



# NO PICNIC

Explorations in art and research

Alison Beck, Matthew Cheeseman, Caroline Evans, Bob Levene,  
Jonathan Paragreen, Hester Reeve, Arne Schröder and Sarah Spencer





**There have been moments of conversations that have had huge resonance. And I don't know—I don't care—how I've applied them. Part of my practice is that I allow this to happen. I let things just sit in the back of my head and I don't work at them too much, because if you try to work at an idea or a feeling, you work it to death and it just disappears. But if it has that much resonance, it will come through somehow.**

**I'll look back in three years' time and ask 'what am I doing now that I hadn't planned to do before the project?'. Although things naturally evolve anyway, I do feel that this is a pathway perhaps to something different. I would like it to be. I would like to keep the group together.**



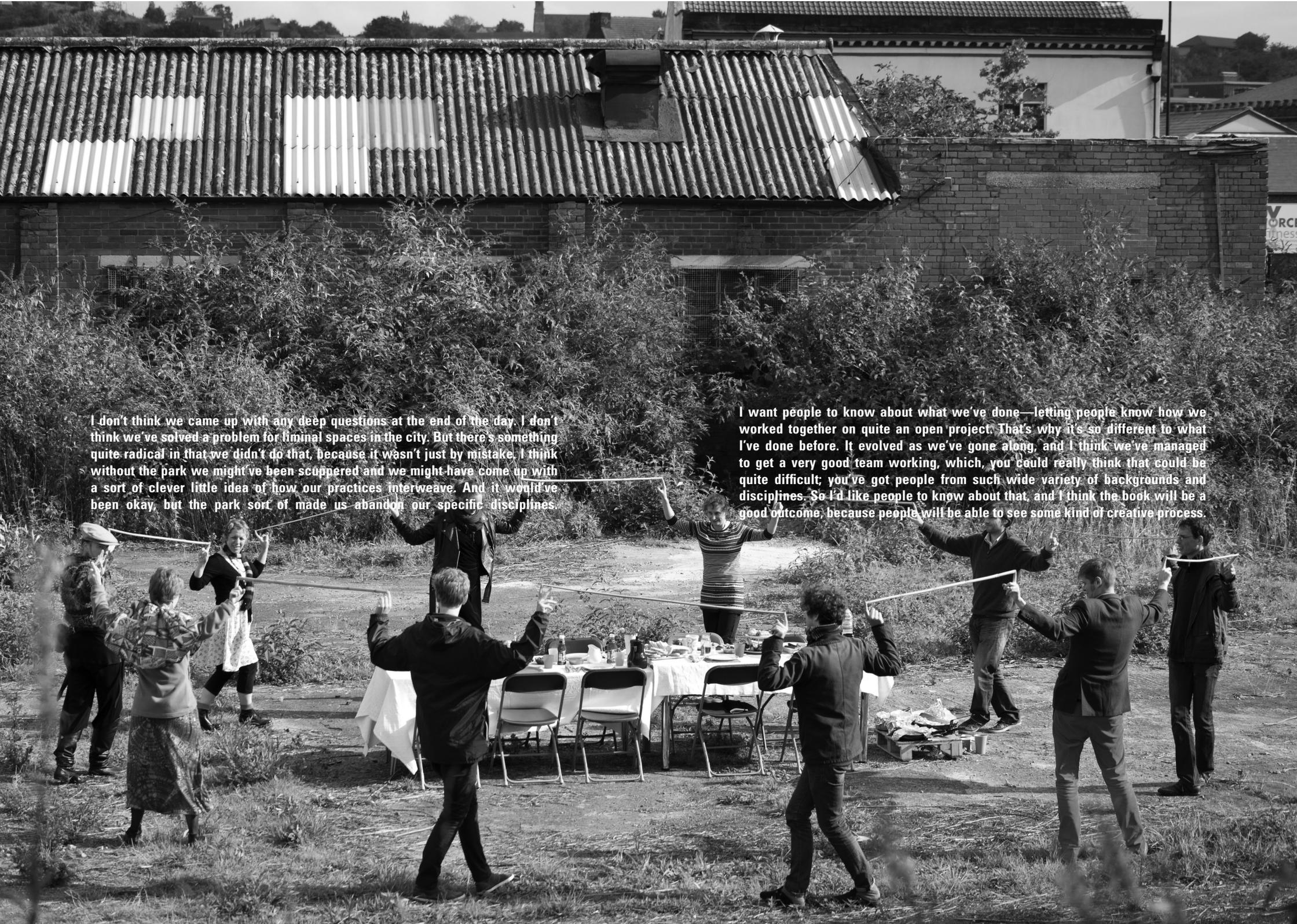
The project was quite fragmented. Well, we were all very busy with a lot of other stuff (i.e. University commitments)... I never felt like I had a very pre-determined role other than I felt a responsibility to make sure it didn't turn into a public art project [laughs]. And that where there was a form for something that came out of our shared conversation, that I would help find that just because I'm used to perceiving where there's a form emerging in terms of there being an event or there being something visual.

There is a trial and error when it comes to formulating research questions and hypotheses—there is really thinking and conceptual planning based on what we know, we deduce this that leads us to this hypothesis that we will then answer by doing these manipulations. In that respect, I don't think the project has actually helped me.

A black and white photograph of an industrial site. In the background, there are several brick buildings, one of which has a sign that reads "WALKER & HOWARD". A large brick wall runs across the middle ground. In the foreground, a person is standing in a field of tall grass and weeds, holding a long pole or tool. The sky is overcast.

The lack of goals has actually been really quite refreshing. The fact that we've had quite a few afternoons down at Furnace Park and there hasn't really been any end goal. It has been: 'let's just see how it goes,' and I don't think in Engineering or actually very much within life, you get to do that very often. Especially doing experimental work, you have to be very clear as to what your goals are. You often use expensive equipment, so you book in time on it, you have to be very clear what you're going to do in that time, and just to play and not know what you're doing isn't something we do... I'd like to make things a lot more open-ended but I think it's still difficult... For any funding we have to have very clear goals. [In future collaborative work] I think we're still going to have to have an end goal, a very particular event. But then I think that the process as to what we do will remain quite open.

'This is a jewel, this is a jewel,' but people don't want to see the jewel; they want to see the museum case and the little brass thing that says, you know: 'this is a jewel'.



I don't think we came up with any deep questions at the end of the day. I don't think we've solved a problem for liminal spaces in the city. But there's something quite radical in that we didn't do that, because it wasn't just by mistake. I think without the park we might've been scuppered and we might have come up with a sort of clever little idea of how our practices interweave. And it would've been okay, but the park sort of made us abandon our specific disciplines.

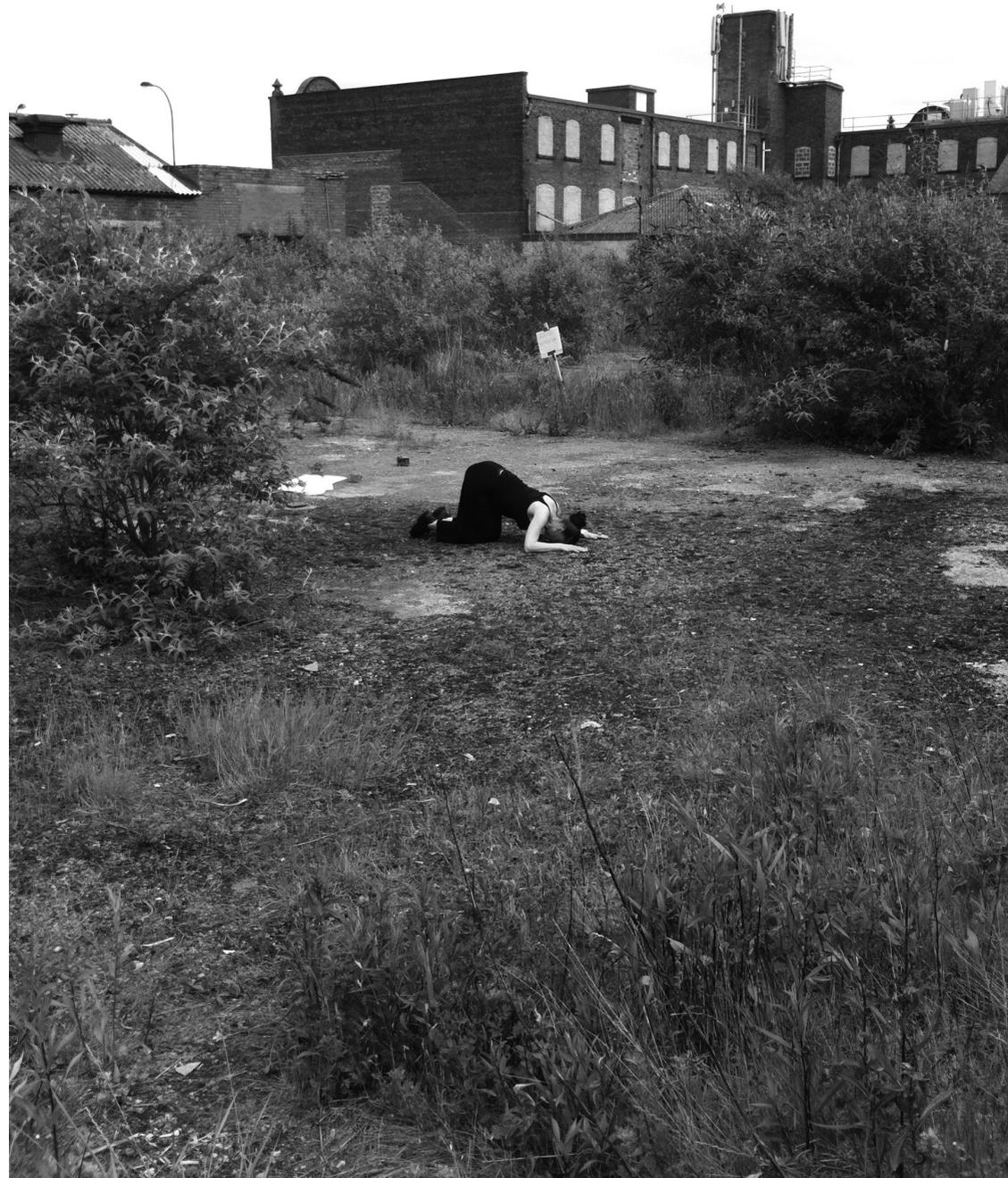
I want people to know about what we've done—letting people know how we worked together on quite an open project. That's why it's so different to what I've done before. It evolved as we've gone along, and I think we've managed to get a very good team working, which, you could really think that could be quite difficult; you've got people from such wide variety of backgrounds and disciplines. So I'd like people to know about that, and I think the book will be a good outcome, because people will be able to see some kind of creative process.

This book collects the writing, images and ideas that a group of artists and university researchers produced over a ten month exploration of each other's work as they explored a wasteland in Sheffield. The project was called Sandpit, which seemed right when we first entered the wasteland on a clear February morning. Along the way we lost that name and ended up elsewhere, still in the wasteland, but doing things that none of us had planned. More than anything this book catalogues that drift.

From the beginning, we designed a project where the artists were integral to the research and not added on at the end, to communicate the 'findings'. As a result, there is no collective arrival here, but rather a set of conclusions and critiques all stemming from the same process. Its interesting how diverse and personal these responses are when the project itself was performed collectively, even down to the writing of this book. Most of the authors are drawn from those who remained at the end of the collaboration: six university researchers (an engineer, a biochemical engineer, an ecologist, a materials scientist, a speech therapist, a folklorist) and two artists (Bob Levene and Hester Reeve). I've specified the artists' names because it somehow seems wrong to further 'specialise' them in the way which seems natural to researchers.

With such a diverse group, we began by working out connections between people. This wasn't always between researcher and artist but sometimes between researcher and researcher. By the end we were all trying to understand and apply artistic practice to the research process. The book has been designed to reflect and make sense of this. It will be useful to anyone interested in integrating artistic practice with other research disciplines. There are three sections to it. The first features essays from the participants, the second captures a group blog we did, the third provides the chronology of the project and documents speeches given at a delicious breakfast we held in the wasteland in which we sited most of our work. This wasteland is called Furnace Park, named after the 19th Century cementation furnace that overlooks it. The furnace ceased operations in 1951, the year of the first Miss World pageant, the first British residential tower block and the first computer to run a business application. Back then, a project such as this would be inconceivable. We hope you gain something from reading this book.

—Matthew Cheeseman



# NO PICNIC

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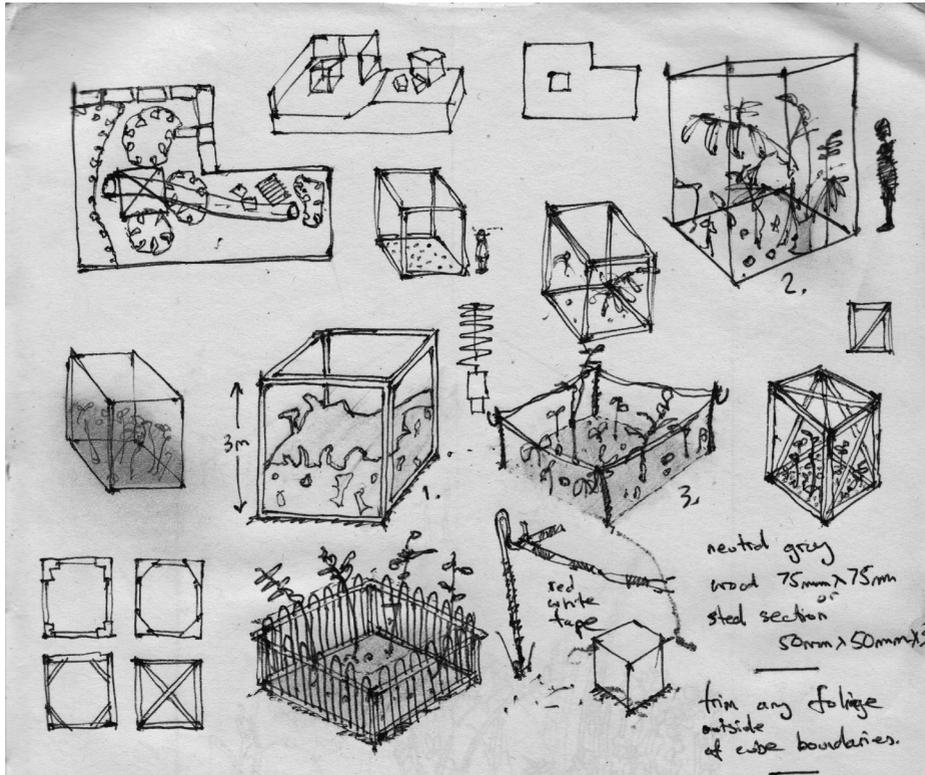
**Thank You**  
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# NOTE ON ART BOOK PUBLISHING

Matthew Cheeseman

I was asked to write 'a note on the reality of art publishing' by the book's editors and a few words on these drawings. It struck me that they are the same piece. We couldn't get this book published by a traditional publisher. There isn't the market. AND Publishing agreed to stock a digital, print on demand edition, whilst we would produce a print version privately. The 'reality of art publishing' is pretty similar to the 'reality' of academic publishing. There are too many producers.

Many of the readers are students, people you work with or advertise to personally. Readerships are coerced from personal connections.

There is a sense within academia that this state of affairs amounts to a form of systemic overproduction. The funding system and job market instill a 'publish or die!' attitude: it almost doesn't matter what you publish, just that you do, as much as possible. This

brings up questions of value: what is more important, the surface or the substance? I am sure there are parallels to art publishing and beyond. We are all producers now.

The drawings are excerpts from the sketchbooks of Tim Lewis, the third artist on the project. He had to drop out because he had a son and couldn't commit anymore. A similar situation to Dr. Tom Stafford, a psychologist on the project who had a daughter and also had to drop out. Tom actually wrote a piece inspired by Tim's work which would be better placed to accompany these drawings, but it was published by the BBC and we don't have the rights to reproduce it. You can look it up online, but only if you're outside the UK as it was published by BBC Worldwide, who aren't supported by the licensing fee.

Anyway, these sketches are ideas Tim had for the project. The previous page details a wireframe box or fence which was intended to demarcate an area of Furnace Park. Nothing would be done to the land inside, which would be left to grow unkempt and unaided. Tim thought that this would act as a control, a kind of rolling memory of the project. It wasn't built. This book is now the only record of the wasteland that was, before the land was cleared and made safe, levelled and wood-chipped. I don't think we've included any photos of Furnace Park as it looks now. Our project happened before it came to be, when there was more wildness to it, if wildness is something you can have more or less of. The tethered faun on the next page is an inhabitant of this place. Explorer, native, captive and guard.

While these sketches may evoke a sense of compulsion, of working out an idea for its own sake, I did pressurise Tim to produce them. I did pay him for them. This makes

me think how complex and long life can seem to be: I first met Tim at the beginning of the millennium, when I worked for the art gallery that represents him. I helped install one of his shows. Along one wall we exhibited pages from his notebooks, just like these. I remember a couple came into the gallery while we were getting ready and took one of the pages, thinking they were free. It shouldn't have happened and it was my fault for not watching them.

I was excited about working with Tim again and never questioned that I'd have to work for free to do so. That's just something I am used to, as an 'academic' willingly working a collection of limited contracts that don't pay the breadth of my ambition. So these words were written for free. I suppose I am getting kudos in return. No doubt we'll give most of the copies of this book away too: the University of Sheffield via the Crucible programme is paying for them and deserves many thanks for that. So I suppose this is my point about the 'reality of art/academic publishing': the so-called bottom-line values of the market are all buried, covered up and crossed out in a hidden sketchbook of other values, desires and motivations. Tim and Tom left this project because of their family commitments, everyone else donated their spare time, working for free. The 'reality' of working in art and working in universities is something that cannot be subsumed by the market principle because they also operate in a gift economy. Much of the anger and frustration that comes from the monetisation of everything is that it cloaks this gift economy in shame. Giving away one's labour for free is not the problem because work, art, writing should/can be self-realizing. This sense of shame is the one thing I've come to terms with during this project.

# SO, WHAT IS THIS ABOUT?

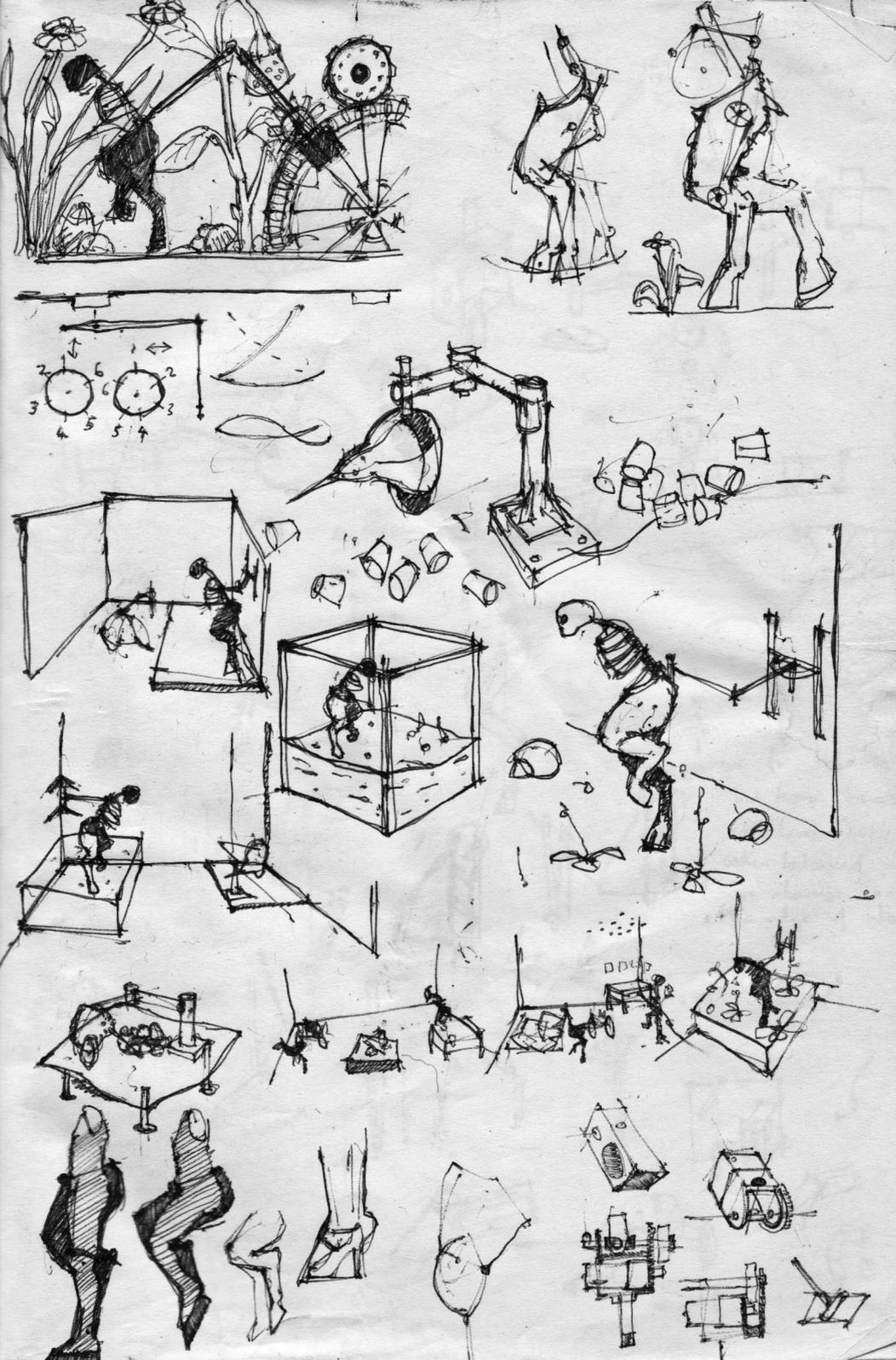
Arne Schröder

When thinking about what to write in my contribution to this volume, I once again read the original grant proposal whose success primed the pump for our researcher-artist collaboration project. According to the proposal, the aim was 'to develop innovative and experimental collaborations between researchers and artists to transform cities and address urban problems'. What immediately struck me was the apparent contrast between this rather grandiose objective and what we actually did. Even when considering the usual over-ambitiousness and pretentiousness of such funding proposals, it feels like our claims and the project's reality do not match. Did we really transform Sheffield? What urban problems did we look at? Was it not just a lot of inconsequential meetings and vague talking? No, definitely not! While the lack of a solid, physical outcome like a novel research finding or a piece of art was maybe frustrating at times, it actually was the deliberately experimental and open character of the project right from the start that made the whole experience so worthwhile.

When in February 2013 we met for the first time at the Furnace Park site, followed by lunch in the pub, I believe most of us, or at least me, imagined that at the end we would have done what scientists and artists normally do: publish research papers or produce objects of art, only this time with some form of contribution by the other camp. How this contribution was supposed to have made the research or art more novel or different from the usual stuff, I had no idea. I was even quite sceptical and in fact it didn't really happen. But while these things would have been a solid outcome and visible demonstration of the project's success, at the end we achieved something much more valuable and lasting.

Triggered off by the online blogging project we started visiting each other's studios, offices and laboratories, met again at Furnace Park or symposia or hung out together in coffee shops and pubs. All this actually only really took off after the blog had come to its official end. And it was during these personal face-to-face meetings with all their so seemingly vague, inconsequential talking that we were exposed to novel ideas and concepts which opened our minds to collaborating with each other. We established relationships with each other and we even developed new friendships. And it is these things that ultimately provide the fertile ground on which often the most interesting research ideas and creative projects grow and which will finally, in later years, contribute to our so grandiose project aim. And in fact, this is what is happening right now based on close collaborations between several of us.

So what I learned regarding interdisciplinary projects is that you need to take your time, develop a personal relationship, sit back and let ideas grow and mature, instead of rushing and doing something just for the sake of doing it. Given the divide in how scientists and artists explore the world and the formats they use to express their findings, this holds even more for collaborations between them. We would not have been exposed to other ways of thinking and exploring had our project been precisely outlined and timelimited, with a well defined outcome. In contrast, NO PICNIC gave us the time and freedom to set the foundations for great things to come. The blogging was a necessary and helpful start, but it could not replace more personal meetings. I guess this is true for any human endeavour: we are social beings and direct talking to each other is what we do.





# GROUND INVESTIGATIONS, A REFLECTION

Bob Levene



It started as an invitation to have a conversation, a one month online exchange of ideas and thoughts. When looking back it was the very notion of dialogue that became not only the means and the process by which this project happened but also the subject and the artwork. With dialogue comes the act of listening, listening without any other intent. With listening comes a building of relationships and understanding and with that can come a new found respect. With respect came support and from that came a genuine space for experimentation and play. From my perspective this was the strength of the project.



The Ground Investigations was our first real world play day and it came from the desire to be working together in the same space with an awareness of each others' practices but without any forced collaboration, need to resolve our thinking or make art. It was simply a fixed space and time for play.

Play is an incredibly serious affair, play is where we learn, discover and uncover without knowing too much about what we are looking for. Play is what artists do. Novel solar cameras were built, surfaces were scanned, passers-by were stopped in the streets, questions were asked, we looked up, down and directly ahead. We talked, walked, made contact with the ground and explored different ways of recording, observing, gathering, documenting, measuring and being in a space in order to understand what that space was. It was a very supportive and equally inspiring environment to work in, seeing everyone doing their own thing gave people permission to carry on or to ask for a hand or an opinion from time to time.



When Hester and myself were given the task to devise or propose a final outcome for the project we both very quickly rejected the idea of producing an installed artwork or object of some kind, it didn't seem to have any relevance to the project. We were keen to continue with the same process and values—dialogue, open-ended conversation, sharing, durational or time based events and without relying on or unpicking the preconceived roles and divisions between artists and researchers. There the concept of the Breakfast was born, the toast became the opportunity for everyone to have their own voice in and about the project.

For myself this dialogue is continuing beyond the project, as a result of meeting the engineering based researchers I am now the Faculty of Engineering's artist-in-residence. The dialogue and listening has become a core part of the process, and I have spent time meeting with engineers finding out about what they do and trying to unpick what it means to engineer something. I've asked them and recorded their hopes, wishes and fears, all of which is feeding into a larger series of works exploring the ground (under), surface, infrastructure and resources.

# AFTER A FASHION

Alison Beck

**Several visits to Furnace Park saw it change from being bare, brown and grey in February to much greener and leafier in May and July.**

As the park seemed to be constantly changing, I wanted to record a sense of the place and the people via microscopic details. On the 1<sup>st</sup> July 2013, I used a microscope to collect images relating to the people who were there. I documented their shoes, clothes, jewellery and tattoos to show Furnace Park after a fashion. The greenery that had grown up had hidden a lot of discarded or lost objects and rubbish. I took images of some interesting items that I found, to convey the wasteland.

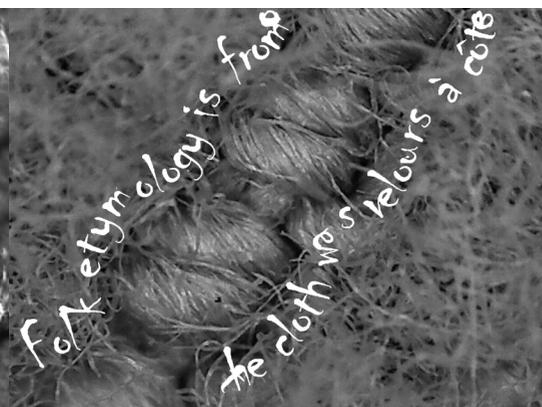
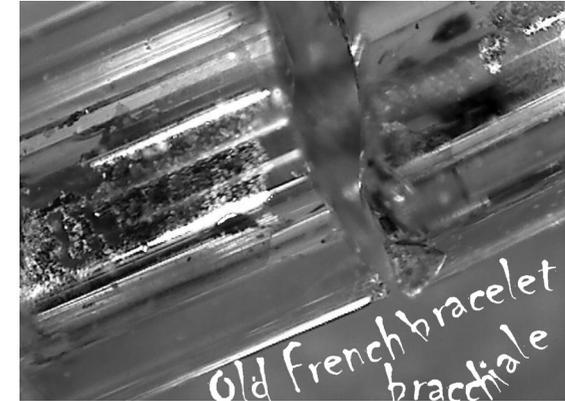
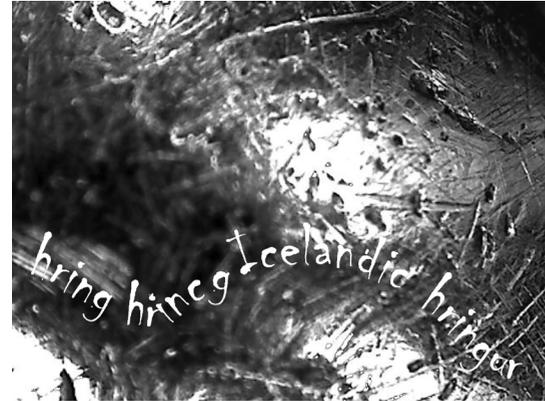
Since those images were taken, Furnace Park has been stripped back to the bare concrete, the rubbish cleared, holes filled in and collapsing masonry secured. Now the site is safe, larger numbers of people can visit as the next phase of change begins.

The micrographs are shown with some comments from the wearer of the item being imaged. Partial snapshots of the etymology of the word describing the items are shown on the pictures to illustrate some of the history of these words and where they may have originated from. Like Furnace Park, their form and meaning has changed over time and continues to develop.

For a ring which looks relatively shiny to the naked eye, the deep scratches and pitting shows a completely different surface to that which I am used to seeing every day.

I think I prefer how this bracelet looks close up.

These images suit my tastes: dark, metallic, shiny and textural, almost oily. They look beautiful in the abstract yet strangely similar!

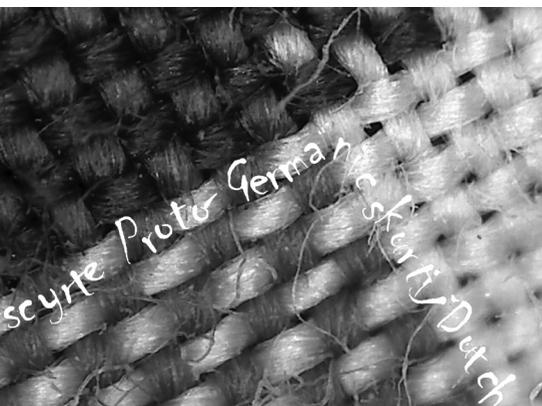


I've already thrown one of these away, it's either been incinerated or lives in landfill. The other two I keep close. One will last for a long time, longer than me, while the other will go when I die.

Fascinating image of the stitching on my shoe, clearly showing that the stitching is composed of synthetic fibres.

I've walked for miles in this shoe.

Plasma is a state of matter consisting of partially ionized gas. I use cool plasmas to prepare coatings to control the surface chemistry of materials such as plastics, glass, metals.



# GOLD FINCHES

Sarah Spencer

**Goldfinches are nearly five times more likely to be seen in British gardens than they were during the mid-1990s.**

Around 313,000 pairs breed in the UK each year. In winter, many goldfinches migrate as far south as Spain. They are commonly kept and bred in captivity around the world because of their distinctive appearance and lovely liquid twittering song. Because of the thistle seeds it eats (and teasel seeds, as seen in Furnace Park) in Christian symbolism the goldfinch is associated with Christ's crown of thorns. In pictures of Madonna and Child the goldfinch sometimes appears to represent the foreknowledge of the crucifixion (see Raphael's Madonna of the Goldfinch). They also feature as a natural luxury in Keats' 1884 poem 'I stood tip-toe upon a little hill'.

My drawing of the goldfinch represents some themes from the interviews I held with researchers:

1. The widening appreciation of art beyond the image
2. Personal entitlement to the creative process
3. A mindfulness in observing our surroundings
4. That distinctions between artist and researcher were explored in relation to producing, understanding, generating.



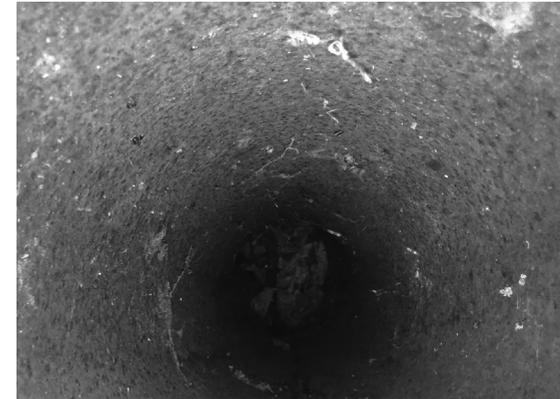
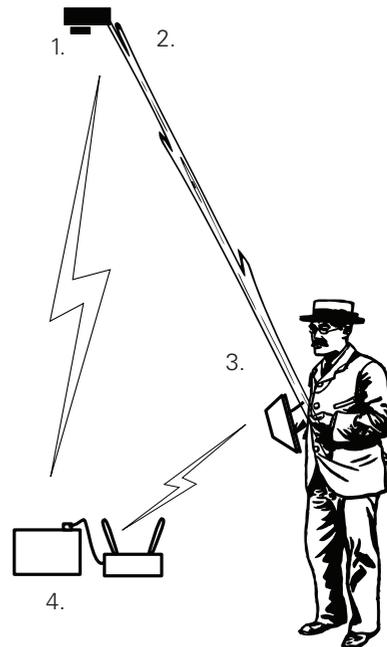
# ANALYSING THE SURFACE OF FURNACE PARK FROM ABOVE

Jonathan Paragreen

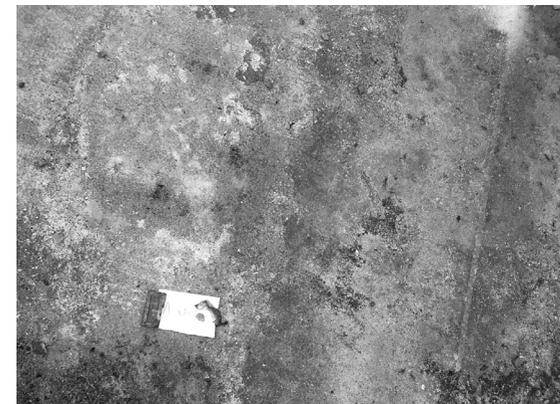
**During the Ground Investigations, whilst most other participants were getting very close up to the surface, I tried to view the surface from farther away.**

I achieved this by attaching an old camera phone to a long stick found on the site, the camera was set to take a shot every 10 seconds allowing time to move into a new location and set up the shot. Further improvements were made for use at future events which allow for control of the camera by any Wi-Fi enabled mobile device and for the user to view the live video stream or to take high quality still images.

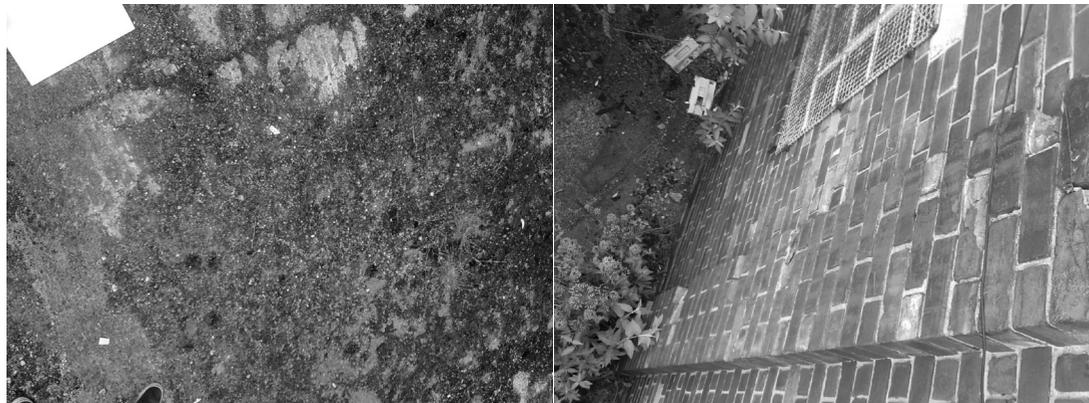
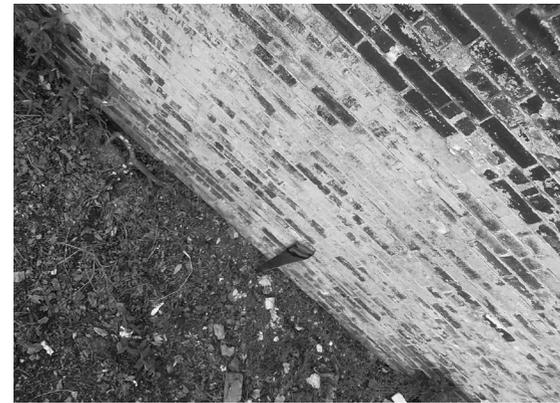
1. Live video stream from camera broadcast over Wi-Fi.
2. Motorola Defy phone installed with free IP Webcam app.
3. Control of camera and ability to view live images in the browser of any Wi-Fi enabled device.
4. Wi-Fi router powered by 12V battery.



The images which I find the least interesting are those of the surface of the park. These images lack a sense of scale and contrast which is gained with the close-up images of the vegetation.



-  
The images looking down on walls  
and fences give a great sense of  
perspective and from angles at  
which we are not used to viewing  
such structures.  
-



-  
People, in my opinion, make  
some of the most interesting  
photographic compositions. I love  
the squinting, looking-up-to-the-  
camera poses.  
-



# CHANGE

Jonathan Paragreen



**‘So you are making people unemployed’ was my grandfather’s response when I told him I was working on an engineering education scheme to automate a process at a local business.**

Old copper mine at Parys Mountain, Anglesey

Engineering is all about making changes, whether that is the design of a new structure, infrastructure, a new process, machinery or a new product. As an engineer I have always loved the challenge of solving a technical problem above all else. In contrast, conversations about my work (especially with non-engineer family or friends) often focus on the negative impact of engineering. Perhaps I just know a lot of negative people, but it has struck me that any change will have some negative impact on someone, even though the overall impact of the change may be positive.

Working on NO PICNIC has caused me to reflect on the social impact of engineering and change. The blogging process has had a particularly large impact. Throughout our meetings this theme of creation and destruction has repeatedly been brought up. Our initial conversations were around changing something physical to create something new. Creating a new steel structure requires either the recycling of the steel from existing products or the destruction of an environment for ores. Our later conversations began to consider social implications. We considered that the change of land use for Furnace Park would have significant impact on the sex workers operating nearby, possibly moving them, which will then also have an impact on wherever they move to. The clearing of the site also caused disappointment to the participants, the vegetation and litter was a large part of our work together. Its loss changed the character of the site, as well as our own feelings of belonging there and our future plans.

*—There’s never been good times  
sin’ spinning-jennies came up.  
—Machine is th’ ruin of poor folk.*

from Mary Barton by Elizabeth Gaskell

Often change is characterised by its negative aspects. Each new technology brings about a period of adjustment. Though change can be tough for the individuals directly involved, fears of mass unemployment due to mechanisation, automation and introduction of robotics have largely been unfounded. People have, however, had to adapt and seek out new opportunities or new careers. Attitudes change over time too and areas where the environment has been scarred by industry are later appreciated for their beauty and scale, from Victorian mills, modern chemical and steel works through to mines and quarries.

Within engineering, technology tends to come first and social impact has tended to be an afterthought, assessed as an add-on process. Environmental and safety risk assessments and public consultations are carried out after considerable design work. This has steadily improved over recent time with concepts of safety and environmental impact being considered much earlier in the design process, although often this is cost driven to negate the need for costly modifications later on. Many large companies now consider robotics and automation as tools for the workers rather than as a replacement for employees, taking into account the need to retain skills.



The term 'creative destruction' has been applied in many topics, from economics to town planning. It was coined by Joseph Schumpeter in the 1950s, to describe how new economic orders arise out of the destruction of previous models. Marx describes the creative-destructive cycle of capitalist forces as leading to their eventual downfall. The term was also applied by Robert Bruce to his regeneration plans for postwar Glasgow which would have required the mass demolition and rebuilding of a large part of the city centre. It is also a recurring theme in Eastern mysticism with the Hindu god Shiva being both a creator and destroyer.

Perhaps such change is inevitable for some. From those whose house stands in the way of a new railway, motorway, or power line to those employed by an industry being superseded by new technology or policy. Engineers do need to develop a greater awareness of the social impact of new technology on individuals and consider how to best minimise this, but change will continue to happen and individuals will have to continue to adapt as long as populations continue to grow and our consumption continues to rise and change. And even for those negatively impacted this can provide a chance to relocate, a change or a push to start something else. It is not all bad, but sometimes it is good for all of us to reflect on what is being destroyed.

Steel works at Redcar, Teesside

# TAXONOMISING RESEARCH

Sarah Spencer

**We sit within macro demographic categories based on age, socioeconomic status, gender, nationality, ethnicity, sexuality. Although these categories appear straightforward they are difficult to both conceptualise and measure. Socioeconomic status, for example, can include data such as wealth, occupation, the occupation of parents, housing status, education level.**

There are also local categories that we find ourselves within, ones which we create through interactions centred on a common set of beliefs, behaviours, purposes and interests. Academics have studied groups based around these communities of practice. An example would be the work of Penelope Eckert, a sociolinguistic who studied jocks (school-oriented) versus burnouts (locally-oriented) in a Detroit high school in the 80s. Such communities might form anywhere—in staffrooms, online, at the school gates, in youth clubs and nightclubs.

And then there are the consumer-based categories according to which we are constantly categorised. These locate us according to our vital statistics, which might include demographic data but also information accumulated from our daily behaviour, both online and offline. An example of such a classification system is 'A Classification of Residential Neighbourhoods' (Acorn). Acorn provides data on the consumption and lifestyle patterns of people living in a particular postcode. According to their website 'Acorn segments postcodes and neighbourhoods into 6 Categories, 18 Groups and 62 Types. By analysing

significant social factors and population behaviour, it provides precise information and in-depth understanding of the different types of people'. This expression, 'types of people', is a recurring turn of phrase in their reports. Postcode searches produce categories of 'types' and descriptions of their behaviour that appear to legitimise assumptions about what people have access to and how people behave. The following examples are direct extracts from the longer profiles provided by Acorn for areas that matter to me.

#### My childhood home

*Fewer than usual of these people access the internet. Those who do, use the web relatively infrequently, possibly for gambling or playing games. Offline some will enjoy going to play bingo. Others will gamble and play the lottery.*

#### My recent address

*A higher than usual proportion might be active switchers of their financial accounts and have recently obtained new credit cards. Some people are only repaying the minimum each month and some will be using their overdraft. Similarly more than usual will have modest savings and ISAs.*

#### The streets around Furnace Park

*You have searched on a postcode where the bulk of the residents are not living in private households. This covers various circumstances.*

- 1. People may be in communal establishments yet still consumers to some degree, for example living on military bases or on holiday in hotels.*
- 2. They may be unlikely to be active consumers, for example residents of care homes or medical establishments.*
- 3. The postcode might represent a business or industrial park with no residents.*

When searches of local postcodes do come back with detailed profiles, they vary widely from one street to the next. One street very near to Furnace Park reads:

*This type comprises halls of residence, purpose-built private sector student accommodation and streets with high proportions of privately rented student flats. Ownership of smartphones, iPhones, Blackberry and Android phones, will be well above average, as will the proportion owning tablet and hand-held computers. Their interests may focus around sports, films and going out. Some may regularly go to the gym to attend exercise, dance or similar classes. Film, computing, educational and style magazines may be their preferred reading matter. The kind of high street names this type might favour includes New Look, Topshop, Topman, River Island, H&M, or La Senza. Coffee shops, pizza and burger shops are also likely to find favour.*

A street or two away from this and the profile changes to:

*Single elderly people and young single parents are both found more frequently than average in these flats. Most of the flats are rented from the council or social housing provider, although a few will be owned. The properties in this type will tend to be mid-rise and high-rise buildings often in cities and larger towns. The numbers claiming Jobseeker's Allowance might be three times the national average. Similarly high proportions might be claiming benefits relating to single parents, or to disabilities. Over a third of households may be living entirely on some form of benefits. In general relatively few people will have many educational qualifications. Those working are likely to be in routine jobs. These will be poorly paid. These areas include some of the greatest*

*concentrations of people with lowest incomes. Under half of the people in these areas earn sufficient to pay tax. They will shop in cheaper high street stores such as Iceland and buy hot food from the likes of Greggs or McDonald's.*

These multi-layered processes of categorisation are being constantly applied by retailers, researchers, politicians and, of course, by all of us in our mundane and everyday judgements of each other. I'm Northern. I am an infrequent member of a life-drawing class. I shop weekly in Morrisons and eat McNuggets. What are you?

#### **Furnace Park and forgetting**

I signed up to the collaboration because I saw Furnace Park as a very unusual opportunity to work with a diverse range of people who lived and worked nearby. I was interested in the challenge of a public engagement project which aimed to meaningfully engage with people who live near each other but who have very different lifestyles. Looking back, I can see how much of this enthusiasm rested on demographic assumptions and an implicit subscription to Acorn's principles of market categorisation.

In the end, our project did not bring together members of different local communities in a shared practice. Instead, we—researchers and artists—became a new community of practice. One which met to reflect on a site of forgotten industrial land tucked down the road from the University. In this newly formed taxonomic group, we practiced forgetting what we'd learned to be. Our professional identity was the reason why we were in the park, and yet it was temporarily stripped back to a set of disconnected perspectives once we were there.

In this project, I was not really an academic speech therapist with all that might involve.\* Unexpectedly, my habit of drawing small bits of the world felt relevant at the periphery as, in the park, we watched ants disturbed under a stone, wondered about a pile of whitening empty snail shells, and watched unexpected goldfinches balance in thistles. My hatred of the social apartheid to be witnessed in shops such as Waitrose\*\* shifted in focus as I reflected on who would have access to this ex-industrial site and why. My interest in forgotten urban spaces became important as the project became an opportunity to examine beauty in a form that is not usually recognised. When I was a graduate speech and language therapist, I worked in Redcar on the coast just south of the River Tees. The steel manufactured in Redcar makes up the Tyne Bridge in my hometown, and for that matter, the Sidney Harbour Bridge is made of it too. I love the steelworks which sprawled along the end of the estuary. I loved passing the fire and smoke these works emitted on the train. I enjoyed the contrast between the beauty of the local beach and the sheer scale of the site on the horizon. I spent my first wedding anniversary happily marching in coastal mud behind a fish market and docks on a walk between Cleethorpes and Grimsby. Now here I was with a group of people reflecting on the beauty and changing value of a disused area of concrete and weeds.

We put down our professional identities. By doing this, the paradoxical outcome was that we had space to reconnect new or seemingly irrelevant forms of being. The experience served to trouble what we were and to reconsider who we considered ourselves to be. The project allowed different parts of me—perhaps us—to achieve legitimacy and relevance within the processes of knowing and understanding.

## Categorising equality

This project changed perceptions of who we are and how we understand the process of understanding. This will have long-term consequences for our work. As an academic and clinician, I've always worked within working class communities affected by deindustrialisation. My research is concerned with securing equal outcomes for children and young people from different socioeconomic backgrounds. I'm currently writing up data about a group of young people I worked with in a socially disadvantaged community who were far less likely to do well in their GCSEs when compared to peers in a more affluent area (24% achieved five or more A\* to C grades at GCSE compared to 61%). I discuss this in relation to their language abilities (such as their use and understanding of complex words and sentences). I investigate how language and educational engagement and attainment relate to wider social inequalities.

As reported by the Sheffield Fairness Commission, an hour's bus journey on the Number 83 through the city shows how stark these inequalities are. The journey starts at Millhouses, where a woman can expect to live around 86.3 years. By the time the number 83 comes down Ecclesall Road and into the city, a woman can expect to live 81.6 years and by the time it journeys up into Burngreave (40 minutes after you've got on the bus); a woman can expect to live just 76.9 years. Despite social injustice across the UK, public attitudes towards inequality are unsympathetic. The move away from a rhetoric of social class towards that of social exclusion within political discussion and research alike has promoted the idea that an individual's lack of aspirations and poor response to opportunity leads to their social exclusion. The emergence of 'chav', along with scroungers and spongers, to describe a section of the working class

has been described by Diane Reay as 'an almost Victorian middle class horror at the indignities of poverty'. Despite the known scandal of tax evasion and the estimated £16bn worth of benefits unclaimed by working and unemployed people, we buy into the myth that the £1.2bn benefit fraud bill is a key factor in the UK economy's crisis.

My research has the potential to have a wider social impact outside of academia: collaborating with teachers, increasing children's language skills, supporting children to do well in school, increasing educational attainment, reducing educational inequality. Obviously, I think this work is very important and put faith in the value of the research projects I am involved with.

A persistent issue worries me though. In order to address social injustice, you need to define those affected by it. This means that as a researcher, I subscribe to some form of demographic categorisation. Some form of identification criteria is needed whether we want to support children who are working class, socially excluded, hard to reach, disadvantaged or underachieving. Quantifying or describing people's background and the identities attached to them is complex and it risks simplifying people's lives and even pathologising them. In my research field, participants are discussed in terms of their parents' educational background, occupation and income. Participants' language skills and educational attainment are problematized. By demonstrating unsupported difficulties and underachievement, research can be used to build a case for further funding, further academic intervention, further professional support. This financial reality, one that underpins and informs most research these days, resonates with Acorn's reductive interests, where social categorisation has been drawn up for financial and instrumental gain. This process of measuring relative

socioeconomic status, language, education, and so on, reminds me of Acorn's attempt to reduce people to a measure of their capitalist potential. It also risks accidentally confirming the societal prejudices that are held about working class communities in the UK. In other words, children from socially disadvantaged homes do less well in school because of a combination of their parents' background and their language skills. Because of my own background, this operation feels like a betrayal.

At first, this current project appeared relevant to my research as it offered a chance to bring together communities with different economic backgrounds and overcome local prejudices. Our work didn't do that (perhaps the park will pick up this aim later), but the project did help to reassert my unease at the role of categorising identity in my own practice. The project was a catalyst for me to abandon some of the endless tensions involved in research and clinical practice within socioeconomically disadvantaged communities. Essentially, the project did this by allowing me space to shed my own professional identity within a work capacity and to learn without defending my own expertise. The project did not bring different members of the local community into Furnace Park in the name of public engagement, as I once hoped it would. Instead, it reaffirmed the potential of dialogue between people with different perspectives as a means of developing new shared understanding. This project gestured towards a potential solution to the challenges faced within my research discipline. I now look forward to engaging in meaningful dialogue with research 'participants' as a way of co-investigating the complexity of social justice, language and education (research taxonomies suspended).

\*As with any identity, it takes sustained effort to construct the identity of an academic speech therapist. Endless small acts create this identity: the activity of reviewing articles, updates to my website, books read, contributions to meetings, maintaining my Health and Care Professions Council registration and Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists membership, the completion of professional logs, my conformity to information governance, my work with service users. Outfits, books, presentations, stationary. My role could be defined by what it seeks to measure: trainee therapist attainment, children's language skills, scholastic success, the impact of a paper, the significance of a finding, the performance on a standardised vocabulary assessment in relation to published norms, the evidence base of interventions, student satisfaction, an applicant's potential, interviewees performance in relation to The 6 Cs (Care, Compassion, Competence, Communication, Courage, Commitment), schools' engagement with research. I know, for example, that the word 'measure' has the phoneme  $\text{ʒ}$  in the middle of it, a 'sh' with voice added, a post-alveolar fricative (also found in 'dysphagia' and 'pleasure'). In the project, standing in Furnace Park, there was a lot to forget in order to become immersed in the process of new understandings, a lot to forget without capitalising on all that has gone before.

\*\*As The Independent and other media reported on 30th December 2013 Waitrose faced revolt from the regular middle-class customer who was concerned that a free coffee deal was attracting the wrong type of clientele.

# FOOTPRINTS: MAPPING THE LEGACY OF THE FURNACE

Caroline Evans



**Furnace Park lies within easy walking distance of the city centre, not more than 25 minutes at a reasonable pace, but it feels distinct—in places, almost isolated—and relatively quiet, despite proximity to the Inner Ring Road and the hum of traffic this provides.**

The furnace in Furnace Park refers to a cementation furnace, built in 1848 for crucible steel production. Ever since the start of the project, I was intrigued by the red bricked conical shaped structure which I'd been told was of historical significance in terms of metallurgy in Sheffield. It stands intact, alone, fenced off, surrounded on three sides by the car park of the HSBC Bank, across the road from the Furnace Park site and diagonally opposite to the Don Cutlery Works. It is a Scheduled Ancient Monument, Grade II listed by English Heritage [Building ID: 457046], described as 'the sole survivor of a characteristic industrial building once numerous in Sheffield'. A striking fact and remarkable, particularly considering that, by 1860 there were reportedly 250 cementation furnaces across the city.

The nearby Don Cutlery Works is also Grade II listed by English Heritage [Building ID: 501152], described as a 'Purpose-built cutlery works. Red brick, part-rendered, some stone dressings, slate roofs with brick gable and eaves stacks. A purpose-built, mid-to-late C19 integrated works, with a typical layout of large front range, probably housing offices, warehouses, and workshops, a yard reached through a covered cart entrance, around which are arranged a number of workshop ranges, at least one of which



has individual hand forges on the ground floor. This type of complex is very distinctive to the industrial identity of Sheffield'.

The red bricks of both structures are readily visible from the Furnace Park site. Both feature in many photos taken there. Together the furnace and Don Cutlery Works reflect steel making and the metal working trades (tools, cutlery, saws etc.) that are key to the industrial heritage of Sheffield. I set out to investigate their legacy by looking for footprints, asking what remains of these activities in the area: are there remnants, echoes, reminders of the heritage of the industrial revolution that occurred here? I was inspired to do this by the skyline views from the park, which showed a mix of old and new buildings, wondering what lay beyond and how it had a relationship to the site.

I set out on foot, with a camera, to explore and record buildings, place names and their usage. This area was new to me, despite working relatively close by.

What did I find? From thinking there'd be only a few key locations to photograph, I quickly realised that there is something of potential interest round every corner. Repeated trips would undoubtedly reveal more. It seemed essential that I let my first impressions guide me. It was therefore necessary to accept that I couldn't catalogue to completion, but instead make lists of what I did find, then work from there. Photographs were taken en route from Newcastle Street (Furnace Hill Conservation Area) and the area beyond Furnace Park, mainly Kelham Island, another designated Conservation Area which lies northwest of the city centre. These areas feel quite distinct as the Inner Ring Road effectively cuts through and circumscribes the area to some degree. The Kelham Island area is crossed by the River Don, around which industry grew up as water was used to drive water wheels to power the workshops.

My first impressions of the new purpose-built flats and derelict buildings (including former industrial sites, with 'works' in their names) changed when I quickly realised that businesses centred on steel are still in production (metal products, saws, scissors). This isn't simply an industrial wasteland re-colonised for residential purposes. The legacy of the furnace is everywhere, not only as industrial heritage, which is formally archived and displayed at Kelham Island Museum, where a Bessemer converter for mass production of steel dominates the external display, but also in the characteristics of the locality. People not only once worked, but are working here, they also live here, play here. The infrastructure and place names reflect that. New housing developments on sites of former works are both new builds (e.g. Cornwall Works) and renovations of listed buildings or factory sites (e.g. Brooklyn Works, Cornish Place). This mix of use reflects 'pull down and build new' and

'conservation based' approaches. The Little Kelham development is converting the former Green Lane Works site and Eagle Works into sustainable zero carbon eco-friendly project housing, retaining and restoring the landmark Green Lane clock tower entrance. Cafés (Grind Café, The Works Café), and leisure activities (Foundry Climbing Centre) indicate that Kelham Island is thriving despite the presence of many buildings with broken windows and a derelict feel to some streets, amongst which I got a bit lost and disorientated whilst absorbed in taking photographs. Business names are still clearly legible from some derelict signs (Wilson and Murray Surface Grinding, Williams Brothers Sheffield). I also saw graffiti. For example, at the Don Cutlery Works I saw boarded up, street-facing windows being painted blue by a workman on one of my visits, and then painted over with art work at a later date.

This project certainly taught me to 'see differently'. First impressions of the area around Furnace Park and my explorations of the building infrastructure were both very surface, in the sense that I simply photographed what took my attention as having a connection to the theme of footprints. I think these images represent my shifting perspective on the space, and also provide a route to cohesive reflection on the links to space which I chose to explore empirically, with minimum prior research.

As an end note, on my travels I found a derelict building labelled 'Footprint Tools'. This seemed apt in terms of my plan and reinforced my selection of 'footprints' as the title for this piece. I was pleased to find that although this site is empty, Footprint Tools have simply relocated within Sheffield, to Admiral Works.





Ground Exploration by Bob Levene.  
Taken during Sheffield Boundary Walk, a project by Ian Nesbitt and Bob Levene.  
Photo by Ian Nesbitt.

# THAT WAS ALWAYS THE WORRY

Sarah Spencer



**Towards the end of the project, I met with the artists and researchers to discuss the nature of the collaboration, the benefits and challenges of the process and whether the project was likely to result in any changes to their wider practice. Quotes from these informal interviews begin the book.**

Two themes emerged. The first was enjoyment as a form of lightness and playfulness. Collaborators gave an account of the project as a break from professional routine and discipline. The second theme was the focus on the process of the collaboration rather than any defined outcomes or outputs: 'That was always the worry, "we're enjoying this too much"'.

The three expectations below are based on artist Hannah Hull's discussion of why art produced via social inclusion activities is only accepted by the art world as Outsider Art (<http://hannahull.co.uk/page14.htm>).

1. Any personal therapeutic element of the result of art or research practice is rarely discussed.
2. There is a tradition of the artwork or research existing in its own right: the practitioners' biography is not often regarded as essential to the reading of the work.
3. Work is often produced in relation to a user, audience or reader.

Our project went some way towards violating all three of these expectations. Perhaps this is why it felt so very unusual. Collaborators' enjoyment and personal satisfaction within the project was reported with a tinge of guilt, which seems unwarranted given that most of the project was completed outside of our contracted hours, in our 'own time' (as though the time in the lab and office isn't inhabited by us). What is the role of playfulness in research? What happens when our practice has a benefit for the researcher or artist? Doesn't research frequently result in a benefit for the researcher (increased funding, a promotion, increased prestige?). Was the project any more than a form of training? Does it matter if the benefits for the collaborators include some kind of release or therapeutic element?

In the absence of goals or the production of an output to be displayed publically, our focus shifted to the process of knowing and understanding. The project offered

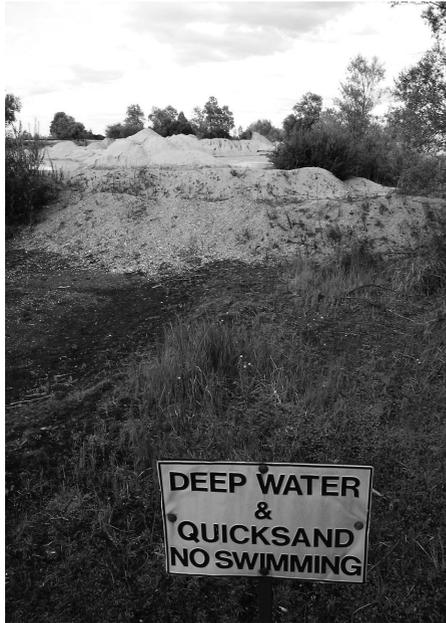
a space to think about processes of constructing new meaning: examining the nature of things, experiential knowledge and methods of representation. The project also allowed reflection on the process of collaborative endeavour: meaningful engagement, forming new partnerships and shared perspectives.

Although the shift from outcomes to process sounds abstract, the collaborators were able to give concrete everyday examples of how they would refocus on processes more generally within their daily role. For example: in incorporating a greater openness in designing future research applications, creating increased space within PhD supervision roles for independent experimentation and risk of failure, leaving room for free experimentation and exploration within future research design.

The project's emphasis on processes has led me to focus more in my own work on the physical activity involved in data collection. Sitting on a tram, occupying the physical environment of secondary schools, travelling through council estates. I've also been inspired by Bob's boundary walks to complete my own walks, in areas similar to those where I've conducted research in the past. Some of the resulting photos of Skye Edge, Manor Top and Park Hill in Sheffield are included in this book. I didn't set off on these walks to achieve a goal or collect data, but to get space to explore my own role in relation to generating understanding. The project has also informed a re-evaluation of my own research practice, prioritising investigation that does not rely exclusively on objective measurement. I work weekly at a local youth club (in a community in which I've conducted research into language and socioeconomic disadvantage in the past). I'm volunteering without a goal or research agenda: just to engage and see where the process takes me.

# FIELD POEM

Matthew Cheeseman



Bob and Hester set up the Ground Investigations and asked us to spend the day doing what we do, but exploring Furnace Park, working alongside everyone else.

I work by writing, so I thought I would do that. I thought I'd write a poem. After a while trying, I decided that was a bad idea. Then I hit upon photographing all the words scattered in the park: words on crisp packets, scraps of paper and on the side of cans. Even though the whole place appeared pretty clean, when you looked around slowly, methodically, you couldn't help but find rubbish and litter. There were words everywhere. Because the park is at the edge of a red light district there were plenty of condom wrappers, at least 40,

probably more. It struck me, at the time, how unlikely it was that previous owners had ever read the packaging beyond the brand name. This thought quickly turned to the words I produced for universities.

As I foraged around in the waste, I thought about writing this piece. I wanted to use all the words I'd photographed, transcribe them perhaps, blow up the photos and copy out all the safety warnings and promotional slogans. When it came to doing this though, I couldn't be bothered and no longer saw the point. I reproduce instead the occasional notes I made as I rooted around the site. I suppose you could call it a field text, which would place it within a research methodology I've used a lot: ethnography. But then again, you don't have to call it that. Neither do I.

A field poem:

*The sound of words—left (let) out—this is not poetry but dirty words.*

*Very positive impressions when I entered the park—the wildlife, the flowers, light rain. But cataloguing the filth, the condoms and then getting bored of the compulsion: the endless, hidden rubbish... makes the place quite, quite horrid.*

*Words running through my head. This stops?  
Pen top off... pushing me into creative writing here—what are the words worth? Anything? And value, again, comes up—into engagement.*

*An engagement worth of words.*

*An engagement of words.*

*Lost brick, where is it? Broken brick with word written on it.*

*Looking for words thinking how fragile the thinking thoughts are—how easily disrupted and lost and overshadowed by the future text, spreading over the real words from the future, here on the ground.*

*The brain as both thought (over)production unit and filter system, removing sensory data, focusing in on rubbish, searching, ignoring everything green and brown, filtering out anything growing or dying, seeking cellophane or chucked aluminium.*

*Why spend time hunting rubbish? Many other things to do. Everyone busy. It is you doing this, by chance, by route. Does that give you a responsibility? To what, here in this park, uni property?*

*Is this a collaboration with artists? Who owns these collaborations?*

*Sarah—Bob conversation. Who owns it?*

*Sarah—isn't it interesting how we come to the park with ourselves.*

Three weeks or so after doing this, I delivered a paper at a symposium entitled 'Critical engagements with engagement'. This was a day I helped plan. Or, at least a day I tried to help fund. Here's an excerpt from my funding application, explaining what the day was about:

*The symposium will not frame its discussion of engagement and research impact on specific case studies, but on the critical contexts that surround public engagement. In this way the symposium will be of use to anyone writing research council applications or planning engagement activities. Research areas for consideration include:*

*Public engagement with higher education; what is at stake when creative practitioners facilitate change in communities; the relationships between the practices of artists and urban policy makers; the line between public engagement as a democratic tool for society's voice and as a mould for society's form; public engagement in industry; public resistance in public engagement; the public's role in academia; the 'participatory turn' and its relational, dialogical and collaborative aesthetics; conceptualising publics; how cultural context inflects public participation; temporality of public engagement; sustainable public engagement; acrimony in public practices.*

That was copied from somewhere. I don't understand half of them. The application continues:

*This is an apposite time to hold such a symposium. Not only would this be the third public symposium organised around the Furnace Park project, it would also be the first held since the project went live. The park has been granted planning permission and the University has been handed the keys. Work is about to commence on site. A three year arts focused site specific project is about to take place in the University. As a curated site, the park could be an innovative and valuable resource for both the University of Sheffield, the city of Sheffield and even an international community of artists and researchers. Yet at the moment this cultural capital is prospective. The implicit research question of the symposium is, then, how might Furnace Park interface with the engagement of research? This leads on into broader questions of cultural value: what cultural value could and should Furnace*

*Park have, and how can discussions of this potential value inform its development? What will the development of engaging this value displace?*

The funding was for £500 to pay for speaker's travel, room hire and food (to encourage people to come along). The application was turned down but the symposium went ahead anyway with funding from another source. If it wasn't for this book those words would never have been read again. Like the rubbish in Furnace Park, my computer is littered with lost words. The paper at this symposium was entitled 'The Threat of Engagement'. Here's the abstract:

*This paper will discuss the Sandpit, a project based in Furnace Park. Sandpit is an eight-month long exploratory collaboration between three artists and six researchers. It was explicitly funded by the University of Sheffield Crucible scheme with public engagement in mind. The paper discusses the public's role within the project (and academia), situating them in relation to the two distinct methodologies Sandpit has concerned itself with: scientific method and artistic practice. What was the point of the project? What has been learnt, discovered or encountered? Does it matter and should anyone care beyond the individual participants?*

As you may be able to pick up, by this point I was disillusioned and bitter about a whole host of things (all to do with work). I gave quite a confrontational paper. Here are some notes from another file I've found on my computer:

*Over the last three years I've been involved in lots of engagement projects at the University of Sheffield... programming films in the cinema, holding a concert for refugees and asylum seekers, putting on*

*an exhibition of Sheffield post-punk music, writing poetry with mathematicians, designing an app that explores Sheffield music culture, using graphic novels with cancer survivors, staging a Throbbing Gristle re-enactment. All have been funded to various degrees, typically AHRC or internal money. One could say I am an engager or an 'engaging researcher'. But I understand the practice very much from the inside, from doing it. I'm not going to formally define engagement because I've never read anything about it, nor been trained in it. I'm not up with the literature. I'm not up with much literature to be honest, even the material in my field. I've been so busy engaging I've forgotten what field I'm in. What research am I engaging? That's never really been a problem, or a question that anyone has asked. As Higher Education has mutated to accommodate impact and engagement I've had to mutate with it, to respond to the funding out there.*

I tried to argue that university funders fetishize an unformed and imaginary 'public', assuming that this 'public' would be interested in the work of researchers if only researchers could learn how to connect with them. It was obvious from the questions I received that I didn't put across my point well and sounded as if I had wilfully ignored my funding remit. It had been a weird morning—I was late for the day because I was stopped by the police for stealing my own bag (true story) and then I had to leave early to meet Bob and Hester to discuss the first iteration of the picnic (which was about to not happen). Luckily I heard Emma Cocker's paper 'Performing the City' before I left. Full of stubborn enthusiasm, I wrote a summary poem:

*rehearsing the mind + body  
in the world, other world, with  
bodies dancing alone  
+ together in body +*

*mind + place, autonomy  
together  
no self in + from  
forms + space*

Despite the poor reception of my own paper I gave a further version at another conference. This time I only have this paragraph, again from a file on my computer:

*Unlearning 'being a scientist' unlearning 'being an artist'—what have the artists unlearned? They are curious... there are different knowledges at play here. A contrast between two different knowledges... the artists with more prestige (in some eyes?), but the scientists with something of more value (in others?), both fancying each other, a bit. And the public was the justification for these knowledges dancing with each other, even if the public never actually got an invite.*

The parallels I'm gesturing at here, between words on discarded condom wrappers, words I've sequestered away on my computer and words written in Furnace Park seems a little trite after I've read the contributions of others to this book. I hope the project has made a contribution to people's lives and working practices. Yet there's something about the whole thing that makes me uneasy. I'm still a little angry and embittered. If anything that is what I have gained from this project: an understanding that I am angry and embittered and a realisation of why that might be so.

The first University building I worked in, Sorby Hall was demolished in 2006 by controlled explosion. It was built in 1963, the year the Robbins Report recommended a mass Higher Education system for the UK. Since it fell, the Endcliffe Village was built and following that the buildings of a

new, unnamed era: the 24/7 Information Commons, the expanded Union and Jessop West (housing English, History and Modern Languages). The Arts Tower has been remodelled and is now an Administration Tower in all but name. As I write, the new Engineering building is preparing to dwarf Music, which has long since come down from the hill to join the campus spreading through the city. The functional utility of the Robbins era has been replaced with colourful cladding and great atriums, where prospective candidates can imagine their ideas soaring.

This new world is the result of education policy, which has emphasised the role of student choice and created an environment of institutional competition. New buildings all play a part in advertising the University as dream machine, capable of transforming student ambition and desire into employment and innovation, whilst producing the same world-class knowledge its reputation has been built on. I don't know much about comparable institutions but I imagine everywhere is much the same. I wonder what these bright, shiny, boastful buildings will look like in thirty years time, when I reach retirement age. I wonder whether I will work in one of these institutions and what I will do. Perhaps the future will look even brighter and even shinier.

The students walking between these buildings have changed in the time I've been at Sheffield. There are more international students, especially Asian students. There are pages on the University website written in Chinese. There are distance learning courses and degree programmes facilitated online, where the University maintains a huge presence, all designed according to its branding strategy. When I arrived in 2005 I didn't have a mobile phone. Maybe that was unusual then; it would be crazy now.

The ideal researcher no longer hides in the office, writing and thinking, but blogs and tweets while they work, manifesting their personality alongside their ideas and interests. Appearances must appeal to prospective students and the public, an abstract public, that not only supplies students but is also served by the university and the knowledge it produces. This duty is made explicit by the funding regime: 20% of the Research Excellence Framework, the national system that proportions research funding, is decided on 'impact': a word that plots research communication like a ballistic field.

When I try to place this project—NO PICNIC—within the landscape I have sketched, I do so within this field of impact and public engagement. This is largely because of the role of artists in our project, which I equate with the developing role of artists in the research process embedded within this landscape. Essentially, artists are good at making things look good. As such they have become more important to researchers during this period of change. It is believed that artists can help the public understand and appreciate the work of academics, who will then be rewarded by increased profile (which helps with attracting students) and better funding through the REF. It's a deal: artists get more work, academics engage their research to the public (who presumably benefit) = everyone's happy.

I try to convince myself that we wanted a project which would both subvert and critique this equation and therefore, somehow, subvert and critique the landscape it is embedded in, but I'm not sure that's quite true. We certainly wanted a project where the artists were integral to the research process and played a part in the decision making. As a result of this we didn't quite follow the research

plan laid out in the proposal. Sandpit, the original name of the project, became an exploratory vehicle and we ranged widely. While ours was very much a communal drift, a group veering, it was definitely steered by the two artists who remained within the project. All this movement and uncertainty is definitely why we moved away from that name, Sandpit, which we all felt failed to communicate where we were heading. In the end, we decided on NO PICNIC. It's a better title, but one that we reached in the very last stages of the project.

What was wrong with Sandpit? Names and brands are essential to Higher Education's explicit market, and at base, sandpits are not meant to drift. They are human spaces, designed for controlled play. Sandpits are separate from the world, defined and limited, so that castles can be built in them and children can mess around. Sandpits are safe, don't hide any surprises and are sheltered from the elements. They are definitely not laboratories, where models of the world are constructed and tested. That is not to say that the laboratory had no place in our project. There was once a belief that the sandpit would lead to the lab. In part, this idea was adopted from the programme that provided our funding: the Sheffield Crucible. Nothing to do with the famous theatre, the Crucible is a model for encouraging interdisciplinary research adopted from the National Endowment for Science and the Arts. All of the researchers involved in the Sandpit were also members of the Sheffield Crucible. It's organised by Sandrine Soubes, the Researcher Development Manager for the Faculty of Science at the University of Sheffield.

In the Crucible a diverse group of researchers listened and talked to each other before coming up with projects, some of which were funded. Sandpit was one of those projects and an adaptation

of the same model, one which introduced contemporary artists as the focus of collaboration. Why get researchers and artists to work together? One rationale comes from interdisciplinary research which believes that academic disciplines, while capable of great advances, also impose restraints, confining researchers into patterns of thinking. This is a bad thing because the world does not organise itself into academic disciplines. Because of this, the problems of mankind, whilst requiring specialists to understand aspects of them, also require specialists to work and think with specialists from other disciplines. Such collaboration is a form of speculative thinking, entertained to foster insight, maybe a breakthrough. Thus the laboratory was implicitly buried in our sand: one purpose of this odd group was to mutate, and by mutating produce new knowledge, or rather, test for the potential of new knowledge. If such a potential was confirmed, then our project, our sandpit, would lead to a larger funding bid, for proper money, from somewhere like the Arts & Humanities Research Council or NESTA itself.

While I'm sure all the participants would have appreciated more funding, there was something a little instrumental in this implied progression which conflicted with the open, exploratory nature of our engagement with each other. It reads well on paper, sensible even, but didn't feel right in practice. That's another reason why the name began to feel uncomfortable: sandpits are shallow things which you cannot sink into, safe places that have been assimilated into the assembly line process of funded research, places which refuse immeasurable and unquantifiable outcomes, places which must, by their nature, be justified by assessment. The sandpits of funded research demand a period of 'blue-sky thinking' before entering the lab. One cannot, like we did,

remain in them, resisting the impulse to finish, sum-up, complete, produce. If anything this project became an oasis from the pressures of academia, a place that protected participants from the constant demands to be entrepreneurial, competitive, world-class, grant capturing, innovative, engaging, shiny, new.

Another reason why the name didn't stick is that sandpits are meant to be fun. Adults like to watch children mucking around in them. Sandpits make families happy. This association keyed in to a suspicion held by the group: that the project was funded because it provided a good show. Indeed, we were funded with the comment that 'real community engagement' should occur throughout the project. Initially, each element of our research proposal was designed to be public. Things didn't work out like that. The group blog wasn't publicised due to issues with opening Furnace Park. The public symposium happened without the public. One of the artists was meant to develop the project's ideas to be exhibited, performed or sited in Furnace Park. Instead all six researchers incorporated artistic practice into their exploration of the wasteland, alongside, or at times led by, Bob and Hester. Nothing was built, exhibited or sited and 'the public' didn't really get a look in to the art/research process. And then we made this book.

I was responsible for running the thing, which is perhaps why I have fixated on names and drift, still suffering spikes of guilt for not following THE PLAN. A lot of this is ingrained. In my experience of funded academic research, you describe what you're going to do, do it, and then assess how well you did it. If things don't go to plan, you publish ignoring this. Precious little fails or deviates on paper. There's two reasons for this. Firstly, the pressure to be succinct and exact. Who

has time for reading about dead ends when everything is about the results (the very ones that artists are meant to engage)? Secondly, there's the pressure to use one's funding efficiently and purposively, or else you might not get much research funding again.

So why did we drift? There was a general feeling that the collaborations were too early, too unformed, exploratory and delicate to engage the public. And that's assuming, of course, that 'the public' a) existed as a consistent and contiguous body (it doesn't) and b) that this non-existent body wanted to be engaged by a disparate group of researchers and artists (it didn't). On top of this there was that nagging sense that the first meaning of sandpit, a place to safely experiment, was undermined by the need for the results to be fun and accessible to outsiders, and that this was our 'real purpose': to perform for an audience. This unease is familiar to anyone who has worked on a public engagement project and was only thickened in the fresh air of Furnace Park, a place which necessarily gave our project a 'public face'.

Just like artists, researchers are increasingly having to perform. Why should they? Some are on precarious, temporary contracts and are paid to jig around. But the impulse to dance is also felt by full timers, derived from the market's focus on appearances and buried guilt over the hike in student fees, which has seen people pay for Higher Education twice over: as students on £9K a year and then again as taxpayers. There is much anxiety underneath the new, shiny, digital Sheffield.

The more a structure is subjected to market forces the more it becomes saturated by guilt. That's my theory. Just as the market maps desire onto buildings, it involves people in the personal

manufacture of desire, where emotions become pointed, amplified, powerful. And that's just the staff! The students are even more anxious about developing and shaping their future. Everyone overproduces to compensate. It's all a bit like the rhythm & blues market in early 60s America. No one knew the formula to getting a hit record aside from the one that worked: release, release, release until the label gets a hit. Everything's done on a shoestring, none of the artists are paid properly, no one trusts each other and the songs are wracked with longing and frustration. That's not to say, of course, that the music isn't any good: there are frequent flashes of brilliance amongst the workmanlike material. Perhaps that's the market philosophy in a nutshell!

Did we shut the public out? Behave selfishly, arrogantly? Or wasn't there much for them to look at in the first place? Was it not arrogant of us to assume that we were hit makers? Perhaps, in the design of this project, we believed too much in artist-researcher collaboration as an engaging public process in and of itself. We meant well, wanting to break down that familiar formula of artists illustrating research findings. Or perhaps, in designing this project, we were simply playing the game of writing up the kind of project that funders want to fund. This meant positioning our interdisciplinary, researcher-artist collaboration as a) groundbreaking, b) full of potential, c) shiny and d) immediately accessible. Of course, it was not quite any of these things. But it got funded. And this book is that product, the output. It's not quite a product of the 'research plan'. The participants resisted the process of 'making' knowledge, just as they resisted the process of 'making' art. Perhaps it was ambitious to attempt this, especially when the participants were donating spare time not paid time.

As a result, the project, and to some extent the book has focused on process: the interaction between researchers and artists. At times this lost its binary orientation and became a group interaction. It was to this expanding state of practice that the participants willingly submitted, gradually turning away from attempts to communicate to 'the public' or indeed the research community. The act of recording the project in this book became a solution to some of the anxieties we experienced. A kind of postcard from the future, from a time when we understood what had occurred within the now-nameless sandpit. The book launch would be the artwork Sandpit had promised to deliver: the artists planned to hold a banquet at which everyone would give toasts and the book would be served up to the guests, who would all be drawn from the University and from those living around or close to Furnace Park. In doing so we hoped to envelop the guests within the process we had shared, to pass on whatever-this-project-was.

The proposal for this banquet is retained in this book. Due to a combination of reasons, practical and political, it never went ahead. Instead the participants held a breakfast of their own in Furnace Park, raising toasts to each other. It was rather nice. Yet, without anyone else, the project became even more personal, and this book grew in importance as an outcome beyond that. If anything, NO PICNIC has demonstrated, for me at least, that it is impossible to submit to a process such as artistic practice in a funded research project without attempting to communicate and thus justify findings, despite these findings being largely intangible or there being no one there to listen to them.

I have felt the resulting dissonance quite keenly when I have attempted to present this project, as if something had gone wrong and I wasn't sure what. Even this essay has taken many drafts and months to write, and I'm still anxious it says too little it too many words. Market forces must have saturated me! As a corollary, I suppose these could be early days for NO PICNIC in that the project might have an impact on my work and thinking beyond this book. Other people have said this elsewhere. And yet it might not: I may well find myself on to the next thing, or no thing. Of course, I'd like it to influence others, but it was such an effervescent process, I'm not sure these texts manage to comprehend it. Perhaps it is this sense of the intangible that is so very appealing to researchers at the moment, working as they are in a university becoming evermore explicit.

To demonstrate this strange, emotion saturated world, I wanted to illustrate this essay with images taken from the quicksand fetish scene which I discovered whilst looking up sandpits on the internet. The female protagonist is often clothed and always in peril. In many of the specialist videos she sinks until she is completely submerged. In some variants the protagonist might struggle and manage to escape; more often that not she submits to a simulated death, taking a certain pleasure from the experience. Instead of attempting to negotiate fair use of other people's pornography we have used a quicksand-related image from Britain. You will have to fill in the bodies, the peril, the excitement and the certain end, all documented for your ambivalent pleasure. The guilt comes later.

# PARKLIFE

Hester Reeve

Text assembled by Hester Reeve from 'Self-Experience in the Theme Park of Radical Action? Social Movements and Political Articulation in the Late-Modern Condition' by Ingolfur Blühdorn (2006) in *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9 (1), p. 23–42.



'Parks, their design, equipment and use', George Burnap, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1916.



A banner in Gezi Park during Gezi Protests: 'Joy is Laughter of the Resistance'. Photo by Azirlazarus, 5<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

Indeed, in most advanced consumer societies the culture of political dissent seems lively and diverse. In the demonstration democracy (Etzioni, 1970) or social movement society (Meyer and Tarrow, 1998) non conventional forms of political articulation and participation have been fully normalized and belong to the standard repertoire of the most diverse social groups.

In this society post-conventional forms of political articulation and participation fulfill a new function: they represent an intra-societal physical and discursive space—the theme park—in which individuals, social groups and society at large can perform and experience key features of the traditional-modern condition which remain indispensable even though late-modern society has clearly moved beyond the traditional-modern phase.



'Parks, their design, equipment and use', George Burnap, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1916.

In advanced capitalist consumer democracies the dominant strategy for this identity construction and self-experience is by means of acts of consumption. For obvious reasons, however, the hopes and expectations of the identity-seeking individual are constantly frustrated: acts of consumption can at best provide evidence of an already existing autonomous identity but they can never constitute one.



A few banners in Gezi Park during the protests: 'Silence the war and raise the peace', 'Listen Tell Hear Speak', 'Yes to peace', 'Those who responsible of Uludere shall be brought to justice'. Photo by Azirlazarus, 9<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

By reproducing the belief in the autonomous subject (voter) which supposedly is its external point of reference, the system of politics is in danger of reinforcing rather than resolving the problem: its promises heighten the horizon of expectations and, by implication, raise the potential for disappointment. In the effort to stabilize its own foundations, the system of politics may therefore even reinforce the experience of disempowerment and exclusion.



'Parks, their design, equipment and use', George Burnap, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1916.

As the logic of the established system has permeated the very patterns of cognition and imagination of contemporary individuals, it is becoming increasingly difficult to even imagine a radically different society, let alone implement it. As late-modern individuals have fully embraced the patterns of identity construction offered by liberal consumer democracy, genuinely sustainable and globally just alternative models would, if really implemented, hardly be attractive or acceptable. It is probably safe to assume that despite their oppositional stance, even radical movement participants are in many respects rather fond of, and dependent on, the existing consumer culture.



View from Taksim Gezi Park. Photo by VickiPicture, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2013.

Indeed, even Touraine, one of the founding fathers of New Social Movement theory, points out that while 'in the past, social movements were the embodiment of a project for a radical reconstruction of society and a figure of the Subject', contemporary protest movements have the 'sole objective' 'to create the Subject' (2000, p. 93), whereby the Subject is understood to mean 'the individual's effort to construct him or herself as an individual, rather than as a subordinate in a logic of order, whatever that order may be' (1992, p. 141).



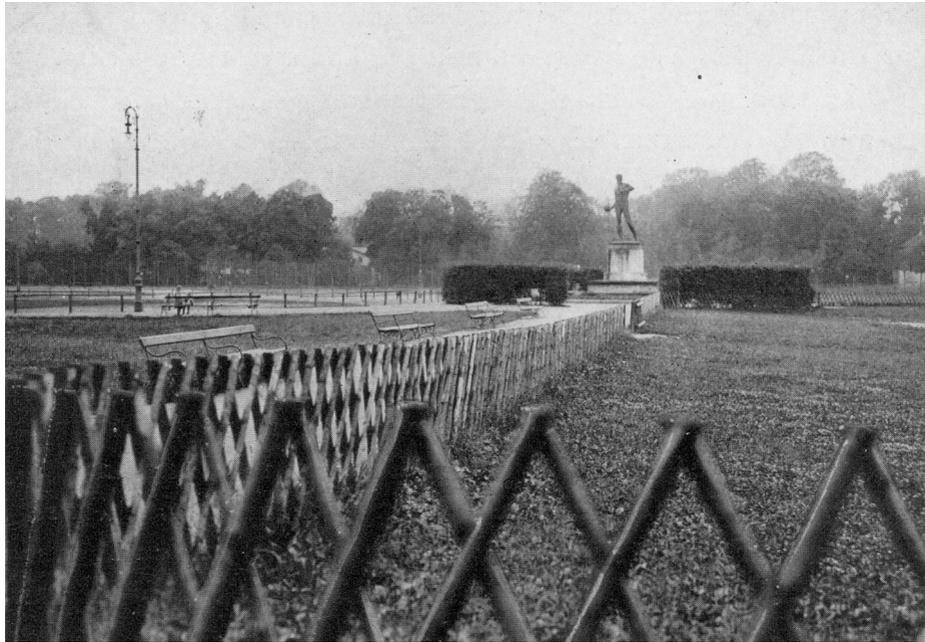
'Parks, their design, equipment and use', George Burnap, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1916.

From this perspective, the significance of social movement politics lies not so much in the demonstration of protest and opposition for the purpose of political change, but in the demonstration, performance and experience of something that is desperately needed in the late-modern condition but that has no place in the established socio-economic system: autonomy, identity, and agency.



2013 Taksim Gezi Park protests, a view from Taksim Gezi Park. Photo by VikiPicture 4<sup>th</sup> June 2013.

Social movements and other kinds of non-conventional political articulation can thus be interpreted as offering a supplementary form of identity construction which helps to compensate for the shortcomings of consumption-centred identity formation. They provide late-modern individuals with an opportunity to experience themselves both within (compliant with) and at the same time outside of (in opposition to, i.e. autonomous from) the system. Exactly this is required to escape the late-modern dilemma, and it is the unique characteristic and attractiveness of the theme park.



'Parks, their design, equipment and use', George Burnap, Philadelphia, Lippincott, 1916.

In the sense that the demonstration of autonomy, identity and political agency inside the theme park of radical action allows for full complicity with the status quo outside this arena, it may be described as a post-political and itself consumptive form of political articulation.



2013 Taksim Gezi Park protests, a view from Taksim Gezi Park. Photo by VikiPicture 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2013.

If it is correct to say, as suggested above, that the reproduction of the autonomous Self is not just a desire of late-modern individuals but a requirement for the self-reproduction of the increasingly one-dimensional system, social movements can thus be said to represent an essential resource for the stabilization of late-modern society. It would certainly be almost nonsensical to suggest that social movements explicitly intend to stabilize the established system. No empirical research would ever support such a claim. On the contrary, it would reveal that social movements not only explicitly want to challenge the system, but that they are actually successful in doing so.

2

# Curious...

Bob Levene



Hello Researchers,

Would you say you're more interested in what is above the ground or below it?

What is already there or what could be?

How things work or how things are?

Who is around or no longer?

Making things better or making things?

Other?

Reply 1: Alison Beck

I often start by focusing on the details and moving on from there. In this picture I was drawn to the pipes underground that have been revealed. Earlier yesterday, I was talking to a student about his project to improve joints in water pipes (clean water, blue or yellow gas pipes... the one shown here is black, is that for dirty water? I must find out). I was wondering how to examine the joints in microscopic detail so he can work to improve them.

Reply 2: Bob Levene

The comforting smooth levels of resistance of that hip joint you showed was strangely satisfying. Its odd to think about the miles of wires and pipes around us as having joints, like some skeleton... that could move? I guess joints are the place of flexibility and motion but also weakness and vulnerability. The exposure of the pipes was the reason I took the photo. I'm curious about the hidden journey our 'living comforts' take before they conveniently pop out of a tap or turn on at a flick of a switch.

Reply 3: Arne Schröder

I can't say I know. I guess I am interested in all these things. Of course I study what is there, but what is there is only a part of what can be. Take the assemblage of plant species you see on the picture: why are there these species and not others? Why only a few individuals and not more? Because other species or individuals have not arrived yet? Why haven't they? Because they can't access the site? Why not? Aren't they there because the conditions are not conducive to their growth (too dry, too wet, too warm, too cold, too few insects for pollination, too many natural enemies eating their leaves, their roots?). Do the first plants keep out others by changing the local site to their benefit but to the detriment of others? Or no more species have evolved yet that can cope with such a habitat? I am actually quite surprised by myself now of what this picture, which I first found uninspiring, made me think about. Basically I covered the major questions of ecological theory here.

Reply 4: Bob Levene

Would we (humans) come into that analysis? I guess I mean how big is the picture you're looking at? The plants, the pipes, the brick, the soil etc. 'Pretty' pictures can be the most uninspiring of all.

Reply 5: Arne Schröder

Humans are part of the picture, but often quite implicit, in the background. Humans change the world and thus the environment of other species, but also their own environment. And indirectly, even moreso: changing how animals and plants live is coupled to the conditions of our existence. Ultimately, everything is connected and feedbacks are everywhere. Science often gets accused of being reductionistic, not holistic enough. I don't buy that. Of course we disassemble complex pictures into smaller, more handy and tractable bits. There is no other way if you want to understand things. But then these small bits are put together again, reassembling the big picture step by step, experiment by experiment, measurement by measurement, model by model. So at the end something emerges that is not the complete picture but a good approximation of the whole of it.

# On science and arts

Arne Schröder

One reason why I joined this project was to learn and think more about how science and art work. I like to think that science is objective, analytical and dispassionate while in arts people are free to let their emotions and imagination run wild. The reason why I like this ideal distinction is that only then can I be sure that I don't fool myself when looking at the world through my models and my data, and moreover, only then can I trust other people's conclusions about how a particular piece of the world works. I also like that because it gives me freedom when appreciating art: I can more justify any personal and subjective feeling I get when doing so, instead of being patronised by someone into a certain way of interpretation or thinking. The problem with this, though, is that this distinction is not correct. It is very wrong. I always knew that, but this project helped me realise that even more sharply.

For scientists, a lot of emotion goes into how we choose projects, we feel deeply about our theories and data, their value for understanding and more. I don't say that is necessarily a bad thing: compassion, creativity and imagination are needed to come up with novel, maybe more promising approaches, and help get over that constant feeling of stupidity so common when doing research. They are also the stuff that keep you going when calculations fail, test animals die, equipment breaks, money stops flowing... However, it makes the rest of science (experimentation, sample protocols, measuring stuff, calculations) a constant struggle to fight yourself (and other scientists) to not give in to wishful thinking, to not bias yourself towards certain pet conclusions, etc.

Tim's work gave me further insights. Through his moving machines and when talking to him last Friday I became aware that art projects often also have to be precise and analytical to get messages across, to take material and physical/biological constraints into account but also to use chances offered by new technology (everybody loved the artificial metallic hip joint Allison brought along as a demonstration object).

Or look at Bob's work on subjective feelings regarding the flow of time and the perception of space. I guess she needed to contrast that with actual scientific measurements of time and space to get at the discrepancy between objective, machine-based measurements and subjective, human feelings. On the other hand, as a biologist I would say that these can't be too much off. People still are able to make it in the real world without getting lost. Evolution saw to that.

# Material matters

Bob Levene



Reply 1: Matthew Cheeseman

Really interesting post. To pick one thing out of it:

>>They are also the stuff that keeps you going when calculations fail, test animals die, equipment breaks, money stops flowing.

Two things that interest me: 1) Much of our lives as scientists and artists are effected by chance, meeting people, exchanging ideas, saying things, overhearing things, reading things that somehow cross your path. I often think that a body of work is in contravention to all of these things that bubble and provoke us. One has to be very persistent to keep a route through all the fascinating things life throws at us. 2) At the same time much of our life is ruled by deep structures we have little understanding or influence over. Economy. Class. Media.

This indeed is one of the fundamental sociological problems: what is the relationship between a) individual agency and b) structural position. Your answer to that is embedded within your politics.



Reply 1: Caroline Evans

These are images of material provided by Roxspur?

Reply 2: Matthew Cheeseman

They're not, I don't think. I find the first very disturbing.

Reply 3: Bob Levene

No, these are images I took whilst visiting Jonathan's and Alison's departments on Friday.



## High visibility purpose

Matt Cheeseman



I like these two. The man in black is Garry Wiggins, the University's surveyor, the man in a High Visibility Jacket is Brad Hurt from Roxpur. Both were charging around Furnace Park on the day that you all met and had the tour. In the picture they are assessing boundaries. I am thinking back to how I walked you around in a very guided fashion, as someone said, a bit like a school teacher. This seemed like the right thing to do: collaborations without set aims are awkward, are they not? They need structure. This puts in mind Sarah's post on Sunday, about occupying the space, understanding a relation to it, a purpose.

Reply 1: Sarah Spencer

I keep thinking about when I turned up at the site that day, two blokes hanging about nearby said 'you need to go around there' when I looked a little disorientated. 'Am I that obvious?' I laughed... 'No, you don't look like that, you've just got the same bag as the rest of them...' My black backpack somehow marked me out as a student to Matt's teacher...

# Classical inspiration

Hester Reeve

I keep thinking about those two old lumps of cement lying menacingly in the top part of the park, they look like they fell from the top of a very thick wall. They also look like archeological remnants. I like the way they are heavy, but they are a bit ugly and also there to stay. It's made me think about a real archeological site in Turkey, Diogenes' famous wall (a great example of ideas grown in the city centre):

'Diogenes of Oenoanda was an Epicurean Greek from the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD who carved a summary of the philosophy of Epicurus onto a portico wall in the ancient city of Oenoanda in Lycia (modern day southwest Turkey). The surviving fragments of the wall, which originally extended about 80 meters, form an important source of Epicurean philosophy. The inscription sets out Epicurus' teachings on physics, epistemology, and ethics. It was originally about 25000 words along and filled 260 square meters of wall space. Diogenes built the wall so that all the citizens of his town could learn and be inspired from it. He said if there were one or two people that were lost he could educate them personally. But there are many. So he decided to put up the wall. According to Epicurus, in order to live wisely, it isn't enough to read a philosophical argument once or twice, we need constant reminders of it or we'll forget.'

Currently, about a quarter of the inscription—in fragments spread across the terrain—has been recovered. The inscriptions contains three treatises written by Diogenes as well as various letters and maxims:

'A Treatise on Ethics, which describes how pleasure is the end of life; how virtue is a means to achieve it; and explains how to achieve the happy life.

A Treatise on Physics, which has many parallels with Lucretius, and includes discussions on dreams, the gods, and contains an account of the origin of humans and the invention of clothing, speech and writing.

A Treatise on Old Age, which appears to have defended old age against the jibes of the young, although little of this treatise survives.

Letters from Diogenes to his friends, which includes a letter addressed to a certain Antipater concerning the Epicurean doctrine of innumerable worlds.

Epicurean maxims, a collection of the sayings of Epicurus and other eminent Epicureans, which was appended to the end of the treatise on ethics.

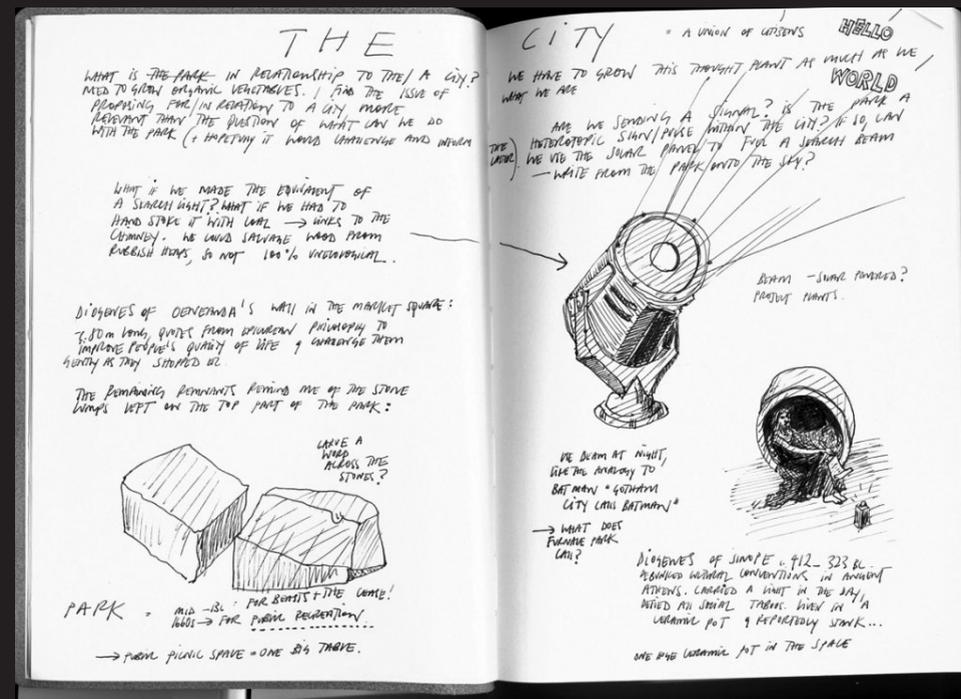
Letters of Epicurus, which includes a letter to Epicurus' mother on the subject of dreams.'

Reply 1: Sarah Spencer

I think I agree with that Epicurus about constant reminders. Also think I could do with reading that treatise on ethics. Like the idea of a rough concrete rebellion in Furnace Park, determined to stay put, nagging and niggling about some forgotten industrial lesson learned.

# A page from my sketch book

Hester Reeve



Reply 1: Alison Beck

Thanks for showing the page from your notebook. It makes me want to start an illustrated notebook of my own! My work notebooks mainly contain written notes e.g. lab notes and only have a few 'sketches' of equipment to help me remember how to use them. The use of solar power (once suitably stored, as described in another strand) to project images (at night?) is intriguing.

# Many ways of how nature acts as a sculptor

Arne Schröder

Humans have created sculptures for at least 40,000 years. One of the oldest pieces of art is the Venus vom Hohle Fels, a small female figurine carved out of mammoth ivory. If you see humans as an integral part of nature (and I believe that despite all our technology we are still, and probably always will be, part of the biosphere on Earth), this is one indirect way of nature acting as a sculptor.

I work with animals that can be highly plastic in the way they look, behave, operate, etc. So another way nature acts as a sculptor is through evolution and ecology. I am also a passionate Rambler and hiker and I have seen landscapes and structures, like arctic tundra and rock formations that are sculpted by yet other forces. What do you think? Are these different ways somehow linked by the actions of natural forces (note that I don't want to anthropomorphise them even if I speak here of nature as a sculpturing subject) or is this just superficial and coincidence?

For example, three joint forces of evolution and ecology led to different body forms in two individuals of the same species of water fleas. One individual was exposed to predator cues, while the other grew up in a predator-free environment.

Reply 1: Hester Reeve

Even my stomach responded to this stimulating post (I mean it made my stomach think so to speak)... that's almost a metaphor of nature sculpting, but in this case my emotions.

I totally agree, nature is carving all the time. I am never sure if this means we should co-carve with her/him/it? Perhaps to find things out, but does it make sense to carve with her in order to achieve beauty? I know you were not suggesting that, but it's an interesting issue. Does it change us? What if the sculpted form of the water flea exposed to predators is more beautiful, more extraordinary to my human sense of taste/'rightness' than the one who stayed 'safe'? I'm someone who can't watch the lions hunting the zebras etc. I get absolutely upset.

Did you see the program about the art of the ice age? It was very good, and talks a little about some of this (the forms 'carved using flint and out of flint' took ages... so experts now think that certain humans were 'artists' in that this was their role and they didn't hunt or gather all those eons ago... But I don't want to end this post on 'artists'... so I'll end it paying tribute to the beauty of the water flea.

## Scratching the surface

Bob Levene

Visiting Alison and Jonathan in their prospective engineering labs last Friday has left me with that exciting but frustrating feeling I get some times when I'm at the beginning of something, unable to articulate why and what it is that I'm excited about. For sometime I've been drawn to the (admittedly broad) areas of engineering, infrastructure and materials. Possibly because they seem to bring together interests such as resources, environment, technology, geopolitics, economics, but somehow routed in the practical, the day to day, the mundane, the human as well as somehow commenting or exposing how we like to live and function.

There is something about it that is inherently sculptural, not just in the forms and objects created (with aesthetic decisions being made alongside or often following function), but also in the systems and networks we've created to feed, heat, communicate and transport ourselves. Alison's research looks at the surface of materials and was fascinating to learn about. Using different methods (optical, electron, laser) to analyse, 'see' and understand the surface as whole. Rubbing, scratching, hammering again and again, testing the mettle so to speak. Creating, coating, changing the surface chemistry, maybe only a few microns thick to make it more resistant or reduce friction, maybe better for growing cells in bioengineering or be less corrosive for medical devices, maybe more durable for turbine blades.

Surfaces, even the shallowest ones, seem to have a lot to them after all. It's the front line, the edge, the point of contact, the touch, the skin, the barrier, the protector, the mirror, the image, the language. I like the potential of scratching the surface, embedding, scarring and marking. I explored this idea in a previous worked called Handmade. My work as a photographer is defined by 'managing surfaces' describing objects by the way you light and create reflections on them.

Whilst walking around the lab I was particularly taken by these small sweet like, appealing objects that turned out to be test samples. Slices of a material are embedded into resin and polished in order to fix them into place ready to be put under a microscope. Depending on the type of material and the form it comes in, a different surface pattern is created. I'd like to study, photograph, look at these objects and other processes the material goes through further.

The afternoon with Jonathan and his colleagues opened up a different scale and loads of thinking. The railways were the topic of discussion, maintaining 5,000 miles of track, keeping leaves off the line, stopping sand from corroding the wheels, risk vs. safety vs. money. There seemed to be crossovers with Alison's research in the resistance and resilience of material surfaces. The wheels on the track for one: Jonathan talked about the bureaucracy and rules Network Rail have in place dictating the various strengths of steel that should be used for train wheels. Too strong and they wear the track down, but the longer they last for the company that runs the train.

It's the enormity of it all that fascinates me, transport, be it moving us or our water, heat, conversation, pictures. Infrastructure can

be thought of as the loom on which we weave the very fabric of our lives, enabling us to move freely, consume, communicate, keep warm and fed; for most of us it is only something we become aware of when it goes wrong. These networks tie us into global systems, yet we rarely see beyond the switch, tap or aisle of food on our doorsteps, but our lives are vulnerable to the economic and geopolitical situations that arise across the world. I'm left thinking about the material (raw/surface), the surface, the scale and distance, the connections and networks.

Reply 1: Caroline Evans

Scale, distance, the connection and networks are all very interesting and relevant to the function of cells: components of life from the unicellular to multicellular. Feels like these themes form patterns which are repeated across the project.

Reply 2: Alison Beck

I'm going to cut up ('section') some pieces of coated steel in a few minutes. I will then be able to analyse the sections in a variety of ways; from the macroscopic to microscopic, physical and chemical properties. Bob, you are welcome to take more photos of these and other processes.



## Subnature

Alasdair Hiscock

As I've read through everything that's been posted, I think two themes have stood out so far.

One is the theme of surface and structure. We've seen ideas of surface markings in the landscape; the surface of materials and minute changes to their properties; the uncovering of infrastructures under the surface; the suggestion that our lives play out as surface detail of a huge network, but how this idea works at the level of tiny cells too; how the natural world sculpts and shapes; trying to preserve an area of the site during the process of development.

The other idea that comes across strongly is about language, and the production of things. How language is used to assert a place in the world; the problem of discussing 'nature' from a perspective of recreating it; a very particular type of language used in site surveys, one that doesn't accept any contingency whatsoever; a quite useful distinction between analysis and emotion when we talk about art and science.

These seem linked for me, in the way that across every type of work there's always a need to exclude certain ideas or possibilities

in order to make progress. In art, design, writing, scientific research, etc.

This brought to mind an interesting book/project by the architectural historian David Gissen. He proposes the idea of 'subnature' in contrast to 'seemingly central and desirable forms of nature e.g. the sun, clouds, trees and wind'. In particular, he wants to propose an alternative to the instrumentalisation of nature in architecture—contemporary 'green' architecture being 'the utilisation of nature as an instrument that cleans the world, increases productivity and efficiency, and transforms our existing natural relationship, while advancing the social sphere as is'.

Subnatures are the marginalised and disregarded side of natural life, such as mud, weeds, dust and pigeons. They are fought against, not seen as the good natures that can provide us with help. However, as the book explores, they can and have been accommodated into the planning of buildings and everyday life through history. This doesn't apply specifically to the Furnace Park site, but I thought it was an interesting point to explore, when we have discussed ecology, materials engineering, the

representation of natural beings and indeed the most green of green things—solar power for the site.

So, where's this all going? What I'm coming to is the idea that all work excludes certain things, indeed it tries to not change certain factors. In every project, there's a possible outcome with terrible consequences that we have to avoid, or we don't know is there. I'm tempted, as a non-scientist, to imagine that this catastrophe scenario is always there in scientific research, as if an accidental turn in the laboratory could immediately destroy the world.

What I'd like to know is what element of your work might be described as 'subnatural'? Perhaps something that is genuinely undesirable that has to be suppressed, or a possible consequence that concerns you. This could be something that you do in your everyday work, or something that has come up in the course of this collaboration. Essentially, I want to know what the thing is that is the opposite of what you're actually trying to achieve?

## Ideas post Alasdair's post

Hester Reeve



This was a very thought provoking post, and timely. It's tied some things together and given me some ideas for something to do in the park but I share this as an offering and not a demand that we should do any of it (well, we should, but it may be too far fetched!):

In terms of surfaces, I am taken by the idea of each of us scratching the surface as we traverse the park... which has been untrodden by human foot for so long... so our very walking across it is somehow a 'thing' and 'artful' in its own right. Not that I/we have been there so many times. This makes me want to spend a 24-hour period in Furnace Park constantly walking around and across the space, ideally with the whole group there... a marathon of sorts but as much a marathon of conversation—if the whole

group were doing this we could have megaphones and hold a conversation together as we traverse on our own random pathways through the space. There is an echo here of ancient practices of philosophy too (carried out in groups walking rather than via texts in books). This would be interesting for others to pop in and watch/listen, but more importantly would actually facilitate concerns and ideas between us because it would stretch what a shared conversation can be, it would remove the politeness and constraints on our ability to think together outside the box. We would be sorting something out rather than showing a conclusion. I also like the way this ties in with the equivalence with a cell (and I haven't posted about cells but I was fascinated by everything that has been said in relation to that). I like

the way that if we did this walking performance event and recast Furnace Park as the (rebel) cell of the 'city body,' then our traversing to and fro would be like DNA moving within the cell, carrying/creating messages. Alison's 'golden scissors' could play a role here—if viewed within the same metaphor of the ark as a cell, then these scissors are like a chromosome, a chromosome of potentiality. We could pass the scissors between us as we talk... or hand them to one another as an invitation to talk. Of course we could take breaks, eat etc. but I like the commitment to at least twelve hours doing this.

Linked to this are other ideas. I have been pondering about how hard it seems to get to what we could make/what we could do in the park and how to link all of our interests related so far. It makes you feel precious (even though Matt has always given us the freedom to do or not to do etc.). So, during the blog period, I've found myself sitting at my lap top but rather than knowing what to post, I've found that my imagination just keeps going back to the park, like quite viscerally in that the colours are vivid and I can feel the cold and the emptiness and am always happy to turn and see the furnace chimney out the corner of my eye etc. So, my strongest sense during the research period is that I have been waiting in the

park all this time. I'm cold but I don't want to leave. Now I am getting this image of those really evocative wooden bus shelters (why on earth do they not build those anymore? Why do they take away those ornate city lamps and put an awful piece of public art in the city centre instead? Can we salvage an ornate lamp-post and put it in the park? Fueled by the solar panels?). I have a strong image of about ten of these wooden bus shelters around the edge of the performance area of the park. They would serve the useful function of shelter for any audiences to future events, they set up a stage as it were (non-traditionally) but most of all they run counter to the idea of linear progression/journey since they are arranged facing each other in a large rectangle shape, and suggest a waiting/hope for the future.

But what I was really asked to think about was what is the opposite of what I am trying to achieve? The thing I am not trying to do is to repeat the problem of public art projects(!) where usually ugly/uncomfortable artworks are made as a type of service provision and equated with progress and value. It's patronizing to people and to art. For me the best cities are ones where children can go scrambling in open fields or play on streets in total safety and you don't need an Arts Council grant or an artist for that. So, I am trying not to

place an 'art object' in the park. I am also not doing anything technological but that is because I am not very good at engineering type things... So, whilst this is opposite to what I am thinking about so far, this is something I would love the challenge of doing and I'm thinking of those solar panels and Tim's adeptness with building machines. I'm all up for putting a machine (which I interpret very broadly, even ideas can be machines of sorts for me) in the park, solar powered. But I wouldn't know where to start and that's quite exciting.

I'm also attaching a drawing I just made from a photograph of 'The People's Militia' training in Victoria Park, London, c.1913. It was organized by Sylvia Pankhurst's East London Federation of Suffragettes. I'm not suggesting we form an army (well, it could be fun, we could make an equivalent of guns that sowed seeds everywhere or were in fact musical instruments that we could play), but it's such a great 'non-park park' image (possibly subnature-ish too), expectant, rebellious and committed.

## Destruction and creation

Jonathan Paragreen

I am fascinated by the discussions which are going on here and having had a busy couple of weeks am catching up. And have had a couple of thoughts below.

Hester's post reminded me of the inscriptions in the stone at the Cow and Calf near Ilkley. I remember when I first saw these inscriptions about 17 years ago I was unsure whether to consider them art or more as graffiti with the negative feelings of destruction which go with that.

However, I like the idea of art forming one thing, but in the process destroying something else. For the inscriptions to have been made at the Cow and Calf both stone surface and the chisel will have been worn in order to create this (I like how this relates to the research areas of wear and the science of surfaces).

In the video of Tim's sculpture (where you turn the handle and it writes out the word love), the pencil made a horrible squealing sound, which reminds us that the pencil is being worn in order to create the words and ultimately will be destroyed. Bob is fascinated by infrastructure, but again roads, railways, gas

pipelines, power cables all remind me of the arguments which are always raised in planning about them destroying the existing landscape: we require the services they bring but we need to destroy a landscape to achieve them. Even as I am writing this, I have started to consider that the power my PC requires has probably come from a coal or gas power station, the extraction of these sources of energy have also resulted in destruction of landscapes or marine habitats. Hester asked why we don't have wooden bus shelters and my first thought was, cost and secondly the susceptibility to vandalism and destruction. Also more abstractly from Hester's post showing the 'The People's Militia' training in Victoria Park, London, this again reminded me that in order to create universal suffrage, many lives were destroyed.

Sarah's work with vocabulary and how different sections of society manage equally well with less vocabulary or different vocabulary made me consider that perhaps education and common language also destroys something in society. I don't believe that any of these things are not right or worthwhile, just that all the time we are losing something to make something. And linking to Arne's work, I am sure that evolution is about loss

as well gain, often losing the ability to do something which is now unnecessary.

So how does this relate back to Furnace Park? I like the idea that we can celebrate the cycles of creation and destruction the park has already gone: from woodland to agricultural to industrial, which has now decayed to what it is today. I have a vision of a sculpture by Tim which is grinding away at the concrete floor either representing the mining or such industries destroying the landscapes, or even wearing an inscription into the concrete and showing the destruction of the ground and the tool over time. I can imagine Bob and Hester capturing other losses and destructions, perhaps Hester the losses and gains of political and historical struggles and Bob capturing some of her insights into modern infrastructure and the contrasts between what that brings and destroys. I feel that the park itself can also be a representation of this with existing trees and perhaps some grass and meadow flowers planted and perhaps even vegetable crops planted to represent the different eras of the site and what has been destroyed to create it.

Reply 1: Hester Reeve

100 yesses to all of the above, very inspiring. It would be great to have one of Tim's machines grinding a word into the surface of the concrete. I wonder if that would deter graffiti on the bus shelters (destruction leading back to creative force?). Maybe his machine could be scribing a statement about people's struggles and the destruction/creation therein (but for the record, the suffragettes never hurt a living thing save the king's horse at the Derby, which was an accident and he survived).

Reply 2: Bob Levene

Your thoughtful and considered post makes me think about the cycle of things, it also brings up thoughts around time and balance. Is there an evenness or balance to this pattern of creation and destruction? Does there need to be? What if the scales tip? It reminded me of the cables and guides on the top of trains and the wheel and tracks below, which all wear down at different rates. When two things come up against each other something has to give. What matter, attitude, technique, composition survives longer; strength, density, resilience, flexibility/agility, resistance, reproduction or refresh. As Caroline explained to me this morning when describing what cells do: survive grow develop or die?

# The destructor

Alison Beck

Hester's 'ideas-post-Alasdair's-post' has sparked some connections for me (networks of cells/neurons as mentioned by Caroline in another post?) concerning gas lamps in Sheffield. When I moved to a hill in Sheffield (towards the end of the last century) there was one beautiful, ornate gas lamp on the hill which was actually lit, and it burned day and night. I thought this was a wonderful and romantic gesture, there to remind us of how it was when Sheffield was lit by gas lamps. Several months later, I carefully read the grimy letters around the base of the lamp:

## SEWER GAS DESTRUCTOR

How my illusions were shattered! There are several of these 'gas lamps' in Sheffield, as far as I know they are no longer lit. So it begs the question what happens to the pockets of sewer gas (methane?) that used to form in sewers of hilly regions like Sheffield. I will ask a friend whose research includes waste water!

There is a lot more to think about. I like Hester's idea of 'walking and talking' and the links to our past, more on these areas later.

Reply 1: Bob Levene

I love that it's a SEWER GAS DESTRUCTOR.

This is taken from 'The History of Monkseaton Village' by local historian Charlie Steel found on the English Heritage website:

'In the 1890s, Joseph Edmund Webb, a builder from Birmingham, invented and patented his sewer gas destructor lamp, and later formed the Webb Engineering Company. Within ten years of their introduction, these lamps were found all over England and in many other parts of the world. Old sewers were often badly laid out and poorly vented, so there was always a danger of disease (or even explosion) from methane and fetid stagnant gases, which could build up in the system. The lamps, which were connected to the ordinary town gas supply, were installed at high points in the system and were coupled directly to the underground sewer. They were usually lit by three mantles, which were rarely extinguished. The burning mantles created an intense heat within the hood, leading to an updraught, which drew air from the sewer through a copper tube inside the column; the sewer gas was therefore harmlessly burned off, thus converting the methane into carbon dioxide before being released into the atmosphere. One lamp was capable of venting an area of up to three quarters of a mile of sewer.'

Reply 2: Alison Beck

Thanks for adding that excellent description Bob. I had a brief chat about the sewer gas destructors with my friend and fellow researcher, Will Shepherd who is based in the Pennine Water Group, Department of Civil and Structural Engineering. I asked him if he had any ideas why the old sewer gas destructor lamps around Sheffield were not lit any more. Whilst this is well to the side of his main research area he made some interesting comments which I would like to share:

'I've worked with sewers for over 10 years and had never come across sewer gas destructors! I would guess that more efficient methods of venting sewers have been developed and perhaps an increased understanding of the problem has negated the need (odour is a nuisance, not a health hazard). As far as I can make out, these were essentially gas lamps running initially on town gas and later natural gas. The heat was supposed to provide an airflow to remove the gas and anything combustible would be burnt. I think in general stack pipes provide sufficient airflow through the systems for it not to be a problem. The main gas issue in sewers is hydrogen sulphide, I'm not aware that methane is a major issue, other problems are odour related. Hydrogen Sulphide is mainly a problem in

# The right to land

Bob Levene

Excited by the recent entries by Alisdair and Hester, below is my response. Although I want to pre-empt it with saying how I'm still unsure about resolving, or making comment/or work so soon and for the sake of it. To me it feels like the conversation is only just getting started. Having said that...

I find the notion of subnature an interesting one, how we give a hierarchy to nature based on our own understanding of beauty. Placing importance on the dramatic, bleak and cute over the seemingly dull, odd and mundane. Do we only try to manage and use nature for our own sake? Giving importance and focus to that which we find aesthetically pleasing, useful and productive? I can understand the desire to, as Arne said 'greening' sites such as Furnace Park, which no doubt has a lot of value to it, but I wonder if revealing, exposing, uncovering, discussing and making aware of what already exists has its own value.

Sewer gas destructor lamps remove sewer gases and their hazards. That is pretty exciting for me, it somehow brings together interests around infrastructure and the power and energy we use. I like the idea of an alternative physical manifestation or indicator of used energy and a connection between

the hidden infrastructure below the surface and a visible signifier above.

Hester's idea of live, temporal shared conversations is a beautiful one as is a long duration of time spent in the park. There is something about the temporal, democratic notion of open dialogue in relation to the more permanent public carved wall of philosophy or the wear and tear markings in the landscape. It also links to Jonathan's ideas of losing something to make something and Hester's idea of sorting something out rather than concluding with a neat finish.

Maybe this could be an alternative approach to the symposium? A durational open dialogue/set of performances/actions on site.

Finally, Sarah mentioned something in an earlier post about the power of looking closely that somehow resonated with me that I wanted to re-post: 'We examine our surrounding reality, we attend to its details and sometime through looking closely we make it appear strange'.

Reply 1: Sarah Spencer

Really interested in the idea of 'giving importance and focus to that which we find aesthetically pleasing, useful and productive' I also wonder 'if revealing, exposing, uncovering, discussing and making aware of what already exists has its own value'.



# Small bubbles

Bob Levene

Today I visited Arne and his water fleas. It was a lot to take in and the conversation got pretty broad and included ideas around truth and truths; a scientific truth being something that had proof and was evidence based and repeatable. Why is this truth any more truthful than others? How these experiments are small controlled and isolated bubbles in a bigger pond.

I got to look at a water flea and a baby water flea feeding through a microscope, which was quite a sight, a transparent shell with a clear pumping heart and brown tube which looked like a spine, but turned out to be its gut. The thing that Arne said that stuck with me most was about how the

rate of dispersal or transfer of species has changed and increased since humans have become more globalised.

We talked about how small and microbotic creatures get onto cargo ships when they fill up with ballast water, despite filters and netting designed to prevent this. When the ships travel to the other side of the world and offload the ballast water and reload cargo, they release foreign species which 'invade' and sometimes destroy the local ecosystem.



## Survive grow develop or die

Bob Levene

This will be my fourth lab visit and I'm beginning to notice each has a particular subtle smell, not to mention beautiful displays of glass bottles and odd things in fridges. Visiting Caroline in the processing lab felt strangely familiar, partly because they develop protein samples on gels, which is not too dissimilar to the photographic process.

We talked about her fascinating work on analysing and breaking down proteins. I also got a well needed lesson in what cells do and how they work. This led to a discussion around knowledge and the feeling of knowing less the more you learn. When isolating environments and conditions to see what happens (as so many lab based sciences do), there almost seems a compulsion and need to know more. The question came up: in order to help, mend and discover are we then creating more problems? It reminds me of the discussions around creation and destruction that are being blogged.

I'm pretty taken aback at how broad engineering is and even more interested in how aspects crossover. Although it makes sense when I looked at the dictionary definition of engineering: 'the art or science of making practical application of the knowledge of pure sciences, as physics or chemistry, as in the construction of engines, bridges, buildings, mines, ships, and chemical plants'. It does look like the examples need updating, as the University departments within the Faculty of Engineering include Aerospace, Automatic Control and Systems, Bioengineering, Chemical and Biological Engineering, Civil and Structural Engineering, Computer Science, Electronic and Electrical Engineering, Materials Science and Mechanical Engineering.

Reply 1: Caroline Evans

Thanks to Bob for paying a visit which encompassed a tour of a lab in the Medical School and then on to the ChELSI labs in Chemical and Biological Engineering. Would like to extend this invitation to others too. We talked for a couple of hours and the time just flew. As Bob said 'The question came up: in order to help, mend and discover are we then creating more problems?' We discussed that recent posts by Alison and Jonathan deal very effectively with this and this all relates back to Alisdair's subnature blog which has provoked a series of interesting responses. We talked about the post on hexagram and Bob said it reminded her of the exhibition 'Forms' by Quayola and Memo Atken in Bradford, 2012, which is a very beautiful analysis of human movement.

Hester's comment that 'In terms of surfaces, I am taken by the idea of each of us scratching the surface as we traverse the park... which has been untrodden by human foot for so long... so our very walking across it is somehow a "thing" and "artful" in its own right' led to discussion that historical aspects of the space remain to be addressed. I was particularly taken with Tim's initial thought to use railings to fence off a few square meters of the middle of the lower area and keep that bit untouched from any site improvement and as it is now. For the reasons of 1) Preserving the initial starting point, 2) As a kind of spurious control sample to compare to whatever the site becomes and 3) Just curiosity as to how the site develops. We also discussed that immersion in thinking about a project is a powerful creative force, particularly in conversation and whether Hester's suggestion to spend some time walking around the site in conversation could be a very productive and complementary activity to the blogs to date.





# Carbon Coating

Bob Levene

Reply 1:  
Alison Beck

These pictures, taken by Bob, show some of the diverse sample preparation for scanning electron microscopy (SEM). One project in Materials Science and Engineering is studying low friction coatings on steel and the other (jointly with Mechanical Engineering) is to improve joints in plastic pipelines (mentioned in an earlier post of mine). The insulating samples were coated with a very thin layer of carbon. The carbon conducts electricity which allows a good, sharp SEM image of the insulating sample to be obtained. Sometimes gold coatings are used. On this occasion I was being trained to use the (ancient but reliable) carbon coating machine. Always seem to be learning something new in my research work in engineering and recently via this project.



# Creativity

Alison Beck



While pondering the question 'what is art?' I began to consider 'what is creativity?' or more importantly 'how do we generate creativity?' and how this links to the project.

I caught the end of a Horizon on BBC2, 'The Creative Brain: How Insight Works'. One suggestion made in the programme, was that creativity could be 'improved' by spending some time doing an engaging but not too demanding task (e.g. sorting Lego bricks into colours or simply going for a walk) which reduces activity in the frontal lobe of the brain (which apparently helps with creativity). This links to the suggestion of a 'walk around Furnace Park' in one of Hester's posts.

Some of the research activities I do in engineering are also 'engaging but not too demanding' tasks, I like to hope that this provides an opportunity and sets the scene for increased creativity! However, I still find walking the best activity for thinking and creativity. What do you find conducive to ideas generation? Clearly, there are many routes. The photographs and reports about the different work spaces, labs, workshops, and studios of the researchers and artists, illustrate that those visits are also great catalysts for creativity. I'm happy to show artists/researchers around my department, labs and so on and am keen to see other's workspaces!

## Representation through language

Sarah Spencer

Bob recommended an art event linked to language and meaning at Site Gallery. The artist Anna Barham discussed her six-week residency in Sheffield and the relationship with the invited speakers, many of whom were locally based academics. The event was about language and its arbitrary nature, the non-referential symbolism of English phonemes and alphabet.

The artist worked in conversation with academics and I was intrigued to hear her thoughts about the process. Anna described how she needed time away from the academic discourses she'd been exposed to in order to 'look at it from the corner of her eye'. Anna explained that the aim of the residency was not to increase her understanding of literary and linguistic theory, nor was it her role to illustrate known theories, but to create anew, in a different mode.

This event made me think of our own academic/artistic conversations. All contributors find themselves confronting the boundaries between academic and artistic production, each bringing a unique perspective to that division. I wonder if we find ourselves looking through the corners of our eyes at each other's ideas and positions?

The discussion also covered Anna's work on anagrams as a route to pursuing meaning that isn't there. Elvis Presley: Silvery Sleeps. Furnace Park: recap far Kun. The interest is in the gaps, the spaces where we persistently search for meaning. It is in this space between meanings (or perhaps in representations?) where something lies. I wonder about the process of collaboration within this project: the cognitive process of making links and networks, finding cohesion. Is this space and absence—the gaps between our agendas—actually where the real meanings lie for us?

Reply 1: Jonathan Paragreen

Hi Sarah, your post reminds me a little bit of a conversation I had last week. I was in San Sebastian and was chatting with colleagues about language, especially what the Spanish call 'false gifts' in learning English. This is when an English word is similar in form to a Spanish word, but the meaning is completely different. In our meeting the following example came up: 'bomberos' meaning firefighter, and not bomb. I think we could find loads of examples of humans reading meaning into things when there is none: tea leaves, faces in the moon, cloud formations. I do wonder if it is natural that any gap will be filled with something. Buddleia plants do a great job of filling any industrial waste land.

# Subsurface and surface structures

Alison Beck



When I saw these tree roots at Yorkshire Sculpture Park last weekend, I was reminded of the description of the GPR survey to provide a visual representation of the subsurface 'tree roots and vegetation can sometimes effect the results'. The path is covered in exposed tree roots but the ones in the photo are cast in bronze (Hemali Bhuta connects deep roots of history with speed breakers).

# Sea, sand and a whole variety of surfaces

Jonathan Paragreen

Just returned from a week long holiday in Anglesey. We set off the day after our picnic in Furnace Park, which remained at the forefront of my mind.

Whilst away we spent a lot of the week exploring the beaches and quite a bit walking, which gave me time to reflect on our topic of surfaces and relating it to the world around me. I reflected a lot on the materials which made up the various footpaths that we walked upon. And was surprised when I really started to think about the huge variety, in some places walking on soft sand paths which were really quite hard going, other places harder sand paths, some stone chipping paths, pebbles, stones laid to create a path; on one island a white path was completely made up of small shells. Some paths were dry and peaty which gave a nice hollow feel and sound as you walked upon them, whilst compacted mud paths gave no such response. The surface of the rocks contained a huge variety of life, limpets and seaweed in abundance.

What struck me was the variety in a single subcategory of surface, such as sand. I walked along the beach towards the sea with my eyes shut (guided by my wife), just feeling the texture of the beach through

my shoes. The differences I felt in a short stretch were amazing: from the soft sand with occasional tussocks of grass, into just soft sand, then into a harder damp sand, in places perfectly flat and in others with deep ripples. On the path to the sea you could hear shells being crushed underneath your shoes over pebbles. The different seaweeds were also evident, from the soft stringy type to a seaweed with pods which you could hear popping as you trod on them.

My thoughts also revolved around destruction and humans leaving their mark. At our picnic we looked at the litter in Furnace Park and thought about how it told a story of what the site has been used for: cans and used condoms, implying the activities carried out. But as I walking along the beaches and eroded footpaths I realised that I was quite literally leaving my own footprint on the landscape.

Alongside them and others you could identify the activities carried out: seeing prints from dogs, written messages in the sand, sand castles, or shallows where someone had sat or lay down. You could tell whether people were walking barefoot or in shoes or in walking boots, all in itself a record.

Perhaps most striking was a scene, which I thought was one of the most impressive sights of the holiday, but it was also where the most destruction of the surface had taken place. This was an old copper mine cut into a large hill. The landscape of rock was an amazing array of colours from reds and oranges, though to purples and greens and the scale of the site left me in awe. How can such man-made destruction finally become a thing of beauty, what phases of public opinion did it go through? From an ugly industrial site to a tourist attraction and apparently now used as a film set. Finally I thought that this was analogous to Furnace Park: is it currently towards the end of its ugly phase and about to be recognised as a place of interest and beauty?





## Furnace Park cleared

Jonathan Paragreen

A photo of the cleared site, taken on my cycle ride home from work on 25<sup>th</sup> July 2013. Looking at it in this cleared state, it seems very bare, almost a different place to where we researchers spent many happy hours with the artists. I expect that further changes will happen over the next few months. I think that this feeling of loss fits very well with many of our conversations on this blog; nothing stays the same forever and to create something new, something else must also be lost.

RIP the over-grown, rubbish strewn Furnace Park, although not universally loved, you had your supporters who appreciated you for what you were. We enjoyed your stories told by the litter and marks on your landscape. Although you are gone you will live on in the hearts and minds of those who have come to know you.



# Participants



## 1 Dr Alison Beck

Alison worked in industry before attending Sheffield University to study chemistry as a mature student. She was awarded a PhD for research using plasmas to coat materials and modify their surface properties. She is an expert in analytical, spectroscopic and other techniques that help to improve our understanding of materials. These have been applied in academic research on including carbon fibre composites, and biomaterials for cell cultures as well as industrial projects such as improve adhesion in gas pipelines and wigs.

## 2 Dr Mathew Cheeseman

Matthew works between English Literature, Folklore, Creative Writing, Music and Education. Recently he has focused on integrating artistic practice with interdisciplinary research.

## 3 Dr Caroline Evans

Caroline's research training in cell biology and biochemistry informs her current work in chemical engineering on medical and medical related projects. This is based at the ChELSI Institute (Chemical Engineering Life Science Interface), a multidisciplinary environment (chemical engineering, molecular biology, biochemistry, bioinformatics) which includes the newly established Sheffield Advanced Biomanufacturing Centre.

## 4 Bob Levene

Bob is an artist based in Sheffield. Her practice manifests as video and sound works, walks, performances, drawings and photography, often adopting pseudo-scientific approaches to explore the systems, tools and stories we live by and how they shape the way we see the world. She has shown work at ICA (London), Arnolfini (Bristol), Northern Gallery of Contemporary Art (Sunderland), Dundee Contemporary Art, Cornerhouse (Manchester), National Media Museum (Bradford), Kiasma Museum of Contemporary Art (Helsinki) and Yorkshire Sculpture Park (Wakefield).

## 5 Dr Jonathan Paragreen

Jonathan has a BEng-MEng degree in Chemical Engineering from the University of Bradford and a PhD in polymer rheology and extrusion modelling. He has worked in a variety of industries: bulk chemicals, oil and gas, aerospace, fuel cells and rail

transport. Jonathan is a Research Associate at the University of Sheffield. Funded by EU FP7 grants, he works on transport security, whole life cycle and cost benefit analysis.

## 6 Hester Reeve

Hester Reeve is a multi disciplinary-artist. Her work has been shown in various venues including former Randolph Street Gallery (Chicago), LIVE Biennale (Vancouver), Arnolfini (Bristol) and Tate Britain (London), as part of the Emily Davison Lodge. She is also a trained facilitator of David Bohm's Dialogue. Hester has a BA in Fine Art (Newcastle Polytechnic) and an MA in Philosophy-Values and the Environment (Lancaster University) and is currently Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University.

## 7 Dr Arne Schröder

Arne obtained an MSc in Biology at the University of Freiburg and a PhD in Ecology from Umeå University. He has worked in research at the University of Leeds, and the University of Sheffield. He is now at the Leibniz-Institute for Freshwater Ecology and Inland Fisheries (IGB) in Berlin. His private interests range from the philosophy of science to human history. As an ecologist his work is concerned with why we see a certain amount of animals or plants at a given time at a given place.

## 8 Dr Sarah Spencer

Sarah is a lecturer in Human Communication Sciences. She has previously worked for the charity ICAN on national projects in secondary schools and the youth justice system, Newcastle University on a project developing evidence-based approaches to communication supporting classrooms and the NHS in Sunderland and Middlesbrough as a speech and language therapist with children with speech, language and communication difficulties. She currently researches adolescent language in contexts of social disadvantage using both qualitative and quantitative methods.

## 9 HAND

HAND is a multi-disciplinary design company, made up of Alasdair Hiscock and Ben Dunmore. With roots in fanzine publishing, the pair have gone to work on an array of projects from art books to lighting installations, web design to clothing.

# First Meeting



DATE: 01/02/2013  
LOCATION: Furnace Park  
The participants met each other in advance of the group blog.

# Sandpit Studio



DATE: 08/04/2013  
LOCATION: Humanities Research Institute  
The participants decided to continue the collaborative process instead of nominating an artist to make work in Furnace Park.

# Picnic



These are some photos of our visit to Furnace Park (thanks to Ivan and Katya for access and for providing chairs). We had a picnic, some lovely soup, scones with jam and cream, cherry cake and plenty of tea! We also took the chance to explore and discuss the project more. We discussed themes that had emerged from the blog, and agreed to meet again to each investigate/interpret the concept of ground as an extension or continuation of the theme of surface. What next?

It was interesting to reflect on Sarah's blog, discussing an artist in residence for a linguistic project, where the artist Anna explained that the aim of the residency was not to increase her understanding of literary and linguistic theory nor was it her role to illustrate known theories, but to create anew and in a different mode.

1. Structure
2. Reflection
3. Cementation works
4. A space for ants
5. Investigating
6. The meeting space



DATE: 17/05/2013  
LOCATION: Furnace Park

## A Proposal From The Artists To The Researchers



### The Work:

A curated dinner party under the open sky in the park for invited guests to serve up the book (literally, as one of the courses).

### The Thinking Behind The Work:

We wanted to build on the spirit of the project so far and maintain it in the final work.

We wanted to integrate the book into a creative event rather than have it 'on display.'

We wanted to have continuity between the project process and the end result.

We wanted to share and celebrate the process, dialogue and interdisciplinary with the public (in particular people living and working in the furnace park area), colleagues and stakeholders.

We wanted to propose a framework where everyone participating has the space to contribute something on their own terms.

### How It Will Work:

Each researcher and artist will invite a select amount of guests.

Printed invitations will be presented by hand.

Researchers and artists will work together onsite to cook a 5 course meal for the guests (this is about spending time together working/chatting in the park and producing something for other people to enjoy, so no stressing over complex menus etc.)

The event will be held together by a toastmaster (we will hire one).

Guests will arrive at the park and be welcomed by the toastmaster, encouraged to explore the park by the offer of h'orderves served by waiters (student volunteers) hidden around the park.

The researchers and artists act as hosts.

The toast master calls the guests to the beautiful (and uniquely) laid table:

A toast\* is made.

The first course is served (Starters)

A toast\* is made.

DATE: 24/07/2014

LOCATION: Email

Re: From The Toast Master General, a proposal from the artists to the researchers.

The second course is served (The Book)

A toast\* is made.

The third course is served (Mains)

A toast\* is made.

The fourth course is served (Dessert)

A toast\* is made.

The fifth course is served (Coffee)

### The Details:

The toast\* is a chance for the artists and researchers and invited guests to say something, read something or do something. We will bring back the megaphone. It should be short and in some way connect to the experience and spirit of the project. It could be a reading from the book, a description of an aspect you liked, and action that points out your favourite bit of the park, a description of something you want to go on to do and so on... the limit is your imagination.

Hester and Bob will design and make small interventions that will contribute to the overall aesthetic and design of the table set up. We aim to design a special napkin, for example. We will use a table cloth, china plates, glasses etc. Although the event will be formal the feel will be one of DIY, so no gold 'wedding' chairs will be in sight!

The meal will be served by waiters (students dressed up in black and white).

Food will be simple, wholesome and manageable for us to cook and serve. But we want to read out people through the process of a proper meal with wine and all the "unwinding" and "getting to know you" and "find dinner stories" that a dinner party invites. I.e We want people to feel part of a special event rather than feel visitors or spectators.

Think special, unique and DIY rather than fancy. That is... apart from the clothes. Dress Up.

### Documentation:

The event will be documented (mainly through stills photography but video of the toasts) but we plan for this to be done at a distance and partially obscured so that no one feels self-conscious.

A guest book will be available after the meal for guests to leave their feedback - another form of documentation.

### What to think about:

What to toast?

Who to invite/how many can we accommodate?

What food to cook?

Does anyone know a suitable, efficient events organiser?

See you on Friday 26<sup>th</sup> July to discuss and develop this together!

# This Never Happened

# Ground Investigations



DATE: 01/07/2013  
LOCATION: Furnace Park  
A research/play day for all the participants.

# Group Meeting

## Changes to Furnace Park

Tim's control box—possibility gone.  
Hole filled in with concrete?  
BL: Have to be very clear—exactly what is going to be in the Park on Sep 29th. BL and HR to confirm with ACJ.  
HR: Bleak, stark park will leave a strong visual impression.  
JP: Emotional response to the wasteground. Sad to see it go.

## What of the proposal?

JP: Tempted to say a eulogy for what was.  
HR: Emotional connection to the creative process too.  
MJC: Day-glo spots everywhere.  
BL: Hazard tape?  
HR: Smoke machine?  
HR: Unsure of Art Sheffield, focus on what we're doing. Engagement with the local public. Don't need to do a song and dance. Symbolic of engagement and interdisciplinarity.  
BL: How do we resolve this? Democratic process. Dialogue from day one. Didn't want to plonk on some art at the end that was detached. Structure to contribute.  
CE: Nice to be given equal space.  
MJC: Elitism challenge.  
AB: Agreed, need to be careful.  
BL and HR: Agree to make the meal open to the public with targeted invites.  
BL: Doesn't resolve how it's going to be perceived. Perceptions of elitism. Community participatory art challenge—flying in, having an

event and flying out. So to come in and invite a whole lot of local people and go away is worse.  
SS: Is it?  
HR: Tired about liberal agendas—'respecting the funders'. Tired of

hearing academics and artists.  
SS: Locals would feel a little bit on the spot.  
BL: Elitism—one of the purposes of the dinner party is the book launch. Locals to be part of the book launch. Meeting a problem.  
HR: Academics having the nice meal—whose cooking that meal?  
MJC: Should be open in some way. Question here about audience and participation.  
HR: If this was major Tate Britain show—that would be a big issue. But it is not. Flyers locally... Open call? Poster on the site—billboard advertising the event.  
CE: Checking the emails coming in from the thing.  
BL and HR: Hand-write a flyer.  
SS: Read spirit of it—didn't think of elitism. It didn't feel like that. Agree—challenging perceptions.

## The book

BD: Can you eat the book?  
BL: Can we have something on the front cover that you tear off  
BD: Put it in a crisp packet and then open it... Sandwich bag... salad bags, tin foil—roll up a magazine. Rubbish—fits in with all the rubbish.  
AH: 124 page A5 decided.  
HR: One thing our project does is document the Furnace.  
AH: Book/magazine hybrid. Read back to back. Different voices, different streams of thought. Split it 40 each between blog/contributions/events.  
BD: Organised around hidden

themes. Interviews not good. Write what you know about. Five themes:

1. Art/Science, Art/Research, Identity. Learning from each other, finding how similar the processes were. Lots of blog around this.
  2. Surface. What can surface tells us? What's beyond the surface?
  3. The site. What is this place, here, temporality, permanence, emotion, ground.
  4. Engaging the public/Politics/Politics-economic-social. What is the public, why should they be interested? Find a local?
  5. Dialogue/Method. Collaboration, practice, benefits, how does it work. Not artist into the department as court painter. ISBN numbers? BL to find out.
- BD: Chronology. Annotation. Timeline?  
Glossary of terms. BD and AH to do. Others to be commissioned in.  
Friday 30th August deadline for contributions—everyone.  
Friday 2nd August deadline for sharing photos AH to set up Dropbox.

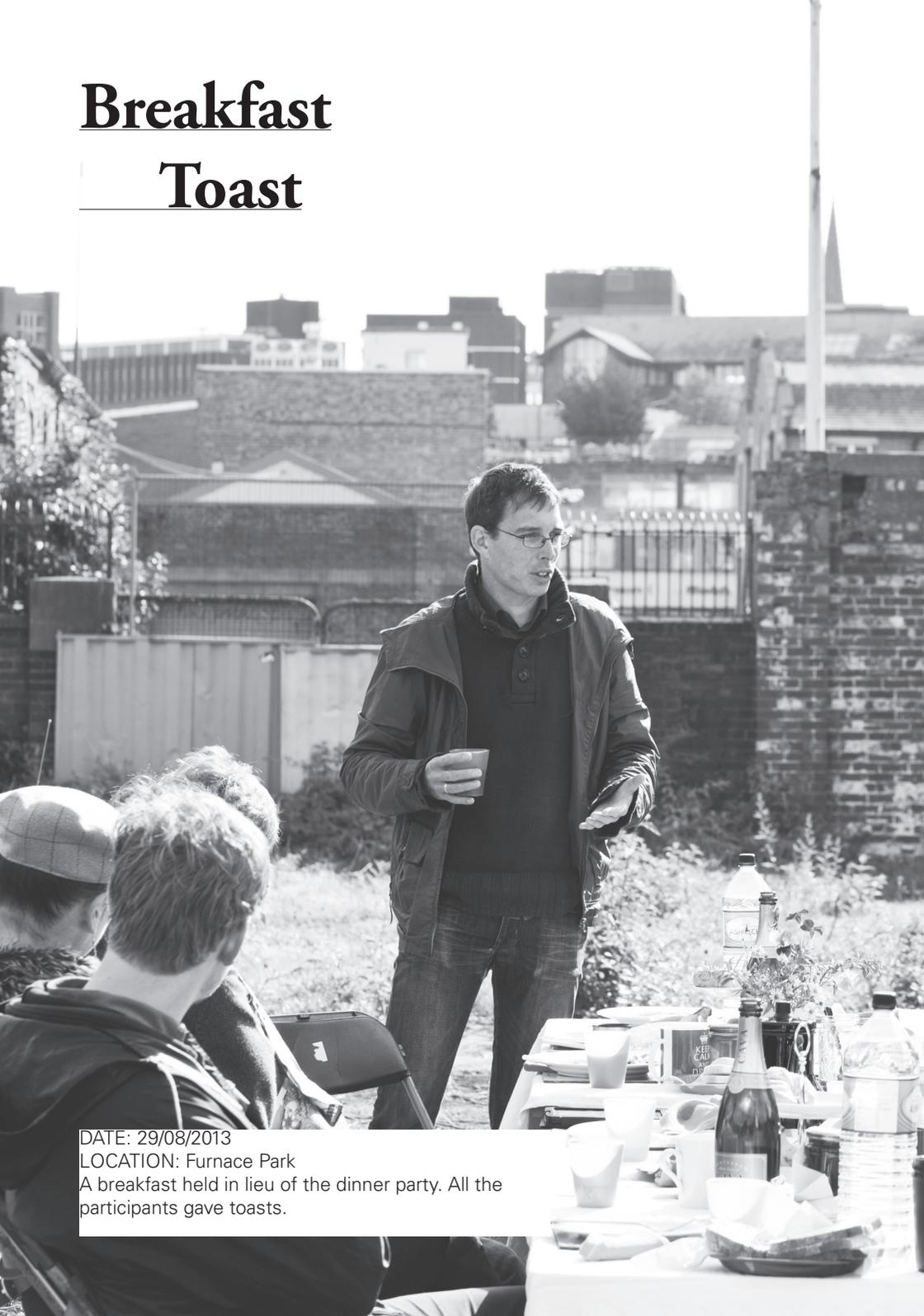
## Logistics for meal

80 people.  
13 FP people.  
Personal invite and an interesting invite each.  
Continued dialogue.  
JR to begin document Google Docs, everyone to add wishlist for Friday 2nd August.

DATE: 26/07/2013  
LOCATION: G03 Jessop West  
Minutes from group meeting.

# Breakfast

## Toast



DATE: 29/08/2013

LOCATION: Furnace Park

A breakfast held in lieu of the dinner party. All the participants gave toasts.

### **Hester Reeve**

Perhaps it is fitting that circumstances forced us into a private breakfast celebration of our book rather than a public evening meal. After dinner speeches fall into recognized social conventions whereas 'after breakfast speeches' smacks of poetic shenanigans! We sit around this table as 'creative agents'. I am deliberately avoiding the arts-science dichotomy here; I think this whole thing worked because somehow we ignited the capacity to be creative agents in one another. Don't underestimate that as a result. So, I raise my coffee cup up to each and every one of you: it's been great!

I also raise my coffee cup up to our avoiding any resolution of our project in terms of a public artwork, or any piece of art per se. We were all thrown out into the open here in Furnace Park and it kind of worked. A process evolved of itself that had less to do with art or science, and more to do with just delighting in spending time with one another exploring this unprescribed piece of wasteland. Perhaps we became as unruly as the park itself, and this is why Manet's 'shocking' painting *Le Déjeuner sur l'herbe* of 1862 comes to mind. This project unwittingly facilitated 'authorized' breaks from the everyday beaurocratic rigors and repressions of our academic professions. Is it any wonder that our behavior was that of wild spirits chasing their tails in the playground? Like the primitive ideal of the first parks founded in the country, Furnace Park has allowed us to escape the norms of the city and, perhaps more importantly, the norms of academia. We didn't come together with a shared problem or aim, we were thrown together with the park the only common thing between us. But what if it is in the very aspect of meeting and eating together in the park that we have founded something? Like today, is this a breakfast or is this a protest? We deliberately came here at the crack of dawn, cooked food and laid our table out in Furnace Park: aren't we symbolically activating the commons?

On reflection, working with you all here has reminded me of an experience of Admirals

Park in Essex where I spent my childhood. My most powerful and 'forget everything else, the world is potential' memory of that park was when my sister, a few friends and myself formed the MCC (the Metal Collecting Club). We had been paddling a quite unremarkable stream and discovered an old rusty bar, about three meters long. It fascinated us for not only was it a foreign body but we had discovered it right in the middle of everything normal. Once disturbed and in our hands, the world changed. We did not transfigure the rod into an alien spacecraft or Native American spear—it stayed a rusty rod. It was we who changed ourselves and the possibilities of what could be done, or, rather, how one could be done by the world! From then on out, we spent our days gathering as much rusty metal from the stream as we could. We didn't make anything with it, but I did make a special notebook to record all the different shapes we had found and that was extremely satisfying.

I think it was the unprogrammed play where one has to invent from ground zero that was so generative for me as a child, and it has been a similar process working with all of you. Quite probably as artists and scientists we don't get enough of this unfettered creative almost aimless space. Well, it's not as if we didn't discuss a lot of really interesting concerns and ideas, but what sort of won over was not any of those ideas but a sense of being inspired by being together in the park.

### **Caroline Evans**

This speech is going to be a mix: from some notes that I made earlier and some talking as I go.

While thinking about what to say, I was inspired by Matt saying the project could allow us to 'reimagine ourselves'. That really speaks to the sense of possibility that I have experienced through this project.

While I have found some conversations challenging and some debates quite intense, what has struck me throughout

the process is the mutual respect shown by researchers and artists. As the project has progressed, these groupings seem more and more arbitrary. I liked too how we moved forward, very much together. On this point, thanks to Matt for his excellent project running and ensuring not only that we kept to the meeting time length, but also that we made decisions, met deliverables by moving lots of discussion and debate into action. I also really appreciate the friendship that developed, for example, after the ground investigation we all moved to a café for review of the afternoon and then spontaneously to the pub to spend continued time together. New working relationships and friendships have been a welcome outcome of the project. It's great that Bob Levene is now Artist in Residence in Engineering at Sheffield and that Alison, Jonathan and I can continue to collaborate in this framework.

In terms of the reimagining, never considered myself a writer (other than of academic reports, articles, grants etc.) and I found the blog an unfamiliar, challenging format, but seeing and contributing to the themes emerging was a really unique process. Later in the project, it was decided that we (whether artist or researcher by training) would each create material for the book. This decision was challenging—daunting even—but it was exciting to go with that idea too and see where it ended up.

My 'piece' for the book is a work in progress, but essentially the basic idea is to draw a circle on a map around Furnace Park and then investigate the industrial heritage within. This isn't aimed at being researched before setting off, more of a walk around to see what is readily apparent and I am writing an explanation to accompany it. And when I set off from my department, late one summer afternoon, camera in hand, it was with a real sense of excitement at the adventure of it all.

So what you all have given me is the courage to do something radically different in style and approach.

And my toast is 'Thank you and to us'.

### **Sarah Spencer**

This project resulted in researchers, artists, academics, doctors, professionals and practitioners becoming creators of photos, friendships, new understandings, perspectives, blogs and words. We were brought together because of our very different viewpoints, skills and methods. We were brought together to share a fresh artist-academic collaboration with the public. Our wealth brought us together; employment statuses, reputations, outputs. Yet in Furnace Park none of this had exchange or use value.

We were all observers watching ants and finches and holes, discomfort and uncertainty, small discoveries and boundaries, procedures and expectations. Observing a small patch of land change from a forgotten trace of industry amid the traffic, a large financial office and the sex trade into a site of health, safety, possibility. Along the way, we all compartmentalised the experience as fun, something different, trivialising Furnace Park against our usual business. This fun and lightness belied a firm grounding. Furnace Park grounded us. The earth, the cement, the cracks and the debris. Our specialisms half understood whispers. Carefully negotiated respect glimpsed through hazy notions of what we do and who we are, where our values lie.

We listened to each other and our boundaries loosened. Furnace Park grounded us like a walk outdoors near our home, like being lost, grounded us like friends' company, like a good book, like yoga and Atticus Finch. Ground: it took us to brown, grey, circle, concrete, earth level, level under. To horizons and soil and substance and diameters, shapes, tea, smoke, continuous points.

The ground offered new understanding, careful quiet observation, a complete rejection of all research that went before. While in our hot bubbling furnace we met grand societal challenges, impact,





engagement, money, entitlement and added value, for a few moments Furnace Park was just ground and an absence of position and discipline. The value of this, beyond subversive art therapy, is hard to articulate. It lies in the absences, lies in the creative stretch between our experiences. The shifted sense of what we are in relation to knowing, researching, observing

#### **Jonathan Paragreen**

This is ad lib. I will try to keep it fairly brief. I just wanted to say that I have thoroughly enjoyed working on this project. I am quite a self-conscious person, but when early on I looked at Bob and Hester's work online, it was obvious that anything goes. And for me I think that has been one of the great aspects of the project: to feel comfortable in doing whatever you want to do.

Much of this comfort is also due to this being a great group of people; Hester and Bob have been fantastically enthusiastic and encouraging to us researchers. I feel that throughout the work I have really got to know everyone. In previous workplaces I have found that you can work with someone for years without really getting to know them, but here everyone has really committed to the project and put a part of themselves into the activities we have carried out and as a result I feel much closer to you all.

So I would like to raise a toast to us!

#### **Alison Beck**

I haven't prepared any notes for this speech... Throughout the project, in the writings and blog, I have noticed how clearly everyone's own distinct voice shone through. In our everyday work so often, we are constrained by style, what should be said, and how it should be said. This also happened to me in a different way regarding the spoken voice. When I first arrived in Sheffield, people could not understand my Derbyshire accent and so that had to change quite a bit! I think the work we have done together in this project has somehow freed us up, helped us learn about different ways

of working and thinking and also allowed all of our voices to come across more clearly.

I wanted to wear something special for our breakfast, so I'll say a bit about the cape I am wearing. A lot of you know that I like making things from textiles and sewing things, and the cape was something simple and fun. I made it from some fabric that I had printed up (as a fabric poster) with the microscopic images I took of people's clothes during our day of Ground Investigations at Furnace Park. Let me point out a few of the images (you're all on it!): Matt's belt, Sarah's necklace, Caroline's ring, Hester's tattoo, Jonathan's ring, Bob's bracelet and quite a few others with Furnace Park as the background.

The toast: To you all; it's been great!

#### **Arne Schröder**

When we started, I was completely lost. But I think I'm not anymore. The whole thing has been a process, for me a journey, that let me discover a lot of new things that I never really thought about. Working with Bob and Hester, I'd never worked with artists before, the discussions we had at the Union or at our meetings was really helpful to give me an understanding of what you can do when you do not have your narrow-minded scientific view (which I'm very proud of) approach to the world. And I think that's one lasting effect, one lasting thing for me from this whole project. And I'm really glad that I've done it, I've met you guys. I had a lot of fun and I also discovered that it's not about producing something because that's what I think I had a little bit in mind that in the end there would be some sculpture. You know my posts about sculpting things and stuff like that, there would be a sculpture now or an art project. Because I thought that's what artists do, they put something there. And Bob your work about walking around Sheffield city borders gave me a way to appreciate the process not the end product, but the process. Which in a way is quite fitting because as scientists we are also usually looking at processes not only at the end product, at least for me as

an ecologist. You have a lot of processes that shape constantly an eco-system. It's dynamic, it's going on, it's going somewhere, it's not static. And I think this matched the processes in this project here. Yeah, I really enjoyed it. I want to thank you guys, it was fun.

Cheers!

**Matthew Cheeseman**

I'd like to raise a toast to:

- Dr Guillaume Hautbergue
- Dr Helen Moggridge
- Dr Tom Stafford (and to his daughter)
- Tim Lewis (and to his son)

All of whom would be here save for time. Now for those who devoted more time than they expected to give, in an environment which eats your time, consumes it. Somehow they managed to feed themselves on a notion of artistic practice. I toast:

Alison, for her ferocious creativity and superhero cape, Jonathan, for his pleasure through innovative deviation, Arne, for his dignity in descent, Caroline, for her searching attention and calm persistence, Sarah, for her soulful intellect and driving conscience, Ben, for his welcome cynicism and paper stock enthusiasm, Alasdair, for his savage humour and steady hand, Hester, for her effervescent philosophy, a combination of air and stone, Bob, for her tenacious vision, water and earth,

And finally Gemma, for being here, and letting us imagine the public through her camera.

**Bob Levene**

It's lovely to hear such heartfelt toasts from all, they all seemed to resonate with each other.

I'd also like to acknowledge the 'gentle witnessing' by those who haven't been involved in the project: Gemma Thorpe taking the photographs and Joe Moore

doing the gardening.

Carl Jung said there were four ways of knowing: feeling, intuition, sensing as well as thinking.

In our world, so much value is placed on what we can measure and put a number to, as well as the act of measuring itself, but from what I've just heard it's the inbetween, the without reason, the connectedness, the ground, the small and a sense of that has shined through.

The wasteland offered space to re-imagine, the kindness, respect and openness of the participants created a safe environment, which for some 'gave courage to do something radically different'. Surely these are the conditions for real change, new perspectives, new collaborations? With the unspoken principles of play, empathy and listening we all got to place value on the unspoken, un-ended, the process, the relationships and sharing rather than the objects, measured, resolved.

So a toast, to you all.

# This Really Happened

No Picnic: Explorations In Art & Research  
Furnace Park, 27th May, 2014, 11am–2.30pm

To launch our book, NO PICNIC, we're holding a picnic. The book presents what happened when researchers and artists explored each other's work in Furnace Park, which was, when we started, a wasteland.

The participants incorporated artistic practices in their research techniques, often alongside events in the wasteland. The project addressed the approaches we take individually and collectively within art, science and investigation. All of this is documented in our book.

Ideally we'd like you to comment on our explorations with insights from your own work and thoughts in this area. We want the event to build on these comments to ask, ultimately, what is research, how should it be carried out, and how should a university involve the wider community in these activities? Your comments will stimulate this discussion, and of course there will be a picnic provided.

Furnace Park is in Shalesmoor, a ten minute walk from the University of Sheffield. We'd like to begin the picnic at 11am and end at 2.30pm with some music. Would you let me know as soon as possible whether you'd be able to make it? Please Reply by Wednesday 16th April at the latest.

Finally, do you know anyone else who would be suitable to speak?

Thanks!

- Matt Cheeseman
- Sarah Spencer
- Bob Levene
- Hester Reeve
- Alison Beck
- Jonathan Paragreen
- Caroline Evans
- Arne Schröder



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Ground Exploration, Hester Reeve, face impression, 2014.

**NO PICNIC was a ten month long research project which put researchers and artists together. The project began at Furnace Park, a site for interdisciplinary work in Sheffield, which was used throughout as a means of thinking about art and research. The book describing and documenting the project was launched as part of the In The City festival in May 2014. The book launch invited 23 people to read the book and respond. Each had five minutes to speak in front of a crowd, before and after a picnic and walk around Furnace Park.**

Speakers

Sandrine Soubes  
Tom Stafford  
Amy Ryall  
Elena Rodríguez Falcon  
Julie Westerman  
Cathy Shrank  
Adam Smith  
Kate Pahl and Steve Pool  
Julia Dobson\*  
Jonathan Orlek  
Kim Marwood  
David McCallam  
Terry O'Connor/Siobhan Foster  
Frances Babbage  
Hugh Escott  
Susan Molyneux-Hodgson\*  
Matt Colbeck  
Greg Oldfield\*  
Sunshine Wong  
Bridie Moore  
John Barrett  
Adam Stansbie  
Richard Steadman-Jones

\*Responded to the book but not from notes that could be collected in this pamphlet.



**AND Public**

NO PICNIC  
Explorations in Art and Research  
CADS and Furnace Park, 27th May,  
11am–2.30pm

11.00 Start / coffee  
11.15 Intro  
11.20 First session  
12.30 Walk around Furnace Park  
1.20 Second session  
2.30 End

**1 Sandrine Soubes**

*Dr. Sandrine Soubes develops and manages the Professional Development Programme for postdoctoral and early career researchers in the Faculty of Science. She established the Crucible programme at the University of Sheffield which funded NO PICNIC.*

When Matt asked me whether I wanted to contribute to the launch of the book, I responded straight away, ‘yes of course it would be my pleasure’, but my next thought was, within a second, ‘damn what will be expected of me, what type of performance is this, responding to a book? An act of scholarly analysis, will this require a literature review of what’s been published on collaborative practices, will it be like in a book group (which I am sad to admit that I have never been part of as I am such a slow reader)?’

So not knowing the form, as I have the privilege of speaking first, maybe I shouldn’t worry too much with what is expected...

What is expected... well that’s the whole point here isn’t it... performing...

performing a function  
performing a task  
performing an output  
what is the right format  
what ought to be...

When I initiated the Crucible programme three years ago, when I was trying to find a way of accessing funding to make an idea, a dream become a reality, I had to perform an act—write a funding application—perform part of the discourse about higher education, press the right buttons to access funding—that’s what you did too when you wrote your ‘Sandpit’ application.

As the initiator of the Crucible programme, I was excited and

scared in reading this book... would this book display the non-sense of my Crucible dream, was I looking for evidence that it was worth the investment, could this be used as case study... what was really the outcome?

I would like to thank you for allowing this book to unsettle and challenge us.

I would like to thank you for your honesty about this puzzling process.

I like it when Arne writes, ‘was it not just a lot of inconsequential meetings and vague talking? No definitely not!... it actually was the deliberately experimental and open character of the project right from the start that made the whole experience so worthwhile’.

Did this work? What was this?

You are not necessarily giving us an answer, but you are offering others an entitlement for a space to be free.

When I started the Crucible programme, what I had in my head was: to give people a space to think to give young researchers the pleasure of being in each others’ company to give you the challenge of each others’ different views about the world to give you freedom to be... but that’s not what we can write on a funding application.

The Crucible labs were probably just the baby steps in this process. You have taken this much further with this project.

The book reflects the real challenge of this process—and yes process it is, less than a thing or artefact. Although the book could be viewed as a Thing. The honest account, the uncertainties about what this was all about is shared in this book, which allow it not just be a Thing.

I would like to thank you for the poetry found in your accounts of explorations. For example, through your exploration of the

ground (microscopic images, Alison’s cape, camera on the pole, Matt’s litter exploration) you looked through different lenses, changed focus and created beautiful metaphors of the collaboration process. It was humorous, irreverent. It has moved me and I would like to thank you for this.

I would like to thank you for daring to play.

I would like to thank you for taking the time. In many conversations I have with academics about development programmes I run for researchers, there is this on-going argument about time. It takes too much time, it could be done in half the time. They are on short-term contract—they don’t have the time—they need to prioritise publication output... so thank you for giving yourself time to be.

I would like to thank you for believing in Bob and Hester for wanting this to be about ‘dialogue, open-conversation, sharing...’ and not about producing a Thing.

I would like to thank you for not conforming to the rigidity of our higher education discourse of contrived delivery—the academic paper. Many papers reinvent reality to make research looks pretty, intelligent, clever—many papers create an artificial narrative of the research process. I understand that through this book you have tried to say it, maybe as it was.

I would like to thank you for daring to say on paper, what might be too daring to say to a funding body.

I love Sarah’s gold finch drawing and how it helped her articulate some of the themes that came from the interviews with the researchers, in particular: ‘personal entitlement to the creative process’ and ‘a mindfulness in observing our surroundings’. The structures and industry of our research systems may make us

Project Participants

Alison Beck, Mathew Cheeseman, Caroline Evans, Bob Levene, Jonathan Paragreen, Hester Reeve, Arne Schröder and Sarah Spencer.

Supplement edited by Matthew Cheeseman and designed by HAND (ha-nd.com).

Image on previous page: *Ground Exploration*, Hester Reeve, face impression, 2014.

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lose sight of why we started in the first place to ask questions.

I would like to thank you for being willing to forget the performative functions of researchers—as Sarah says, ‘in the project, standing in Furnace Park, there was a lot to forget in order to become immersed in the process of new understanding, a lot to forget without capitalising on all that has gone before.’

The work that you have done during NO PICNIC is what I had dreamt of but couldn’t put in words. When people ask me what I do for a living it is hard to say... I am not really a manager... I am not really an academic... I am not really a trainer... In an exercise we did during the last lab of the current Crucible, we asked everyone to articulate in one sentence what they do... I could say that what I do is... I help create small bubbles of freedom, small bubbles of conversation.

Thank you for making this be real.

## 2 Tom Stafford

*Dr. Tom Stafford is a Lecturer in Psychology and Cognitive Science at the University of Sheffield. He studies learning and decision making with a focus on the movement system. He was part of the NO PICNIC.*

[A reconstruction of what I wanted to say, and what I actually did say, at the launch of NO PICNIC on 27th May 2014.]

I’ve just left a University meeting where someone made an impassioned protest about the number of duties academics have. They were still despairing about the amount of work we’re asked to do as I left to get to my bike so I could cycle here.

On the way I passed a new development of luxury student flats named ‘impact’. A cruel pun on the

need to justify research, I wondered?

I work as an experimental psychologist, and so, as I rolled down the hill, my thoughts returned to the research that occupies so much of my time, research I’ve been doing on learning and learning curves.

But as I arrived at NO PICNIC these thoughts also fell away and I turned to think about failure.

### My failure

You see, I was originally part of this project. In the book, Matt says some kind words about me not being able to continue being involved because I had a newborn daughter. And it’s true, I do have a daughter and that does fill up your time. But the truth is that it wasn’t just that which meant that I dropped out of the project. Really it was a question of priorities. I was focused on my research on learning curves, about writing grants and publishing papers, with a limited amount of work time. This project just... fell off the edge of the things I could do.

So I was thinking about my failure to be involved, and about the instrumentalism—the need for results—which structured my time so that I decided I couldn’t afford to be involved.

And instrumentalism turned my thoughts to my first academic job. You see I’m a recovering social psychologist, and my first job after my PhD was on a project looking at brownfield land. Brownfield land is previously used land, like Furnace Park. Previously used land can be polluted, but possible harm from that pollution is always a risk, rather than a certainty, and people think about risks in funny ways—hence my involvement as a psychologist.

One thing we looked at was who the public trusted to tell them about risk. Was it the media, local government, pressure

groups or scientists? We found that the expertise of the person giving the information was nearly irrelevant—people trusted information from people they thought were on their side, regardless of whether they were qualified to judge the risks.

One day, as part of this project, I was on a site visit to a housing estate which had been built on or near polluted land. The residents of the estate were understandably upset when they discovered the extent of the pollution and were pressing for a clean-up—a clean-up of great expense and uncertain efficacy. I was being driven around the site by the chief planning officer at the local council.

‘They say to me, Tom’, he said, ‘they say to me “how much is a human life worth, eh? How much is a human life worth?” What I don’t tell them is that according to us it is exactly four hundred and seventy five thousand pounds.’

### Instrumentalism!

Another thing I learnt from that project is that it is a myth that brownfield sites are barren and greenfield sites are always more important to protect because of the richness of the habitat. As you can see from places like Furnace Park, although left unused—often because unused—brownfield sites can become vibrant ecologies.

Thinking of this turned my mind to something Vaclav Havel once said. He was a Czech dissident in the days of the Soviet Union. He wrote samizdat—typed and illicitly copied essays which were clandestinely circulated. In those days you had to know the right people get hold of his writing (perhaps like the NO PICNIC book). In the 90s I could buy his writings in a book. Now you can find them all on the internet.

In one of his essays Havel writes about the value of art which isn’t aligned with the objectives of the

state—purposeless culture. He says that, like the ecologies of the natural world, these ecologies of culture must be conserved and cultivated. You never know, he argued, where the thing you need most is going to come from. You never know when you’ll need to draw on the resources and wisdom stored in such a niche.

I couldn’t find that passage flicking through my copy of *Living in Truth* however.

Another passage that stuck in my mind concerns Havel’s writing on what he called the Post Totalitarian System. These, he said, were societies, both East and West, where the need for direct repression has passed. Here, he said, every person’s attention was kept nailed to floor of their self-interest. Control was maintained by material comforts, and the fear of sticking out.

I couldn’t find that passage either. Perhaps it is in his *Letters to Olga*.

Instead, I found this passage, from his essay *Politics and Conscience*:

‘As all I have said suggests, it seems to me that all of us, East and West, face one fundamental task from which all else should follow. That task is one of resisting vigilantly, thoughtfully, and attentively, but at the same time with total dedication, at every step and everywhere, the irrational momentum of anonymous, impersonal, and inhuman power—the power of ideologies, systems, apparatus, bureaucracy, artificial languages, and political slogans. We must resist its complex and wholly alienating pressure, whether it takes the form of consumption, advertising, repression, technology, or cliché.’

And that is the end of my meander in thought from the University, to learning, to instrumentalism, to ecology, to dissident publishing, and so to NO PICNIC. The book reminded me of

the importance of spaces outside of the narrow instrumentalism that rules so much of my life, and it is a true testimony to a particular place, at a particular moment, with particular people. I look forward to reading it again.

## 3 Amy Ryall

*Amy Ryall is the External Engagement Projects Officer for the Faculty of Arts & Humanities at the University of Sheffield. Amy supports the development and delivery of public engagement projects, brokering relationships with external partners, highlighting practical support available to academic staff and liaising with relevant departments outside the Faculty.*

The theme of the book struck me as being about curiosity and exploration and an attempt to claim back time spent ‘just exploring’ as a legitimate academic and creative endeavour. Play and experimentation are vital in any process but the legitimacy of this type of activity is often lost in a culture which demands instant results which can be easily measured. Professional anxiety about what constitutes productivity is paralysing and any notion of time spent in experimental thought or deed is dismissed as indulgent.

What NO PICNIC has done is demonstrate the productivity of exploration with few pre-determined end-goals. It goes some way to dispelling the myth that time spent exploring and thinking is unproductive. It’s a myth instilled in children from an early age with the expectation from primary school that the teacher will spell out (and write down on a board for all to see) the objectives for each lesson before the lesson has happened. The idea behind this is that the class will know exactly what they’re trying to achieve. How tedious, that we should know where we’re going

all of the time, and how wrong to segment the hours of the day into those when we are ‘learning’ and those when we are not. Cutting out the ‘play’ element of school limits learning by dismissing any accidental or unexpected discovery as unimportant and instilling a culture which restricts learning to something that happens at school. The leap to the notion that if it’s not within the objectives, it’s not worth knowing is small and the myth begins.

Museum learning, which I was involved in before coming to the university sector, can offer a break from the constraints of this system. Although much learning in museums stems from the National Curriculum; because museums aren’t limited in the methods that they can use for learning, they can be a bit more creative and experimental in their approach. A good example of this approach is in the use of Object Dialogue Boxes. If you haven’t yet experienced an Object Dialogue Box then I urge you to have a look at [www.objectdialogueboxes.com](http://www.objectdialogueboxes.com). It’s well worth it. These boxes, housed in museums and galleries across the UK, including the British Library, Museums Sheffield, Manchester Art Gallery, Imperial War Museum London, Turner Contemporary, Harewood House and Norwich Castle Museum, are full of hybrid objects. None of the objects contained within each box exists as a recognisable ‘thing’ but is made out of fusing two, sometimes three, objects together to create a new one. Using these objects as navigational tools around museum galleries, children are actively encouraged to explore, to embark upon a journey not knowing where they’re going to end up. And that is the point. New discoveries are made, in far flung nooks and crannies that would never be reached without the prompt of the object. There are no set objectives and children

direct their own path through the gallery, leading to rich discussion and learning. Playfulness and the unexpected are used to get to more serious notions of, for example, art or history.

Another part of my professional life which resonates with the notion of NO PICNIC is my involvement with the Their Past Your Future project, at Imperial War Museums. This unique education project, Big Lottery funded to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 2005, was subsequently extended to include other conflicts and worked with many young people, teachers and educators. A major part of the project was visiting historic sites relevant to conflict all over the world. Of course these trips had aims and objectives to them, but the most value out of these trips was not to be had from these specific visits but from taking people out of their normal environment, mixing them up with people that they might not otherwise encounter and encouraging them to explore. The social space of coffee houses, dinners, coach and plane journeys provided the best environment for creativity and productivity. The historic site visits alone would have provoked activity but without the space to explore, they would be quickly and easily forgotten.

In thinking about this response, I came back to something that I wrestle with from time to time; the importance, or otherwise of evaluation. Evaluation is everywhere. It's how we 'prove' our worth, that the funding pot has been well spent, that the benefits to the 'end-users' can be seen and measured. Yet, what we really should be looking at is almost impossible to measure. Evaluation takes a snapshot at one moment in time of the most straightforward thing to record, quite often the numbers. What it rarely captures are the

long-term benefits and resulting activity. Their Past Your Future closed in 2010. In 2014 I am still involved with AHRC research networks which are a result of the project, working with those who participated and regularly drawing upon the work that I did then and I know that others are too. No one knows about this, beyond those who are directly involved. The evaluation report from official end of the Their Past Your Future contains a lot of useful information, but it doesn't cover the full impact of the project; the hours spent talking to people, devoted to thinking about how things happen or how they should happen, that have influenced my working and non-working life ever-since. Curiosity, exploration and play were key to Their Past Your Future, as they have been in NO PICNIC and should be seen as much a part of the process of achieving something as end-goals, aims and objectives.

#### **4 Elena Rodríguez Falcon**

*Elena Rodríguez Falcon is Professor of Enterprise and Engineering Education at the University of Sheffield. She worked in project management, product development, quality control and business planning before developing three degrees which aim at embedding enterprise and management in engineering.*

I read NO PICNIC with great interest. I had met a few of the collaborators through a different project and really wanted to know what they had been up to.

This patchwork type of book contains a very diverse collection of thoughts, reflections and conversations. Whilst reading it, it struck me as both cohesive and disparate. I suppose that is what the group felt and as such the communication of this process, where each one of them found themselves moving from an initial idea to one that made

them feel at times frustrated, uncomfortable and then to a stage of transformation and acceptance.

The stage of it all is Furnace Park, at a time when one could have perceived chaos and disarray; now an amazing project that has transformed that disarray into order? Art? Or as the authors of the book question... change that can also be perceived as destruction of what it used to be. Do you need to destroy to create?

I very much enjoyed that strand in the book. Creation and destruction. I think the authors felt that very same process happening to themselves. Particularly, the researchers. They had to destroy their previous conceptions of knowledge, innovation, outcomes, outputs in order to create a new self where organic learning, play, working without aims can, perhaps, provide a new way of doing things.

And I say perhaps, because as an engineer myself, who although likes to learn organically and play with my environment, be flexible in my expectations and direction of my projects, I would have found the whole process very challenging too. I felt certain contradictory thoughts whilst reading about the change of name of the project from Sandpit to NO PICNIC. For the artists, playing with form, ideas, processes, textures, images, sound, etc. is essential to their work. For researchers, the word 'play' feels uncomfortable as it implies lack of structure and lack of aim. Which it is what I feel happened at the end... the lack of structure and lack of end goal, at least in the form that in our disciplines we recognise, prevailed. Was this not then a 'sandpit' after all?

Artists and researchers alike clearly learnt from each other's disciplines. Whilst the researchers reimagined their way of working and communicating their

ideas, even the way of creating knowledge; the artists, immerse themselves into the disciplines of the researchers.

Whilst the researchers found themselves working in a different way, struggling to do so as their very ingrained training told them they needed an output, evidence of the work they were creating and at times, in their own words 'disillusioned' with this process; the artists challenged their understanding of the researchers' disciplines, but not of their way of working. In this sense, the process was biased towards the artists' way of working and creating.

The feeling of guilt is mentioned at times during the book; guilt of not having goals, of the absence of the production of an output and of the lack of a public display. Instead, enjoyment and personal satisfaction emerged. And they asked themselves, is this allowed? Should we be having fun? And 'justified' it by saying that they were doing it in their own time.

Reading this journey from the outside it did strike me as a collision of feelings, from guilt to pleasure, from dissolution to reimagination, from artist to researcher, and vice versa. But an aimless project I don't think it was. In the words of Sarah Spencer, 'the project offered a space to think about processes of constructing new meaning; examining the nature of things, experiential knowledge and methods of representation. It also allowed reflection on the process of collaborative endeavour: meaningful engagement, forming new partnerships and shared perspectives'.

If the project achieved this, and I think it did, guilt must not be part of the equation. Creation of knowledge and outputs can take, clearly, different forms.

Interdisciplinarity is something that we all need to continue to work towards and learn from each other's attempts to do so. This project and approach has offered us a new way of thinking about it. I will certainly try to see what happens.

Thank you.

#### **5 Julie Westerman**

*Julie Westerman is a Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at Sheffield Hallam University. Working with drawing, sculpture, film, animation and CAD, her work engages with a range of research questions, pervading anxiety over global warming and our reactions to catastrophic events of natural forces.*

Thank you for your email, finding ways of working cross disciplines is very close to my heart and practice. I enjoyed both the book and the event, which I thought brought forth such an interesting range of responses. I haven't experienced an event structured like that before and thought that it was a very successful model. As of course was the project itself!

As you suspected I am very much an 'off the cuff' speaker, and so did not have any coherent notes.

But a point worth musing on is that you have to have a project to do in order not to do it. It focuses the discussion, raises expectations and allows you to define your resistance in relation to the original goals.

#### **6 Cathy Shrank**

*Cathy Shrank is Professor of Tudor & Renaissance Literature in the School of English at the University of Sheffield. Her research focuses on sixteenth-and early seventeenth-century literature. She has recently published on nationhood, Shakespeare and losing control.*

I work on early modern writing, and one of my on-going projects is on dialogue: works written in the form of a conversation.

As I read through NO PICNIC, many of the things you recorded resonated with my research in that area.

In sixteenth-and early seventeenth-century socio-political theory, conversation was given special value. Conversation was what drew communities together: it was through conversation that people were persuaded to abandon self-interest and savagery, and to gather together for a longer-term public good; and it was conversation that then held those communities together and, as one writer put, was 'the means whereby men [i.e. humans] come to love one another and to link themselves together'.

Conversation, then, has a crucial role in forming and sustaining communities, which is what you have created here, through your own conversations.

Importantly, early modern dialogues often take place over meals, an activity which plays on the multiple meanings of the verb common in the period: talking, sharing food, sharing full stop; and the publication NO PICNIC was full of references to the lunches, the breakfast, the time in pubs and cafes. The dialogue form, then, is one which is socially engaged. It's not neutral: it has ideological resonance.

One of the striking features of sixteenth-century English political dialogue is its tendency to avoid abstraction. Rather, the energies of its writers are directed towards addressing real-life problems. Not least of these issues is how to prevent the human cost of socio-economic or technological change (one of the ideas that came across strongly in Jonathan Paragren's piece).

However, since so many of these problems are complex, out of the control of those speaking (and—in the real world—beyond the control of their authors), early modern English socio-political dialogues tend to reach an impasse, or stutter into despairing silence. They cannot come up with a solution, and—even if they do— they share a certain scepticism about whether anyone with the power and efficacy to effect change is willing or able to listen and respond.

One of my favourite dialogues, however, does something rather different. It is, appropriately, called *News from the North*, and was written in the late 1570s by an author who goes by the initials 'T.F.', and who identifies himself as a student at one of the Inns of Court in London.

Travelling back from Scotland to London, T.F. stops for the night at an inn in Ripon. There, he witnesses a debate between the inn-keeper and an impoverished ploughman, about whether lawyers (and the law) are forces for good or evil. (This was a period in which litigation was increasing exponentially, and the ploughman has himself been reduced to penury by a series of unsuccessful lawsuits, so they're tackling a live socio-political issue.)

The debate reaches an impasse. Even so, the metropolitan author is transformed by the experience, because of the process of communication that he has witnessed. The innkeeper and ploughmen produce no solution about lawyers and the law. But despite their diametrically opposing views, the two men treat each other with respect and civility, and—as such—provide a model for how to manage disagreement that, if followed elsewhere, would diminish the need for litigation. (I don't think T.F. was cut out for a career in the law!) We're back to conversation

again: its importance for forming and sustaining communities, and its importance as a process, not a product; something I think that this particular community in Furnace Park would endorse. (And, as was pointed out in NO PICNIC, conversations involve listening as well as talking.)

So, I would join my predecessor, T.F., in commending what you've done here:

You've resisted institutional/sector pressures (like T.F. questioning the nature of legal practice in his own time, and its drive for profit); you've realised that process can be more important than product; and—in forming your community—you've celebrated the role of commoning: of sharing, eating, talking.

To draw one last analogy with *News from the North*: to do all this, you've needed a liminal space (both geographic and temporal), away from the everyday routine. T.F. found it by departing from the London Road for a night: you've found it, over the last however many months, here, in Furnace Park.

#### Post Script

I hadn't expected this to happen, but the day spent reflecting on NO PICNIC fed back into my research on sixteenth- and seventeenth-century dialogue. When thinking about *News from the North*, and discussing it in research papers, I'd always stated that—after the dialogue about the law reaches stalemate—the work 'fragments' in to a tale-telling competition. I now realise that this isn't a breakdown at all, but another way in which the work creates community, in this case by celebrating and centring the apparently inconsequential. The work doesn't 'fragment' into a tale-telling competition. It 'resolves' into one. So, thank you for that insight too.

### **7 Adam J. Smith**

*Adam J. Smith is a researcher at the University of Sheffield and a Visiting Lecturer at York St John University. His PhD investigated politeness in a Hanoverian periodical, The Free-Holder. He blogged for the 18thCentury Garden Project in Furnace Park.*

On first reading I found some of the sound-bytes that open this book really quite shocking:

'I don't think we came up with any deep questions at the end of the day.' 'There have been moments of conversation that have had huge resonance. And I don't know—I don't care—how I've applied them.' 'I don't think this project has actually helped me.'

Furthermore, this is apparently a project which brazenly didn't do what it was supposed to do, and then celebrates this resistance. When explaining, upfront, that the project didn't do what it was going to do the anonymous author of one quote confesses that 'I don't think we've solved a problem for liminal spaces in the city. But there's something quite radical about that.' Both as someone who regularly chases research funding and as someone who has always considered the impulse to constantly assert the value and significance of my research to be an expectation of university research, I at first found some of these statements physically painful to read.

The book troubles notions of what research is, how it is carried out, and how its 'productivity' is determined. It suggests that regimented goals and the markers of 'value and success' propagated in academia today can suffocate research—or at the very least, contort it. Most of the book's authors speak to an over-emphasis on goals, frameworks, methodology and a frantic impulse to find 'something'; to somehow

fashion an answer. All of these impulses, the book suggests, actually serve to distance the researcher from the topic or object of their study.

On first reading this can come across as a frustrated response to an all pervasive and ever expanding bureaucracy, but on closer inspection this book actually enacts a resistance to something far greater: a more internalised pressure to discover something worthwhile. And this pressure can get in the way of a researcher's primary engagement with the material under analysis. By the end of NO PICNIC it seems that the most powerful outcome of this project is that the researchers involved managed to transcend this initial pressure and experience something new and exciting.

In the book we are told that after the project's enforced blogging came to an end its participants began to 'hang out together in coffee shops and pubs' and through 'vague and inconsequential talking' became 'exposed to the novel ideas and concepts which opened their minds.' The truly interdisciplinary discussion happened in the pub after the 'the blog had come to an official end'—when the pressure was off. This, for me, is the crucial point that this book endeavours to make. After the proposals and the funding and the goals comes the 'time [to] develop a personal relationship, sit back and let ideas grow and mature, instead of rushing and doing something just for the sake of doing it.' You can't force results to happen, and in doing so you can run the risk of missing the whole point of what you're doing.

It is a classic trap: accidentally trying to force research to fit a hypothesis. At this point in the text it struck me that I've seen this happen before. In fact, it has happened to me before: in undergraduate seminars.

Oftentimes, if you present a student with a poem they will subject it to every form of stylistic, contextual or critical analysis you can think of before they actually read it. I've been there, I've done it myself. It is incredibly hard to just read a poem, and then look for clues. My advice in seminars, (which I give all of the time) is, in the first instance, to take a step back, breath out, relax, and then just read the poem.

This isn't something restricted to undergraduate students either. A couple of years ago I was involved in the running of an Eighteenth-Century Reading weekend for post-graduates at the University of Sheffield. The text we were discussing was Laurence Sterne's *The Lives and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (1759). The book is hilarious. It is gold. It never gets old. But it is incredibly difficult to get a reader encountering it for the first time, with all of the expectations which come bundled up with the idea of approaching a 'historical' novel, to see the jokes. They're there—in every single line, but if I had a penny for every time a student gives me an overly earnest reading of the excessively parodic opening paragraph I'd have about 10p by now.

However, on this reading weekend, when we took everyone to a barn in the middle of the Peak District and plied them with wine and beer and food, suddenly everyone had thought it was hilarious. Away from the class room—away from the trappings of academia and the ivory tower—away from the pressures of having to say something clever—suddenly people who had read *Tristram Shandy* countless times were really reading it for the first time. I was one of them.

I think this is analogous for what it is that NO PICNIC is trying to say. Funding, structure, aims, methodology are all vitally

important—of course they are, but your primary relationship with the topic of study has to come first. Good ideas work. Good ideas attract support and attention. To try and tailor an idea to speak to the infrastructures that sustain support and attention is a tempting but potentially unfruitful route into research. The point of NO PICNIC is to remember not to become fixated with those very infrastructures.

As one anonymous commentator poignantly observes, you can find yourself asserting that ' [t]his is a jewel, this is a jewel,' but people don't want to see the jewel; they want to see the museum case and the little brass thing that says, you know: 'this is a jewel. '

NO PICNIC has reminded me not to lose sight of the jewel.

### **8 Kate Pahl and Steve Pool**

*Kate Pahl is Reader in Literacies in Education in the School of Education at the University of Sheffield. She is involved in a number of research projects focusing on artists, such as Co-producing Legacy, Community Arts Zone and Imagine: Connecting Communities Through Research. She has a longstanding collaboration with Steve Pool, an artist based in Sheffield.*

#### Steve

I'm not sure me and Kate produced anything—I was a bit jet lagged as it was the day I got back from Canada—Kate may have something. My big observation on the day was how much had happened in terms of the legacy of the project but as it had 'officially' finished this was difficult to 'officially' measure and people were keen to get on with these new projects—not really much of an insight but I offer it here—or maybe a phrase about the best laid plans of mice and men.

Kate

I agree with Steve it was an emergent space and we responded, in the moment, to that space. If I had any quote I would offer this from Amanda Ravetz, Kate Genever and Helen Graham. It is from Volume One (in press): 'Working together we co-construct, collaborate, offer ideas. We don't abandon authorship because this would be to risk abandoning responsibility. Authoring as we go, we give over individual possession of the idea in the generation of a shared experience/outcome. All those included are authors'.

### **9 Jonathan Orlek**

*Jon Orlek is a member of the architectural practice Studio Polpo. He is interested in public space making, relational practice and the connections between architecture and performance art.*

I have a habit of flicking straight to the back of academic books. I go straight to the bibliography as a quick way to establish a shared ground with the authors. In the case of NO PICNIC this search led me to an invitation I had already received; to the launch of the book and an opportunity to respond to the contributions. An early version of this text was written as a result of this invitation.

This was a difficult book to respond to. Not because of the existence of an alienating bibliography, but because the contributors each describe an extremely personal process of transformation and reflection. As the individual stories unfolded I was drawn into them, their claims and the experiences they described. I believe, as the book occasionally claims, that the NO PICNIC project will inform and broaden future research undertaken by the contributors. This is a convincing book in celebration of process over end product, of specific real relationships over abstracted ones, of conviviality over formality.

But as I read these stories my over-riding feeling was that of jealousy—I Wish I had been there!! Where would I have ended Up!? How might I have changed? NO PICNIC provided an environment for researchers to act outside of their comforts and share unfamiliar experiments openly and honestly. And for me it opened up important questions about how this freedom and inhibition to explore is achieved; the extent to which one has to close off to open up.

I found myself becoming more self-reflexive, I felt like I had to be in order to meaningfully respond to the project. Like the NO PICNIC contributors I reflected the questions raised by the book back onto myself. I began thinking about the 'NO PICNIC' spaces in my life—the spaces which provide me with the freedoms and protections to explore beyond my disciplinary and professional securities. I won't list them all here, but they would include pubs, meals, reading groups and friendships in other cities. This book has made me see new value in these spaces, and encouraged me to find more of them. In doing so this book, for me, has made significant contributions.

### **10 Kim Marwood**

*Dr. Kim Marwood is the Project Officer for Community Heritage in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Sheffield. She works on a range of community and public engagement projects in addition to pursuing her own research.*

Based on my own research interests and academic practice, I would like to offer a series of reflections on NO PICNIC which draw on three key aspects of my own work—these are heritage, communities and research.

#### Heritage

In my work, heritage can refer to people and culture in

communities, particular places, buildings or landscapes, objects and ephemera which can represent a particular history. Furnace Park presents a curious case, as a number of contributors, including Caroline Evans note, the area has a rich industrial history, signified by the red bricks, factory buildings, and the imposing presence of the furnace itself. Heritage can be discovered and uncovered through what we might call 'traditional academic research': trawling through archives, articles and books. This gives you the standard or accepted narrative and history of a site—what artists and artistic methods can bring are new and different perspective—in this project participants were quite literally examining the site from different viewpoints and distances. This curiosity reveals aspects of the site often hidden or overlooked. Collaborators on the project also took time to dwell on the temporality of heritage and how their creative interventions in the present can impact on the future of the site and how this relates to its past.

#### Communities

Linked to these collaborative reflections on the history and meaning of the site was the way in which participants negotiated various definitions of 'public' and 'communities'. The absence of a public with whom to engage was initially viewed as a failure of the project—yet what emerged was a sense of community amongst the collaborators—a group of people with a stake in the area. A group of individuals with different skills, knowledge and experience—a group of people who inhabit the space, connect with its history and imagine its future. Post-industrial sites often present a problem for researchers who want to conduct research which also engage communities, they are often abandoned spaces—once thriving with life and community which are now host to transient residents: students; young

professionals; artists; or even, in this case, sex workers and the homeless. In many ways the failure of this project to engage with the community became its strength—the collaborators were forced to scrutinise themselves, their own practices and connections to the site and one another.

#### Research

Finally, I would like to reflect on the role of research in the project. In my projects, I am often questioning where research happens—shifting emphasis from institutions like universities out into communities. I was struck by Bob Levene's comment in the book that the Ground Investigations were 'a fixed space for time and play'—and the manner in which Matt Cheeseman's contribution to the book reflected his own experimentation with artistic practice and methods. How significant then was Furnace Park as the setting for this project to take place? Did this project work because artists and academics came together in this neutral space neither had already claimed—and was not already claimed by the local community? I will leave you with this reflection: can these collaborations only take place outside of the studio—or outside of academia? Must they always be in marginal spaces?

### **11 David McCallam**

*David McCallam is Reader in French Eighteenth-Century Studies at the University of Sheffield. His research interests include eighteenth-century French literature, especially libertine fiction and the moralist tradition; mountain exploration and travel literature; the development of earth sciences in eighteenth-century Europe, particularly concerning volcanoes and avalanches.*

#### Failure

The first thing that struck me on reading NO PICNIC was a blithe, life-affirming acceptance of failure.

'I don't think we've solved a problem for liminal spaces in the city'; 'this book catalogues drift'; 'In the end, our project did not bring together members of different local communities'. Here's the paradox: the open acceptance of failure, of 'violated expectations', to paraphrase Sarah Spencer, this was the project's success.

We're no doubt all familiar with this in modernist thinking, Samuel's Beckett's famous line: 'To be an artist is to fail, as no other dare fail, that failure is his world'—which quote in context comes from his discussions about Modernist art with the French art critic, Georges Duthuit.

Yet the NO PICNIC project shows that failure is not less integral to the researcher's world. And what that failure gives the researcher is the freedom and time to think; failure frees the researcher from her crushing, life-stifling audit culture (REF, bids, impact, outreach). To fail here too is a sort of badge of honour, a hand held out to the artist...

Crucially, as Arne Schröder puts it, this open-endedness gave researchers and artists the time to 'sit back and let ideas mature and grow', it gave them that precious thing, deceleration.

Yet how was this achieved?

#### Inconsequence

In a word by inconsequence. From the earliest age, we're reminded that our actions have consequences, that what we do will necessarily impact on the world around us. Yet actions also have inconsequences—a lack of intent, ending or result. And these inconsequences can be every bit as productive as consequences can. This is NO PICNIC's 'vague and inconsequential talking'.

#### Commensality

It's what the French might classically have called 'bavardage'.

I mention this, as my own research is in 18th-century French literature and culture. I also have the dubious honour of having worked on picnics. To be precise, on the seemingly crazy practice of picnicking on an erupting volcano. A common feature of the Grand Tourists' visits to Vesuvius. And here, in the shade of a cementation furnace in conical volcanic shape, once full of molten materials and spewing smoke, we picnic in turn! On Vesuvius the Grand Tourists' greatest shock was not the proximity of whizzing volcanic ejecta or rivers of red-hot lava, but the radical equality of eating together on the exposed mountainside—it was the scandal of commensality (the practice of communal eating and drinking, as Cathy has already suggested).

Hester Reeve's work on the 'park' part of Furnace Park shows that this radical egalitarian edge still haunts these spaces where collective interrogations of power might occur, where dissent and communal picnicking coincide. Why? I think because they offer an original model of dissenting collaboration (for artist and researcher) something that late 19th-century French artists sought in their various subversions of the bourgeois picnic, in the 'Déjeuners sur l'herbe' (Luncheon on the Grass) of Manet, Monet and Tissot. It's perhaps no coincidence that Hester cites Manet in her 'breakfast toast'.

They dovetail collective and individual, radical practice—exemplified for me in one painting I saw at last year's 'Art Turning Left' exhibition at Liverpool's Tate Gallery. This was Maximilien Luce's *L'Académie* (1895)—the Steelworks. Luce was a Neo-Impressionist who used the latest painting techniques to express his anarchist views. In the Steelworks, he used the dot-by-dot style of the new Pointillist art to show workers in a foundry, with each dot of paint

representing the anarchist politics of individual autonomy (of colour, light) working together to produce a collective, proletarian vision of power and change.

I'd like to finish by saying that the politics—inadvertent or otherwise—of NO PICNIC also draw on the individualist-collective forces of artist and researcher to arrive at something similar: a monument to failure, inconsequence, commensality and... creative non-conformism.

## 12 Terry O'Connor

*Professor Terry O'Connor (of Forced Entertainment and, at the time, of the School of English) wrote these words which were performed by Siobhan Foste, an MA Theatre & Performance graduate from the University of Sheffield.*

### Ands to Add

We had 3 days to make something, a performance that responded to the site. Most hadn't heard of Furnace Park. There were twelve of us, different ideas, different methodologies, different theatres.

But the gates were shut and we couldn't get in.

We walked the spaces around the park a derelict and abandoned industrial terrain north east of the university, a growing archive of vegetation, prostitution, the crumbling remains of 19th century slums, Sheffield's early steel manufacture, the accompanying waste trade and the UK's only remaining cementation furnace, beneath which is written 'by this process blister steel was manufactured and in the true Sheffield tradition NOTHING GOES TO WASTE'

which didn't go to waste.

We found a place by the entrance gate, a turning circle for cars at night, littered with condoms, it resembled the outline of an auditorium with a little stage. We started to use that.

NOTHING GOES TO WASTE Brian Eno made the claim that modern art is as much about curation as it is about creation.

We got busy with something that might have been documentation, curation or creation, busy recording the moments of making and turning the records into another kind of making.

Walks were planned, then walked and photographed photographs became slide shows in 10 minutes, decisions left here or right there turned into routes on maps became lighting sources for a whole room. The turning circle cul-de-sac became a theatre And the theatre space, back on Hawley Street, less than half a mile away, a cul de sac of sorts, a growing archive of statements, decisions and suggestions, written, printed and pinned to the black theatrical drapes.

Outside performing, we used phones to collect and layer material apps to simulate dice, a new spin on an old tradition of chance construction.

We googled texts based on ideas thrown like darts from this site to other terrains:

the international legislation around prostitution the geographical spread of steel manufacture its uses the language of fermentation

and its deaths strange fictions that resonated with this site voiceover texts from sci-fi computer games texts about Ruskin and the aims of commonwealth.

We played a song on the weedy speakers from phones held aloft all playing the same song, all set to play at more or less the same time

This curation creation was also a question about collaboration an unstoppable exchange or conversation between place and people and documents, records, websites material provoked and appropriated and reshaped and re-ordered.

For Deleuze collaboration was

A stuttering  
A broken line  
A series of ands

and Furnace Park had many ands to add

and so we tried to match our process to the site

and yes it was research into performance (experimental) and making (collaborative) and site (contestable) and history (partial, fragmented, performative)

and no it did not look like any piece of theatre you might have seen but that's a good thing, right?

And no it didn't have a subject or a story or a thesis or what you might consider acting

and yes it had form and a sense of parts talking to one another to cast a larger whole

and no it didn't become a script or a book

and yet, yes it opened ways of seeing and working that the (now former) students continue to use and have taken to places I couldn't imagine

And no we couldn't say that all those methodologies will move forward in the same direction

and yes it was based on commitment and yes it had heart and it had brain and legs

and yes, the concourse now called Furnace Park began with a conversation, that led to a walk That led to this site's first imaginings, (a long while ago) that allowed our theatre research project, (one of many running side by side,) instigated by that first brave move and a space seen as an opportunity

and a friendship that has woven in and out of University confines for some years now

and new friendships lasting longer than the three days of work

and yes it was based on the principle that people can honour their connections in a way that institutions maybe can't.

And no it hasn't quite finished.

There will be ands to add.

## 13 Frances Babbage

*Dr. Frances Babbage is a Reader in Theatre at the University of Sheffield. She is interested in participatory performance, theatrical adaption, gender themes and theatrical reworkings of myth and fairytale.*

### Detail

The writer Robert Pirsig, in Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (1974), found that very often students in his creative writing class 'just couldn't think of anything to say.' He advises one 'blocked' student who was unable to produce 500 words about the USA, or about her own city, or the city's main street: 'Narrow it down to the front of one building on the main street. Start with the upper left-hand brick.' This strategy seemingly succeeded, as she comes to the next class with 5,000 words: 'I sat in the hamburger stand across the street,' the student said, 'and started writing about the first brick, and the second brick, and then by the third brick it all started to come and I couldn't stop.' Pirsig/the novel's protagonist concluded the student had been stuck because she was trying to repeat, in her writing, things she had already heard—just as on the first day of teaching he had begun by repeating things he had already decided to say.

A similar frustration with repetition and glibness comes across in Matt's account of preparing the funding application for this project. So easy to trot out the phrases funders apparently want to hear, without any of us—writers or receivers—truly understanding what the words imply. But how then to 'unblock' when it comes to carrying out the work itself? This book—one 'output' of the project—is a beautiful and thoughtfully made 'thing', but in it I'm struck above all by the fascination with detail communicated through individual contributions: in Jonathan Paragreen's close ups of vegetation, Alison Beck's 'microscopic' examinations, Matt Cheeseman's condom wrappers. Maybe when it's not clear what (if anything) will result from a multidisciplinary artist/academic exploration, the most valuable way forward may be for the

participants each to begin by just looking, according to his or her own particular way of seeing, one brick—one blade of grass, stone or feather—at a time. What might come of this scrutiny, conducted both discretely and side by side?

### Juxtaposition

In 2007, the French conceptual artist Sophie Calle presented Take Care of Yourself. This work was an exhibition/documentation of 107 responses solicited by Calle from a highly diverse group of professional women to a breakup email that Calle had been sent by her male lover. Take Care of Yourself frames these 107 interpretations of the email—from (among others) a lawyer, linguist, psychiatrist, anthropologist, forensic scientist, actress, clairvoyant—a parrot!—in simple juxtaposition. The collection as a whole is unsentimental (Calle said: 'I have my own sentiment—I don't need that of others') and often highly technical: Calle explained that she especially enjoyed it 'when the whole discussion would turn around a single comma, like the philologist, who discusses the world existing between two sets of quotation marks. The more detailed and specific the analysis, the more I liked it.' Reading NO PICNIC, my response was very similar.

### Coexistence

As I understand it, this project has been not so much 'interdisciplinary', as multidisciplinary: diverse approaches have been allowed to coexist side by side, with the implicit frictions between them allowed to persist.

Or, if this work is interdisciplinary, I am curious to know whether Furnace Park has been not so much the focus of the project as itself the inter, the contested space between disciplines that allows the conversation to occur and which, in the end, resists categorization or ownership by

any. Half-established and half-demolished, half-industrial and half-wild: as children know instinctively, incomplete spaces like this can be the best place to play in. If it is to be curated, let curate mean care for and care about—but, please, not rush to ‘organize’.

#### **14 Hugh Escott**

*Hugh Escott is a researcher in English and Education who has worked on a range of AHRC Connected Communities projects. His research looks at representations of Yorkshire dialect in literary texts.*

There are a few points that the NO PICNIC book has made visible which have been issues or questions I have been working with. These issues have arisen whilst I have been undertaking interdisciplinary research or working on community engagement projects. For me, the discussions in the book recognise the difficulties of interdisciplinary research or collaboration which are perhaps not present in the official discourse surrounding these activities at a time when both the words ‘interdisciplinary’ and ‘collaborative’ are in fashion.

I feel that there is a general consolidation of the terms academic and artist in the sense that expectations of what ‘the academic’ or ‘the artist’ do are usually very different to how they actually operate. Also there is a lot of crossover between these two identities which is not fully recognised in research contexts. It is interesting reading about the processes of identity construction or deconstruction that everyone went through on the NO PICNIC project, and I feel that these statements are very interesting in themselves because of the way they reflect what is ‘usually’ expected of artists and researchers.

The reason I am commenting on the relationship between artists and academics is because I am currently working on a research project investigating the role of artists in research projects. The particular focus is on AHRC Connected Communities projects where the research involves working with communities. The discussions in NO PICNIC about gaining access to the public, who are ‘the public’ and how artists have been used to engage them with research, have been useful in developing my thinking. This is because in exploring the role of artists on community engaged research projects there is a knot that needs to be unpicked concerning whether artists are used to gain ‘access’ to ‘the public’ or whether their practices and thinking is, or can be, fully involved in the direction a project takes as whole. The continued involvement of artists in public engagement raises questions concerning what value is placed on arts practices by those funding or undertaking research. The collaboration with artists that researchers undertake also raises a question about what skills, or ways of thinking, do artists engage with, that academics perhaps cannot, which allows them to work fruitfully with ‘the public’? I want to briefly address play as a way of learning. My colleagues in Education discuss the importance of play in childhood education, not as something frivolous but as something that is very important for learning and for social interaction. I feel that as adults we are denied this way of learning, that if something looks ‘fun’ or ‘enjoyable’ it is not serious. There are lots of points in NO PICNIC where those involved talk about how the process was at times pleasurable and also gave people space to develop their thinking in many ways. I want to ask why are we made to feel guilty or uncomfortable doing this in a research environment? In Physics, Andre Geim became the first

person to win both an Ig Nobel prize, for levitating a frog, and a Nobel Prize, for the development of the revolutionary material grapheme. There is something that can be said for approaching research with a sense of humour, as well as the ability to discard disciplinary identities and take on new approaches.

Finally, the discussions in NO PICNIC articulate a range of things I feel I have only learned from working on interdisciplinary and community engagement projects, which relate to the practicalities of undertaking this kind of research: research needs to be able to fail; talking is the work; creating distance from your disciplinary identity or losing your area of expertise is a good thing; and that interdisciplinary work is often a ‘violent’ or problematic process.

#### **15 Matt Colbeck**

*Matt Colbeck is a PhD student in the School of English at the University of Sheffield. His research looks at the representation of coma and brain injury in literature, drawing on theories of trauma and identity. He runs a writing group, the members of which have all been affected by coma, brain injury or both.* From the very outset of entering PhD research, I was determined that my work would incorporate some form of public engagement. Indeed, the very kernel of my thesis was formed by the observation that somehow, the actual experiences of coma survivors seemed to be far removed from those experiences narrated in the lion’s share of coma fiction.

What better way, then, to draw a link between my research and public engagement through the creation of a writing group, the members of which were all survivors of coma or brain injury or both. Within this group, first person narratives of the

experiences of surviving and living with the effects of these conditions have been produced, against which the fiction can be compared and analysed.

Reading NO PICNIC, I was particularly struck by Arne Schroder’s maxim with regards to interdisciplinary projects: ‘to take your time, develop a personal relationship, sit back and let ideas grow and mature, instead of rushing and doing something for the sake of doing it.’

Perhaps this is why, in the three years of running the writing group, The Write Way, we have produced only two slim volumes of work.

But this is okay.

Over the years, the focus hasn’t always been on the ‘end product’. We’ve explored the value in drafts, fragments, snapshots; thoughts, images—abandonments. Writers have found ways to talk about issues and experiences that they’ve never been able to speak about, or have hitherto been unable to confront.

In this way, I would hope that we’ve somehow side-stepped the ‘publish or die!’ pressure that Matt Cheeseman warns against, the somewhat viral attitude existing in modern academia.

But more than this.

I, too, like Sarah Spencer, have the occasional pang of discomfort regarding my role in addressing social injustice or, particularly in my case, social imbalance—there are very few accurate depictions of coma and brain injury, something that The Write Way, and my research, is hoping to put right.

Sarah discusses her ‘unease at the role of categorising identity’ in her own practise. For me, I experience the occasional unease of what exactly my role

is in the writing group. Through praxis, I have tried to take as much of an ethical position as possible: encouraging writing about first-hand experiences of coma and brain injury, yet not enforcing this; catalysing discussions surrounding an edit process, yet not suggesting the edits themselves; looking at the experimental possibilities of layout and mise-en-page, yet not prescribing these.

Again, I would hope that this hands-off approach is reflected in the two collections of The Write Way’s work that I have published to-date.

However, as the end of my current strand of research looms ever-closer, another sense of unease begins to chew away at me—when the final ts have been crossed and the final is been dotted, the thesis reaching completion, what position will I be left in and, moreover, what position will The Write Way be left in? If my work takes me away from Sheffield, will I be viewed as an academic who has swept into this marginalised group in society, and then left them to their own devices?

My final hope is that this won’t be the case—that their work will continue to be produced and their previously hidden voice be listened to.

I would suggest that the work in the form of the publications that we have produced almost isn’t the important end-result. Over the years, there has been a steady growth in confidence of our members and generation of ideas that extends beyond the group and the writing.

As I speak, several members of the group are putting together a research proposal looking into the link between homelessness and brain injury in Sheffield, building on the excellent work produced by universities in Toronto, Glasgow and Leeds.

I would like to think, then, that my work with The Write Way has been a successful venture into public engagement. Like NO PICNIC, it might not fully achieve its initial goals: it may never redress the imbalance of negative misrepresentations of coma and brain injury which are so ingrained in society. Indeed, speaking at a brain injury conference a couple of years ago, an occupational therapist, in response to my discussion of such representations, said that she was approached by the BBC to provide some information on brain injury rehabilitation. They were writing a drama about the subject, and wanted further insights. On receiving her information, they responded by saying that what she had provided didn’t really gel with what they were writing.

Thanks but no thanks.

However, as NO PICNIC demonstrates, the concrete fulfilment of such initial goals, often influenced by the straitjacket of funding streams, is not paramount.

Instead, the process is everything, and what we learn and how we develop through this process will influence and inhabit all of our future work. And in an era of results-driven, statistically-obsessed outcomes, it is these so-called softer skills that are often harder to recognise, that we must hold onto and cherish.

#### **16 Sunshine Wong**

*Sunshine Wong is an art writer and PhD researcher in art and social engagement. She works on socially engaged art and collaborative, activist practices in communities.*

For my response, I am focusing quite specifically on Hester Reeve’s piece called ‘Parklife’ which made me think about designated spaces for contained

dissent. It got me thinking about the what an individual is now, in a time of advanced capitalism when we are reduced to always being consumers and divorced from understanding how societal contexts mark our lives.

For instance, sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has talked about superindividualisation in late modernity, while Mark Fisher has indicated toward the extreme privatisation taking place: specifically of the self, but this can also be extended to include industries and spaces.

My concern is in relation to the suppression of subjectivity, and how to make it possible for its display and development.

Turning to the park more generally, it is a state-owned space; it is for 'the public' under specific legal restrictions.

When we see a site such as Furnace Park, what is our immediate reaction? How do we see it? What are we allowed/not allowed to do? [Side note: it isn't really a park, but 'wasteland' has apparently been ruled out. In that case, a 'park' is what the space most resembles in function] In Hester's piece, there is a photo of the sit-in in Taksim Gezi park in Istanbul last year. It was violently suppressed, only to pop back in greater numbers in parks all over the city. These later protests were no longer just about environmental issues, but about the right to assembly, freedom of speech, and government encroachment on secularisation in Turkey.

As I look at Furnace Park, I gravitate towards spatiality as an issue, i.e. the right to assembly, or simply, to congregate. Are parks the ideal spaces for that? If not, then where? We can think about the Occupy movement and the reinscription of spaces, to use them as points of departure in thinking about a public use of space.

What I'd like to alight on, at the end, are these ideas: of public, pace, and use. Harkening back to what Zygmunt Bauman and Mark Fisher say about the disappearance of a collective subject and accountability, I'd like to propose some specific questions:

Firstly: what constitutes a public? In light of diminishing public spaces, services, and media, how do we imagine/reimagine the concept? Matthew Cheeseman also expressed his ambivalence toward 'public engagement' issues that academics face when applying for funding. We might consider how the two correlate.

Secondly: in what ways do spaces resist the impressions we make on them? I don't know what the processes have been in setting up Furnace Park, though they were probably tedious and bureaucratic. A theme throughout the texts seems to have been the implicit and explicit failure of the place to reveal its full potential, which perhaps is partly down to time and resource restrictions. But it would be interesting to reflect on the space's capacity to reject our desire to make something out of it. Lastly: how can the perception of 'use' be expanded? Not having a product at the end of a project is normally bad news for funding. To promise and deliver—this is the cycle that has at its core pre-conceived ideas that self-fulfil, that do not permit deviations, disorientations, and unexpected perspectives. Referencing Walter Benjamin's strolling in the 'wrong' direction—queer theorist Judith Halberstam advocates tapping into 'intuition and blind fumbling' as they 'might yield better results'. So the task at hand might be learning how to articulate these darker, less well-trodden territories.

### 17 Bridie Moore

*Bridie Moore is a Theatre Facilitator and a University of Sheffield PhD Researcher into the performance of age and ageing. She has recently formed a performance group with performers over the age of 50 and is experimenting with age blind casting, new scripts and norm-resistant age performances.*

I am a PhD student researching age and ageing in performance in the School of English at the University of Sheffield. In previous lives I have been a director and facilitator in youth, community and mainstream theatre and I have also been a Lecturer in Performing Arts in a large Further Education college. These converging identities of course influence my responses to NO PICNIC. I have responded to the publication in a way that reflects what the team was faced with. In the same way as the surfaces of and perspectives on Furnace Park provided starting points for their investigations, as a sort of flaneur of the text I have meandered my way through NO PICNIC finding and commenting on whatever resonated with my own practice.

#### Hope

I identified with the sense of hope and expectation that always gathers around a new project and recognize this as a vital source of inspiration and a basis on which to guarantee at least the enthusiastic, energized opening to a project.

I also recognized the idea of 'drift' and that, through engaging with a process, we find out what a project is about. This includes either not quite following or even departing radically from the plan. We find out that the process itself is creative and productive, irrespective of the final outcome.

Furnace Park was a wasteland that changed throughout the process: this speaks to

the impossibility or at least problem of the 'exegesis'—the recording and communication of the creative research process. Peggy Phelan's famous quotation about performance from the chapter 'The ontology of performance: representation without reproduction' in her book *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (1993) is relevant here:

'Performance cannot be saved, recorded, documented, or otherwise participate in the circulation of representations of representations: once it does so, it becomes something other than performance. To the degree that performance attempts to enter the economy of reproduction it betrays and lessens the promise of its own ontology. Performance's being, like the ontology of subjectivity proposed here, becomes itself through disappearance.' (p.146)

A similar difficulty reveals itself when attempting to capture traces of a creative process. In the same way that the used condom packets disappeared and the surface of the park was obscured by chippings, creative artists are faced with the impossibility of going back to the ground on which they built the work. Starting points are obliterated by the process and origins can never be entirely recaptured. The record of the process is not the thing itself.

#### A process brings about a community

Volunteering gifts the participants' time and, alongside the growth of the idea through practice, the people involved engage in a process of self-development. Sarah Spencer quoted Hanna Hull who points out that 'social inclusion' art is seen as outsider art by the arts establishment—this resonates with my own practice, which has been mainly concerned with theatre education, theatre for wellbeing, or theatre in settings of social exclusion.

We should feel no shame in giving 'spare' time for free, here we engage in an alternative system of value. Hester Reeves' citation of 'the theme park of radical action' (p. 63) is pertinent here; the process of making and researching can stand outside an established arts economy, this represents an alternative space, especially in times of what I would like to call 'deep capitalism' (as opposed to what some hopeful commentators call 'late capitalism') in which we have internalized market ideals even to the extent of our conceptualization of self. The process of creative research can operate in a different economy, even if only for some moments in time. In my field, performance, this translates to the workshop space, and here there is the potential for the group making work/doing research to stand outside a commodified, individualistic, brand-orientated conceptualization of product and subjectivity, to form a socially supportive space of mutual discovery, an anti-goal, one that does not have to be product orientated. This, we have hope enough to believe, solidifies a sense of identification with a social group, formed through engagement in creative process as opposed to consumption-centered identity formation, which as Hester Reeves says can 'at best provide evidence of an already existing autonomous identity but... can never constitute one.'

#### Public engagement

I have returned to university at a time when public engagement is high on the agenda and I realize that artists have been creating through participative arts for decades. Consequently, there is a newly focused 'fit' between artists and researchers.

The university represents a refuge for many arts practitioners who having fallen prey to austerity cuts who might want to formalise and legitimise their practice by

engaging in academic research using creative practice. This is my story to some degree, although I left my job in FE voluntarily, in October 2010, it happened to be on almost the same week as the Comprehensive Spending Review was published.

The interesting question becomes: is the engagement between artists and researchers an act of public engagement in the same way as it would be between the university and say mental health service users or socially excluded young people? I would say that when researchers engage with artists this is just as valid a form of public engagement; artists are also an 'excluded group' often suffering the effects of poverty, lack of social support and shouldering a burden of shame at operating outside corporate or even public systems, working for free in order to 'do' their art.

My final response to the book centers on comments made by Sarah Spencer about the categorization of social groups and focuses on the heterogeneous social group that I work with—older people. Highlighting the injustice of making one group (benefit claimants, immigrants etc.) responsible for the wider economic forces at play and over which they have no control reminds me of the tendency to blame the older generation—conceived of as having generous pensions and vast housing wealth—for the economic barriers against the younger generation entering the property market. This tendency doesn't recognize this as a discourse that obscures and exonerates the financial institutions, global forces and government policies which accelerated house prices beyond the reach of younger and older people alike.

## 18 John Barrett

*John Barrett is Professor of Archaeology at the University of Sheffield. His main areas of research are Archaeological Theory, European Prehistory from the early agriculture to Romanization and the development of commercially funded archaeology in the UK.*

My mistake in my speech was to refer to occupying the Octagon when I meant the Rotunda (I work for a University which tolerates the marginalisation of radicalism whilst taking out a court order against students occupying its buildings). I am certainly not expecting more from you and your colleagues, you have all done enough in providing the intellectual excitement that all who spoke recognised. On the other hand, the rest of us have perhaps not done enough. To break the 'disciplinary' confines that structure the curriculum would result in all of us learning afresh because we would have to find the means to express what we would want to come next.

## 19 Adam Stansbie

*Dr. Adam Stansbie is a composer, performer and writer specialising in electroacoustic/acousmatic music. He is interested in the analysis, aesthetics and philosophy of contemporary music and is Director of the MA in Sonic Arts and the MA in Composition at the University of Sheffield.*

Where process becomes product and product process Creative practice as research is certainly NO PICNIC. It involves a painstaking process of creation that is typically bereft of prearranged or systematic methods, concepts, materials, forms, aesthetic approaches, and a whole host of other research norms and expectations. In most cases, creative practitioners engage in an act of discovery, in

which thinking, and knowledge-generation more broadly, involves a process of doing; although the term creative practice as research is far too broad to impart any meaningful information about either the practice or the research in a given field, it is this process of doing which seems to connect practitioners professing to be 'research-active'. Curiously, this process is often simply a means to an end; most practitioners produce products (texts, scores, compositions, sculptures, paintings, dances, theatre productions, and so on) which, in the vast majority of cases, intentionally conceal the 'painstaking process of creation' described above. This is invariably one of the major contributing factors to the rather parochial, yet common-place, view that creative practitioners are simply 'making it up as they go along'; despite the (admittedly self-declared) third research paradigm mantle, it is an unfortunate truth that this academic and intellectual activity continues to be eyed with suspicion, and even hostility, by various sectors of an academy that claims to value the liberal arts.

With the above in mind, I found NO PICNIC extremely refreshing, for it intentionally and unashamedly collapses the process/product distinction outlined above. On the one hand, the written text clearly functions as a product, complete with photographs, images, prose and poetry that are, at numerous points, hilarious, sublime, poignant, subversive, mundane, absurd, and frequently pointless; it is, when taken as a whole, a wonderful collection of artistic and intellectual curiosities and oddities which, similar to the subject (Furnace Park), is littered with nooks and crannies which must be observed from numerous perspectives, rather like a kaleidoscope of thoughts and images. On the other hand, this curious product

somehow manages to capture the process of its own creation. The reader/viewer is led, as if by accident, through the unfolding development of the process of doing. Examples are in abundant supply; consider the following brief statements, abstracted (and, brazenly, unreferenced) from the text:

'There have been moments of conversations that have had huge resonance. And I don't know—I don't care—how I've applied them. Part of my practice is to allow this to happen.'

'The lack of goals has actually been really quite refreshing.'

'Let's just see how it goes.'

'It was the deliberately experimental and open character of the project right from the start that made the whole experience so worthwhile.'

'During these personal face-to-face meetings with all their so seemingly vague, inconsequential talking that we were exposed to novel ideas and concepts which opened our minds...'

'We practiced forgetting what we'd learnt.'

'I simply photographed what captured my attention.'

'After a while trying, I decided that was a bad idea.'

And my personal favourite:

'When it came to doing this though, I couldn't be bothered and no longer saw the point.'

These kinds of statements fill the entire book. At first, they appear to be little more than flippant precursors to a more polished or refined product that one expects to emerge later on. Reading further, one realises that the lack of telos, purpose, necessity, functionality

and, ultimately, resolution is the nucleus of the book; these process-driven statements are the product itself. It is, of course, rare to come face-to-face with such an honest account of the process of creation, and one is left with a clear view of how certain methods, concepts, materials, forms and aesthetic approaches developed. More importantly, however, in NO PICNIC we find process and product solidified into a whole, or, to put it another way, we find that process becomes product and product process.

## 20 Richard Steadman-Jones

*Dr. Richard Steadman-Jones is a Senior Lecturer in the School of English at the University of Sheffield; his field is the History of Ideas and the focus of research is the way in which language has been—and is now—conceptualised in the context of cross-cultural encounters.*

In the mouth of the demon It's the end of the day. It's all been said and done. But—in spite of that—I need to say or do something. So I've decided to finish with a story. I didn't write it myself. It dates from the 12th century and it comes from the songs of Milarepa, the Buddhist poet and practitioner who has sometimes been described as the St Francis of Tibet, not least because of the eccentricity, what is often called the 'craziness', of his approach to his tradition. I don't offer this tale in an attempt to convert you to Buddhism and I apologise if you've heard it before. I think it's a good story, though, and it has something to say to us about collaboration and the kinds of experimental practice that this project has embraced. Over the past five years I've done a certain amount of similar work and Milarepa's story has come to speak to me very forcefully over that time. It is a story about how to cope with demons.

For many years, Milarepa committed himself to constant practice, living in a cave and devoting all his time to the pursuit of the dhamma, the doctrines of Buddhism. One evening, so the story goes, he had been out to gather firewood and returned to find that a pack of demons had moved into his home. Demons are no respecters of persons and they were making free with his meagre possessions—using them, breaking them, tossing them aside. They sneered when he remonstrated with them and responded to his gentle entreaties by laughing loudly and doing unspeakable things with his cooking utensils. What is one to do in such a situation? Milarepa's response was to try to change the demons. He sat on the floor and taught them the dhamma—the Buddhist account of the world that promises liberation to anyone who is willing to practise. But the demons were unimpressed by this. They laughed at the dhamma and when someone laughs at the dhamma then, really, what is left? If the truth of the world (as you see it) is rejected by the other—not argued against but disparaged in the most basic and brutal terms—then what basis do you have for communication? Milarepa might have left. He might have walked away and looked for another place of safety in which to sit and practice. But in the end he took a brave decision (and Milarepa was nothing if not courageous.) He stopped teaching. He stopped protesting. And he said to the demons. 'Well so be it. We'll have to live together. Here—together—we shall live.' At this point, according to the story, all but one of the demons simply stood up and left the cave. Demons are creatures that thrive on opposition and, without it, had no reason to stay. But one of them—the biggest one, with the sharpest teeth and the nastiest smile—remained in the cave and did not leave. So Milarepa chose a still more radical

path of vulnerability. He went to the last remaining demon, placed his head in its jaws, and said: 'Devour me if you want to'. And, when he said this, that demon also left.

This is, of course, a tale about the dissolution of ego. According to the doctrine, what summons demons into the world is the very sense that one must be a coherent and bounded person, able to say, 'this is my cave', 'this is my bed', 'these are my utensils'. Once one relinquishes that sense of distinctness—the egoic illusion—the demons disappear. Today, however, I offer the story as a comment on something more specific—on the kinds of adventurous practice that this project represents and in which everyone here has an investment. Such work, almost by definition, involves a coming together across the boundaries that divide up traditions of training and experience. I've chosen my phrasing carefully here—traditions of training and experience—because I want it to apply similarly to all of us, however we identify ourselves: as whatever kind of artist, whatever type of academic, whatever sort of activist. I don't mean to disparage any of these traditions. They supply us with the essential tools that we need for the work we do. But they are also involved—deeply involved—with questions of ego. A tradition becomes caught up with one's sense of personhood and if one's tradition is rejected, one's sense of personhood is threatened, a situation that (in the terms of the story) is most likely productive of demons. I've met them myself in a range of different spaces. I've seen them gathering around others and others it seems have seem them gathering around me.

Faced with demons it is tempting to preach the dhamma (in a metaphorical sense, I mean)—to spell out the law of one's own tradition in a way that takes for granted its reasonable and rational

character. I have preached and I've been preached at. It is rarely very edifying. What I like about this book with its doubting and sceptical tone is the whiff of the demon's mouth that hangs about it. And on that note I shall finish. I don't want to spell out my interpretation further like the worst sort of contributor to 'Thought for the Day'. I would just like to leave you with the image of Milarepa—listening to the demons' laughter, watching them desecrate his flannel, wondering how vulnerable he is really willing to be.

### **21 Andrew Landels**

*Andrew is a PhD student in Chemical and Biological Engineering at the University of Sheffield. He attended the launch but didn't speak, sending instead the responses below. The second he wrote first and said 'scratch that' before agreeing to include it.*

#### One

In the first part of NO PICNIC, where each author examined the site in a different way, it felt like reading something fragmented. Individual essays on a vague central topic. It was only once I reached the end that I decided that the whole book was more like a memorial service than an investigation. The site was being anthropomorphised as some late socialite, where each author was an associate from a different circle, pulled together by shared tragedy. The disparate group collectively working on an epitaph for a person that none of them really knew. In the end, it wasn't about the site at all: it was about the authors. It made me wonder briefly if we're doing the same thing to nature in our pursuit of an objective scientific truth—we know the dates and times, facts and figures, but perhaps we don't truly connect with the subject?

#### Two

I felt a certain amount of a connection with the situation the authors were placed in. Trying to bring a group of disparate ideals together to produce a book on an undecided topic with potentially infinite scope felt alarmingly familiar to my own efforts in trying to figure out how my current work will ever amount to a thesis in the next eighteen months. In some ways it felt worrying, the book was written by people who've already advanced in the field and they still end up in the same situation.





**The value of the project is intangible in a way. Art is intangible in many ways. So therefore why do a project like this? The only logical reason to do a project like this is that other people should do a project like this and that this effervescent 'whatever' should be passed on as a social relation. I don't think a book is going to do that. I don't think a kind of symposium is going to do that at all.**

**The only reason that it's being done is to prove to other people that it was worthwhile doing and that's disconnected. We live in a disconnected world where the spectacle is more important than the actual process of research.**