

Encounters & Spatial Controversies

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Abstract

Many contemporary commentators suggest that urban space and public space have no settled form – that they are forever subject to contestation. It follows that the spaces most of us occupy, act in and pass through day after day are, if not overtly antagonistic, then somewhat fraught and compromised. My practice explores this terrain by engaging with specific spatial controversies, getting embroiled in arenas of friction, overlapping with a variety of different ‘actors’ and processes.

Works develop as I try to do things in spaces, often in urban environments, probing situations in order to try to grasp their dynamics. Trying things out in space as an independent practitioner, I run into many kinds of structures, boundaries and rules. How such encounters unfold and are responded to and/or recounted – these questions lie at the heart of my work.

The form of the work has varied. I have, for example, created posters, performances and a film. Some works have taken the form of insertions of objects into existing arenas and processes. On other occasions, my exploratory investigations and activities are narrated in the work. The work has appeared in diverse contexts: fly-posted across a town; inserted into a planning-consultation meeting; hidden beneath an exhibition space.

This thesis will introduce five specific projects. An iteration of *Four Anecdotes* forms my Preface; this work is then discussed in Chapter One. Chapter Two introduces *Huis Clos Planningline*; Chapter Three *Reverse Consultation (Old New Town)* and *Cushion Distribution (Public Inquiry)*. Chapter Four is accompanied by a short film (attached) and is entitled *The Vessel*. Elaborations and analyses of these works will be augmented by discussions of works by other artists that are particularly relevant, among them Gordon Matta-Clark, Allan Sekula and Francis Alÿs. Uncaptioned images will run throughout the thesis, in parallel with the text.

Overall, I will argue for the value of a type of ‘site-oriented’ practice that probes and investigates spatial dynamics and power relations through experimental involvements with a range of sites and actors. In particular, I will contend that practices involved with everyday encounters and mobilities – including my own practice, which focuses on mobile things as they traverse boundaries and jurisdictions – allow structures and relationships to be encountered and tested in their day-to-day operation, with the twists turns and wriggles of practice generating new materials, works and ideas.

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Prologue: *Four Anecdotes*

Four Anecdotes is the title of a performance I first developed in response to an invitation to contribute to an event at Rokeby Gallery in London in 2010. I have performed the work several times since: indoors and outdoors, in the context of talks about my work and at two conferences.¹ In the work, the four tales below are recounted informally, from approximate memory. On a table in front of me as I speak sit four objects: a closed cardboard box, a bottle of mineral water, a pear and an upturned DVD.

Re-presented here, the work will serve to introduce four of the locations that I have spent time in recently. Individuals and events mentioned in the anecdotes will resurface throughout this thesis. The anecdotes also function to introduce some of my activities in and around these locations. In doing so, they begin to suggest some of my priorities and the ways in which I have been working as an artist.

¹ First performed as part of 'Zero Budget Biennial Performance Evening', curated by Michael Dean, Rokeby, London, 1 April 2010. Subsequently performed at 'Parade: Modes of Assembly and Forms of Address', Rootstein Hopkins Parade Ground, Chelsea College of Art and Design, 23 May 2010, and at 'Invisible Topographies: Critical Strategies Between Art and Geography', University of Barcelona, 29 November 2013. Also performed as part of various talks and lectures about my work.



A few years ago, I lived in Crystal Palace, in South London, close to a large park. Crystal Palace Park was originally designed and laid out in the late nineteenth century, when a vast iron and steel structure – Joseph Paxton’s famous Crystal Palace – was located here, on top of a hill. The building famously burned to the ground in 1936, but scattered architectural and sculptural fragments from the period survive: crumbling steps, headless statues and sphinxes, even some ‘dinosaur lakes’.

Today, the park hosts all kinds of different activities. There’s a 1960s sports centre and athletics stadium right in middle of it. Rock concerts are held here from time to time. There’s a children’s farm, a model-car racetrack, a cricket pitch. One corner is used as a caravan and camping site.

Not long after moving to the area, I started to see planning-site notices appearing, tied to trees and railings. These informed us that a new master plan had been submitted to the local council by the London Development Agency. The park was apparently to be re-landscaped by an award-winning German design team; interesting new buildings and infrastructure were to be put up, large areas replanted and the park generally ‘unified’.

However, the plans proved controversial. The redevelopment was to be funded by selling off areas of the park for the construction of expensive new private apartment blocks. Many local community groups were outraged. In fact, a lot of people more generally were very concerned that if this was allowed to go ahead, it could set a precedent for the sale of public parkland across the UK.

I became really interested in all this and decided to try to meet some of the people involved. I got hold of the phone number of London-based landscape architect Phil Meadowcroft, who was working with the German company on the design of the new park, and made an appointment to meet him.

His office turned out to be on the second floor of a converted warehouse in North London. I climbed the grey metal staircase that ran up the outside of the building and was met by a friendly receptionist who showed me into a large conference room and told me that Phil would be along soon.

In the conference room was a long table surrounded by chairs. And in the middle of this table sat a large cardboard box.

Phil soon appeared and happily started to answer my questions about the new plan for the park. Before long, he pointed to the box, and explained that he had dug it out to show me in case I might be interested. It was full of all kinds of documents: surveys, reports and official publications relating to the park.

Phil told me that he had been handed the box by a council planning officer when he'd won the commission to redesign the park. Apparently, as he passed it over to him, the planning officer had said: 'Everything you ever need to know about Crystal Palace Park is in this box.'

A few years later, I became extremely interested in Poundbury, a residential 'urban village' built over the past couple of decades on the edge of Dorchester.

Poundbury is quite well known in the UK, and especially among architects; it's the brainchild of Prince Charles, in his capacity as the Duke of Cornwall. (The Duchy of Cornwall is one of the UK's largest landowners.)

Prince Charles has very particular ideas about architecture and urban design, and Poundbury is quite an unusual place. Master-planned by architect Leon Krier, it's a carefully choreographed cocktail of past architectural styles, local materials and traditional craftsmanship, combined to try to suggest some idea of an ideal, roughly speaking 'English' community.

I came to know the place because my brother worked there. I would visit him, and he'd show me around a bit.

After a while, I decided that, in order to understand Poundbury better, I needed to meet some of the other inhabitants. My brother suggested we visit a friend of his who had moved in recently, a retired teacher called Andrew.



Andrew lived in a ground-floor apartment in a newly built Neo-Georgian block facing a noisy building site, soon to be Queen Mother Square. After tea and biscuits, he showed us around his flat, telling us about various adjustments that he had wanted to make to his property since moving in, and about the surprisingly long-winded negotiations he had had to get into with Duchy officials in order to get permission.

He explained that all Poundbury residents are required to sign up to a very strict set of regulations stating exactly what you can and can't do in and around your property. It's known as the Poundbury Code. For example, no Poundbury homeowner is allowed to paint their front door a different colour without the express written permission of Prince Charles.

Andrew then led me out of the back of his flat onto a small patio area that backed onto a communal car-parking space and was divided from it by a low brick wall. On the patio, he was growing flowers in a few pots.

Andrew told us that he'd written to the Duchy to ask if he could install an outside tap so as not to have to carry a watering can through from his kitchen every time he wanted to water his plants. Apparently, there had been an extremely long delay before he received a reply. And when he did finally get a response, it puzzled him.

The letter from the Duchy explained that he could only install an outside tap if he plumbed in an additional valve just inside his flat that would enable the water supply to be switched off in two different places. When Andrew had phoned to ask why this double tap was felt to be necessary, a Duchy representative explained that, because his patio was so easily accessible from the shared parking area, the Duchy was concerned that his neighbours might trespass onto his patio and steal his water.

Five years ago, I was invited to make a new piece of work for an exhibition to be held in a nineteenth-century townhouse in Campden Hill Square, Holland Park, a very expensive residential area of West London.



The curator, Patricia, had just bought this house with her financier husband. It had been decorated in an eccentric fashion by its previous owners, and this had given Patricia the idea of inviting some artists to respond to the place and to host an exhibition before refurbishing the house completely. So I visited to have a look around.

I found Patricia's stories about her neighbours much more interesting than the house itself. One of them, who lived right next door, happened to be the mayor of the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea. Previously, he had been the head of the borough's planning department.

The mayor's property was very similar to Patricia's, with one major difference. Whereas at the end of her garden she had a separate mews building – originally servants' quarters – his garden had at some stage been divided in two. As a result, the mews building that would once have been part of his property was now a separate small house, which had its own little courtyard, divided from the mayor's garden by a high brick wall.

Patricia also told me that an elderly couple who owned a small dog had once lived in this mews house.

Growing at the far end of the mayor's garden, next to the high wall, was a mature pear tree. Several of its branches reached over the wall, overhanging the couple's courtyard. For several weeks each year, pears would drop from these branches into their space.

One day, the couple's dog, which would often exercise in the courtyard, refused to go outside. He suddenly seemed very distressed. Assuming he'd been hit by a falling pear and traumatised by the experience, the couple went to knock on the mayor's front door to explain what had happened. They told him they were only renting their property, that their landlord was rubbish and that he wouldn't do anything about the overhanging branches. They then asked the mayor whether he would mind cutting them down.

The mayor proved brusque and unsympathetic. He made it quite clear that he liked the shape of his pear tree and wasn't willing to do anything about it. The couple, very disappointed, followed up with a note, a further visit, then two letters. But the mayor stuck to his line.

Eventually, Patricia told me, the couple, disheartened and exhausted by the endless attempted negotiations, had decided to move out.

My brother used to live on the edge of the seaside town of Weymouth, near Poundbury, also in Dorset. I used to stay with him from time to time.

From the upstairs windows at the back of his terraced house, you could look out over Portland Harbour, a vast expanse of water. And in the distance, at the foot of the cliffs of a peninsula known as the Isle of Portland, one could make out what looked like a long grey warehouse. Chris explained that it was a prison ship, HMP Weare, and that there were 450 prisoners on board.

I became quite fascinated by this floating metal box. Eventually, I decided to try to photograph it. This, however, turned out to be problematic. Although you could see the prison ship from a distance, it was impossible to get close to. It was moored inside a private port, beneath steep cliffs. The waters around the port were also restricted.

I contacted the Portland Harbour Authority and was informed that the vessel was no longer being used as a prison. The British government, I learned, had sold it to a company who service the international oil industry. They sold it to a company that was now converting it into a 'floating accommodation unit' for oil workers in West Africa. I was also told that I would not be permitted to photograph the vessel.

Nevertheless, I persisted in trying. I spent time scrambling across the cliffs with my camera, trying to catch a glimpse of it. One morning not long afterwards, however, I read on the website of a local newspaper, The Dorset Echo, that the former prison ship had left UK waters. It had been towed away unannounced and was now on its way to Nigeria.

My disappointment at this news was tempered a little by my later discovery, on the newspaper's website, of a short film documenting the ship's departure. Shot in the early morning from high on the cliffs, the film combined atmospheric shots of the misty harbour and circling seagulls with views of a huge grey metal box with barred windows being eased from its

moorings by tugboats and towed away between distant harbour walls – all to the accompaniment of a romantic piano soundtrack in the style of Richard Clayderman.

Credits at the end featured the name of the filmmaker and his production company. So I rang Geoff Moore to express admiration for his work, explaining that I was an artist. I asked him whether he might be willing to allow me to use his film in an artwork of my own.

Geoff was delighted and offered to send me a DVD copy in the post, saying he would be happy for me to make use of it anytime.



Chapter 1: Unsettled Spaces

The work *Four Anecdotes*, one of whose manifestations is inserted above, introduces a series of spatial controversies. These range from a contested urban master plan to a dispute between neighbours, from a resident's negotiations with regulators to my own attempts to outmanoeuvre prohibitions relating to a former prison ship. Highly specific – rooted in particular locations and concerning moments in individuals' daily lives – each anecdote highlights some kind of struggle over space.

More specifically, the anecdotes concern claims around boundaries. A landscape architect has to acknowledge his complicity in a plan to sell off the edges of the park he's been commissioned to unify. A new resident's request to improve his patio arrangements triggers a bewildering response from his freeholder. And a mayor ignores his neighbours' concerns, seeking to maintain territorial clarity with an argument about arboreal aesthetics.

The different boundaries around which these events and dynamics unfold are certainly physical (park railings, garden walls, cliffs...), but they're also legal and/or regulatory. The Poundbury Code is the most obvious example, but at Portland too my awareness of harbour restrictions and a series of less than positive emails from the port's development officer kept me at a distance from the port just as effectively as the perimeter fence did.

In *Four Anecdotes*, awareness of such codes emerges gradually, through the stories. The anecdotes recount a convoluted sequence of events that slowly builds to a kind of denouement. The stories show me out and about in different locations, asking questions, noting anomalies, experiencing/ encountering generosity and frustrations. Over time, it becomes apparent that each dispute hinges on, and is articulated by, an object, a fact dramatised by the items sitting on the table in front of me.

So the spaces here aren't only built, social or regulated – they are also cluttered with things. Each anecdote comes to its resolution around one object: a crux, or central character. Things in the stories are also characterised by different kinds of mobility. The cardboard box full of documents is passed between different individuals, then to me. A new tap may or may not be installed, breaching the wall of Andrew's flat. A pear falls, landing on a dog. A floating prison is filmed as it's towed out to sea. A



mezzo di strutto
interkomm

WALKS
IN SOCIALIST
PIMLICO
3:30 PM

MIKE RICKETTS
FOUR ANECDOTES
2:15pm - 3pm 3-4pm

little unexpectedly, attending to, and drawing attention to, *things* – more or less ordinary, more or less regular in their mobility – becomes one way of articulating something about boundaries.

For in *Four Anecdotes*, boundaries, codes and conventions are not set in stone. The work builds to moments where these are nudged into action, questioned, challenged or transgressed. The work features escalations, building to moments of attempted negotiation, entrenchment, legal mutation. I seek to understand my local park's future. Andrew tries to make adjustments as he 'settles in' at a new residential development. A dispute between neighbours leads to a couple exiting their home. I make a request to photograph a prison ship.

The focus is on moments of actual or possible transition. With these encounters and conversations, uncertainty is in the air. It might appear, for example, that these are really emblematic stories about tensions between 'private' and 'public' space. But things aren't so clear. Not only are definitions of these terms complex and contested, especially in a period in which traditional distinctions are growing ever more blurred, but expectations about public and private space (or, better, private interests versus more 'dispersed' sets of interests) are skewed in *Four Anecdotes*.

In Portland, for example, a public institution was moored inside a private port. In Kensington and Chelsea, the inflexibility of one publicly elected official on his own patch had unfortunate consequences for his neighbours and constituents. And whereas at Crystal Palace a plan to privatise large parts of a park for the construction of luxury apartments was felt by many to be a threat, at Poundbury the Duchy's response implied that it's the 'community' that has the potential to wreak havoc with the area's choreographed integrity.

Different structures and dynamics are 'run into' – by me, by other individuals and by mobile objects – in these tales. And, as the artist (and narrator), I am not detached from any of this. I am involved in the situations that I recount. My curiosity and worldly activities – my practice – have been inspired by, and have also *generated*, narrations and turns of event. Process and encounter are also suggested by the hybrid (quadripartite, verbal/material) form of *Four Anecdotes*, as well as by the fact that the work has had different iterations in different sites and circumstances. Each anecdote *meanders*,

reaching only provisional closure. The four are tangentially related, their structural and thematic similarities never explicitly drawn out.

There is a play between the 'here and now' of live narration and my pointing to other times, spaces and individuals, and also between the stillness and isolation of the four objects in the room and the ups and downs, toing and froing and worldly embroilments of their equivalents in the tales. Even by the end, when their connection to the anecdotes' content has become more or less apparent, the four objects' status as false referents lingers on. Like the anecdotes, each object has come into focus but retains its identity as an odd non sequitur.²

So the work doesn't ever fully coalesce or obviously 'critique', far less strive to resolve, any of the issues or conundrums that it purports to share. Re-performed with slight variations, its form is not fixed. This is not merely a matter of repetition and restaging, since as well as *recounting* a series of encounters, the work itself *triggers* or *constitutes* a series of encounters. Therefore, though a printed manifestation of the work appears above as a prologue to this thesis, *Four Anecdotes* will, the next time it is performed, unfold a little differently, depending on memory, circumstance and audience. No definitive version exists.

As I narrate, and someone listens to, *Four Anecdotes*, we do gradually, through each story, come to an object (of concern). In 'entering' the space of the work, the listener embarks on a path of uncertainty, in a space in which we may need to reshuffle our conceptions. Few clear signposts have been set.

In several ways, *Four Anecdotes* point to my concerns and methods more generally as an artist. My works tend to emerge from a spirit of 'open' curiosity, a questioning, multidirectional involvement in the complicated dynamics of social space. I explore diverse spaces, getting interested in details, different dynamics and turns of event. The starting point for my engagement with a particular location is almost always prosaic, stemming either from a personal connection or informal invitation of some sort.

Works tend to be developed gradually, following several 'leads' or lines of

² The use of montaged non sequiturs keeps interpretation open, allowing for the possibility of dialectical relationships and even allegorical readings to emerge: prison-ship-as-housing, for example.

enquiry. I have contact with a wide range of different individuals, most often informally, for instance chatting in person, on the telephone, or writing via email. I overlap in various ways with the activities and practices of others. I also visit libraries and archives, and research spaces and stories online. I photograph, note and collect things. I experience all kinds of things, including generosity, tensions and antagonisms, barriers and restrictions, along the way.

Gradually, something evolves – or doesn't – as I try to respond to particular dynamics as I encounter them. Importantly, I always try to avoid a predefined position. There is no *a priori* 'research question' or specific agenda; a work's logic or direction isn't set out in advance. Issues, topics, controversies are run into, over time. I also try to withhold any assumptions I might have about the meaning of key terms such as 'public space'. Holding certain questions open seems to help in allowing the work to develop its own dynamic. It follows that very often, when I am working, I'm not certain exactly what I am doing or where things are going.

Working in this way, I encounter and sense different dynamics, structures and practices – how codes are internalised, embodied in specific individuals' actions and expressions, for example. I feel things for myself. Sometimes I try to explore what's going on in a situation by trying to participate in it. Because of how I work, via 'encounters' – responding to people and situations, sometimes with persistence – a benign question can trigger an unexpectedly dramatic response. Details can suddenly become significant. Tone and content often shift about. This variety, unpredictability and even randomness seem to be by-products of this way of working.

The practice generates questions, paradoxes and anomalies. For example – Whose space is this? If standing here is not illegal, why do I feel so anxious? I try to allow this feeling of discovery, puzzlement and questioning to come across in my works, to communicate some sense of the awkward interfaces of social space that I've experienced. So, while works have very different forms – narrative performance, a poster project across a town, a short film, for example – all are structured so as to emphasise process, allowing questions to persist.

Some works such as *Four Anecdotes* recount or 're-narrate' my activities and enquiries as I follow leads, especially following mobile objects as they

move between and through different spaces and structures. Other works see me responding to a situation by making tactical *insertions* of equally mobile objects into existing social spaces and processes. This approach also sees me ‘following’ these objects. In both approaches, objects cross and at the same time reveal physical and non-physical boundaries, different structures and codes.

Both of these approaches – ‘re-narrations’ and tactical deployments of things – involve a kind of performative action developed in response to the practices of others. All of my works discussed in this thesis have had different iterations and have been re-sited in different locations, finding new publics, interlocutors and participants.

In general, then, I’m discovering, through practice, some of the variety of types of location and occasion where powerful spatial dynamics unfold. My key method is to track mobile objects that occupy and cross different spaces, in so doing highlighting boundaries, structures and codes. Awareness of these objects and stories about them are generated by my multidirectional and cumulative approach to practice. Ultimately, it’s the objects and stories themselves that enable issues and controversies to emerge.

I conceive of my practice as emerging from a rich vein of art that has, since the 1960s, explored space critically whilst avoiding pre-established position-taking. Of course, many artists have practised in lively, questioning ways across various sites and locations throughout this period, generating diverse manifestations of what art and architecture writer and theorist Jane Rendell has coined ‘critical spatial practices’.³

Certain practitioners associated with conceptual art in the late 1960s and ’70s particularly interest me here. Turning their backs on conventional object production and consumption, conceptualists developed distinct kinds of activity, dispersal and insertion across different sites, contexts and processes. Some treated the city non-hierarchically as a ‘stage’, for example.⁴ Most were fascinated by and experimented with non-visible structures, boundaries and codes. Arguably, this was the generation whose

3 Rendell, *Art and Architecture*.

4 Donna de Salvo uses this metaphor of the city as stage in: De Salvo, “The Urban Stage”. On conceptualism and urban space, see also for example: Whitney Museum of American Art, *Power of the City*; also Wall, “Dan Graham’s Kammerspiel”.

moves into what Rosalind Krauss famously called an ‘expanded field’ of art practice anticipated a much more *widespread* ‘dislocation’ of ‘site’ in art that has, in recent years, seen many adopting mobile forms of practice and interaction, including diverse ‘dialogical’ modes.⁵

Very many contemporary practitioners engage with day-to-day spatial dynamics, connecting with others’ worldly practices in open-ended ways. In the ‘post-studio’ present, it’s common for artists to be practising while out and about, highlighting overlooked phenomena, tracking things, negotiating, ‘intervening’, and so on.⁶ Artists often deploy multiple methods – pilfering and re-framing diverse practices and disciplines – and pursue diverse lines of enquiry at any one time. And, interestingly, authors from various disciplines seem increasingly keen to acknowledge artists as significant contributors to knowledge about contemporary social space.⁷ Two examples of the kinds of artist and artwork that interest me here may help to clarify my own position and argument.

Francis Alÿs is a practitioner whose entire oeuvre seems to be infused with the inspiration he takes from others’ spatial practices. Various apparently incidental patterns, rhythms and goings-on in urban environments are highlighted via his works. He is best known for peripatetic actions where he makes his way through different urban spaces – often accompanied by an object – and several of his projects also involve the participation of others (including non-humans, for example dogs...) The outcomes of works almost always have an element of unpredictability to them, contingent as they are on other city inhabitants’ responses to his actions and propositions.

Alÿs seems to test things out in the world via actions, doing things in order to see what unfolds. Visitors to an Alÿs exhibition in an empty eighteenth-century house in London were invited to take one of his paintings home for the night.⁸ A group of sculptural objects were dropped in the trash in Mexico City only to resurface some time later at local flea markets.⁹ An urban fox is

5 Krauss, “Sculpture in the Expanded Field”. On contemporary spatial practices, see for example: Kwon, *One Place After Another*; Doherty, *Contemporary Art*.

6 Post-studio was a term used by Michael Asher and John Baldessari while teaching at CalArts in the 1970s.

7 Examples include: Hawkins, *For Creative Geographies*; Pinder, “Arts of Urban Exploration”; McDonough, *The Situationists and the City*; Rendell, *Art and Architecture*; Deutsche, *Evictions*.

8 Part of the Artangel commission *Seven Walks*, London, 2005. See Alÿs et al, *Francis Alÿs, Seven Walks*.

9 *The Seven Lives of Garbage* (1995). See Medina et al, *Francis Alÿs* on this and other

released into a public museum and captured intermittently in CCTV footage. Itineraries are traced and/or re-imagined. Entirely new ones are generated. Exploiting and responding to existing situations, patterns and practices with subtle dislocations and a 'light touch', Alÿs' best works have wider resonance without seeming dogmatic.

Interestingly, Alÿs has stated that he likes the idea of his works circulating in the city as rumours; urban myths. He also regularly shares his processes in his works, most notably via video footage of his actions, but also via tabletops of drawings and research materials, or via postcards that form ephemeral records of his activities that can be picked up and used. All of this opens up questions around where, how and when the work exists, and for whom. A variety of forms, sites and audiences often multiplies the unpredictability of his work, adding to the sense of a practice-in-progress.

At least two decades earlier, in 1973, American artist Gordon Matta-Clark discovered that the City of New York was holding a series of public auctions at which it was selling off urban 'slivers' – very small or oddly shaped plots of land. By the end of the following year, Matta-Clark had bought fifteen of these random, unwanted bits of 'gutterspace' located in the then-suburban boroughs of Queens and Staten Island, gathering an array of documentation relating to his new properties – deeds, maps and tax bills.

He undertook improvised site visits and took numerous photographs, carefully mapping, comparing and weighing up his new property portfolio. Of course, absurdity lurked in the act of gathering so much data about (almost) nothing. Some of the 'slivers' represented the absolute antithesis of social space, being completely inaccessible to anyone, including their new owner! All of the slivers were narrow 'edgelands': spaces between land or buildings owned by others.

Matta-Clark was noting gaps, absences, relative blind spots in the (capitalist) city. Most importantly, he wasn't merely noting their existence, for example merely picturing them or naming them as 'art'¹⁰; in actually buying them, he was actively engaging with the economic and legal processes that *produce* them. Through his activities, Matta-Clark both drew attention to,

projects by the artist. Kwon suggests that, since the 1960s, much art 'no longer seeks to be a noun/object but a verb/process'. Kwon *One Place After Another*, 24.

¹⁰ In 1960, Dutch conceptualist Stanley Brouwn had declared all the shoe shops in Amsterdam an artwork.

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and contributed to, their complex identity. Remnants of his project – known informally as *Fake Estates* and never made public during his lifetime – allow us indirect glimpses of these strange entities, and how they’ve been mapped, drawn and administered over time.¹¹

A lot of questions remain, of course. What exactly was Matta-Clark up to? How did these ‘slivers’ come to exist, and what was the city doing selling them off? Who else was buying them? And, more broadly, just how did the city come to be so complex and commodified? There are certain parallels with Alÿs here. Matta-Clark’s intentions are not clearly delineated. His work’s parameters are not clear. This is no explicit critique of private property.¹² *Fake Estates* is not obviously ‘political’ but leaves much room for thought.

Artists like Alÿs and Matta-Clark respond unexpectedly to particular spaces, allowing the specificity of the situations they come across to inspire the development of new processual works rather than imposing their own agenda.¹³ Both embrace factors and events beyond their control, engaging with and correspondingly *making manifest* different spatial systems and practices. Neither artist is first and foremost interested in *picturing* the world¹⁴ nor does he tend to approach space in physical terms here (in fact, both of these artists moved away significantly from their early training in architecture). Art historian Miwon Kwon has noted one characteristic of certain recent ‘site-oriented’ practices: that neither site nor ‘topic’ is ‘defined as a precondition. Rather, it is generated by the work’.¹⁵ It is in some contemporary equivalents of these artists’ territories – such interstitial ‘moral thickets’ (the phrase is geographer Eric Laurier’s) – that I have been trying to develop my own new works.¹⁶

On a basic level, four ingredients circulate and interconnect for me as an artist: spaces, people, words, and things. *Four Anecdotes* is made up of these. In fact, we might immediately transform my four ingredients into

11 See Kastner et al., *Odd Lots*.

12 Matta-Clark did develop a critical commentary on private property in other works such as his well-known *Splitting* (1974), an assault on the physical structure of an empty suburban house. A key context for *Fake Estates* was a bankrupt City of New York. This was the city suddenly accessible to the artist *financially*, as near-worthless property. See, for example, Sussman, *Gordon Matta-Clark: ‘You Are The Measure’*.

13 Harriet Hawkins characterises space and place ‘as process and in process’, citing numerous authors, in Hawkins, “Geography and Art”, 59.

14 Though Alÿs does make paintings, drawings and animations.

15 Kwon, *One Place After Another*, 26.

16 Laurier, “Doing Office Work on the Motorway”, 262.

questions: How might *space* be productively understood here? What kinds of *people* might be sought out in attempting to understand an area's complex 'social' dynamics, and how might they be engaged with? Why do *words* seem so important? And is the fact that *objects* feature prominently a mere conceit?

Exploring these four interconnected questions that have been *generated by* my practice, I'll say a little more about the conceptual territory that interests me and about my working methods. I'll then go on to introduce and analyse four further works in Chapters 2, 3 and 4.

Spaces are being 'practised' by all of us, all of the time. Space isn't understood merely or even primarily as physical structure (as suggested by the phrase 'built environment', for example) or as some kind of abstract continuum or container for action. Space is emphatically *social*. Spaces are certainly *regulated*, but they're busy with all kinds of individuals and groups practising in various ways in complicated relation to one another. Spaces are also lively with *things*.

All of this specificity, variety and complexity means that generalising about space can be problematic. Spaces are *in process*. They're distinct from one another. They're often unpredictable. Given all these competing practices and stories, 'practising' in space – itself forever in production – is for artists, for any of us, bound to be a bumpy ride.

Of course, such notions have long preoccupied authors outside the realm of art. Here, I will briefly introduce two arguments by Doreen Massey and Bruno Latour that have expanded my understanding of these key notions and encouraged the direction and logic of my practice.

Many contemporary writers discuss space as 'social practice'¹⁷ and as processual, encouraging us to think *beyond* static, conventionally geographical understandings of the term. Complications associated with the coexistence and *collision* of distinct spatial practices are articulated and explored especially fruitfully by Doreen Massey in her 2005 book *For Space*¹⁸. She defines space as *encounter*.¹⁹ Stressing that her discipline

17 Crang and Thrift, "Introduction", 2.

18 It is worth noting that Massey proposed that spaces should be conceived of as 'nets of social relations' as early as the early 1990s in texts such as Massey, "Questions of Locality".

19 Massey, *For Space*, 137. Another influential geographer who uses the term 'encounter'

has shifted away from ‘physicalist metaphors’ (for instance she refers to ‘an over-developed tendency to draw a line around a space’), she proposes the idea that places be understood as uneven ‘webs of relations’ – not as ‘nouns’, but as ‘verbs’.²⁰

Massey’s notion of ‘throwntogetherness’²¹ in particular points to the fact that experiences of mutual incredulity are features of most peoples’ everyday lives. ‘The question of our living together... is the central question of the political’, she asserts memorably.²² This seems important. Like some art writers in recent years, Massey has been influenced by – whilst developing her own critique of – ‘radical democracy’ theorists Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, who have contended that the world is structured by antagonism and dissensus.²³

Massey is not alone in reconceiving space in such ‘agonistic’ terms. For example, her fellow geographers Ash Amin and Nigel Thrift have conceptualised urban space in terms of ‘moments of encounter, collision, touching, fighting, engaging, ignoring’.²⁴ But Massey’s is an especially articulate reconceptualisation of space, foregrounding what curator Okwei Enwezor has called our ‘intense proximity’.²⁵ She focuses her attention on points and moments of contact between very different ‘actors’. For her, such ‘encounters’ aren’t merely fraught. They’re moments of potential change.

Massey is keen to highlight how some people have more power over

widely is Nigel Thrift. E.g., writing with colleague Ash Amin, Thrift states: ‘Places are best thought of not so much as enduring sites but as moments of encounter’. Amin & Thrift, *Cities*, 30. Advocating what he calls a ‘non-representational geography’, Thrift claims to be interested in ‘actual occasions’, a ‘geography of what happens’. Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory*, viii.

20 See discussion of this aspect of Massey’s work in Adey, *Mobility*, 75–6. There are interesting parallels with Kwon’s discussions of post-1960s *works of art* as ‘verbs’ here. Kwon *One Place After Another*, 24.

21 Massey introduces this term in the context of a discussion of the concept of place: ‘What is special about place is precisely that throwntogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating a here-and-now...’ Massey, *For Space*, 140.

22 *Ibid.* 151.

23 For art writers influenced by Laclau and Mouffe, see for example: Deutsche, *Evictions*; Bishop, “Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics”. Massey’s critique of Laclau in *For Space* is based on the argument that he understands space to be the realm of the fixed and the non-political. She challenges this aspect of his work. Massey, *For Space*, 42–5.

24 Amin & Thrift, *Cities*, 30. Amin and Thrift also point out that there are ‘different intensities at different locations’. Amin & Thrift, *Cities*, 52. Mouffe summarizes her ‘politics of antagonism’ and dissensus in the context of a discussion of contemporary art in Mouffe, “Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces”.

25 *Intense Proximity* was the title of Enwezor’s Paris Triennial at the Palais de Tokyo and other venues, 2012.

their mobility than others.²⁶ Her sensitivity to uneven power relations is notable. Power, she asserts, never sits still. And the variety of social space is important: at one point she suggests that ‘the element of dislocation’ characteristic of contact with others (‘outsides’) ‘opens up the very possibility of politics’.²⁷

This argument chimes with my practice in that I get involved in points and moments of contact between contrasting individuals, agencies and groups. On the one hand, my works emerge from a series of encounters and connections between myself and others. Works then focus on zones and moments where diverse actors meet, negotiate, collide. So, while discursive aspects of space interest me greatly – the planning and urban-development practices mentioned in *Four Anecdotes*, for example – such phenomena are always approached *in practice*, in moments of connection and overlap with others, rather than as monolithic or already-defined entities.

After all, ‘power’ is never something that one can stand outside of. (It interests me that Massey often uses *her own* life experiences in her work.²⁸) In general, Massey is against ‘stabilising’ space. At one point, she goes so far as to suggest that stabilisation may be a (fantasy) function of representation itself.²⁹

Interestingly, other contemporary geographers keen to consider ways in which the world is constructed through activity have also thought about the capacity of different modes of representation to register ‘living rather than

26 See for instance: Massey, “A Global Sense of Place”. Another key author on mobility and power is Tim Cresswell, e.g. Cresswell, *On The Move*.

27 Massey, *For Space*, 151.

28 For example: In a moving essay written as a reflection on a return visit to Wythenshaw, near Manchester, where she grew up, now a housing estate which is home to her elderly parents, Massey quotes philosopher Henri Lefebvre: ‘There can be no question that social space is the locus of prohibition, for it is shot through with both prohibitions and their counterparts, prescriptions. This fact, however, can most definitely not be made into the basis of an overall definition, for space is not only the space of “no,” it is also the space of... the affirmation of life.’ Massey goes on: ‘My parents are not passive... They continue to make places... In the evening as we talk, the spaces open out... Most of all, and still, there is that space which is hardest of all to picture, to pin down: the space of social relations.’ Massey, “Living in Wythenshaw”, 473

29 For instance as she wrangles with Michel de Certeau, she suggests: ‘the argument that representation necessarily fixes, and therefore deadens and detracts from the flow of life... I would not entirely dispute’. Massey, *For Space*, 26. Interestingly, philosopher Michel Serres, influential on Nigel Thrift’s non-representational geography, is also ‘wary of the spatial image’, preferring to think in terms of ‘turbulences’. Cited in Crang & Thrift, “Introduction”, 21.

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lived space'.³⁰ For example, some have looked to performance art in their quest to identify a form of practice that might 'escape representational forms of capture'.³¹ However questionable arguments for a non- (or *more than*³²) representational form of practice might be, this brings us back once again to the question of what methods one might turn to in order to engage profitably with spatial encounters, controversies, events.

In 2005, French philosopher and sociologist of science Bruno Latour published a provocative critique of sociological methods entitled *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory*. The challenges that he throws down to sociology and social-science researchers in this book have proved stimulating to me as I've developed some of the art projects discussed in this thesis. Latour's concern with 'the social' might initially seem to shift us towards relationships with and between various kinds of people; however, for Latour, the 'social' is far from tidy. Here is another 'processual' model in which multiple 'actors' – including some quite unexpected players – are forever connecting and colliding, all busily at work.³³

One of Latour's central claims is that no 'social' connection or bond exists without constant maintenance, negotiation and activity: 'associations' between actors are constantly performed and asserted, as various 'types of connection' are established, bolstered, challenged and threatened.³⁴ Latour suggests that researchers 'feed off controversies'³⁵ – situations where existing categories are being put under pressure, where things 'might be assembled anew'.³⁶ The multifarious complexity and *precariousness* of 'social' relations is therefore once again highlighted.

30 Amin & Thrift, *Cities*, 48.

31 Peter Adey, discussing Peggy Phelan's argument in her book *Unmarked: Politics of Performance*, 1993, in Adey, *Mobility*, 142–3. Performance art is rarely about picturing, framing or 'holding still'. One might say that performance works via encounter, proposing certain kinds of connection, perhaps at the same time as various kinds of estrangement and boundary-blurring. Performance has the capacity to introduce new kinds of dynamic and mobility into an already lively, 'performative' present.

32 Hayden Lorimer prefers the term 'more-than-representational'. Adey, *Mobility*, 133.

33 Latour's Actor-Network-Theory is acknowledged and discussed quite extensively by Massey in *For Space*. Thrift also engages with A.N.T. See, for example, Bingham & Thrift, "Some New Instructions for Travellers".

34 Latour, 5; 31. Massey also writes on the significance of negotiation. Massey, *For Space*, 140.

35 In fact an early section of his book is entitled 'Learning to Feed off Controversies'. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 21–25.

36 *Ibid.*, 5.

For Latour, the task of any researcher is to work ‘in the middle of things’ – to attempt to ‘follow the actors’ as they ‘innovate’ in such a scenario, to ‘trace’ multiple ‘trajectories’ or ‘vectors’ of activity and how they perform in relation to one another.³⁷ Researchers shouldn’t prejudge or try to stand outside a situation. Pre-established hierarchies shouldn’t be granted undue respect. Correspondingly, ‘irregular details’ mustn’t be missed.³⁸

Latour writes: ‘Power and domination have to be produced, made up, composed.... It’s so difficult to maintain, so constant work is being done.’³⁹ Again, it’s this emphasis on process, on attention to detail and the actions and narrations of a wide range of actors operating in ‘agonistic’ relation to one another, that interests me very much.⁴⁰ In Poundbury, for example, I was finally handed a copy of the ‘all-important’ code not by a Duchy of Cornwall employee but by an estate agent who had just introduced me to a range of properties available. She’d pointed out two distinct zones on a large map: in ‘Phase 1’, the properties are ‘more country cottage’, whereas in other areas built later the houses are all ‘more Bath’. A cafe owner I’d just spoken to had enjoyed playing devil’s advocate, mocking me for being surprised that Poundbury has no public toilets – it is, after all, ‘just a posh housing estate’. My brother’s friend Andrew had said of Prince Charles’s team: ‘We call them the Platinum Police.’

Cumulatively, these little meetings and details started to amount to something significant. Latour acknowledges that any attempt to trace connections and events might ‘fail’ – a ‘trail of associations’ might turn out to be uninteresting or quickly peter out. Nevertheless, he insists that nothing ever lies ‘behind’ all this activity, and that staying open to events as they unfold should bring ‘issues’ to the fore, leading to interesting results.

Latour advocates ‘writing down risky accounts’, by which he means noting down as much detail as possible in a ‘redescription’ that ‘re-lives’ what was ‘gathered together’ during the practice of research.⁴¹ This suggestion

37 For instance, Latour writes, ‘Actors... engage in providing controversial accounts for their actions as well as for those of others.’ *Ibid.*, 27. Latour’s mantra ‘follow the actors’ offers a corrective to the average researcher’s predilection for ‘expert’ interpretation at the expense of the narrations and innovative accounts of ‘research subjects’.

38 *Ibid.*, 14.

39 *Ibid.*, 64.

40 This takes us well beyond ‘top down, bottom up’ readings, for example. E.g. Massey provides an important critique of the way in which Michel de Certeau opposes ‘the city system’ versus ‘the little people’ in his book *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Massey, *For Space*, 46–7.

41 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 47 and elsewhere. Latour suggests the importance



Name your house within the 'frame' of your front door
in the porch front itself
in the lintel
the door
ment and your front door is
behind a gate, then this gate
for your house name.

ouse 1

HOUSE

TILES

3

The
OACH
OUSE

columns, verandah and porch
ings (intercolumnations) shall be a
approximation of the Golden
Columns shall be Doric or
n orders with correctly and
ntically proportioned entabla-
(see leaflet C, Glossary)

masonry piers shall be no less than
mm thick and built in English or
ish bond.

3. Subsidiary Elements

3.1 Small features added to a building
placed within the gardens, can, if
one without sufficient care or atten-
tion, mar the appearance of the
building or its setting. Good design, or
unobtrusive siting can often overcome
problems.

a. The following items are specifically
FORBIDDEN:

Bubble skylights, prefabricated
accessory buildings, permanent plastic
sunblind/awnings, plastic commercial
fascias and lettering and internally
illuminated fascias and signs.

b. The following items shall NOT be
located such that they will be visible
from the street:

Clothes dryers, meter boxes, air extrac-
tors, dustbins, rooftop solar collectors.

c. No waste or soil pipes may be
attached to the exterior of any house.
Combined internal systems of drainage
are to be used.

Lettering G...
Many househ...
individual ho...
forcing the in...
within Pound...
encouraged to...
ments with th...
taking action.

14. Pound Fences and

14.1 The treat...
between indivi...
between public...
not an aftertho...
the overall desi...
Poundbury Bu...
requirements fo...
is also applicab...
repairs.

a. All boundary...
intention of pro...
adjoining garde...



parallels my approach in *Four Anecdotes*, where I re-narrate my activities, especially details of encounters with different actors and their stories and practices.⁴² An anecdote, of course, is a particular kind of narration: an ‘incidental story’ that one tells or is told. Anecdotes are often concise first-person redescriptions of ordinary situations, told to others.⁴³ In their form and content they seem to me uniquely placed to connect productively with the texture and goings-on of the everyday.

Interestingly, Massey is also interested in ‘spatial stories’: she actually writes of spaces as ‘stories-so-far’: ‘One way of seeing “places” is as on the surface of maps... But to escape from an imagination of space as surface is to abandon also that view of place. If space is rather a simultaneity of stories-so-far, then places are collections of those stories, articulations within the wider power-geometries of space. Their character will be a product of these intersections within that wider setting, and of what is made of them. And, too, of the non-meetings-up, the disconnections and the relations not established, the exclusions. All this contributes to the specificity of place.’⁴⁴

There are strong echoes here of Michel de Certeau here, who, in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, wrote suggestively of how ‘stories... traverse and organise places; they select and link them together; they make sentences and itineraries out of them. They are spatial trajectories.’⁴⁵ Moreover, for de Certeau stories are mobile: ‘the story... does not limit itself to telling about a movement. It makes it. One understands it, then, if one enters into this movement oneself.’⁴⁶

One further key idea of Latour’s that reconnects us to the persistent if

of this method for ANT when he writes: ‘if your description needs an explanation, it’s not a good description’. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 147. The role of description is discussed extensively in a conversation between Latour and philosopher Graham Harman published as Latour et al., *The Prince and the Wolf*. For example, Harman states at one point: ‘Serial redescription is what Bruno does.’ Latour & Harman, *Prince and the Wolf*, 74.
42 It may be useful to note that much historical conceptual art was resistant to narrative.
43 For a very interesting recent essay on this subject see: Michael, “Anecdotes”.

44 Massey, *For Space*, 130

45 de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, p.115. Also: Iain Borden and his editorial colleagues writing in the book *The Unknown City* wrote on the capacity of a ‘narrator’ to ‘capture... something of the subjective sensation, the sheer vividness, of urban experiences and movement, and perhaps hint at the ‘secret history’ of the city...’ Borden et al., “Things Flows Filters Tactics”, 19.

46 de Certeau, op. cit., 81. Note however that Massey develops her own critique of de Certeau (e.g. as discussed at footnote 40 above).

unlikely *materiality* of many visual artists' spatial practices is his claim that among the 'actors' that can be 'followed' are ordinary *objects*. In Latour's actor-network-theory (or ANT), objects aren't passive entities whose destiny is merely to be manipulated by humans. They are lively, they have distinct characteristics and roles in 'social' situations that can be 'traced', with valuable and often-unexpected results.

'Objects...by the very nature of their connections with humans...shift... to being intermediaries', Latour suggests.⁴⁷ In one essay, he writes at length about a door closer, for example.⁴⁸ As someone who had spent time accumulating detailed notes and photographs exploring the movement of gravel (into the spokes of wheelchairs, into people's sandals), the policing of family barbecues and the granting of special dispensations for the parking-up of caravans at Poundbury – and had very eagerly investigated Duchy-endorsed gloss-paint front-door colours – this was compelling stuff. Latour's contention that objects can contribute significantly to spaces and events as 'mediators' and 'intermediaries'⁴⁹ has inspired my own interest in how things function in ambiguous ways – especially across and between different spaces – triggering and/or contributing to a dynamic.⁵⁰

These are the kinds of things that interest me: small gestures and details, odd gaps or sudden rushes in communication, the posting of a notice, 'small' relational moves that might accumulate or connect, evidence of bigger tensions or shifts. As will become clear in forthcoming chapters and the 'redescriptions' of specific projects that follow, I naturally practise 'in the middle of things', working in worldly situations, exploring how and where 'power' dynamics can be felt in the rhythms and 'mess' of particular spaces and daily lives.

Such a method allows for the capture of unexpected material and a range of trajectories that might otherwise be eclipsed. Attending to mobile objects in

47 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 79.

48 Latour, "Where are the missing masses?", 155.

49 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 40.

50 Other authors, such as geographers Tim Cresswell and Peter Adey, have also explored objects' mobilities, including how things sometimes transgress boundaries and can act as catalysts. (Nigel Thrift has suggested: 'things answer back'. Thrift, *Non-Representational Theory*. 9.) For Cresswell, the word 'mobility' implies passage through complex, uneven social space; this is distinct from 'movement' which 'can be thought of as abstracted mobility (mobility abstracted from contexts of power)'. Cresswell, *On The Move*, 2. In parallel with Latour's advice to 'follow the actors', I often share *others'* readings of objects' mobilities, rather than imposing my own.



a world of multiple actors, barriers and codes has become my most crucial method: noting, tracking and following things-on-the-move as they inhabit and cross boundaries, revealing and drawing attention to structures, codes and practices as they go. Such an approach allows a capturing of such codes *in their operation* – not as distant, stable or theoretical structures but as active and busy, in and around all of us.

The three chapters that follow will offer redescriptions of, and reflections on, the gradual development of specific works of art. Chapter Three will recount the development of a work called *Huis Clos Planningline* that led to an engagement with a specific planning authority. Chapter Three, 'Reverse Consultation', will recount two projects developed in Harlow and in Crystal Palace respectively; these concern 'participation' and 'consultation' - in other words, what can happen when planners and development agencies try to engage with publics. Finally, Chapter Four, 'The Vessel', will re-connect us to the former prison ship now long-gone from Portland Harbour. My attempts to persist in following this particular object have taken me on an unexpected and elaborate journey into new digital realms.

**HELL
IS
OTHER
PEOPLE**

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Chapter 2: Hell Is Other People

‘Conflict, division, and instability... do not ruin the democratic public sphere; they are the conditions of its existence.’
Rosalyn Deutsche.⁵¹

This chapter will concern a work called *Huis Clos Planningline*. First conceived in London in 2007, it was eventually realised in Frome, a market town in Somerset, in 2012. As its title suggests, the work engages with planning practice. Once again, urban regulation is at stake. Connecting with such structures in the context of bigger questions relating to the nature and experience of public space will be my particular focus here.

Explaining the origins of *Huis Clos Planningline* will require a return to the house in Holland Park and its owner, Patricia, who told me about the mayor, the pears and the dog. Patricia had other tales to tell me the day I met her. For instance, how, cutting her front-garden hedge one morning, she had been addressed haughtily by a different neighbour who had assumed that, as a young woman of Asian origin, she was a maid or housekeeper to the new owners. Shortly afterwards, various members of a very active local residents association had dropped by to introduce themselves, meet the newcomers and make very sure that Patricia and her husband understood, and would abide by, the rules of the area. Among the regulations that Patricia was made aware that afternoon was a stipulation banning the posting of notices, signs or any other form of announcement in any of her windows that faced onto the street. Evidently, such paper pronouncements were deemed a threat to the area’s architectural integrity and leafy charm.

Campden Hill Square is one of the country’s most expensive addresses, dominated by grand nineteenth-century houses facing a large tree-lined garden. The Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, presided over by Patricia’s unneighbourly neighbour, features the largest conglomeration of super-expensive residential properties in the UK.⁵² Patricia’s stories, recounted as we wandered through her empty residence, painted a picture of an area subject to draconian planning regulations and characterised by a wider social ambience of mutual suspicion, interference and veiled threats.

51 Deutsche, *Evictions*, 289.

52 ‘Campden Hill Square named most expensive street in England and Wales’, www.mirror.co.uk (29 December 2011), accessed 1 June 2014.

Mundane entities on property boundaries seemed once again to have the capacity to cause offence: if falling pears had triggered a major stand-off between residents, was it really possible that 'Happy Birthday' banners or announcements for school fairs pinned up in front windows might trigger anger or legal action? Once again, I seemed to have stumbled across a regulatory device aimed at maintaining conformity.

Thinking of how to respond to Patricia's invitation to make a new work for her group exhibition *Someone Else's House*, I was keen to respond to these planning stipulations and dynamics, taking boundary issues and awkward encounters as my cue. I suggested I could fly-post the neighborhood with posters featuring Jean-Paul Sartre's well-known phrase 'Hell is other people' alongside the telephone number of the local council's planning department. I'd paste them up in her windows too. The design would be simple and the posters would appear almost 'un-designed', with an informational graphic style and colour palette inspired by road and street signage. Posters would 'pop up' anonymously and as a kind of 'nuisance'⁵³ and claim to space that would trigger different kinds of contact between locals and the area's regulators, across different points in the borough. The work would transgress specific laws and elicit a variety of responses that would unwittingly lead to interruptions in the work of the planners, nudging regulation into action. Some people would ring the mystery number out of curiosity and/or confusion. Others would contact the council to complain about the posters' appearance. In doing so, they would have to ring the very same phone number given on the posters themselves.

So although the inclusion of this particular public-access phone number would prompt the unfolding of a certain degree of chaos for the planning department, its provision would facilitate the reporting of this 'crime'. The terms nuisance and perfect citizen were cunningly elided and confused. More broadly, the number's presence alongside Sartre's words would invite questions around responsibility and behaviour; they suggest social exclusion ('other people') and blame. If the posters' appearance would be an irritant for many – 'messing up' the area visually and materially – the form of the work would match its content.

Each poster, a montage of fragments, would be a paradoxical proposition. I imagined the whole work unfolding as a fragmented provocation, an oddball

53 'Nuisance' is a legal term.

engagement with urban managerialism. The work would obliquely and indirectly aggravate Kensington and Chelsea's planners, enlisting unwitting locals in the process.⁵⁴ The printed posters themselves would be *catalysts*. The work would quietly ruffle the prevailing atmosphere of conformity. At the same time, much of its impact would remain unseen.

Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Patricia graciously declined my idea. Like Andrew in Poundbury, she was a new resident, settling in, working out how she might fit in to her new area. She didn't think such a project – inferring social division, transgressing the stipulation she'd mentioned, involving fly-posting and triggering unwanted phone calls to council planning officers – would help. The mayor (and former head of planning) next door wouldn't be happy. So I made a different work for her exhibition.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, I continued to be interested in my proposal, and thought I'd go ahead with the fly-posting anyway.

But when it came to it, I couldn't do it. I only put up one poster. Anxiety about the possible consequences of fly-posting in the area had got the better of me. Being caught red-handed, reported, prosecuted, fined, getting a criminal record, losing my job, not being able to support my family – were these fears realistic or unfounded? I couldn't take the risk. Ignorant of the detail of relevant laws and regulations – and of exactly which authorities, agencies or individuals might act against me, if I was caught – I nevertheless strongly suspected that there would be severe consequences for me, personally, if I was apprehended.

Of course, the regulations were also alive in the members of the residents association who'd visited Patricia, and in Patricia herself – the person through whom, after all, I'd become aware of certain local rules in the first place.⁵⁶ Michel Foucault would be smiling. His argument concerning 'disciplinary space' in *Discipline and Punish* suggests that discipline is internalised by individuals in the modern state, leading to a situation whereby we are constantly policing ourselves.⁵⁷ My anxiety about initiating

54 Fly-posting is a mobile practice associated with the appropriation of public and private spaces, sometimes by activists, also for advertising and publicity purposes.

55 I made *Moraine*, a sculptural installation featuring, amongst other elements, used books about city planning and urban design.

56 I'd learnt of all this from Patricia - from her redescrptions of her fraught encounters. I didn't learn of these regulations from an official source.

57 Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*. An interesting recent appraisal of the value of this theory is: Murakami Wood, "Beyond the Panopticon?"

Huis Clos Planningline brought home vividly the power that these regulations held over me, constantly, as one member of the public trying to practise in public space. Foucault would not be at all surprised that their power was formidable *despite* my ignorance and doubt.

Art writer Rosalyn Deutsche's argument about public space, articulated in her brilliant 1996 book *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics*, springs to mind here. Her essay 'Agoraphobia' in particular addresses our tricky cocktail of uncertainty, antagonism and power. Strongly influenced – like Massey – by Laclau and Mouffe, Deutsche suggests that public space is never consensual or unified, that it's always characterised by difference and conflict. In short, it's political. Public space can't be understood as distinct from private interests.⁵⁸ All citizens' 'right to the city' must be acknowledged.⁵⁹ Deutsche's argument hinges on freedom, democracy and the much-debated notion of the 'public sphere'.⁶⁰

Most significant for me here is Deutsche's suggestion that that there is a profound void at the heart of the very notion of public space. If the 'democratic invention' in the eighteenth century (an idea connected to the French Revolution and the Declaration of the Rights of Man) had offered power to 'the people', then concomitant with this key shift towards modern democratic life was the fact that any certainty about the basis of authority in society (previously embodied in the monarch and, by extension, in God) disappeared. The democratic public sphere 'belongs by right to others, and to no-one in particular'; we are 'presented... with unknowability, the proximity of otherness, and, consequently, uncertainty... in the self'.⁶¹ Deutsche suggests that, in democratic societies, this void cannot be filled by anything other than competing claims, counterclaims and frequently fierce debates.

So we find only 'declaratory' assertions and powerful legal and physical claims to space – from individuals, interest groups, developers and local authorities, for example. 'What if we define public space as the space where society constitutes itself through an unending declaration of rights that question and limit power?' Deutsche asks.⁶² *All* definitions of and claims to

58 The concepts of public and private are 'co-constitutive'. Deutsche, *Evictions*, 58, 228.

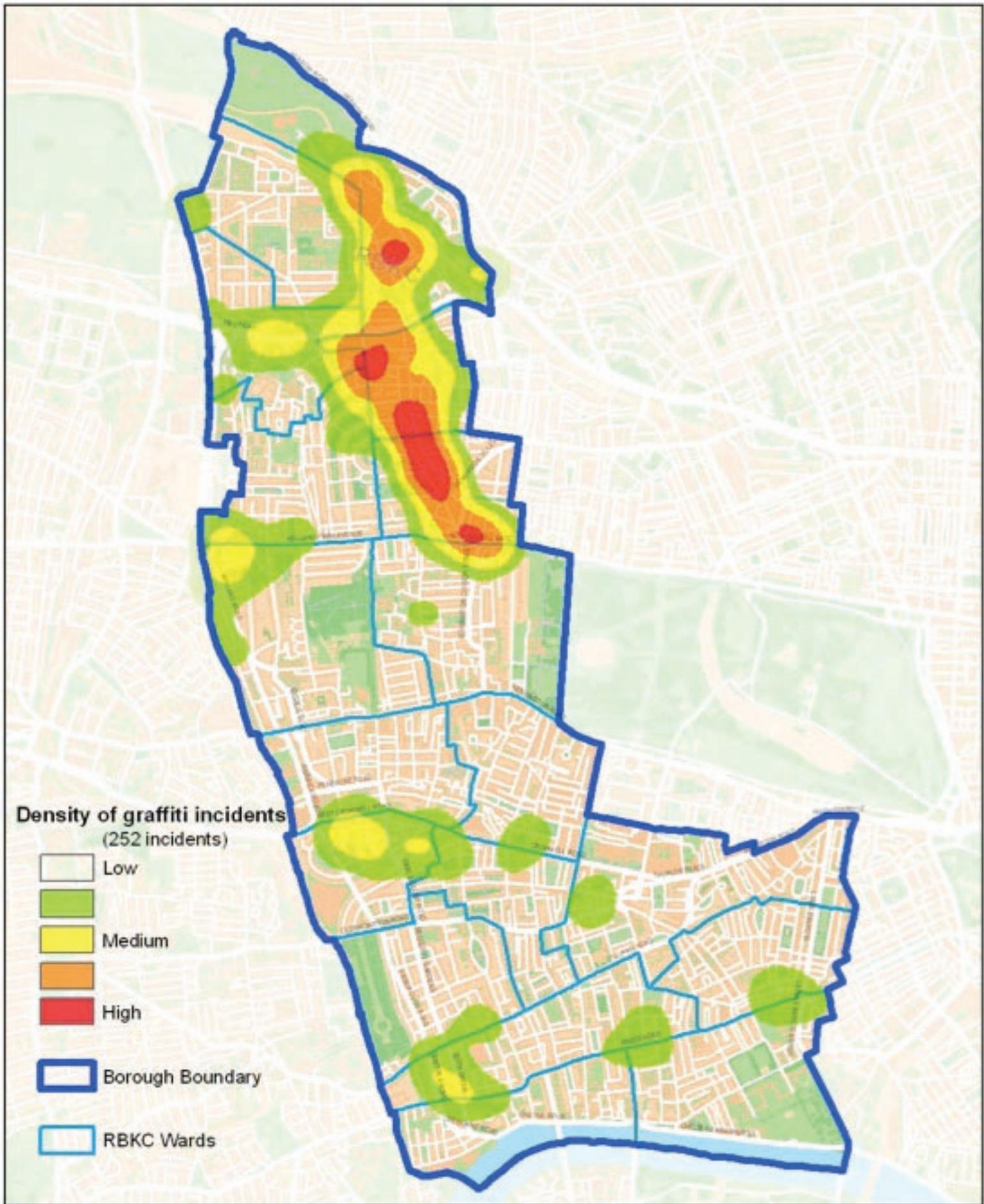
59 Lefebvre, "The Right to the City".

60 The notion of 'the public sphere' comes from Habermas. For a range of perspectives on the subject, see Calhoun ed., *Habermas and the Public Sphere*.

61 Deutsche, *op. cit.* 325

62 *Ibid.* 42

Graffiti Incidents Hotspots July 09



Graffiti Incidents Hotspots July 09



Date: 20/09/2009
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ROYAL BOROUGH OF
KENSINGTON
AND CHELSEA

public space are ‘declaratory’ – from regulators to residents’ groups to the mayor’s to my own. *All* involve assertions of, challenges to and maintenance of boundaries and perimeters, positing particular ‘rights to the city’ in a wider context of deep uncertainty regarding responsibility and power.

For Deutsche, for example, so-called community groups that claim to defend or promote neat, civilised public spaces in fact ‘occupy’ them, almost always legislating against, and excluding, individuals and communities. Such groups aggressively ‘appropriate’ public space while claiming to be its defenders.⁶³ There are strong echoes here of Patricia’s experience in her front garden and with her early visitors.

There are also substantial parallels between Deutsche’s argument and a more recent UK-based empirical account from Anna Minton in her 2009 book *Ground Control*. Minton investigates how many apparently public spaces in Britain are now privately owned and/or managed via complicated arrangements arising from public-private partnerships. Often, we have no idea who owns the ground we are standing on (there is no database of land ownership in the UK) and we have only the vaguest awareness of the frequently severe restrictions on our rights that are enforced by a wide variety of agencies in ‘public’ spaces – agencies allegedly acting on ‘our’ behalf.

Again, ignorance is ubiquitous. Without actually realising it, we are all constantly moving in and out of areas that have different ownerships and contrasting legal status. In many places, visible barriers, or markers between properties and legal jurisdictions, simply don’t exist. Minton argues that such a worsening situation, along with the growing significance of property interests and security technologies, is changing the kinds of social spaces we’re inhabiting and intensifying our attitudes to one another for the worse. She suggests heavily regulated environments involve covert forms of exclusion and that this, in turn, encourages suspicion and intolerance.⁶⁴

These are ruminations on a macro level, inspired by anger about specific situations, blindnesses and arguments. But it’s the detail of specific

63 The politics of gentrification is a major concern for Deutsche; also public art’s complicity in this kind of agenda. See also a discussion of middle class ‘moral regulation projects’ in Murakami Wood, “Beyond the Panopticon?”, 253.

64 Minton, *Ground Control*.

THE PHILLIMORE ESTATE

Livi

WELCOME TO THE PHILLIMORE KENSINGTON ESTATE WEBSITE
TO STROLL AROUND THE ROYAL BOROUGH IS TO WALK IN THE
FOOTSTEPS OF KINGS AND QUEENS, WRITERS AND
REVOLUTIONARIES, POLITICIANS AND PAINTERS, THINKERS
AND THESPIANS.

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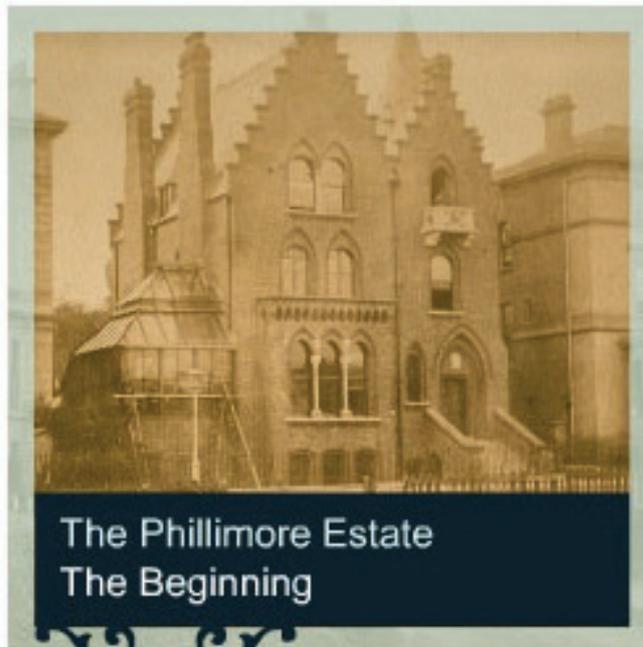
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The Phillimore Estate
An Introduction



The Phillimore Estate
The Beginning



The Phillimore
1741-1829



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scenarios that stimulates me. For instance, I'm gripped when I come across a page on Kensington and Chelsea's website devoted to 'graffiti and fly-poster removal', where, following comments condemning vandalism and advocating professional cleaning of surfaces with appropriate chemicals, two questions appear. 'Is the graffiti or fly-posters [sic] on a privately owned property?' and 'Is the graffiti or fly-posters [sic] on council-owned street furniture?' Then some advice is offered: 'If the graffiti or fly-posters are on privately owned street furniture such as: telephone kiosks, green cable utility cabinets, railway bridges, bus shelters, you must report these faults directly to the company.' Before reporting an instance of such crimes, we are instructed to find out the ownership of the land, building or object that's the 'support' for the poster or tag. The trouble is, as Matta-Clark's *Fake Estates* and Minton's argument suggest, questions of ownership and responsibility in the city are very often not at all clear.

Who would have thought that railway bridges might be classified as 'street furniture', let alone that they're privately owned, any more than 'directional signs' or 'litter bins', for example? Campden Hill Square is by no means a straightforward 'panopticon' either.⁶⁵ The square is subject to a distinct set of regulations within the wider Borough of Kensington and Chelsea because it falls inside the Kensington Conservation Area. In addition to the Campden Hill Residents Association, there's a Campden Hill Square Garden Committee (garden access is for keyholders only). The square is also immediately adjacent to the Phillimore Kensington Estate, a large area between Holland Park and Kensington High Street managed for Lord Phillimore and Trustees by the City law firm and property agent Savills.⁶⁶

Even putting these additional complex entities to one side, a wide range of prosecution options are available to any UK planning team or government agency looking to prosecute fly-posters, their backers or their employers.⁶⁷

Parish councils hold various powers, for instance, including the right to issue on-the-spot fines. Local police can grant individuals responsibilities under Community Safety Accreditation Schemes. Also, following a case brought successfully by Camden Council against 'guerrilla' marketing company

65 Latour suggests that Foucault's 'panoptic' model might be supplanted by a newly complicated alternative: 'oligoptica'. Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, 181.

66 <http://www.phillimore-kensington-estate.co.uk>, accessed 1 September 2014

67 See legal advice on fly-posting: <http://kb.keepbritaintidy.org/flyposting/>, accessed 1 September 2014.

Diabolical Liberties, ASBOs can be deployed, which usually contain exclusion orders.⁶⁸ Under certain circumstances, councils can apparently even enter private homes and properties to remove posters.⁶⁹ Many different structures, individuals and groups overlap, each with different agendas, legal arsenals and jurisdictions.

In Campden Hill Square individual residents keenly police ‘their’ area, knocking on front doors and assuming responsibilities across various boundaries. Often, they are encouraged to do so. The introduction to the private Phillimore Estate’s website reads: ‘If you are contemplating living on the Estate, or are indeed a resident, you will probably already appreciate what is so special about the Phillimore Kensington Estate... You have an important part to play in protecting the character of our streets... We ask that you take ownership of the Scheme alongside the Trustees and perhaps approach it as John F Kennedy might have done: Ask not what your Scheme can do for you – ask what you can do for your Scheme.’⁷⁰

As I’d fretted away, trying to attach my single poster to a British Telecom box already coated with textured anti-climb paint, I’d had no idea of all of this detail. Little did I realise either that five years later, I’d see many posters almost identical to the one I was struggling with stuck up all across a Somerset town.

‘Friction is variably distributed in space...’

Tim Cresswell.⁷¹

The circumstances of this project’s later revisiting and realisation in Frome were of course very different. Here, I was *invited* by a small, ambitious commissioning organisation, Foreground Projects, to make *Huis Clos Planningline* in a town in which, by this time, I also happened to live. Frome is a place with a mixed demographic and its fair share of socio-economic problems, plus – quite importantly – some keenly disputed redevelopment plans.⁷² It’s also a place that many are keen to promote as an artistic

68 See Hugh Kuir’s article “Writing’s on the wall for flyposting”, *The Guardian* (11 September 2004) <http://www.theguardian.com/uk>, accessed 1 September 2014

69 <http://kb.keepbritaintidy.org/flyposting/>, accessed 1 September 2014.

70 See under ‘Residents’, then ‘Freeholders’, then ‘The Benefits of a Scheme’ at: <http://www.phillimore-kensington-estate.co.uk>, accessed 1 September 2012.

71 Cresswell, “Towards a Politics of Mobility”, 16.

72 See for example BBC News, “Frome Development Plans Revealed for Saxonvale Site” (8 September 2013) at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-somerset-24009845>, accessed 15 August 2014.

community with an independent spirit, an attractive place to live in and visit.⁷³ According to a Sainsbury's supermarket area manager I met on a train, Frome registers as 'average' according to every chart and type of assessment the company uses for evaluating specific locations in the UK.

In any case, this context would differ substantially from moneyed West London. Any residual defiance I'd felt on behalf of Patricia and her elderly neighbours towards the Mayor of Kensington and Chelsea, his planning department and interfering locals had long since waned. Enacting the work now, with curatorial backing, would mean a rethink and a number of adaptations. Most immediately, a new 'Planningline' would be needed: a phone number for the planning department at Mendip District Council, the authority responsible for Frome, would now be used.

In this market town, the posters would be much more noticeable than they would have been in London (where fly-posting is generally widespread). Also, Foreground curator Simon Morrissey and I could not risk being seen fly-posting across Frome, since this was to be one of a number quite widely publicised commissions in a part-public-funded curatorial programme called *Notes from Nowhere*. Our solution to this particular conundrum was to hand out posters to passers-by in Frome town centre one Saturday morning and to invite *them* to display them in their street-facing windows or in public spaces around town. In the event, a small group of volunteers, plus the curator and I, handed out approximately 200 posters in the town centre. We discussed the project with people in as much detail as seemed appropriate, Simon having briefed the distribution team on the work's interpretation in advance.⁷⁴

Responses were very varied, from resistance to curiosity, bemusement to laughter. Interestingly, not everyone who seemed keen to take a poster asked about the phone number. More detailed explanations of the work triggered quite a lot of laughter – some nervous, some defiant. A couple of philosophy fans enjoyed the Jean-Paul Sartre quote. Some expressed alarm at the nature of the project. In general, the handing out of posters

73 For example, on 25 March 2014, an article in *The Frome Times* celebrated the fact that *The Sunday Times* had just declared: 'Frome officially one of the best places to live in the UK'. See <http://www.frometimes.co.uk>, accessed 12 July 2014.

74 Simon was keen for it to be emphasized that he did not consider Sartre's statement or its appearance on these posters to be 'negative'. He encouraged the team to suggest to the public that my project asked questions about where and with whom responsibility for our town lies. I did not dispute this reading of the work.



made the project both sociable and (more) unpredictable. The idea of delegating responsibility for pasting up and displaying the posters expanded the involvement of ‘publics’ in the *realisation* of *Huis Clos Planningline*. Many more people were now involved in the work’s early stages and were aware of the ‘concept’. The work was no longer anonymous. One could access basic information about it online and in Foreground’s marketing materials (though details of the phone number were withheld in published interpretation). Those who ‘installed’ posters were effectively complicit in the realisation of the work.

The addition of still more ‘mobilities’ – via the distribution and movement of posters across town – was another important development. (This was part of a broader development in my practice, at the time, in fact: my interest in rules and public space was leading me towards my idea of tracking objects through diverse social space, as an experimental way of testing boundaries and possibilities.) By the Sunday morning, posters had started to appear in a wide range of locations, both indoors and – especially – out, pasted or otherwise attached to a wide range of structures and surfaces. Sitings were more or less prominent: outward-facing in an upstairs bedroom; repeated, running across a shop window; on notice boards, doors, gates and different kinds of walls.

On the Monday morning, Foreground commissioned a photographer to scour Frome’s streets and alleys to record as many posters as he could find. A large selection of images was uploaded onto the project’s website, and onto Foreground’s Facebook page. By ten o’clock on Monday morning, Foreground Projects had received an email.

On 21 May 2012, at 09.56, McKay, Laura wrote:

Dear sir/madam

I understand that your organization may be involved in the posters up around Frome which state ‘Hell is other people’ and then give the phone number 01749 341535. The Planning team are now receiving numerous phone calls about these posters because they include the phone number of one of the Planning Officers at Mendip District Council. I am not sure whether this is an error or is intentional but it is causing some disruption in our office as we have no involvement in this project and are having to deal with calls relating to it.

I would appreciate it if you could let me know how you intend to address this situation.

Many thanks

*Laura McKay
Senior Planning Officer
laura.mckay@mendip.gov.uk*

*Mendip District Council
Cannards Grave Road
Shepton Mallet
Somerset
BA4 5BT
Customer Services: 01749 648999*

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Mendip District Council makes every effort to keep its network secure and free from viruses. However you do need to check this email and any attachments to it for viruses and accuracy as the Council can take no responsibility for any viruses, errors or omissions which are transferred or arise as a result of the transmission of this email.

This e-mail has been scanned for viruses by Symantec Scanning Services – powered by MessageLabs. For further information visit <http://www.symanteccloud.com/>

As suggested above, the posters had likely prompted at least two types of phone call to the planning department's switchboard: some curious and/or confused, others indignant. Simon rang me at 10.30am, wondering how I felt about the email and asking how I thought we should respond. I reiterated what he already knew: that, for me, the whole point of the project was to find out what would happen in these circumstances. Later in the day, Simon forwarded me his reply.



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HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE

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MEMOR
NO PARKING
ANY TIME

David Heath
David Heath CBE MP
Somerton & Frome
Constituency
Tel: 01373 43618
Fax: 01373 455152
Westminster Office
Tel: 01373 219 6245

GRAFFITI

*From: New Info <info@foregroundprojects.org.uk>
Date: 21 May 2012 13:29:45 BST
To: "McKay, Laura" <Laura.McKay@Mendip.gov.uk>
Subject: Re: "Hell is other people" posters: Frome*

Dear Laura,

Foreground has commissioned the artwork 'Huis Clos / Planning Line' by Mike Ricketts as one of 8 commissions that form part of our current project Notes from Nowhere, funded by the Arts Council of England, St Catherine's Artisan Market Ltd and University of the West of England.

The artwork was given out to the public in the town centre this Saturday to a generally enthusiastic response. We obviously cannot control how or where individuals have chosen to display the posters or use them (or not). When giving out the poster we have not been disclosing the nature of the phone number unless expressly asked and it was surprisingly rare that people were curious about this. The project is about people's relation to each other and their relationship to bureaucratic structures. The artist's intention is to ask questions of where the responsibility for social harmony lies – with authorities or with individuals. 'Hell is other people' is a quote by the writer Jean-Paul Sartre from his play Huis Clos. The artist is situating it as an ambivalent statement about society, neither intended to be expressly positive or negative. The intention of the project is to make people more aware of public structures that exist around the regulation of the places in which we live.

Should your department continue to receive calls that you find disruptive, please pass on the above explanation for the work and our email address through which people can contact us directly instead.

With kind regards

Simon

*Foreground
The Old Church School, Butts Hill, Frome, BA11 1HR
E: info@foregroundprojects.org.uk
www.foregroundprojects.org.uk*

Laura never replied. Within the next few days, almost all the posters displayed in accessible locations were ripped down, in what was apparently a concerted, coordinated effort to eradicate the project physically. (Councils tend to like to remove fly-posters quickly, in any event.⁷⁵)

⁷⁵ For as campaigning group Keep Britain Tidy helpfully point out: 'Surfaces that are blighted by illegal posters and placards can quickly attract further defacement, 'envirocrime' and other forms of anti-social behaviour. Cleaning up helps to restore confidence in the community and provides a strong disincentive to flyposting companies when they realise

In the meantime, other interesting things had started to happen. Several rows of posters on one boarded-up entrance to a disused Variety Club in the town centre had been added to. One or more objectors to my project had designed and printed their own posters featuring new printed messages, and pasted them in dancing diagonals right over the top of mine. 'HEAVEN IS THE RIGHT TO REPLY', some declared wittily and no doubt accurately. Others mocked the work as 'CLEVER CLEVER', questioned the project's Arts Council funding and suggested that the work lacked depth.

In addition, a few days later, I was plugging 'Hell Is Other People Frome' into Google to bring up Foreground's Notes from Nowhere webpage and show images of my project to a friend, when I had another surprise. An artful black-and-white photograph of a dilapidated Frome building with one of my posters stuck onto the window had been uploaded to Flickr. A caption had been added by the photographer, James Loudon: 'Hell is other people. Can't argue with that.' At the time of writing, James's photograph has had '264 views, 4 faves, 7 comments', including praise from a group called Doors Windows and Steps and remarks from individuals such as 'Ananabanana', who writes simply: 'Nice work!'

However, it was probably the appearance of the rebarbative posters on the Variety Club hoarding that represented the most interesting moment in *Huis Clos Planningline's* unfolding: here, the work had become richly 'dialogical' – both the posters and their site had become subject to dramatic conceptual and material re-appropriation. 'My' posters, themselves appended to a temporary structure, had become supports for a further thoughtful, anonymous and 'responsive' move. This was a counterclaim on space that wryly mimicked, and played out on top of, components of my artwork – an elaborately enacted gesture. This layered, tatty surface, just along from the town council's offices and right opposite a Pound Shop, was now a zone featuring fragmentary assertions concerning public space, rights and the value and accountability of contemporary art. I keenly recorded it all in photographs. Interestingly, Foreground did not.

The reason that this particular prominent cluster of 'HELL IS OTHER PEOPLE' posters might not have been removed along with all the others

that the posters are not displayed for any length of time.' <http://kb.keepbritaintidy.org/flyposting/>, accessed 15 May 2014.

**Heaven is
the right to
reply.**

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**Heaven is
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before this intervention is also quite interesting. The posters on the former Variety Club entrance had in fact been pasted there by Simon and I with permission from the building's owner, local entrepreneur, property developer and Foreground supporter Gavin Eddy.⁷⁶ I suspect that the Planning Department employees knew that Eddy owned this building and asked him whether they might remove the posters – an 'offer' that he'd declined. This is conjecture; nevertheless, thinking about details of this property's ownership *plus* this property developer owner's connections with Foreground is in line with the kind of analysis of 'hidden' facts undertaken by the 'other' fly-posters (who'd 'revealed' aspects of this Foreground project's funding). More broadly this detail also brings us back to the question of visibility.⁷⁷

The posters that displaced mine were partly intriguing because they represented a rare moment in which the work's dynamics played out materially and also visibly. So much of what *Huis Clos Planningline* was concerned with *and precipitated* was entirely *unseen*. The mini-short-circuiting of routines in the Planning Office and the conversations that followed, for example, could only ever be imagined. Despite everything involved – all the activities, materials, and communiqués, printed paper, glue, the surfaces and boundaries stuck onto, the read and dialed numbers, phone lines, printed and spoken words, various rhythms and mobilities, distributions, irruptions, pauses, responses, more pauses, rushes, or not – the work as a whole could only exist *in one's mind*. This sense of unknowability seems important, in that the agencies and the regulatory and legal structures with which the work engages aren't readily visible and can never be known in their entirety either.

So the immateriality, the 'non-visual' nature of my work, echoes these qualities in regulation. Also, planning officials – arbitrators and official regulators for the area – aren't visible locally; they're located 'elsewhere'. Similarly, *Huis Clos Planningline* was here, there, 'everywhere', nowhere – characterized by brief appearances and disappearances across a wide area. The work's dispersal complicated notions of 'site' but connected to a real-time jurisdiction. The 'processual' nature of the work engaged with

⁷⁶ Eddy has been a long-standing sponsor of Foreground Projects via companies Forward Space and Catherine Artisan Market Ltd..

⁷⁷ Foreground's connection with Eddy means that this project was not unsullied by art's connection to property interests and a town's regeneration. Nevertheless, this unholy alliance was not an uninteresting one, whereby the property developer backed a project which questioned some of the tenets and structures that impact the day-to-day management of his property portfolio.



James Loudon

+ Follow

277 views

4 fav

Hell is other people

Can't argue with that.

regulations as a 'live' phenomenon that could be tested – something real and specific involving individuals, a public phone line, written communiqués, poster-removal teams and so on. As 'more paperwork', my posters suggested not only urban information and symbolic disruption, but also consciously connected to a bureaucratic 'aesthetics of administration'.⁷⁸

With all its pinnings- and pastings-up, complaints and reportings, interrupted work schedules, re-appropriations and re-sharings, my work differs significantly from poster projects of the past by artists such as Barbara Kruger and Jenny Holzer. However, some points of connection include the insertion of provocative 'social' statements into shared urban spaces, and the use of an ambiguous mode of address.⁷⁹ Holzer's displaced social messages in (originally fly-posted) works such as *Truisms* (1977–9) sit uneasily in informationally-crowded public spaces, whilst the *viewer* is somehow implicated in Kruger's more overtly 'dialogical' propositions, without it being at all clear who the 'we' or 'you' that she often refers to actually are.⁸⁰

In my work, is the 'hell' those 'other people' who live, work and play around us, acting in ways that don't conform to 'our' way of doing things, with or without permission? Might it not be those making planning decisions on 'our' behalf, attempting to arbitrate between different parties in specific situations? Or the artist, or the commissioners? The person who distributed this poster or posted it? Or the person calling this *Planningline*, out of curiosity, or knowingly, in complaint? The work is structurally complicated, 'processual' and temporal in nature, a 'real time social system', of sorts, perhaps.⁸¹

78 Buchloh, "Conceptual Art 1962-1969".

79 The sudden appearance of posters across a town was reminiscent of Daniel Buren's *Untitled (200 Paris billboards)* (1968). Another serial posting of a challenging statement in shared urban space was Alfredo Jaar's *Studies on Happiness* (1979-81), a billboard intervention across Santiago de Chile. Ceildo Meireles' *Insertions into Ideological Circuits* including *Coca Cola Project* (1970) involved dispersals of verbal provocations whose worldly impact could only ever be imagined. Inviting people to take posters away, dispersing the work and messages into (unseen) 'private' spaces was an important element of Felix Gonzales-Torres' work of the early 1990s.

80 Holzer's *Truisms* include phrases such as FREEDOM IS A LUXURY NOT A NECESSITY, CHILDREN ARE THE CRUELEST OF ALL and IT'S BETTER TO BE LONELY THAN TO BE WITH INFERIOR PEOPLE. Rosalyn Deutsche suggests that in her practice Barbara Kruger simultaneously introduces and queries the possibilities of a dialogical public space. Deutsche, *Evictions*, 300-302

81 'Real-time social system' is a phrase used by Hans Haacke, most famously in the title of one of his best known text and image installations: *Shapolsky et al. Manhattan Real Estate Holdings, a Real-Time Social System, as of May 1, 1971* (1971).

GENTLEMEN

HELL
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01753 41535

£60 penalty will
be charged for
infringement of
regulations

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The posters' appearance 'activated' regulations *in* people, calling them into being as internalized by a specific area's inhabitants. The work connected with regulatory authorities by provoking spaces between them and the publics in whom regulations might be said to reside. But people's responses were not consistent. Frome's publics were by no means all compliant Foucauldian subjects, for example. Individuals taking and displaying posters around the town actively chose to make public a statement questioning social cohesion in a personal and collective moment of symbolic defiance. Others obliterated Sartre's words and the council phone number, offering a *counter-argument*. This wasn't a work that simply involved the transgression of a rule or taboo in order to 'reveal' it. Neither was it a straightforward demonstration or illustration of 'disciplinary' power in action. It was an experimental work made in and across some of these territories, one that itself led to a range of responses and tactical moves.⁸²

So although the posters featured a numerical 'code that marked access to information'⁸³ which was distributed in a situation where 'power' is 'exercised through its invisibility'⁸⁴, the work also responded to and promoted difference and confusion, rather than adopting a targeted or analytical approach. The work *ran up against* others' demands for clarity. This is a characteristic of my work more generally. As in Campden Hill Square, it was not entirely clear who or what constituted 'authority', given the multiple accounts, posturing and anxiety.

Unlike even the most ambiguous advertisement that might withhold information for dramatic effect, then, my posters wouldn't appeal to one particular group or consumer; instead of inviting any kind of belonging to or connecting with a particular 'community', the posters would invoke society on a more general level (via Sartre's quote) prompting involvement from intrigued and 'concerned' individuals who *happened to be* in the area. The work was full of gaps (temporal and cognitive) and 'disconnects'. It represented a very real kind of 'interference', a fragmented provocation, undertaken in what experimental sociologist Harold Garfinkel might call the

82 Bearing in mind this conscious triggering of reactions and responses from members of an urban public who subsequently go on to report an incident to a relevant urban authority, an otherwise unlikely comparison with a videoed action by Francis Alÿs is interesting here: in *Re-enactments* (2000), Alÿs walked, carrying a gun, through the streets of Mexico City, until being arrested by policemen who'd obviously been notified by residents and/or passers-by...

83 Murakami Wood, "Beyond the Panopticon?", 253.

84 Foucault, quoted in Deutsche, *Evictions*, 187.

rule-governed everyday.⁸⁵

If, for Latour, ‘authorities’, ‘institutions’ and ‘the law’ exist as a complicated, interconnected web, as a set of activities, processes and ‘performances’, my work connected with these dynamics – how they are ‘felt’, touched and experienced. Rarely ‘seen’, the *practices* of authorities, regulators and others could be ‘traced’, via the occasional email and the disappearance of posters and so on.

My work *played* with rules, practices and boundaries. The trajectory of the practice is to *challenge* legality, *playfully* testing the (my, our) right(s) to the city. The work gave rise to practical challenges. Will you respond? Will you, should somebody, act or complain? Should something happen or ‘escalate’ here or not? Paralleling the complicated boundary encounters that I’d heard about in a Holland Park square, the work would constitute a *potential* catalyst for confrontation and controversy.

Echoing Massey, Deutsche points to ‘the productive role’ that can be played by a kind of ‘disruption in which groups consider their own uncertainty’⁸⁶. Perhaps this is what happened in and around Frome. In any case, to steal a line from curator Jean-Charles Massera, *Huis Clos Planningline* involved a little ‘dance with the law’.⁸⁷

85 See for example Hester, “Ethnomethodology”.

86 Deutsche, *Evictions*, 322.

87 Massera, “Dance with the Law”.

Chapter 3: Reverse Consultation

‘Publics are called into existence, convened... This implies focusing on processes through which publics emerge.’

Nick Mahony, Janet Newman and Clive Barnett.⁸⁸

If the previous chapter was concerned with the idea of engaging with official structures and the regulation of specific shared spaces, here I will shift to a concern with different notions and definitions of the public, and in particular with how publics are conceived, constituted and dealt with by planners and professional agencies in the context of urban-redevelopment processes. My interest in this area arose from personal experience: early in 2008, I participated in a series of ‘public dialogue meetings’ commissioned by the London Development Agency for discussion of the controversial master plan for Crystal Palace Park (already mentioned in *Four Anecdotes*). My experience of these meetings, and the questions that arose from them, went on to inspire the development of two new works: *Reverse Consultation (Old New Town)* (2008) and *Cushion Distribution (Public Inquiry)* (2009). Both of these were developed in the context of decision-making processes relating to urban redevelopment. Once again, the question as to how art might engage with ‘publics’ and ‘public spaces’ would be explored in open-ended ways, allowing for unexpected turns of event.

The projects’ starting points were very different. One came from an invitation to undertake a commission for the town of Harlow in Essex, where a town centre master-planned from scratch after the Second World War was set for redevelopment – part-demolition and ‘enhancement’ – largely for shoppers. The other emerged independently, from my participation in the Crystal Palace meetings. The circumstances in Crystal Palace were more starkly controversial, given the proposed sale of public parkland. This was a situation already triggering serious objections and debate. Both projects ended up sharing a specific conceptual focus, riffing on and wrangling with ideas of participation in planning. If planners and developers often ‘consult’ members of the public on new schemes and projects, then the model of ‘consultation’ in which I participated in South London inspired new ways of working here.

As one of the first post-war British ‘new towns’, Harlow’s origins predate the advent of consultation in British planning by a number of years. Early

⁸⁸ Mahony, Newman & Barnett., *Rethinking the Public*, 2.



demands for public participation in major urban decision-making were part of the political landscape of the late 1960s and '70s.⁸⁹ By contrast, the climate in which Sir Frederick Gibberd and his colleagues mapped out the new urban environment that was soon to become home to thousands of East Londoners was one of top-down provision, driven by experts in their the field.⁹⁰ Built on open countryside not far from what is now Stansted Airport, Harlow was a hybrid of modernist urbanism and garden-city design. Laid out before the 1960s expansion of car ownership, the town was 'zoned' according to function and neighborhood. In the mid-1990s, when I first visited Harlow, I was struck both by its extraordinary built utopianism and by the extent to which it had aged as a *physical* environment. The impact of Margaret Thatcher's 1980s 'right to buy' housing policy and more recent developer-built housing was also clear. Red-brick estates now filled several of Gibberd's green spaces. Also, many residents had made adaptations to their residences that would have had the town's original architects spinning in their graves.

In 1996, I wrote an essay – accompanied by a series of colour photographs – exploring some of the key ideas informing Harlow's design and the reality of this designed environment then. Gibberd's commitment to 'landscape', for example, was one topic. Essentialist notions of family and community were also central – evidenced by 'neighbourhood clusters', community centres and paddling pools. Such notions were also thematised in outdoor sculptures. Henry Moore's *Harlow Family Group*, unveiled in the town centre in 1956, was emblematic here. The work, now protected from vandals in the hallway of a new glass-and-steel Civic Centre, promoted progress and optimism while simultaneously seeming rooted in some distant past.

My essay also mused on Harlow as an 'old new town': what had happened to this modernist environment as it had aged? Many historic features now appeared oddly abandoned, and were depicted as such in my photographs. The hybrid modernism of some of the town's sculptures, many of a kind characterised by Herbert Read in terms of a 'geometry of fear', now spoke

⁸⁹ Public involvement in planning discussions and decision-making didn't really exist in the UK before the 1960s. The practice had become quite common by the 1970s, was downplayed by the Conservative government in the 1980s, only to re-emerge in the 1990s under New Labour. Some planners feel that, once elected, politicians should make planning decisions rather than then commissioning further consultation. R. Darke, "Public Participation, Equal Opportunities, Planning Policies and Decisions".

⁹⁰ The East End was overcrowded and had been very heavily bombed during the war. Arguably, the consensus politics that had existed during wartime continued to have an impact in the immediate postwar years in the UK.

their language of alienation amid cracked paving stones and graffiti close to an already ageing 1980s shopping mall.

This critical study of Harlow drew on historical and cultural research alongside psycho-geographical wanderings-with-camera, and was published in 1997 in *Inventory*, a journal produced by the eponymous London-based artist collective.⁹¹ In retrospect, the piece had some limitations. It was an outsider's view, one that analysed, but was also strangely fixated on, the town as a dilapidated *built* environment.⁹² So it was with some reservation that I responded when, twelve years later, in March 2008, an artist named Roman Vasseur contacted me via email, having enjoyed my essay.

Roman explained that he had an unusual job: he'd been appointed a 'Lead Artist' at Harlow, which meant that he sat on a committee deciding on a contemporary arts strategy for the town, as well as on key committees relating to the redevelopment of the town centre. In an exploratory first meeting in a carefully chosen venue – the foyer of the 1951 Royal Festival Hall – he explained to me that a key part of his role was to curate several new art projects for Harlow. He invited me to develop a solo exhibition that would be the last in a series of newly commissioned exhibitions and events he was planning, to be called, collectively, Art and the New Town. My slot would be in mid-December.

I'd seen an artwork by Roman a couple of years earlier, in an interesting exhibition at the ICA. It had consisted in part of a text proposing the procession in public of the anointed body of a public mural artist.⁹³ It was puzzling to be approached by this selfsame artist with a view to producing a new public artwork for this 'Sculpture Town'.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, he seemed keen to counter local expectations as to what 'public art' might be – for example, by commissioning new time-based, new-media and curatorial projects rather than more bronze on plinths. Apparently aware of the problematic premise of commingling art with commercially driven development, he was determined

91 Ricketts, "Harlow".

92 Such concerns, and similar images of 'empty' mid-Twentieth Century structures and spaces were not uncommon in British contemporary art and culture of the mid-late 1990s, for example: some of Iain Sinclair's writings, and films and video installations by Tacita Dean and Jane and Louise Wilson. In the 2000s, some artists, writers and exhibitions would explore this kind of phenomenon in more detail: E.g., a series of books reflecting on the legacy of post-war urban design by Owen Hatherley; MACBA's international group exhibition *Modernologies*, 2010.

93 *Murder Considered as a Fine Art* (2004-) seen at I.C.A. London in *Real Estate: Art in a Changing City*, 2005, a group exhibition curated by B&B.

94 Harlow Council rebranded Harlow as a 'Sculpture Town' in 2009.

to curate ambitious projects that responded to the town's history. The plan was to show works in a new temporary exhibition space: the only partly ironically titled Harlow Temple of Utopias. This would be an artist-decorated shipping container dropped into the middle of the town's market square.⁹⁵

Harlow's redevelopment was being masterminded by a quango called Harlow Renaissance.⁹⁶ The new art projects would be commissioned by Essex County Council under the umbrella of Commissions East, a regional Arts Council-funded body. I was intrigued by Roman's ambition, especially by his stories of his involvement with various committees, a situation that sounded to me like a strange mutation of the activities of John Latham and Barbara Steveni's Artists' Placement Group in the 1970s. I felt that, in this complicated situation, with new buildings and high-street retail names set to replace the public spaces of the post-war new town, simply reconfiguring my 1996 essay wasn't really an option.

The complexity of this new context had to be taken into account.⁹⁷ The meetings Roman was involved in were triggering major changes in Harlow. For instance, Elisabeth Frink's sculpture of a warthog, commissioned to inhabit Gibberd's extraordinary listed Water Gardens opposite the Town Hall, would soon overlook a huge TK Maxx store. From this complex combination of pre-existing elements – an essay; the people of Harlow's non-awareness of the essay; Roman's enthusiasms and his work with a wide range of different agencies and agendas in the redevelopment process; his shipping-container-as-customised-gallery-space; and multiple possible publics, audiences and groups – something interesting would have to emerge.

My eventual proposal was to pass copies of my 1996 essay, either in its complete form or in extract, to members of Harlow's main redevelopment committee or 'steering group' and to ask them to annotate it in any way they wanted. The resulting material – papers, comments, scribbles – would then be edited and re-presented for whatever public might enter the temporary exhibition space.

95 The specially-clad and painted shipping container was a new collaborative art work by Roman Vasseur and Diann Bauer entitled *Let Us Pray for Those Residing in the Designated Area*. It has since been exhibited in a gallery exhibition in Berlin. See <http://www.romanvasseur.com>, accessed 1 September 2014.

96 Anna Minton is one commentator who has written critically on the Urban Renaissance phenomenon in the UK. Minton, *Ground Control*, 25-6.

97 Minton writes on Urban Development Corporations in terms of the appropriation of space. Minton, *Ground Control*, 10-11.

I was keen to invite individuals who were deciding the town's future to share their personal responses to my readings of the town's origins and mixed history. After all, there would be lots for them to comment on, given the strongly worded nature of several sections of my text. Printed copies of the decade-old essay would, simultaneously, both accrue interventions and animate discussions. Competing ideas and, hopefully, otherwise privately held views would appear in the public space of the improvised market-square gallery. 'Consultation' would be reversed – or 'détourned'. The work would be dialogical and discursive.

Roman liked the idea and agreed to enable it, embracing my suggestion that he might act as curator-cum-producer and enlist his committee colleagues into the work. We both had a 'slightly tense' early meeting with Alastair Howe, an architect active on Harlow's arts committee. Although in strong disagreement with much of my text, Alastair was very enthusiastic about the prospect of a work that would trigger debate about Harlow's future and identity. The project would certainly represent a very different model of art production from Henry Moore's monumental *Harlow Family Group*, acknowledging (even inviting) dissensus rather than consensus, and challenging rather than nobly serving the people driving the town's now very different built futures.⁹⁸

By the summer, Roman had begun to distribute copies of my essay to key committee members and had won over a 'powerful advocate' in Essex County Council's Ian Hatton. Consent forms were prepared and distributed⁹⁹, and a press release for my project – with exhibition dates scheduled for early December – had been published. It read:

Reverse Consultation (Old New Town)

Sixty years after the original designs for Harlow New Town were drawn up, planners, architects and developers once again have their sights trained on the town centre. This moment of opportunity, anxiety and debate forms the immediate context for a new project by artist Mike Ricketts.

If planning authorities routinely consult the public on future

98 Chantal Mouffe states at one point: 'According to the agonistic approach, critical art is art that foments dissensus'. Mouffe, 'Artistic Activism and Agonistic Spaces'. Philosopher Jacques Rancière also uses the term 'dissensus', notably in his book of the same name published in 2003.

99 See Appendix 1 for *Reverse Consultation* invitation to participate and consent form.

decisions about public space, proposing various kinds of dialogue and involvement, here individuals involved in deciding on Harlow's future are themselves being 'consulted' by the artist. A number of participants have been invited to respond to an essay written by the artist about Harlow roughly a decade ago, and published by artists collective Inventory.

Annotations and critical responses to this (old) text, penned by various individuals, will form the basis of this project. Material presented in the exhibition will effectively highlight some of the passions, knowledges, and beliefs held, not only by the artist, but by people now involved in defining Harlow's future.

By the time autumn leaves began to fall, however, stagnation had set in. Though Roman remained confident in his ability to cajole his committee colleagues into action, other advocates were proving elusive, and doubts started to loom large. Only in late November did a new opportunity suddenly arise in the form of Nicola Bowland, a key person at Harlow Renaissance, with responsibility for the town's 'rebranding'.

Interestingly, Nicola made some not-so-subtle attempts to wrestle the project into what she saw as a more positive direction – she was keen for visitors to the exhibition space to be able to add their own opinions of the essay. This was an approach that I'd ruled out for myself early on; I was very keen to avoid obvious kinds of 'community' participation, and instead to shift attention to developers, politicians and decision-makers, a less expected move. In particular, I was keen to counter expectations that a 'public' art project should be 'community'-based, that it should involve 'collaborations' with residents' groups and so on. I felt this strongly with regard to new towns in particular, where residents and 'communities' are endlessly 'consulted' on their lives and their experiences of the area. (A recent example was Stephen Willats' project *People to People, Person to Person* (2007) where the artist worked with eleven residents from the Netherfield estate, Milton Keynes.¹⁰⁰)

Nicola did, however, suddenly arrange access to the heart of the regeneration process. Her suggestion was that I take over the initial half hour of an already scheduled 'Central Steering Group Meeting' and consult 'members' on my essay, there and then. Roman and I did so, on 3 December, in a conference room in Harlow Civic Centre, making a sound recording of spoken responses to my 1996 words from representatives

100 Hammond, *Person to Person*.



HARLOW ESSEX

6 NOV - 22 DEC

2008

ART AND THE TOWN

www.artandthetown.org.uk

PRIVATE VIEW
Saturday 22 November 12.45
The Gibberd Gallery, Civic Centre

A series of temporary visual art projects and public panel discussions for Harlow New Town curated by Roman Vasseur, lead artist for Harlow

- Diann Bauer
- Amanda Beech
- Chris Evans
- Alison Gill
- Pil & Galia Collectiv
- Wayne Lloyd
- The Serendipity Group
- Mike Ricketts



University of the West of England



commissions

east

of Harlow Renaissance, Harlow Town Council, consultants CBR Ellis, developers Stockland, architects Engles, Essex County Council, the Homes and Communities Agency, and the East of England Development Agency. After the meeting, I transcribed these various responses and emailed them out to everyone, requesting clearance to use their words in the exhibition. Unfortunately, the project then hit a wall – two walls in fact, simultaneously.

Firstly, I was informed that there was suddenly ‘enormous concern’ among key people at Harlow Council and Harlow Renaissance at the idea of my essay being made available for the public to read, which was the very premise of the invitation to exhibit. Apparently, my text now had the potential to trigger local outrage and negative press coverage. Secondly, as my exhibition’s opening date drew ever nearer, it became clear that only two of the twelve people whose verbal responses I had recorded at the meeting had followed through and given permission for their words to be used. The Chief Executive of Harlow Renaissance subsequently offered his words, but this was too little, too late.

In this situation – I was now being required to respect individuals’ copyright and also forced to comply with pressure *not* to release my original essay into Harlow (Latour advises: ‘abstain from interrupting the flood of controversies’¹⁰¹) – I had no option but to rethink the exhibition at extremely short notice. Working in close cooperation with Roman, I concocted a paradoxical display. I posted a short text, explaining exactly what had happened, just inside the gallery space. The first of my Latourian ‘re-narrations’ began: ‘I am sorry there isn’t much to see here. I should explain...’¹⁰² On a table at the far end of the space lay a labelled audio cassette containing the sound recording from the meeting. My text explained that these recordings ‘cannot, by law, be listened to’. It also explained that my original text, deemed too problematic to be read, was ‘presented in a way that ensures that it cannot be’. Wrapped in a plastic bag, the original text was shoved underneath the shipping-container gallery space, where it could just be seen, out of reach, from beneath the entrance, with the help of a torch available via the invigilator.

The (non)presentation of the sound recordings and the essay’s bagging and positioning beneath the gallery space dramatised the notion that words

101 Latour, *Reassembling the Social*, p. 24.

102 See Appendix 2 for the exhibited text.



– and, more generally, the project itself – had been repressed. My clear verbal explanation of events – including the naming of specific individuals and agencies – combined with the relative emptiness of the gallery space and the referral of visitors to the litter-strewn underside of the Temple of Utopias, pulled the carpet from beneath the conceit of the gallery and the commission, focusing attention on the unwillingness of the quango and public officials to engage in dialogue, and on their struggles to control discourse around the future of the town.¹⁰³

However, none of this was seen by a broad public because, within minutes of opening, the exhibition was shut down. As the last in the Art and the New Town series, my work did not enjoy its own vernissage, so, shortly before eleven o'clock on the first morning, an invigilator, an elderly Harlow resident who'd volunteered for the role, had opened the space and, perplexed by what he found, telephoned Harlow Renaissance to register his concern. Soon enough, Chief Executive Andrew Bramidge and Harlow's Arts Development Officer Kelly Lean visited the space and padlocked the exhibition. Neither the show nor the space was to open to the public again.

I then received a phone call from a weary-sounding Roman who told me that he was outraged and would argue for the exhibition to be reopened. Emails went to and fro between various parties, records of communication breakdown.¹⁰⁴ Interestingly, one major point of contention remained: the question as to whether the text, the tape and the bagged essay (installed in and under the space) actually constituted an art exhibition. The fact that my text seemed to be apologising for, and reflecting on, the non-realisation of the intended project seemed to have suggested to the invigilator, and – conveniently – to Andrew Bramidge that art was absent here.

This was, of course, absolutely not the case – the work had always been intended to be process-based and responsive, more Latourian 'follow the actors' than Sol LeWittian 'the idea becomes the machine that makes the art'.¹⁰⁵ I emailed alleged commissioners Essex County Council and

103 Positioning the bagged essay beneath the space also invoked criminality – 'planting' the object beneath the institution..

104 Since these emails are quite long and contain detailed arguments, I have made a selection and attached them in Appendix 3.

105 Source: LeWitt, 'Paragraphs on Conceptual Art'. Admittedly this pitting of Latour against LeWitt may be a false opposition if we note a point made by Michael Newman that some conceptual artists embraced the involvement of others, in so doing opening their work to contingency and the unknown. Newman, "Conceptual Art from the 1960s to the 1990s: An Unfinished Project?" More recently, Claire Bishop has argued that the most engaging

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● Reverse Consultation(4)

● Me

To Roman Vasseur, Andrew Bramidge
CC Kelly Lean

Dear Andrew

Thank you for your email.

I am obviously very concerned that the exhibition has been closed, and would ask you to rec

I have spoken to Roman this evening, and will allow him to respond to the specific points you
his forthcoming reply, we / I deem the notion that my text in the exhibition contains 'inaccurac

In addition, I would ask you to bear in mind that, as part of the exhibition, the text pinned to t

At the moment, I fail to understand the justification for the closure of this public art exhibition
by yourself.

Best wishes

Mike

Mike Ricketts
Mobile: 07890 769421

--- On Thu, 18/12/08, Andrew Bramidge <andrew.bramidge@harlowrenaissance.co.uk> v

From: Andrew Bramidge <andrew.bramidge@harlowrenaissance.co.uk>
Subject: Reverse Consultation
To: rickettsmike@yahoo.co.uk, "Roman Vasseur" <Roman.Vasseur@uwe.ac.uk>
Cc: "Kelly Lean" <kelly.lean@harlow.gov.uk>
Date: Thursday, 18 December, 2008, 3:27 PM

Mike, Roman

I have to say that I am very disappointed.

I can understand your frustration at not getting the responses to the essay that you had wan
inaccuracies in your note pinned inside the container that cannot go unchallenged.

Commissions East to protest the exhibition's closure, but was answered only with a brief reply pointing out that Christmas would soon be upon us and nothing could be done until the new year.¹⁰⁶

Roman, already buffeted by critical feedback from a local residents' association concerning another commissioned project – a film by Amanda Beech which had represented an award-winning modernist housing estate as a dark, threatening environment¹⁰⁷ – told me that he had 'offered to resign' as the town's Lead Artist over the closure of my show. He hadn't actually resigned, of course. I visited Harlow again, myself, to see the space, which was still padlocked, with no explanation.¹⁰⁸

Although stressful, the question as to whether this project had 'failed' proved a very productive one for my practice. As my title suggested, my proposal had always been to develop a wry commentary on planners' and developers' 'consultation' processes by 'turning the tables' on 'members' involved. Inviting their responses to my essay, I was opening my own work to criticism as a way to generate new material about the town. My use of my essay as a kind of 'readymade'-cum-surface-for-inscription was crucial: reproduced, re-edited and distributed in hard copy and also emailed as an attachment, this was the thing that had sat unread in in-trays and inboxes, been passed round, ignored and finally noticed – especially once it had been bagged up and 'hidden'. The essay *eventually* triggered issues, arguments and actions...

The complicated dynamics of the work's unfolding could certainly not have been predicted. I gradually came to recognise that the signalling of the commissioners' withdrawal of commitment from the project by the physical bolting and locking of the steel doors of their own exhibition space was probably a much more telling conclusion to this experiment than any 'personal' statements scrawled in the margins of a text could possibly have

examples of 'relational', 'dialogical' or 'socially-engaged' art tend to involve strong assertions of the artistic autonomy. See for example her evaluations of provocative projects by Thomas Hirschhorn and Santiago Sierra in Bishop, "Antagonism & Relational Aesthetics".

¹⁰⁶ See Appendix 3.

¹⁰⁷ The noir atmosphere and pumping beats of Beech's film *Statecraft* (2011) upset residents of Harlow's Bishopsfield estate when they viewed it in the temporary exhibition space. The Residents Association had granted the artist permission to film on the estate, which they were trying to save from the threat of demolition at the time. Beech had filmed there with spotlights casting long shadows at night. According to Roman, residents felt that the film perpetuated negative stereotypes about the ambience of this kind of housing estate, a type of built environment that they called home and for which they were campaigning.

¹⁰⁸ This in spite of a the Council's claim that a notice explaining the exhibition's premature closure would be posted on the door of the space. See Appendix 3.

been. The response of Harlow Renaissance in shutting down discourse, avoiding the alleged risk of publics witnessing different individuals' positions at a 'sensitive' time, evidenced an extraordinary level of anxiety at the idea of allowing a contested public space of the kind proposed by Deutsche. It was perhaps no coincidence that the American investment bank Lehman Brothers had collapsed that autumn, sending international stock markets spiraling downwards and rendering many commercial development projects of any ambition precarious. Nevertheless, positing a direct causal connection between such global financial shifts and the buckling of my humble proposal for publics dropping into an improvised gallery space in Harlow's Market Square would seem quite a stretch.

Although these potential publics were denied access to the exhibition, the work did of course have another public: the people involved in the redevelopment process and in the art commissioning. The padlocking of the exhibition was by no means the end of the line, in any case – it had led to further emails, discussions and decisions (to discuss resignation, on Roman's part; to reluctantly agree to pay me my £500 project fee on Essex County Council's part) and revelations concerning the extent to which private investment interests pervaded and drove these only *seemingly* public art commissions. The exhibition's closure was in fact very telling. In an email to Roman and I, written very shortly after the closure of the exhibition, Andrew Bramidge did acknowledge that all parties involved may have learned from the process.¹⁰⁹

In any case, I made the decision not to continue to push the work further at this point – for instance, to mount a legal challenge or to take the story to the press. The padlocking of the shipping container's doors would stand as a crudely enforced 'full stop' for the project – a blunt attempt to halt (silence, remove-from-vision) the project's antagonisms, miscommunications and stop-and-start mobilities. Here were echoes of Deutsche's 'Agoraphobia': an organisation moved in to aggressively appropriate a public space that they themselves had commissioned, in order to 'protect' the public from the kind of debate that they had earlier *apparently* actively encouraged. Positions had shifted dramatically.

Interestingly, tensions have continued to simmer in subsequent suppressions and re-narrations of the project. A short-lived Harlow

109 See Appendix 3 for Andrew Bramidge's email.

Renaissance webpage that celebrated the Art and the New Town commissions omitted my name from the list of artists and failed to mention my project. Curator Roman Vasseur published a reflective book entitled *Let Us Pray for Those Now Residing in the Designated Area*, which makes only the very briefest mention of my project, suggesting that the work had simply been an experiment that failed. In the context of a discussion of the unwillingness of those involved in ‘investment led development’ to appear in public to discuss or engage with new art, Roman states: ‘Mike Ricketts’ project *Reverse Consultation* attempted to address this by interviewing the partners in the project. But with very little response to his questions.’¹¹⁰

A public lecture on Art and the New Town delivered by Roman at the Arnolfini gallery in Bristol on the evening of 28 April 2009 omitted discussion of my work altogether. On the other hand, this thesis and a more recent mixed-media work I’ve exhibited called *The Unravelling (Harlow Renaissance)* (2008–11) have constituted my own competing re-narrations of events. The latter features a typed re-narration of what happened at Harlow very similar to the one exhibited in the closed-down display, plus a photograph of a labelled audio cassette with the meeting details handwritten on it and its ‘innards’ ripped out.¹¹¹ By these means, and through discussions of *Reverse Consultation* in various talks and lectures I’ve delivered, and of course here in this thesis, the work has found publics and interlocutors well beyond Harlow’s redevelopment team.

‘There simply is no single way of representing the public...’
Nick Mahony, Janet Newman and Clive Barnett.¹¹²

Reverse Consultation (Old New Town) was an early project that turned out to be significant in the development of my understanding of what it might mean to work ‘in the midst of’ existing tensions and antagonisms. Although the physical objects and texts I distributed and presented in my exhibition have all been lost (stolen, in fact, for only one annotated copy of my essay was returned to me after the exhibition was shut down), the work couldn’t be physically suppressed. In retrospect, it was precisely as relationships began to unravel – and I was able to begin to feed off controversies – that I

110 Vasseur, *Let Us Now Pray*, 44.

111 This work also included a ‘bagged-up’ essay, using in a pink carrier bag from Superdrug in Harlow, located just opposite the former site of the ‘Temple of Utopias’...

112 Mahony et al., *Rethinking the Public*, 27



was forced to respond *further*, and the project started to gain in traction and intensity.

If this work had turned perversely on ‘consultation’, on engaging with the inefficiencies, messiness and volte-face-ing ruthlessness of specific individuals and agencies involved in the usually behind-the-scenes construction of one allegedly ‘public space’, another project I was beginning to develop concurrently in my home territory of South London was doing something similar.

As explained in my prologue, I’d become fascinated by the history and strange, fragmented spaces of Crystal Palace Park, in particular its diverse uses and social life. In my quest to understand some of this complexity – to get some provisional answers to some seemingly simple questions: who are the public here, and where can they be found? – I’d started to have conversations, chatting with local skateboarder and activist ‘Dylan’, for example, who had recounted some personal stories about the park and introduced me to a local historian. I spoke to staff at the Crystal Palace Sports Centre and chatted to a devotee of guru Amma to try to find out why her group had chosen to use the Sports Hall for their annual darshan ceremony for several years in a row. All of this led me to a conclusion shared by many contemporary commentators on public space: that it seems more appropriate to speak of multiple publics than of a single public or ‘community’. It confirmed yet again that any idea of a singular or unified public space isn’t really possible.

With this in mind, I was fascinated to discover, in the spring of 2008, that just such a singular public space – an assembly of the park’s publics – was in the offing: a series of public-dialogue meetings were being held as part of an elaborate public-consultation exercise with the aim of seeking locals’ views on the new master plan for Crystal Palace Park being proposed by the London Development Agency. To my mind, the very idea that any such meeting could represent ‘the public’ for this large urban space seemed absurdly ambitious. How could such extraordinary diversity possibly find representation here? Nevertheless, the LDA and its specially commissioned public consultation team clearly hoped that individuals and groups would come together to rationally discuss plans to rescue the park from neglect. As a local concerned to understand the implications of these proposals, I went along to several meetings.



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uplifting thousands of people day after
unconditional, regardless of belief, or
hear her ⁸⁹ speak, hear her unique devo
presence

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Whereas nicely designed pamphlets and posters and other forms of marketing promoting the park's redesign had suddenly become widespread (the park had acquired its own website and logo; an 'information bus' was roaming the area; and an exhibition in a tent in the park had featured contrasting design ideas), the public-dialogue meetings were held in an unlikely venue: a nearby Salvation Army Hall. Proceedings would unfold amid crucifixes, felt banners and collages made by children on the first floor of a red-brick building, directly above a Blockbuster video shop.

The meetings were quite fascinating and extremely heated. The context for this 'assembling' was one of dissensus.¹¹³ The LDA's proposal was highly controversial; individuals and groups entered the fray with extraordinary adversarial zeal. Claims and counterclaims were noisy and rife. The meetings were chaired with varying degrees of success by a contracted conflict-resolution mediator named Nigel Westaway.¹¹⁴

An added complication was the fact that just a decade earlier the same park had been the site of significant protests against *another* development plan, one that had aimed to build a cinema complex on the famous 'top site' of the park where the Crystal Palace had once stood. At that point, several local groups had joined environmental protesters from across the country and a number of different heritage organisations in a series of actions, occupations and legal battles in a campaign that successfully overthrew the plan, which was backed by Conservative-controlled Bromley Council.¹¹⁵ A considerable number of local individuals and groups involved in the earlier protests were now gathered once again, but in very different circumstances. The political landscape had changed, creating a new and complicated picture.

Particularly exotic to me were the elaborate techniques employed by the organisers of the meetings in their attempts to corral us, 'the public', into effective forms of participation. For Nigel Westaway and his team it seemed

113 Spaces of political assembly were Bruno Latour's topic in an essay for the catalogue of a 2005 exhibition he co-curated with Peter Weibel called *Making Things Public*. He writes at one point, 'We don't assemble because we agree, look alike, feel good, are socially compatible or wish to fuse together but because we are brought by divisive matters... in order to come to some sort of provisional makeshift (dis)agreement.' Latour & Weibel, *Making Things Public*, 23.

114 The meetings in which I participated were attended by around seventy local residents. Nigel Westaway and Associates worked with The Environment Council to facilitate and deliver the consultation on the LDA's behalf.

115 See Ruby Toogood, 'Crystal Palace Park – WeWon!' at <http://www.urban75.org/news/001.html>, accessed 20 August 2014.

clarity ruled. Relevant ‘publics’ could apparently be identified and mapped by being broken down into different types: for instance, those of different ages and mobilities or those with interests in particular areas (e.g., ‘sport’, ‘nature’, ‘heritage’) would need to be *seen to be* represented. Key figures in local societies had evidently been contacted, their groups then becoming ‘stakeholders’ in the consultation process. Thanks to their websites and published newsletters, these groups’ priorities and agendas could, of course, be studied, their responses to proposals perhaps even second-guessed.

As meeting participants, we all signed in on arrival, and were asked to state in writing the name of the specific organisation to which we belonged. This clearly presupposed that each attendee would have a clear affiliation with a single group. I didn’t. Over a Welcome Coffee, badge-wearing organisers pressed Post-it notes into biscuit-crumbed hands, urging swift and decisive written responses to complex issues (‘housing’, ‘governance’ and so on), which would be appended to large sheets of paper stuck up with Blu-Tack. Other non-verbal methods by which opinions were courted included ‘dot exercises’, which involved individuals placing brightly coloured stickers on paper wall charts. The positioning of one’s sticker in a particular box would again depend on one’s unequivocal response to certain generic statements about the park: whether one ‘agrees’, ‘strongly agrees’, ‘strongly disagrees’ and so on.

More wall charts, inscribed with topic headings such as ‘governance’ or ‘trees’ and accompanied by Post-It notes and marker pens, lined the meeting spaces, again offering a chance for individuals to add their own comments. These charts were constantly evolving, and it was not difficult to anticipate how future analysis and subtle editing would efficiently extract data and content from these hastily scrawled and chaotic ‘dialogical’ spaces.

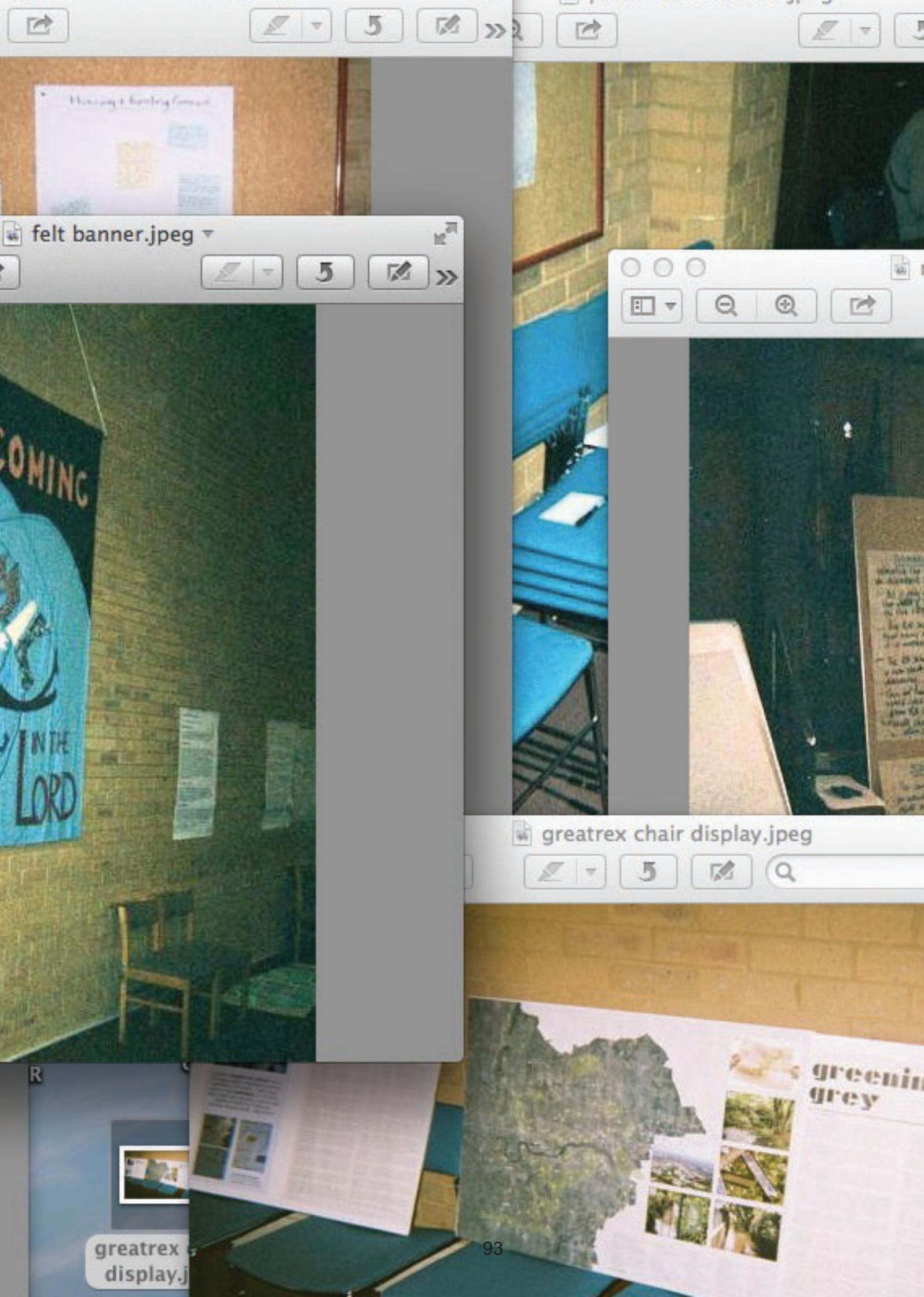
The material culture of the space was, then, compelling – large sheets of paper, masking tape and stationery of all kinds circulated, in a strange choreography, among coffee cups and doilies, along with the rearranged furniture, a data projector and screen, various files, documents and handouts. These kinds of details interested me in particular: the lively relationships between people, things (such as stationery) and the spaces used for the meetings (with the charts and religious banners, objects left and propped on chairs, lining the room). In the main hall were more examples of ‘mediating’ materials and devices used by consultation organisers – an

imposing line of flip charts dominated the stage. Facilitator Nigel kicked off each meeting by explaining certain ‘ground rules’, including the fact that ‘live’ minutes would be recorded by hand by one of his colleagues, at the front of the room.

Noting all this detail – the *material* constitution of the ‘public’ and of ‘public opinion’, the sheer *labour* involved – was one thing. Witnessing the unpredictability of us ‘actual’ publics was quite another. For despite the organisers’ striving for clarity of communication, consistency of behavior and rational participation, the reality of the meetings was extremely messy. It rapidly became clear that individuals had multiple allegiances and shifting and/or contradictory views. Individuals’ and groups’ antagonistic interrelationships – often based on past and present allegiances – had a dramatic impact on the direction and tone of debate. There were regular challenges to the authority of group leaders from their own members. Often, breakdowns in the meetings’ ground rules brought the proceedings to a complete halt.

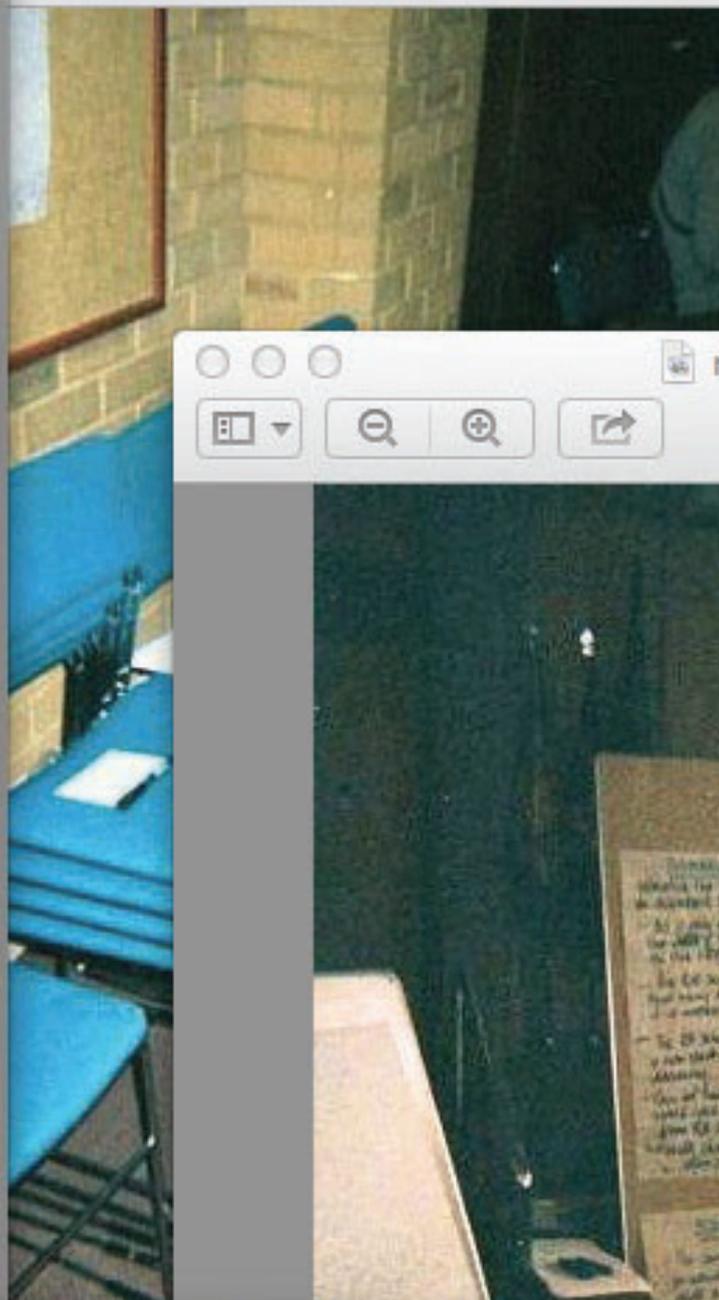
Anomalies such as personal leaflets distributed by individuals in the coffee area abounded. An elderly gentleman was given a special dispensation to announce an upcoming concert of music by George Frideric Handel in the main meeting space. Another gentleman, John Greatrex of the Joseph Paxton Society, propped several homemade notice boards against chair backs along the edge of the coffee room, publicising his personal (and passionate) campaign to ‘green the city’. A very complicated picture that far exceeded the organisers’ categories was immediately apparent. Especially fraught were the regular, strongly worded criticisms of the way in which the meetings were being constituted, managed and recorded. Frustrations with, and anxieties about, the ineffective nature of the meetings were regularly voiced. Several attendees bemoaned the failure of the meeting to properly represent the diversity of people who use the park. Many mocked the Post-It note and sticker exercises. Some annotated others’ notes with abrasive comments. Others ignored the exercises altogether.

So despite very substantial investment and elaborate efforts to engage all who were present in constructive discussion, there was a startling mismatch between the ways in which the organisers conceived of, corralled and dealt with ‘the public’ and the actual publics – which were simply too unwieldy, complicated and diverse to be defined, involved and managed effectively.



Housing & Building Council

felt banner.jpeg

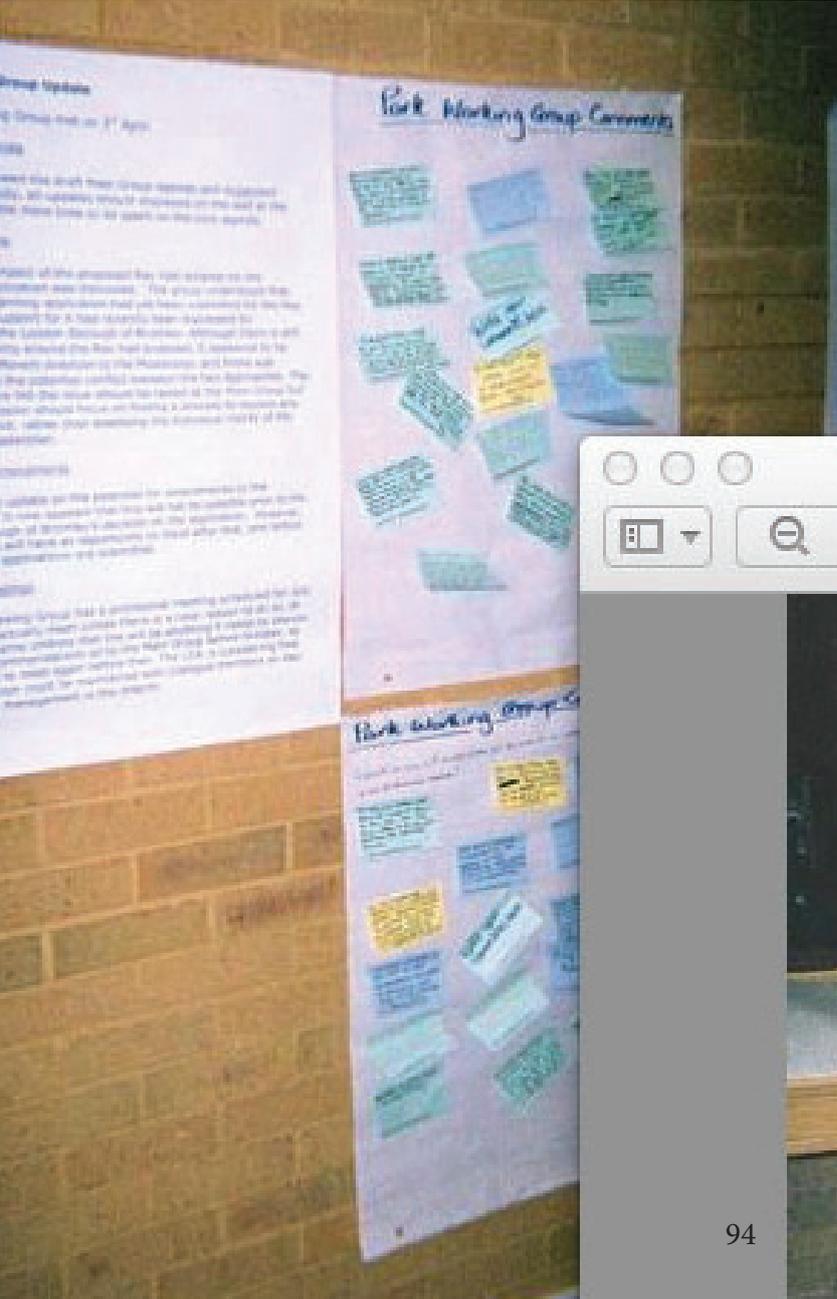
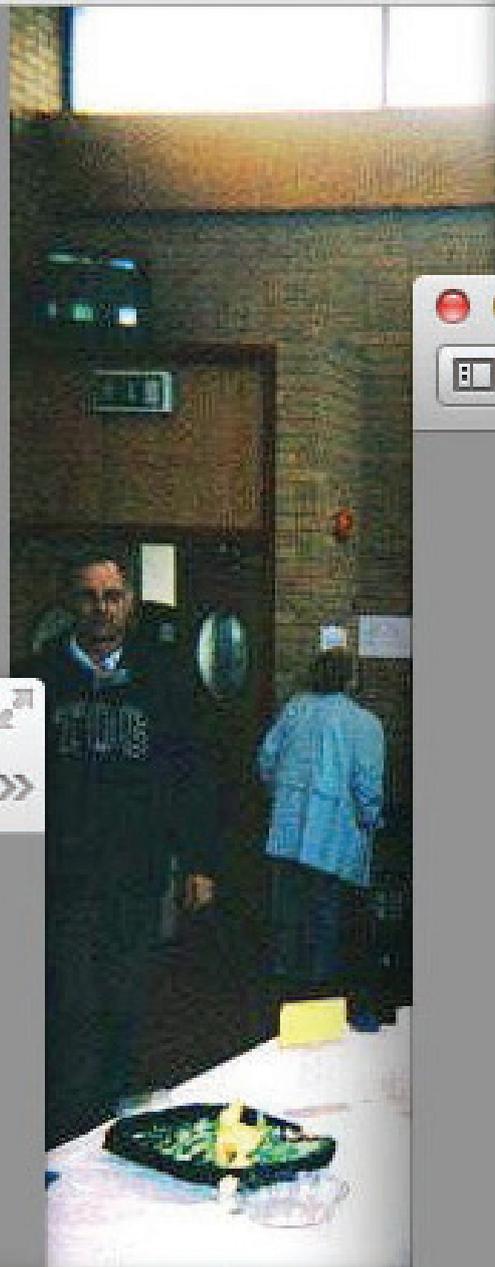


greatrex chair display.jpeg



greenin grey

greatrex display.j



All of these elaborate attempts to call a ‘public’ into being – the expectations of straightforward affiliation (pigeonholing) and the efforts to streamline and control proceedings – contrasted profoundly with the struggles of *us*, a *wide range of* individuals, publics, groups, to use this inadequate and unstable framework as a site within which to assert some remnant of a right to the city.¹¹⁶

To follow Latour and ‘non-representational’ geographers in trying to ‘trace’ events as they unfold and to do so without moralising¹¹⁷, one could note here: different groups working hard to perform their roles; a compelling mixture of unpredictability and system or routine; diverse modes of participation and attention; the constant opening up and negotiation of fault lines; the significant presence of ‘mediators’; instabilities and insecurities in groups; the active role of objects in proceedings, plus a constant awareness of the structural limitations of the assembly – for example, the existence of different meetings and of other (absent) parties. A notable example of the latter was local developer Ray Hall, who was at the same time trying to persuade Bromley Council to give backing to his *own* plan to build a half-size replica of Paxton’s Crystal Palace – which would house a hotel – on the top site of Crystal Palace Park.

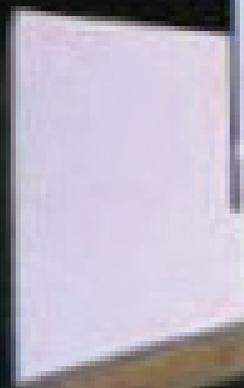
Some of what I witnessed in these meetings directly inspired my annotation proposal for Harlow. From here, I borrowed the notion of inviting members’ comments using analogue means (pens and paperwork) and, more specifically, of asking a specially convened group of individuals to respond in writing to a series of statements about the nature and value to them *personally* of a specific ‘public’ space. I had been shocked by the crudity of The Environment Agency’s efforts and its inability to make much progress, even though these were apparently leaders in the field. As one meeting moved to the next, events around the master plan seemed to be proceeding with little regard for the discussions I was part of. On one occasion, Nigel Westaway even opened a meeting by admitting that he’d broken one of his own key rules of engagement since we’d last seen him. Between meetings, he had had a private meeting with Ray Hall - the man with a private, competing plan for the park - without consulting the delegates. Even in the context of widespread cynicism regarding the ‘dialogue’ process, this confession from Nigel angered and upset many. But he seemed unmoved,

116 For recent, wide-ranging thinking and research on the constitution and understanding of publics see: Mahoney, Newman & Barnett, *Rethinking the Public*.

117 Laurier, ‘Doing Office Work on the Motorway’, 272

THE
SALVATION
ARMY

UNDER DORWOOD



WEIGHT
HOME

STAY
HOME



probably all too conscious that arguments around how to manage an effective consultation have a history as long and complicated as the history of consultation itself.

'In the schemes of neo-liberal and neo-conservative forces... politics is reduced to a technical-pragmatic exercise in implementing and managing developments that are regarded as inevitable, performed by an elite coalition of diverse experts.... If a space for urban politics is allowed at all, it is often a 'pseudo-space', in which oppositional forces are carefully managed by the status quo and stripped of any subversive sting.'
BAVO¹¹⁸

Doubts about the potential of 'democratic' spaces of public discussion in general have been voiced across a variety of disciplines for some time. As we've seen, for example, in the 1990s art historian Rosalyn Deutsche was suggesting that conflict lies at the heart of any concept of democratic public space. Planners have debated and experimented with different approaches to urban 'publics' for several decades. For instance, an article penned in 1969 by Sherry Arnstein, 'A Ladder of Citizen Participation', identifies and exposes a number of possible positions; these range from 'citizen power' all the way down to 'manipulation' via 'tokenism'.¹¹⁹ Aspect of planner and planning theorist Leonie Sandercock's critique of her own discipline is also of some relevance here.

Sandercock points to the limitations of planners' reliance on 'structured participatory situations' and proposes a broadening of the number of ways in which publics might be attended to in planning and development situations. She suggests listening to individuals' 'storytelling', for example - a strategy that has certain parallels with my own improvised (non-instrumental) methods.¹²⁰ In fact, many planners now point to the need for a *range* of methods to be used in any one situation. For instance some have undertaken 'advocacy' on behalf of particular groups; others have encouraged 'community empowerment'.¹²¹

My own practice has led me to encounters and engagements with people

118 BAVO, *Urban Politics Now*, 7-8.

119 Arnstein, "A Ladder of Citizen Participation".

120 Sandercock, *Cosmopolis II*, 67, 81.

121 See, for example, discussion in Jean Hillier "Puppets of Populism?"

and things in 'discursive' spaces connected with decision-making about physical spaces. Other artists have recently experimented with possibilities, practices and structures of 'consultation'. Hans Haacke's forms of consultation, for example – his 'invitations' to 'publics' and/or groups to respond in preordained ways to an unexpected brief – seem to me to offer a provocative mimicry of the kinds of consultation exercises discussed earlier here. Haacke's famous 1970 work *MoMA Poll*, for instance, challenged visitors to a museum exhibition by asking them the 'wrong' kind of question, a question about their political allegiances in the context of the war in Vietnam. He invited exhibition-goers to take a slip of paper corresponding to their profile and place it in the 'ballot box' of their choice.

A more recent work project by Haacke, *Der Bevölkerung* (2000), is however particularly apposite here, since it's a work in which questions of participation, public representation and public space are explored in critical relation to one another. This major commission to mark the reopening of the Reichstag building in Berlin saw the artist turning on elected decision-makers – representatives of the German 'public' – and inviting/challenging every Parliamentary Deputy to bring 50kg of earth from their constituency and add it to a new work of art located in the middle of a courtyard at the very heart of the building. The earth – and, subsequently, various weeds that would grow from seeds embedded in it – would surround a monumental neon inscription reading 'The Population' (a term chosen in critical counterpoint to another, 'To the People', famously emblazoned on the front of the parliament building). The point that no one German 'people' ('Volk') straightforwardly exists was made both in Haacke's choice of term and in the fraught realisation of his project. Many elected politicians declined to participate, their refusal becoming part of the work. The (ongoing) unfolding of this complex project continues to signal the extreme difficulty of consensus.¹²²

I went on to make two insertions in and around the meetings at Crystal Palace. The first of these was an experiment in one of the public-dialogue meetings discussed above. I was keen to explore what it might mean to slip yet more paperwork into this already crowded arena.

Intrigued by organisers' attempts to control and accommodate anomalies, I

¹²² See the project's website, including live webcam: <http://www.derbevoelkerung.de>, accessed 3 September 2014. See also the excellent discussion of this work: Mouffe Deutsche, Branden & Keenan, "Every form of art has a political dimension".

followed the lead of the gentleman who'd advertised his Handel concert (he was allowed to leave his flyers on a table in the coffee room). I approached Nigel Westaway for permission to distribute some 'prints exploring the history of the park' during a coffee break. I was permitted to do so, in the space adjacent to the main meeting space, as 'a local artist'. My two prints were in fact colour photocopies that were made available for free in the space. One featured a transcription of dialogue from a 1998 Ali G sketch in which the TV character had lampooned eco-protesters and police in and around Crystal Palace Park a decade earlier.¹²³ The margin of the 'print' featured a scan of a familiar oak-leak motif: the one featured on the LDA's marketing material. A second poster featured a photograph of the then-closed National Sports Centre, located in the park, plus the words 'Amma' and 'asbestos' – the latter a reference to the material recently found in the sports centre's roofing.

This distribution of paperwork again mimicked some of the forms of representation and distribution of the LDA and the Environment Agency. The prints highlighted specific phenomena of a kind that pass beneath the radar of master planners and dialogue-meeting organisers alike. The montaged selection suggested a sense of randomness characteristic both of the daily life of the park and of these meetings themselves. All of this lent the experiment a touch of absurdist humour - the 'significant' collided with the 'incidental'. Adopting a montage logic also meant that my position wasn't clear. Bullet points lent one poster a deadpan quality.

The decision to incorporate a transcription of an Ali G sketch found on YouTube had particular implications: my use of this source signalled my own distance from the protests of a decade earlier (I hadn't been involved in those events). The insertion of Ali G's anarchic sketch was also read by some as provocative, since several individuals present at the meeting had been involved in the protests as environmentalists targeted by the comedian. The text was also thoroughly irreverent; above all, it triggered nervous laughter and questions. Very few people present had heard of Amma, for example, or connected this word with annual gatherings in the Sports Centre. This lack of recognition seemed important, since it suggested the limitations of any one individual's knowledge of their area. (Most present were, however, aware that asbestos had been found in the National Sports

¹²³ This Ali G sketch is currently available to view at: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NJeqpZpHUI>, accessed 1 September 2014.



everybody is banging on about the environment thing what is they
banging on about I dont know that is why I is come down to the tree
protesting site to solve the problem of the environment and maybe
to mash up some police wicked we are here at the HQ of the tree
people gonna go in help them out all them people out there what is
they actually doing why is they here because there's so little from
what I can gather theres so little space left in London and they want
to put a multi storey cinema complex and a rooftop car park for one
thousand cars is it gonna be one of them new cinemas with all the
air conditioning and oh I dont know it would be a modern structure
of some sort but do we but they is wicked no could they build this
one and knock down the crap ones and then build trees there we is
now gonna meet the main copper the guy whos sorting it all out if it
comes to a ruck who do you thinks gonna win it isnt going to come
to a ruck but if it does no its not going to come to a ruck this is
being dealt with as peacefully as possible is it possible for us to get
in not at this stage because its still dangerous is it cos I is black not
at all do you think its time for the protesters to start lookin after
themselves and protecting themselves well violence doesnt solve
anything does it oh I dont know it does it does and it doesnt yeah
but it mainly does not really come on you cant win with violence can
you oh you can in what situation in a violent one who are the pixie
people are you one of the fairy folks who are the pixie people are
you one of the fairy folks we like this planet do you want to see it go
up in smoke alright me has heard both sides of the argument me
dont understand either of them but me is well up for a ruck anyway
you can take our trees but you cant take our freedom you can take
our trees but you cant take our freedom freedom freedom freedom
freedom mes having a little go is it cos I is black

CRYSTAL PALACE PARK PAST PRESENT FUTURE

Crystal Palace Dialogue Masterplan Questionnaire Summary

March 2008

**NIGEL WESTAWAY
& Associates**

environmental facilitation
and conflict resolution

The Environment Council

Environment Council

Crystal Palace Park Dialogue Masterplan Questionnaire, March 2008

of those attending

logue

ees

| | Organisation |
|------------------|---|
| Cleery | |
| King | |
| Lown | |
| Phillips | |
| Becker | |
| Williams | |
| David Francis | All and none |
| Ren Moran | Bromley Green Party |
| Steve Dowbiggin | Capel Manor College |
| Samantha Hin | Capel Manor College |
| Mike Ricketts | (Community) |
| Pat Palmer | CPCDT |
| Vivien Day | Crystal Palace Campaign |
| Ray Sacks | Crystal Palace Campaign |
| John Bellerby | Crystal Palace Community Association |
| Suzanne Elkin | Crystal Palace Community Association/CPAG |
| Gill Hall | Crystal Palace Community Association |
| John Payne | Crystal Palace Community Association |
| Don Bianco | Crystal Palace Foundation |
| Edith R Watt | East Dulwich Society |
| Craig Richardson | Friends of Crystal Palace Park |
| Theresa Connolly | Friends of the Earth Southwark |
| | Friends of the Earth Southwark |
| | Friends of the Earth Southwark |

Centre, which led to its closure for several months.)

This project, made in an intense dialogical context, was a new departure for me at the time. Like *Huis Clos Planningline* and *Reverse Consultation*, it involved printed text and its distribution. Of course, the work engaged with the site and process of debate about one public space, highlighting specificity, complexity and difference. Intentionally low-key, its impact was quite limited. If this mini project seemed fragmentary, even inconsequential, perhaps this was appropriate in a context where courted relationships weren't entirely effective either.

Not long after this, the public-dialogue meetings were suddenly abandoned when central government stepped in and launched a public inquiry into the Crystal Palace Park redevelopment. This had been triggered by Bromley Council's endorsement of the new LDA development, complete with its proposed sale of public parkland. A public inquiry was necessary because the government realised that the proposal would violate existing legislation (the park enjoys Metropolitan Open Land status, for example). This decision to approve the sale of public parkland could set a precedent amongst 'cash-strapped' councils nationally. I decided to make a work to mark the opening of this important public inquiry and duly contacted the Bristol-based Planning Inspectorate for England, the organisation in charge of the proceedings. In a phone call, I explained that that I was keen to contribute to the inquiry, but that rather than appearing in person to speak or submitting written words in a letter, I'd like to submit an object. I was told by a puzzled official that there was no precedent for this idea, and that it would certainly not be allowed. I was also informed: 'If you're going to contribute to this discussion, you have to be either for or against this redevelopment. There is no grey area.' Again, the terms of participation seemed extraordinarily crude.

On the first morning of the inquiry, a friend and I positioned ourselves on the pavement outside the Salvation Army Hall in which proceedings were once again to take place and welcomed anyone arriving by offering them a hand-stencilled cushion to take into the meeting. The inquiry was due to last seven weeks, so I figured the one thing people might appreciate on attending this meeting would be to have something comfortable to sit on. The cushions were spray-painted with different images: some with a silhouette view of some tree houses built in the park by eco-warriors who'd contested the multiplex development plan a decade earlier. Others showed an iconic local

APP/G5180/N/09/2098454, APP/G5180/N/09/2100067 a

TOWN AND COUNTRY PLANNING (INQUIRIES

RULES 2000

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN

An Inspector, instructed by the Secret

Will attend at

Salvation Army Hall, Westow Street, I

On

7 July 2009, at 10.00

To hold a local inquiry into

(A) An application for planning permission by London Devel
First Secretary of State under section 77 of the 1990 Act for
for landscaping and improvement of park comprising demoli
buildings and structures including removal of existing hard s
including of part of caravan site to public open space and m
erection of new buildings and structures for various uses inc
maintenance facilities/community facility/information kiosk/gr
kiosks/cafes/toilets/classroom/children's nursery/treetop wal
residential dwellings, erection of a new regional sports centr
alterations to ground¹⁰⁴ levels with new pedestrian paths, vehic
park/highways works/water feet

building, an octagonal cedar accommodation block, located next to the Sports Centre in the middle of the park, that was set to be destroyed if the plan went ahead. Still others featured an image of a remarkable architect-designed structure that had been planned for the top site of the park a few years earlier but had now been completely forgotten despite having caused considerable excitement nationally.¹²⁴ In other words: a past moment of anti-development protest, an abandoned architectural project plus a residue of a stylish 1960s vision of public provision now destined for the wrecking ball.

On the whole, my cushions went down very well – within half an hour, all thirty five of them had been taken. By lunchtime on day one, they were scattered across the meeting room. By the end of the day, people were approaching meeting organisers to ask where they might store them overnight. One group took to them particularly enthusiastically: entirely coincidentally, the Crystal Palace Community Association, the main opponents of the master plan, had also arranged to gather on the pavement outside the meeting early on the first morning of the inquiry. They arrived with placards soon after we did, and told us that they'd be posing for local press photographers in a few minutes' time. They keenly adopted cushions and brandished them defiantly during the photo shoot.

To an extent, then, CPCA members 'appropriated' this project. This was puzzling, since two of the three images on the cushions bore no relation to their cause. They did seem particularly keen on the tree house stencils, but generally appeared to feel that because I was there *alongside* them, in front of the inquiry building, and was handing things out, my project *must* be a kind of protest too, and I must be a kindred spirit. In any case, in photographing their protest and publishing the images in newspapers and online, South London's press also 'documented' my work, making it (more) public, distributing it widely and sharing it with different constituencies. Two newspaper reporters also asked me what we were up to and noted down my improvised responses. One wrote a short piece about my work, titling it 'Cushion Protest'. She also emailed me a few days later to apologise for the headline, saying that she did understand that my work wasn't *really* a protest but that she'd liked the phrase so much that she couldn't resist using it.

This journalist was right about my work, though: although I'd spray-painted

¹²⁴ See the architects' webpage that still celebrates this doomed proposal: <http://www.wilkinsoneyre.com/projects/new-crystal-palace.aspx?category=cultural>, accessed 1 September 2014.



Discover
Green
Crystal Palace





NO
HOUSING
ON
CRYSTAL
PALACE
PARK

NO
HOUSING
ON
CRYSTAL
PALACE
PARK

CRYSTAL
PALACE

NO TO
housing on
Crystal Palace Park



For sale
A3 Lease - All Enquiries
020 7280 4700
44
Low street
020 8771 5194









and stencilled fabric for this unannounced street intervention, I didn't wield a placard or a cushion myself. I wasn't part of the CPCA's protest or aligned with their legal action. Although I was concerned about the future of this park, I was more interested in what this inquiry stood for more widely. More specifically, my work *toyed with parameters determining participation* in the inquiry. Cushions with obtuse and/or unwelcome images on them crossed physical and legal boundaries. Carrying these soft furnishings from the pavement into the hallway and up the stairs and into the Salvation Army Hall would contravene the stipulation I'd learnt of. Any subversion here lay in the defiance of clear allegiance and in a tactically scrambled invitation to *all to participate* in something unfamiliar whose function wasn't clear.¹²⁵

For if this was an 'intervention', it wasn't me performing the intervention: with my/their re-coded objects – held, posed with, carried, sat on – *anyone* taking a cushion would 'flood' the meeting space with still more extraneous objects and mixed messages. The logic was perhaps close to that of the Trojan Horse. But without the horse, or any concealment in fact. No one questioned the cushions' arrival. There'd be no pillow fight here. Soon enough, they were all being sat on anyway, the work effectively invisible, until the first coffee break.

So: a young government barrister took one and, in so doing, inadvertently broke his own meeting's rules. More barristers strode past me confidently, smiling; two ladies tried to pay me for their lovely cushions. The CPCA chairman, perhaps nostalgic for an earlier moment of clarity and solidarity, grabbed extra tree house cushions for his legal team. In this odd collision of 'the street', the administrative and the domestic, once again *objects* and their mobilities around a 'public' arena would transgress, and draw attention to, boundaries that weren't otherwise evident.

Harold Garfinkel might call this a 'breaching experiment'.¹²⁶ As at Harlow, there was a confusion of site: the inquiry was one *allegedly* public space, an inadequate forum for debate and decision-making concerning the destiny of

125 In *The Gift*, a book first published in 1924, French anthropologist Marcel Mauss famously argued that accepting a gift locks the recipient into some kind of reciprocal bond or obligation. This is interesting in relation to this work, where, as in Frome, participants more or less consciously colluded with me in performing an interruptive artistic action.

126 The sociologist's fascinating, intentionally provocative breaching experiments - experimental failures to follow conventional behaviour carried out by his students in ordinary situations - are the subject of Garfinkel, 'Studies of the Routine Grounds of Everyday Activities'.

another: our local park. In contrast to Harlow and within certain parameters, anyone could witness and join in these proceedings. *Cushion Distribution (Public Inquiry)* capitalised on the gradual one-at-a-time appearance of these individuals, groups, officials – these putative ‘publics’. Whereas at Harlow my exhibition had been padlocked by a CEO, here the work would get to infiltrate this formal forum much more visibly, prompting new connections (generating its own momentary groupings, its impact enhanced by CPCA members and press photographers). In short, the work unfolded in more carnivalesque ways.

Both *Reverse Consultation* and *Cushion Distribution*, like *Huis Clos Planningline*, arose from attending carefully to the *performance* of codes, regulations, obligations and habits in specific situations. Discussions at Harlow and Crystal Palace concerned redevelopment processes. Both situations could therefore have led to artistic responses that (merely) reacted to ‘controversies’ surrounding the privatisation of these ‘public’ spaces (‘investor-led’ development at Harlow; the sale of public parkland in Crystal Palace). My detailed concern with the terms of consultation – with the *constitution* of ‘publics’, as well as of ‘public space’ – takes us a little *away* from such approaches to this territory. Similarly, my interest in the *material* constitution of such discursive spaces and bureaucratic processes – along with my mimicry of this in the use of parcelled-up essays, typed announcements, branded and distributed cushions and so on – may mess with some straightforward assumptions about ‘social’ practice in art.

While many artists have experimented with – and confused – different models of ‘participation’ in recent decades, some of them messing more or less productively, in the process, with ideas of group identity, ‘community’ and belonging,¹²⁷ my two projects connected a skewed kind of ‘participatory’ art with a detailed questioning of the terms and methods of public consultation and participation in planning.¹²⁸ The complicated, vexed, ‘political’ question of how we understand ‘public space’ has hovered throughout.

127 This has been rich territory in recent art. Jane Rendell wrote on Jeremy Deller’s work in her book *Art and Architecture* for example. Writings by Claire Bishop and Grant Kester have been significant here. Artists and curators - for example Suzanne Lacy and Nicholas Bourriaud respectively - have made key contributions. Interestingly, Bourriaud claims Felix Gonzales-Torres to be a particularly influential figure in terms of this kind of work.

128 See also the work of German artist Andreas Siekmann, especially his 1999 work *Square of Permanent Reorganisation*, documented and discussed in Butin, H. ed., *Andreas Siekmann*.

This embroilment has allowed an experimental engagement with the definition and constitution of 'publics' in the context of others' practical efforts to establish parameters around the future of two 'public' spaces. The projects connected with working sites and processes where 'publics' and public spaces were actively being constituted, while the symbolic challenges and ambiguities developed within these contexts served to actively question whether these forums really constituted 'public spaces', in Deutsche's terms, at all.

Chapter 4: The Vessel

‘A researcher is, by definition, someone who is looking for... something that withdraws from him and that he quests after.’

Georges Didi-Huberman.¹²⁹

The series of anecdotes and accompanying images that will form the first half of this chapter have had other lives as an artwork also called *The Vessel*. This work has had several different manifestations: as a performance with projected images, as a peripatetic performance inside a prison, and as a short film (attached) accompanied by a selection of curated artefacts in a solo gallery exhibition.

In the context of this chapter, the anecdotes that constitute *The Vessel* have been expanded and elaborated on; interpretive passages are woven through the text. Following this, the second half of the chapter will feature descriptions of *The Vessel's* various manifestations and reflect on the work further, citing other artistic inspirations, and exploring how I consider this, my most recent project, to have expanded my practice in new directions in recent years.

This chapter takes us back to Portland Harbour, to the prison ship seen from my brother's house, to that 'floating space' tied to the dockside, a public institution hidden beneath cliffs inside a private port.¹³⁰ You may remember that the fourth of my *Four Anecdotes* stemmed from my curiosity concerning a warehouse-like box that I'd seen in the distance. I'd wondered how the world's television cameras would deal with HMP Weare's grey presence during the upcoming 2012 Olympic sailing events, for which Portland would be the venue. This curiosity, piqued by my brother's stories of the prisoners' life on board, was followed by my request to the harbour authorities, and their refusal to give me permission to access the port to photograph the vessel.¹³¹

129 Quoted in Montmann, *Mapping a City*, 231

130 In his 1967 essay "Of Other Spaces", in which he characterized both prisons and ships as 'heterotopias', Michel Foucault wrote: 'The ship is a floating space, a placeless place...' Quoted in Votolato, *Ships*, 33.

131 My brother had worked on board as a Public Health Officer. The strategic location of Portland Port's jetty in a 'somewhat out-of-the-way' location is characteristic of most modern ports in the UK, according to Patrick Keiller, director of the film *Robinson in Space* (1997). P. Keiller, "Port Statistics", 450. Portland Port's website also explained: 'The Port also has its own police force, officially the country's smallest, with trained and appointed Special Constables who have full powers of arrest.' <http://www.portland-port.co.uk/leisure/notices>, accessed 12 August 2012.

Having learned that I wouldn't be allowed to photograph the former prison ship, I'd pondered how to approach it. The port's website featured a map that clarified the extent to which the waters around the port are restricted. This made an approach via water seem impossible.

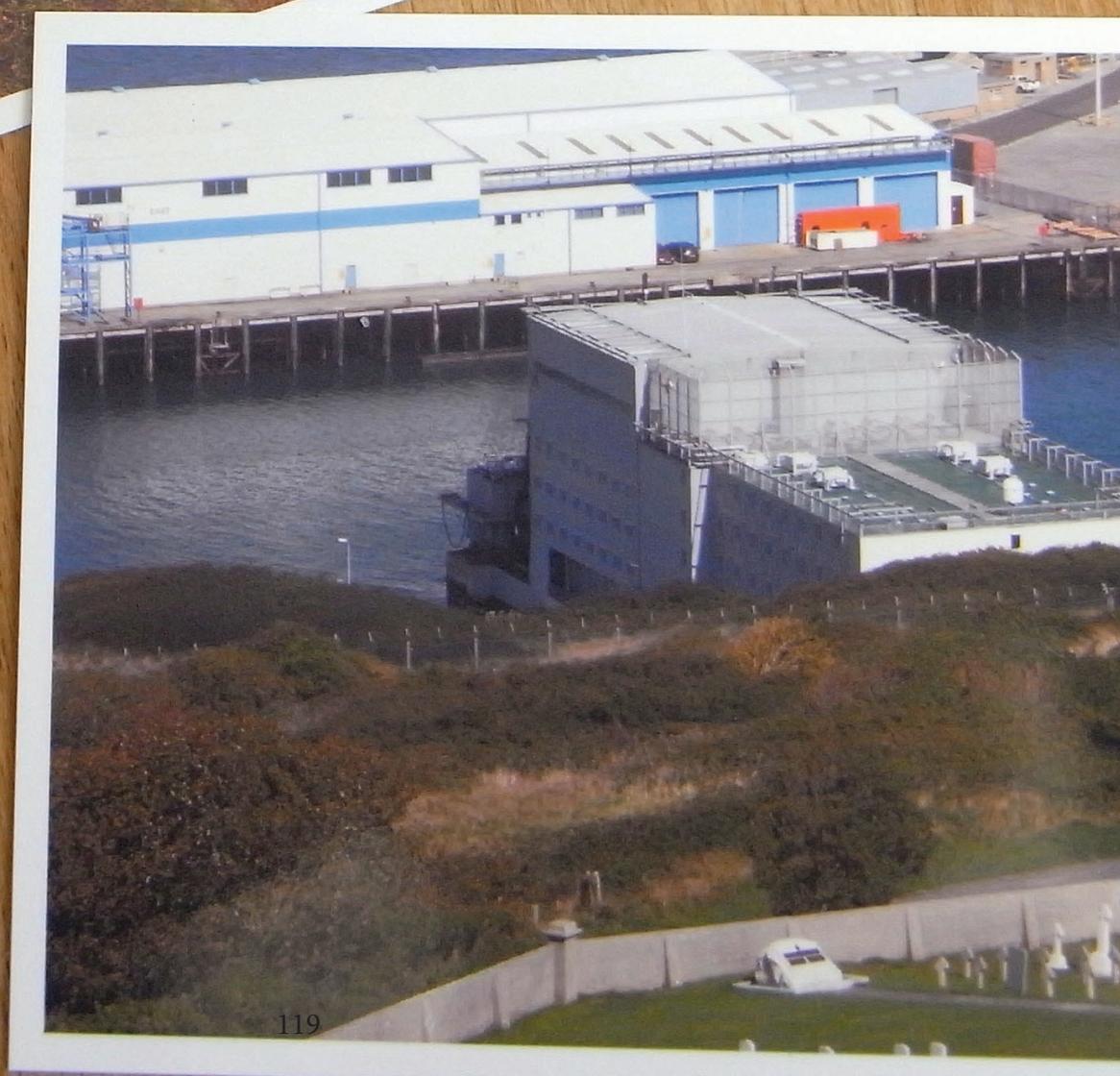
This area of Jurassic coast is renowned for its dramatic geological features and stone quarries. It's less well known for its historic connections to the military and for its prisons. Until recently, the port had been a large naval base – barrack blocks had been converted into luxury apartments in the run-up to the 2012 Olympics – and the Royal Navy remains a regular client of the port.¹³² In the nineteenth century, thousands of convicts had built Portland's huge breakwaters. In fact, my brother's 1980s red-brick semi from which I'd first seen the prison ship was built on the site of a former torpedo factory.

Standing on the cliffs above the vessel, I became more than aware of this penal-military matrix.¹³³ Looking down across a disheveled naval cemetery, camera in hand, managing only partial views of the vessel, I found myself immediately beneath the high walls and CCTV cameras of another, much larger prison: HMP The Verne. Once again, I started to worry about my safety. Were my attempts to photograph a former prison ship while standing in this location, outside a second prison, actually legal? This was a period of heightened security and anxiety in the UK's public spaces. The Olympic security machine hadn't moved into this area yet, but it soon would; the semi-aerial views afforded from these cliffs would prove advantageous for surveillance purposes in summer 2012.

My own quest for higher ground had unconsciously mimicked this kind of strategic logic. At the same time, once again, I'd meandered into a zone of uncertainty. Just then, though, I remembered that my Barclays Bank account featured a free legal-advice helpline that I'd never used before. So I telephoned them from the cliffside to find out how they might view what I was doing. Barclays lawyers called me back a few hours later to tell me that although photographing outside a British prison is technically not illegal, I would be well advised to contact the Verne prison authorities to explain my

132 See 'Ocean Views' website www.ocean-views.co.uk/, accessed 2 September 2014.

133 With this institution (built within a nineteenth-century citadel), a nearby Young Offender Institution and the prison ship all in close proximity to one another, it is tempting to characterize Portland in Foucault's terms as a 'carceral archipelago' (Murakami Wood, "Beyond the Panopticon?", 248).



activities and to ‘avoid any misunderstanding’...¹³⁴

I intended to persist when I learnt, from looking at *The Dorset Echo’s* website, that the former prison ship had disappeared. Clearly, this was a second major obstacle: a further and rather more decisive *withdrawal from view*. Once again, however, this apparent impasse would merely herald a shift in the direction of my enquiries. For precisely at the moment at which the vessel was being towed away from British waters, it had ironically become more visible to me than ever, via the practice of someone else – the photographer Geoff Moore – in an online platform, *The Dorset Echo’s* website. Although no longer positioned in the physical vicinity, the vessel now ‘appeared’ in still and moving images, bordered by advertisements in the margins of my screen. I rang Geoff to ask for his permission to show his film in the context of my own work. I also began to search online more widely.

I began to track the ship through different kinds of spaces, especially *hybrid* digital environments, developing a project that would unfold over a number of years.

A reproduction of the front page of *The Sun* featured a grainy photograph of HMP Weare. The headline teased the British government into the idea of buying back the vessel to solve yet another ‘crisis’ in prison overcrowding. Other news websites discussed the Weare as an object of local and national controversy. Many Portlanders had disputed its arrival in 1997 on the grounds that its presence would deter tourists; some had taken the fight to the local planning committee.

At the other end of the prison ship’s tenure – once it had been closed following the assessment that it was ‘unfit for purpose with no access to fresh air and insufficient space for exercise or education’ – there was much conjecture as to its future.¹³⁵ Would it be relocated to the Thames, perhaps?

134 This scenario on the cliff top bears comparison with some of the activities of a London-based group called I’m A Photographer Not A Terrorist. These are photographers who have set out to take photographs in ‘sensitive’ spaces, especially in the City of London, deliberately prompting and filming the intervention of various security agencies with the intention of questioning, with legal know-how and on-camera, one’s rights, in such spaces. Many of the resulting films are currently available to view online. These individuals also explore the law in process, in specific spaces, via practice. By comparison, however, my own activities are neither premeditated nor ‘informed’, nor are they didactic. They’re not pre-planned to draw attention to the policing of urban space or to highlight the prohibitions on lens-based practices, for example.

135 *The Independent*, 1 Dec 2006.

THE **SUN** 30p
Friday, December 17, 2004 30p www.the-sun.co.uk



SHIP OF FOOLS

YOU SEE A...



Scuba-diving enthusiasts hoped that it might be sunk to join the many other wrecks in Portland Harbour and thus become part of this accidental underwater museum.¹³⁶

The vessel had been photographed from above and could be zoomed in on, using Google Earth. The prison's name still hovered over a pixelated grey rectangle surrounded by deep green, its former address and postcode listed alongside. All of this was seemingly 'live', even though – as I knew – the vessel had already left.

The website of the new owners, Sea Trucks Group – a company based in Holland and operating in several parts of the world – was also something of a revelation. Images of a wide range of support and accommodation vessels with platforms, cranes, and diverse equipment scrolled down the screen before me. The smiling faces of company employees wearing bright-orange boiler suits shone out from my screen, and, sure enough, there was a photograph of their new accommodation barge, Jascon 27, taken at night in Portland, its cabin lights ablaze and reflected in the sea. Listed beneath were the vessel's vital statistics. For me, the allure of these figures was tainted by an awareness that whereas, as a prison ship it had housed 450 men, now, converted into accommodation for oil workers, the vessel provided accommodation for more than 500.

I was beginning to discover that this metal box had multiple kinds of presence in a variety of locations. Earlier kinds of encounter were being augmented by an altogether different kind of activity: attempting to track a *moveable* space in and through new, varied spaces – especially, but not exclusively, online.

One turquoise-tinted photograph of the prison ship originally posted on Flickr had subsequently been downloaded, customised and reposted with the words 'Soldados 1982' imposed across it. Clicking on it took me to the blog of a lively group of Argentinean veterans of the 1982 Falklands conflict, who were exchanging their memories of the war and discussing associated stories online. One of them had picked up on the unlikely fact that this former British prison ship now on its way to West Africa had once spent time in the Falklands, serving as troop accommodation for the British Army just after

136 Yorkshire Divers' Dive Forum: 'Sinking HMP Weare?', <http://www.yorkshire-divers.com/forums/archive/index.php/t-17408.html>, accessed 1 September 2014.

the end of the confrontation. Searching for more details, I put in a request to join a Facebook group, Falklands 1983. And before I knew it, I was looking at faded snapshots of the vessel moored at the end of a jetty leading from a newly constructed road near Port Stanley.

Several former Royal Engineers who had lived on board between long hard stints of clearing minefields and building a military airport happily shared their memories with me. Reports ranged from accounts of cramped, odorous conditions and nausea to affectionate reminiscences of individual characters and alcohol-fuelled pranks, many of them featuring munitions and other military equipment. Some responded to my questions in great detail, explaining that more than 1,000 soldiers had lived on board, and that an onboard gym had hosted occasional entertainment evenings featuring the likes of Jim Davidson.

Photographs allowed glimpses of four-berth cabins adorned with pictures of families and loved ones, topless tabloid beauties and Christmas decorations. One former sapper, Julian Beirne, emailed me long sections of his self-published memoirs recounting the ups and downs of his South Atlantic tour.

Through this array of material, I began to be able to construct an understanding of the life of the vessel long before it was ever brought to the UK. But there were complications and inconsistencies. At least three accommodation barges were used in the Falklands during the period concerned, so I spent much time trying to clarify, for myself and others, precisely which one I was tracking. The vessel's name was changed during these years, from the *Safe Esperia* to the *Bibby Resolution*. The troops also had their own ironic nickname for it: 'Holdfast Hotel'.

One conundrum in particular stood out: I'd heard from one source that there had been a fully enclosed heated swimming pool on board, but most former servicemen I spoke to expressed serious doubts about its existence. A few individuals described it in detail, however: the warm, smelly water, thick with chlorine. This led some former 'squaddies' to suspect that knowledge of the pool had been kept from them at the time and that it had probably been reserved for officers.

I subsequently learnt that this swimming pool had in fact been used by groups of local schoolchildren who'd been invited on board to learn to swim.



back to Picasa Web Albums.

Sign in



Floating Hotel (Esperia)



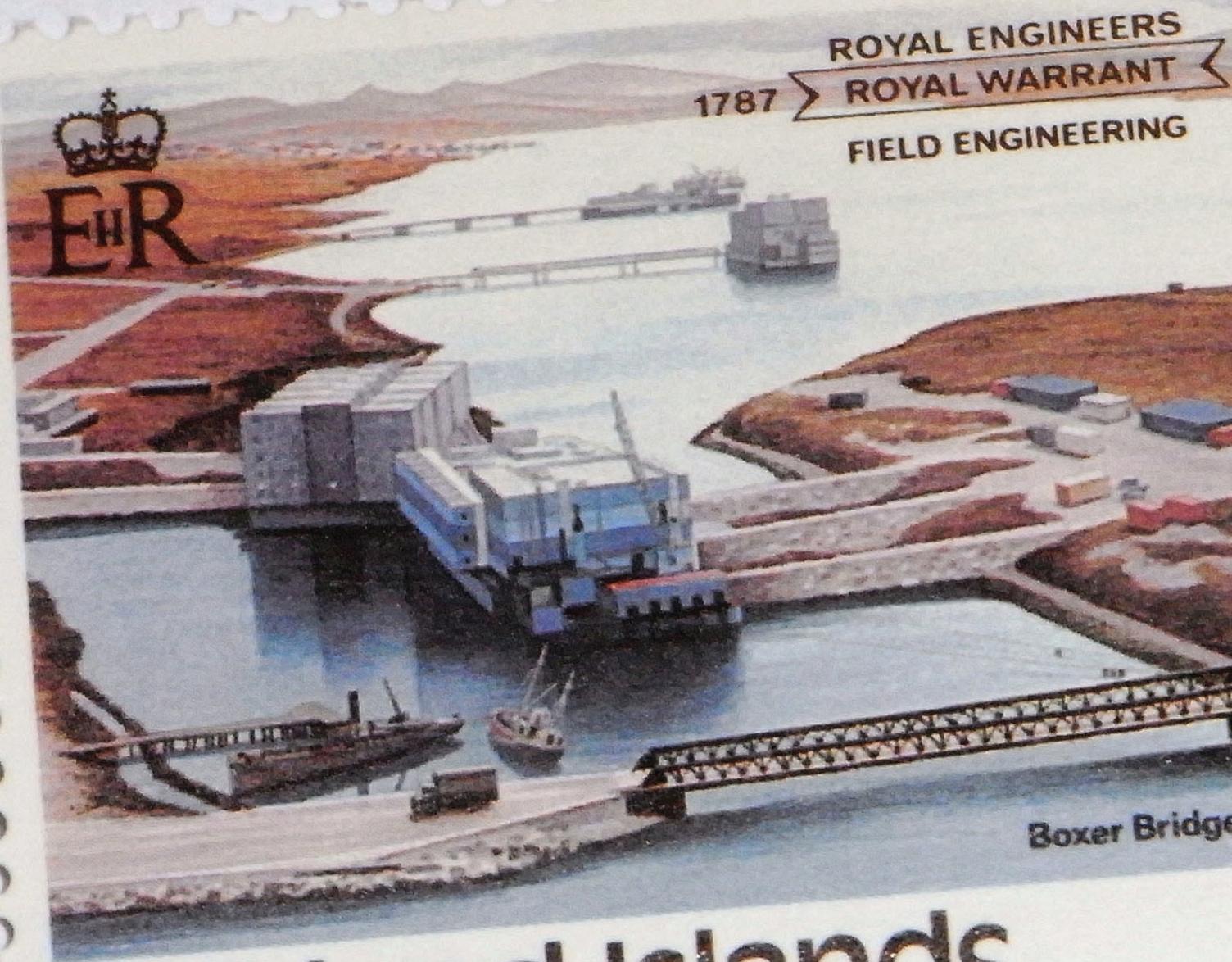
One person who told me that she remembers swimming on board as a girl was Lisa Watson, who is now editor of the Falkland Islands' newspaper *Penguin News*.

This story of the swimming pool – a rumoured space at the heart of an over-full box, a warm body of water held apart from and above the choppy, icy ocean – draws attention to the 'unseen' nature of this space, to its microworlds, internal divisions and hierarchical structure. It also points to complicated questions concerning what constitutes knowledge of this space. What did it mean to weigh the childhood memories of Lisa against the scepticism of a group of former Royal Engineers, for example? One moment, I'd be referring to Hansard, the record of British Parliamentary proceedings, and registering the fact that Labour MP Tam Dalyell had asked a question about the accommodation barges in the House of Commons; the next, I'd be receiving an email with a faded snapshot picturing young servicemen in front of a Land Rover, the grey box-like vessel moored in the background.¹³⁷

Clearly, there'd be no straightforward account or 'explanation' here. If tracing the object-space of the vessel was exceeding expectations and yet evading clear definition, trying to understand it through its associated 'networks' of relations was proving equally complicated. How, for example, was I to accommodate the discovery that these barges had been commemorated on a postage stamp?¹³⁸ Attending to this one element of the messy aftermath of UK's South Atlantic campaign – a barge housing troops who would otherwise have been camping out in extreme conditions – had become one way of registering points of contact between the geopolitical manoeuvrings of a small former imperial power and a cluster of individuals' daily lives, then and now. For one thing, the stamp, and the fact that one Facebook group call themselves 'RAF Coastal Dwellers', highlighted an unexpected *affective* dimension... If this group of men so strongly associated their comradeship with their cramped, moored-up temporary home 30 years on,

137 The 'distribution of knowledge' at different points in the 'career' of a thing is discussed by anthropologists Igor Kopytoff and Arjun Appadurai in the edited collection of essays *The Social Life of Things*. These authors explore how an object's meaning and value can shift dramatically at different stages of its life, as it moves through different spaces, systems of value, use, and so on. Appadurai, *Social Life of Things*, 41. In the introduction to his book *Ships*, design historian G. Votolato points out that different individuals understand a ship very differently depending on their role and relationship to a vessel. Votolato, *Ships*, 9

138 Source: <http://www.shipstamps.co.uk/forum/viewtopic.php?f=2&t=11337> accessed 3 March 2013.




EHR

1787 **ROYAL ENGINEERS
ROYAL WARRANT**

FIELD ENGINEERING

Boxer Bridge

Falkland Islands



DET NORSKE
VERITAS

REGISTER
OF
SHIPS

1983

NO
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JAN
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DET NORSKE
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SHIPS

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BOOK

1986
DET NORSKE
VERITAS

perhaps Foucault had been too quick to characterise the ship as a 'placeless place'.¹³⁹

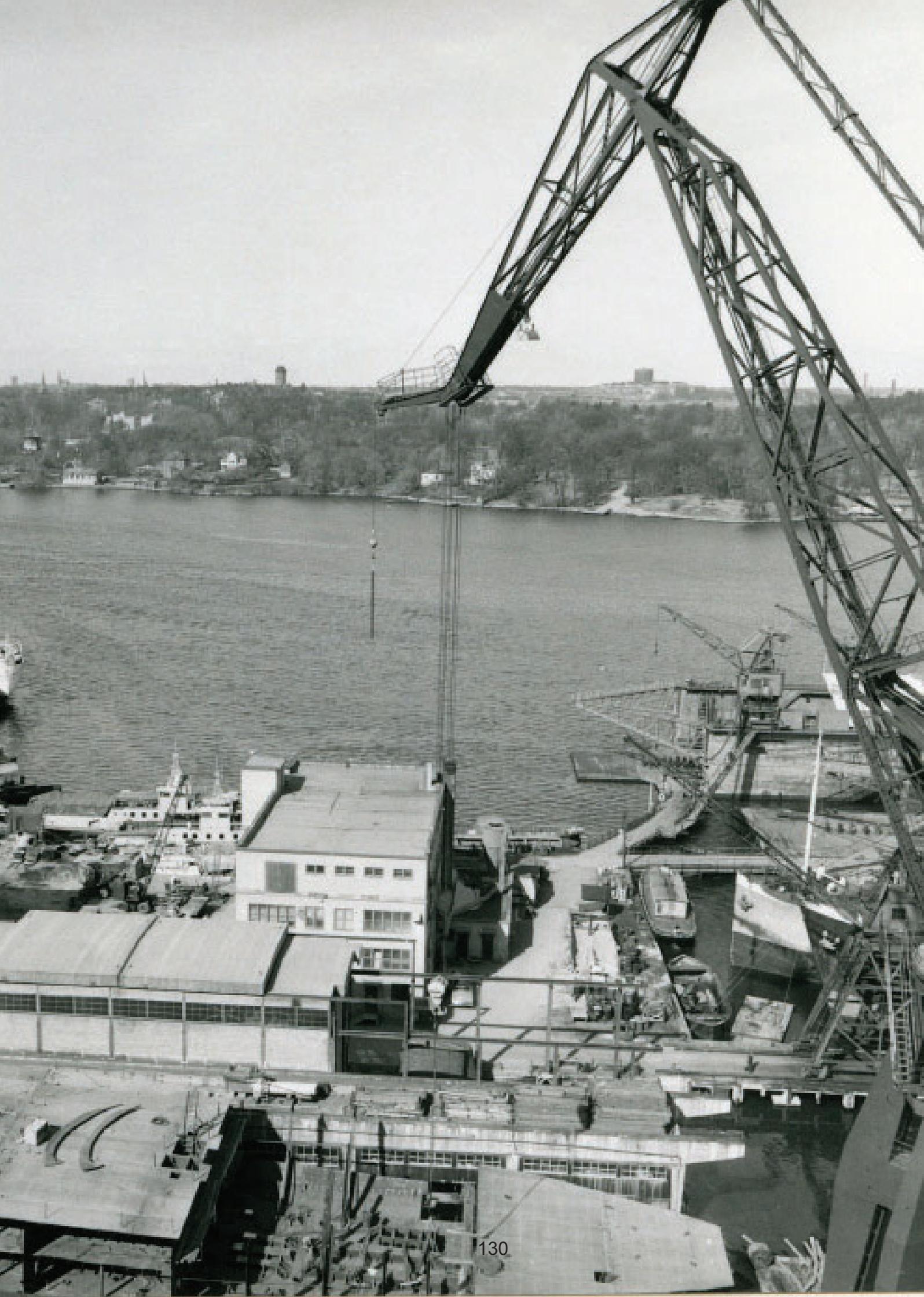
Remotely developed mutual generosity and trust were rapidly becoming a key part of the story of this emerging work. Perhaps unsurprisingly, however, given ongoing disputes over the Malvinas' sovereignty, I also witnessed antagonism and verbal abuse online. The administrator of the Falklands 1983 Facebook group posted a message to members to ask them their opinion when an *Argentinean* veteran put in an application to join the forum. The response wasn't positive. They (we?) effectively 'gated' the forum against an outsider.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, the Argentinean veterans' blog I'd read early on – the one that had triggered this whole episode – was eventually shut to me: 'ACCESS DENIED'.

Logins, terms and conditions and various kinds of online etiquette were now as significant to my 'journey' as earlier physical and urban regulatory boundaries had been. Keen to check facts and to discover more details of the vessel's story in person, however, I made an appointment to visit Lloyd's Shipping Register in London. Having located their second dramatic Richard Rogers-designed building in a narrow courtyard, I pinned a security pass to my chest before being led past models of historic and modern ships into an oak-panelled library and research centre. Here I met Louise Bloomfield, who, it turned out, had her own file on the former prison ship. Part of Louise's job is to collect press cuttings about ships deemed significant to the company, which is primarily concerned with financial risk. However, over the years, she'd also collected reports on maritime anomalies that had intrigued her.

Her file reached back to the 1980s and she allowed me to scan its contents for my research. She also showed me several volumes of a Scandinavian ship register, Det Norske Veritas. The volumes for 1985 and 1986 were inexplicably missing. Nevertheless, consulting these sources, along with others, enabled me to begin to piece together other aspects of the vessel's

139 Geographer Tim Cresswell concurs, suggesting: 'the ship is also a place... Particular forms of sociality mark ship life.' Cresswell, "Ergin Cavusoglu and the Art of Betweenness", 75. See also: Hasty & Peters "The Ship in Geography and the Geographies of Ships." Regarding comradeship, for example, an official-sounding group the 'South Atlantic Medals Association 82' 'exists to maintain and promote a sense of pride and comradeship among all veterans of the South Atlantic campaign'. <http://www.britains-smallwars.com/Falklands/ATB/index.htm>, accessed 1 September 2014.

140 I stood by. Massey raises concerns about the prospect of online forums becoming new 'gated communities'. Massey, *For Space*, 95.



life.

Built in 1979 in a struggling Stockholm shipyard called Finnboda Varf (now a residential property development), the vessel was launched at a time of global recession. Within three years, this ‘hotel barge’, also referred to in the Register as a ‘pontoon’, had had three different owners, and had been renamed twice. By 1982, its owners were a company called Consafe, founded by J Christer Ericsson. The only tangible evidence I could subsequently find of this company’s existence was an image of a company dinner plate sold on eBay.¹⁴¹ Consafe had been responsible for making the vessel into the kind of structure it is today – by welding together a *lot* of shipping containers.

With no engine, a flat-bottomed hull and no bow or stern, this type of ‘non-propelled vessel’ is known as a ‘coastel’ or a ‘flotel’.¹⁴² Technically not a ship, it can’t move and sits low in the water. The best way of shifting it any distance is to piggyback it on top of another ship. This formation can be seen in various photographs that I found or was given that show the barge having been floated onto the middle section of a semi-submersible ship or ‘heavy lift vessel’. This is how it had made its long journey from Sweden to the Falklands in 1983. On arrival anywhere, though, because it has its own electricity generators, fresh water production and sewage treatment systems, the vessel’s reliance on on-shore services is minimal.

According to Swedish shipping engineer Peter Kjorling – who had helped to construct the vessel in Stockholm and whom I telephoned in his office in Sweden one Monday afternoon – when Margaret Thatcher’s government wanted to charter barges for the Falklands, it was very keen to be seen to be sending only *British* ships. So a deal was done whereby a 50 per cent share of the vessel was bought by a Liverpool-based shipping company called Bibby Line; the ship was then reflagged to the UK.

After four years in the Falklands, it was transported back to Europe, passing once again through the Strait of Dover. En route, aerial views of it were taken from a helicopter by a company called Fotoflite. This company

¹⁴¹ The company’s full name was ‘Container Safe J. C. Ericsson’. It would go bankrupt in 1985. See: http://www.jcegroup.se/the_jce_story/the_jce_story2.aspx, accessed 1 September 2014.

¹⁴² A coastel is a human container made of shipping containers. An useful animation demonstrating how a coastel is built can be viewed on YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zed857LUubM>), accessed 1 September 2014.





Bibby Resolution

Vessel Type: Accommodation Barge, IMO Number: 8636180,
Gross Registered Tonnage: 13512, Year Built: 1979

[Click here to view image and vessel details and order...](#)

Prices from: **£18.30** (including 20 % VAT)



Bibby Resolution

Vessel Type: Accommodation Barge, IMO Number: 8636180,
Gross Registered Tonnage: 13512, Year Built: 1979

[Click here to view image and vessel details and order...](#)



Untitled - Google Chrome

www.fotoflite.com/components/com_virtuemart/shop_image/product/72115...

[Click here to view image and vessel details and order...](#)

Prices from: **£18.30** (including 20 % VAT)

photographs all significant daytime marine traffic that passes through this stretch of the English Channel and then contacts ships' owners and attempts to sell them the new images of their vessels.¹⁴³ Fotoflite's 2014 price list for one of their six 1988 images of the *Bibby Resolution* – as our hotel barge was now called – starts at £18.30 for a 18x12cm view. A 76x102cm print would cost you £147.60, including VAT. I decided to buy none.

The vessel's next few months were spent on the Dutch-German border, housing migrant workers who were building the Passat motor car in a Volkswagen factory outside Emden. Volkswagen's archivists have a record of a barge being chartered, but hold no other details. Again, the trail goes cold. In a marginal spot alongside an industrial plant on a wide Northern European estuary, this enormous object effectively disappears.

Then a new job came in. The late Ed Koch, then Mayor of the City of New York, had gotten himself a jail crisis. He wanted a solution to ease prison overcrowding.¹⁴⁴ So a major refit ensued – a procedure known among engineers as 'deep interior remodelling'. Cabins became cells, multi-door sluices were added, and walls in bathrooms were cut out to prevent prisoners from hiding from view.¹⁴⁵ Once complete, the vessel was carried west for its first stint as a prison hulk.

PR Newswire Europe proudly announced the charter, emphasising the flexibility of such a vessel: 'accommodation units can be modified to customer specifications for use as hostels, barracks, offices, hospitals or even hotels, and they are equally suitable for service in the Arctic or the Tropics due to high standards of insulation and air-conditioning.'¹⁴⁶ Grant Saunders, who replied to my inquiries on a merchant navy online forum, had been a young steward who'd joined the crew in Emden.¹⁴⁷ In 1989, he was waiting for the vessel to arrive on the banks of New York's East River and caught a snapshot of it as it was tugged under the Manhattan Bridge.

143 FotoFlite had also photographed the vessel as the *Safe Esperia* on its way to the Falkland Islands...

144 Koch was well known for his drive to 'clean up' Manhattan during this period, displacing urban undesirables and embracing corporate development and gentrification. See discussion in Deutsche, *Evictions*.

145 Detailed technical information was gained from my phone conversation with former engineer Peter Kjorling, who had flown from Sweden to help to convert the vessel to a prison in Germany. He also visited again for technical inspections in New York.

146 'Bibby Line Charters sister ship 'Venture' to NYC Dept of Correction', *PR Newswire Europe*, Aug 13 1987, accessed via online database NexisLexis.

147 <http://www.merchant-navy.net/forum/showthread.php?t=515> accessed 20 May 2012



Just as would be the case several years later on its arrival in Portland, this prison ship's appearance in New York became mired in controversy and legal dispute. Local newspapers recount how East Village community groups and the head teacher of a local primary school, whose view of the East River was now dominated by an unsightly grey box topped by a caged exercise yard, were outraged. Children were now to be protected from the existence of the vessel, rather than invited on board. A Lower East Side community group contested the barge's presence in New York State's Supreme Court, contending that it would have an adverse impact on the environment and on property values in the area.¹⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the *Bibby Resolution's* presence was backed by the court and it stayed in position as a prison ship in New York for three years, until it was closed and moved under a legal intervention by the city's own river authorities.¹⁴⁹ For much of its time in New York, it served as a drug rehabilitation unit in which an estimated 85 per cent of inmates may have been HIV positive.

One dramatic high-contrast black-and-white picture of the vessel moored in New York was taken for *The New York Magazine* by documentary photographer Jeff Jacobson, who worked for the famous photo agency Magnum.¹⁵⁰ I corresponded with Jeff, asking him about this image and the shoot. He couldn't remember it and had no negative or print. Another image shared with me by Bibby Line's Maritime Department *appears* to show our vessel moored at a pier in the foreground, against the Manhattan skyline. However, this is in fact a picture of a different vessel, a sister ship called *Bibby Venture*, which was also chartered from Liverpool and also used as a prison in New York at this time.¹⁵¹

The interest of several international journalists who reported on the vessel in New York marks its first recognition as an entity deemed worthy of 'public' attention. In interviews, prison officers and prisoners would be quoted by

148 The case was heard in May 1989.

149 The Army Corps of Engineers has jurisdiction over rivers in the U.S. They contested the presence of the prison barge primarily on the grounds that it formed a significant obstruction to East River traffic.

150 A speculative online search led me to it on Google Books in an uploaded 23 April 1990 issue of *New York Magazine*. Interestingly, Jeff Jacobson's early work included photojournalistic responses to life in prisons in the American South.

151 *Bibby Venture* featured in the Al Pacino movie *Carlito's Way*. The pier against which it was moored was used by NYPD Detectives. From here they would run drug-gang-busting missions across Manhattan, nightly, according to Peter Kjørting.









journalists; comments on cells with river views and conditions on board compared with those at other prisons were usually forthcoming.¹⁵²

When the *Bibby Resolution* was taken out of service in 1992, it was reflagged to the Bahamas. One local press report suggests that the vessel simply lay 'rusting in the East River'. No longer in use, it had become something of a liability – very expensive for the city to maintain and too expensive to move. New York's Department of Corrections advertised both barges for sale in 1993 and again the following year. Finally, in July 1994, both sold via a shipbroker based in New Jersey.¹⁵³ The British Home Office had already expressed an interest. As late as 23 March 1997, the *Resolution* 'vanished from its East River berth... it was quietly towed into a high-security dry dock at the Brooklyn Navy Yard for its refit and repaint.'¹⁵⁴ It was then reflagged to St Vincent & The Grenadines.

In 2011, I wrote to former mayor Ed Koch, who by this time was a Professor of Law at New York University, to ask him whether he had any memories of the two prison ships he'd hired that he'd be willing to share. He replied that he didn't.¹⁵⁵

A few days after reading about the prison ship's sudden departure from *Portland* Harbour in January 2010, a very odd thing happened. Suddenly, when I did an online search for the vessel, dozens of images of it appeared on all kinds of websites: Flickr, Shipspotting.com, Shippassion.com, even Uglyships.com! Here was the familiar grey metal box and the barred windows, but all in much more detail than I had ever seen before. And this did not look like Africa; in any case, not enough time had passed for the ship to have reached Nigeria yet. A quick read clarified what had happened.

Just four days after leaving Portland, the vessel – perhaps unwisely being towed all the way by a tugboat – had run into storms in the Bay of Biscay

152 Lloyds Register's file on the vessel includes several such press cuttings. Others were accessed via online NexisLexis using the search term: Bibby Resolution. For example, in June 1989, prisoner Teodoro Espada remarked: 'This is a beautiful place...It's like a hotel...' This appeared in an article in the *Hobart Mercury*. However, by September 1989, with the vessel in use as a drug treatment jail, the *New York Times* reported: 'All day, every day, the thin metal walls of the *Bibby Resolution* vibrate with the sounds of 384 inmates who shout, scream and sob their way through the battle with their addictions...' This journalistic interest anticipates the reaction to the vessel's arrival in Portland several years later.

153 'Things moving in and out of the commodity state...' are a point of discussion in Appadurai, *Social Life of Things*, 13.

154 The Sunday Mirror, via NexisLexis.

155 Ed Koch died in 2013.

and taken shelter in the Spanish port city of La Coruña. Here, moored in the city centre, our former prison ship, now Jascon 27, was suddenly very visible and became something of a minor celebrity, attracting the attention and amazement of local shipping enthusiasts, city residents and local journalists alike.¹⁵⁶ Online chat featured a mixture of historical data, bemusement and hilarity. Then, after four days in the spotlight, the vessel was, again, gone.

One of the more intriguing images of the vessel I found online early on was a small, blurry photograph of a painting of the prison ship HMP Weare moored in Portland Harbour. Clicking on it took me to the website of the artist, Trever John de Pattenden, a British-born wildlife painter based in Dubai. Most of Trever's pictures are of birds of prey, butterflies and big cats. They tend to be destined for hotel lobbies, charity auctions and the residences of Middle Eastern royal families. But a caption accompanying this image explained that the painting had been commissioned from him by the UK Prison Service to celebrate the opening of the floating jail in Portland in 1997. The caption also explained that following the closure of HMP Weare, the painting was now hanging in the Prison Service Museum at the Prison Service College, a training facility near Rugby. Intrigued, I decided to try to make arrangements to see the picture.

However, when I contacted the Prison Service College, they told me that the Prison Service Museum collection had recently been sold off to a tourist attraction in Nottingham called the Galleries of Justice. I was advised to contact the curator there, Bev Baker. I did, and Bev informed me that the painting had never arrived in Nottingham. She reckoned that if I emailed the Prison Service College again, someone might discover it hanging on an office wall.

A bit perplexed, I thought I'd contact the artist to get his opinion. A friendly email from Trever explained that he'd been offered the commission by his father-in-law, who happened to have been the first governor of the prison ship. In fact, the governor had been so delighted by the painting that he had written his son-in-law a letter at the time, praising its 'remarkable' qualities. Trever also forwarded me a copy of a printed label that the governor had attached to the back of the painting at the time of its delivery. The text confidently stated where the painting would hang in the future: either on the

¹⁵⁶ Once again, information regarding the vessel was 'made public' by enthusiasts rather than 'official' sources here.

(rickettsm...



- PHOTOS
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- ADD PHOTO

E.COM

Jascon 27 - IMO

Like

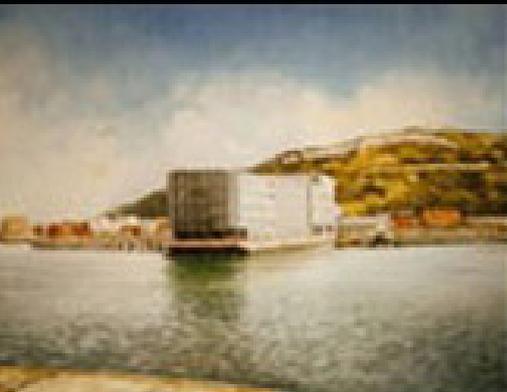
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+1 0

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CT FROM
MAKERS





H M Prison
The Weare
Rotherham Road, Castletown
Portland, Dorset DT5 1PZ
Telephone: 01305 822100
Fax No: 01305 820792
Ext: 200



Mr T Depattenden
Marketing Communication & Promotion Manager
The Hyatt Regency Dubai
PO Box 5588
DUBAI
United Arab Emirates

Your reference

Our reference

PJO/MC

Date

6 November 1998

Dear Mr Depattenden

I would like to thank you for the beautiful painting which Tim O'Connor presented to me. It is admired by everybody who has seen it. It truly is a remarkable work and so correct in all points.

It will be treasured by all of us and when the prison ship is eventually de-commissioned it will be sent to the Prison Service Museum at Newbold Revel Staff College.

I have attached a copy of the statement which I have placed on the back of the painting.

Once again, please accept the gratitude of all of us at the prison ship, H M Prison Weare, for a truly wonderful painting.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely

P J O'SULLIVAN
GOVERNOR

walls of the Weare or at the college.

However, Trever also told me that he suspected that his father-in-law may have been given the painting by the Prison Service as a retirement gift a few years before. Since the picture could still not be found, I asked him whether it would be possible to contact his father-in-law to find out whether this was true. Trever explained that sadly this would not be possible, because he and his wife had split up a few years ago, and he'd now lost touch with his father-in-law, who, in any case, might have moved to America.

In October 2011, I submitted a Freedom of Information request to the Ministry of Justice asking for clarification as to the whereabouts of this painting. The reply I received seemed to confirm that this work of art had evaded the custody of its commissioners. I wrote to Minister for Justice Kenneth Clarke to let him know.

Several months later, I made a return visit to The Verne, the large prison in Portland, this time with an appointment to meet staff there to discuss working together on an art project: a clifftop performance to be called *The Vessel*. We met in the visitors' waiting room. Just as I was shaking hands with the prison governor, I noticed that, hanging on the wall just behind him, was the painting. Evidently, when the prison ship had closed, someone had simply brought the picture up the cliff and hung it on the wall. And here it had been, surrounded by notices and prison regulations, ever since.

'Mobilities leave footprints that researchers can follow...'
Peter Adey.¹⁵⁷

This elaborate research project was triggered in the first instance by an inability to access and photograph a space. Then, of course, the huge former prison ship had quite literally disappeared. As it was towed away, my quest would shift unexpectedly from the 'local' to the 'global' – a shift already anticipated by the prospect of an Olympic presence on this section of Dorset coastline. I would now resort to attempting to track its movements through diverse kinds of space, particularly online.

For although the vessel looked as though it wasn't supposed to go anywhere, it turned out to have been all over the place. Inaccessible to

¹⁵⁷ Adey, *Mobility*, 43.

HMP THE WEARE
PORTLAND HARBOUR
1997 - 2005



HMP THE VERNE
VISITOR INFORMATION
WELCOME TO HMP THE VERNE
WE HOPE YOU ENJOY YOUR VISIT TODAY
PLEASE REPORT TO THE MAIN GATE NOTIFY THE GATE KEEPER OF YOUR ARRIVAL

- IDENTIFICATION WILL BE REQUIRED
- LOCKERS ARE PROVIDED FOR THE SAFE KEEPING OF PERSONAL PROPERTY AND ANY OTHER ITEMS THAT ARE NOT PERMITTED INTO THE ESTABLISHMENT (£1 COIN REFUNDABLE)
- VISITORS WILL BE SUBJECT TO A SEARCH IN LINE WITH THE NOTICES DISPLAYED

IT IS ILLEGAL TO PASS ANY ARTICLE TO ANY PRISONER BY ANY MEANS VISITORS OBSERVED DOING SO WILL BE REPORTED TO THE POLICE AND PROSECUTED

GOVERNOR

VISITORS: MOBILE TELEPHONES

PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU LEAVE YOUR PHONE IN THE CAB OR THE SECURITY LOCKER PROVIDED. IF YOU ARE FOUND WITH A MOBILE PHONE INSIDE THE ESTABLISHMENT IT WILL BE CONFISCATED AND THE MATTER REFERRED TO THE POLICE.

- Mobile phones are a threat to safety in prisons, linked to drug use, violence and bullying
- We will use the (Offender) Management Act 2007 to prosecute visitors caught bringing mobile phones into the prison. The Act introduces a high fine penalty of up to 1200 £ AND IMPRISONMENT for this offence.
- There are serious health risks associated with increasingly powerful 'phishing' tools - which can require hospital treatment.
- We have introduced high security waste and Body (Officer) Security Notices (BSN) to ensure in progress detection.
- Closed visits and / or a visit ban will be considered if visitors are found to smuggle phones or other contraband.
- Prisoners can lose privileges to spend extra time in prison if caught with a mobile phone. They could also be transferred to another prison.
- If you are being searched and asked to look in someone in conditions, you can speak to the HMPS national prisoner advice support worker on 087 628 8800.

me as a material object, it could be found on Google Earth, in a shipping register, on the website of an expat painter, in a painting, on a postage stamp, in documents in archives, in memories, photographs and so on. What eventually became my nonlinear ‘redescription’ would necessarily be pieced together from diverse sources and multiple simultaneous lines of enquiry. Combined, the traces I gathered *produced* the vessel, in its physical absence. If, as Peter Adey says, ‘physical mobilities may be tracked by the digital signatures they leave...’ (Adey, p. 218), then attending to and participating in *online* spaces meant that I was practising in very *recently developed* arenas and across *new* hybrid kinds of space.

As already suggested, however, this shift into online communities didn’t necessarily make life any easier; new kinds of regulations, protocols, restrictions and boundaries quickly arose. Why was this suddenly such a restricted Facebook group? Did I wish to join this discussion? Should I log in? Was adding ‘comments’ concocted from Google Translate really the best way to be joining a trail of Flickr banter between Spanish shipping enthusiasts? I would once again have to try to keep nimble in attempting to grasp or capture the vessel’s fleeting different presences, in a strange, twenty-first-century parallax.¹⁵⁸

The ambiguous and elusive nature of the vessel I was tracing added significantly to the confusion here. Its identity is, of course, confusing and singularly unstable. It defies easy classification. A coast-hugging object somewhere between a building and boat, it’s a liminal structure, transportable (with considerable effort and expense), hireable, buyable and – once in situ and hooked up – operable at short notice.

Usually positioned *out of view*, it has been *part-owned* and endlessly reflagged, and has changed hands many times. These are some aspects of the vessel that can’t be seen. In fact, one of the few consistent things about it is its code: its International Maritime Organisation number 8636180. Launched, like Margaret Thatcher’s government, in 1979, its only very slightly ‘offshore’ position in more-or-less marginal locations has allowed for all kinds of legal ambiguity. Geographer Kimberley Peters, who has undertaken a detailed study of Radio Caroline, suggests that this connects to the nature of ships in general: ‘the ship occupies an edge or liminal space,

158 There are multiple relational movements: the vessel’s various movements, my movements, the stories’ movements... The ‘hinge’ is the floating box.

away from the centre and surveillance'. In the case of our vessel, there's a connection with its use as a penal space here: 'the prison is a space that the "outside" is not permitted to see...'¹⁵⁹

So 'power exercised through its invisibility' lurks again here. Clearly, the vessel has been conscripted into various more or less controversial situations and roles (the aftermath of war; to house a migrant workforce; to help out an overstretched prison service under a problematic political administration; to service the global oil industry in a notoriously contested and dangerous part of the world). But, as suggested above, its role is rarely simple or straightforwardly interpreted.

As with all sites of contestation, the vessel's appearance has triggered wildly contrasting responses. It hasn't merely been towed into fraught zones – its arrival and presence have very often triggered significant controversy and debate. Most obviously, whereas in the Falklands its appearance was largely welcome, residents of New York and Portland considered it an incendiary proposition. Its early days in Portland saw both a legal process and the prison governor's sentimental commissioning of its picture in oils.¹⁶⁰

Peter Adey has noted that rights are often 'highlighted and performed' at borders, as various kinds of application for access are 'scrutinised, accepted or declined'.¹⁶¹ This observation is pertinent to my practice in general. However, whereas Adey is writing about *individuals'* passage across *physical* borders, here it's the *barge's* passage in and out of diverse physical and also *digital* arenas that highlights certain spaces and/or places and their structures and parameters.

I tracked the vessel's intersections with all kinds of structures, institutions, individuals and agencies, as well as its run-ins with different jurisdictions, classifications and groups. To emphasise – this is what is different about this project: the vessel appears in, and disappears from, *online* spaces as much as it both crosses and moves between physical (and regulatory, national, economic and political) zones. My attempt to try to photograph, then track and follow the vessel – my resulting experiences, in *digital* networks, as well

¹⁵⁹ K. Peters, email correspondence with the author, 2013.

¹⁶⁰ His son-in-law's painting features a cloud of seagulls rising gracefully from one end of the vessel upwards into the bright blue sky. Given that the Weare housed prisoners nearing the end of their sentences, it does not seem implausible to read this detail as a metaphorical representation of the anticipated literal-and-moral freedom of the vessel's inhabitants.

¹⁶¹ Adey, *Mobility*, 108-9

as elsewhere – now became a key to the story of the work.

So this is simultaneously a redescription of historical/physical *and* present-tense / online ‘moorings’ and rarely smooth journeys, both the vessel’s *and* my own (the latter, somewhat ill-informed and improvised). Very often, as in Campden Hill Square, I didn’t understand the parameters of the online worlds in which I found myself working. Once again, I struggled with the negotiation of terms of access and protocols of dialogue and participation. For instance, do I really want all these Falklands veterans posting to my Facebook page?

In persisting in my attempts to glimpse and trace this space that was always ‘floating’ beyond reach, I got embroiled in all kinds of conversations, complications and obligations. Should I have purchased a FotoFlite photograph, having expressed an interest, and had the company digitise and upload old images to the site? Is it acceptable to leave my email address in this website ‘comments’ box, or might there be a more appropriate approach? In *The Vessel*, my practice had become less about knocking on doors, joining meetings, arranging face-to-face dialogues and making phone calls. It had moved into new hybrid environments. Riven with new barriers, misunderstandings and agonisms, new technological platforms and forums were now *enabling* my open-ended investigation: mediating and – along with the vessel itself – co-producing the core of the work. And the work in turn reflects back on the nature of such platforms and media.

Of course, images of various kinds and qualities increasingly proliferate online, often posted by ‘amateurs’ and enthusiasts. And this ubiquity stands in high contrast to Portland Harbour’s original ban. As Anne Owens, the chief inspector of prisons who finally closed HMP Weare, said of the vessel, it’s ‘literally and metaphorically a container’. I’ve come to think of the vessel as a kind of litmus test-object that has dipped in and out of diverse worlds; a cultural and historical grey card.¹⁶²

There are certain parallels with another well-known artistic project here: Allan Sekula and Noël Birch’s film essay *The Forgotten Space* (2010). Building on Sekula’s 1998–1995 work *Fish Story*, this work involved tracking

162 This idea of the grey card harks back to my fantasy of its persistent presence in the background of future Olympic television footage. In my mind it might represent the kind of inverse of the bright colours of the five rings of the Olympic flag around which many nations of the world smilingly yet competitively gather every five years.

JASCON 27

Accommodation Barge



and following shipping containers around the globe, exploring everyday life in and around some of the world's biggest commercial ports and exposing details of the different lives and forces that enable, and exist alongside, day-to-day globalised trade.

Nevertheless, there are important differences between *The Forgotten Space* and my own work. Sekula focuses on one ubiquitous *type* of object rather than *one particular* object. Though both containers and flotels have emerged to service postindustrial economies and hold unseen contents, the vessel's function has changed dramatically over time, and it has, as a result, played different roles, intersecting with very different structures and networks, both in the wider world and online. So whereas I hop between *contrasting* 'webs of relations', noting especially the vessel's presence during moments of transit and arrival in new zones, shipping containers are focused on *strategically* by Sekula and Birch precisely because they form generic lubricants in *one* homogenised system of globalised trade.

The tone and form of my work, following as it does the vessel's constant 'moving on', tries and invariably fails to keep pace with its unexpected appearances, disappearances and shifts. In his essay 'The Cultural Biography of Things', anthropologist Igor Kopytoff has written: 'An eventful biography of a thing becomes the story of the various singularisations of it, of classifications and reclassifications in an uncertain world of categories whose importance shifts with every minor change in context. As with persons, the drama here lies in the uncertainties of valuation and of identity.'¹⁶³ Kopytoff's editor and colleague Arjun Appadurai adds: 'What is political... is the constant tension between the existing frameworks... and the tendency of objects to breach these frameworks. This tension itself has its source in the fact that not all parties share the same interests in a specific regime of value.'¹⁶⁴

While these authors' primary interest was in commodities, my interest is more in understanding the production of social and public space. And – importantly to me – it has been precisely at moments when it has been moved and comes into physical visibility anew that the vessel has created the greatest ructions, curiosity and concern.¹⁶⁵ This is as true of its

¹⁶³ Kopytoff, *op. cit.* p.90

¹⁶⁴ Appadurai, *op. cit.* p.57.

¹⁶⁵ Of course moments of concern also *lead to* heightened visibility - online and in various media - as images get uploaded and so on.

appearance on Flickr thanks to bemused Spaniards as it is of its arrival in Manhattan or Portland beneath bridges or between harbour walls. Perhaps an ambition to see and reveal this thing, and to haul it into public view, has been one function of my own assembling and sharing of its unique narrative, here and elsewhere.

But it's not as simple as this. As suggested in previous chapters, 'bringing things into view' is not all that I am doing.¹⁶⁶ I'm intrigued by, but also suspicious of, the notion of the artist as revealer of the 'forgotten' (Sekula/Birch), 'hidden' (Taryn Simon¹⁶⁷) or 'secret' (Trevor Paglen¹⁶⁸), since this suggests a sense of purpose, perspective and moral authority that I rarely feel and therefore cannot readily accept.¹⁶⁹

I don't set out to 'expose' anything or point persistently to some overarching meta-narrative regarding power (as, for example, Sekula and Birch do in *The Forgotten Space*¹⁷⁰). My work includes 'surface' detail and of course *makes vivid the challenges that I face along the way*, suggesting some of the ways in which power works as *dispersed and capillary-like*, and constantly *in process*.

Similarly, although artist (also writer and activist) Trevor Paglen might work in a wide variety of ways - for instance collaborating with plane spotters and astronomers - he consciously stalks and targets 'secret' phenomena.¹⁷¹ By contrast, my own multidirectional enquiries actively beg the question as to where a point of contention, or an authority on an issue, might lie. To call

166 I already suggested that the effect of my poster project *Huis Clos Planningline* wasn't simply to transgress and in doing so 'reveal' 'unseen' regulations and taboos.

167 The reference is to Simon's photographic series and artist's book *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* (2007) where she has attained permission to photograph a wide range of different kinds of space that for various reasons she would not under normal circumstances be permitted to enter. Simon, *American Index*.

168 Paglen's practice involves tracking and making visible 'secret' installations and activities, such as remote U.S. military bases, unclassified satellites and evidence of 'extraordinary rendition'. See for example: Paglen, *Invisible: Covert Operations and Classified Landscapes*.

169 Harriet Hawkins' critique of art writer Irit Rogoff's discussion of projects by artists Alfredo Jarr and others springs to mind here: 'This research remains dogged by a sense of...casting the art as revelatory with respect to hidden mechanisms or assumptions...' Hawkins, "Geography and Art", 58. Hawkins is discussing Rogoff's argument in her 2000 book *Terra Infirma*.

170 The film's narrator returns time and again to a broad critical commentary concerning the insidious effects of globalisation on a wide range of lives. Therefore, although focusing on individual lives and very occasionally acknowledging the ups and downs of their encounters and processes (the nature of his contact and dialogue with others, the politics of access, and so on), Sekula and Birch's narrative keeps reverting to big 'dark' political truths.

171 Paglen spies on spies, challenging the law, or, more accurately, government law-breakers, in an explicit effort to explore and reveal the margins of legality.

Barclays' expert financial lawyers from a clifftop with questions regarding rights of access is to turn to the 'wrong' professionals for any number of reasons. On the one hand, this was an entirely practical decision (I was seeking advice regarding my status in this 'marginal' location), on the other, it inferred my powerlessness, ignorance and complicity. (I continue to bank with Barclays, and it seems ironic to have turned to a bank's legal team now that these same institutions have been so widely criticised for being economical with the law themselves.)

In my practice and redescription, gaps in knowledge, impasses and ironies abound, compromising any clear sense of revelation while simultaneously pointing to the impossibility of any definitive account. The story-within-the-story of the painting is an obvious example here: doubling or mirroring my larger quest to image one object with an equally elaborate attempt to track down a *second* object – a handmade representation of the first. Once again, enquiries and conversations got everywhere and nowhere as I encountered inefficiencies, documents both official and personal, and learned of the unaccounted-for sale of public assets to a private museum of crime. A red herring, then – no more or less significant or consequential than my main task.

Other gestures have been more overtly playful: I send in a Freedom of Information request to obtain an official answer as to the whereabouts of a painting that no civil servant has noticed has gone missing. I send personal messages to Ed Koch and Kenneth Clarke. Emails, messages and online chat across the globe mean that the tale and trace of the vessel is marked by dislocations as well as by dense interconnections.

To serve up a blurred image of a company ceremonial dinner plate, sold recently on eBay as the sole residue remnant of an earlier era of bankruptcy and recession seems poignant and somehow apposite. What is its story? How did it get lost from the dinner service? How has it survived? Who might have bought it? Did it sell to a foreign buyer, like the vessel? Might the vessel itself ever be offered on eBay?

This ongoing sense of self-reflexive process and puzzlement is also evident in the manner in which I've chosen to share *The Vessel* as a work of art. I've presented and sited my anecdotes and visual material in different ways for different audiences. A live performance of the stories accompanied by

a series of projected images constituted the first iteration of the work. As in *Four Anecdotes*, an informal, gradually unfolding delivery – now gently subverting the forced formality and ‘authority’ of a ‘slide lecture’ – facilitated a sharing of the *uncertainty* as to where these tracings and redescriptions might lead. This is how it was presented twice, in an art-school research seminar, and in a self-organised two-person exhibition in London.¹⁷² But, appropriately, *The Vessel* would shift about and have no definitive form.

As 2012 and the London Olympics approached, I was keen to return *The Vessel* to the physical and regulatory environs of Portland Harbour, where this whole episode had begun. I wanted to find a temporary ‘berth’ from which to share my research with, I hoped, a mixture of locals, interested ‘publics’ and tourists, by siting my performance in a location overlooking the precise spot from which the former prison ship had disappeared.

Security around the port was already building to unprecedented levels, since a new National Sailing Academy had been built immediately next door. My enquiries about borrowing a harbour-facing luxury apartment in the jade and glass panel-clad Ocean Views development – the former naval base – for a performance or exhibition came to nothing. So in the end I approached two quite different organisations: HMP The Verne, whose intimidating gateway at the top of a long winding lane continued to loom over the area, and a local multimedia arts festival.¹⁷³ If the latter would include my work in its summer programme of exhibitions and events in Weymouth and Portland, I thought, it might also help me with practicalities and publicity for an event.

To my delight, both responded positively and soon enough I was shaking hands with curators, prison officials and staff. The Verne team told me that in fact they were about to launch a new social-enterprise initiative close to the main car park. In a strange no-man’s-land within the Verne citadel but just outside the modern prison walls, the Jailhouse Café would see prisoners nearing the end of their sentence preparing and serving meals, sandwiches and drinks to members of the public. Despite the immediate surroundings – abandoned buildings, warning notices – and the fact that customers would have to come up the hill, through the intimidating main prison gateway and past the modern prison office to get there, the putative attraction of this new

¹⁷² ‘Prison Ship Air Crash’, 24 Grays Inn Road, London. Two person exhibition with Vicki Kerr.

¹⁷³ b-side multi-media arts festival. See: <http://www.b-side.org.uk>, accessed 1 September 2014.

venue would be a large grassy area immediately in front of the café boasting ‘the best coastal view in the south of England’, to quote the Governor. Sure enough, one could see not only the whole of Portland Harbour and the coastline around Weymouth from up here, but miles towards Poole in one direction and the entirety of Chesil Beach in the other. It was windswept but truly panoramic. So the Jailhouse Café formed the hub of my event.

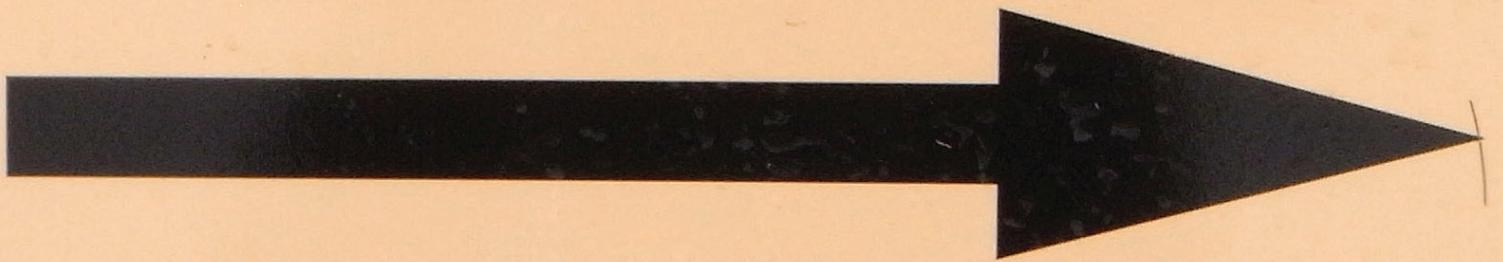
In fact, I performed *The Vessel* twice – two hours apart – one Saturday afternoon in September 2012. On each occasion about 30 visitors rounded hairpin bends as they drove or walked up the hill, then waited for a security green light at the entrance gate before coming through the tunnel and being greeted by prisoners wearing high-visibility vests. After a cup of tea and a warm welcome from prison staff – with a polite instruction *not to take any photographs* – everyone gathered on the clifftop for the first part of the narrative above. We stood immediately above HMP Weare’s former mooring. Paralympic sailors from across the globe raced dinghies in the distance. The world’s TV and press ignored us. They were looking the other way.

I pointed out my brother’s house too. In fact, I pointed out Chris himself, since he’d come along to one of the performances with his family. Once I’d discussed the Barclays lawyers, we headed inside, where I projected images and performed the rest of my tracings. My portrayals of the Falkland Islands, Lloyd’s Register, Ed Koch and La Coruña were accompanied by more tea, cake served by high-vis-clad waiters, a few chuckles and babies’ squawks. My *pièce de résistance* came at the end, however: having talked about the lost-and-found painting, I announced that we would now all walk together, five minutes down a path from the café, to the actual visitors’ waiting room.

There, we stood in front of Trevor John de Pattenden’s painting. The work ended in a few seconds of uncertain silence, followed by gathering chat and even a bit of applause. Both audiences seemed quite delighted by *The Vessel*. Many attendees were locals with strong memories of HMP Weare. Several people had worked on board, and some of them wanted to talk to me individually to share their recollections. One informed me that HMP Weare had been the only British prison to have needed a collision plan. Some others suggested other people whom I should meet. Had I met the daughter of the last governor of the prison ship, for example? She was now a primary school teacher in Weymouth but, as an art student several years



The Jailhouse Café



This Way







back, she had been allowed by her dad to do a whole photographic project on board.

The audience was very varied but it's perhaps worth noting that prison staff in particular seemed to enjoy *The Vessel*. The work features several prison-related tales that must have seemed nicely irreverent in this context – for example, the irony of the story of Trever's painting having been 'lost' by the Prison Service certainly wasn't lost on them.¹⁷⁴ Staff and prisoners listened to the stories alongside one another, mixed in with everybody else. (Two members of staff had gasped when I'd screened an image of my Barclays debit card during an image run-through at lunchtime and warned me that one of the prisoners might memorise the card details and empty my bank account...)

The extent to which staff at HMP The Verne seem to have valued these events was in fact signalled by their commissioning, the following year, of a (paid) artist's residency that would lead to the production of a new permanent work. This entirely unanticipated (and perhaps somewhat ironic) outcome confirms the fact that here, as with *Cushion Distribution*, the work had developed quite a specific and unexpected fan base.¹⁷⁵

These Verne events obviously added significant new dimensions to *The Vessel*: situating the performance in a specific location connected to both the vessel's and my own interconnected histories, along with making the work mobile (as we walked around the site), were both novel elements here. Inviting and corralling mixed publics to join me in this intimidating location to enjoy the view, some recollections and reimaginings of an absent vessel and a piece of inmates' cake were further experimental moves.

Perhaps most importantly, engaging with another 'local' official structure – HMP The Verne (the prison site, the staff, the prisoners, their characteristics, activities, resources and so on) – and working to collaborate on such an unlikely event, constituted another attempt to *participate*, one whose 'success' stood in contrast to my failed attempt to work productively with the Portland Harbour authorities at the bottom of the cliffs.

¹⁷⁴ Interestingly, prison staff hadn't asked me for details of *The Vessel's* precise content in advance of the events.

¹⁷⁵ As at Harlow, the work's significant 'public' included the 'host' organisation; again the hosts claimed to have learned something from the process of the unfolding and staging of the work.

After all, I had finally managed to access a prison – albeit, again, the ‘wrong’ one – and a very different one from the one I had started with (HMP The Verne lies within a huge clifftop citadel with ramparts, ditches and whopping stone walls). I had managed to insert one prison into another...

In the event, I couldn’t have imagined more accommodating and welcoming (co-)hosts. So staging these events significantly *extended* the project, further testing and expanding relationships and legal parameters. The whole process kept the dialogues that constituted the work moving. As at Harlow, the processual practice couldn’t be contained by a single authority. My desire to keep a strong sense of a live practice was clear from the fact that we were gathered in this highly unlikely location beneath razor wire, in a high-security penal-cum-port-cum-global-sporting environment: seagulls circled, boats tacked in the wind, the radar dish of a naval vessel moored in the harbour turned silently, a plate of biscuits circled the room...

By contrast, the following year, a short film or ‘moving image document’ version of *The Vessel* was shown in a solo exhibition at WorksIProjects, a gallery in Bristol. I will say less about this manifestation, since this film is attached as part of this submission, but it is an artwork made for monitor and/or computer screen. In this version, I filmed a number of images and the occasional object from above, being placed onto, piled upon and removed from a tabletop. This was an approach intended to allow for a sense of intimacy, while also capturing some of the diverse materialities of what I’d gathered together in my tracing of the vessel.

I’d recently read critic Leo Steinberg’s writing on Robert Rauschenberg’s early 1950s ‘combines’, which he characterised in terms of a ‘flatbed picture plane’: ‘surfaces such as tabletops, studio floors, charts, bulletin boards – any receptor surface on which objects are scattered, on which data is entered, on which information will be received, printed, impressed – whether coherently or in confusion’.¹⁷⁶ This passage seemed to me an uncanny intimation of the state of my MacBook’s desktop as much as a characterisation of any 60-year-old work of art. And indeed the other discovery I made during the creation of this film was moving-image ‘screen capture’ technology, which allowed me to share, ‘live’, my cursor-led journey through some of the online spaces in which the vessel had been – and can be – tracked.

¹⁷⁶ Steinberg, “Reflections on the State of Criticism”, 28.

So, again, this was a way of trying to share key aspects of my research/ art *process*: as one watches the film, one moves through some of the same spaces as I had done. Although a film is clearly not a live work, I was excited by the possibility of being able to share the sense of discovery and frustration that I had felt so often during my years-long activities.

Also, although much of the visual material in the film is photographic (and this is conceptually important, given that a ban on photographing the vessel had triggered the whole thing in the first place), I was keen to emphasise that the work is built from a *variety* of borrowed traces and materials. In line with this, I became eager to display a selection of objects and found footage alongside my film, in a small curated display, as part of the exhibition.

HMP The Verne's governor agreed to lend Trever's painting to the exhibition. WorksIProjects gallery insured it, and I went to collect it, leaving an empty space amongst the notices and posters on the waiting-room wall.¹⁷⁷ In Bristol, a square hole was cut in the gallery wall behind the painting. This allowed for a view of the back of the work, where the label that Trever's father-in-law had stuck there still could be seen.

I finally exhibited Geoff Moore's film of the prison ship's dawn departure from Portland – the one that had featured, in a verbal description and as an upturned DVD, in *Four Anecdotes*. This was screened on a small monitor with headphones for the piano music. Immediately next to it, on an identical monitor, was a 1997 ITN news report, which I'd found online, showing the arrival of the prison ship in Portland. So through one pair of headphones a journalist shouted his words over the noise of his helicopter's whirling blades, while, on the other, haunting melodies overlaid tugboat movements – with occasional special effects. These two very differently authored short film extracts showing the vessel arriving in and departing from Portland Harbour were downloaded, saved, looped and juxtaposed with one another, in close proximity to my own film.

A friendly philatelist I'd contacted online then sent me a gift: a pristine first

¹⁷⁷ I sought advice from Keith Gill, a Specialist at Christie's, on how to establish an insurance value for Trever's painting. Comparisons with previous sales of similar works were impossible for this commission, and 'decorative value' didn't really apply here. Therefore replacement value was the only viable way of establishing the painting's value. Trevor emailed me to say that if he was going to paint the picture again from photographs and sketches he would charge £1,200, so this is the amount for which the work was insured.





Michelle Preston,
Business and Community Partnership Manager
HMP The Verne, Portland, Dorset, DT5 1EQ.
Tel: 01305 825169 Michelle.preston@hmprisons.gsi.gov.uk

April 19, 2013

Agreement between HMP The Verne and Works Projects c/o Mike Ricketts relating to painting of 'The Vessel,' HMP the Weare

that the painting of HMP The Weare by Trevor John de Pattenden is temporarily on loan to HMP The Verne in order that it may be shown as part of the Regional Interface Work Projects at 'The Vessel,' for the purpose of display at The Gallery, Sydney Row, Bristol BS16UU on Saturday 20 or Sunday 21st April 2013 and will be held securely on Mike Ricketts. Appropriate Insurance is in place for this, held by Works Projects at 33 Cumberland Road, Bristol, BS1 6UX. www.worksprojects.co.uk A Morrissey, Director / Curator at the Works Projects Bristol.

HMP The Verne following the exhibition, at a date no later than 24 May



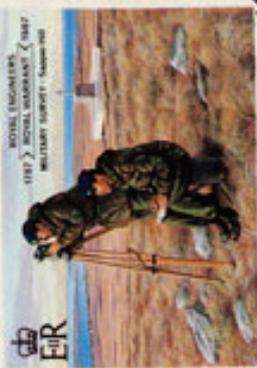
ROYAL ENGINEERS

ROYAL WARRANT

1787 - 1987



Falkland Islands
OFFICIAL FIRST DAY COVER



Falkland Islands 10p



Falkland Islands 24p



Falkland Islands 29p



Falkland Islands 58p

day cover of the Falklands Royal Engineers set that included the stamp showing the accommodation barge. I hadn't been able to find one of these online. In return, I agreed to mention his specialist Army stamp website on my exhibition's press release.

Having secured the loan of Trever's painting and then the first day cover with stamps featuring carefully executed paintings, I wondered whether I could possibly find one or two more original paintings of the vessel for this ever-more-varied display. After much searching, I alighted on *Coastel, Stanley Harbour* on www.paintingsIlove.com: an atmospheric acrylic on paper by retired Harrier jump-jet pilot Tony Stubbs. When I joined the website to make contact and complimented him on his portrayal, Tony emailed enthusiastically, explaining: 'Why did I paint it? ...It was, I suppose, the juxtaposition of something so 'industrial' looking set in a natural place, and the light. Evenings were fantastic there, looking westwards past Port Stanley to Tumbledown and Two Sisters beyond as the sun dipped below the horizon...' Tony kindly agreed to lend this work to my exhibition.

I displayed it atop the packing materials in which it arrived through my letterbox, standing it up taped to its backing board. Shortly afterwards, I bought *Coastel, Stanley Harbour* from Tony for fifty pounds. Since then, Tony has added the words 'This picture is now sold' beneath the image on the website and has added another portrayal of the vessel to his artist's page.

At the exhibition opening, in this gallery between a tidal river and Bristol's Floating Harbour, just around the corner from Brunel's SS *Great Britain*, I enjoyed a coincidental meeting with a bunch of former Royal Navy servicemen, one of whom remembered visiting the vessel from his time in the Falklands in the 1980s. This submarine captain had seen a comedy show on board featuring TV ventriloquist Bob Carolgees and his hand puppet Spit the Dog...

This final chapter has made explicit my method of following mobile objects, tracing their movements across boundaries. In so doing, these objects reveal the kinds of contested spaces which they both inhabit and co-produce. I have also suggested that *The Vessel* represents a significant shift in terms of the kinds of ever-more hybrid space in which I work. Whereas



earlier works had explored physical, regulatory, and discursive spaces, lived and 'everyday' environments, *The Vessel* has seen me more than ever involved with digital communities and networks. While email and web research (along with phone calls and letters) have always been significant to my practice – and therefore online and offline, material and digital have always been to some extent co-present - this more dramatic drift into online networks and environments has led to new kinds of experience.

Like *Four Anecdotes*, recounted as my Preface, *The Vessel* is also a renarration. In fact, this thesis as a whole can also be understood in these terms. All the research projects represented contain multiple iterations, as I've experiment with different ways of 'making things public' at the same time as investigating the limits of access, participation, visibility and production of public space.

Crucially, I practise 'in the midst of things', running into and responding to different boundaries, controversies and dynamics in their operation. Few things are prescribed taken for granted in advance. In the same way that I would never want to practise with a predefined idea of what art might be, I feel the same about public space, rights, and publics. My commitment to detail, specific scenarios and webs of connections means holding big definitions and theories of space, authority and power at bay. Rather than adopting some 'depth' model of analysis, I'm interested in discovering for myself how power can be produced and exchanged in apparently small actions – the reflagging of an accommodation barge, the padlocking of a shipping container, the welcoming of a young photographer into a prison ship – relational moves that are part of fluid and dynamic situations in which objects, people and their relations are embroiled. In contexts characterized by endless claims, counter-claims, appropriations and uncertainties, such moves become political, often unexpectedly.

Although this thesis is submitted, the spatial tracing continues. Both Planningline phone numbers in Kensington and Chelsea and Mendip Council remain live at the time of writing. Harlow Renaissance closed down in 2010. During his most recent six monthly royal visit to Poundbury on 16th May of this year, The Prince of Wales visited a new bespoke jewellery shop called Purple Penguins.

On a windy 3rd October 2013, Mayor of London Boris Johnson held a press

conference at the top end of Crystal Palace Park to introduce Chinese multimillionaire Ni Zhaoxing to the U.K. He explained that this Chairman of property developers ZhongRong Group will invest five hundred million pounds to rebuild the Crystal Palace in its original 1854 location in park. The Mayor declared the plan 'a brilliant, original and simple vision', however, it wasn't at all clear what the new building's function would be.

In December 2013, having found a list of all Nigeria's ports on Lloyd's of London's website, I spent four and a half hours scouring aerial views of the Niger Delta on Google Earth, as which point I saw a familiar sight moored against the Federal Ocean Terminal near Onne. According to shipping register D.N.V., Jascon 27's current 'operational status' is 'laid up'. But since it can't move, it probably would be. Four out of five of its required surveys and certificates including its classification certificate, sewage and air pollution are more than four years overdue.

Appendix 1.

Reverse Consultation (Old New Town), Harlow 2008:

Participation Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form prepared for project.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET 'Reverse Consultation (Old New Town)'

REQUEST TO TAKE PART IN A NEW ART PROJECT

My name is Mike Ricketts, I am an artist, and I am currently developing a new project for an exhibition in Harlow in December. This will be one of a series of contemporary art exhibitions and projects taking place in a temporary exhibition space in the Market Square.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF PROJECT

A text about Harlow, written by the artist over a decade ago, will be made available to a number of individuals currently involved in the planned redevelopment of the Town Centre. These individuals will be invited to annotate a copy of the text, and to send it back to the artist, who will present a selection of these annotations (along with his original text), in the exhibition. Participants can choose whether to respond to the text anonymously, or declare their job title / role in the redevelopment, or declare their identity in full.

YOUR PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this project is entirely voluntary. You may decide to stop being a part of the project at any time without explanation. You will receive no payment for your participation.

COLLECTION OF DATA, USE OF INFORMATION AND COPYRIGHT

Individuals' annotations will be gathered, and a selection made for re-presentation in the exhibition. Your annotations will be clearly presented as such, in accordance with your declared wishes on how your identity should be treated (i.e. anonymised or not). Annotations will be used by Mike Ricketts solely in the development of the art project outlined above. Mike Ricketts may wish to publish a version of this art project as a booklet or pamphlet, or as an article in a journal/publication in future. You retain copyright ownership of the content of your annotations. In order to facilitate the accessing and use of your text in the context of this public project, a Creative Commons License will be used. This means **you keep your copyright**, but allow people to copy and distribute your work provided they give you credit. By signing this form, you are giving consent for your annotations to appear under a 'Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 3.0 Unported Licence'.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ABOUT THIS PROJECT

I will be glad to answer any questions you might have about this project at any time.
You may contact me at: **rickettsmike@yahoo.co.uk**
Mobile: **07890 769421**

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT:

'Reverse Consultation (Old New Town)'

By signing below you are agreeing that you have read and understood the Participant Information Sheet and that you agree to take part in this art project.

Please tick one of the following three options:

- I consent to being identified by name *and* job title / specific redevelopment role, in the art work and in any work arising from it
- I consent to being identified by job title / specific redevelopment role *only*, in the art work and in any work arising from it
- I do not consent to being identified in the art work or in any work arising from it

Participant's signature

Date

Printed name of person obtaining consent

Signature of person obtaining consent

Appendix 2

Reverse Consultation (Old New Town), Harlow, 2008:

Transcript of typed text presented as a component of the exhibition.

I am sorry there isn't much to see here. I should explain.

This project has been an odd one. The invitation to make an exhibition inside a customised shipping container placed in the middle of a market square came in April, from an artist called Roman Vasseur. He told me that he'd got a job as something called a 'Lead Artist' in Harlow, where there was lots of redevelopment going on. I had already written and published an essay about Harlow in the late 1990's. Roman was inviting me to re-present this essay in some way, as an exhibition.

The idea I devised for this commission was to give copies of my old essay to individuals now involved in the redevelopment of the town – planners, developers, and so on – and to ask them to comment on it. I called the project 'Reverse Consultation (Old New Town)', riffing off the way town planners and developers often consult the public on their views. My original essay was quite strongly-worded, so I suspected that it might generate some lively debate.

In the summer, all seemed to be going well. Key players in Harlow's redevelopment had copies of my essay, and the project appeared to have landed a powerful advocate at Essex County Council. As autumn leaves began to fall, however, stagnation set in. Only as recently as late November did the assistance of Nicola Bowland (who works on the 'rebranding' of the town for 'Harlow Renaissance') suddenly give me access to the heart of the regeneration process: a 'Steering Group Meeting' in the Civic Centre on 3rd December.

At the Steering Group Meeting, I recorded spoken responses to my essay offered up by a wide range of individuals: representatives from Harlow Renaissance, Harlow Council, consultants C.B.R. Ellis, developers Stockland, architects Engles, Essex County Council, the Homes and Communities Agency, and the East of England Development Agency. After the meeting, I transcribed these responses and emailed them out to everyone, requesting clearance to use individuals' words in the exhibition.

Unfortunately, the project then hit a wall - in fact two walls, simultaneously. Firstly, I was informed that there was suddenly 'enormous concern' amongst key people at Harlow Council and Harlow Renaissance at the idea of my essay being made available for the public to read (the premise of the initial invitation to me to exhibit). Apparently, my text now had the potential to trigger local outrage and negative press coverage.

Secondly, as the exhibition's opening date drew ever nearer, it became clear that only two of the twelve people whose verbal responses I had recorded at the meeting would follow through and offer permission for their words to be used in the exhibition. The Chief Executive of Harlow Renaissance subsequently offered his words too, but this was too little too late.

Therefore, since I am required to respect individuals' copyright, and, of course, wish to comply with pressure from the authorities *not* to release my original essay into Harlow, I have no option but to present this rather paradoxical display. Alongside this text, a cassette tape featuring recordings of the verbal statements and responses made at the meeting is present, but cannot (by law) be listened to. And my original text, deemed too problematic for you to read, is presented in a way that ensures that it cannot be.

Appendix 3

Reverse Consultation (Old New Town), Harlow, 2008:

A selection of emails received and sent by me in the immediate aftermath of the closure of my exhibition.

18 Dec 2008

From Andrew Bramidge (Chief Executive, Harlow Renaissance) to Roman Vasseur (Lead Artist, Harlow and Curator, Art and the New Town) and myself:

Mike, Roman

I have to say that I am very disappointed.

I can understand your frustration at not getting the responses to the essay that you had wanted, but there are a number of factual inaccuracies in your note pinned inside the container that cannot go unchallenged.

- At no time have ourselves or Harlow Council stated that the text cannot be publicly displayed. For me, the whole point was public displaying it with associated commentary. Clearly, it is provocative and we have all expressed that we need to be careful about how we use it but have never said that it cannot be used. In fact, I was under the impression that your 'Plan B' was to use extracts and invite public comment. To imply that you have been banned from using it is simply untrue.
- You state that in the summer all the key players had copies of the essay and that this then demonstrates a lack of interest. In fact, I was only provided with a copy of the essay on 19th November and I do not think that many (if any) people had it before then and some certainly had it after this date. Consequently, it is not surprising that it has been difficult to get quality responses from people when we have tried to do the whole thing in three weeks!
- The note talks of the lack of positive response from the town centre steering group. Whilst it was disappointing that more people did not provide consent for their recorded comments to be used, this needs to be set in a wider context. Steering Group members were only made aware the day before the meeting that this was to be an agenda item. Given that some people were out of their offices on the Tuesday afternoon they had not seen, let alone read, the paper before the meeting. Accordingly, the responses you recorded were off the cuff remarks to something that people had at best skim read in the meeting. I know that some members of the group felt that they had been bounced into this and again it is probably not surprising that the follow up response was poor.

Given the above I felt that, as Chair of the Project Strategy Group, I have had no option but to close the container and it will now remain closed. If the things you had stated had been accurate then I think you would have been entirely justified. However, I feel strongly that it would be wrong for the piece to be seen without the wider context above. An additional factor has been the views of the invigilators – the two who were present this morning felt very aggrieved that their time was being wasted. We did not wish to do this with other invigilators when we are reliant upon their good will for other exhibitions.

I think that we could have generated the enthusiasm for the project and the willingness to

participate had it been timetabled better. If indeed the interaction on the project had actually commenced in earnest in the summer then I think we would have had a good product by December. In the end it was too rushed to get a meaningful participation. With hindsight, I think we can all learn from this. Perhaps we could have been clearer about communications and who was to be responsible for identifying participants, distribution of materials and decision making.

Personally, I would still be keen to resurrect something from this as the concept was a good one. With more time I am sure we can get a quality response. No doubt you will both have your views and we will also clearly discuss it at the Strategy Group meeting on 14th January.

Regards

Andrew

18 Dec 2008

My initial reply to Andrew Bramidge:

Dear Andrew

Thank you for your email.

I am obviously very concerned that the exhibition has been closed, and would ask you to reconsider this decision.

I have spoken to Roman this evening, and will allow him to respond to the specific points you raise. As you will no doubt see from his forthcoming reply, we / I deem the notion that my text in the exhibition contains 'inaccuracies' to be misguided.

In addition, I would ask you to bear in mind that, as part of the exhibition, the text pinned to the wall is an art work.

At the moment, I fail to understand the justification for the closure of this public art exhibition / commission, presented in a public gallery space, by yourself.

Best wishes

Mike

18 Dec 2008

Email sent by me to Roman Vasseur, Kelly Lean (Arts Development Officer, Harlow Council) and David Wright (Director, Commissions East):

Dear Roman, Kelly and David,

I am writing to appeal for your urgent support. As you are probably aware, my new exhibition for the 'Art and the New Town' series of commissions in Harlow ('Reverse Consultation (Old New Town)') opened this morning, but was shut down within hours.

As you can see from the email copied below, Andrew Bramidge, Chief Executive of Harlow Renaissance, was responsible for closing the show. He seems to be arguing in his email

sent this afternoon that he has closed the show because a text that is included as a key component of the exhibition includes passages that he considers inaccurate. Whilst I contest his claims regarding the content of the text in question (and Lead Artist Roman endorses me on this, and will be arguing the individual points to Andrew Bramidge shortly), I strongly suspect that Andrew's views regarding the detailed content of an artwork are no justification for him taking it upon himself to shut down a public exhibition in a public gallery space?

This is clearly a dramatic action to have taken against an art project, an artist, the realisation of a public commission, and - most importantly for me - the exhibition's potential publics. I would much appreciate it if you could help by resolving this situation as soon as possible.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Mike (Ricketts)

(Cced to Andrew Hunter, Essex CC)

19 Dec 2008:

Roman Vasseur email to Andrew Bramidge:

Dear Andrew

Thank you for your email. I will answer it in more detail this afternoon. Unfortunately I have to prepare for a meeting right now.

I think it is very regrettable that the show has been closed in this way and would much prefer that it be reopened. Your involvement and very welcome lead on things has only been recent and as you suggest lines of communication could have been better prior to this. As a result I will need to respond to claims of inaccuracies as I believe the nature of Mikes final work reflects conversations and processes outside of your own work with the project.

Also although Mikes work may seem 'in place' of an artwork I consider it to be an artwork. There appears to be a notion that the show was in some way not delivered by Mike and therefore could be closed. I am sorry that the views of one of the invigilators was seen as the basis for a curatorial decision. I did speak with them both yesterday morning. Mike did state in an email to both you and I that subsequent to an underwhelming response from the partners to his request for permission to use their words a different approach was being adopted. I don't think that we should forget how accommodating Mike has been in this process i.e. Awaiting lans responses and suggested way forward with the project, editing and cutting the text twice in response to requests from individuals, transcribing all the responses etc.

I hope that a solution can be arrived at.

Regards

Roman

19 Dec 2008

Response from Andrew Bramidge to Roman and I:

Mike, Roman

Thank you for your comments and I do completely understand your frustration. However, I do still feel that the text is a misrepresentation of what has happened. Roman, I would still welcome your thoughts on the matter.

I have liaised with Harlow Council and Essex County (the two funders of the exhibition programme, along with ourselves) and with Commissions East who have been participating in this over the last year and acting as our advisors. None of these parties feels that the exhibition should remain open and, indeed, that the exhibition that we commissioned has not been delivered. Whilst we all clearly understood that a different approach was to be undertaken I don't think that we expected this to consist of a page and a half of complaint about lack of participation. The issue has solely been one of timescale. Perhaps we are at fault for not engaging more fully last Friday on what the concept was to be for the 'different approach'.

As I hope you both appreciate, I have always been very supportive of the concept of the exhibition and I very much hope that we can still work on producing this and displaying it elsewhere in the town. I would suggest that all those to whom this email is addressed and copied convene in the first week of January to reflect on where we are and to see what we can deliver. I can be available anytime on 6th January, morning of 8th or anytime on 9th. We can then take a recommendation to the Strategy Group meeting on 14th Jan.

I hope that you will all feel that this is a sensible way forward.

Regards

Andrew

19 Dec 2008

Reply from David Wright to me:

Dear Mike

Thank you for your email and sorry to hear about your project. I am afraid it would be too difficult to review till after Christmas now, as this would require all parties meeting today. Please rest assured that we will do all we can to resolve any issues in the New Year.

David

19 Dec 2008

Email from Kelly Lean to Roman Vassseur, Andrew Bramidge, David Wright and myself:

Hello all,

The following statement will be put up outside the container shortly to explain the closure. I will also be contacting people on the mailing lists to inform them of the closure. Mike, I hope that you will be able to contact anyone you have invited along.

We regret that the Temple of Utopias has been closed a few days early as it has not been possible

to stage the final exhibition. We are in discussion with the artist about presenting this exhibition in Harlow at a future date.

We apologise for any inconvenience this may have caused. However, the project has been a tremendous success with over 700 visitors during the 7 week Art and the New Town project. Thank you for your support.

In response to Andrew's suggestion, i think that a meeting in early January would be the best way forward. I've checked Gavin's calendar and it seems the 6th in the afternoon or the morning of the 8th would be best for him. I can also make these dates.

Many thanks,

Kelly

Kelly Lean
Arts Development Officer, Harlow Council

19 Dec 2008

My reply to Kelly Lean:

Dear Kelly,

Thank you for this email.

I infer from this that you and Harlow Council are endorsing the closure of my exhibition by Andrew.

My request would be for any notice outside the exhibition to clarify that the final exhibition has been closed early (it was installed, and did open to the public).

In addition, please could the notice NOT state: "We are in discussion with the artist about presenting this exhibition in Harlow at a future date". This is inaccurate. I am not currently involved in a discussion about this. This exhibition (which is not being treated as an exhibition, it seems to me) constitutes my final work on this project.

Please could you also clarify whether this notice will be posted by Harlow Council or Harlow Renaissance, or whose logos etc will feature?

Any discussion I am involved in at present is to try to get a clear answer as to why the exhibition has been closed, and regarding the re-opening of the exhibition.

Regards

Mike

19 Dec 2008

Email from me to Andrew Bramidge:

Dear Andrew

Thank you for your email.

As you will have seen from my email to Kelly, I am still struggling to understand the basis on which the show has been closed.

I fully appreciate that you have been a supporter of and contributor to this project in the run-up to the show opening. However, I am unhappy about any assumption that I will be involved in future meetings or dialogue regarding the project, given what has happened in the last 24 hours. I hope you can understand that the exhibition that has been shut down constitutes a summative piece of work regarding this project.

Best

Mike

22 Dec 2008

Email from me to Kelly Lean

Dear Kelly

Thank you for your email, and for agreeing to remove the sentence that I objected to from your proposed notice. Thank you too for referring to my exhibition as an exhibition.

However, when I visited Harlow's Market Square on Saturday, around lunchtime, I was surprised to find that no statement announcing the closure of the exhibition was visible outside the exhibition space. Perhaps you can explain?

I would like to respond, briefly, to your suggestion that my current exhibition does not 'realise the project as planned'. From my point of view, my exhibition was always going to present the outcome of a process of 'reverse consultation', i.e. material generated by this process (my attempts 'to realise the project as planned') would feature in and as the exhibition. I would acknowledge that a 'surprise' element of the exhibition I eventually installed might have been the lack of any visitors' VISUAL access to my words and to the words of others who had contributed. But this is NOT to say that these elements do not feature in and as the exhibition - they do. And I would argue that these elements are presented in juxtaposition, too.

I have to say that, on the final day of the (planned) exhibition, I have still not received a clear and specific reason as to why it was closed. I am confused by your suggestion, made here, that an art exhibition needs to be 'accurate' in order to be open to the public. I also remain amazed and disappointed that possible publics for this exhibition (both local and wider) remained uninformed as to its closure, and the specific reasons for its withdrawal from view.

Regards

Mike

22 Dec 2008

Email me to Andrew Bramidge:

Dear Andrew

Given that Roman has not sent you an email responding in detail to your numbered points, and is now sick, I will address them. I will offer responses to your objections to the text component of my exhibition.

Following your numbered points:

1. The statements I make in the work happen to be true. Roman can tell you more about this. As you note, I do not claim in the exhibition text that either Harlow Council or Harlow Renaissance 'banned' my full essay. I am intrigued that you were "under the impression that your Plan B was to use extracts and invite public comment". This has never been my plan. It sounds closer to desires that I understand were expressed by your colleague Nicola Bowland, at one stage.

2. In the exhibition, I do NOT claim that ALL the key players had copies of my essay in the summer. The essay was distributed to several people that Roman considered significant in Harlow's redevelopment during the summer. Roman can tell you more about this.

3. The text in the exhibition does indeed suggest disappointment at the lack of follow-up response from steering group participants, but this disappointment was real. Whilst the late notice, even lack of advance notice, for some attending the meeting, was not completely ideal, we were aware of this at the meeting, and I think operated sensitively with this in mind. For instance, at the end of the exercise, I explicitly stated that I would welcome responses requesting for only some of peoples' words to be used for the project, or requests for the editing of peoples' transcribed words. Your colleague Nicky Bowland, who, as I acknowledge in my art work text, generously arranged this meeting slot for us, at short notice, must surely have been aware of the possibility that not everyone attending would pick up emailed-out paragraphs in time for the meeting, and therefore might feel a little 'bounced into' the process. I would remind you that using this meeting in this way was Nicky's idea. I tried to be as accommodating and understanding as I could, to everyone, given the situation. As it happened, you may be interested to know that the two members who responded in time, happy for me to use their words, were very likely amongst those who had heard little or nothing of the project before the meeting itself. No response came from anyone connected with organisations who had commissioned this project, before the deadline.

I consider your inclusion of comments regarding your invigilators' responses to this exhibition quite extraordinary, in this context.

I also have one or two more things to add regarding my decision not to attend meetings or continue to develop the project in Harlow in the future. I regret having been forced into taking this difficult decision. However, I have done so for several reasons, some of them not to do with Harlow Renaissance:

1. I have still not received a specific and convincing reason why the exhibition has been closed. In fact, suggested reasons for its closure seem to have shifted somewhat.

2. It seems to me that my exhibition has not been treated as an exhibition, or as a work of art, in much of our correspondence, since its closure.

3. Kelly Lean's email to me stating she would put a notice outside the gallery, that came through to me on the back of yours, stated that she intended to announce that I was in negotiation with the commissioners about

a future exhibition in Harlow. This was plainly not true. I found this antagonistic.

4. It seems to me that my project has, from the start, been about trying to engender dialogue and debate, but the exhibition's closure, followed by Commissions East's decision last Friday NOT to issue a press release announcing its closure, followed by my realisation on visiting the gallery on Saturday that Kelly Lean had NOT posted a notice on the outside of the gallery explaining the closure of the show, have all led me to the conclusion that a LACK of public awareness of the project has been decided upon. This is thoroughly disheartening for an artist who has engaged in a public commission.

Regards

Mike

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