is a more provisional framework of socially and inter-subjectively constructed meaning.

The situated and responsive mode of meaning-making in my conversational approach opens up the subject matter of art, and deviates from the more familiar artistic approach of importing concepts or tropes from the dominant critical philosophical discourse. In the interaction between co-participants and contexts in

the work of art, dialogue shifts the thematic concerns of art to what is revealed by the situated language game to be the topic at hand (Freeman, 2011) in a manner that diffuses the thematic concerns of the work of art.

This approach abandons the certainty of art as an abstract and ideal common ground, or single framework which unites all participants allowing them to steer conversation and make easy comparisons (Rorty, 1980). Such an approach more appropriately reflects the growing diffusion of art practices and critical perspectives in contemporary art which I discussed in the methodology. This diffusion of thematic concerns presents a more relativist conception of meaning-making in art. Drawing on Wittgenstein's (1958) emphasis on the 'use' of language presents a mode of dialogical art that is made up of many overlapping language games, which themselves are made up of overlapping language games and particular uses of language. Each encounter is the potential generation of a new theme which might allow the participants to co-construct a new language game or use of conversational dialogue.

Although co-participants have a prior idea or expectation of what the subject of dialogue and or art is, this might differ from other people's prior ideas. The constructionist perspective does not assume there is a right or wrong idea of what the subject to be discussed by art should be. An example that illustrates this perspective is the gallery manifestation of *An invitation to dialogue*. One woman said she had been worried about what we would talk about, but then realised when she arrived that that was the point of the work. The dialogue of the work of art allows for the negotiation and co-construction of subject matter. It also allows me and other

participants to be drawn out from the hermetically sealed artistic world (Rorty, 1980). In practical terms it allows me to be drawn out of my assumptions of what dialogical art should be, and be about, by accepting the possibility of diffusing art's concerns.

Dialogue implies changing our understanding of ourselves and/or our relationship with the world

A dialogical approach which displaces the disciplinary framework of art, and opens it up to a conversational frame of meaning-making in art, risks being interpreted as dilettante by people more invested in the normative disciplinary worldviews (Rorty, 1980) (see case reflection of *An invitation to dialogue* at philosophy conference) (Appendix 2). The reverse risk of such a practice is of presenting myself like a 'philosopher king' to borrow Rorty's (1980) term, and appear to know everyone else's worldview. In this manner the artist may appear to or assume to already know what others are doing in the language game and how to lead others to true knowledge. Both perspectives imply a doctrinaire and reinforcing disposition towards knowledge. The dilettante interpretation implies an interest without real knowledge and lack of self-commitment. Here one assumes that not to express and assert a disciplinary point of view is to lack a commitment to a discipline of knowledge. The second characterisation conveys a belief that a framework or worldview provides the path to true knowledge. Both interpretations misconstrue the transformational learning potential of dialogue, which may involve changing the

understanding of ourselves supplied by disciplines, and the relationship with the world proscribed by disciplines.

My constructionist approach to dialogue is underpinned by the notion of dialogue as a language game, which maintains an open disposition to co-learning. This reflects the view of one artist I spoke with who said ‘The way we learn is not with the attitude of expertise but the attitude of not, the attitude of the lack of knowledge, with an open mind.’ It is very easy for artists involved in academic contexts to slip back into a traditional didactic stance, and belief that it is the role of artists to correct and activate the learning of others. I have found it very difficult however to practice a mode of dialogue aimed at sustaining a critical openness necessary to change my attitude to the world and others through dialogue. The cultivation of an attitude of critical openness to self-change may be necessary to avoid dialogical learning slipping back into a reinforcement of the dogmatic mantra (Roberts, 1999) of traditional dominant art discourse, and its promotion and activating change in others. This transformational learning potential of dialogue is sustained through a stance of uncertainty, and working to avoid dogmatic assertion (Roberts, 2005). By continuing to sustain such an attitude and participate in art, such a dialogical approach may begin to make art’s framework of meaning more inclusive and amenable to social change (Dirkx & Mezirow, 2006). Without critical uncertainty and openness the learning dynamic of dialogue is reduced to a process of corrective education and indoctrination (Hull, 1981) of the next generation of artists and publics.

**New understanding: Implications for the meaning-making
process of dialogical art**

In the following section I draw out and discuss the implications of two aspects of meaning-making. Firstly, I examine how dialogue can differ from traditional artistic modes of meaning-making and reasoning based in oppositional argument. I argue that dialogue develops a descriptive mode of meaning-making and reasoning which is an alternative to oppositional argument. This approach develops out of the attempt to grapple with the transformation of meaning in the flow of social reality. Secondly, I look at the diffusion of thematic concerns by dialogical practices. I develop this discussion by highlighting how adopting a language game approach might offset the tendency to reduce the thematic concerns of dialogical art to narrow issues of political power.

Shifting away from oppositional argument and the emergence of an alternative approach to meaning-making

Not all dialogue necessarily follows strict rules of logical argument. To assume it does is to adopt a disposition informed by Socrates's method of refutation and contesting of contradictory logic. Nor does the artist have to learn dialogue by strictly following the proscriptions of philosophers and art critics. Instead artists can strive to learn through social interaction and communicative exchange with the hope and expectation that they might discover dialogue grounded in myriad everyday language games. This approach does not exclude the Socratic method, but subtly

steps away from assuming the privilege of oppositional modes of argument, such as dispute and antagonistic contradiction.

Nevertheless, in immersing myself in the exchange of social reality, I have encountered expectations that it is the function of the artist to sift and decide which dialogical language games are right and which wrong. Such expectations seek to circumscribe meaning by grounding it in the philosophical language game of seeking, and or negating the various properties and functions of dialogue. This approach prescribes meaning-making as a process of emphasising and summarising differences (Wittgenstein, 1958, p.25–29).

If we examine the goal of argumentative discourse, we see that it is an attempt to clarify the common elements that are essential to all manifestations of a word such as dialogue. As Wittgenstein (1958) observes, the idea that this is even possible has constrained philosophy (p.19), and by extension continues to hold back art's conceptualisation of meaning-making. In contrast artists who adopt a language game approach to meaning-making do not aim to define dialogue in this way. To seek definition leads on to the need to define those words that provide the definition. This in theory may become an endless task, unless those seeking a definition become satisfied that either there is enough correspondence with their expectations, or enough of an attempt to locate and fix a word that the other person's doubt is set aside. In this view, Wittgenstein (1958) suggests that to seek a definition is to seek to resolve the discomfort and uncertainty of meaning-making in the sphere of social life. The consequence of aiming to establish essential truths through a mode of oppositional argument is that such an approach risks obscuring the concrete cases

(the specific art practices) which helped me to understand the usage of general terms like dialogue and dialogical in the first place.

This raises the problem of how I and other artists can grapple with meaning as it emerges from the social processes in which we participate. My response is to see dialogue as a process of meaning-making as the attempt to describe this struggle. In this view this inquiry is simultaneously working through the puzzle of emergent meaning through dialogue while allowing that mode and understanding of dialogue to emerge from my dialogical engagement in the social world. Part of the process of grappling with this puzzle is describing the process.

As part of my grappling with the flow of meaning in my socially grounded process I construct and produce numerous texts and research reports of the process of dialogue and emergent meanings. These texts are new language games and manifestations of dialogue, and so re-enact and re-describe some fragments of meaning which emerged during a particular conversation, exchange, or encounter, and through reflecting and remembering recent past encounters. This is presented as a constructionist interpretation of grounded theory which aims at describing characteristics of the inquiry as dialogue. This approach should not be confused with earlier models of grounded theory which attempted to define one real description of a phenomenon. Constructionist grounded theory research reports don't provide definitions in that manner, nor do they offer a distillation or description of the essence of dialogue. The descriptive process of language games identifies characteristics which emerge from the co-constructive process of situated dialogues. These descriptions and research

texts act as a provisional and partial understanding of dialogue as it is co-constructed through interaction in my social situation as artist and researcher.

This approach to research writing is part of my on-going dialogical practice and presents a very different character of meaning-making from that of definition and argument based modes. The presentation of research reports, analyses and reflections on emergent characteristics acts as a description of the language game (Wittgenstein, 1958) and process of becoming familiar with dialogue as art. This is an open-ended process in which research texts do not function as a final summation or formula for dialogue but provide provisional interpretations to hold up and compare with the next example (Wittgenstein, 1958), the next encounter and manifestation of dialogue as art.

The possible implications of dialogue's diffusion of thematic concerns

My dialogical perspective construes art as being made up of multiple local realities like science and many other spheres of human practice and meaning-making (Hosking, 2008). In a language game view of situated interaction, each manifestation of dialogue may comprise a local reality and have its own interactionally constructed rules. In this view, artistic dialogue may not only involve multiple local forms, perspectives and interests, but each dialogue may reconstruct the rules, interests, and form of dialogical interactions. Such a situated process of meaning-making questions the universality of abstract critical judgement, and the construction of a totalising reality called art. In this approach, dialogical art makes historical and objective

detached evaluation problematic (Bishop, 2004). For if each interaction may generate and modify its own rules and thematic concerns, how do you criticise dialogical works in which there is no true or false, no absolute right or wrong (Hosking, 2008)?

The diffusion of thematic concerns in situated dialogue may have unanticipated implications for artists. Informal conversation can undermine the categories of speaker entitlement (Potter & Hepburn, 2008). This means that interlocutors' expectations and assumptions of what and who determines which topic is important or significant in conversation can be undermined. It can also mean that participants might not conform to the assumption that it is the artist's role to speak, to be knowledgeable and define what subject is of interest. Participant categories, like speaker and listener, artist and audience can become blurred and the stakes that participants have in the meaning-making process exposed. Artists may be exposed to perspectives that question and threaten their sense of being entitled to define meaning, and assume that art is a reality that spans all historical and contextual realities, and overrides all local meaning (Hosking, 2008).

My approach has been to focus on the thematic orientation of each dialogue as language games as constructed through an interactional process (Potter & Hepburn, 2008). I propose that the subject of dialogue may emerge out of and draw upon the preoccupations at hand and compete with those concerns and preoccupations administered by external structures and ideologies (Bourriaud, 2002). However, where people express unexpected ideas or themes, others tend to seek explanations for the expressions by fitting them to a paradigm they have in mind (Wittgenstein, 1958). This can lead artists to adopt conventionally administered art critical

perspectives and to dismiss the thematic concerns of everyday dialogue as banal or boring.

To adopt a language game approach to dialogue is to adopt an everyday disposition towards language and discursive themes. This can facilitate artists focusing on the thematic orientation of dialogue and considering the correspondence of expectations with external ideologies. To dismiss everyday concerns or say a theme or subject in a language game is boring is to miss the point, (Wittgenstein, 1958) as making such a statement is akin to complaining that other people's expressions of their interest and preoccupations are trivial utterances, instead of considering the use those expressions may have in language games other than art criticism (Wittgenstein, 1958). The benefit for artists of such a diffusion of thematic concerns in dialogue is how such an approach may examine art criticism's unquestioned sense of political entitlement and produce an alternative artistic stance to traditional claims that artists know what concerns are important, what reality is and what is best for others (Hosking, 2008), and that others need liberating from their ignorance.

Chapter 6: Relating

In this chapter I address the relational thematic of dialogical practice, through a layered performance of dialogue. A variety of subordinate relational themes apparent in this study's research material are introduced and presented to readers as a constructed assemblage in the manner of a mimetic dialogue. The mimetic re-inscriptive performance of knowledge offers an opportunity for renewed inter-active participation as the diffuse structure seeks to avoid leading readers to a singular goal or immediate conclusion. The diffusion in the presentation of dialogical themes is continued by a tag cloud, which represents the themes and tensions within the previous constructed dialogue. The tag cloud acts as a bridge into the following layer of dialogue, an interpretive discussion of the literature.

In the discussion I consider how conversation is receiving increased attention within dialogical art practices, providing new and more ambivalent resources for the performance of artistic relationships through dialogue. This is followed by an examination of several other loosely intersecting thematic concerns expressive of the relational dimension of dialogue. It follows, therefore, that dialogical practices may be altering the construction and sense-of-self of co-participants, in a manner which both relies on and contributes to an openness to self-risk, and which may be changing the sense of engagement in art. Such openness is proposed as the transformational potential of dialogical art, which exists in tension with and raises questions about the ethical status of dialogical exchanges. I then highlight how

dialogical practices continue to problematise representational practices within art representation raising attendant concerns about the possible negative implications of identification.

The discussion concludes by offering the tensions within dialogical practice as shared dilemmas and preoccupations, which paradoxically may act as potential supportive dynamics for dialogical practice. The next section draws on the interpretive resources offered in the discussion of the literature to enact a dialogical reflection. The ultimate layer of which highlights how the relational dimension of this dialogical mode of practice aims to offset concerns about objectification in dialogue through a focus on interpersonal conversation, expressed as an interactive process of learning and discovery.

Relating dialogue

Mark: I'm interested in the possible connection between conversation and relating in dialogue. In my work *An Invitation to Dialogue*, conversation has been an informal exchange, almost like pub chat, where people talk about everyday stuff like sport. That kind of informality extended even to the point where during a dialogue I did on Blackweir Bridge in Cardiff, one guy asked me if I ever 'pulled' doing this art work. He associated conversation with talking about sex, sport and taking the mickey down the pub and at some level in my dialogical work conversation seems almost part of a process of fitting in or seeking new relationships. You can be in other people's space, like when a foreman of the building site next to where I was working noticed me and came over to ask why I was there. He was almost expecting me to ask about his work, how long it would take and so on, but at one level it seems like the most simplest form of relating, an encounter. Yet at a philosophy conference, in my discussion panel, Gideon Calder suggested that all practices directed towards audiences are analogous to conversation. I think he wrote something like, 'they are a process of shaping the 'what' and 'how' of delivery as well as responding to that which is delivered.' But I was struck by his reflection that philosophy has traditionally focused more on the work or labour of the speaker, and he was suggesting that listening is... hold on I've gotten it written here. Yes, he said listening is 'a necessary condition of the particular kind of thing that conversation is.' I wonder if any of you connect with that?

Dirk: Well 'I had a period of working in industry which was sort of interesting ... because I am not really doing much of that now but I worked in the software industry as a kind of creative thinker, artist in residence kind of. I think that the stuff I did was, I would be... it was more often very strategic so... We took a minibus driver called Gordon, who I think had had some kind of breakdown or something because he was told he had to take it really easy. He was quite a sort of articulate amateur dramatic person and I found out through chatting to him that he was good at telling jokes. So I ended up organising the quarterly meetings which was hundreds of people and I would give Gordon a spot and he would just stand up and tell jokes and it was great. People were astonished.'

Mark: So conversation can be part of a wider strategy? A strategy for finding out and relating?

Peter: 'Yes, and I think you are seeking validation in some ways, where you're seeking people to, well I suppose it's like conversation or something, that there are these opportunities for people to reflect on what's happened to them I suppose and I am thinking in terms of a lot of the works that I have made, there are opportunities for people to not only participate, not only to generate the data that I am interested in but also to produce the behaviour or action or whatever it might be that I am interested in, the thing that looks like a work. There is also very rapidly after that, opportunities for people to talk to me or people around the project or for me to become aware of how people are thinking about themselves having been involved in the project and that seems to be a wider reflection on the thing that just happened.'

Mark: So it can be part of a strategy for thinking about our involvement? I think I connect with that, from an artist's perspective. I guess I'd go so far as to say, it's been a process of thinking or rethinking my strategy as an artist, but also how I understand how I relate to being an artist. Early on I considered if working with conversation might be a bit like Kaprow's notion of being an un-artist. I think he replaces 'artist' with 'player' as if adopting an alias, and as a way of altering a fixed identity. But I have also wondered if the notion of an artistic alias might connect with the idea of bad faith. At that conference I mentioned, a philosopher told me about Sartre's analogy of the waiter and the concept of bad faith. He said that Sartre describes the waiter as acting too eager to please or too eager to appear like a waiter, and that this can come across as inauthentic. This is bad faith because the waiter is not merely the 'object' or serving waiter but also authentically himself. Does this reflect how any of you see yourselves as artists, or maybe what being an artist means for you?

Andrea: 'For me I'm an artist because, well 'I also have this need to really er, I enjoy making the works myself. I have this pleasure in, in the actual, how do you say? In the labour, when...'

Mark: 'In the fabricating?'

Andrea: 'In the fabricating, in the labour. So again it is just the result of if I had been employed by myself to make it.'

Mark: I guess I am thinking more about conceptualism and ideas art, rather than that traditional notion of art maker. Because with conceptualism, 'with the generation of artists like Vito Acconci, there was something new, they were referencing beyond just the visual arts, for example poetry.' It wasn't just about re-making and...

Jane: 'I think that is the difference. They were just, it was a kind of group force, not looking at anything else, and doing what they damn well pleased. And it is a different attitude, whereas now I think there is a sense of something in the air that makes it okay to do because it's been done before. So it's not quite so ferocious anymore. And yet it's important to have that guise of that original ferocity.'

Mark: It's different now but still with a past guise?

Jane: What?

Mark: Being an artist. It still requires a guise of being connected to others, maybe recognised as part of a group? Maybe recognised by the group. But how does that happen?

Nguyen: 'I didn't start out wanting to be an artist. My aim was to become a commercial art director. My dream was to work for Alexander Liebermann. If I couldn't work for Alex Liebermann at Condi Nash I would work for Archimayev. But when I came to New York for the interview, during the interval I had a little break. So I went out to the Modern Museum and I saw de Kooning Woman 1 and

saw all the great modern masterpieces too, and that was a profound experience. It was as James Joyce said, 'an Epiphany'. And that was when I decided to be a painter. I had a very good professor in college from the very moment of my freshman year. In fact it was the first week where you had to take an eclectic class from every field. It was my first painting class ever. I think I was sixteen. Her name was Jane Piper... Jane Piper was the one who told me, and she knew what I wanted to do with my life. But she said to me, you will probably be a very successful art director but you have the temperament of an artist, of a painter. If you ever change your mind you call me. So this is exactly what happened to me when seeing de Kooning's painting Woman 1, and I called her... So I called her up. I said Jane, you are right. I want to be a painter but what should I do? She said you must come to New York. And I said to her, I don't know anyone in New York but I will definitely take your advice. "Should I go to school?" She said "yes, you have to go to school just to get your feet wet." So she was the one who told me to go to New York Studio School, A-Street, where the original Whitney Museum was. It's no longer an interesting school. It's actually run by a hideous English painter.'

Mark: 'Was it interesting at the time because of the people there?'

Nguyen: 'Yes and No...So that school, I was there for a year. The only great thing that came out of that experience was knowing two artists, Peter Agostini an older sculptor, part of the New York School and Nicholas Carrone, a painter who I am still very close to.'

Mark: 'So teachers were important for you?'

Nguyen: 'Well I think Peter Agostini and Nicholas Carrone were very important to me because I had visited them every weekend and we talked and I saw how they lived their lives as artists and of course I admired that very much. I was a very good student at the Studio School, I was offered to go to Cohegan on a scholarship, I was offered to go to Columbia, many places, and I was so, in complete obsession about how I would go about starting my life as an artist. But at the same time I wasn't so seduced by the glamour that was going on in the eighties, especially late eighties with New Expressionism, it was the time when the inflated economy allowed for this incredible emergence of stature, where artists became nearly celebrity like personalities.'

Mark: 'Nearly celebrity?'

Nguyen: 'Absolutely! I mean Julius Schnabel, Basquiat, Clemente, I met them. Was I impressed with their work? To some extent yes, but I was aiming for longevity.'

Mark: 'And were you impressed with them or their work?'

Nguyen: 'Well I was impressed with the energy, with the excitement, with all the things that were going on in terms of how Soho felt with this prospect of painting being done in so many various ways. New Expressionism as a term is kind of ridiculously stupid although the German and some New York artists were the same and painted in the same manner but there were other things going on that were under

the radar. Richard Serra and Chuck Close were not being considered as great artists in those years. They were ignored.'

Mark: 'Why do you think they were ignored at that particular moment?'

Nguyen: 'Because Basquiat's bad paintings were considered great.'

Mark: 'So how we understand what makes a good artist changes?'

Nguyen: 'Absolutely! That's a reason why I had a greater appreciation for the New York School of artists because they were bohemian. They were impoverished people. In fact you can argue that a few of them killed themselves because they were exposed to this incredible social status in a way. Life magazine published Pollock's article, saying, "Is he the greatest American painter?" Called him "Jack the dripper." And de Kooning and you can imagine Rothko, they all hit the bottle. They didn't know how to deal with fame.'

Mark: It reminds me of when someone asked me whether Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital was useful for understanding conversation. But I'm not sure I really understood this at the time.

Suzanne: For me, 'it is something that is changing and transforming – it's not static, fixed. Some artists that are... the bigger named artists who are working with gallery representation, they have their galleries that do a lot of administrative stuff; I don't have that and you only have so much time in a day to, between the teaching and the other things, to make your work and then you have to market it. The marketing is in a sense a whole full-time job. And it can be expensive, if you are submitting to a lot of festivals and things like that. So I have to be really careful of who I go with, if I'm spending all my time preparing for the shows I have no time for making work.'

Mark: 'It seems like the value of being an artist changes on the one hand, and on the other that there is no self outside of the art world. As you say it's a full-time job.'

Dirk: 'I felt I was very much in the art world but wanting to be out of it at the same time. So when I graduated I became a school teacher in a Hackney comprehensive school which was tough and I think if it had been a good school I might have just carried on as a teacher part time or something. But it was a terrible art department. It was just appalling really. So I then reengaged with my practice and became unemployed for a while and set about a career as an artist. So the reason for mentioning the school is that I really want to just go into the world and see what it is like to be out of the art world. I suppose ever since then I have kept a foot in both camps a bit.'

Mark: But I wonder if conversation as art might question or might alter the fixed identity of being an artist? Or how I understand or construct my artistic self. I use conversation in the mode of interview and public encounter as art, and I'm not focused on, or not marketing the thing that ends up at the end necessarily? I'm interested in what Gideon Calder said, that conversation is a practice directed

towards audiences and I'm interested if or how this shapes the deliverer as well as the delivery of art.

Peter: 'The idea of conversation as interview, as research method is common and understood. But those things become apparent to the outside, people other than me when a particular social context is shaped or defined by people inviting me to make work. So there are these moments when you are invited to... maybe again it is this idea of becoming social I suppose. The thing that has been in development and has been probably developed by me and maybe a few other people have known about it, suddenly has these opportunities through marketing and outreach and publicity and press coverage, whatever. And the convention of the exhibition and the performance whatever, they become social at that point.'

Mark: It's almost like you are suggesting we are invited to become an artist publically. Being an artist is only about becoming a public figure, like a celebrity.

Nguyen: 'I know that even though people say all kinds of things about Richard Serra, about Bob Ryman, about Elizabeth Murray, about those artists that I know, but once you know them, of course when you are exposed to that level of public... when you become known, you become a somewhat public figure. So people sort of create a space for themselves.'

Mark: A space? Can I just go back to the idea of becoming social, or invitations, maybe the difficulties of that. I can remember one participant in a dialogue saying they had been worried about what we were going to talk about but then she told me that she was annoyed with herself as she realised that that was the point; to come and relate. And at the philosophy conference a philosopher told me that philosophers are not always comfortable speaking with practitioners. And artists told me following the philosophy was difficult, but I guess that's different. Or maybe it isn't. I told the philosopher that artists aren't always comfortable speaking with philosophers. Is it discomfort? I wondered about this in a dialogue I had with an audience where they had looked uncomfortable, and disinterested. I doubted then whether it was possible to have a dialogue with a crowd. But it was cold and windy and outdoors, and I struggled on for a couple of minutes before thanking people, and feeling something like a fool and a failure. So I guess that felt like even though I'd been invited, or commissioned to do this work, that at some level it was a failure, or I was. But then one man hung back and asked about the location. I mentioned the vulnerability and exposed nature of the crossing. I explained that it was 'inbetween' different areas and I was interested in observing if I felt there was any dialogue between the two sides of Eastside. Who was the public for The Event? That's the festival the dialogue was part of. So there was the individual conversation, which emerged out of the non-conversation with an audience, but now I think I am also interested in the vulnerability of being an artist.

Dirk: 'You know I trust some friends really well, really fully but sometimes I feel exposed in the art world. It's true I do feel exposed so to have Tracy as a loyal friend, although she can be very difficult, means that I will always trust her...' At some level, 'as an artist it is hard to know who you can trust because I mean it is a

competitive business and occasionally you think, oh, I shouldn't have said that to that person or it's just a bit kind of prickly.'

Nguyen: 'I know a lot of successful artists that have no friends. They are miserable human beings.'

Luke: For me, 'it doesn't feel like I am threatening to people in the architectural field because I am not in their territory. It's not saying that those people who look at my work, other architects, not saying that their work is mediocre. It is just that their practice is different, and I don't feel, they don't necessarily feel it as a threat and I think artists don't because they see it as outside the art world.'

Mark: Art's less competitive if you don't seem to be in someone else's territory. Or people feel less threatened? But in *your* work, 'we talked about the participants that in [the] Norway [project] responded maybe defensively. In a similar way, there seems to be a strong thread of defensiveness' with some other works?

Nadia: In Turkey? 'But I think in a way it was expected, and I caused that and I was aware of what I was doing because they told me I was not allowed to enter the primary school you know. And I would be the artist saying yeah Ok. Should I complete the project because I am not allowed to enter the primary school? The same thing, I was kind of [expecting] it, that there could be a problem of some kind because I disagreed with the decision which [they] made in my name. I felt a need to make the work to address this so it was my responsibility to do it and to ignore what this body that doesn't know me and doesn't know the project and they just kind of, probably like paranoid, they just kind of said No, because I am a foreigner. So for me it was not relevant enough to listen to that.'

Mark: So Gideon was right, and conversation shuts down when people stop listening.

Jane: 'Well, we have a student, these little paintings he was doing, in six months his little paintings that we were critiquing were skyrocketing at sixty thousand dollars each. And they were sold before he made them, before the market had been created and everybody leapt on the bandwagon and the closed syndrome went into effect.'

Mark: But that was an MFA student right? I wonder about artist-researchers. A while ago, 'we were talking about the separation of you from all the kind of, the feeling you had of not being supported by a community and how that that wasn't uncommon in other universities or for other artists in academic settings.'

Jason: 'Yes, I think that's generally speaking the case. I think one of the things a research culture does foster is a community, where the arts have a tendency to accentuate individual practice. So I think, yeah, those are reflected.'

Mark: 'You were making a point about a certain individuality being espoused. I can't remember who by.'

Jason: 'Well I think that the individuality or the autonomy of the artist, the sort of an artistic autonomy is related to notions of individuality... [there] is certainly a structure which is visible which demonstrates a notion of acute heightened emotional awareness, kind of existential awareness, which is tied to an individual experience in the work of the artist. The expressionism that was so widely sent around the world as part of the Marshal, the cultural aspect of the Marshal, the Marshal Plan being the reconstruction of the world using American funds after the Second World War and part of that plan involved exporting art works. The artists that were principally exported or the art movements that were principally exported were that of Abstract Expressionism. Because it neatly fitted with a notion of American originality and an American dynamism and also I think of a certain sort of individuality. It's a uniqueness.'

Mark: 'So in the spread of modern art... perhaps at the end of the Second World War, the seeds of contemporary... would you say erm, in that historical...'

Jason: 'Yes, it's a combination of things. It's a highpoint of a certain sort of modernism, it's the endpoint of a certain sort of modernism, and it also contains the beginnings of sort of radical ideas, which became the foundations for anything contemporary.'

Mark: 'And that emphasised the autonomous individual artist.'

Jason: 'Absolutely. Which was still very much in currency all over the world. It's just that it was espoused in a different sort of way within, it was espoused as, it was re-codified I should say as a, it was, it was something to do with the tie between individuality. And the tie between individuality and some sort of autonomy of artistic production and that in relation to being a more persistent American idea.

Mark: But, 'going back to your point just now of the impact of community on your practice, almost perhaps even the need for that community – did responses of that artistic community have any impact on how your work evolves and changes?'

Jason: 'Somebody pointing out to me this kind of nervousness that they had about a fear of what I would remember. Walking into this forgotten space – I mean they understood quite intimately the metaphorical implications or the implications out of the metaphors – that I was delving into in some ways.'

Mark: 'That you have suppressed memories?'

Jason: 'I don't think it's exactly that. I mean you know or at least not beyond the banal, I think suppressed maskers, it sounds so much grander than it is. I think I have a certain amount of wilful... at some level memory dysfunction. You know that's an aspect and was something that was affecting me earlier on.'

Mark: It sounds like you use personal stuff in your work. I wonder how difficult it is for others to engage with that. Do some people feel works with that kind of personal dimension are over sharing? Although someone in my discussion panel wondered if intimacy might be banal. But on that bridge dialogue, I spoke with one

performer who wanted to be less self-contained. 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. And I'm interested in how some of you understand engagement. For example, some people have commented on how open the invitation in my dialogues seemed, not shouting, and that people find me. Which I think was interesting in light of what Matt MacKisack said about my dialogue at The EVENT. He said my location emphasised an intimate immediacy necessary to be heard, and I was interested in that as a contrast to the point he made, I think citing Groys, that it is difficult for the individual work of art to force others to look at it and to assert its presence.

Luke: 'I think one of those things that really you've recognised is the power of having people view your work and forming their opinions.'

Mark: A philosopher at conference said, 'rapprochement enables dialogue.' And oddly I've been thinking about that in light of a conversation I had on that bridge. A guy asked me whether bird song was dialogue. I said dialogue could be reflective or an act of recognition and not simply a semantic exchange. He thought recognition was important. He told me that he thought he'd already had a dialogue while approaching me. He'd asked himself what he thought of me; how I was dressed; what he could tell from my body language; whether I was someone he felt safe approaching, and what I was after. So maybe there's a connection between people's prior opinions and whether they can determine any coming together or rapprochement.

Nina: 'I have actually been very afraid that people wouldn't want to participate, but if you approach people in the right way people do participate.'

Jane: But 'conceptualism, really did demand participation, that was the buzz word then, of the public, you couldn't be just a person wandering through.'

Mark: You work in a participatory way with different publics don't you?

Dirk: Yes, 'so one of the reasons I went fully into live work was to have a direct engagement with audience and one of the reasons I stepped out of it was that I felt like that I had had enough and I wanted to be more reflective and celebrate the obscurity of having an art practice. And then I will do a public art commission, which is very much about working with a particular community which I find incredible satisfying and not peripheral at all. I find I get very engaged in some of the commissions that I do.'

Mark: But that's more than my starting assumption of engagement as being present, and coming together. That guy at the philosophy conference also spoke of understanding. I've got some notes I made here. '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.' So I read into that a connection between engaging others and seeking to share understanding.

Suzanne: 'I mean I hope that certainly by putting my work out there that people are able to engage with it and somehow they have an experience that makes them think about something, or respond.'

Stuart: In my park project, 'I wanted it to be a little bit of work like a building of a kind of relationship requires work if it's of value. I did not want it to be just a stand that you would come to like a passerby so it would be a little bit like you know if anything else it would be like a one-off thing. Whereas this you actually take time and initiative to go seek this out... I really emphasise the idea of active listening which emphasises over content, much more the things that the speaker themselves emphasise in strong emotion and the idea is that you focus on that and then you kind of mirror back to them. It's the basis of any good therapy to be honest, is you mirror back and then you get deeper as you connect and then it's obvious that you are really listening to the person beyond the words they have said.'

Mark: But even in dialogue, that still seems chancy. Even to get to the possibility of building a deeper more engaged relationship seems...

Peter: But 'I think in most cases I can predict that people will make themselves available to me and will talk to me and each other after the event if you like. I am quite careful who I invite into works because you can, you know in order for someone to be powerfully engaged with the work, strongly engaged with the work, there have to be hooks for them and I think by making them feel like they are key to producing the work or that they transformed it some way.'

Mark: I'm not sure I get the idea of transformation. I guess the closest I have come to touching on that in my invitations to dialogue is when I spoke with a couple who had recently got back from an Antarctic expedition. They said the Antarctic was like a snowy Cambridge, all flat and white. But now that they were back they felt everyday routine and life with the kids was tiring and mundane. I asked them what they thought art was and they mentioned something about creativity but they did not see themselves as very creative. They did say however they enjoyed seeing the world afresh through their kids' eyes. So I guess I wonder if dialogue can be transformational through changing the way we see the world by having a break or seeing it from someone else's perspective.

Dirk: 'So, I ended up organising the quarterly meetings which were hundreds of people and I would give Gordon a spot and he would just stand up and tell jokes and it was great. People were astonished. This is the minibus driver and he is on stage and he is quite relaxed telling a few jokes. Some of them about the company and some of them not and what I did by that was change how he was seen and that was all very deliberate. So Morris was the gardener, Gordon was the minibus driver and it was about challenging the *status quo* a bit and making it kind of a community which was one of my roles really.'

Peter: But, 'it is not a trick and it's not mystical but the most significant thing about the work is the thing that catches you by surprise. You think you have done something quite simple and followed a simple process, I am going to take you for a walk here and I am going to say to you, do this at the other end and you say yes, okay easy. Then you do it and it transforms you in such a way that you think, I would never expect that. What looked like a really simple trivial thing suddenly through whatever process I put in place, becomes something that people don't forget or they feel a responsibility not to forget it or something and it transforms them. If I was to do this as a strictly ethical thing then I'd have to say to people, "You know at the end of this you are going to feel like you are solely responsible for this painting."' "

Mark: But in that company residency... 'So in effect you have really changed how the company sees itself?'

Dirk: 'Yes. And that was why I was a success there. I was there for some years and yes that was exactly what it was about.'

Mark: And those years, that's a relationship really, coming back to the idea...

Dirk: 'I think the dilemma for me in it was that I became so enmeshed in the relationship that I could not with any kind of sense of integrity, step out and think of it as art any more. Well it was like I was part of the community and I was a strength in the community so I couldn't satirise it really. Well, I could satirise it but I couldn't critique it. It wasn't appropriate to critique it. Only when I left could I critique it and I am now working on a performance that critiques corporate life. It took a few years before I was able to do that. It's not just aimed at that company. It's aimed at other companies where I worked.'

Mark: 'Could you explain why it is difficult to critique it while you are in the relationship? Why was that difficult?'

Dirk: 'Because I was loyal. I was loyal.'

Mark: 'Would it have undermined it? It was of value both to the company and to you [yes] and critiquing in that kind of way...'

Dirk: 'Now I regret I didn't do more documenting; at least documenting, but I didn't even feel comfortable documenting things. So it was about loyalty. It was about loyalty and I didn't want to kind of make people feel that I was in some way stepping out of being one of them.'

Mark: Ok not documenting. I'm still struck by your point about when its appropriate to critique or not, and I've asked others about artists critiquing and being a critic...

Luke: 'I know that there are some artists who also are art critics. I think that is a very dangerous position to be in because it's very different, difficult for an artist to

be completely open-minded about other people's work in terms of being critical because if the work comes close to theirs, then it's a little bit frightening for them.'

Mark: Well I've wondered about the danger of sounding like an authority in my dialogue works. I worry I sounded didactic. Others can, 'think that you're trying to give them a very specific understanding... [or] think you're trying to teach them a truth.'

Luke: 'Absolutely, especially as a teacher, it's really dangerous to them a truth. It's for them to uncover their own truths and not to be that fearful of expressing those truths.'

Mark: But isn't making statements, or that process, isn't it to do with representation. That people imagine art illustrates and exemplifies? Isn't it a question of what people expect, or how they believe representation relates to truth? Do you think that's been an issue in...?

Nadia: 'I don't like to, with my works, to illustrate anything, to speak through metaphors, to make statements, that's just not what I find productive, or interesting or challenging for me, and for people I would like to address with my work. For me the work starts speaking and in that way is finished when there is a question in it. And that was for example, like I got a few times criticism on some of my works, especially from Dutch art, especially traditional like funders and these kind of powerful people that give money. But sometimes they would be like unhappy with how my works look like, because I don't use the best camera, I don't use perfect light if I use lighting at all. But for me these are all irrelevant things in the way, that if I can say that the minimum of attention of that kind to the situation, then I am fine with it. And also at the same time it's not irrelevant, its quite important for my work because sometimes you see that process of making something, it is very transparent because it is part of the work, sometimes I work with the crew, sometimes it's just me, and the smallest camera, because I do something illegally so it's very different. For example, for them they think also in terms of finishing and having the proper work, sometimes they would say it's not like beautiful enough, it's not like proper enough, in that way. For me I am quite aware of the medium and [I] know when I use HD and when I use the crappy camera because it also says a lot about the subject. Because now I have all these artists that with funding with HD, they are like without questioning "why HD" because the quality of image also reflects something... I heard something interesting, like in Kosovo, artists became so much aware of that, and also kind of art market they started lowering the quality of the media on purpose because they would become more hip or more exotic... they would give [sic] more attention you know but they have of course proper cameras and then they would lower it.

Mark: 'But isn't that the same problem as using HD?'

Nadia: 'Yes exactly but I think this is a deliberate choice. I think this is something that someone thought of, you are using it as a strategy, but using HD...'

Mark: '...unthinkingly is worse than using crappy [gear] so they see the trap of style and the seduction. It's interesting you talked about criticism from funders... [the idea

of] having power to say something, do you feel you, artists have power independent of the formal art world? You don't think we are dependent on funders?'

Nadia: 'No, I worked totally unfunded by like for, well actually I just got my first grant, and I don't think the art world has to do, has to be connected to the funding body or to institutions necessarily. I exhibit in proper places, right, but I am not dependent on having support or not. Because I take seriously what I do and no one is going to tell me if I'm going to do it or not according to if they give money or not. I find a way to do it, right? That's for me having responsibility over what you do. So, I think it's great to have funding but like in Holland, especially I think it's kind of the same here, it's a lot of artists wait to get this money to, make a project and they don't produce anything. For me I have no respect for these artists, maybe I'm hardcore but I have no respect because I don't think that one should go when it's totally funded. Then you know you go on, work in a bank. Then you are paid all the time for what you do. So for me it's kind of the reason for this necessity for me to work regardless of...'

Mark: 'To make art work not necessarily to work?'

Nadia: 'Yes, that's what I mean by 'work'. I think it's also when I think of it I also for me it's similar I think to education, but it doesn't mean that if you don't get a scholarship you shouldn't educate and for me somehow there is a somehow, these are two necessities very close to each other. It's about personal responsibility and ethics of working. So if I don't get a scholarship, no education for me? Well no! That's how I think of it. What do you think?'

Mark: 'I think I agree quite a lot.' But I remember when I was asked in my dialogue on a bridge if I was getting paid for being there. I said I didn't accept payment for the work. And the guy said that wasn't the same as saying that I couldn't see any reason why anyone would pay me. And he told me that I was taking the moral high ground. So I find it tricky. Erm, can I just go back to something said earlier, about relational enmeshment, or forming relationships or something like that. I wondered if... is it about duration?

Nina: Yeah.

Mark: Like 'with the communities that you related to or the places that you had conversation, do you have a lasting connection to those places? Do you go back? Do you know the people?'

Nina: 'Yes, even in Israel, when we went to those families, we actually keep in touch with all of them.'

Mark: 'Really?'

Nina: 'Yes. Two have been to New York and we saw them in New York. Like not visiting us, but like when they were visiting New York they emailed us. And I think in Brighton beach we got everyone's phone numbers. They are not interested in art generally, we can't make them come and see the show, we can invite but then only a

few people went to... they are not going to see the show, but we are going to send them postcards. We really want to give back, as we can, to the people because they have been generous and we are all part of this project. It is not like we are doing blank research when you email someone and they fill in a form and email it back – and there is no personal connection. And if we recognise someone, of course we will stop and talk to them.'

Mark: 'That's a really important dimension to your practice?'

Nina: 'Yes. I think it is very important because it is all based on trust and the relationship.'

Mark: 'Do you feel responsible towards the people you have worked with?'

Nina: 'Yes. Unfortunately, yes.'

Mark: 'Unfortunately?'

Nina: 'Yes, like sometimes too much because I am always worried to let them know we have printed cards and email, like not so detailed, what we are doing. But I feel better if I inform everyone of every step.'

Peter: 'I suppose the ethical question and this is kind of the situation that art finds itself in when it has to be ethically pure if you like or ethically clean, is that strictly speaking I should describe fully to people, before they engage with the work, how I think they might be transformed and what I think they may have to live with after the event. Whereas actually I know the kind of the power of the work.'

Mark: But if it's relational don't people have a sense of that. I'm thinking of your work here, because 'one of the things that has seemed important in your work is the question... is how do we develop our relationship with people that you're working with. Can you say why your relationship with people who participate with you is important or can you say something about the nature of that relationship?'

Nadia: 'Well I think it differs a lot in different projects, so sometimes I'm just very honest and very happy that people have understanding for what I want to do and to do it together, but sometimes you have to have this strategy of like cheating to be able to convince someone to participate, and then to prove along the way that this was the right thing to do. So it really differs – for example, the piece that I made in Turkey I made illegally and then just after that like when I started filming and they noticed me filming around. Then I said like, I am doing some research for the university. And then they said OK but you have no right really because I got rejected by the Turkish Ministry of Culture and Education to actually film and it is actually the same thing with funding, and I said like, no one stops me from making work right? I was so annoyed that there is this ministry and they censored my website in the end.'

Mark: 'They censored your website?'

Nadia: 'So I might have problems going back to Turkey. Because when you go to my website, it is written like "contrary to Turkish law" and under article this and that, "this is closed because this person is insulting Turkishness", which is totally not true what they did. I just filmed a ritual. I didn't say anything about it right. There is no text. I don't like to moralise. I just like to put things as they are and then each of us can relate to it in a, not in a different way but I don't like to judge.'

Mark: 'Can you ever not judge though because you have chosen it? Isn't you choosing it a judgment?'

Nadia: 'Yea, but that's a choice so of interest because I don't make statements. I try to stay as true to the situation and if you are in a situation, I don't know if you... No, I didn't judge it at all because first of all as I said before, I don't like statements. I don't like drawing conclusions. I don't like imposing my conclusions on something. But the matter of choice and choosing something is quite important. But I don't think it necessarily has to do with judging something.'

Mark: 'You mentioned being an artist is having the power to say something, and then you said that they are not concerned with the formal art world. Can I ask you what you mean by "the power to say something" – what do you mean by "artists have power"?''

Nadia: '...Maybe I can illustrate best with talking about a project I did recently in Norway. I went there with an amateur choir, and they sing these kind of religious light pop songs. They go horse riding and then they come and sing together. So it's a very Norwegian high-class thing to do. I mean who has this hobby? I have no time for a hobby. So it's a totally different world in that way. And they come to them and I say 'I would like us to work on a song together. So I'm not changing what they do, I'm not interfering with their practice. But then I come and say there is a song I would like us to do. It is Revolution by the Beatles. So what do you think of that? And they didn't want to do it. Why? Because they say they can't relate to the notion of a revolution or political change or political thinking at all. And then I say 'you are the children of the 1968 revolution. Why do you live here in the North. It was on the islands. It was totally up. It is partly the outcome of the revolution. Because your parents lived in communes and actually moving out of the city, and searching for alternative ways of living. And I say for me it's impossible to be immune to political situations, and not be aware of our notion of a citizen, because I think that as an artist and I would like to believe every single person, that he or she is a citizen. And for me being an artist is so much about being a citizen in a way, that is having the power of speech. And then they said 'no, no, no, and then I referred to the right wing in Norway and in Europe and you know...that they should feel or that... I don't want to impose that they should. But I said "don't you think it has something to do with you and your habits? If you weren't able to have your rehearsal or go to ride a horse then you would start thinking about these things." I don't know. And then in the end we made a piece together and then we being not interested in the notion at all. So that was very interesting for me, and that was what I wanted to work on in the end, about them having this total distance towards the legacy of 1968 revolution and through that to any kind of political awareness and engagement. So the piece actually communicates this, them being totally disengaged with the subject, with what they

are singing. And when they saw the piece, they were a bit kind of angry, because what they wanted me to do was to, is to film them singing on the beach, like this amazing landscape. Also like them not wearing Viking costumes, and when they saw how I stripped totally, because I filmed it in the living room because that's also how I work. That's also a very important part of my work, I don't stage much or at all. I always work in a given circumstance but then what I stage is like my gaze, like how I feel. It's like the staged moment. So they were quite angry because I didn't show them...'

Mark: 'Showed them in a staged moment, in a best light?'

Nadia: 'And that's what I tried to explain to them, this piece is not about you having beautiful voices, and singing, this piece is not about me, this piece is about two of us coming together and possibly having conflict or trying to understand each other. Because this is like utterly private, well it's not maybe private, it's all part of the work but you don't see it there.'

Mark: 'Did you find that work difficult because of the conflict, is conflict a problem in your work?'

Nadia: 'No, I mean when I returned back to Holland, I was like a wounded animal – I had two nervous breakdowns, you don't sleep for two weeks. I was totally exhausted physically and mentally but that's how I like working, that's the most honest way of working. So I was in a very kind of masochistic way kind of pleased about how things went, because something really happened in the process.'

Mark: 'You were vulnerable – you were affected?'

Nadia: 'Yes, of course, and they were affected as well and it was a dialogical piece on many levels. And as I told you before I don't know where the project will go and this was such a good example of figuring out where do we go from getting together, how do we develop our relationship?'

Mark: I suppose developing relationships suggests perhaps an extended durational process, but in my invitations to dialogue the relating has been more immediate I guess. In simple ways like when some people commented how nice it was that I wasn't wearing a label. They said that it seemed like everything they went to involved wearing a label, which I thought was interesting. But a woman on the bridge in Cardiff when I asked her if she lived in Cardiff and she said yes, but she wasn't sure she really 'lived' there, even after fourteen years. 'It's a Welsh thing. I'm English.' That's about relating but not necessarily just in the work, but it also says something about durational relationships I guess, not belonging, feeling connected or whatever.

Tracy: Well, I connect more with objects than people anyway. 'I was just... been moving all over the place and I do identify so strongly with objects and always have. And how in a way they define the individual and how we are defined through objects and how things take on such sort of meaning from one's own memory.'

Mark: I know also that you've used objects as a way of kind of examining people's relationship to place, haven't you. In that show I saw of yours.

Nina: Yeah, 'every two weeks we brought in new work. The show was changing all the time. And the idea is like when you move to a new apartment, you have boxes and then you buy a mirror and then you buy something else, napkins and everything else. So it is the same with the postcards, you know the idea of the American Dream? Or Identity... I think answering this question, and thinking about it is kind of a reaction of people because when they choose postcards you can see what they relate to.'

Mark: But I guess I've been more focused on relating interpersonally in conversational encounters, and maybe the other person as object in dialogue. Possibly because of an early dialogue I did in Leeds where I felt I began to consciously identify with the attitudes of the stallholders in the market, which were struggling. I felt an immediate desire to react to the conversation of the stallholders and try and help but later I recognised that the situation of the market might be inevitable change, and I began to question my feeling of responsibility. But in later dialogues like *The Event*, I struggled to make myself heard outdoors over the sounds of traffic and I felt foolish. But one guy hung back and asked why I had chosen to do it on a pedestrian crossing. I think I mentioned the vulnerability and exposed nature of the crossing, but I guess I was also interested in observing who related or identified with such art work or events, who was the public was for *The Event* and my work. I think I was still thinking of Steinberg's idea that artists are often the first audiences for other artists and wondering if there is a hard separation between artists and non-artists in contemporary art publics. Like I've been invited to be a participant in some of your works. But is that kind of identification with contemporary art a prior shared world kind of thing?

Peter: 'I know my world is constructed in a particular way, I see the world in a particular way because I am an artist making their way, validating things through the historical literature and contemporary literature. And it determines that I look at some things before I look at others.'

Mark: So artists relate to, validate and construct their world in a particular way? But is that like a common ground or something which makes it easier to relate to other artists?

Luke: 'A number of people have said, and I really love this term that, "I'm an artist's artist." Someone would come to me and say, you know a person I respect, "your work is very Japanese, or Asian" and then someone else would say "Well, you know about this idea of indeterminacy and John Cage" and so then I would go looking and start to see the kind of way things are evolving because people have brought to my head stuff that I wasn't aware of.'

Mark: He brought stuff to how you thought, but you mentioned respect? Is that the same as someone having authority? I'm thinking about collaborations or the shared work of meaning making in art. Didn't one of you collaborate with a writer and critic? Did you?

Nadia: 'There is a something one academic wrote, something about my work, he was going to give a lecture about my work, and that was for example very valuable experience a person like that who is a theorist, and that actually he found the work interesting, and he dedicated his time to write about one piece and to develop a lecture around it because that person was generous in sharing ideas and thoughts about the subject. Instead of describing it as, I don't know, as a 'nice work.'

Mark: He was a theorist? 'Do you collect information about how other people interpret your work?'

Nadia: 'No, I don't think all of it is relevant. Like there are some articles published about me, about my work in some quite important [publications] but I didn't collect all of these articles because I don't think that they are saying the truth, in terms of what they are saying about artists. But I don't think that one should necessarily identify with the authority of art critic describing your work, even though it is a positive description of your work.'

Mark: But you valued the text of the theorist? Can you say...?

Nadia: 'Yes, it is a text that is not descriptive. He doesn't say that it's in this media, this and that and blah blah blah, but actually he has something to add to the subject that I'm working on. So he actually contributes to the research of the subject, that's what is for me interesting and these texts they are really such a joy because it is... you have someone else who is also contributing to something, to my artwork but to the subject that I found interesting.'

Figure 6 Relating tag cloud



Relating: a discussion of the literature

In this chapter I discuss how the literature connects with the relational characteristics of dialogical practice described in this study. Firstly, I highlight how conversational dialogue does not provide regular representations of reality, or moral detachment but may provide artists with the resources for enhanced self-questioning and recognition of vulnerability. The second section addresses the implication of the self-questioning dynamic of dialogue, which is not simply a hope for a less constrained sense of artistic self, but hope for a less defensive disposition towards other perspectives and conceptualisations of being an artist.

I then discuss the importance of risk and how dialogue can provide a sense of how to survive together the ambiguous, ambivalent and contradictory demands and situations of life. The fourth section examines how dialogical practices are changing notions of engagement in art, moving debates beyond simplistic dualities whilst still recognising concerns about the instrumentalising potential of dialogical engagement. The transformational potential of dialogue is the theme of the next section. This is not an argument that dialogue can solve all social and relational problems, but a simpler articulation of the desire of many artists to be challenged, stretched and transformed by new ways of thinking and doing art.

Then I explore how debates about the ethical dimension of dialogical and socially engaged art practices go beyond a simplistic quest for moral purity (Kester, 2004), and the possibility of absolute ethical sanction to address the concerns raised by

antagonistic perspectives. I highlight arguments that the real ethical question about antagonism is whether artists have lost the ability to adopt an antagonistic stance towards the dominant discourses of art. I consider whether dialogical perspectives might be seen as a productive alternative approach to art discourse.

In the penultimate section, I consider how collaborative dialogical art practices and research-based arts practices are facing a crisis of representation, leading to research texts that seek to act as a dialogical space for the imaginative presentation. Lastly, I discuss the relational theme of identification and address the impression that identification is alluded to in a simplistic argument that legitimises perspectives which reinforce our worldview, but also dismisses threatening perspectives.

Conversation provides the resources for a more contradictory, and ambivalent relationship to the world

The contemporary art world has seen an intensification of talk over the last decade and a half. This has established conversation as a means of establishing new relationships, formulating new questions, gathering information, accessing knowledge and mode of artistic practice (Rogoff, 2010). Such has been the expansion of conversation as mode of art practice that even interview has become recognised as an artistic form (Bourriaud, 2004). Increasingly contemporary art and curating are characterised by the informal discursivity of conversation, resulting in a prioritisation of the psychological aspects of discourse over more traditional artistic concerns (Foster, 2004).

Conversational art is often informal in nature, and a messy, contingent yet free-associative method of communicative and relational co-construction of meaning that shrinks the modernist distanced relationship between art and audience (Bhabha, 1998). The contingent yet free-associative nature of conversation means that it may simultaneously address the general concerns of contexts and yet spin off in unanticipated directions. Conversation closes the distance between art and audience by bringing audiences directly into the co-production of the work of art, and emphasising the centrality of communicative exchange in conversational art (Bourriaud, 2002). It represents a shift away from the point of view that reality and its meaning in art is necessarily revealed through a visual confrontation with objective reality, which contains the privileged truth about nature and being (Bhabha, 1998). In conversation truth is located in contingent relationships, which it also produces. This means that conversation simultaneously produces both the communities of interpretation and the conversational encounter as work of art leading to multilayered, unexpected and generative relationships of meaning (Bhabha, 1998).

Conversational approaches have been criticised (Bishop, 2004, 2005, 2006b) as being presented as an essentially equal dialogical exchange, and ignoring its potential for instrumentalisation. Indeed some artists are open about using conversational methods assertively to change the perceptions of participants and participating communities (Kester, 2004). Conversational approaches have also equated audience with community which has elicited post-structural and postmodern criticisms of speech as essentially authoritarian modes of collective communication (Bourriaud, 2002). Such criticisms draw on a range of negative interpretations. For example,

Barthes (1979) sees the spoken word, and thus conversation as a discursive mode which serves the power relations of authoritarian regimes. Nancy (1991) characterised inter-subjective discursive exchange as potentially violent, and collective interaction as implicitly compromised and totalising. Lastly, Lyotard (1992) construes communicative exchange as essentially a conflict and contest. In this worldview, conversational interaction is characterised as a malevolent force which negates our subjectivity, and dominates us through our subordination to language (Kester, 2004). While speaking and listening are believed to fix and concretise thought, writing is proposed as an ideal creative realm that offers a more liberating interplay of meaning (Derrida, 1978). Post-structuralist criticisms of spoken interaction tend to essentialise conversation as intrinsically harmful and limiting, whilst seeking to privilege writing and text as ideal modes of creative exchange and liberation.

In contrast to such disparaging characterisations, conversation can be a means by which participants generate new insights and develop new frameworks of meaning (Kester, 2004). This is because conversation allows for more provisional relationships of free association and can increase a person's openness towards new relationships and meanings (Bourriaud, 2002). This generative potential contrasts the reduction of conversation to a violent contest of conflicting identities. Instead of negating subjectivity, conversation can oppose the ossification of subjectivity by monologue, as spoken interaction can produce more enigmatic meanings resistant to fixture and concretisation (Szewczyk, 2009).

Conversation has been construed as an artistic approach which resists the fixity of realist inscriptive practices (Bhabha, 1998), contests the administration of rationality, and exposes and challenges the reinforcement of existing power relations (Szewczyk, 2009). Conversation is less a means of defining the reality of others, instead it is the risk of redefining ourselves (Szewczyk, 2009). However, key to offsetting the dynamics of control and monological reduction in conversation is its grounding in everyday language use which allows for emergent understanding, and processes of meaning-making (Gerz, 2004).

Bourriaud (2002) however suggests that conversational art needs to go beyond immediate spaces of everyday encounter, and to be opened up to on-going dialogue that can expand the horizons of the conversation as art. This opening up to on-going dialogue must reveal the artist's expectations about the relationship, roles and function of all participants, and expose the creative behaviour and attitudes of the artist and others (Bourriaud, 2002). It is only through continual re-engagement in conversations with different perspectives that artists are exposed to wider on-going social dialogue (Kester, 2004).

Grounding conversational art practices in a process of on-going dialogical encounter potentially expands the general worldview of art and resists a retreat back into historical presentations of the artist and their constructed reality as naturally separate and objective (Bourriaud, 2002). However, like the traditional historical world view of art, conversational art is just one constructed and negotiated point of view amongst others. Conversational art has to exist and maintain an appeal in a contested landscape of negotiation and exchange. The appeal of conversation as artistic method

is not that it provides reassuringly regular and certain representations of reality. Nor does it provide artists with a comfortable exterior moral detachment. Instead conversational art may provide artists the psychological resources to recognise their co-dependency on and overcome their vulnerability towards others and other perspectives (Bhabha, 1998). It may facilitate greater self-questioning by artists which can become a means of living with contradictory, and ambivalent relationships to the world (Bhabha, 1998).

Dialogical practices alter the construction of the self in the work of art

Notions of independent selfhood traditionally associated with the figure of artist as independent author, are threatened by dialogical approaches that emphasise a sense of artistic-self constructed through encounters with, and generated through relationships to others and otherness. This tension reflects a historical struggle in art for singularity against collectivist perspectives (Bourriaud, 2002). The modern western construction of the artistic self as expert, adept at self-projection and sole producer of individual objects (Kester, 2013) still remains unchallenged and unquestioned by many art institutions today (Gerz, 2004). The expert artist is actively promoted by contemporary critical perspectives that seek to sustain the privilege of the individual artist. In this worldview the privileged expert artist is preserved but reconstituted as a politicised yet detached therapeutic analyst. Art critical perspectives assign artists the role of revealing the constraining effects of mass ideological structures on unwitting audiences (Kester, 2013). Contemporary art criticism draws on modernist and post-structural psychoanalytical perspectives

providing artists with a rationale for disrupting publics seen as ordered and centred Cartesian selves. The member of the art public is targeted as they are assumed that their individual agency is constrained and determined by the ideology of overarching social structures such as language, myth, the unconscious and discourse. This disruption of art's public is seen as necessary in the post-structuralist perspective because constraining social structures such as discourse are thought to remain impervious to reciprocal processes of co-construction which might change them (Kester, 2011).

There is another motivation for disrupting people. Artistic disruption aims at converting Cartesian selves into post-structuralist selves, converting publics into its ideal self-image. The post-structural self is characterised as non-rational, opaque, incomplete and antagonistic (Bishop, 2004). People are incomplete because they are dependent on others (Bishop, 2004) and this dependency on others is what prevents a person being totally himself or herself. At the interpersonal level, this conceptualisation allows the artist to blame others that they encounter for reminding them of their vulnerability, and self-uncertainty. This is the exteriorisation (antagonism) of interior disruption (agonism). At a framework level in art, this disruptive perspective oscillates between the assumption that new frameworks and conceptualisations of selfhood are impossible within existing discourses and ideologies, and the belief that the agency of the self can only be liberated through an artistic antagonism designed to agitate people to a point where they reject and overthrow the domination of dominant ideologies and discourses.

Increasingly the paradox seems to be that post-structuralist critical perspectives have become the dominant discourse, ideology and proscription for the sense of self of the artist. In response, dialogical practices increasingly turn towards situated artistic practice in the hope that a less uncompromising, unthreatening and more provisional sense of artistic self may emerge (Kwon, 2004). Instead of interpersonal exchange being a violent clash between fixed identities, artists conceive of provisional dialogical relations as more ambiguous and undecided. Such encounters can be more like an experience of bumping into otherness in the world rather than having otherness thrust upon you. Dialogical encounters maintain the agency of the other as where people may feel potentially threatened they can decide for themselves whether they wish to veer away from such encounters (Weiner in Baldessari *et al.*, 2007).

Bourriaud (2002) goes further, however, arguing that works of art should consider ‘the criteria of coexistence’ or the extent to which works of art do not permit different selfhoods, or the perspectives of others. In this point of view, dialogical encounters as art are successful when they aid the capacity for self-construction, but it denies the possibility of people deciding that art is of no use to them. If dialogical approaches can sustain an openness to being of no use, as well as useful to people’s self-construction, then art offers a potential contribution to the other’s constructions of their selfhood. In this manner dialogical art usefully contrasts approaches that disrupt and deny the validity of the other person’s sense of self or dismiss them as naïvely complicit with the forces that shape and constrain them.

Dialogical perspectives and practices are criticised as deviating from post-structuralist construction of selfhood, seeking a unified sense of selfhood rather than

reinforcing the dynamics of splitting and division which serve as the antagonistic drive (Bishop, 2005). However, dialogue does not require an absolutely rational and unified sense of self, but relies on a sufficiently coherent sense of self to participate in listening to others as well as speaking to them, and a person's ability to identify and empathically relate with others and their perspectives (Kester, 2011). This constructed sense of self proposes a person as a dynamic meeting place of forms of knowledge and action, which question the wider forms of knowledge and forms of life that shape both a person's sense of self, and their actions (Bourriaud, 2002). In this perspective, dialogical art practices aim to alter and develop the construction of the artistic sense of self in two ways. Firstly, dialogical practices may allow artists to be less constrained by the defensive rhetoric of critical perspectives that desire an individualistic autonomy. Secondly, the hope is that dialogical art may sustain a sense of artistic-self that is open to other perspectives, new approaches and alternative ways of being an artist.

Dialogue sustains and is sustained by self-risk

All artistic activity may be understood as a mode of self-presentation to others. Putting oneself forward presupposes the possibility of conflict, and risks of failed acceptance (Groys, 2011). Artists who exhibit their pictures in exhibitions risk people not going to see them or saying they are rubbish, and artists who invite people to join them in dialogue risk the possibility of no one turning up or verbally attacking them. Dialogical projects however close the traditional separation between artist and others and expose people to the more immediate and keenly felt risks of direct

exchange and encounter (Bourriaud, 2002; Kester, 2004). Dialogue entails further risk as it involves seeking new lines of thought, challenging normative assumptions and cultural identities through mingling different cultures and perspectives and working in ways with unpredictable outcomes (Kester, 2004). As art seeks new lines of thought through dialogical practices, art shifts away from traditional analytical conceptual structures and research approaches. More participatory and performative modes of artistic life are taking the place of traditional analytical approaches which is forcing artists to give up the sense of security traditionally afforded them by more traditional analytical perspectives. Rogoff (2008) argues artists who adopt more participatory and performative research approaches within hierarchical institutions and conservative disciplines risk contradicting traditional expectations of more predictable and rationally determined approaches to artistic inquiry. Adopting such approaches may be easier for artists who have already found acceptance and security within such traditional hierarchies, although they may be less inclined to take risks or work in ways which might undermine the normative rules of that hierarchy (Gillick & Weiner, 2005/2006).

Artists may accept the risk of non-acceptance within a hierarchy if they feel compelled to speak openly about perspectives that may benefit others (Rogoff, 2010). This may be true of artists working in social contexts and hierarchies as well as academic ones. Responding to the feeling of a moral demand to share what may be useful to others risks reducing dialogue to deterministic crusade and dogma (Bhabha, 1998). This risk can be offset however by remaining open and listening to others and different perspectives. In this perspective, dialogue can be construed as providing a sense of how to survive risks together (Rorty, 1980) through the sharing

of conceptual resources, which allow us to remain actively engaged in the ambiguous, ambivalent, and contradictory demands of social reality rather than retreating from them (Bhabha, 1998).

Dialogue alters the sense of engagement in art

The notion of engagement in recent art has been expanded by debates about dialogical practice. The notion of ‘engagement’ was interpreted as constrained by the prior proscription of participant identities and roles, often with the artist becoming a delegate claiming authority to speak in order to empower themselves through artworks which functioned to soften up audiences (Bourdieu, 1994; Kester, 2004), and inculcate correct artistic attitudes for the appropriate interpretation of art (Kwon, 2004). Many socially engaged practices were re-characterised as research-based art (Bishop, 2006b) and suggested greater participation and collaboration through dialogue (Kwon, 2004) aimed at disrupting proscriptive and behaviouralist frameworks (Kester, 2013). Artists in this approach face the problem of how to avoid dialogical exchange in the field translating into an objectifying process of ethnographic mapping that merely reinforces the artist’s authority over the authorship of meaning in the sites of encounter (Kwon, 2004).

Historical disputes about engagement have shifted. Initially different perspectives characterised visual spectatorship as a passive mode of consumption and dialogical engagement as an active collaborative process of shared meaning-making. Later, these debates polarised along lines of singular-exclusive and thus bad authorship, and

collective-inclusive and thus good authorship (Bishop, 2012). Such debates risk creating a false separation between dialogical/active and visual/passive modes of meaning making (Ranciere, 2011) and singular/plural authorship. The latter division is even more surprising as Bishop (2012) argues that since Barthes (1977) all authorship has been understood to be multiple and dependent on contributions from others. As (Beech, 2008) advocates attempts have been made to replace the logical binaries with more complex descriptions of the various dynamics of self-determination and power relationships which shape the engagement in particular works of art. Lacy (2010) attempted to blur the descriptive binaries of engagement. She presents a concentric model of the influence people have on works of art as a mobile and changing relationship. The influence people have on a work of art fluctuates between roles necessary for the work of art to exist, and those whose role is increasingly more peripheral and less responsible for shaping works. The concentric model however replaces binary oppositional spatial biases with circular, logocentric biases located around a Cartesian singular centred individual artist.

Bishop's (2006) participatory framework of engagement similarly attempts to collapse binaries between amateur/professional, production/reception and artist/audience yet still appears to privilege artists that sustain the traditional autonomous aura of art. Autonomy is a defensive critical stance towards practices that seek more intimate and immediate modes of artistic engagement, increasingly articulated as encounter (Kester, 2011) and which veer away from the privileged stance of detached textual engagement. Encounter underpins the principle of dialogue (Bourriaud, 2002), is a key characteristic of contemporary urban social life (Althusser, 1995), and can establish unanticipated connections between different

levels of reality (Bourriaud, 2002). Dialogical encounter is seen as a process of generative and transformative understanding which may have a psychological and emotional attraction for some (Freeman, 2011). Such encounters are constructed as works of art through weaving together evolving signs, objects and gestures, into diverse and unstable forms (Bourriaud, 2002).

Dialogical encounters as a mode of artistic engagement have been criticised as a panacea for art's own social marginalisation (Beech, 2008), not sufficiently scrutinising their central relationships, or asking why and who benefits from such works (Bishop, 2004). Critical responses can reduce the emergent meaning of such works to narrow questions of processes and relationships of power (Beech *et al.*, 2012). Their unstable forms also provoke anxieties about the problems of objective criticism and evaluation of works which emphasise first-hand experience (Bishop, 2012). The concern is that dialogical encounters may enact a form of engagement which elides social complexities and tensions within art's social economy (Bishop, 2004); complexities which in Bishop's perspective are better sustained through antagonistic controversial encounters. Stott and Kester (2006) suggest, however, that the antagonistic posture is so familiar that it merely reaffirms the self-knowing and clichéd rhetoric of established art-world audiences. Increasingly the problem has become how to present engagement in works of art in less ideal and universalising perspectives, and which sustain the unpredictable and transformational potential of dialogical engagement (Beech, 2012).

The transformational potential and the ethical implications of dialogue

Claims for the transformational potential of dialogue may express an over-optimistic belief that all social conflicts can be resolved and societies' relationships radically changed through dialogue (Kester, 2004). Dialogical works of art are construed as the meeting of different forms of life in encounters which aim towards the transformation of participant worldviews, and self-understanding through a merging of horizons which constitute our social reality (Bourriaud, 2002). Conversational encounters in particular maintain a sense of dialogue's transformational potential through open-ended discursivity. This sense of open and generative discursivity resists final definitions, and attempts to fix the meaning of art. Dialogue cannot be transformed into a singular thing, as in dialogue multiple forms of life, actions and communicative exchanges coalesce in networks of forms (Bourriaud, 2002).

However articulating and attempting to represent and describe the multiple forms of dialogue is a process of rational objectification which interrupts the on-going transformation of dialogue, although this objectification is inevitable when the mind turns anything into a topic to be discussed (Bourriaud, 2002). In this view representations of dialogue are also transformational, as interpretations of the world transform and reconfigure it (Ranciere, 2011).

Concerns about the objectification of dialogue can be counterbalanced by artists adopting fleeting forms which coalesce only temporarily (Bourriaud, 2002). Informal conversation is proposed as a useful example of the network of dialogical forms, as it is an inventive process which is endlessly shaped and transformed in turn by the process of exchange (Bourriaud, 2002). However, it is the potential for dialogue's

transformation to spill over and changes the players of the game that most appeals to artists. Beech (2012) suggests that artists creating new forms of engagement, in order to transform and stretch themselves, and this is what artists want from others, to be stretched, and transformed through new ways of thinking and new forms of life.

Dialogical practices question the ethical exchange of art

Dialogical art like all social human activity is based on commerce which involves the production and exchange of things which elicits questions about the relative moral values and conduct of groups involved (Bourriaud, 2002). Dialogical practices are not exterior to the systems of exchange, but enact encounters between different forms of life, realities and horizons, which symbolize the challenges and constraints of demonstrating a responsibility towards others (Bourriaud, 2002). The responsibility symbolised by inter-subjective encounters has been interpreted negatively by individualistic perspectives as a kind of burden (Bourriaud, 2002) and self-sacrificing abasement (Bishop, 2006b), but this seems too absolute a rejection of responsibility as something negative and contrary to the desire for individual freedom and independence.

The ethics of responsibility symbolised by dialogue are more ambiguous and uncertain, and Kester (2011) argues such perspectives recognise that in art co-option, compromise and complicity are unavoidable. What is important in dialogical projects is not being ethically pure or ethically sanctioned, but the capacity of co-participants

to make ethical judgements in the work of art, and to be able to take responsibility and answer for their actions in such work (Kester, 2004).

The dialogical ethics of responsibility are underpinned by Levinasian and Bakhtinian perspectives which emphasise a dialogical aesthetic of encounter which Kester (2004) proposes is as an alternative to the violent objectification of Cartesian identity. This perspective allows people to exercise some agency in the world, as criticisms that in the Bakhtinian perspective dialogue is a process which sees the other as simply a means for increased self-authorship are offset by the Levinasian notion that what I gain from the other is a gift (Kester, 2004). If we follow this line of thought, it presents dialogical encounter as a process of ethical 'give and take'. In dialogue we are invited to recognise the other interlocutor as a person with a specific identity, and not merely a subject for our own benefit.

Bishop (2004) is concerned that the self-sacrificing tone of dialogical practices is translated into arguments for the renunciation of singular authorship and artistic control. Dialogical practices deflect from the antagonistic imperative and its central belief that it is the artist's singular task to generate uncomfortable encounters, and to expose what is repressed in others (Kester, 2011). This perspective ignores that it may be damaging to others to expose repression, and may confuse repression with suppression. We might consider the possibility of whether artists adopt the antagonistic posture in order to suppress their own uncomfortable feelings in response to the ethical demands of others, or merely as an attempt to get along with the worldview presented by dominant critical perspectives. Using the word antagonism without looking at its relationship to the dominant discourse is like

assuming that all works of art should adopt the style of antagonism (Gillick & Weiner, 2005/2006). Counter criticisms of antagonism tend to emphasise how such practices repeat questionable ethical dynamics already present in art's social world, such as exploitation of vulnerable people, in order to supposedly provoke and make art audiences critically conscious of exploitation. The important ethical question that dialogical perspectives raise is increasingly less about whether works of art are exploitative but whether 'artists have lost their ability to have an antagonistic relationship to dominant discourse' in art (Gillick and Weiner, 2005/2006, p.12).

Dialogue problematises representation in contemporary art

All work including making or enacting a work of art involves presentation as Bourriaud (2002, p.110) states, 'the image is an act' and images have the power to form connections. Increasingly we rely on images to reinforce a sense of a shared world. In the traditional *avant-gardist* narrative, representation potentially dehumanises the represented (Gerz, 2004), doing violence to the specificity and uniqueness of individual experience, and producing cliché and dead or unproductive metaphors (Kester, 2004). Despite such concerns, objective representations of collective worldviews are still sought by art institutions and authorities (Gerz, 2004). Throughout history, art has acted as a means of representing a sense of shared worlds of meaning, but the power of art to represent a sense of what is shared has become increasingly diffuse as the technological means of representation have proliferated (Bourriaud, 2002). Dialogical practices have shifted how representation is understood and the artist is no longer seen as objectively creating images of the

shared worlds of others, but examining what relationships are enacted by the depiction of social relations of which the artist is a part. In dialogical perspectives artistic representations stand in for the artist's worldview and relationships to the world (Bourriaud, 2002).

This shift from objective to inter-subjective depictions of social relations has been highlighted in socially engaged art research (Finley, 2003), which faces a problem of representation. Artists as researchers are confronted by the problem of how research material generated by collective and social processes can be reported without such material being reduced to the object of a singular authorial voice. This is keenly felt by artists involved in research processes where material is processed by a single person. Since the 1960s artists have adopted various approaches to generating and representing collaboratively produced material, including research logs, project descriptions, reflections, retrospective third person narratives, and written dialogues between artists (Bishop, 2006).

These approaches have been adopted by artists in response to the crisis of representation in research writing. This crisis has led artists to question for whom research is enacted, whose worldview is represented, and foregrounded issues of agency (Finley, 2003). However, increasingly the view that in representations of social or collaborative processes, not all co-participants are equal, or can be represented in the same manner has gained more acceptance (Von Osten, 2008). This is especially the case in much research-based art practice, in which projects are still largely processed and re-presented by a single author. Artist researchers have increasingly responded to the crisis of representation by expanding the narrative

voice in research texts, and producing texts which merge processes of information generation, action in the social context, and performative research reporting (Finley, 2003). The aim has been to create texts that act as a dialogical space for the imaginative interpretation of events and contexts in a manner that draws attention to the process of doing research rather than only the production of a finished report (Finley, 2003).

Identification as a process of support in dialogue

Identification is a characteristic dynamic that occurs in debates about dialogical practices. It is often associated with the desire for social wholeness and values of closeness and reciprocity, yet such interpretations ignore the extent to which identification splits, excludes and delimits (Kwon, 2004). Critical debates about identification typically divide between perspectives strongly opposed to the principle of identification, and those that retain some faith and see some positives in practices that involve an identification with otherness and others. These debates often present identification as an alignment with similar perspectives which people feel legitimate their own point of view, or a reaction against those perspectives that threaten the sense of validity of our worldview.

For example, the post-structuralist perspective remains dominant in much Anglo-American art theory. It is broadly opposed to the principle of identification, as it contradicts the appeal to a disruptive mode of art (Kester, 2011). This disruptive perspective is self-identified by its critical proponents as the perspective of advanced

or *avant-garde* art (Kester, 2011). Yet presumably identifying with disruptive perspectives is also a means of legitimising the projection of an individual desire to disrupt the cohesion of others.

Conversely, identification with perspectives that do not legitimise the disruptive point of view is dismissed, in a manner that reinforces negative interpretations of identification. Here identification with other perspectives conveys different points of view within art as different from art (different from this dominant point of view). For example, we might think about Foster's (1996) criticism of artists that he argues identify with ethnographic perspectives and practices. He describes this identification as a turning away, and process of projective idealisation of the other. This is a clever use and reinforcement of psychoanalytic language which underpins and legitimises much post-structuralist art criticism, and is an effort to delegitimise those practices that do not identify with exclusionary definitions of art, or in turn convey a more inclusive and interdisciplinary interpretation of art. Foster's (1996) rhetoric presents identification as a false turn away from what he assumes to be the natural and authentic mode of critical art. It also elides the post-structuralist identification with disruptive psychoanalytical and philosophical perspectives in a manner that ghettoises contemporary artistic practice and discourse.

Debates about identification in dialogical art practices make little distinction between projective and empathic identification and risk reducing arguments to simplistic judgements of right and wrong. Such arguments fail to acknowledge that in processes of identification all perspectives are constructed and not products of natural forces (Rorty, 1982), and what is important is to remember that identification

can be about supporting other human beings trying to make their way in the world
(Bhabha, 1998).

Discussion of some characteristics of relating in dialogical art

This discussion is in two parts. In the first half of this discussion I summarise my understanding of the relational characteristics of dialogue. I address seven themes. Firstly, I talk about how conversation allows for a more contradictory and undecided relationship to the world that can contrast attempts by artists to produce accurate representations of reality. Then I discuss how dialogue can alter and change our sense of self as artists and researchers, and lead to a more ambiguous but generative disposition towards ourselves. I go on to highlight how in the competitive worlds of art and academia such an approach can involve risk to our sense of self, but paradoxically also provide resources for sustaining a more ambiguous sense of self.

Then I discuss how relational perspectives are altering the conceptualisation of engagement in dialogical art practice, presenting dialogue as an invitation not just for others but for the artist to be challenged and stretched to think in new ways. I briefly examine the ethical challenge that dialogue raises and how rather than appearing an exercise in rational judgement, relational perspectives promote the effort of the artist being answerable for the decisions and acts which make up their work. Following this, I look at the dilemma of artistic representation in co-constructed projects. I reflect on my use of bricolaged dialogues, and the attempt to convey the gift of exchange and interaction with unique and unpredictable perspectives of others. I discuss how this exchange is balanced with my own voice as co-participant, and my role as post-producer of research texts.

Then I highlight the possibility that identification in dialogue can be less a process of judging right and wrong and instead the attempt to empathise with others trying to make sense of their interaction with the world.

In the second half of this discussion I examine the emergent understanding of relating, focusing on the importance of conversation. I highlight how conversation can offset concerns about objectification in dialogue, can contribute to a less universalising and ideal mode of engagement, and can be understood more as a relational process of learning than production of objective outputs.

Conversation provides the resources for a more contradictory, and ambivalent relationship to the world

Even though conversational art practices have gained more recognition and become more established over the last fifteen years, they function in a contested artistic and academic landscape. Developing a conversational inquiry and mode of practice has proven at times a psychologically demanding process. Conversation as practice has involved coming to a new understanding of my vulnerability as an artist, researcher and lecturer; and realising the vulnerability and uncertainty of understanding. This vulnerability was emphasised through the realisation that adopting a conversational practice situates me the artist-researcher in uncertain, ambivalent and contradictory social relationships, but doing so also risks antagonising others in the field of art and research. This antagonism has been most pronounced amongst those who privilege more certain, sequential processes of research, and who desire more stable

representations of reality. My conversational approach problematises such expectations in artistic inquiry as it departs from a sequential series of stable events of meaning. The conversational method emphasises a re-engagement with sites of meaning-making not necessarily a linear and progressive engagement. Linearity and stability are abandoned as they only serve to alleviate anxieties about the ambiguity and irregularity of conversational inquiry woven through specific socio-cultural relationships (Faubion & Marcus, 2008).

The appeal of conversation as an artistic practice is that it reminds me of the tendency to confuse dialogue, and artistic authorship with a thing. By this I mean to confuse dialogue as a natural fact to be discovered, rather than a constructed social phenomenon. Yet conversation is thought to offset essentialism and reification through the production of ambiguous representations (Harris, 2008). This has been an emergent understanding that has become apparent to me through this inquiry. In the conversational work *An invitation to dialogue* my understanding of the process shifted away from the attempt to enact an authentic mode of dialogue, or to establish the foundational conditions (as in the philosophy conference discussion panel), to realising that the reiterative descriptive nature of the work adopts a Rortean (1980) disposition. In this perspective conversation is seen as a method which requires a creative effort to sustain openness to further conversation, and the generation of new descriptions, rather than striving to be able to describe dialogue accurately.

Dialogical practices alter the construction of the self in the work of art

Despite the ambiguity of conversational approaches, the process of research may lead artists to adopt an assertive, knowing and expert sense of self. This self-knowing expert meets many expectations of the constructed academic sense of self. My constructionist approach contrasts this construction and its basis on the assumption that academic research necessarily equates to a rationalist self-knowing person divested of doubt and uncertainty. Through my dialogical practice in the social world I have become more attentive to how this self-certainty can morph into the belief that the artist is expected to be an expert on all social things and know the answer in all social situations. Whereas in counselling training that I undertook many years ago, one of the first issues addressed was the limits of our expertise and the possible dangers of doing harm by not considering the limits of our expertise, no such caveat of doubt seems to feature in the formation of artist-researchers.

Dialogical approaches have also altered the sense of self I invested in the production of traditional autonomously authored objects. At times during this inquiry I have fallen back into believing it is important to make objects that look like art. I have produced posters, and ephemeral text works. I made these objects ephemeral to offset the notion of artist as producer of valuable objects. What I hadn't considered was the extent to which I was responding to tacit expectations of others for outcomes to look like art. While posters and text objects meet expectations that the outcome of practice-led art research should resemble and look like art, what was more difficult was questioning this assumption as something natural, and part of what 'unquestionably' constitutes the sense-of-self of being an artist as individual

producer of art things. My approach diverts from this traditional construction, by entering into co-participatory processes which not only diffuse the autonomous ideology and framework of my artistic practice, but moves my sense of artistic-self from a grounding in the autonomous production of artistic looking things.

Perhaps the most challenging dynamic in adopting a dialogical approach has been grappling with abstract debates about people. To some extent I reinforce this abstraction by referring to selves instead of people. What seems to be disputed is the conceptual structure of the sense of self that should ideally be reflected in artistic practice. Dialogical approaches are opposed by antagonistic perspectives because it is assumed they aim towards a centred and coherent sense of self (Bishop, 2005). This criticism conveys the sense that there are only two possible constructions of selfhood; either the rational self-knowing academic artist, or the decentred, fragmented, and disruptive post-structuralist sense of self of the antagonistic artist. In this inquiry I have tried to balance expectations of artistic, academic and personal sense of self in a manner more reflective of pluralistic and developmental notions of self (Kegan, 1982). This sense of self aims towards coherence even as new experiences and perspectives make absolute coherence an ever retreating ideal. But as Kester (2011) suggests it has been through trying to maintain a sufficient sense of self-coherence that I have sought to remain open to listening to and empathically relate to others. This openness towards others has included other artists, who have expressed a belief in the generative potential of a more ambiguous sense of being an artist. Like one artist I spoke with in the USA, I find Kaprow's notion of being an un-artist helpful as a way of sustaining a generative ambiguous sense of self, and openness in dialogue.

Dialogue sustains and is sustained by self-risk

Art is a competitive business and taking a different stance or approach to the dominant worldview involves risk to the self. In *An invitation to dialogue* at The EVENT (see case reflections) I felt anxious about the risk of failed acceptance (Groys, 2011) of the work by publics and other artists, despite the work being commissioned by a selection panel comprising of artists. I was transferring feelings of the vulnerability I felt in adopting an emergent conversational dialogical approach that was different to more certain linear approaches more familiar to members of the research hierarchy associated with my faculty.

Delivering a lecture to other artists made me realise that there was interest and appetite for alternative perspectives, and this encouraged me to speak openly about my different perspectives as I felt they may have been of benefit to others. My dialogue with artists in the United States, who express different perspectives to the normative UK academic art framework has encouraged me to accept a different disposition within the competitive realm of art.

Situating my practice in conversations outside of those dominating the immediate institutional perspective of this inquiry led me to meet other artists facing similar risks and struggles for the recognition of less prescriptive approaches to art research. I have been encouraged by other artists and participants to sustain the risk of addressing alternative perspectives and approaches. I believe there is growing frustration with dominant perspectives and approaches in art research, and conversely growing interest in more ambiguous, uncertain and speculative

approaches to socially engaged art. My dialogical inquiry has brought me into contact with other artists expressing different opinions about art and research, and made me consider that sustaining a practice which risks lack of recognition from dominant perspectives provides insights and resources which may help other artists survive.

Dialogue alters the sense of engagement in art

Central to my inquiry has been the notion of dialogical engagement. Debates about engagement in recent art have tended to divide into binary characteristics such as active/passive, visual/oral. As Beech (2012) observes, the problem increasingly is how to talk about engagement in dialogical practices in less ideal and universalising perspectives. My responses has been to adopt the Wittgensteinian notion of language games which reflects the complex interactive and intercommunicative dynamics of social action, without proscribing or delimiting what a dialogical language game should be. This is more apparent in the work *An invitation to dialogue* which weaves reflections on visual aspects as well as spoken aspects of dialogical encounter. For example, in the dialogue on Blackweir bridge (Appendix 2) a man told me he had been judging whether to approach me further by watching me from afar. This reflects the mobile and dynamic qualities of engagement as people can change the manner and mode of their participation and take more responsibility for the development of the conversation as work of art. I also emphasise the ‘invitation’ in the title of this work as a means of attempting to sustain the unpredictable nature of conversational encounter. Works which invite everyday encounters may suggest the transformation

of potential sites of contradiction, non-compliance and dissent into stable commodities (Ranciere, 2004), and participation in such encounters is criticised as involving a prior specific formation of people's roles (Beech, 2008), I construe invitation as something improvised and a relationship of giving. Invitations may catalyse future invitations (Matthé, 2009) to dialogue, which do not necessarily require my involvement.

The invitational dimension of my approach to conversational works aims to sustain the unpredictable and transformational potential of dialogical engagement, without framing dialogue as the solution to all social problems. The importance of the potential for transformation through dialogue is as Beech (2012) suggests how this approach has stretched and challenged my practice and understanding as an artist, by exposing me to new ways of thinking about art and dialogue. For me it has heightened the danger of adopting a deterministic approach, which insists that others should be open to being stretched and challenged by the work of art.

Dialogical practices question the ethical exchange of art

One of the abiding challenges for me however has been coming to a new understanding of my ethical disposition through the work of dialogue, especially as I recognise that communicative exchange, and knowledge and learning that stems from it, raises questions about my conduct and the relative value of the exchange. I have realised that all action in the social world exposes people to these issues at some level. My stance has been not to dismiss ethical concerns as impossible

standards of moral purity, nor to dismiss them as overly sacrificial normative conformity, which constrains artistic practice. Instead I endeavour to sustain and enhance my awareness of the implications of my actions and judgements and their impact on others. My sense is that artists are taught to perceive ethics as a rational debate and argument between individualistic or collectivist perspectives. Whereas, the sense that I have gained through this practice is more akin to a Bakhtinian ([1919] 1990) notion of being able to answer and think through the decisions and actions I have taken as an artist.

The problem of representation and the potential support of identification

This Bakhtinian perspective contributed to my realisation of the significance of the crisis of representation in co-constructed dialogical art practices. Dialogical art invariably involves some aspect of presentation and the giving and sharing of information and meaning. Dialogical art as research involves the artist in the tricky problem of claiming the authority and power to re-present what was given and shared. As Gerz (2004) notes this post-production and re-presentation potentially diminishes the uniqueness of the giver and the gift, turning it into a commodity. I have interpreted this problem as how can I as a researcher retain a sense of the process of exchange and giving that is central to this dialogical inquiry, without reducing all research texts to my own monological perspective as author (Finley, 2003). My response has been the development of bricolaged dialogues as a mode of re-presenting the conversational exchange and gift of unique perspectives of other

co-participants in this inquiry in a manner that does not lead to a singular goal, determined by me the re-author.

This inquiry presents dialogue as less a process of projective identification and alignment of other perspectives with my own, but instead as an interplay and attempt to empathise with other people's varying expressions and beliefs in a manner which enhances my understanding of what may motivate such understanding. My hope is that my practice describes a process of identification through dialogue which resists simplistic judgements about right and wrong, and fails to consider that people with different opinions may also be trying to make sense of their particular approach to the world.

New understanding: Discussion of the emergent understanding of relating

In this section I discuss the salient relational characteristic of dialogue which emerged through this inquiry. I focus on conversation as a significant interpersonal aspect of dialogue. I discuss how it can offset concerns of objectification, present a less universalising and ideal mode of engagement in dialogue, and present dialogue as a more relational process of learning.

Offsetting concerns of objectification in dialogue through interpersonal conversation

Conversational approaches to art practice present artists with the twin challenges of how to avoid reducing conversation to an ideal method of engagement, object and goal of art, and secondly how to mitigate the objectification of others, and ideal construction of the artist in interactions.

In this inquiry conversation acts as an adaptive interactive process and method instead of objective output or rigid procedure. This perspective led me to understand semi-structured interview as an open-ended co-constructed interaction and see it as part of an on-going social practice, not just as a process of mining other people's views. The danger in emphasising conversation as interaction is the temptation to begin to conceive of it in increasingly ideal terms as a more active, more engaging, more perfect mode of exchange. In my approach I see conversation as part of a wider flow of my socially grounded practice in which I weave together talk with texts and

acts in an on-going process of constructing my relationship with the world (Potter & Hepburn, 2008). I incorporate conversation as a thread of events and encounters in my on-going socially grounded practice through the production of research reports and texts. However, conversational events and encounters cannot be fully or objectively re-presented by transcript, case-reflection or research text.

This social constructionist inquiry attempts to avoid the belief that it presents unambiguously objective representations of others, the world, and the process through the construction of dialogical bricolages which combine recorded extracts, and fragments from multiple conversational events. These textual dialogues are an effort to highlight and reiterate that conversation is not an objective output but an inter-subjectively constructed social phenomenon. I reinforce this approach by presenting these representations of conversations not as objects but as invitations and opportunities for renewed interpersonal conversational exchange, rather than the production of a valuable art object. Grounding conversation in interactive social relations in this way offsets idealistic conceptualisations as an analytical process of the mind (Rorty, 1980). In this view the objectification of conversation is offset by a commitment to continued interaction in social discourse.

Seeking new conversation in social settings raises the associated problem of how to mitigate objectifying others in the process of on-going conversation, and limit reinforcing artistic authority to project meaning onto others and the sites of encounter (Kwon, 2004). In my perspective it may not be possible to avoid reification entirely as making conversation as art presents talk as an object of human effort (Harris, 2008). My approach is to work at conceiving of the effort of human talk as

necessarily interactive, co-constructive and a process in which co-participants strive to develop a free-associative relationship to the authoring process. This free-associative stance is central to my grounded theory approach, and contrasts with the construction of the singular authorial power of the artist. In this manner I aim to disrupt the authority of the artist to speak for and on behalf of others. This can be achieved through open and unstructured conversation which treats all co-participants as potential generators of new descriptions, abnormal yet valid topics, themes and ways of talking. While this approach does not avoid the potentially objectifying dynamics of projective identification, it recognises that in socially situated conversational interaction the artist may also be the recipient of such projection. Considering abnormal topics, themes and ways of talking as valid, and an expression of a unique person's perspective or worldview emphasises the possibility of dialogue to be a process of empathic rather than objectifying projective identification.

Reflecting on open and unstructured conversation has made me more conscious of the potential objectification of others, or the assumption of objective roles by myself and others. As I believe it is important to strive to relate to other co-participants as people with their own specific identities, so too conversation reminds me that being an artist is not merely a matter of adopting the right vocabulary, or acting in a way deemed correct for artists by others (Rorty, 1980). Conversely instead of objectifying the other as *other* than the artist, conversation can present the artist as a mobile construction formed collaboratively by people interacting with people. The implication of such an approach is that in conversation, the specific identity of artist may be a provisional quality and outcome of the interactive and constructive process of conversation. As a result there may be conversational interactions from which I

come away feeling neither an enhanced self-understanding as an artist, nor a definite sense of its identity as the work of art.

Conversational dialogue as an interactive process of discovery and learning

The realisation that even semi-structured interview can be a co-constructed relational interaction enabled me to recognise in open and unstructured conversation the potential for a relational and relativist mode of learning. This presents a different interpretation of conversation than as a rational and objective exchange. The practice of open and unstructured interpersonal conversation facilitates a more free-associative and enigmatic relationship to meaning. The free flowing conversation I aim for is a more generative and reflective mix of preconscious and conscious thought more akin to modes of thinking which permeate everyday life (Locke, 2007). This approach towards language use is a characteristic quality of language games, and the grounded theory disposition of this inquiry.

Free flowing conversation facilitates imaginative and creative exchange and open-ended discovery (Locke, 2007). It offers people engaged in situated conversation a degree of intellectual autonomy, and may facilitate alternative interpretations of frameworks of meaning. This process of learning is key to my development and to the generation of a framework for dialogical practice and inquiry as art. It allows me to interpret and think about ideas which emerge from my interactions with other people in the field of this dialogical inquiry. In adopting a discovery approach to dialogue, free flowing conversation involves accepting an element of uncertainty and

ambiguity in the process. Ambiguity is sustained because whether the outcome of the inquiry is a social practice or the interpretation of a social practice can never be fixed or ultimately resolved (Harris, 2008). This ambiguous stance avoids the need to express a view on what dialogue *really* is (Rorty, 1980). In this manner this inquiry generates a mode of practice which aims not to resort to or generate ideal or universalising articulations and representations of dialogue. As a conversational approach this inquiry contrasts with dialogical practices that strive to achieve an accurate correspondence of reality or the reality of others (Rorty, 1980).

In this Rortean view, this inquiry's mode of conversational art is presented as a socially grounded process of conceptual learning and improvement. By grounding conversation in an on-going dialogical framework this inquiry offers artists an alternative means of conceptualising their relationship to the process of engaging in human and social life. This was an important contribution realised through the expansion of my conversational approach to include the more transparently socially situated work *An invitation to dialogue*. This work revealed the difficulty of representing conversation as action and interaction, and of conveying the unpredictable quality of live delivery. I attempt to preserve some sense of the discovery, unpredictability and transformational potential of live conversational interaction by developing bricolaged dialogues which weave together the various conversations of this research. These are themselves woven into a grounded theory thesis as representation of on-going social interaction and conversation of this research, in which the bricolaged dialogues best reflect the interactive and transformational learning potential of my mode of dialogue.

Chapter 7: Discussion and conclusion

This inquiry emerged as a process of weaving, selecting alternative patterns and criss-crossing unexpected strands and threads of practice and understanding. Even as I was consolidating all this, I was beginning to pick away at those troubling loose ends, which just a moment ago seemed to me the very stuff of the fabric of dialogue and art.

In this chapter I summarise the making of this conversational tapestry, highlighting the layers through which the construction of this dialogue was performed. Then I offer a summary of what was found through this study, drawn from new understanding from the previous three chapters. I highlight how this dialogue generates the construction of an alternative disposition to artistic inquiry. I point out how this approach facilitates the weaving and layering of different oral and inscriptive practices in the performance of knowledge, but also how such an approach may destabilise expert claims to knowledge and power. I go on to discuss the potential limitations of this work and I highlight what gaps could be filled out in the on-going work of weaving dialogue as art.

Lastly, a statement of this study's claim to understanding and knowledge is offered – specifically how this mode of practice contributes to an understanding of knowledge production by manifesting and demonstrating knowledge as performed through layered dialogue. The attendant claim is also made, that through adopting the

constructionist conceptual metaphors of grounded theory and language games, such an approach can offset concretisations, and avoid foundationalist and essentialist prescriptions of dialogue and dialogic art.

How this thesis was constructed

This inquiry started with a recognition of certain incongruities in the increasing intellectualised and discursive nature of knowledge production within art's social reality. Despite postmodernism's replacement of a modernist objective, universalising beliefs and perspectives art still seems to suffer from a modernist stylistic bind (Ramsden, [1972] 2004). Artists seem limited to producing and describing individual works rather than articulating frameworks, and surprisingly seem discouraged from questioning the current conservative and dominant paradigm. Yet traditional frameworks seemed to struggle with the complex and changeable social reality that seemed a feature of dialogical art. The traditional paradigm still presents an autonomous notion of art in which artists appear free from everyday constraints (Ramsden, [1972] 2004), yet one from which they do not appear free to depart. Who would have thought that (increasingly) the only people not permitted artistic licence are artists? Perhaps for dialogue to become a way out of this bind it needed a more appropriate paradigm.

Taking a provisional look at the conversation surrounding dialogue in contemporary art, it seemed relational approaches to dialogue explored how different worldviews might coexist (Bourriaud, 2002) and produce frameworks of connected knowledge,

which increase critical awareness (Kester, 2004). So I visited some exhibitions and attended talks by artists mentioned by Kester and Bourriaud. In these encounters I felt that dialogue often seemed a very deterministic mode of meaning making, and means of educating others, through the dissemination of rational content by artistic experts to non-expert publics. Where was I in all that – a trainee expert? I began a social constructionist framework as a potential alternative to art's traditional critical paradigm, and what the implications might be of such an inquiry.

I was aware that the themes and concerns of dialogical art might be predetermined and biased by power relations within the institutional research framework of contemporary art and by my own self-motivating perspectives. As a result I set out to construct an approach that allowed perspectives to emerge from the interactions of the socially grounded process of dialogical art. At the time I didn't realise how this would transform into a commitment to, and prolonged engagement with the social world of contemporary art.

Amongst those artists that I had encountered I was most affected by the work of Ian Wilson, of whose work I had previously been unaware. I was particularly struck by how Wilson's informal spoken works often took place in the course of the artist's daily life, and his encounters with the art world. They bridged what are often seen as divided worlds of meaning. Although later I came across a brief mention of Wilson's work in the literature on dialogical practices in art, attending a *Discussion* at the Van Abbemuseum made me consider what other artistic practices and perspectives with dialogical resonance may have been omitted from critical debates on dialogue. This encounter reinforced my belief that participating in socially grounded interaction

might reveal unexpected perspectives and insights overlooked or edited out of more abstract critical perspectives on practice. It seems appropriate that conversation should become such a central characteristic of my approach to dialogue.

How a socially constructed framework developed out of inquiry

Throughout the journey of this study there has been a gradual emergence of the insight that the goal of my practice-led research deviated away from art work as the production of objects for contemplation. Instead the outcome has become the construction of a framework of practice and understanding of on-going dialogue as the occupation of art. Thinking back to my observation of the diffusion of practices and perspectives in contemporary art, I realised this implied that there may be multiple realities of dialogue. In seeking to understand this I became aware that my conception of art was as a social realm constructed through social actions, linguistic messages, and various relationships (Dorn, 2005). I made a conscious connection between my beliefs about this socially constructed world of interaction and communicative exchange and the social constructionist world-view. This world-view informed my study and contributes to my interpretation of that inquiry as a mode of art practice. I interpret the meaning-making process of my social interaction and communicative exchange as dialogical art through the lens of Wittgenstein's (2010) notion of language games. This has led me to abandon the concept of the artist-researcher as separate observer. Instead what emerged was an understanding of dialogical practice as a mode of life, characterised as an on-going conversation and practice of co-participatory learning.

Constructing a situated conversational practice of co-participatory learning as a mode of life

Taking part in a conversation over many years one notices by looking back, the punctuation of pauses, the re-gathering of resources before interrupting the flow of others and a sense of the gradual and on-going process of gleaning insights, threads and expressions. This process is learnt through the use of language in conversation, and the outputs woven out of the contributions of many other people whose conversations intersected and overlapped my own.

I adopted a face-to-face naturalistic conversational approach. I reinforced this sense of connectedness by adopting a referral approach to arrange to speak with other people. I was surprised at how this approach led me to speak with important figures in contemporary art who I had thought it would be impossible to reach. What struck me was despite the competitive nature of contemporary art, how incredibly generous people can be. These experiences of dialogical exchange make characterisations of conversational encounters as a process of mining others and violently appropriating the other seem very incongruous.

My referral method of expanding the conversation of my inquiry led to an unanticipated transfer of my work into a gallery setting. This move broadened my mode of engagement to include more obviously socially situated field conversations. This rescued conversation from the appearance of ideal rationalistic exchange, and opened it up to the rewarding challenges and complexities of grappling with meaning-making in the flow of social reality in which I was engaging.

This shift also altered my understanding of the desired for type of conversation.

Initially in interviews I had hoped for and valued intense and open exchange. The constructionist grounded theory approach allows for the transformation from a semi-structured protocol to a more generative and reflexive mode of interaction (Locke, 2007) more like the mode of thought characterised in the notion of language games. This common ground of everyday talk facilitated the blending of research material and transfer of the notion of intense talk to the demands of being occupied by on-going conversational inquiry.

The practical concern became one of how to represent such a complex process. As I began recording and writing about insights which emerged through inquiry in the field, my writing moved through intermediate reflections through to transcriptions and reflective research texts. I realised that producing descriptions of social interactions transforms the world into constructed representations (Holstein & Gubrium, 2008b). What I had not anticipated was that my interpretative adaptation of conversational art practices and their incorporation into a social constructionist framework exposed my practice to criticisms of quasi-ethnographic approaches in art (Foster, 1996). These criticisms reflect the crisis of representation in socially grounded inquiry. Imagine my surprise. How had abandoning my past as a visual artist led me to a crisis of representation? It took me some time to realise that my move to a practice of socially situated conversation shifted my art away from an ocular-centric logic and revealed a more complex, plural, and collaborative constructed logic. In my view the conversational work of art is a form of life constructed through the interaction of multiple forms of life and world-views. How

could I synthesise and present research material which sustained something of the unpredictable and complex nature of conversational interaction?

Synthesising, analysing and presenting research material

I adopted a social constructionist approach to synthesising and analysing the research material of this inquiry. I was helped in selecting broad organisational themes by the contributions of participants in a conference panel on conversation that I was asked to convene. I took the themes context, meaning-making, and relating as a starting point. I then highlighted key words in the research material that resonated with any of the organising themes. These were then arranged into further groupings with thematic similarities, and then these groups simplified further and the coding (labelling) of provisional themes for discussion aligned as far as possible with the language of originally coded material. This was a complex process to convey, yet a very practical reflection of the notion of language games as a process of learning through the use of language. Through this interpretive process I became familiar with the language of the extracts and their themes, in a way which reminded me of learning foreign languages through conversational immersion. This experience is as compelling as it is difficult to convey.

In thinking about the presentation of research material I realised I needed to sustain something of the multiplicity of perspectives and voices which was a feature of my collaborative approach to meaning-making. I moved away from earlier approaches that were more mechanistic. Instead I adapted a tripartite Platonic structure (Gill,

1996) of presenting dialogue. This is an original interpretive contribution of my inquiry. It led me to consider the *maieutic* structure of mimetic dialogical texts as an alternative to more linear narrative approaches that may iron out differences and digressions obscuring something of the provisional quality of grounded theory inquiry (Lempert, 2007).

My construction of mimetic dialogical texts reflects my perspective that representing research material such as interview transcripts for example, is an act of construction, presentation and simulation, not a mirror of actual events (Rhodes, 2000). These dialogues are one of many possible accounts. They contribute to the emergent understanding of this inquiry. They illustrate how this inquiry demonstrates an alternative mode of dialogical practice which weaves situated talk and textual practice in the performance of knowledge. They sustain multiple perspectives and voices and acknowledge that anonymising speakers can offset the appearance of a dramatic exchange that converts real people into heroic artistic characters. They aim to offset the objectification of knowledge and the retreat of meaning-making in art back into a process of contemplating finished objects through not presenting a clear outcome. Like Plato's (1989b) *Phaedrus* I do not present the starting point as a goal (Burke, 1997). These dialogues act as an invitation into the conversation of the research through promoting a more active reading and puzzling of the text.

I produced tag clouds to act as a general reminder of themes and thematic relationships without implying a specific information structure more than the general occurrence in the flow of the mimetic dialogues. These act as a transition between mimetic dialogues and the discussion of the main themes as they connect with the

literature on dialogical art. I then provide a reflection on how these themes contribute to my understanding and practice of dialogue as mode of art. The separation into a tripartite dialogical structure of mimetic dialogue, discussion and reflection is intended to only present a symbolic authorial resolution to dialogue (Cossutta, 2003).

From the discussions of understanding which emerge out of the previous three thematic chapters I present three constructed expressions of what I found. These are outlined below, and then reflected upon in the following section.

This inquiry's findings

This dialogue facilitates the construction of an alternative disposition to artistic inquiry

- This inquiry constructs a framework that grapples with dialogical practice in the flux and change of art's social reality. It sustains a provisional relationship to knowledge and an openness to its on-going transformation.
- Thus the outcome of this inquiry functions as an on-going mode of practice which oscillates between interpretation of the social practice of dialogue as art, and a socially constructed practice of dialogue as art.

This inquiry demonstrates dialogue as a process of weaving situated talk
and textual practices in the performance of knowledge

- My practice moves from situated talk and interaction to the production of texts which act as invitations to continued situated talk, and strives to acknowledge perspectives and insights which may be dismissed by abstract theoretical perspectives.
- The *maieutic* form of presenting material generated by situated talk offsets potentially deterministic dynamics and avoids leading readers to a single conclusion, and better reflects the flux and ambiguities of interactional and inter-subjectively constructed meaning in socially grounded research.
- The claim to a share of recognition in the on-going artistic labour of dialogue is my continued involvement and commitment to sustaining the conversation, which is privileged above artistic claims to knowledge and power.

This mode of dialogue destabilises expert claims
to knowledge and power

- The learning dynamic of language games destabilises the traditional construction of academic artistic expertise and promotes continued uncertainty by questioning any claims to foundation of knowledge in art. This

disrupts the traditional construction of artist-researcher as assertive, self-knowing expert and solver of social problems.

- This practice aims towards an expertise of provisional and uncertain knowing, and a stance of provisional ignorance, which seek to avoid the characterisation of the artist as one who is expert at enabling others to know. Instead I offer the possibility of artist as one participating and sharing the risks of dialogical learning through interaction in the social world.

Implications of these findings

In my inquiry I highlight the increasing tensions between traditional perspectives and artists seeking alternative frameworks of practice through dialogue. I have demonstrated how developing a more socially situated framework of practice involves negotiating the complex web of contested relations and power dynamics which constrain artistic practice, discourse and research. What I have also described is how this study has transformed my understanding of the artistic labour of meaning-making, learning and relating through dialogue. Here I discuss what this inquiry might mean for art practice in its various dimensions and contexts.

The implication for other practitioner artists also questioning or seeking alternatives to traditionalist perspectives is that such a mode of dialogue can destabilise the ground on which your education, training, and many professional institutional opportunities have traditionally been based. This entails a huge letting go, and a loss

of certainty and security. Adopting such a mode of dialogue not only disrupts the way in which education, tradition and individuals of influence construct you as an artist, it can also disrupt your co-construction and reinforcement of them.

There is scope for the further broadening of perspectives within art education. In particular how the notion of meaning-making is taught, could profitably be expanded to include more practical and situated alternatives to the narrow post-structuralist linguistic perspective. This might begin to balance the heavy literature bias of theory which has become such a feature of art teaching and discourse. The concept of socially situated language games as opportunities for learning might also contribute to the delivery of socially engaged art practice. Such an approach can expose artists to unexpected perspectives and criticisms of the institutions and perspectives that shape their worldview. This can enhance the reflexivity of artists but also provide resources for open-ended development and new understanding.

As well as broadening linguistic perspectives in the teaching of art, this study suggests that art continues to rely on and use a limited range of psychoanalytic theory turned philosophy. Many of the themes that seem central concerns to artists as they develop and progress through their education reflect the language of psychoanalysis. Further examination of a broader range of current psychodynamic practice could be productive for art education. Artists like Hutchinson (2005) have begun this process by alluding to Phillipsean (1995) characterisations of academic expertise as possible ways forward without falling back into the transferential trap of past expectations. While Phillips (1995) points to the potential contribution that Winnicott and Object Relations might make to art's conversation, in this study I

draw upon the work of Kegan (1982), and Jacobs (2006) as important alternative contemporary voices to the Modernist Freudian and post-structuralist Lacanian views which dominate much of the debate about people in dialogical art.

We might also consider the implications for how art institutions consider engagement. This study suggests that dialogical engagement requires taking the seemingly everyday responses of others more seriously and not dismissing them as irrelevant, and that artists seek invitations to be transformed and challenged through interaction with different perspectives. Dialogue reveals the potential for artists to be transformed by the labour of communicating their beliefs with others who do not necessarily share the same worldview about art. In turn this implies that dialogue involves speaking and listening to different voices and perspectives and practising naturalistic conversation as well as the rehearsed idioms of art theory.

Later in this chapter I talk about where my research goes next, but I also want to reflect on what I feel the implications for art research might be of this inquiry. Surprisingly many reactions to the grounded theory framework of my inquiry reveal that many researchers are not aware of its development away from its early positivist roots into a more imaginative and creative process of analysis and assemblage. Further research could explore the transferability of my grounded theory approach into other art forms such as video, or new media. Such inquiry might reveal potential incongruities between technological mediation of communicative exchange and the possibility of artists sharing the risks of dialogical learning and social interaction.

Lastly this inquiry has surprising implications for my future practice. Recent conversations I had with a contemporary art gallery in the UK suggest that situated conversation and *An invitation to dialogue* with gallery directors, curators, and funders could contribute to debates about dialogue in institutional settings in contemporary art. This idea was the basis of a series of dialogues provisionally agreed with the Arnolfini Gallery Bristol. However, with restructuring and staff changes the timing for such a residency was not appropriate. A re-enactment of this inquiry in a network of contemporary art institutions would expand the scope and on-going contribution of this practice-led inquiry though revealing more of the logics, which contribute to the construction of artistic interaction and discourse.

Limitations of this inquiry

This inquiry sustains an uncertain disposition towards the production and presentation of knowledge through the adoption of a Wittgensteinian and social constructionist disposition towards conversational interaction and the production of texts. In this view all knowledge is necessarily fallible (Weinberg, 2008) and this is inevitably the case in inter-subjectively performed knowledge brought together and presented by one person. What is important in my approach is the acknowledgement of the limitations which provides an opportunity to incorporate the potential biases, omissions and mistakes which characterise the way in which I make sense of my socially situated inquiry (Linders, 2008).

With hindsight the development of my understanding of conversation as a co-participatory artistic method suggests an omission in my interview protocol. While some people said they found the opportunity to talk about their work useful, and the conversations had raised unexpected questions or perspectives, few people mentioned what their motivations were for engaging in the work. This may have contributed further insights as to what people thought their prior preoccupations and interest in dialogue were. Something of the interactive aspect of this work is also absent from this account. This account omits a handful of prior conversations and informal meetings, which acted as a quasi-interview process, but more an examination of me by other participants. In retrospect extending case-reflections to such prior conversations may also have been instructive.

One reason perhaps for me not doing so was my awareness that my interpretive and free-associative approach to conversational interaction was generating large amounts of research material. As this material was being produced I did not realise the significance of such peripheral material, and it is only looking back at how my understanding of the process has been transformed that the value of recording such insights occur. The presentation of material in the dialogues is the tip of a conversational iceberg of the inquiry as a whole, which this report struggles to convey. My emphasis on the written re-performance of material from spoken interaction provides only limited reference to aspects of social interaction not conveyed by transcripts (Nikander, 2008). The social constructionist grounded theory approach facilitates some incorporation of other discursive material in the reproduction and representation of dialogue. I see the inclusion of this material into the

on-going re-performance of dialogue as increasingly part of the artistic labour and task of engaging in on-going socially situated dialogue.

Lastly, there is the methodological limitation of my constructed framework and its Wittgensteinian (1958) perspective. My approach, and its representation of the practical use of dialogue, does not identify what dialogue essentially is. This may be construed a limitation for those seeking definitive answers. Instead my practice produces a provisional description, a web of relations of some characteristics of this particular construction of dialogue as art. This makes the contribution of this inquiry local, situated and limits the universal transferability of its output. This however addresses an increasing demand for investigative approaches in dialogical art which avoid universalising, and essentialising perspectives, and instead attempt to convey something of the uncertainties, ambiguities and contradictions of socially imbricated artistic practice.

Future research

In this inquiry two things emerge which are of wider interest. Firstly, the scope for exploring artists written dialogues as a mode of practice. At least two co-participants in my inquiry have written dialogues as part of their practice, and I have had some conversations with the producers of the artwork the Arpanet dialogues. There is increasing interest in this area since Bishop's (2011) article on the textual products of the Collective Actions Group. This will be an area I will explore further as a theme

for a 'Dialogic' event, the dialogic practice and research group I contribute to, before exploring this topic as a paper for publication.

Secondly, I have become increasingly interested in the pervasive rhetorical opposition between antagonistic perspectives (Bishop, 2004) which construe the role of the artist as delivering a therapeutic shock, and dialogical perspectives (Bourriaud, 2002; Kester, 2004) which emphasise the importance of openness. Yet Foster in conversation with French *et al.* (1997) suggests that art historical and critical appropriations of psychoanalytic concepts may be detached from current perspectives in the field of psychoanalytic practice. I am interested in exploring the contribution that the concept of psychological defence (Kegan, 1982) might make to dialogical art practice. Such a discussion could examine how this notion might alter our understanding of the balance between open and vulnerable dialogue and more antagonistic postures.

What I gained from doing this research

This inquiry has changed my understanding of art practice, dialogue and learning. It has revealed both the incredible challenges and unexpected rewards of developing an alternative dialogical disposition towards contemporary art practice. If I was to offer advice to my younger self about to embark on this inquiry, I could only say the following: You will make mistakes, but persevere, as you will discover dialogue provides the resources to make sense of the chaos and flux of art practice in the social world. You will be exposed to a much broader range of perspectives and

horizons than you will at first grasp. And yet at other moments people will reveal very specific and immediate insights and concerns. These may express broad worldviews in such simple terms as to seem almost everyday and unworthy of notice.

Through dialogue I have received immense generosity by the trust that other people and practitioners placed in me. Some of the relationships I made through dialogue will be temporary, but no less real and significant for that. Others will be lasting, significant and sustain my thinking for years to come. I was transformed by the smallest practical insights as much as by the large ones. At times I needed to retreat but I remembered the reward of seeking new conversation. All this has given me the confidence to assert that dialogue as art and research can make a contribution to the on-going, uncertain and ambiguous conversation of contemporary art.

This study's contribution to understanding and knowledge

The practice embodied in this thesis contributes to an understanding of knowledge production by demonstrating knowledge as being performed through layered dialogue. This layering provides an alternative approach to traditional perspectives as it does not separate or seek to privilege particular modes of knowledge production. Instead, this practice moves between layers of differing modes of meaning-making in an on-going manner. The effect sustains the generative tension between differing performances of knowledge through dialogue, and aims to avoid concretisations, and essentialist or foundationalist prescriptions of the meaning of dialogue and dialogic art.

The resurgence of interest in dialogue continues to provoke critical debates about the ideal mode of interaction, exchange and transformation through art. On the one hand, among artists this interest contributes to the on-going diversification of oral, inscriptive and performative practices through which knowledge is presented and re-presented in contemporary art. While on the other, this increased interest has fed into disputes between traditional perspectives which have sought to privilege either distanced visual and textual over more immediate oral modes of exchange. The result has been a counter tendency to emphasise dialogue as collaborative oral inter-activity in contrast and opposition to what have been characterised as more passive individualistic inscriptive textual practices. When dialogical practices such as this are presented as academic research and as a written thesis, this sense of separation is further enhanced by the traditional academic shift from oral to written modes of presentation (Barnacle & Mewburn, 2010) which privileges written modes of knowledge performance.

This normative academic expectation for textual presentation exists in tension with this study's complimentary emphasis on the interpersonal and conversational generation of research material for the construction of a written thesis. These conversations were enacted through interaction and relationships with many people in contexts other than that in which the thesis is presented and encountered. The resolution of socially generated material into textual theses may also imply the privileging of interpretive textual dialogue over oral exchange. This risks downplaying the contributions of numerous others, and presenting an oversimplified re-presentation of dialogical inquiry enacted through a series of complex and multi-layered performed interactions and exchanges.

In this study I have interpreted the risks associated with the textual re-performance and re-presentation of conversationally co-produced material through research texts, as raising the spectre of the crisis of representation in research. This leads me to question for whom this research is enacted, and whose worldview is represented (Finley, 2003). As many others contributed to the construction of this practice, I construe this research as performed for and through my interaction in a community of interest. However, through this inquiry I have come to accept the view that in representations of social or collaborative processes, not all co-participants are equal, nor can their various contributions be represented in the same manner. I feel this is particularly so of this inquiry grounded in the context of research-based art practice, a context in which projects are still largely processed and re-presented as the product of a single artist-author.

Tension between singular expert claims to knowledge and the collective performance of knowledge

Social constructionist practice is not only a process of constructing research reports. It is also a process through which the artist-researcher is re-constructed, through interactive communicative exchange and a process by which claims to knowledge and power are made. My response in this study has been to aim to offset singular claims to knowledge and thus to power, by foregrounding the interactive participation of multiple participants and the contributions they make to the performative co-construction of knowledge. This is done primarily through constructing an alternative mode for the presentation of research material. Mimetic

representations of interactive *maieutic* dialogical exchange present research material in a manner which sustains multiple perspectives, thematic preoccupations and avoids resolution into a singular outcome or conclusion. These texts invite active participation by readers through inducing an imaginative entering into the conversational exchange, eliciting contributions from the reader's own perspectives to the *maieutic* performance of dialogue. The construction of such mimetic representations of dialogue is central to this mode of practice's response to the crisis of representation, and contribution to knowledge. These dialogues highlight this mode of practice as research as co-performed through interaction between multiple people. Nevertheless, this process is framed and resolved into a single thesis. The problematic tension between the multiple co-production and singular textual resolutions in the performance of knowledge is mitigated by the constructionist perspective that the worldview expressed by a singular researcher is already the product and construction of overlapping worldviews generated through on-going interaction. This on-going commitment to social dialogue symbolises an acceptance of the possibility of re-constructing knowledge and understanding, and further unsettles the notion of singular resolution.

While in this research we might accept that all co-participants are not equal, or their various contributions representable in exactly the same manner, such an acknowledgement may seek to obscure or merely ameliorate criticisms of claims to power by artist researchers. Socially grounded art practice-as-research can be one means of constructing an artistic sense of self in the mode of dialogical expert. My response in this practice has been to offset claims to power by de-stabilising the constructed identity of artist as assertive self-knowing expert. Following Hutchinson

(2005) and Beech (2010) I propose adopting a more Phillipsean (1995) disposition towards expertise. Such an approach constructs the artist as an expert in ambivalent knowing, doubt, and would portray the artist as a person willing to share the risks of continued dialogical learning through interaction in the social world. The artist as a symbolic expert in uncertainty sustains a provisional disposition to the performance of knowledge. This stance articulates the central implication for understanding of this study's performative construction of knowledge. That is, that this practice's approach to knowing articulates how dialogue may contribute to the increasing shift in critical art practices towards to more uncertain, imbricated and performative approaches that continue to do away with earlier distinctions of knowledge production (Rogoff, 2008). Conducting this research has compelled me to recognise the performative nature of my critical actions and my stance towards the dialogical production of art. It has led me from a stance of being discomforted by, and finding fault with other perspectives, to a more uncertain space in which I can examine the interplay of my own assumptions and those of others.

Avoiding rigid concretisations, and foundationalist and essentialist prescriptions of meaning

The maintenance of an uncertain disposition towards knowing in this practice entails a commitment to layering dialogical discussion and reflection with social interaction and communicative exchange. This performance of knowledge is shaped by the metaphors of language games and grounded theory inquiry. These provide a

conceptual approach which aims to avoid rigid concretisations, and essentialist or foundationalist prescriptions of the meaning of dialogue and dialogic art.

Concretisation is offset as the resolution of the layered performance of knowledge into a singular dialogical text, is like the mimetic dialogues in this study's three central thematic chapters, intended to present only a symbolic authorial resolution to dialogue (Cossutta, 2003). In the constructionist disposition of this mode of practice, a singular concrete reality of dialogue is never defined or consummated as an objective representation. Concretisation is further precluded as the construction of this practice is an open-ended relational process which makes and remakes the language games, and forms of life through which it is constructed (Hosking, 2008). In this view such a constructionist disposition of art practice cannot claim to know how dialogue or dialogical art really and concretely are, but instead they must merely remain committed to the transformative co-participatory performance of knowledge. Such a stance is a shift away from more conventional analytical conceptual structures and more assertive and objectivist outputs of art research in favour of the generative and creative rewards of performative dialogical inquiry offered by a constructionist grounded theory approach.

My mode of practice also seeks to avoid foundationalist or essentialist prescriptions of dialogue or dialogic art, recognising the concern that interpretations of dialogue in art are ever more constrained and prescribed (Beech, 2012). In this construction of dialogical art practice, the use of the language game metaphor for the performance of knowledge replaces foundationalist and essentialist approaches to knowledge production. In adopting such an approach, the belief that one is discovering the

essence of what is under discussion is abandoned, and instead we are faced with a sense of the relativity of the descriptive performance of knowledge in relation to particular traditions, historical accidents, and the various descriptive vocabularies (Rorty, 1980) of contemporary art. It thus follows that this thesis can be understood as one of many possible accounts. It is an imaginative re-interpretation of events and contexts that draws attention to the process of performing dialogical art practice as research, instead of merely presenting the reader with a summative report of the work of art and definition of dialogue.

The implication of such a mode of practice is that it may offset critical prescriptions about what may be thought essential, or normal to the conduct of dialogical art as research and inquiry. My hope is that, as Rorty (1980) suggests, this study may serve to prevent other alternative modes of dialogical practice and inquiry being viewed suspiciously simply because they differ from what is normal. In coming to a symbolic conclusion about this study's contribution to knowledge, I have come to share Rorty's (1980) conviction that people are always free to choose new descriptions of what they do and how they construct their sense of self. This has led me to conclude that the effort to avoid concretisations through providing an alternative to essentialising and synthesised prescriptions of meaning of dialogue and/or dialogic art is of central importance to the generative relationship between dialogue and dialogic practice enacted and re-imagined through this inquiry.

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