



**ART OF EXCHANGE: A PRACTICE-BASED INQUIRY INTO CO-OPTING
SITE AND AUDIENCE AGENCY IN THE CONSTRUCT OF AN ARTWORK**

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Art of Exchange: A Practice-based Inquiry into Co-opting Site and Audience Agency in the Construct of an Artwork.

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Abstract

This body of creative work asked what we can learn about the transference of agency between artist, site, and audience, in particular relation to the audience as a core element in an artwork's construct or activation. The resulting critical overview builds on, and contests, theories established in Alfred Gell's 'Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory' (1998) and Nicolas Bourriaud's 'Relational Aesthetics' (1996) through practice-based research and the consideration of contemporary theorists including Kim Charnley, Gregory Sholette and Claire Bishop.

The primary aim of this research was to examine the potential for co-opting site and audience agency in the construct of an artwork by asking three sub-questions focusing on the possibility of establishing a space to be inhabited, equally, by both an art and not-art audience, the transference of 'tokens' or requested interactions, and how an artwork draws on its specific site. This involved the creation and observation of a body of performative and sculptural artworks and the siting of those artworks with partial or no acknowledgment of a wider artistic context. Diverse sites for exchange included rock concerts, public billboards, town centres, sometimes including 'tokens' to be taken away within a process of exchange.

Key findings conclude that viewers are engaged in a social relationship with the artwork - acting upon it or being acted upon by it – and, through this relationship, the artist can incorporate the audience/viewers into the fabric of the work, extending their role into a fundamental bringing-in-to-being of the artwork. Audience preconditioning towards a site extends the artwork's dialogue beyond that of simply being considered an artwork. When successfully presenting as a credible version of something existing beyond the contemporary art canon, discussion of art or not-art becomes irrelevant, as the artwork exists to be experienced and processed on its own recognisable terms. The memory of that experience/exchange becomes the medium through which agency is passed on to/through the audience.

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Creative Outputs

In chronological order:

A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation (2006) p.26

One-off live performance at Nottingham Boat Club, May 20th, 2006.
Commissioned as part of the British Art Show 6 fringe festival, Sideshow.

Video – A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation, Clip (10 mins):

<https://vimeo.com/196250697>

The Death of Peter Fechter (2007) p.69

One-off live performance on August 18th, 2007.
Commissioned by the ICA (London) on a temporary site in Plumstead, London.

Video - The Death of Peter Fechter, Clip (2m 30secs):

<https://vimeo.com/118580750>

Video - The Death of Peter Fechter, Full performance (55 mins):

<https://vimeo.com/435055682>

Metal Militia (2014) p.31

One-off live performance on June 6th, 2014, at The Maltings, Berwick-Upon-Tweed. Commissioned by Berwick Visual Arts.

Video – Metal Militia, Clip (3 mins):

<https://vimeo.com/user5428572/metalmilitia>

Video – Metal Militia, Full Performance (25 mins):

<https://vimeo.com/99119101>

God So Loves Decay (2016) p.50

One-off live performance on May 7th, 2016, in Luton Town Centre.
Commissioned by Sunridge Avenue Projects.

Audio – God So Loves Decay:

<https://www.smarkgubb.com/god-so-loved-decay>

Ganas de Vivir (2016)

p.55

Printed text on a guitar plectrum, distributed by Joey Z of Life of Agony on their Autumn World tour, 2016.

Free For All Forever (2016)

p.76

Temporary billboard sited along the I-70 in Missouri, USA, through October/November 2016. Produced in collaboration with the I-70 Sign Show.

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Glossary

Agency: A collective term for the range of ‘agent/patient’ relations as defined in Alfred Gell’s ‘Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory’ (1998). In simple terms, the direct and causal effect one thing has on another i.e. the artist as the source of a creative act that shapes a material, or the artist’s ability to create a physical response or engagement in their audience through the production and exhibition/staging of a creative original artifact.

Art Audiences: Viewers of an artwork who bring some prior knowledge, interest, or experience of visual art to a specific encounter with an artwork or situation. This term is not used pejoratively or hierarchically.

Artifact: The output from a creative endeavour or the practice of an artist. In the case of this study, this extends beyond physical objects to include anything that would broadly be identified as performance or performance art.

Artworld: A collective term to describe the professional and creative sphere in which artifacts are created, exhibited, discussed, bought, and sold. The institutions and communities that are specifically engaged in the creation, dissemination, and interpretation of art (contemporary and historical).

Co-opting: The intended inclusion, by the artist, of a pre-existing and autonomous element, in the construct of an artwork.

Contemporary Art: My interpretation is in line with that of Peter Osborne, as discussed in ‘Anywhere or Not at All – Philosophy of Contemporary Art’ (2013), where he argues ‘contemporary art’ be viewed as a critical term, as opposed to a specifically temporal term. His argument is for a post-conceptual ontology of contemporary art becoming the basis for all critical art practice today, characterised by the dialectical relation between a work’s aesthetic and conceptual aspects.

Context: Influencing factors surrounding the exhibition or performance of an original creative artifact. These may be physical, cultural, geographical or historical, and feed into the audience or participant’s reading or understanding of the artifact.

(Additionally, we must note that the terms 'site' and 'context' are often used collectively as 'site and context' because, as with my research and in relation to the artistic intention for the artwork, the two factors are often inextricably linked. When using these terms I am using them in the same way as Claire Doherty in the 'From Studio to Situation' (2004) collection of essays and interviews i.e. *'practitioners, commissioners and critics have become dissatisfied with the expression 'site-specific', submitting a gamut of new terms to describe artworks and projects which deal with the complexities of context – amongst them context-specific, site-oriented, site-responsive and socially engaged'* (Doherty 2004). My works are rarely site-specific in a traditional understanding of this term, falling more into these latter definitions that have emerged out of critical necessity.)

Culture: When referring to 'culture' in a general sense, my use of this word can be aligned with Raymond Williams' 'Culture and Society 1780-1950' (1958). A 'culture' that is *"concerned...with the kinds of personal and social relationship; ...both as a recognition of practical separation (of certain moral and intellectual activities from the driven impetus of a new kind of society) and as an emphasis of alternatives."* (Williams 1958). *"Where culture meant a state or habit of the mind, or the body of intellectual and moral activities, it means now, also, a whole way of life."* (Williams 1958).

D.I.Y. Culture: Broadly used to describe, and draw distinction between, cultural outputs and activities supported by a recognised mainstream, and the outputs and activities of cultural practitioners who self-organise through necessity, or as an active rejection of mainstream support, often involving the support and co-operation of like-minded practitioners.

Documentation: A recording of the original creative artifact through audio-visual means for the purpose of archiving or re-presentation in an alternative format or space. I have always been very specific that the document, or documentation, of my work is not the work; it is just a means by which future audiences can view an artwork that has already happened. To reference Doherty again, speaking of Francis Alÿs work 'When Faith Moves Mountains', *"What is the difference between the experience of the work's first and second audiences – from the participants in the desert outside Lima to the museum visitors on Fifth Avenue (NYC?)"* (Doherty 2004). This concern is somewhat mitigated in my own research through making no claim for the documentation to be anything more than a document of a past artwork.

Encounter: The moment of engagement with the original creative artifact by the audience or participant. This encounter is not necessarily embedded within the contextual framework of knowingly encountering an artwork or art-event. In my research the audience encounter does not necessarily presume knowledge of the work's artistic context.

Event: A time-constrained occasion through which an original creative artifact is experienced by the audience or participant. In relation to this portfolio, these are always one-offs. The occasion of these events is advertised to a potential audience, sometimes with the specific intention of drawing a finite and closed audience and, in other instances, merely to raise an awareness of the event itself. In this second instance, the presence of unknowing or uniformed primary participants, and how this activates the work, is part of the research itself.

Not-Art Audiences: Viewers of an artwork who bring no specific knowledge, interest, or prior experience, of visual art to a specific encounter with an artwork or situation. 'Not' is used in preference to 'non' (i.e. non-art audience) as 'non' suggests an absolute position, as opposed to a transient focus (though a not-art audience may also include a non-art audience). This term is not used pejoratively or hierarchically.

Participant: This has two potential readings in relation to my research. The first is an audience member who steps into the space created by the artwork – physical or conceptual - whether by explicit invitation, or of their own volition, and engages and involves themselves in the work in a more explicit way than the other audience members. The other is the performers I work with in the creation of the work.

Primary Audience: The primary audience consists of two constituent parts. The first are the audience and participants who explicitly choose to engage with the original creative artifact. The second is the audience who pass through the site of the artifact's presentation during the event or exhibition, leading to a more passive encounter of the artifact, but a primary encounter, nonetheless.

Secondary Audience: These are the people who experience the work through some means other than the original event or exhibition; a future presentation of the document, or documentation, of the event or exhibition or the sharing of the experience from one person to another through aural means.

(Additionally, I must note that I do not see these two distinct audiences as existing in isolation from one another. The creation of this secondary audience may be an intended consequence of an artist's agency.)

Site: Any location used for the staging or exhibition of an original creative artifact. In the case of this research, often, a non-gallery or non-traditional exhibition space, such as a public location.

“The energy level when we play is incredible. I was talking to a fan who said that we were a band that gave out this energy and the audience was receiving it and then giving it back to us. And we were receiving it through our heads and channeling it through our guitars again, back out at them. There’s, like, this circle of energy going.”

Kirk Hammett (lead guitarist for, the rock band, Metallica), speaking in the documentary ‘A Year and a Half in the Life of Metallica: Part 2’ (Dubin 1992)

“I need you all – every one of you. I cannot do without you. This story is something we make together. – Iago ap Rhys, do you think I could tell these stories in the way that I have told them if I was speaking to you alone? This Matter is fed by its listeners, just as a tree is fed by the soil in which it grows. Every Cyfarwydd (storyteller) sends out roots and draws sustenance from his audience; because you cannot see them does not mean they are not there.”

Cian Brydydd Mawr, fictional Bard, talking about his recounting of ‘The Four Branches of The Mabinogion’ in ‘The Assembly of the Severed Head’ (Lupton 2018)

1

Introduction

1.1 Preface

At the start of this critical overview, I feel it important to offer some brief personal background about three key influences on my approach to practice:

- My cousin introduced me to heavy metal music (specifically, Iron Maiden) when I was 8 years old.
- I grew up in a seaside town (Herne Bay on the north coast of Kent)
- I spent the ages of 6-15 growing up through the 1980s.

How my work functions in a space and interacts with its audience has been influenced more by a lifetime of attending rock concerts than a similar amount of time spent visiting art galleries – the immediacy of the exchange, the intangible fabric of what is exchanged between artist and audience, and the active role the audience play in the creation of that moment and, thus, the activation of the art.

In relation to the other points, I would ascribe a similar observation to my personal experience of growing up in the seaside towns of Herne Bay and Margate, Kent, until I was 21 years old (1974-1995). The months from October to April see the town lay largely fallow, a skeleton of its summer self. Many businesses are closed, the holidaymakers are gone, even residents are wont to decamp to sunnier climes. However, from May to September, the arrival of the new season brings with it an influx of people - an audience of sorts. The town puts on its show and the entire space enters symbiotic activation. Where once were grey shutters and grey skies, now come blue skies and the bright colours of tourist shops and arcades. The sound of silence and cold wind is replaced with the sound of chatter, laughter and arcade games. I'm painting a slightly romantic picture, but these absolute contradictions of seasonal existence and atmosphere in a seaside town are very real and very stark.

The 1980s has had a great cultural and historical influence on my practice, particularly evident in one of the works in this portfolio. A decade of action, for good and for bad; the miner's strike, the Brixton riots, the Falklands War, the rise of Alternative Comedy and the fall of the Berlin Wall. These are all things that feed the narrative content of my work but are also manifestations of agency - individual and collective.

1.2 Research Aims and Questions

My over-arching research question looks specifically at ideas of agency and the role of the audience:

- *From the artist's perspective, through the exhibition or staging of an original creative artifact, what can we learn about the transference of agency, particularly in relation to the role of the audience or participant as a core element in the completion or activation of an artwork?*

To analyse and discuss this, I have identified three sub-questions or research intentions/outcomes, each of which I discuss in a chapter of their own, in relation to three pairings of my artworks:

- *To examine the exchange between 'the work', 'the world' and 'the audience', and their specific influence and impact on each other, through the creation of a space that can be inhabited by two separate audiences – artworld and non-artworld - who experience an identical activity, and yet understand it differently.*
- *To examine direct interaction between the artwork and the viewer – physical, emotional, intellectual; the offering of a physical object, gift or interaction. A literal reach beyond the typical viewing experience and the potential to establish an expanded spatio-temporality in the receipt of the artwork.*
- *To examine how the artwork draws on and manipulates the physical surroundings in which it is sited in order to intensify the viewer experience and extend its dialogues beyond that of simply being considered an artwork.*

The findings from these three sub-questions are then brought together and discussed in relation to the over-arching question in a conclusion.

1.3 Interrelation of Thesis Literature and Witnessed Performances

The key theoretical foundation for my research is made up, primarily, of two texts that emerged at similar times but have had markedly different impacts, whilst overlapping in key areas. Both are theories around an artwork's capacity to have a social impact, beyond that of a traditionally accepted arts arena; Nicholas Bourriaud's ubiquitous

'Relational Aesthetics' (1996) and the lesser known 'Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory' (1998) by Alfred Gell. In terms of an overlap I have identified between their two sets of ideas, I would make brief reference to Arnd Schnieder's essay 'Art/Anthropology Intervention' in the collection 'Practicable: From Participation to Interaction in Contemporary Art' (2016), where she states, *'Indeed, the new thinking on agency in anthropology has many points of reference – as yet rarely made explicit or explored – to the notion of relational aesthetics in contemporary art theory.'* While my artworks are not explicit illustrations of these points of reference, I will illustrate how my practice and research make an original contribution in furthering the related discussions.

Completing my undergraduate degree in 1998, it was almost impossible not to be influenced by Bourriaud's theories built around a generation of artists such as Liam Gillick, Rirkrit Tiravanija and Carsten Höller, striving to engage their audience in social relationships, not just the traditional observer-and-object relationship between an artwork and its viewer. I mention 'Relational Aesthetics' (1996) here to acknowledge the important role it plays in informing the contemporary theoretical dialogues that surround the development of my practice, but also to disregard it further from my discussions. Whilst agreeing with Bourriaud's preliminary analysis, I believe his conclusions are insufficient. It is my claim that they only reach a midpoint in their analysis of the potential of relational practice, as much of his argument remains rooted in a quite traditional hierarchy of the art world operating above, and other to, the rest of the world – a world of not-art. Whilst the work he discusses did attempt to reach out and create a social engagement that was very different to traditional artwork, it (the work), and they (the artists), were happy to do so within the accepted and acknowledged framework of the artworld. My research has sought to question the persistence of such a hierarchy.

This is acknowledged and criticised by Claire Bishop in her essay, 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics' (2004) and the lack of any useful emergent political action from the invited interactions within a relational work's construct. (Bishop makes specific reference to the art critic, Jerry Saltz's, account of Rirkrit Tiravanija's 1992 exhibition at 303 Gallery, NYC, 'Untitled (Free)', where Saltz recounts a series of dinners-as-artworks and the associated conversations relating specifically, and exclusively, to the New York artworld that was hosting the relational exhibition.) Similarly, Stephen Duncombe identifies a similar problem in his analysis of D.I.Y. culture, where he states, *'...since all of this happens on a purely cultural plane, it has little real effect on*

the causes of alienation in the wider society. In fact, one could argue that underground culture sublimates anger that otherwise might have been expressed in political action.' (Duncombe 1997). Though, to offer an alternative perspective to Duncombe's claim, George McKay argues, *"there is a tremendous emphasis in DiY Culture laid on actually doing something in the social or political realm."* (McKay 1998). I make specific reference to D.I.Y. culture, as the ethos of working beyond, or adjacent to, the constraints of the mainstream underpins much of the intention of my own work; the idea that a creative artifact can exist credibly without the stated validation of an established industry, and that creative activity can exist outside of, or adjacent to, those industries – co-opting their existence as a point of reference to push against.

In Kim Charnley's analysis and critique of an exchange between Claire Bishop and Grant Kester in the letters page of Artforum, he articulates his frustration at the *"...avoidance of questions that are raised when art is confronted by a limit, in the moment of attempting to transgress it. At this moment the dissensus is a radical one, in as much as it is a disjuncture between art's self-understanding and its social reality."* (Charnley 2011). The questions alluded to at that moment of transgression, and the dissensus to which he refers, identify the point at which my research is focused, and identifies a space that moves beyond any I believe is examined in 'Relational Aesthetics' (1996).

The works presented in this critical overview, in part, evidence a social value in producing for a community, no matter how niche. Two other examples I would offer of this kind of production are Grizedale Arts and Sunridge Avenue Projects (which features significantly in Chapter 4); both are organisations I have worked with. Grizedale Arts – an arts organisation once connected primarily to a sculpture trail in Grizedale Forest, Cumbria, UK – have, under the directorship of Adam Sutherland over the past 22 years, completely re-invented their role as a host and commissioner. Their activities have ceased to be specific to a place (the forest) and become specific to a series of local and national communities through which they co-author their projects (see 'Adding Complexity to Confusion' 2009, for a comprehensive archive of projects from 1999-2009). Just as the term 'relational artists' can be used as shorthand to describe a group of practitioners with a particular set of interests in their work, the 'Grizedale Artists' of this period could be taken as a starting point for a discussion around contemporary artists working with ideas of social value and producing for a community; Juneau Projects, Anna Best, Minerva Cuevas, Karen

Guthrie and Nina Pope, Simon Poulter, Paul Rooney, Jeremy Deller and Alan Kane, Simon and Tom Bloor, Dominic Allan – the list goes on. I was personally involved in three major Grizedale projects; ‘Roadshow’ (A touring art exhibition-cum-performance/music festival. 2003), ‘Let’s Get Married Today’ (An actual wedding, commissioned as an art project, where I performed a narrative DJ set at the reception. 2003), and ‘Romantic Detachment’ (A group residency/exhibition at PS1 MoMA, NYC, where I made a documentary about the project that also functioned as a remake of the video nasty classic, ‘The Driller Killer’. 2004). My involvement in these projects – the structure and approach of the projects, along with the artists I worked alongside – had a profound impact on my understanding of visual art’s ability to transgress its traditional boundaries.

Secondly, Sunridge Avenue Projects – a project, organisation, and artwork developed by, Grizedale Arts creative-alumnus, Dominic Allan - was a series of public exhibitions, talks and events, housed in non-arts and temporary spaces around the town of Luton, UK, in 2016; a project that could seemingly happen anywhere but, equally, absolutely nowhere-else at all. On the front-page of the project website they, metaphorically, set their stall out:

“Sunridge Avenue is a suburban street with trees and parked cars. It’s the street in which artist, Dominic Allan grew up, in which his ageing parents still live. It’s a street that is both inoffensive and undemanding, save for the nightmare neighbours at no. 34. It’s also the name of this project because it is a place from which all things can grow. It’s close to town; it’s walk-able from the train station. Easyjet planes flyover and you can hear the football... It is the name for this project because the gallery space in the town is used as a crèche and for business meetings. And they charge artists to use it.” (Dominic Allan, Sunridge Avenue Projects, 2016)

Both projects/organisations are examples of the social value I previously mentioned; the activities, and the experience of the activities, are the most important thing, but the residual value to the space and the communities they exist within are of equal importance. A legacy exists in the form of a social currency that the activities create.

Whilst I am making no specific claim for the production of new political action from my work, I am identifying my research interest that a product of the artworld can have affect and agency, or be designed to have affect and agency, outside of that sphere; examining whether the integrity of an artwork is compromised by its goal to

successfully exist, and be relational, outside of a traditional arts arena. Whilst my argument is weighted towards ideas that any activity, given the appropriate motivation and context, can be classed as art, I am particularly interested in the position of the audience; in their relationship to 'the work' and the ensuing cultural, political and emotional experience.

This hierarchy of 'art' and 'not-art' is something I have a particular interest in challenging, by creating situations and spaces where this discussion ceases to be relevant. This is where Gell's theory of social agency and engagement begins to inform my research, around the relationships that an artwork can have beyond the artworld or without even acknowledging its presence or connection to it. Gell's theories, centred on art's agency from an anthropological perspective, go some way to addressing my own concerns with Bourriaud's assertions. It is his belief that traditional aesthetic theories of art are too passive and fail to acknowledge or unpack the complex relationships that exist between artist, material, action, and an intention for influencing the thoughts and actions of others.

On May 20th 2006, I staged a live event at The Nottingham Boat Club as part of a fringe festival to the 6th edition of the British Art Show. This event - 'A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation' (2006) - is a work I will discuss in depth in Chapter 3 of this critical overview. Briefly, the event consisted of an on-stage interview between me, Geoff Lucas and Phil Myatt; Black Sabbath's original roadie and the promoter of Mother's Club in Erdington, West Midlands (UK), respectively. This was followed by a performance from a Black Sabbath tribute act, Sack Sabbath. This was the first live event I'd staged as an artwork. Knowing that the event held as much interest to music fans as the arts audience, I made a point of additionally advertising it in local music and record stores. The event sold out and was well received by the collected audience, which included the appointed evaluator of these fringe events. In a brief exchange with the evaluator at the end of the night I was informed that, in terms of the fringe festival report, this sold-out event had not been a success as they had spoken to a few members of the audience who hadn't been aware they were at a visual arts event. It was this work and, specifically, thinking in depth about the evaluator's comment, that revealed the opportunities and challenges found in much of the making and research contained in this portfolio; the idea that, from my perspective, the audience were so much more than an audience, they were an active and essential element in the creation of the work. The lack of perceived 'success' of the event, due to the fact they didn't define their experience as attending a visual arts

event, was of little relevance to me. Quite aside from any of my own intentions, this assessment felt invalidating of the experience those audience members had inhabited.

Here, I will offer one direct quotation from Gell's text that, in the case of this study, eloquently illustrates my own position and research interests:

"In place of symbolic communication, I place all the emphasis on agency, intention, causation, result and transformation. I view art as a system of action, intended to change the world rather than encode symbolic propositions about it." (Gell 1998)

Gell goes on to state his lack of interest in art criticism and I would, again, follow him in this. Art criticism primarily engages in relative discussions of validity or success within an institutionally recognised artworld and not its impact beyond this environment. For the sake of this practice and research my interest specifically positions itself mostly outside of this world, focusing on the function and impact of the work on the social relationships that it brings about and utilises.

Take, for example, public protests or rallies. These are not discussed in realistic terms as being 'good' or 'bad'; the success of a protest is judged, primarily, on the agency it transfers and the impact it goes on to have. Of course, there can be discussion at the time as to whether the protest conformed to accepted social boundaries, whether it was peaceful or whether it created or caused any violence or destruction of private/public property, in which instance the discussion would largely be pejorative. However, even in this instance, where in the moment a protest or the actions within it would be deemed 'bad', if the agency that it transfers ultimately goes on to motivate change or action for a largely perceived good, then the 'bad' recedes and the success of that transference and intent takes centre stage. This is just to reiterate my lack of interest in offering any formal criticism on art, or 'art criticism', as it is generally called. That is to say, my interest in this study and my research lays elsewhere. Art-critically bad art can carry agency – though in acknowledging this I am not, specifically, identifying my own work presented here as art-critically bad, merely acknowledging the irrelevance to my research of traditional art-criticism. My research objectives are not a methodology to decide whether art is good or bad, but instead to enable the observation of the effect of its agency in the world and the role that audience plays within the construct, and activation of, the artwork.

There are two other assertions of Gell's I must mention in this introduction, which are things I believe my research specifically contradicts and builds upon. The first is that once an artwork has been 'enfranchised' as an artwork (Gell 1998) then it exists exclusively as an artwork and can, therefore, only truly be discussed within a framework of art theory; to discuss it outside of this negates its stated and acknowledged purpose for existence, which is to be viewed and experienced as an artwork. Whilst I believe this potential is something an artist must be wary of, the research I will present makes a claim that it is possible for an artwork to exist equally and credibly, concurrently, within an art theoretical and not-art theoretical framework.

In the final stages of siting a major public work, 'Alight' (fig.1), there was much discussion from the commissioner and project managers as to whether we should include a plaque somewhere in the vicinity to identify the title and creator of the work (me). I felt strongly that one should not be included as to do so would have located this object firmly within the world of art and public sculpture. My objection was connected to Gell's aforementioned point about enfranchisement; a logical extension being that once an object has been seen, or identified, as an artwork it is impossible for a viewer to un-see this and so it conditions every thought or action they then have in response to that object.

It is highly likely that anyone coming across 'Alight' would identify it as public sculpture, as it serves no obvious practical function in the space. However, despite this inevitable identification of 'Alight' as public sculpture, I felt that to include a plaque would establish a cultural hierarchy of the kind I am working to dissolve. It would announce to viewers that they are a viewer and, it, is an artwork and therefore they should draw on their preconditioned responses to public art in how they view, interpret or navigate the object. This conditioned response could create an artificial barrier between viewer and object, in terms of their perceived capacity to engage with it. My artworks - developed through my research into the relationship between the audience and the artwork, be it a temporary billboard, a performance, or a permanent public sculpture - are a journey in moving the work in to a space where no assumed hierarchy exists.

I am of the opinion that the art world actually contains many (often quite disconnected) worlds, each with their own problems, whether that be the '*dispossession, displacement and social-cleansing*' (Pritchard 2017) of artwashing through the institutional co-option of public art and socially-engaged practice, or the

dominance of a capitalist market that creates '*a countervailing sphere of invisible or overlooked art production and its history*' (Sholette and Charnley 2017), but my aforementioned interest in achieving a semi-circumnavigation of the mainstream or, in this instance the art world, is primarily born of unease at the presence of a dominating voice of categorisation, or 'enfranchisement'.

Recognised art-spaces, in the broadest possible use of that term, are so loaded with this voice of enfranchisement, I would argue they strip away the potential for something to be viewed as anything other than an artwork. That's not to say the work can't achieve anything of interest on its own artistic terms, but it will struggle to escape its categorisation as, first and foremost, an artwork. This is one of the problems highlighted in Bishop's aforementioned critique of relational artworks. Another example is the exhibition 'Spank the Monkey' (2006) at The Baltic, Gateshead, UK. In its own words, '*the first serious international examination of urban and suburban art bridging the gap between the street and the traditional art space*' (Baltic+, *Spank the Monkey*, 2006), the exhibition included a selection of artists associated with street-art, comics, graffiti and associated cultures such as skateboarding; what would primarily be classed as D.I.Y. or outside-of-the-mainstream pursuits. At the time, I was developing my own national-touring project based around the crossovers between art and skateboarding, 'Among the Living', and what I set out to achieve was the antithesis of 'Spank the Monkey'. Where the Baltic exhibition drew an existing culture in to its galleries and delivered a sanitised version of that culture to an arts audience (presumably in the hope of bringing new, not-art, audiences through their doors), 'Among the Living' sought to co-opt the spaces where this culture already existed and create a shared space through which contemporary art could be experienced; essentially, the graphics printed on the bottom of skateboards. In doing so, neither culture was compromised, nor placed in hierarchical opposition to one other, they simply co-existed.

Much of the work I discuss in this critical overview specifically seeks to exist, equally, within an art and not-art context. Whilst it is enfranchised as 'art' by one section of the audience, this is of little or no relevance to another section who will have come to the work through some other means, such as seeing an advert for a music event in a record store, or simply happening upon the work without any visual indicators that what they are seeing or experiencing is a work of art. Whilst it can be discussed within a framework of art theory it can equally, and relevantly, be discussed within any number of other frameworks relating to its specific form; concerts, performances,

street preaching, advertising/billboards. It's enfranchisement as an artwork to one section of its audience does not negate its capacity to be enfranchised, and discussed, as the 'other' thing that informs and shapes it.

To illustrate this action, I will offer two examples of others work. The first is simply analogous to the research I am engaged in here.

In July 2016 the comedian and broadcaster, Richard Herring, took part in the 'Tempting Failure Festival of Performance Art and Noise' (Tempting Failure 2016). He had been invited to perform a live version of his 'Me1 vs. Me2 Snooker with Richard Herring' podcast; a podcast in which he plays himself at snooker, whilst also commentating on the game (Richard Herring 2016). The comedian, known for his introspection in the development of his comedy, states that the podcast is essentially a recreation of his lonely teenage years. He is not a visual artist, nor makes any claim to be for himself or his work. However, the festival curators saw fit to enfranchise this work as visual art within the context of the festival. This thing that existed in the world as a comedy podcast, was brought into a space whereby it now functioned credibly as an artwork for an entirely different audience. At that moment this work existed, both, within an artistic framework as well as those not-art frameworks it already existed within prior to the event.

The second, arguably more complex illustrations, are two experiences of performances/events I attended by the musician Nick Cave; the first, a full concert at Nottingham Ice Arena on September 28th, 2017, the second a more conversational 'evening with' event staged at the Wales Millennium Centre on June 15th, 2019. Cave is known for his preacher-like persona and performances, whilst making no specific claim to be so, or habitation of this role in the way an actor might. The tour in 2017 was the first since the death of Cave's son in 2015 and the subsequent release of his album, 'The Skeleton Tree', which dealt with his grief and loss. It's important to note that, such is Cave's mythological status amongst his fans, that a significant proportion were aware of the significance of these first performances since his son's death. I attended the fourth of a five-night run of UK tour dates, so had been able to observe the response to the previous gigs in the mainstream media and online through my peer network. It was noticeable that people were discussing them in some other way to a concert of music, something more reverential. This was born out by my own experience which was more akin to how I imagine a mass-religious happening than a concert, with a single man able to manipulate the attention and

emotional dial of those 10,000 people present, at will. Something had happened in the moment where Nick Cave had crossed from simply being a musician to occupying some other position, without stating any intention to do so.

The same thing could be observed more closely at the 'evening with' event in June 2019, where Cave performed songs on the piano and answered questions from the audience. To contextualise this, Cave runs an online forum/website, 'The Red Hand Files', where people are invited to ask him anything they like, whether about his life or simply his views on a given subject. The specific example I will give was when a woman in the audience chose to tell Cave, and the sold-out auditorium, about the death of her child to brain cancer. This culminated with her asking Cave for a hug, whereon he stepped down from the stage and embraced the woman. In that moment there was a profound sense of connection and healing, again, in much the way I would imagine an equivalent religious event to feel. In both of these instances, I draw a direct comparison between Nick Cave, the musician, beginning to operate in this 'other' space in a credible sense, and also the equal role of the audience in the creation and activation of that moment.

The second of Gell's assertions I wish to highlight is that his theory was developed in relation to physical objects that can be classed as artworks, not things that would fall under the category of 'live art' such as performances or readings (Gell 1998). Through my work and research I have specifically sought to challenge and extend Gell's theories in relation to what would broadly be designated as performance. In some instances, such as the billboard I will discuss in Chapter 5, I would go so far as to say that I am making a claim for the capacity of a physical object or artwork to function as something more akin to a performance in its own right, in relation to the key role that the audience play in its activation and completion as an artwork.



Fig.1. *Alight* (2014) - Permanent public work sited in Cardiff (UK) city centre
Image credit Jamie Woodley

2

Chapters Overview

In Chapter 3: *Free For All Forever*, I will discuss my works 'A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation' (2006) and 'Metal Militia' (2014) in specific relation to the creation of a space that can be credibly inhabited by, both, an arts audience and a non-arts audience. I will also begin to examine the incorporation of the audience as a fabric element into the construct of the artwork, beyond that of simply viewer or recipient.

In Chapter 4: *Pass it On*, I will discuss my works 'God So Loves Decay' (2016) and 'Ganas de Vivir' (2016), in specific relation to the offering or passing of a token, object, gift or interaction. I will contextualise this practice and its use within tribal exchange rituals as detailed in the studies of, both, Gell (1998) and Mauss (1950), examining how this approach establishes a connection with recipients of the work overall.

In Chapter 5: *Cultural Alloys*, I will discuss my works 'The Death of Peter Fechter' (2007) and 'Free For All Forever' (2016) in specific relation to site, and the role that site plays in the construct of the work, and in the understanding or processing of the work for an audience. I will examine how a preconditioned understanding of a site, or space, by an audience can be used in the construction of a work.

In relation to my research methodologies, the public staging of the works included in this portfolio is a key methodology in itself. There are numerous steps on the way to arriving at the point of exhibition, but the physical staging of the work/event, and its promotion, provide the physical space in which the research and observations can take place.

3

Free For All Forever**3.1 Research Objective**

To examine the exchange between ‘the work’, ‘the world’ and ‘the audience’, and their specific influence and impact on each other, through the creation of a space that can be inhabited by two separate audiences – art world and non-art world - who experience an identical activity, and yet understand it differently.

In this chapter I’m primarily going to focus on the two works ‘A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation’ (2006) (fig.2-8) and ‘Metal Militia’ (2014) (fig.9-10). Although nearly a decade apart, these two works are quite similar in their form and intention. Objectives and findings originally considered and observed through ‘A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation’ (2006) were revisited and re-examined through the latter work.

3.2 A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation (2006) – Overview and Method

This work is a key foundation in the wider body of research that constitutes my claim for this PhD. Commissioned as part of a city-wide fringe festival happening alongside the Nottingham leg of The British Art Show 6, it took the form of a one-off live event at The Nottingham Boat Club on the banks of the River Trent. The event consisted of an on-stage interview (fig.2-3) between me, Geoff Lucas – Black Sabbath’s first roadie – and Phil Myatt – the owner and promoter of Mothers club in Erdington, followed by a performance from one of the UK’s leading Black Sabbath tribute bands, Sack Sabbath (fig.4-5). Mothers existed from 1968–1971, above a furniture store on Erdington High Street, and was very important to the music scene of its time, staging shows by many of the world’s leading rock acts in their ascendance, such as Led Zeppelin, The Who, T.Rex and Pink Floyd (who recorded half of their ‘Umma Gumma’ album there). Black Sabbath, often credited with the invention of what has come to be known as ‘heavy metal’, were amongst those who performed at the club, their first time being on 11th March 1970 (Graham Young, *Remembering Mothers*, 2015). Geoff Lucas was their roadie at that time.

This event developed from a project I’d been working on for the organisation ‘The Public’ in West Bromwich. They commissioned a series of projects under the umbrella title of ‘Wonders’, asking artists to respond to the locality by developing a project around something they felt to be a ‘wonder of West Bromwich/the West Midlands’. I have a long-standing interest in rock music and heavy metal and, for me,

a 'wonder' of the West Midlands was the fact that it had given birth to this highly influential form of music. Specific to West Bromwich, members of the bands Led Zeppelin and Judas Priest had grown up in the town. My instinctive love of this music has become more analytical over the years and heavy metal, as a cultural, political and sociological entity, is something I have returned to on many occasions – including the other work I will be discussing in this chapter, 'Metal Militia' (2014).

The other consideration within the 'Wonders' commissions were that they all had to engage with web-technology in some way. I chose to develop an online archive of stories and memorabilia based around the birth of heavy metal in the region (fig.6). Specifically, I was looking to gather and archive material that would never make it in to a museum of memorabilia or a formal biography of a band or musician, but were the kinds of things that have enormous value when shared between fans – a t-shirt given to someone by Robert Plant of Led Zeppelin for fixing his lawnmower, a record given to someone by Ozzy Osbourne as a teenager as payment of a debt; pub stories and objects of little value outside of a very specific culture and context.

In this work I am interested in the cultural value that unofficial memorabilia and stories shared amongst fans take on. A term I've developed to describe this value – in particular, the moment in which this value is created – is 'cultural alchemy'. What I am referring to is the moment when, for example, something is exchanged between one fan and another, or a musician and a fan, and whilst the thing in itself is not precious in economic terms – it could even be impossible to ascribe economic value to the thing which is being exchanged, such as an anecdote or story - what happens in that moment of exchange is the creation and attachment of value which will be understood, and shared, by other people engaged by that specific culture. A plectrum, in material terms, is a cheap piece of plastic but when it comes from the hand of a respected musician it takes on an entirely different value (economic, on some small level, but primarily it retains an intangible essence of the performer it has come from – a cultural value). Whilst a spoken story or anecdote is not, generally, shared for economic gain, there is a cultural value attached to it that is acknowledged, and shared in, when the recipient chooses to pass it on within the culture. The creation of that value is what I mean by 'cultural alchemy'.

The work I developed specifically for the 'Wonders' project became an online archive of the stories and memorabilia I gathered. To compile a record of stories and memorabilia I set up stalls in local libraries (fig.7) in order to interview people for the

project. I further engaged the public through local newspapers and radio stations, and followed other information and leads that I gathered through a word-of-mouth process. I would meet someone at a library who would tell me I should speak to someone else, or I would receive a phone call following a local newspaper article, which would lead to an interview with someone who would then recommend other people to talk to. Also key to this process, and my objectives, was an assumed trust; I had no intention of corroborating or authenticating the objects or stories I was being told and shown – partly, as by their nature, it would have been virtually impossible to do so but, more importantly, I was prepared to allow these things to exist in this place of trust, believing that if someone had engaged with the project there would most likely be some authenticity or truth behind whatever they presented to me, even if it had become somewhat embellished over the years. This trust was in keeping with the essence of the project and the phenomenon of how these things are lovingly shared amongst fans.

It was through this process that I met the former-roadie, Geoff Lucas, and the former-music promoter, Phil Myatt. They were extremely generous with their time and their stories from this period, which led me to develop the idea for a live event whereby we could share these stories with a live audience. The decision to hold this event in Nottingham, practically speaking, was inspired by the fact it was happening as part of the British Art Show fringe. In many ways it would have made more contextual sense to hold it in the West Midlands somewhere, but I was also inspired by an anecdote that Geoff Lucas had told me during our first meeting, about Black Sabbath playing at The Nottingham Boat Club and how it was the first time the band had ever been able to afford two vans to get to a gig – one for the band, one for the equipment. This gave me the context for the intended event.

The Nottingham Boat Club, much like Mothers, had been an important gig venue on the circuit back in the 1960s, 70s and 80s. Despite being nothing more than a boat club, it hosted an incredible roster of acts through that time – Led Zeppelin, Eric Clapton, The Sex Pistols, Jethro Tull, Black Sabbath and Iron Maiden, to name a few (Chris Lewington, *Boat Bands*, 2020).

In terms of the live event, from an artistic point of view, I was interested in taking an act who make their living performing the songs of one specific band, and placing them back into a context where those songs would have been performed by the actual band, many years previously. The very existence of tribute acts is based on

cultural nostalgia – they usually perform as a ‘classic’ line-up of a band, playing only songs from a very specific period in the band’s life. As such, in a time where many older bands have reformed to cash in on the nostalgia that exists around their earlier career, often missing a key member or two, I was interested in the credibility of the experience that could be had by putting a tribute act on in such an authentic venue, when compared with the experience of seeing the weakened original band going through the motions in an arena. In this proposition I am not attempting to establish a hierarchy of experience. Rather, I wished to acknowledge that the combination of elements I was bringing together may in fact offer a more credible version of the experience that nostalgia tells us we want.

Another key consideration was the audience. This event was being staged as part of a visual arts festival by a visual artist, so at its core it is an artwork or, rather, a time-limited arts event/performance. For the reasons discussed above, the conceptual framework for this was the simultaneous sharing of this cultural experience with the fringe arts festival audience and also a non-visual arts audience – an audience of music/rock fans. Again, it was important that no hierarchy, or distinction, was made between these two different audiences. The project was advertised as a live art event through the festival networks to a visual arts audience and was equally promoted through appropriate channels, such as record and music stores, as a gig/event to a music audience (fig.8). People from both audiences turned up, they paid, they experienced the event, and left. This was the first instance of my creating and staging something that would exist in a shared cultural space, and this thinking had a profound influence on my next project.

3.3 Metal Militia (2014) – Overview and Method

This work developed out of a context-specific proposition from a commissioner, to research Berwick-Upon-Tweed and develop a project/artwork based on that research. During my research in the town I visited the Berwick Barracks; a former military barracks, now an English Heritage property and museum. Such is the scale of Berwick that these barracks, and the military history of the town, are still very visible and important to its culture and economy. Contained in the museum is a history of the barracks and, more specifically, a history of the formation of the Kings Own Scottish Borderers regiment, who were housed there from 1721 until 1963. That regiment ceased to exist independently following its amalgamation with four other regiments in 2006. The museum tells the story of how on March 18th 1689, when Edinburgh was facing an imminent attack from the Jacobites, the 3rd Earl of Leven

walked through the streets beating a drum and raised an army of 800 men in the space of two hours who went on to repel the Jacobites. It was this militia that formed the basis for what became the Kings Own Scottish Borderers. Due to the method of their creation the regiment retained the right, by military law, to 'raise a militia by beat of drum'.

This history, and phrase, became the starting point for the project I developed. Due to my aforementioned interest in rock and heavy metal and its expanded cultural associations, I drew connections between the idea of a militia being drawn together by the sound of a beating drum, and the moment of a gig or performance, when like-minded individuals are drawn to the same space by the potential of the music. I also drew connections between the idea of the cultural sub-genre in itself – that of rock/heavy metal – and the idea of a regiment or militia. Much has been written about the fashion of sub-cultures, suffice to say that there is a uniform of sorts that is traditionally associated with heavy metal – leather jackets, denim jeans, t-shirts, bullet-belts, studded wristbands etc. Quite aside from the obvious military connections with elements of this 'uniform', the mere fact that it exists places the musical sub-genre of heavy metal and their fans - often referred to as 'armies' – into a direct contextual comparison with military regiments. There were also the obvious, and somewhat clichéd, associations to be drawn around ideas of war, terror and death – all things that are frequently present in a visual and narrative sense within heavy metal and its sub-genres. Through further research, I discovered that whilst the Kings Own Scottish Borderers no longer existed, the piping band that had been attached to the regiment still does and continues to perform.

This collection of references became the starting point for the project I developed (fig.9). My idea was to take the piping-band and have them perform traditional piping-tunes, of the sort that would have led soldiers in to battle for hundreds of years. Introduced alongside, and in to, this performance would be drumbeats written and performed by an extreme-metal drummer. Extreme-metal is not, in itself, a specific sub-genre of heavy metal, but an umbrella term for a collection of sub-genres that push heavy metal to its sonic extremes. This often incorporates extreme speed in the playing, along with heightened narrative content of what would traditionally be considered dark or horrific subject matter. The drummer I approached to be involved was Nicholas Barker, who is widely viewed as one of the world's leading extreme-metal drummers. Coincidentally, I later discovered he is also a military history fan

and so was keen to be involved. The plan was to have this performance take place on the parade ground of the barracks, with an audience present.

Key to the development of the performance was that the piping-tunes performed were not altered or compromised in any way. Numerous examples can be cited of artists who have taken genres of music and repurposed them through seemingly contradictory instruments or arrangements, including Jeremy Deller's 'Acid Brass' (1997) or Matt Stokes 'Sacred Selections' (2005). This work was the exact opposite of their interpretative approach. Far from taking heavy metal songs and performing them on bagpipes, this was about bringing something of the extreme/heavy metal culture to these original piping tunes to create something new, and to carry with it the weight of the associations I have discussed above.

As with 'A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation' (2006) my intended audience for this project was to be made up from more than a visual arts audience. As with that previous work, there was a visual arts audience who would come to engage with the event as an artwork, but there was also the heavy metal audience who would be drawn by the involvement of Nicholas Barker. Additionally, there was the audience associated with the piping-band who would be interested to experience this take on traditional piping-tunes. Again, as with 'A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation' (2006), it was promoted independently to these different audiences – the arts organisation dealt with the promotion to the arts and local audience, whilst a specialist rock/metal PR agency promoted the event to their audience. This was, again, a deliberate attempt to avoid creating any hierarchy or cultural preference over the space into which the audience/s would be stepping on the night of the performance.

The performance was due to take place on the barracks parade ground but this, unfortunately, had to be changed as after an initial agreement with English Heritage they went away and researched Nicholas Barker. Nick has played in many very successful bands within a range of extreme-metal sub-genres, but the band in which he made his name is the British Black Metal band, Cradle of Filth, who as the name suggests, take an anti-Christian stance in their lyrics. In 1993 the band released a promotional t-shirt that has become known as the most offensive t-shirt ever produced by a rock band (Dan Epstein, *The Story of the Most Controversial Shirt in Rock History*, 2015), featuring a topless, masturbating, nun on its front, with the phrase 'Jesus is a Cunt' on the back. This has led to several wearers of the t-shirt,

including Nick himself, being arrested under profanity and public disorder laws. Despite Nick having left the band in 1999, the controversy that surrounds this t-shirt, and by association Nick, remains. English Heritage were offended by this t-shirt and withdrew their support for the event. (This opens up an interesting space for a dialogue around accountability and responsibility, in particular how long does someone remain accountable for an associated action, although that is not directly relevant to this study.) Consequently, the event was moved into a small performance space in The Maltings arts centre in Berwick.

Despite losing the contextual relevance of the barracks parade ground, having experienced the performance, there was a heightened intensity of experience created by containing it in this smaller, enclosed, space and ultimately I think the performance benefitted from this unfortunate turn of events. By the nature of such projects things rarely work out as originally planned. Embracing such moments, that in the first instance often feel quite catastrophic, has become an active part of how projects now develop. This feels entirely in-keeping with the research that runs through this study; an acknowledgement that the elements I am drawing together are just one part of the process and it's their interaction with an audience and the real world that, ultimately, forms them into a resolved work.

One direct element of collaboration in this process was with the artist Christophe Szpajdel. He is well known for the logos he creates for bands that sit within the various extreme-metal sub-genres. These logos can be seen as a visually extreme version of a traditional heavy metal band logo, often highly complex to the point of illegibility. Christophe was commissioned to produce a logo of the project title, 'Metal Militia' (fig.10.), visually and contextually elevating the title to something akin to a band name.

3.4 Research Findings

The construction and staging of both of these works was explicitly engaged in research on the relationship between the audience and the work, specifically the creation of a space to be inhabited by audiences from two different cultural backgrounds or interest groups. In the first instance the challenge was whether it was possible to successfully create such a space where the work existed credibly, and equally, for two different audiences.

My experience as a practitioner has offered insight into how contemporary visual art often seeks to engage with cultures outside of its own in this way, yet often what emerges is a visual-arts-influenced version of the culture it is attempting to explore or engage; a somewhat compromised version that lacks credibility. These problems are touched upon by many, including Kaprow (1966), Dutton (2003) and Rancière (2009) and often seem to focus on the staging of the work, whether that be something that is too physically referential of a distracting-other or whether that distraction is present in how the work is framed, culturally speaking. This was something I attempted to mitigate through my approach to publicising the events to its constituent audiences; an attempt to avoid any unwanted cross-pollination from one culture to the other (primarily, visual arts to music).

As discussed in the introduction, a key point of reference in my research has been Alfred Gell's 'Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory' (1998). A particular gap in that study is in his stated position that his research only considers the artwork (or the 'index' as he identifies it) as a pre-existing physical object (Gell 1998). There is no consideration of performance or live art in relation to the theories that he develops, which is interesting in itself as the text contains an increased focus on tribal exchange rituals, which is an association I will explore later in this critical overview. He does consider the recipient of the experience, but due to his fairly conventional position that prioritises the artwork as a resolved object, there is no exploration of the potential for the audience, or the recipient of the work, to be seen as a fabric element within the work, or their potential to be included as a literal material in the construct of the work. I take the view of a performance or constructed live-experience, including the audience, as a collection of elements brought together to create a new whole, in much the same way as a painter or sculptor would bring together the necessary material elements to create a new work (which, on completion, we don't view as a collection of those elements, but as an independent entity – an artwork).

The 'recipients' or audience for an artwork are inherently engaged in a 'social relationship' (Gell 1998) with the work, in that they are either being affected by it, or they have caused it to come in to being in some way (on one level, an artist makes a work with the intention for it to be seen by a contemporary arts audience, or in another interpretation of this social relationship, a work may come into being at the request or instruction of a patron or commissioner). It is my assertion that there is also the potential for a more fundamental bringing-in-to-being of the artwork, through the incorporation of the audience as a fabric element within the work.

In relation to Gell's discussion of agents (things that act upon) and patients (things that are acted upon), there is a space in which the relationships I set up with the audience extend way beyond the role of simply 'patient', or 'recipient'. Whilst on one level they are a conscious and willing audience, present by their own volition and choice, on another I am making the claim that without their presence in the room these artworks are incomplete and, therefore, not fully resolved or functioning. This is different to the question of whether a play performed without an audience is still a play, or whether a painting without a viewer is still an artwork – in both instances I argue that, yes, they are still those things, they are just not being viewed. However, in the case of the works being discussed in this chapter (and others I will discuss, briefly, at the end), the audience is a vital element within its construct. Where a more traditional view of an artwork is that it carries the agency of the artist and delivers it to the recipient, in setting up the relationships I did with these works I was observing the potential for the recipients to bring agency into this environment and exchange as well, irrespective of whether they know they are carrying this agency. Simply by engaging with the potential of the performance or situation they fundamentally shape the artwork itself and become an agent in that exchange.

However, that is not to reduce the audience simply to the equivalent of a canvas or piece of stone. Whilst they are, unknowingly, playing that role, the creation of this space or work that can credibly bridge two – or more – cultural perspectives is also an intellectual projection of the recipients. In all instances we must consider the intellectual and historical baggage that enters the room with the audience and how this shapes theirs, and others, experience of the work. A useful way to consider this is in relation to a 'prototype' (Gell 1998) – the original source that the artwork represents – and the prototype's direct influence on the artist and, ultimately, the work that they make. I believe the same consideration can be applied to the audience. They will have seen the press release for the live event and, based on their reading of it, coupled with their existing knowledge and experience, they will have constructed an image in their minds as to what this event will look like, or what the experience will be. This perceived (pre)understanding acts as the agent for their attendance at the event, at which point, on arrival, they enter into the fabric of the work in terms of its resolution and completion. Equally, in the instance of 'A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation' (2006) there is an out-of-time-ness to the work that must be taken into consideration. As our understanding of past events shifts over time, the constructed image or expectation that the audience are carrying with them is based, somewhat, on their knowledge of prior events. Whether this knowledge is

first or secondhand, a significant period of history has passed since the original events that inform that knowledge – where the events were once contemporary, the passing of time has enabled much processing of those events to have happened, formally and informally. This collected processing and passed time is unconsciously entering the room with the audience, not simply their desire to see something that they think they might like. An image, or in this instance, a live-event, contains ‘unthought thought’ (Rancière 2009) – the creation of a new thought in the recipient that is beyond or outside of the control of either the artist or the recipient. This potential creates a ‘zone of indeterminacy’ capable of straddling thought and unthought, activity and passivity, art and not-art. This indeterminate zone, where any interpretation becomes possible and the need for categorisation begins to dissolve, becomes an intellectual representation of the space I was striving to create through the artwork. In setting up this event and this space, I was not attempting to create something that existed as a hybrid between visual arts and music, or art and not-art, but to create a space whereby the integrity of both remain intact depending on the cultural perspective of the recipient, the knowledge they are bringing into the room, and their unthought thoughts. As such, the space itself remains neutral, in so far as it does not preference one perspective over the other.

3.5 Other Relevant Presented Works

This space and consideration is also present in other works presented in this portfolio, in a lesser or tangential way, so I will discuss each briefly. The following works moved the art in to a public space in a much more absolute way, removing any sense of a formal venue to be attended. In many ways the research involved in the above projects lead directly to this decision to move things to this more absolute space – even further away from a ‘traditional’ or easily accessible visual arts audience.

God So Loves Decay (2014) (detailed information in Ch.4): As a work designed to be happened upon in the street, there was no staging around it to make it clear whether this was anything other than what it appeared to be – a street preacher reciting texts to whoever was prepared to listen. That said, the event had been promoted by the commissioner and so the arts audience in the town were aware of the time and location of the performance. As such, this work has a specific relationship with the works discussed in this chapter. The credibility of this work felt as strong, if not slightly heightened, in comparison to ‘A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation’ (2006) possibly due to the site we were using, which is well-known to

the city as a site for street-preaching. This use of site will be discussed further in Chapter 4.

Free For All Forever (2016) (detailed information in Ch.5):

This work existed almost entirely without any visual arts context surrounding it. Whilst this project was listed on my website and that of the host organisation (I-70 Sign Show), the potential audience for the work was so massive (every single person in a vehicle on the I-70 over a month) that the chances of any significant number of those who experienced it seeing either of our websites were very slim. The nature of this project – a billboard on a route known for housing radical-religious posters – creates the potential for a huge number of audiences. It cannot be neatly broken down to a music-or-art equivalent, or even people-who-want-to-see-it-and-those-that-don't. The staging and imposition of the billboard is designed to reach every single person who drives past, irrespective of interest or cultural leaning. As such it becomes difficult to discuss it in the same terms as the works above, even though there is a clear connection.



Fig.2. *A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation* (2006)

l-r. Geoff Lucas, Phil Myatt, S Mark Gubb

Image credit Jonathan Waring



Fig.3. *A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation* (2006)

l-r. Geoff Lucas and Phil Myatt

Image credit Steve Fisher



Fig.4. *A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation* (2006)
Sack Sabbath performing
Image credit Steve Fisher



Fig.5. *A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation* (2006)
The audience during Sack Sabbath's performance
Image credit Steve Fisher

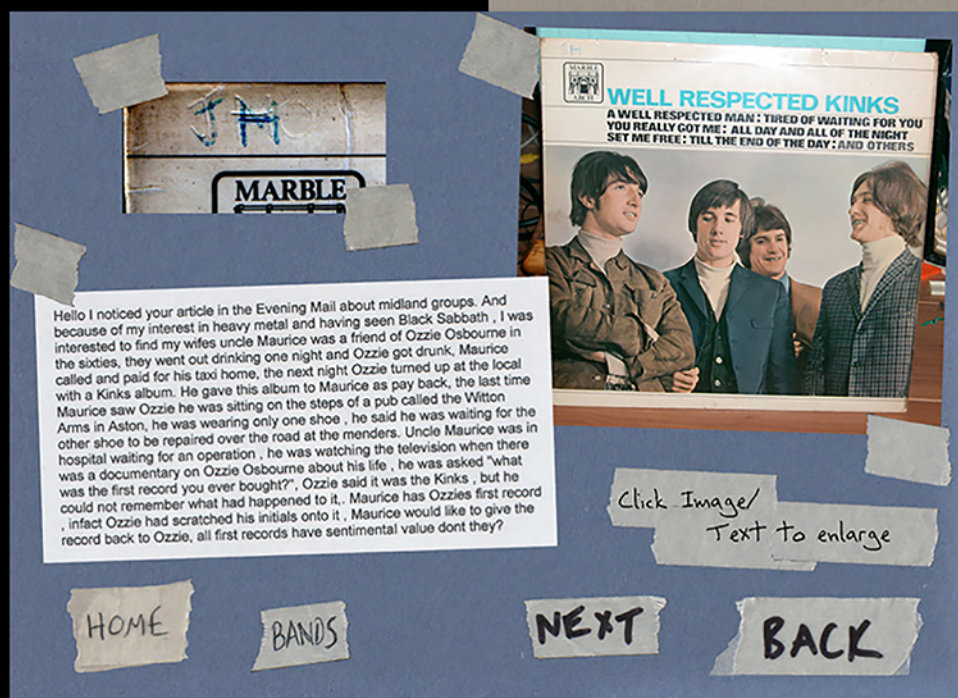
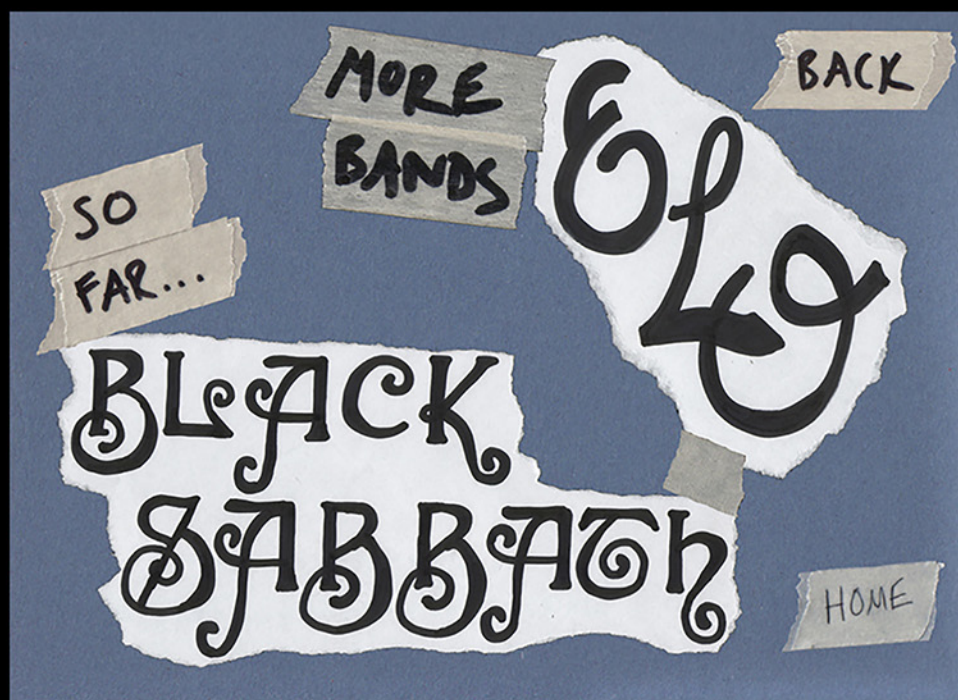


Fig.6. Screenshots of webpages from A Real Rock Archive (2006) online archive

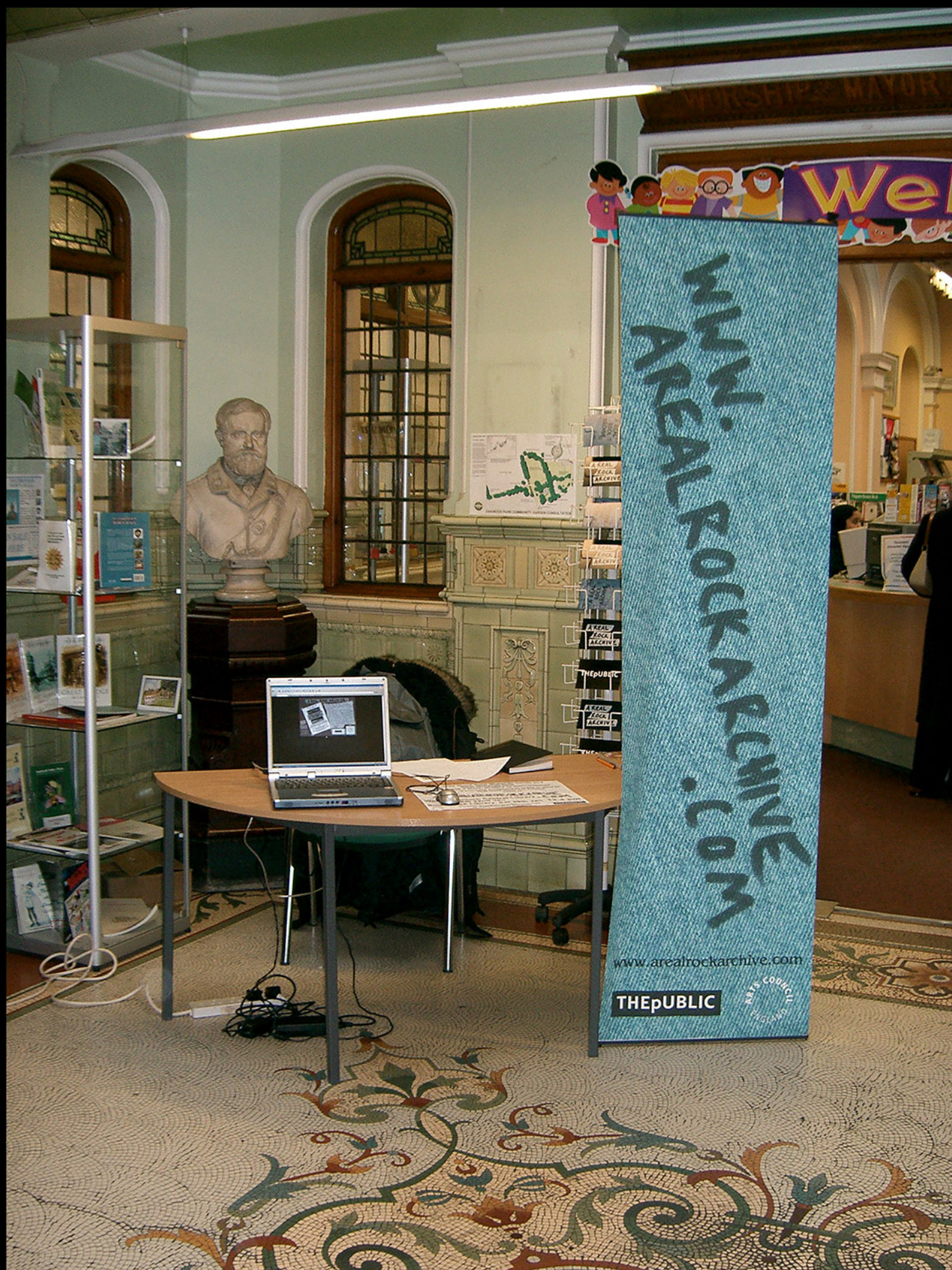


Fig.7. A Real Rock Archive (2006)
Information gathering at Central Library, West Bromwich

A REAL ROCK ARCHIVE PRESENTS

Sack Sabbath

PLUS AN ON STAGE INTERVIEW WITH

GEOFF 'LUKE' LUCAS AND **PHIL HEATT**

SABBATH ROADIE/TOUR MANAGER
1968-1976

PROMOTER, MOTHERS CLUB
BIRMINGHAM, 1968-1971

SATURDAY MAY 20TH

NOTTINGHAM BOAT CLUB, WEST BRIDGFORD, 7.30pm

TICKETS £4 ADVANCE £5 ON DOOR
TO RESERVE, 0115 912 8991, MARK@AREALROCKARCHIVE.COM

An evening of music and
conversation, celebrating the musical
heritage of the Midlands

An on stage interview with two of the
guys that were in the thick of it,
followed by a gig from, Black Sabbath
tribute band, Sack Sabbath

GEOFF 'LUKE' LUCAS

Having been friends with Geezer Butler and a roadie
with Geezer's pre-Sabbath band, The Rarebreed, Luke
became Sabbath's chief roadie, right from
the pubs and clubs of the UK,
through their globe spanning world tours

PHIL HEATT

Establishing 'Mothers' club above a furniture store on
Erdington High Street, Birmingham, in 1968,

Phil could never have imagined how successful it
would be. With John Peel as resident DJ, Mothers soon
became THE club to play, with the likes of Sabbath,
Zeppelin, The Who, Deep Purple and Pink Floyd all
taking to the stage.

By the time it closed, it was voted 'Best Rock Club in
the World', by America's 'Billboard' Magazine, ahead
of the likes of NYC's and LA's Philmore East and West

Fig.8. Flyer design,
front and back, for
A Real Rock Archive:
In Conversation
(2006) event



Fig.9. *Metal Militia* (2014)
Images from the performance at The Maltings, Berwick-Upon-Tweed, Friday 6th June, 2014
Image credits Mark Pinder



Fig.10. *Metal Militia* logo
Designed by Christophe Szpajdel

4 *Pass it On*

4.1 Research Objective

To examine the direct interaction between the artwork and the viewer – physical, emotional, intellectual; the offering of a physical object, gift or interaction. A literal reach beyond the typical viewing experience and the potential to establish an expanded spatio-temporality in the receipt of the artwork.

In this chapter, the primary focus will be the two works 'God So Loves Decay' (2016) (fig.13-18) and 'Ganas de Vivir' (2016) (fig.19). These works were made within six months of each other in 2016 and, whilst different in their form, both engaged with the idea of the passing of an object or token; an action which, both, ensures the transference of my artistic agency through the work and continues that transfer in the form of the object/token. They also pushed my research in to delivering artworks in non-arts environments, including the removal, from around the work, of any physical or visual framework recognisable as being of a visual arts event or exhibition; meaning, no pre-defined arts space, supporting information, or other obvious signs of authorship. As the research themes discussed in Chapter 3 formed the foundation for this body of research, the research in this chapter really opens up the idea of exchange, in quite a literal sense, both in terms of a space for exchange and the exchange of an object.

4.2 God So Loves Decay (2016) – Overview and Method

The proposition to develop this work was similar to that discussed in relation to 'Metal Militia' (2014); an invitation from Sunridge Avenue Projects in Luton (Dominic Allan, Sunridge Avenue Projects, 2016) to visit the town and develop a work in relation to something of interest that I uncovered. I had previously undertaken a smaller commission from the same organisation and so I chose to build on the research from that and make a more developed work in response to the Luton-based post-Punk band, UK Decay.

'Sunridge Avenue Projects' was the umbrella title given to a series of projects commissioned by the artist Dominic Allan, a.k.a. Dominic from Luton. Over a period of six months he commissioned a series of exhibitions, talks, performances and events in Luton, culminating in a celebratory event and exhibition at his parent's semi-detached house on Sunridge Avenue. My preliminary commission was included

in a temporary exhibition, 'Init' (2013), in a town centre space temporarily occupied by the organisation Departure Lounge, who partnered with Allan on the show. This work built further on my interest in the cultural heritage of music scenes. In this first instance, I developed a response to the formation and residence in Luton of the influential post-Punk band, UK Decay, formed in 1979 and still active today. The work was a limited-edition t-shirt containing the phrase 'God So Loved the World' (fig.13), which I had commissioned to be rendered in a Black Metal style logo by Christophe Szpajdel – this occasion, in 2013, was the first time we worked together. These t-shirts were available to buy for £20 from the gallery, at which point it was entirely up to the purchaser whether they treated it as a precious, limited, art object or whether they wore it as a t-shirt.

The phrase 'God So Loved the World' was a specific reference to UK Decay's first record release, 'Split Single', which contained an image of the band stood underneath a crucifix on the exterior wall of St Saviour's church in Luton, which incorporated the same phrase; a shortened version of the bible quote, *"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."* John 3:16. I had previously made works where I had taken quotes from heavy metal songs and rendered them in the style of bible quotes on fluorescent paper, resembling the kinds of poster one often sees outside of churches, so in taking this bible quote and rendering it in the style of a band t-shirt I was doing the same thing, but in reverse. My desire to do this came from a long-standing interest in the power of the written word to significantly influence an individual's worldview, from band's lyrics through to religious texts. Also of interest was the longstanding moral conflict that exists between the Church and popular music, particularly genres such as Punk and Heavy Metal, and how for many people an engagement with such musical genres and their lyrics becomes as much of a political and moral compass as the, purported, word of God is for others.

In terms of the 2016 commission, I was interested to further examine ideas of the written word and its impact through time. I also saw this as an opportunity to make the connections I draw between the personal influence of religious texts and band lyrics more explicit. The work I developed was performance-based, drawing upon religious street preachers that can be found in the centre of most major towns and cities around the UK; individuals who tend towards fanaticism in their beliefs who non-specifically address the space and the passers-by reading from their chosen text, often with free literature for general distribution.

The performance took place over a period of four hours on Saturday May 7th, 2016 (fig.14-15). I had engaged the punk musician, Russ Crimewave, to be my preacher and the site we chose, at the advice of Dominic Allan, was directly outside the Town Hall in the town centre. The reason for choosing this site was, in part, as it is an open space and known for having street preachers there, but also the Town Hall's rich political history, it having been burned to the ground in the Peace Day Riots of 1919. Ideas of how the site of the exhibition of an artwork or performance can be co-opted in to its narrative and conceptual framework, even becoming an agent in its own right, is something I will discuss at length in Chapter 5. Suffice to say, in this instance, the widely known political and historical charge of this site further informed the public's reaction or reading of any action I introduced into the space.

Alongside the performance, with the band's permission, I produced a prayer-book-style publication of their collected lyrics (fig.16-17). As well as forming the spoken content for the performance on the day, I was interested in these words as a material element. In the same way the site brought with it a historical and political charge, these words carried a similar one; words written in, and about, the town nearly 40 years previously, that had been distributed around the world through various means, now brought back to their site of inception and reinterpreted through a contemporary filter and all that had passed since their initial writing. A suitcase containing these publications, and the instruction 'Help Yourself', was on the floor next to Russ throughout the performance, an explicit invitation for passers-by to help themselves to copies of the free publication – though I also chose this phrase for its dual connotation of reading as an instruction to passers-by to 'help themselves' i.e. to analyse their own situation and work to change things they deem necessary.

Specific to this research, the three elements I was particularly interested in were the staging of the performance in a public space without any visible acknowledgment of it as an artwork; the role of the passers-by/audience within this set-up; and the exchange of the publication of collected lyrics, both in aural and physical terms.

During the performance Russ read continuously from the publication of the band's collected lyrics. The audience to this performance were the passers-by on that Saturday morning, many of whom ignored it, some of whom stopped to listen for periods of time, others of whom simply cast a glance as they went on their way, plus a few who shouted derisory comments as they passed by. At times the audience were entirely in movement, walking by, whereas at other times small groups would

stop and gather before moving on. This ebbed and flowed across the four hours of the performance. At the end, we simply gathered the suitcase with the remaining publications and left.

A second iteration of this performance took place in February 2018 at UCLA, Los Angeles (fig.18), following my response to a call for papers for the conference, 'Curating Resistance: Punk as Archival Method' (abstract included in Appendix A). My proposal was to re-present this performance in Los Angeles and discuss the project and its relationship to archive. At the conference's request the performance formed part of my presentation, essentially stripping it of any of the additional context of its original site or a similarly charged site in Los Angeles. It was also being delivered to a knowing and willing audience. This provided an interesting space in which to observe and compare the two iterations of the work, as it was so compromised and contradictory to the original site and intention of the work. Prior to the presentation I distributed copies of the free lyric publication to the assembled delegates, but whilst the knowing and willing position of the audience made up for some of the missing support that the original staging of the work contained, it remained a fairly flaccid experience, functioning more as live-documentation of a set of ideas, than a full re-presentation of the work itself.

4.3 Ganas de Vivir (trans. 'Will to Live') (2016) – Overview and Method

This work functioned as a discrete element of a much larger undertaking and body of work titled 'Revelations'. The full 'Revelations' project, which took place between September and December 2016, consisted of two solo gallery shows, an art-fair booth, three public projects/interventions (this was one and, another, 'Free For All Forever' (2016), will be discussed in Chapter 5), a 200-page publication covering twenty years of practice with supporting essays, and a collaborative-intervention in the pages of a quarterly visual arts publication, 'CCQ'. In itself, the full 'Revelations' project and body of work was research in to the 'distributed object' (Gell 1998); in simple terms the idea that this collection of elements, whilst never existing together, exist as a whole in terms of how we are able to consider them. That does not preclude our ability to consider them in isolation, as I am going to do here, but this idea of something being spatio-temporally dispersed is something that I will return to.

In its form, this work was a very simple object; a guitar plectrum with some Anglo-Saxon runes printed on one side (fig.19). The complexity in this work, aside from its narrative content, exists entirely in the social relations that I (as the artist) and it (as

the object) enter in to and pass through. I approached the guitarist Joey Zampella (a.k.a. Joey Z) of a well-known Brooklyn-based, heavy metal band, Life of Agony, to enquire whether he would allow me to place some artwork on one side of the plectrums he would be using on an upcoming world tour. It is standard that guitarists in successful bands will get plectrums printed with their name, band logo, or something else that identifies them. This is not to identify ownership in terms of capital protection but ascribes some cultural value to the object – in a small way, like a certificate of authenticity. It identifies the plectrum as having been owned and used by that specific guitarist in that specific band, which carries cultural value amongst their fan base.

As discussed in Chapter 3, I am interested in an idea that I have termed as ‘cultural alchemy’; the passing of something from one person to another which has little economic value, but takes on great cultural value (and some increased economic value) in that moment of exchange. Plectrums passed from musician to fan are an ideal example of this. In-and-of themselves a guitar plectrum is a cheap piece of plastic. A simple tool that has remained largely unchanged for around one hundred years (Emile Menasché, *The Surprisingly Long History of the Guitar Pick*, 2017). Within various genres of rock music, it is a normal part of any live experience that the guitarist will throw used plectrums into the audience throughout the concert. There are no formal rules or protocols to this act, it is just an accepted norm that at several points during a concert, at an opportune moment, the guitarist will pass a plectrum to a willing fan, or flick it out into the crowd to find a home with a grateful attendee. These simple items proceed to take on a weight of cultural value and importance beyond that which we would expect for such an object.

On one level, this work was specifically engaging in an accepted route of exchange. No fan attends a concert expecting to receive a plectrum, but many hope to be a recipient. It is a limited act, in that only a handful of plectrums are distributed throughout the concert and, when engaging in this exchange, the guitarist knows full well the value of this exchange to the recipient. In approaching Joey Z about placing this artwork on his plectrum, I knew that he would be engaged in this kind of exchange with fans through the band’s upcoming tour. I was not asking him to do anything additional on my behalf, other than allow me to introduce the work into the space of his plectrum. In allowing me to do so he was also agreeing to engage in the distribution of those plectrums to Life of Agony fans across the world. On another level, I was using this social relationship with Joey Z to add a specific kind of cultural

value to the plectrum; a value that would be understood and appreciated by the recipients in his audience. By this, I mean I could have gone to some open-mic nights in pubs and played songs and handed out these plectrums, but the cultural residue that passed on with the plectrum would have been greatly reduced to the point of becoming negligible. By the plectrums passing from my hand, to Joey's, and then on into the hand of a Life of Agony fan, the moment of cultural alchemy is maximised. We should also acknowledge the heightened emotional state of the recipient of this token. Concerts, by their nature and spectacle, are emotionally charged events, as is the idea of any interaction with the performer on a stage, and both of those things were at work in this moment of exchange from Joey-to-fan.

There was also a narrative reason for wanting to establish this far-reaching relationship and distribution technique. The Anglo-Saxon runes I printed on to the plectrum were a literal translation of the phrase 'You are bigger than this place'. In a historic sense this was referring to the idea that the Anglo-Saxons were fundamentally a migratory people. They were the metaphorical embodiment of the phrase 'you are bigger than this place', constantly passing on and passing through to conquer new lands. This phrase also makes reference to the romantic notion that the act of learning to play the guitar (or any instrument) can potentially be seen as a ticket out of one's current situation, on to somewhere bigger, brighter and new. So, for both of these reasons, to distribute this message through someone such as Joey was a way to fully amplify this potential. In terms of the recipients choosing to decode the message, it would be entirely down to their own curiosity. Anglo-Saxon runes are very recognisable and there exist many easily accessible translations of runic alphabets. For an inquisitive fan it would require modest effort to reveal the hidden message.

Therefore, what I was setting up was a fairly complex set of agent-to-patient relationships wherein I was the agent in the creation of the plectrum, which I then passed to Joey, making him a recipient, who then acted as an agent on my behalf by distributing the plectrum to his fans (the patients), whilst at the same time bringing his own agency to bear as a secondary agent, through cultural alchemy. In terms of the artwork, it was the full scope of this journey that constituted the work, not simply the image of the runes that I had printed on the plectrum.

The final thing to acknowledge here is the arena in which this artwork was created and received. Similarly to 'God So Loves Decay' (2016) and the works discussed in

Chapter 3, this existed entirely outside of a traditional visual arts arena. There was nothing to inform the crowds at the Life of Agony concerts that Joey would be distributing an artwork of mine throughout the gig. To do so would have compromised the integrity of the complex set of agent-to-patient relationships I have just described. However, I must acknowledge that this was an arts-arena of sorts. The audiences at the concerts were willing attendees and participants at an arts event, albeit a music event. As such, they are a different kind of audience to the audience who experienced 'God So Loves Decay' (2016), who were experiencing the artwork in an open and public space. That said, as with the aforementioned work, the site – the concert arena – plays a similar role to the town square in bringing a set of cultural and historical assumptions to bare on the situation. The concert arena is far from neutral and is consciously co-opted into the production and experience of the work.

4.4 Research Findings

This area of my research opens up questions around the nature of the exchange that happens between artist, artwork and audience. Specifically, how vital the audience are in the completion of the chain of events or set of social relations that the artist has instigated, or is attempting to instigate, through the creation and presentation of the work. There is much to be drawn from the anthropological studies of tribal gift and exchange in the works of Mauss (specifically, 'The Gift', 1950) and Gell. Mauss (1950) observes, "*What imposes obligation in the present received and exchanged, is the fact that the thing received is not inactive. Even when it has been abandoned by the giver, it still possesses something of him.*" Here, he is talking explicitly about a Maori law of exchange, but in this single observation we see, both, ideas of the transference of agency and also the essential nature of the recipient.

Most artwork is made with an intention for it be involved in an exchange with another, whether it be the case that the artwork has been made for someone, or the narrative/conceptual exchange that an artist hopes to engage in with the, often, non-specific other (non-specific, as this is largely uncontrolled or undefined, beyond the fact that someone may be a gallery visitor or a willing audience member at an event). Whilst there is a level of assumption in this statement – some artwork is created with no intention of it ever being experienced by another, or entering into any form of exchange with anyone other than its creator – for the sake of this study I am referring to those works that are deliberately placed out into the world by an artist, to enter into an exchange with people other than its creator.

There are many points to be drawn and built upon from Gell and Mauss's writings on gift and exchange. I will briefly summarise some of the key ideas that I am claiming to have built upon, or tested, within my own research. Mauss asks a key question of the nature of exchange, in questioning what power is resident in a gifted object that makes the recipient pay it back (Mauss 1950). One answer to this question, in a tribal context, is that until the gift has been repaid then the recipient is perceived to be in some way subordinate to the gifter. A hierarchy has been established and therefore an imbalance of power exists. He goes on, in his aforementioned discussion of Maori laws of exchange, to propose the idea that the object exchanged and received is not inactive; that even though it has left the possession of the giver, it still retains something of them (Mauss 1950). In relation to artwork, this can be fairly directly equated to Gell's theories around the agency of the artist that has, both, created the index (artwork) and is then passed on through it. In Gell's discussion of Voodoo Sorcery (the kind of magic through which an individual is harmed by the destruction or manipulation of a simply rendered likeness of them, often incorporating exuviae; hair, nail-clippings etc.) he discusses these exuviae as fragments of a distributed personhood; that is to say that they are not merely representative of that person, they are literally part of that person (Gell 1998). He also offers some interesting thoughts around spatio-temporality and the possibility of agency's deferred employment. To do this he gives the example of a landmine carrying the agency of the soldier who places it, which is only then deployed once the landmine is trodden upon and activated (Gell 1998).

By engaging with these ideas of exchange I had to ask myself some difficult questions around my accountability and responsibility in offering these tokens but neither expecting, nor requesting, any form of reciprocation. In doing so, was I inadvertently placing people in a subordinate position? In considering this troubling prospect I became aware that I was guilty of assuming a hierarchy not dissimilar to that which I refer to, and take issue with, in the introduction to this critical overview about 'Relational Aesthetics'; I was, by default, placing the artwork in a more significant position in this network of exchange than the audience or recipient. My assumption was that the artwork carried the majority of the agency in this exchange – that the audience or recipient came to the experience or exchange as an empty vessel, wanting to be culturally filled-up by the artwork and sent on their way. When re-examining this hierarchy or order of exchange, I would now argue that the crux or true power lies with the audience or recipient and what they bring with them and offer to the exchange.

An artwork can be viewed as a container of dormant agency that can be released or activated by a viewer. The index has been created through the agency of the artist and that agency, by transference, now resides within the object, which lays dormant until a patient arrives and engages with it - in doing so releasing or reactivating that agency. The patient's willingness to engage, even with a fleeting glance, is equivalent within the exchange to all of the intent or agency that the artist may have loaded into the work. In terms of a hierarchy or order of exchange, it is this willingness that comes first. Without the patient coming to the work open for an exchange, no matter what agency the artist has loaded into the index, the work remains impotent as there is no exchange, and the index has no inherent capacity to force one. As such, there is no danger of an unreciprocated exchange being offered by the artwork, as what is being offered by the artwork is actually the reciprocal offering to the engagement of the viewer. What they take from the experience – physical or otherwise – is equivalent to the completion of the gift-and-exchange dynamic previously mentioned. This idea can be mapped through to the disappointment that may be felt, as a viewer or audience member, if the work fails to deliver on its part of this exchange. If the work does not return an experience in equivalence to the willingness that the viewer or audience member has brought to the exchange, then there is a disparity or imbalance in the transaction manifesting as disappointment, or anger, or another negative emotion. To use an economic analogy, the viewer is left down on the deal.

Rancière (2009) touches on the understanding that a viewer brings to the activation of a work, and acknowledges that in spite of any intention or desire on the part of the artist, there is always a distance between the artist-and-artwork, the viewer-and-artwork, and also the artist-and-spectator – that there can be an incorrect assumption on the artist's part that what a spectator will draw from an artwork or experience is what they, the artist, have put in to that artwork or experience. In this sense the artwork exists autonomously between the artist and the spectator. In acknowledging this we can identify a transfer of interpretive agency. Whilst the artwork was the artist's idea, and they have conceived the work and brought it in to being, they are not the work themselves, so there remains this interpretive distance between artist, artwork and spectator. In certain works this is something I have consciously incorporated into the construct of the work, taking a directorial backseat to avoid taking complete control of the final outcome. For example, by accepting and inviting the audience to be a part of the work's fabric, there is both an element of chance and also an equality to their presence in the work; their role, merely by their presence, is

of no less value or importance to the work overall than the roles that may be undertaken by more directed actors or controlled elements of the work.

Building on what I believe to be one of Gell's most interesting and relevant ideas – spatio-temporality and the delayed deployment of agency – I want to bring it together with his thoughts on exuviae in *Volt Sorcery*, by considering the roles of the plectrum and the lyric prayer book. Both are 'land-mines' and exuviae in my artistic equivalence. Both are objects that exist at some distance from myself, primarily through the distribution networks that I have built into the work, but that carry my agency into the hands of the recipient. I would also make the claim that they are so intimately bound to the performer (or distributor) within the artwork that they are 'of' them in the same way that hair or nail-clippings can be viewed as part of a distributed personhood (Gell 1998). Certainly, if we view the token and its complex set of social relations as part of the fabric of the artwork itself, as I do, these tokens are unquestionably exuviae of the artwork. They carry the agency of the artwork and, by default, my agency that resides within the work. Even after removal from the site of engagement, these objects carry my agency with them and retain the capacity to shape or influence the thoughts and actions of the recipient.

At this point an interesting question arises around what happens if these objects make their way into the hands of someone who was not the original recipient. We could assume that these objects would be shorn of much, if not all, of the context through which they were received in the first instance. They remain a piece of the artwork's, and my own, distributed personhood but potentially cease to continue carrying the agency they have had up to this point. At this instant it could be said that we are seeing the reversal of the cultural alchemy I have previously referred to; a regression to a simpler state, becoming representative of themselves and the function they serve; a plectrum, a collection of lyrics etc. However, to make reference to the intention of the online archive in 'A Real Rock Archive' (2006), the whole time those objects pass from one hand to another along with a retelling of the story or context of their receipt, the act of cultural alchemy remains intact, along with my agency, though arguably in some form of decay the further they move in time and space from the source (the original performance that involved the passing of the token).

On this I would draw one more example from Gell's (1998) research, that of Malangan carvings. These carvings are used in the mortuary ceremonies for

important persons and only serve their function for a very short period of time. The attendees of the ceremony gift money that entitles them to view and, therefore, remember the carving. Relationships are legitimised by these purchased rights to the creation and retention of a memory, but these memories are also transformed into an asset of the ceremony through an individual's capacity to act as an agent in physical recreations of the images and motifs in future Malangan carvings. The future recreations of these carvings, made possible by those purchased memories are then, again, sold on as memories and assets of the future ceremonies. I draw comparison between the economic value of this purchased right to remember and the cultural value of the stories gathered in my online rock archive and with the tokens of the plectrum and the prayer book. The stories can be aligned with the remembered images of the Malangan, but the tokens are more akin to the Malangan itself; an object that carries a weight of value in the moment of the ceremony but, once removed from that moment, ceases to have value for its creator / user / distributor, but carries value for its recipient.

Gell's research gives us many interesting and relevant perspectives on the use of creative artifacts in tribal rituals, which I believe to be pertinent to my own research into the relationship between the viewer, object, and the transference of agency. One point is that these artifacts are rarely seen as artworks by their creators or consumers, so once they have served their ritual or ceremonial function they are no longer of use or value and so can be sold, or gotten rid of, often to Western museums (Gell 1998). In reality, these objects mostly perform an exclusively functional role in rituals and social and political moments. They are often containers of agency in some form, used for the transference of that agency – which may be representative of many things, including land, wealth or social standing – from one person to another, or multiple others; such as the aforementioned Malangan carvings. In the moment, this makes them extremely valuable on those terms, but as soon as the ritual has passed or, more importantly, the agency has been passed on, they cease to have value. They are not revered as special, or art, as we do from our Western perspective. This idea of the value being something other than the object – the purchasing of the memory of the Malangan carving, for example - and the presence of the 'audience' being as integral to the activation of the object as the existence of the object in the first place, is key to my conclusions.

In purchasing a ticket, for example, to a one-off performance, someone purchases the 'right' to a memory of that event. As with the Malangan carvings, the agency of

that event is internalised by the purchaser (of the ticket) and continues to be available for distribution through their memory. This is an example of the cultural alchemy referred to in Chapter 3, whereby a memory of something takes on a tangible social value within an appropriate community. I would argue this could be seen as the ultimate activation of an artwork by its audience and, in turn, activation of the audience by an artwork - they are literally charged with memories by the work's presence which then exist as agency as opposed to a 'passive registration of the past' (Gell 1998). To take the performance attached to 'A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation' (2006) as an example, it starts to act in much the same way as the very things I sought to archive in the original project; the people that attended the performance have bought the right to remember it and thus can exchange it as a form of cultural currency (cultural alchemy has taken place). To draw another comparison, with 'Ganas de Vivir' (2016), after the moment of exchange in the concert, from Joey to fan, the plectrum ceases to have any value for me. The purpose of its existence was to pass through the complex set of exchange relations, as described earlier. It was purely a tool used for the transference of my agency and once that journey was complete it ceased to be of relevance or value to me. However, it has undergone a process of cultural alchemy and takes on a value to the recipient (the Westerner in this allusion), despite having distributed its agency from my perspective.

A rethinking around the hierarchy within these exchange relations between artist, artwork, site and audience has become key to my own understanding, specifically that the artwork is not the most important factor within this exchange. That role goes to the exchange that occurs between artist and viewer via the artwork. To illustrate this idea and to, again, look at it from an anthropological perspective I include a redrawing of a diagram from Gell's research, (fig.11) which he uses to explain the idea and process of the Maori 'whāngai hau', followed by my own interpretation of the diagram (fig.12), redrawn to illustrate my own findings about the relationship between artist, artwork, site and audience.

Gell's diagram illustrates a magical process whereby a priest creates a mauri (a stone representative of the fertility of the forest) that is then placed in the forest. By doing so, they are gifting this stone and the results of its productivity (hau) to the hunters, who in turn must return some of the hau of the mauri (their catch) to the priest. Of course, there is no magic involved in this process; the priest is merely co-opting the agency of the forest - its productivity – by creating the mauri and placing it

in the forest. Both the stone and the hunter's catch are exuviae of the forest (matter which is shed by the forest and therefore becomes part of its distributed personhood), in that they are a by-product of the forest's growth, which are shed and harvested. So, in practical terms the magic must work, as the hunter's catch is proof of the mauri's agency (its magic). This is my redrawing of Gell's original diagram explaining the process (Gell 1998):

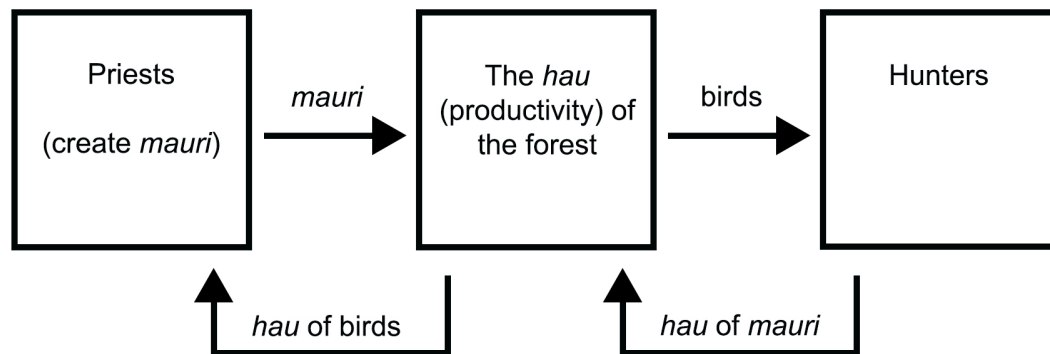


Fig.11. The circularity of productive exchanges between index (mauri) and prototype (hau) after Babadzan, 1993

Below is my redrawing of Gell's diagram to illustrate the process of making, siting and viewing an artwork:

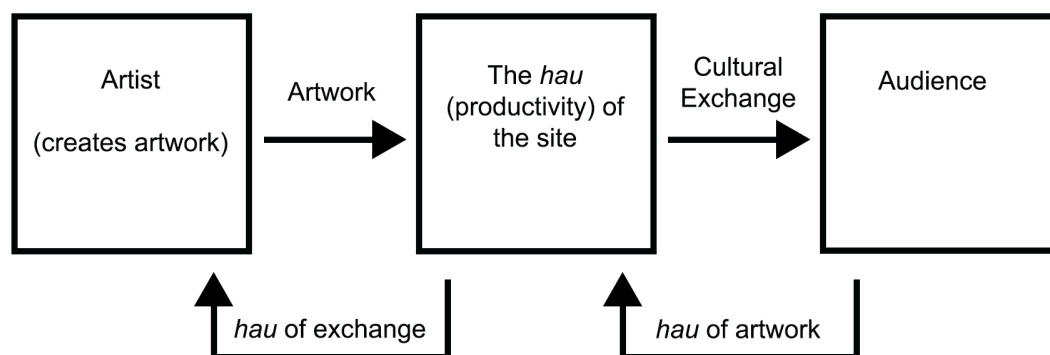


Fig.12. The circularity of productive exchanges between index (artwork) and prototype (hau) after Gell, 1998

In redrawing Gell's visual equation to illustrate my version of the exchange between artist, artwork, site and audience, I aim to establish the circular and non-hierarchical nature of the role each element plays within this process. Whilst it does begin from a

specific place, if you take any one of them away, the entire process collapses. Whilst this process is notionally based on ideas of magic, we can observe the practical application of this belief and how it works in a tangible way.

Contained within this diagram are important considerations of each of the elements I am examining through my research. There is the artist who makes an artwork (the *mauri*) which they then site (the forest). There is the audience (the hunter) and the cultural experience offered by the artwork (the *hau* of the artwork) and the exchange between artwork and audience that can be taken away. When viewed like this we can clearly make a comparison between the process of 'whāngai hau' and an artist's activation of a site and the audience's experience of it – for example, how an artist might take a billboard or a concert venue and co-opt the agency of those sites/spaces into the creation of an artwork.

In this analogy the audience are harvesting the site through their experience of the artwork. The artist makes this possible by introducing the artwork into the site in the first place, in essence creating a 'mauri' by doing so. However, the artwork is not the productivity in-and-of itself. This is more equivalent to the cultural experience of interacting with an artwork. By making these things we are inviting an exchange – something that can be taken away – and so in creating the work, we are at the same time creating a 'mauri' that ensures that the site is productive for the audience in their harvest of the cultural exchange. Which brings me back to my earlier conclusion that what can be taken away from this exchange is the agency of the artwork. The artwork itself is not the harvest, instead it's what the viewer takes away from it.

Of course, in this analogy there is no firm equivalent for the *hau* of the birds. There remain questions as to what is the return to the artist, as to the priest (their share of the catch). That's not to say this return doesn't exist, but it becomes individual to the artist and their intentions for sharing the work in the first place, whether that be visibility, professional kudos, feedback, money etc. In the shifting parameters of potential personal gain through the production of contemporary art, only the individual can identify what they were hoping to harvest through their creation of the *mauri*.

4.5 Other Relevant Presented Works

Elements of these ideas, modes and rituals of exchange are present in each of the works in this portfolio. Whilst not always an exchange of a token, the experience

offered is something more than that of an object to a viewer in a gallery. These works all reach out to the viewer in a literal and physical way, whether that be them co-opting the viewer as a physical element or material within the work, or stepping into a space already being inhabited by the viewer and requesting their attention. With all of these works it can be argued that the spectacle of the experience is a method through which an engagement or exchange with the audience was established.

A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation (2006) (detailed information Ch.3)

Whilst this portfolio specifically focuses on the 'in conversation' event that came out of the wider 'A Real Rock Archive' (2006) project, the online archive itself (fig.6.) is a clear demonstration of these ideas of exchange. The stories and objects gathered in the archive are tokens in themselves, whether they are physical objects or something more ephemeral. They have the capacity to be exchanged and to act as the distributed personhood of the original source and of the other person in the experience (generally the recipient of the original experience or token) and to carry value and agency ad-infinitum, until such a time as they are shorn of any context. The archive itself is a good example of the deferred employment of agency, in that the stories and images, having been collected by myself, lay dormant on a website until such a time someone engages with them, where they continue their journey through a retelling or description. The 'In Conversation' event created a moment in itself whereby new anecdotes could be gathered and created, to be shared at a later time.

Metal Militia (2014) (detailed information Ch.3)

As with any live performance, particularly a one-off, Gell's writing on Malangan carvings (Gell 1998) and the paid-for right to own a memory that carries value and agency, have relevance to the function of this work. The work was not primarily constructed to create this memory, but it is unquestionable that a by-product of the performance is the right for those who attended to keep and share that memory at will, and depending on the recipient of that shared memory and the community they exist within, it will carry value and agency.

The Death of Peter Fechter (2007) (detailed information Ch.5)

The entire staging of this work was designed to put the audience in a position where they were unavoidably part of the work, and engaged in an explicit interaction with it, from the moment they stepped on the coach to be bussed to the performance site. Their mere presence at the performance made them part of the work. Whilst there

were no explicit instructions, the staging and direction of the events that unfolded were designed to make it clear that audience members were able to interact as much or as little as they wished. Merely by being present they were playing an active role in the performance as an erstwhile West Berliner. By introducing this element of personal agency or chance involvement into the construct of the work it created an environment whereby an audience member was entirely surrounded or consumed by the work. Despite elements of the work potentially being uncomfortable for the audience, in a narrative and physical sense, there was literally nowhere to retreat to that wasn't simply another place that remained within the framework of the performance. Whilst on some level that might sound like I set out to hold them against their will, it is not the case. My intention was to create such an all-encompassing spectacle that the idea of disengaging from the interaction was never an option.



Fig.13. *God So Loved the World* t-shirt
Produced for 'Init' exhibition, Departure Lounge, Luton, 2013
Designed by Christophe Szpajdel



Fig.14. *God So Loves Decay* (2016)
Images from the performance, Luton Town Centre, Saturday 7th May, 2016



Fig.15. *God So Loves Decay* (2016)
Image from the performance, Luton Town Centre, Saturday 7th May, 2016



Fig.16. Pages from the free publication distributed during the performance, *God So Loves Decay* (2016), Luton Town Centre, Saturday 7th May, 2016

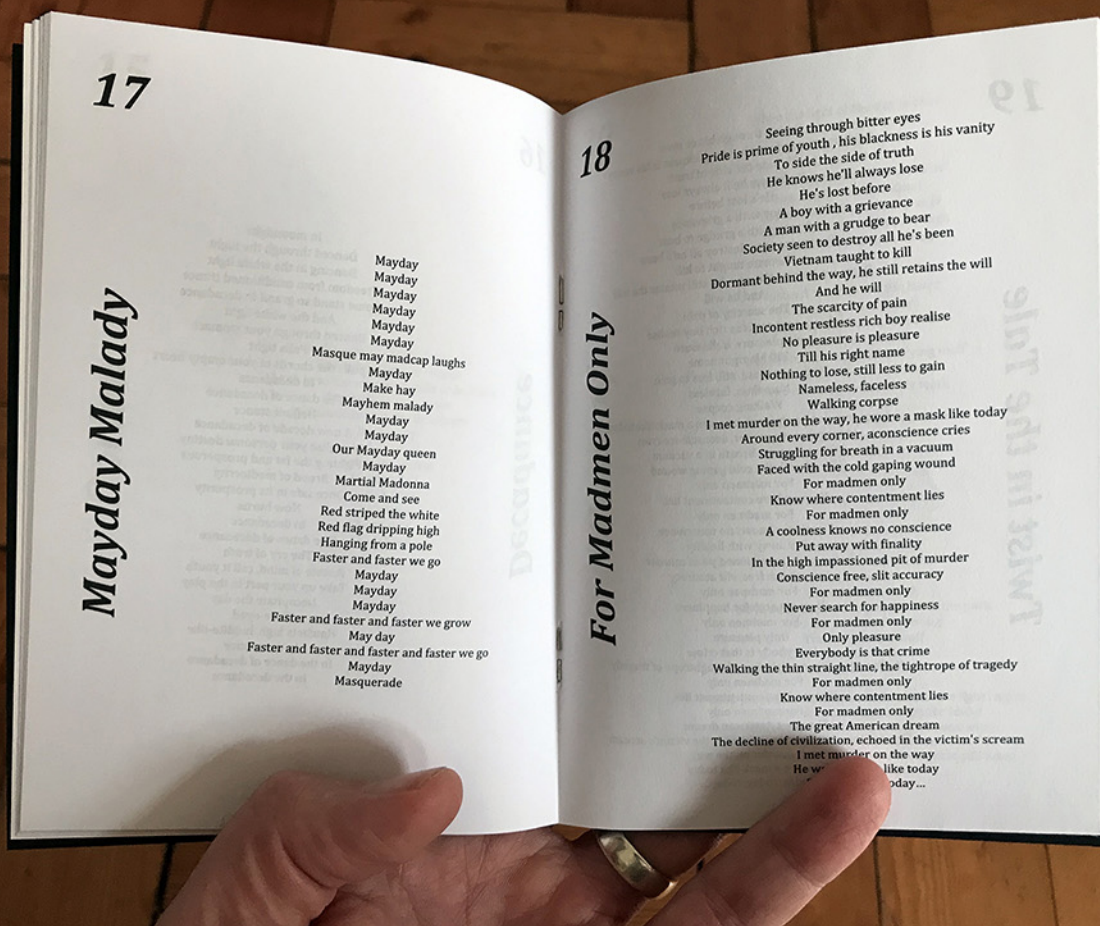


Fig.17. Pages from the free publication distributed during the performance, *God So Loves Decay* (2016), Luton Town Centre, Saturday 7th May, 2016



Fig.18. Re-presentation of the performance *God So Loves Decay* (2016) at *Curating Resistance: Punk as Archival Method* conference, UCLA, Los Angeles, Saturday 10th February, 2018

Fig.19. *Ganas de Vivir* (2016) plectrum, front and back, alongside Joey Z performing with Life of Agony. Performance image used by kind of permission of Joey Zampella

5 **Cultural Alloys**

5.1 Research Objective

To examine how the artwork draws on and manipulates the physical surroundings in which it is sited in order to intensify the viewer experience and extend its dialogues beyond that of simply being considered an artwork – primarily through the works ‘The Death of Peter Fechter’ (2007) and ‘Free For All Forever’ (2016).

The focus of this chapter is ‘The Death of Peter Fechter’ (2007) (fig.20-26) and ‘Free For All Forever’ (2016) (fig.27). These works are very different in their approach and form – the first a site-specific live performance and the other a billboard – but both specifically drew on their respective sites and physical constructs to intensify and feed the narrative experience of the work. Both also sought, in varying degrees, to bridge a gap between that of a credible and fabricated experience.

5.2 The Death of Peter Fechter (2007) – Overview and Method

This work was commissioned within the established arm of the ICA (London) live art programme, through which artists were commissioned to stage reenactments of important cultural moments. Artists interpretations as to what qualified as an important cultural moment were very broad; from my own acutely political take, to Forsyth and Pollard’s restaging of David Bowie’s final gig as Ziggy Stardust, ‘A Rock n Roll Suicide’ (1998), and many others in-between. Not long before this work was commissioned, I took my first ever trip to Berlin and, on a visit to the Mauermuseum at Checkpoint Charlie, was introduced to Peter Fechter’s story.

Fechter was a young citizen of the DDR who was shot and killed attempting to escape over the Berlin Wall on August 17th, 1962, with a work colleague, Helmut Kulbick. In this early stage of the wall’s life – it had existed for three years by this point - it was feasible that with a quick sprint and jump across no-man’s land that a person could make it on to the wall and clamber over the barbed wire that topped it. On the other side of the wall an escapee would land on the streets of West Berlin, with no further no-man’s land or armed guards to negotiate. During Peter and his colleague’s attempted escape they were fired upon by DDR guards and, whilst Helmut made it safely over the wall, Peter was hit, but not killed, and fell back into the no-man’s land on the East German side of the wall. He lay there slowly bleeding to death for around an hour whilst West-Berliner’s gathered against the wall calling

for the guards to step in to help and attempting, themselves, to assist Peter by throwing him first aid. After roughly an hour the DDR guards entered no-man's land and removed Peter's body. This tragic event took place a few hundred yards from Checkpoint Charlie. Whilst Peter was not the first or the last person to be killed trying to escape over the wall, the nature of this event and his death gained international coverage in a way that many deaths on the wall did not.

There were many reasons for my interest in staging a re-enactment of this moment. I have a particular interest in the politics of the 1980s, having spent my formative years of 6-16 growing up through a decade in which the fear and paranoia that surrounded the Cold War firmly imprinted, on me, the ever-lurking threat of nuclear annihilation. From this time I have a particular interest in the Berlin wall, it's shifting position within public consciousness and culture – how in some ways it almost became anthropomorphised or, more accurately, took on the essence of a mythical beast or monster. To clarify what I mean by this, when people speak of the wall, it is often described in sentient terms as opposed to simply being an inanimate object. The wall is ascribed agency. Tangentially, we can see a perfect example of spatio-temporally distributed agency (Gell 1998) through the wall itself. The wall contains the distributed agency of those that built it, in much the same way as a placed, but yet-to-be-detonated, landmine does.

My specific interest in the wall was how it had become a character in history, playing an active role in the politics and conflicts of the time. I was also interested in the human story of Peter Fechter, which in no uncertain terms is a tragedy; his loss of life, along with all the others who died on the wall, can easily be overshadowed by the scale of the political situation. To most he is just one of around 140 people who lost their lives trying to escape over the wall and I felt that to reenact this moment celebrated his life and, in isolation, gave back an importance to a moment that so easily gets lost in the statistics. I was also interested in using the telling of his story to bring focus on contemporaneous issues of enforced political migration. At the time of the performance, 45 years on from the original event, it could be argued that for many nothing had really changed – from Mexico to Iraq and many other places – people were, and are, still losing their lives each year, in their thousands, in their attempts to escape to a perceived better life. Finally, and specifically relevant to this study and chapter, I was keen to address what I perceived as shortcomings or problems with linear-narrative performances.

As much as possible I wanted to address the obviously-staged nature of such performances, particularly the conscious acknowledgment that what one is experiencing is staged at all. The period of time I decided to focus on was the final hour of Peter's life and death. In terms of narrative this would include the run to the wall, the shooting, the hour-long bleeding-to-death and Peter's removal from the site. I would not class this performance as theatre, but theatre contains many of the constructs that I was attempting to circumnavigate and deconstruct; the acknowledged beginning and end of a performance – the implicit release for the audience when curtains close and actors take a bow, relieving them of any further need to spend time with their heightened emotions of ethical quandaries. I also wanted to approach the traditional narrative arc of performance very differently, where an equal amount of action or narrative is delivered across the duration of the performance. In this instance the majority of the 'action' – in terms of the dash for the wall and the shooting of Peter – was to happen very early on, leaving the majority of the performance as the act of Peter slowly bleeding to death before his body was, finally, removed. The reality of watching someone slowly bleed to death has the potential to be quite boring, despite it being the emotional crux of the performance. As such, the planned performance was at odds with the traditional open-curtain-beginning-middle-end/resolution-close-curtain approach of most theatrical performances.

How the audience were managed through their experience of the performance was key to much of the above. Early on in the project's development it was decided that the audience would be bussed from the ICA to the performance site, without telling them where they were going. On one level this served the practical purpose of ensuring that all of the audience arrived to the performance at the same time, but it also put the audience in an uneasy position – any control over their engagement with the performance was largely surrendered the moment they stepped on to the bus, as from this moment they were unknowingly already within the performance. This not-knowing would play a key role in unsettling the audience and beginning to break down the mental barriers that exist between the performed and the real.

At this point I will expand on my personal understanding and interpretation of 'site' when discussing this work. For me, the site of this performance was dispersed across the entire audience experience. The coach that took the audience to the performance, and the time that passed on the journey there and back, were as much part of the site of the performance as the space in which the action took place. In

terms of the artwork's capacity to draw on and manipulate its physical surroundings, all of these elements fall within my categorisation of site.

The performance space itself was deliberately chosen to feed into the mounting unease that the bus journey established. I had found an industrial site in Plumstead, about an hour's drive east from the ICA. The site was visually perfect for the performance – semi-derelict with a large red brick warehouse – it was also at the end of an increasingly uninhabited road meaning that the audience, having joined the bus at the ICA in central London, were being deposited in a deserted and rundown space without any further acknowledgment or information as to how things would play out.

On the site, I had recreated a 10-metre-long section of the Berlin Wall, based on photographic documentation of the wall in 1962, and already had the actors who were playing my DDR and American soldiers in position, essentially 'guarding' the wall. So, at the time of arrival to site for the audience, the performance was already, technically, underway. There was no formal announcement of a beginning, just as there was to be no formal announcement of an end. After leaving the bus, the audience were pointed in the direction of the wall, where they were able to take up a position of their own choice on the West Berlin side of the wall (it was not possible to access the East Berlin side). Approximately twenty minutes after the audience had arrived on site, with no warning or announcement, 'Peter' and 'Helmut' emerged from the red brick warehouse and made their dash for the wall (fig.21).

I took a similarly open approach to the directorial framework in how I worked with the actors. We had two days' rehearsal prior to the staging of the event and, during this time, we ran through the first ten minutes of the performance only two or three times – the minutes prior to Peter and Helmut's dash to the wall, the dash itself, and Peter's gunning down. The majority of our time together was spent discussing the event and establishing some visual prompts that could be used to keep the actors abreast of the time that had passed during the performance. Quite deliberately, we didn't rehearse past the point of Peter's shooting as I wanted to avoid creating a situation where a series of actors were delivering a set of rehearsed actions, looking to each other for established prompts or dialogue of any kind. I essentially wanted to put the actors in as vulnerable a position as the audience, to heighten their sense of nerves, unease, and confusion on the day. To do so felt right, in terms of honouring the historical moment, and was a conscious strategy in my attempt to break down the evident staging of a performance. That is not to say that there was ever any chance

that the performance would veer from the narrative course it needed to follow. I simply set up a series of events, pinned together by a loose framework, to be negotiated by the actors in a credible way. On the day I also had several actors planted amongst the audience to take on the role of the West Berliners – shouting to the guards to help and calling out to Peter. Again, my direction with these actors was very light touch, simply informing them about the original events, the rough framework and cues we had established, and then allowing them to pass through those moments by their own volition. Whilst taking on a narrative role in the performance, by placing them in the audience seemingly as audience members, I hoped they would act as a further bridge between the acted and lived experience for the audience, even acting as a potential catalyst for audience participation.

Another key element in the credibility of the performance was the use of live-firing AK47 machine guns of the sort the DDR guards were issued with, using blank ammunition. It was my belief that in the same way the gravity of a human death can be lost in its reporting, the terrifying and awesome power of firearms is not understood by the majority of people as they have been fortunate enough to never directly experience them. The visceral experience of being near to an AK47 as it is fired lent a further layer of credibility to the performance and audience experience.

After an hour elapsed, the DDR guards moved into the no-man's land and removed Peter's body from the space (fig.26). This signaled the end of the performance to the actors playing the American soldiers, who then moved through the space clearing the audience from the site as though ushering a crowd away from the scene of a crime. At no point did the actors break character or suggest that this was formally 'the end'. The audience re-boarded the coach and were driven back to the ICA where they were left to go on their way without ever receiving acknowledgement that the performance had ended.

5.3 Free For All Forever (2016) – Overview and Method

In terms of practical considerations, placing an image on a commercial billboard is, in many ways, the opposite of the complex undertaking of a project like 'The Death of Peter Fechter' (2007). However, what was being tested and observed with this work, in relation to site, had a complexity quite closely aligned with the previous project. This work also formed part of the larger, multi-outcome, 'Revelations' project previously mentioned in Chapter 4.

This billboard (fig.27) was programmed as part of the I-70 Sign Show in Missouri - a project that describes itself as '*a public-art exhibition on mid-Missouri billboards*' (I-70 Sign Show, 2020). Developed, in part, out of a recognition that the state has many surplus billboards which makes them economically viable as sites to occupy, the project also functions as a direct critique and dialogue around the nature of the billboards in the state, that primarily address themes around '*religion, sex, politics, guns, race, labour, beauty and consumption.*' (I-70 Sign Show, 2020)

In practical terms, the relationship with the I-70 Sign Show was developed after I'd had the idea to place a work on a billboard in America, something already decided through the process of developing the elements of the 'Revelations' project. This desire came from a longstanding interest in the cultural exchange that exists between our two nations and also my own experiences of driving along the interstates and freeways of America, particularly through the deserts of California where these billboards often take on a monolithic presence due to the scarcity of urban development. Around the time of developing 'Revelations' I became aware of the I-70 Sign Show and approached them about the idea of collaborating on the exhibition of this work. In doing so there was already an existing and developed dialogue around their use of, and relationship with, the billboards and so by introducing a work into that space there was a useful element of shorthand in establishing the work's relevance. I'm aware that this could sound parasitic, but I would argue it's coherent with my interest and use of site; how each element in a work's make-up and siting can further feed its impact and agency in the world.

The phrase and imagery is something I have reworked and re-presented in several different situations, from a placard in a gallery space, to a permanent public artwork, on the front of a building (fig.28) and these large billboard presentations. It developed initially out of an interest in the use of language in politics and advertising, coupled with a photograph I took purely by chance on New Year's Eve 2008/9 on the Las Vegas strip, an image I have subsequently used as a photographic work, 'The New Pornography' (2010) (fig.30) – its title is a quote from disgraced TV evangelist, Jimmy Swaggart, who used the term to describe rock and pop music on June 1st, 1986 (Patrick Goldstein, *Jimmy Swaggart Blasts Rock Porn*, 1986). The photograph is of a lone religious protestor, stood in the midst of the New Year celebrations with a placard saying, 'Jesus Saves from Hell'. This work takes its aesthetic from that placard, along with the simplicity of its message. In terms of the phrase I have used, it is deliberately ambiguous and open to interpretation. I believe, depending on the

beliefs or state of mind of the individual reading the phrase, it can be interpreted as meaning either *'everything will be free for everyone forever'* or that *'everything is in a state of free-for-all forever'*; arguably two quite opposing and contradictory views, with positive and negative resonances easily attributed to one or the other.

This iteration of the billboard also came to be one half of a two-site, two-continent, realisation of this work, as I was approached by the project, UGO, based in Southampton, who were commissioning a series of billboards as a fringe project to the British Art Show 8 (Jonathan Kelham 2016). This opened up the exciting possibility of having one billboard sited in Missouri (fig.27), with another sited concurrently in Southampton (fig.29). Whilst I view each realisation of this work as a unique outcome, I was interested in the idea that the two billboards would exist on two continents at the same time, setting up a dialogue between them that was a literal manifestation of my personal interests in the cultural exchange between our two nations. This felt particularly relevant in relation to some of the key thinking of the wider 'Revelations' project and my interest in a single project existing in multiple-parts, in multiple sites, largely all at the same time. Whilst the exhibition periods for the two billboards did not match-up exactly, there was a period of several weeks where their exhibition overlapped. In many ways the UK version of this billboard was more incongruous than its US counterpart, where there is a long and established history of overtly provocative religious billboards, more in keeping with the aesthetic and, potential, provocation of the work.

In relation to the idea of using billboards as a site on which to position artworks, I am interested in the democracy of these spaces. Essentially, if you have the money to pay for the space, you can site the work. They also provide a very developed context in which to site something for consideration due to the prior assumptions that viewers bring to their reading of billboards. They are spaces we simply accept as somewhere that delivers information to us. We don't need to question the credibility of what we see on a billboard – though we can, of course, question its intent and validity – but as a space through which to deliver something for contemplation much of the work is done for us through conditioning; we inherently know and accept the purpose and intent of a billboard and so respond accordingly by taking in the information, sometimes involuntarily. The nature of this acceptance of the activity and role of the site is of key interest in relation to this study and how this plays a particular role in the interpretation and activation of the work sited on a billboard.

5.4 Research Findings

I'd like to start the analysis of these two works by acknowledging that agency does not always, necessarily, start with the artist (Gell 1998). In the same way I have questioned the notion of the artwork being the most important thing in a hierarchy of exchange, it might appear counterintuitive to position the artist further down this chain of agency than the material. Whilst drawing, in part, on artifacts created for the purpose of tribal rituals, Gell (1998) makes the observation that this idea of the material leading the artist is not unusual in Western art, from the carvings of Michelangelo to Duchamp's ready-mades and beyond; the idea that an artist is sometimes merely extracting the artwork from the material and the final form of the artwork is imposed by the material itself. In the instance of Michelangelo this is the 'liberating' of the slave sculptures from blocks of stone and in Duchamp's, seemingly detached, selection of readymade objects, the very reason they were selected is because they had, apparently, no reason to be selected, creating something of an intellectual contradiction. In relation to my personal research and experience of the co-option of site into the construct of an artwork, I also place site within this umbrella category of 'material' and thereby charge it with the agency to lead the artist as much as be used by them. Whilst not a material, in so far as it cannot be picked up and placed somewhere else, the site is an essential element in these works in that it informs the audience understanding of the work and is as considered as any other part of the work's construct. The sites are not arbitrary or make-do but are chosen for the properties only they can bring to the artwork overall. The site can even be the motivator for the creation of the work in the first place. A clear example of this is my use of the billboard. Whilst a fabricated object in its own right, the billboard is also an established and pre-existing site and, therefore, a material that can be used by an artist, or influence an artist, in the construct and creation of an artwork. As stated previously, my desire and intention to make this work pre-existed my interest in the specific billboard that I used. Were it not for their pre-existence, I would have had no desire or intention to make a work in the form of a billboard and all that they represent, something which also applies to the creation of the plectrum discussed in the previous chapter.

The next part of this discussion is in acknowledging the symbolic agency of the billboard. The object of the billboard, our preconditioned response and understanding of what a billboard is, and the purpose of its function, are key considerations in the construct of the artwork and the audience experience and understanding of the work. In some ways the object of the billboard transcends the role of simply being a site as

its form is key to the audience's understanding of their experience of the work. In taking this form there is no other information a viewer needs to make an informed judgement as to what they are experiencing. At the moment of interaction it is irrelevant whether it is art or not-art, because in either instance it is still credibly the thing that it appears to be – a billboard delivering visual information. This immediate understanding and acceptance is entirely down to the symbolic agency of the site (object) itself; an agency that is given to the billboard by our learned experience and conditioning. A huge amount of work has already been done by the site (billboard) in terms of translating this experience into a form to be engaged with by an audience. This understanding goes further than the object itself, informing our expectation as to the function or intent of the visual information contained thereon. It is our unconscious expectation that the visual information on a billboard is designed to inform or instruct us in some way. Billboards are not generally used as a purely decorative space (unless it is being subverted by someone such as an artist). Even in that instance, it is our conditioned response to the site that makes the subversion interesting and evident; the subversion of the space is being activated and understood by our preconditioned response to the function of the site. Simply by applying our own imagery on to the surface of a billboard, we are co-opting all of that symbolic agency and understanding into the fabric of the work.

Of course, the same can be said for any site that is consciously chosen by an artist. However, that is not the same as saying that all artworks incorporate the site into their construct or narrative. Whilst the site of the staging or exhibition of an artwork will always inform our understanding of the object and its function on some level, it is often not the case that the artist has included the site as a material element in the work in-and-of-itself. A simple example would be that of showing an artwork in a gallery. Whilst a gallery is a very specific site and context, mostly, our understanding of the site simply informs us that we are in the presence of artworks, as opposed to the site functioning as a material element of the work itself.

I would draw some comparison with my use of site and that of sites used for rituals or festivals. The spaces in which I stage my public works become essential to the construct of the work, as well as the audience's experience and understanding; the gig space feeds, and becomes part of, the experience of the performance; the Town Hall Square feeds, and becomes part of, the performance of the street preacher; the billboard feeds and becomes part of our experience of the imagery applied to it. There is a long and established history of the production or co-option of spaces into

ritual experience. The social rituals of the Fuyuge people (Hirsch 2013) take place in a purpose-built plaza known as the 'gab'. Another example might be the 'Maes' of the Eisteddfod in Wales; a celebration of Welsh culture believed to have originated from the Bardic traditions of the C12th. In that instance, similar to the 'gab', the 'Maes' is a temporary village in which all of the activities and social exchanges are held. Whilst the sites I use may not all be specifically constructed, the introduction of the artwork into them is always specific to that site or setting – it is not random, at all – so they become like a readymade 'gab' or 'Maes' in which my 'rituals' and social exchanges are conducted and experienced. Mostly, I do not need to construct my own space in which to conduct my ritual as their nature identifies an appropriate and pre-existing site.

In Sarah Vanhee's discussion of her 'Lecture for Everyone' project (Boutens 2017) she talks of the work as being an 'intrusion', in the sense that the work was not presented to an invited or specifically willing audience, but was introduced into a space where she knew there would be an audience, but one who were neither expecting it nor specifically looking for it. Part of her reasoning is that should the work be participatory she would have had to make compromises that she did not want to. I would claim something of this logic and approach in my public projects, specifically 'Free For All Forever' (2016) and 'God So Loves Decay' (2014). These works are introduced into a space for anyone, with whatever perception or view, to see and engage with. They are not hiding or apologising for the art but they are delivering it in an authentic wrapper that can be viewed, credibly, as something else.

This leads me to the consideration of a group of 'dissensual participants' (Bottoms, 2017) – those people or factors that sit firmly outside of the artist's direction or control. In the case of the billboard, these participants can be identified as everything from the weather, to the interstate, or the people in their cars driving by. These participants are a vital component of the work, again, something I view as a material part of the work's construct. Without these participants the work becomes nothing more than an intellectual decoration. It is their presence and interaction that activates the agency of the billboard and, therefore, the work's capacity to carry my own agency into the world.

In relation to 'The Death of Peter Fechter' (2007) the considerations of site, and the active role it played within the work, were quite different to those discussed so far. In part this is due to an expanded interpretation of what I view as the site for the work.

As touched upon already, I class each of the several spaces that the audience passed through in their complete experience as the site of this work. In the way I have previously discussed the different components of the 'Revelations' project as being a single project distributed over a range of outcomes, a comparison might be drawn with this work. The site of the project was the meeting point outside the ICA, as well as the bus and its journey to the space where the performance took place, and the bus ride back to central London. It would be inappropriate to distinguish between these different elements as it's the sum of these parts that created the work and experience. For example, if someone missed either of the bus journey's to-or-from the performance space, they would have missed out on a key part of the closely directed process and intention for the work. The journey there – the act of being driven to an unknown location – was designed to be disorientating and unsettling. Equally, the journey back, having been given no formal resolution or end to the experience of the performance, was vital in extending and maintaining a collective sense of unease or discomfort. As such, all of these elements together can be identified as a single site of experience in relation to the artwork.

In the staging of 'The Death of Peter Fechter' (2007) much of the consideration of the site, and its use, was an attempt to remove it from any recognisable aspect of traditional theatre or performance. It was an attempt to address a problem that I now don't believe it was ever possible to solve; that of the work simply being viewed as art and, therefore, remaining firmly rooted within a very specific context and frame of reference that, by default, somehow lessens the credibility or impact of the experience. However, I do believe the work was successful in addressing and upturning many of the conventions that exist around performance, enabling this work, ultimately, to function in a very different way to the kinds of performance the audience may have previously experienced.

Whilst more of an obvious fabrication than a work such as 'Free For All Forever' (2016), in so far as the audience knew this was an artistic event and they had opted into the experience, the considerations of site were designed to address or mitigate this fabrication as far as was possible. A problem of this fabrication are the very associations that an artistically educated or knowledgeable audience might bring with them (Kaprow 1966); if something is even remotely reminiscent or referential of something else this can compromise the integrity of the experience and the audience's ability to fully give themselves over to it. Unavoidably, if things are advertised as 'art' it sets up a conscious staging around them, but by allowing them

to be discovered or happened upon it leaves the real-world context intact – the gig, the street preacher, the billboard etc. – which allows for a more complex set of relations to remain attached to the experience of the works, as people necessarily factor in their cultural preconceptions of the site, the performer etc. By simply introducing an artwork into a site without acknowledgement, nothing is present to compromise the authenticity of the moment or experience. Prior to the introduction of my works into these sites, in an artistic sense, they might be considered ‘naked and expressionless’ (Baudrillard 1976). Through the introduction of my artworks into these ‘naked’ sites I am engaging their capacity as a material for symbolic exchange. That said, I must reiterate that this engagement is not possible of any randomly chosen site (unless the site is randomly chosen and then a work specifically developed for that site). The sites chosen for the staging of the works are an essential part of the work’s make-up. They are as important as any other element in its construct, without which the work would be as incomplete as an unfinished painting.

5.5 Other Relevant Presented Works

Considerations of site and the role it plays within the experience of the work are present in all of the other works presented in this portfolio. Most, if not all, of the considerations within them are discussed in the previous section of this chapter, but I will briefly contextualise each project in relation to that discussed already.

A Real Rock Archive: In Conversation (2006) (detailed information Ch.3)

As discussed in Chapter 3, site was an important consideration in the construct of this work. Whilst I would say that, from an artistic perspective, the use of the Boat Club as a site primarily played a conceptual and narrative role, it is unquestionable that the site functioned as a material element of the work. In many ways this work is one that most acutely aligns with the concerns of this chapter. On some level it would have been possible for the work to have existed successfully elsewhere but, necessarily, any other space used would logically have had to be an established concert venue, thereby bringing in to play all of the associations that the audience have with a gig venue and its history. The historical context that the chosen site brought to the work was a key element in delivering the wider narrative of the piece. It also specifically aligned the event with the historical precedent of gigs and performances that had taken place there previously, allowing for the creation of a credible space for both constituent audiences.

Metal Militia (2014) (detailed information Ch.3)

The site we were unable to use for this performance – the Berwick Barracks Parade Ground – would have been another good example of a site-as-material-element. As it was, the performance space we ultimately used brought little, specifically, to the narrative experience for the viewer, other than it being a recognisable performance space. The historical context of the parade ground would have brought a similar layer of narrative to The Boat Club in the previous work, however, it could potentially be argued that the credibility of the experience could have been compromised; in so far as the performance had no specific bearing on the activity of a parade ground and so the incongruous nature of this, whilst interesting, would not have lent itself to any extension of the dialogue around its existence as anything more than an artwork.

Ganas de Vivir (2016) (detailed information Ch.4)

This work has to be considered within the context of a multiplicity of similar sites. Many of the elements within each site remained consistent – the band, the songs, the types of venue, the interests of the audience etc. – but the physical venue changed every day throughout the distribution period of the work. It may be most appropriate to view the hand of Joey Zampella as the key site for the exhibition, activation and distribution of this artwork, as it was his use of the plectrum and the passing of that plectrum from Joey to a fan that was most important. However, even taking that micro-view of the site, it was still contained within a much bigger context, which was established by all of those elements listed previously.

God So Loves Decay (2016) (detailed information Ch.4)

As discussed in Chapter 3, site was absolutely key to this work. In removing and restaging the performance from its original site the work became too compromised to function as anything other than live-documentation of itself. In the same way The Boat Club brought a wealth of history and credibility to the experience for that audience, the Town Hall Square performed a similar function. It was arguably the only site that this piece could fully exist within – its removal compromising the narrative and conceptual intent for the work too much. As with 'Free For All Forever' (2016), the experience of a street preacher in that specific part of Luton Town Centre is so recognisable to the majority of the town centre users it makes the work an entirely credible experience. Any consideration of whether the performance was art or not-art become irrelevant as it is a credible version of the thing it is being, and therefore becomes something to be experienced and processed without the weight of any additional framework.



Fig.20. *The Death of Peter Fechter*, images of performance, Saturday 18th August, 2007
Image credits Lydia Polzer



Fig.21. *The Death of Peter Fechter*, image of performance, Saturday 18th August, 2007
Image credit Lydia Polzer



Fig.22. *The Death of Peter Fechter*, image of performance, Saturday 18th August, 2007
Image credit Lydia Polzer



Fig.23. *The Death of Peter Fechter*, image of performance, Saturday 18th August, 2007
Image credit Lydia Polzer



Fig.24. *The Death of Peter Fechter*, image of performance, Saturday 18th August, 2007
Image credit Lydia Polzer



Fig.25. *The Death of Peter Fechter*, image of performance, Saturday 18th August, 2007
Image credit Lydia Polzer



Fig.26. *The Death of Peter Fechter*, image of performance, Saturday 18th August, 2007
Image credit Lydia Polzer



Fig.27. Free For All Forever (2016)
I-70 Sign Show, Missouri
Image credit Anne Thompson



Fig.28. Free For All Forever (2010), Chapter Arts Centre, Cardiff



Fig.29. Free For All Forever (2016), UGO, Southampton
Image credit Jonathan Kelham



Fig.30. *The New Pornography* (2010)
Photograph

6 **Conclusion**

By first viewing this portfolio of artworks through the subset of questions in the previous chapters, this enables us to take a wider view on the relationship between artwork, viewer and site, leading to useful new understanding, or capacity for understanding, of my overarching question – *“From the artist’s perspective, through the exhibition or staging of an original creative artifact, what can we learn about the transference of agency, particularly in relation to the role of the audience or participant as a core element in the completion or activation of an artwork?”*

6.1 Summary of Findings

The focus of the research objective in Chapter 3: Free For All Forever, was: *To examine the exchange between ‘the work’, ‘the world’ and ‘the audience’, and their specific influence and impact on each other, through the creation of a space that can be inhabited by two separate audiences – art world and non-art world - who experience an identical activity, and yet understand it differently.*

The primary challenge in achieving this research objective was in the possibility of establishing a space where an artwork could retain its credibility, equally, for an art and a not-art audience, concurrently. In attempting to do so, visual art often creates a compromised version of the culture it is trying to engage and discuss. This can, in part, be mitigated through the surrounding project-architecture, such as how and where an artwork/event is publicised. An audience or viewers are engaged in a social relationship with the artwork, in that they are either acting upon it, or are being acted upon by it. Through this relationship, the artist can choose to consciously incorporate the audience/viewers into the fabric of the work as a material element, extending their role and presence into a fundamental bringing-in-to-being of the artwork. Their agency enters the room with them, as it were, and then is co-opted by the artist and artwork, meaning this needs no further action, or consent, from the audience other than their presence in the room. In turn, as the elements cohere, the experience of the audience/viewer ceases to be under the control of the artist, artwork, or recipient, which creates a zone of indeterminacy where the need for categorisation begins to dissolve. This is seen in many of the works presented in this overview but is certainly the case with two key works in this chapter, ‘A Real Rock Archive’ (2006) and ‘Metal Militia’ (2014).

The focus of the research objective in Chapter 4: Pass it On, was: *To examine the direct interaction between the artwork and the viewer – physical, emotional, intellectual; the offering of a physical object, gift or interaction. A literal reach beyond the typical viewing experience and the potential to establish an expanded spatio-temporality in the receipt of the artwork.*

The primary challenge in achieving this research objective was in establishing, or observing, how vital the audience are in the completion of the chain of events set in motion by the artist and artwork. The viewer, as the traditionally received recipient of the artist's agency through the artwork, is in no way subordinate in the exchanges between artist, artwork, site and viewer. In fact, they sit at the centre of the exchange with the artist and artwork and are the catalyst for the activation of the dormant artist's agency contained within the artwork. Any artwork sits autonomously between the artist and viewer, creating an interpretive distance and a transfer of interpretive agency. In acknowledging this, a space is created where the artist can cede control and engage chance, allowing for an equality of experience in this exchange; in so far as what the audience bring to the exchange is of equal importance, value, and necessity, as that which the artist brings through the artwork. The very presence of the audience/viewer at the site of this exchange is evidence of the agency that exists within the artwork. To view the set of social relations that exist around exchange as part of the artwork, is to establish and make visible the path of the artist's agency. To continue the distribution of this agency, the exchange of the token must also carry with it knowledge of its journey so far (that's not to say the token ceases to have any agency in the world without this knowledge – the mere presence of the plectrum in 'Ganas de Vivir' (2016) could still encourage someone to play a guitar – but it reverts to its original state, as being primarily representative of itself; once it has served its ceremonial purpose, it is of little intrinsic value). Until such time as the token is shorn of its original knowledge, it creates an expanded spatio-temporality in the ability for the artist's agency to distribute itself. The value is contained in the attached experience and the memory, which becomes the medium through which the agency is passed on. The artwork charges the viewer through these memories of itself, so without the audience/viewers presence the agency cannot be activated or passed on. The product of the exchange, between the artist and viewer via the artwork, becomes the most important element in the relationship between artist, artwork, site and audience. By introducing an artwork into a site, the site becomes productive for the audience, and the product of this (the cultural exchange) can be taken away.

The focus of the research objective in Chapter 5: Cultural Alloys, was: *To examine how the artwork draws on and manipulates the physical surroundings in which it is sited in order to intensify the viewer experience and extend its dialogues beyond that of simply being considered an artwork.*

The site of an artwork can be viewed, by the artist, as a material and co-opted into their construction of an artwork. The properties of a site can also manifest as agency and draw the artist to it in the first instance. The sites chosen for the staging of artworks are an essential part of the artwork's make-up and are as important as any other element in its construct, without which the artwork would be as incomplete as an unfinished painting. An audience's understanding of, and preconditioning towards, a co-opted site can assist in extending the artwork's dialogue beyond that of simply being considered as an artwork. At the moment of interaction it becomes irrelevant whether an artwork is art or not-art, because it is first and foremost the thing that the audience/viewers pre-conditioning informs them it is. The symbolic agency of a site can be co-opted and used by the artist, as we see with 'Free for All Forever' (2016), 'Ganas de Vivir' (2016) and 'God So Loves Decay' (2014), along with several more of the works in this critical overview. In using these spaces, and this approach, the artist can be unapologetic and uncompromising in what is introduced into them; only practical negotiation for access is required. The artwork is not stating itself to be art but, equally, it is not hidden; it is merely presenting as a credible version of something that also exists beyond the contemporary art canon. When an artwork successfully presents as such, any discussion of art or not-art becomes irrelevant, and it merely exists as something to be experienced and processed on its own recognisable terms. A work's 'dissensual participants' (Bottoms, 2017) – associated people and factors outside of the artist's control - are an essential element within its activation. It is them, and their association and interaction, that activates the co-opted agency of the site. Finally, my research demonstrates that the 'site' of an artwork or experience can intentionally be distributed over time and space. A series of concurrent actions and sites can coalesce in to one essential site for the experience of an artwork, as demonstrated by my approach to site in 'The Death of Peter Fechter' (2007).

6.2 Statement on the Broader Outcomes

As stated in the introduction, a key foundation of my research has been the desire to move beyond the limitations I contend exist in Bourriaud's writing on relational practice. As is so effectively noted by Martin Creed's 'Work No.232: the whole world

+ the work = the whole world' (2000), there seems little point in forcibly enfranchising an object as 'art' (Gell 1998) when, in reality, the moment it comes in to being it is instantly and unavoidably consumed by 'the whole world'.

The things we create as artists can be located within micro-dialogues around the artwork's relationship to other contemporary art objects and ideas. Or we can acknowledge that the artworks we make have a direct relationship with the whole world – a billboard activated by an artist on a highway is in dialogue with the architecture of its neighbouring billboards and dollar stores more so than it is with their potential use by contemporary artists. A performing street preacher in a town centre is in a dialogue with the other street vendors or performers as much as they may be part of a micro-dialogue around art as protest or subversion through performance. That's not to say those micro-dialogues are irrelevant or unimportant. However, in relation to my work, there is an immediacy to the audience interaction that draws, fundamentally, upon their experience of the entire world, not a niche subset of experiences within it. The majority of people who experience the work, or comment on it, will be discussing it exclusively as an object within their total reality and in relation to the other elements within that total reality, as opposed to discussing or considering it exclusively within a contemporary art dialogue. It is my co-option of these realities within the construct of my artworks, that completes them and brings them in to being.

The majority of these works contain a wholly credible internal identity, existing as an artifact in the world with the capacity to engage an audience, deliver an experience, and convey a message. Whether these things are a product of art or not-art ceases to have any specific relevance on their ability to exist autonomously and credibly, or to affect change in the world. Where previously the social relationships between viewer, creator and artwork may have been explicit, in terms of a work's commissioning, this is no longer the case (Hirsch 2013). Therefore, I would argue, it is most appropriate to consider the work outside of the contemporary art canon, whilst at the same time acknowledging that it is emerging from that space. Contemporary art now exists in a relationship with its viewer where, primarily, the viewers of an artwork are unknown personally to the artist. The work in this portfolio is about social relationships and agents, in the way that Gell defines these terms, in that the audience is either being affected by the work or they have caused it to come in to being in some way; it is not a metaphysical process of creating beauty or transcendence, but in building on an assumed set of knowledge and social

interactions that facilitate a connection to an unknown audience in the first instance. In this sense, I am setting up a proposition where the work becomes something waiting to be activated by the presence, or engagement, of the viewer or audience. It is in stasis until such a moment occurs in a viewer's conscious engagement with the work. This connects to aforementioned ideas on spatio-temporality – the moment an artist's agency 'detonates' at some distance from themselves.

In relation to performance that edges towards participatory theatre, as some of my presented works do, we must acknowledge that the experience is often weighted in favour of the pre-established intentions or interests of the artist (Bottoms 2017). In part, the work in this portfolio addresses that criticism and attempts to negotiate, or resolve, the problem. This accusation can be leveled at a work such as 'The Death of Peter Fechter' (2007). In a post-screening discussion about the work at the ICA, I was asked, *'How would you have felt if the actors had stepped in and saved Peter?'* Within my deliberately hands-off approach to the final construct of the work this was, technically speaking, a possibility. However, whilst I never explicitly gave the instruction 'not' to save Peter, the points of engagement I had established with my actors and participants were within strict parameters that would ultimately lead the action to an anticipated final destination. I must ask whether this is a problem, particularly when discussing agency, as there is the potential that in the space I established, where the actors and participants had an invited level of free will, maybe all I had created was the illusion of (their) agency. The reenactment was directed down a single path to a pre-determined conclusion. Of course, individual agency and free will in this situation differ from the kind of agency I have been discussing in general – that of the artist, or the artwork's capacity to affect change in some way. In those terms I believe the work and the experience to be coherent, particularly in relation to the key focus of this research – the role of the audience in activating or completing the work - as, without them and their involvement, the work could not have existed.

However, in analysing this body of works, I have found that the less formally directed works successfully created a space in which the audience were free to act or react in whichever way they chose, within the parameters of established societal norms. This highlights the role of the preconditioning or assumptions that audiences bring to an experience and how this is something that can itself be incorporated or co-opted by the artist. Again, there is something here to be questioned around the superior assumptions that exist around an arts audience; that they are somehow more

informed or connected or relevant. Certain works presented in this portfolio are specifically for an unknowing audience in that sense, and therefore I have to accept that many people may physically see the work but not process it in any way. I am aiming the work at those who observe it and wonder what it is and try to understand how it is different to the similar things they have seen, or what purpose it is exactly serving in the world. In creating this moment, and this consideration by my audience, the transference of agency can begin to affect change.

6.3 Main Contributions

- Innovative application of anthropological theory to the discourse around the co-option of site and audience agency in the construct of an artwork.
- Implementation of Gell's reading of Babadzan's anthropological theory of the circularity of productive exchanges, providing practical and theoretical insight into the complex and tangible set of activation relations between artist, artwork, site and audience.
- Contradicting and building on the discourse around two specific areas of Alfred Gell's 'Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory' (1998) – those of an artwork solely being defined as a physical object, and an artwork being irreversibly enfranchised as 'art'.
- Extending the discourse around the relationship between anthropological theory and relational aesthetics, providing useful insight into this relationship and its practical application.
- Testing, and providing insight, into the point of transgression and the *'disjuncture between art's self-understanding and its social reality'*, as referred to by Kim Charnley.
- Innovative methodological approach to the examination of a coherent, but distributed, site for the exhibition, experience, or presentation of an artwork.
- Innovative methodological approach to the creation of a space where an art and not-art audience can experience an identical activity, yet understand it differently.

Further Development and Future Work

There are two new works, already undertaken, and two projects in development that I consider as extensions of this research.

The first was a cover and a series of internal photographs for a book by the writer Jon Gower. The second was the album cover artwork, design and layout for a solo record by the musician, James Dean Bradfield (of the Manic Street Preachers). In both instances, due to the existing relationships I had with the work's authors, I was invited to consider the proposition as an artist, as opposed to a designer. I was given no specific brief, just a narrative to respond to and a space with a specific set of parameters in which the work would finally be sited.

I see both of these projects as a development of my interest in site – in both instances I approached the spaces, that of the book and the record cover, as a contextually rich site, in much the same way I have considered the site of a billboard in this critical overview; spaces loaded with prior-understanding and assumption that can be co-opted into the experience, construct and delivery of the work. Both of these projects also have a particular relationship with ideas of the passing of a token or object – whilst neither are free, they are objects that exist in multiples and will go on their own journey irrespective of my involvement. In that sense, they can particularly be aligned with 'Ganas de Vivir' and the introduction of my work on to Joey Z's plectrum, along with his role as a secondary agent in the realisation of their distribution. Of particular interest are these sites for my works as, whilst I can draw the connections above, they are very different from the sites I have previously used in my work or been invited to access and consider.

The first of the two larger projects has been in development since 2016, when I made a research visit to Cardiff-by-the-Sea in California. As a Cardiff (UK) resident, I was interested in the relationship that exists between the two places; Cardiff-by-the-Sea was given its name by Frank Cullen who first broke ground there in 1910, as his wife was a former resident of Cardiff (UK). I wish to examine this relationship through artistic activity and on an initial research trip, in 2016, a key focus was to identify sites and spaces around the town through which a programme of activity could be embedded. These sites/spaces include Frank Cullen's original house (the first house to be built in the town and now available to rent as a holiday-let), the Kraken (a surf-shop-turned-bar and music venue) and La Paloma Theatre (an old independent

cinema one mile up the road in Encinitas). There is also the local school and the wider community of the town who would form part of the project. The purpose of the project would be to examine, and strengthen, the relationship and history between these two places, with the potential for establishing a reciprocal event in Cardiff (UK).

The second project in development is a live performance and reinterpretation of the stories of 'The Mabinogion'; a collection of stories first compiled in written form in the C12-13th, from Bardic tales. These stories form the basis of Welsh folklore as we understand it today. My interest in these stories is, in part, a direct relationship that can be drawn with the other Celtic mythologies to be found around Europe and the contemporary interpretation of those mythologies through sub-genres of heavy metal; both, Black Metal and Viking Metal, in Scandinavian countries, draw extensively on these mythologies. There is, currently, no such history of a similar interpretation in Wales and I am developing ideas for a Black Metal-style reinterpretation and performance of the stories of The Mabinogion, to be performed in the landscape at the original sites of the tales. My interest is, equally, in positioning these stories in a different context – one which is aligned with the already established cultures and approaches of Black/Viking Metal – and also in researching the potential for introducing, and reinvigorating these ancient tales, through their dissemination to a new audience and sub-culture in a new form. The preliminary research for this project was presented in collaboration with Dr Tom Cardwell (UAL Wimbledon) at the Punk Scholars Network 6th International Conference and Postgraduate Symposium, Newcastle University, in December 2019 (see conference abstract in Appendix A)

Both of these projects are an extension of my research interests as laid out in this critical overview; they will draw significantly on my research into the audience's role in the construct and activation of the work. They will also draw on my findings and conclusions in relation to site and the practical application of narrative associations and prior assumptions that site can bring to bear on the work itself and the audience's understanding of the experience.

Appendix A

S Mark Gubb – God So Loves Decay An Abstract for ‘Curating Resistance: Punk as Archival Method’

Abstract for an Alternative Presentation

My proposal is to restage my performance work, [‘God So Loves Decay’](#), commissioned by [Sunridge Avenue Projects](#), first performed in Luton, UK, on May 7th, 2016. This took the collected lyrics of seminal UK punk band, UK Decay, and, working with musician [Russ Crimewave](#), saw them ‘performed’ in Luton town centre in a form akin to a religious street preacher. A limited-edition publication of the lyrics was produced and given to passing members of the public. This happened with the full knowledge and support of UK Decay. Authenticity of experience was key – there was no public indication this was an artwork, thereby allowing the words of UK Decay to be interpreted by this unassuming audience in a contemporary social, economic and political context. The act of re-presenting these words in this shifted way is an acknowledgement of their ongoing relevance, pulling them back out of the cultural archive and reinvigorating them in a time starkly reminiscent of that of their inception, but in a context that encourages an expanded dialogue. The logistics of presenting this at the conference would simply be mine and Russ’s presence there. I would be happy to decide on the exact parameters in negotiation with the organisers – it could happen in a traditional presentation slot, it could happen at a given time and space outside of this arena, or as a combination of the performance and a more traditional paper, to contextualize the content and intentions of the work.

Biog

S Mark Gubb is a visual artist and Senior Lecturer in Fine Art at the University of Worcester, UK. His PhD and artistic research examines ideas of exchange between artwork, viewer and exhibition/performance site, including the importance of popular culture as a means by which to process and reevaluate our experiences, historically and philosophically.

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Proposal for Punk Scholars Network 6th Annual Conference

'Hiraeth' – a collaborative project

Dr. Tom Cardwell (UAL) and S. Mark Gubb (University of Worcester)

Keywords: Black metal, mythology, Welsh heritage, artwork, noise.

This paper will present the ideas behind 'Hiraeth', a collaborative artwork currently in development by S. Mark Gubb and Tom Cardwell, which proposes an album and performance for an invented Black Metal band. 'Hiraeth' is an untranslatable Welsh word that describes a sense of longing for home.

The album will comprise of songs based on a series of Welsh, pre-Christian, tales called 'The Mabinogion'. First compiled in the C12th-13th, they are the source of much Welsh folklore and, for many years, were never written down, being passed on through the oral tradition of the bards. For the artists, this relates to the fiercely underground early Black Metal scene – a scene remarkable for its conscious adoption of noise and lo-fi recordings - and how it was developed through word-of-mouth and fan-to-fan exchanges. It also places this Celtic mythology in a relationship with the Norse mythology so often referenced in the lyrics and ideologies of early exponents of Black Metal.

It is envisaged that the completed project will centre around a live performance of the album, complete with stage costumes and sets, as well as further visual outcomes including record sleeves, patches, etc. which will subsequently be shown in an exhibition context.

In specific relation to the conference theme, we also draw influence from Hugh Lupton's historical fiction 'The Assembly of the Severed Head'; a fictitious account of the first transcription of the tales by monks and their transgression of the, by then, dominant Christian moral position.

Both Gubb and Cardwell share a research interest in art practice that responds to metal and punk subcultures. Previous projects include 'Metal Militia' a live music performance at Berwick Visual Arts (Gubb) and 'Still Life and Death Metal' a battle jacket research project (Cardwell).

Artists' websites:

<http://tomcardwell.uk>
www.smarkgubb.com



S. Mark Gubb – 'Metal Militia', commissioned by Berwick Visual Arts



Tom Cardwell – 'Bad Patch' solo exhibition at Wimbledon Space, March 2017

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