

Residency-as-Method

**A Process-Based Approach to Developing Artistic Ways of Knowing
Within Sites of Informal Learning**

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PhD 2022

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A Process-Based Approach to Developing Artistic Ways of Knowing Within Sites of Informal Learning

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of

Manchester Metropolitan University

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

The Education and Social Research Institute

Faculty of Health and Education

2022

Abstract

This study makes the proposition that an artist's residency-is-method. By method, I mean a specific way of doing research. Residency I define as an artist working within a practice within a site. I identify the relations between personal art practice and its agency through telling the story of an experiment in research-creation that crosses three sites. The study builds a platform and in so doing creates a territory where multiple trajectories collide. The study employs propositions from the field of research-creation as an approach that pays attention to the individual subjective and a singular arts practice.

The intention is to acknowledge the difficulties and contradictions that emerge when artistic ways of thinking are diffracted through the lens of research methods and brought to written language. This study is written for artists and researchers who are working on cross-disciplinary research projects that are not located within university fine art departments. It contributes from an individual and personal perspective to the growing fields of research-creation in that it pragmatically layers the approach into the complex relation of work within sites of collective community action.

Where necessary the study draws on theoretical and ontological thinking of post-philosophies, specifically Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of *assemblage* and the *nomadic*. However, it remains deeply immersed in the thinking-making-doing process of art within the ongoing creative-event. It applies research-creation as an approach to open a space for art to do things differently and enunciate *newsense* challenging multiple disciplinary boundaries and sedimented ways of knowing.

This study interrogates thoughts, observations and the concepts that emerged from the interactions between doing research and maintaining an artist's identity through thinking-making-doing within multiple sites of practice. I recognise that the work of this study is a further *ravelling* and as such a coming together. It is not a systematic untangling, the undoing of knots, or an unravelling. There are no conclusions, only thoughts and movement in process.

The Words to be Spoken First

*'Let us nevertheless start with the grasping side: it establishes a
'holding together'*

Chaosmosis (Guattari, 1995:113)

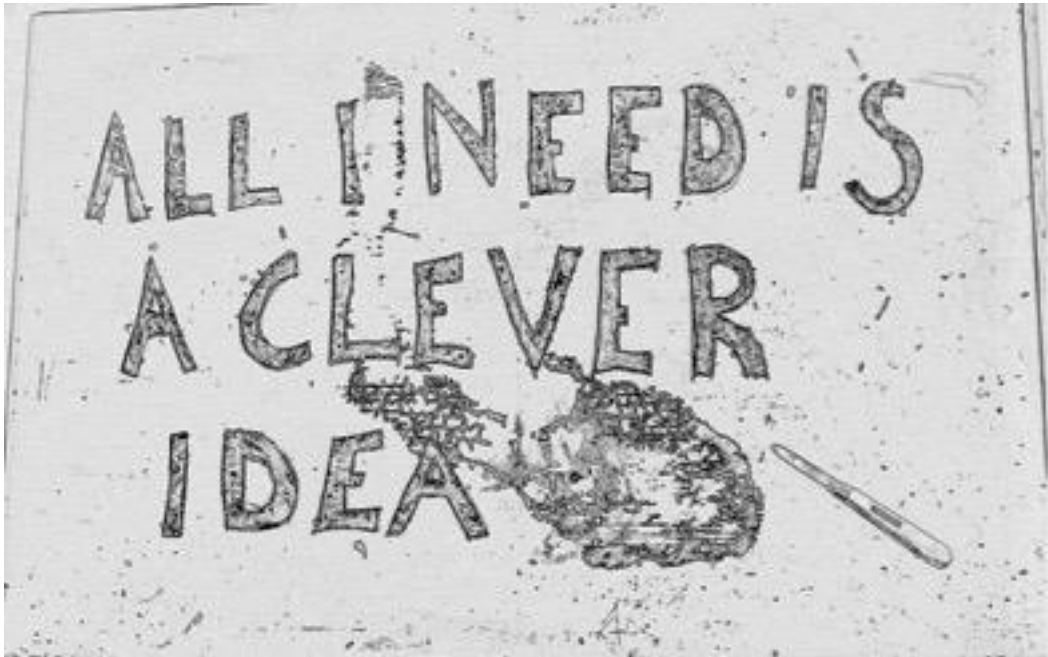


Figure 1 : Clever Idea (Source: Steve Pool, Pahl et al., 2013)

There is still nowhere to start to write what needs to be spoken first. It feels arbitrary to place it at the beginning. This page according to tradition should be an abstract, the fiftieth iteration of a well-honed single page of A4. Yet we should always start as we mean to continue and there will be space for the abstract later.

At a conference at Cornell University exploring posthuman utopias a representative of the indigenous American community is requested to greet the delegates. He tries to speak from his tradition, these are the centuries-

old '*words to be spoken first,*' enunciated before any gathering or event. He is interrupted by a diligent professor as we need to be told where to find the tea and coffee and the route to the nearest restroom. It is difficult to know where to start or how to start and often the best place is with a story. The story has its own reason, it is not an effort to give precise and useful information. A story can hold simple and complex truths, these can be lost or reduced if they are explained in too much detail. Cornell University took its land from an indigenous people under the Morrill Act restrictions. There are worse abuses than telling us where the toilets are before the speaking of sacred words of welcome. The story is small, yet it enunciates chaotic and symbolic resonances both virtual and real.

I greet you here as a visual artist, as a researcher, as a maker of play equipment as matter out of place. There are words that must be spoken first and apologies that must be given.

I apologise for the fact that however hard I tried I could not fit myself into the form required to write in the way I had hoped for.

I apologise for the lack of order and clear language. Much of this confusion is unnecessary.

I apologise that I have developed no systematic approach and talk of glimpses and of things half-seen.

I apologise for everything I have read and everything I have not read and my ability to forget some things and make other things up.

I apologise for the lack of understanding, lack of maturity and the difficulties I pass on to you the reader.

I aspire to tell a story of getting lost, of losing myself in thought and action.

Entwined within this getting lost are encounters with new ideas. I will refer to these ideas as concepts. Looking back the most challenging aspect of this work has been to bring concepts to my world of thinking-making-doing.

Concepts here refer to the business of philosophy or the product of philosophical thought. The concept presents us with an abstract idea and within this PhD concepts unfold within an expanding art practice. Embarking on a four-year PhD study has afforded many opportunities and challenges all of which come from a middle space within thinking-making-doing. None of them are separate.

My PhD project explores the concept of the artist-in-residence as a way of doing research. It sits queasily between research-creation and auto-ethnography. Predominantly based in an adventure playground in Sheffield, I am researching how to promote an ethos that encourages the self-building of play equipment with a focus on loose parts play. I trained as a sculptor and my approach draws on years of working as a freelance artist engaging with and researching with young people. I have always been interested in how we

move through space, how space is occupied and how this relates to power structures and young people's autonomy and agency.

As my study progressed, I began to explore where research takes place and how it defines a territory.

This idea of territory slipped into the world, and I became dissatisfied with the way research seemed to make edges where before were unacknowledged folds. I began to build a platform as part of my fieldwork to ironically make the edges substantive. This felt straightforward both practically and theoretically. The platform afforded movement and generated space. Like many good ideas, it came to me all at once in a moment and was complete as an object in my mind's eye. I was struggling with where research started and stopped, the territory was mapped from the outside, and the structures of what constituted this territory seemed baked into the unfamiliar habits of doing research. I had little control over these parameters, the crossings and lines of demarcation seemed arbitrary, all the diagrams and maps had already been drawn.

I would build a platform which would be an area for young people to participate in loose parts play. The platform would be the place where the research took place, where it could be held within a frame. It was also a boundary to be crossed, an edge, a line, a platform to jump from.

There was a moment in the middle of the summer of 2020 when things began to make sense. Looking back, I am filled with a strange nostalgia for

what turned out to be the start of something. I was reading and making and thinking and doing. I include an extract from my blog here as it tells of a messy time when something was working. There is no straightening out of this text, no tighter edit, I do however add footnotes as commentary. Like much of the writing that follows in this study it skirts on the edge of sense and is difficult, yet it is writing that is immersed in doing and doing is always messy. I start here in what ended up as the middle of things.

Art in the time of Covid

I maintained my PhD blog 'Myphd' regularly from the 8th of October 2018 until the 22nd of March 2022. It contains 143 posts that track the journey of my PhD study and how it relates to and entangles with other aspects of my life. The original posts are not fully referenced and use informal writing. Like other writing within this study, ideas, objects, and theory jump around. I quote directly from my blog where I feel that the writing from the time expresses something within a context that I cannot bring to language in a successful way after the event. Each post is given a date and can be found in its entirety and in context, here

<https://stevesphd.blogspot.com>

Week 9 in the big brother House- (new)sense

(Blog post-June 12th, 2020)

My daily regime is now established. I get up at about 8.30 and spend around two hours reading A Thousand Plateaus. I normally manage about fifteen

pages; this is my main achievement for the day. I don't find it difficult to read though I can see how the thinking grows in you and makes difficulties. In the Plateau that talks of sedimentation, they refer to the Arthur Conan Doyle story, The Day the Earth Screamed. I read this short story at age fifteen to satisfy a craving for early 20th-century science-fiction writing. I developed a soft spot for the ever-angry Professor Challenger, who had a grand plan to dig a shaft so deep below the surface that he would be able to prick the world. The story keeps coming back to me as it is about digging and I will spend the rest of my day digging holes for posts, to erect legs and supports at the adventure playground. Digging through a layer of hard shale, a coal seam, very close to the surface, then a layer of Gannister, the rough clay used to make crucibles that were used to pour the blister steel of the industrial revolution.

Challenger digs so deep that he pricks the consciousness of the earth, and She/He/They scream.

This is what Deleuze and Guattari are hoping to achieve in their writing, to dig so deep that they prick the collective mind of thought. In saying mind of thought I flag to myself that I am understanding, to an extent at least, the idea of assemblage.

This is all part of the same thing. The same ideas, a monad, yet it holds a difference. A difference that is temporally located within Bergson's idea of time as subjectivity. Not something we are within but something we are of, a

thing to keep in-mind (mind becomes both mined, as in dug out, mind as in mine and mind as in mind the gap or the minor parts of language).

Everything is different but the same thing, all the concepts roll together as do the days of working and reading everything is in opposition, in direct contradiction, language collapses.

In 'A Thousand Plateaus', if a problem arises with a strand of thought or a concept, the authors tag on or jump to another concept and then say it's different but the same. There is an ironic strand that flows through the book. At points they cross the philosopher's 4th wall and like Lovejoy the lovable rogue antique dealer in the 90s TV series speak directly to the reader or to the camera. They need to fill in some gaps in the plot that they have lost.

Deleuze and Guattari often apologise - we are a bit sorry for making you read this stuff but it may be worth it if you stick with us. These are jolts, punctures or little wake-up calls (are you still there?). These asides are strangely absent in the secondary literature apart from Massumi who has adopted their trick, to break a habit and separate the dog from his vomit.

It is funny to look to Deleuze and Guattari to structure my open time, to mark the passing of the days. It is an effort not just to be building a platform. A simple platform with a tree growing out of it. It feels harder to be marking a territory that also includes thought. Abstract thought rather than felt thoughts.

I cannot imagine many things other than a pandemic that would afford an opportunity for paying such attention. Perhaps a long personal illness and slow recuperation.

With this move towards a difference of understanding comes a slight smugness, an ability to spot the Deleuze in Glissant¹ or the lack of it in Jane Bennett². The hook and hold of it. 'A Thousand Plateaus' can be read as one side of the Velcro it is easy to forget for it to be sticky you need both parts..... the hook and the eye. The concepts and the world.

But how to speak of this (New)sense to anybody living a life in the world of adventure play? This gets more and more difficult. So difficult I am aware it will never become easy. Even though Deleuze and Guattari's writing is visceral and human and connected to the flows and rhythm of the everyday. For me, it is an on-the-skin writing. It is not in-the-skin, forever writing like a tattoo. As a written text it is removed and reified, the book and the platform are becoming objects.

There are no notes but there is a deeper understanding. 'A Thousand Plateaus' is where the plain of consistency is fully established. For me as someone who lives on the edge of nomadic madness, and walks confidently in its shadow, the plain fits quite naturally into a life. Perhaps for many, the

¹ Glissant works with the concept of the rhizome in relation to his theories of creolization and opacity (Glissant, 1997)

² Jane Bennett's (Bennett, 2010, p 88) vitalism the concept of jizz which she outlines in her book *Vibrant matter* as a life force feels different to Deleuze construction of *a life* (Deleuze, 2001) in the blog post I refer to my feelings when reading texts rather than specifics.

plain offers an alternative - the points that surface as critiques of the current state of things are useful for people who have been schooled to think in certain ways. The book is not a guide, it is not against anything it is pure philosophy in the western tradition. This is the production of NEW concepts on the plain of immanence. They do this repeatedly.

It is probably the book that has most changed me in the way I think, I think. I am only starting to be able to read it properly. I am a coward nomad who knows he is only happy when he is travelling. I am also the sailor who fell from grace with the sea.

And then I stop, I have forgotten how much trees move in the wind and the platform is screaming as the bark of an oak tree rubs against harsh corrugated metal of the roof I've just fitted. The sound is like fingers scratching down a chalk board and I must climb back up my ladder and enlarge the hole with tin snips. My tinsnips are made in Sheffield by a company called Gilbow. I have lost a piece of rubber from between the handles. This means I can't seem to use them without trapping my nipple. As I work, I think about what we can and can't anticipate. I think about how things grow and how, when Covid is all finished and we have built a new normal, kids will be playing elaborate games and building their own worlds in a space I've helped to make. I think Deleuze would be impressed by the sheer physicality of the construction and the impact on bone, skin, and muscle. Guattari would oink like a pig which is apparently his way of showing

approval. I have stopped the tree from screaming. I trap my nipple in the handle of the tin snips and let out a muffled cry.

'From now on we have to make do with it, start from there, return to it and circle around.'

Chaosmosis (Guattari, 1995:116)

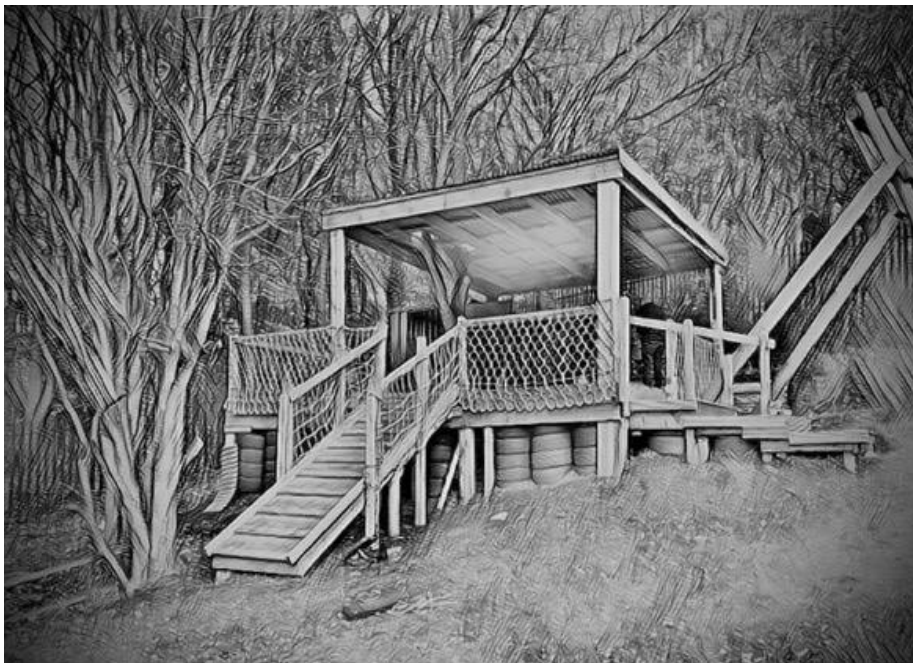


Figure 2: Sketch of Finished Platform (Source: Steve Pool Nov 2020)

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Prof Kate Pahl, Dr Laura Trafi-Prats, and Dr Geoff Bright for the challenge, support and advice that has guided me through and pushed me over the line. Geoff retired during my second year yet his thoughts, activism, and most importantly his unquestioning belief in me and my ability runs through these pages. Laura, by paying careful attention, has taught me to get better at academic writing and frustratingly recognise my limitations. I would especially like to thank Kate for putting up with me as I bounced from crisis to crisis. She has been a great principal supervisor and without her none of this work could have happened.

Thanks also to Prof Abigail Hackett for letting me piggyback on her project, cut my teeth, try things out and come up with ideas. I remember being sat cross-legged on a playgroup floor talking about Deleuze and representation, secret plans and what we were going to cook for tea. Her generosity of mind got this project off to a flying start. I would like to thank the staff at the museum for their help and input in realising the exhibition.

I would like to thank Dr Sarah E. Truman and Dr David Ben Shannon for their advice on research-creation which gave me the confidence to follow this line of thought. Thank you also to my colleagues at ESRI, the students and the staff who have enriched my time in Manchester over the last four years.

I would like to thank the volunteers, staff team and children at Pitsmoor Adventure Playground. We all know how important we are to each other; we build, we make, we think, we talk, and we play together. In the end, I

couldn't write this for you, I had to write it for myself. I think this is okay as it turned out that this was where I needed to do the work. Luckily, I did build a nice piece of play equipment with a tree growing through it which feels fit for purpose and fair exchange. Without you, none of this would have been possible and my life would be smaller, less filled with joy, hope and purpose.

And finally, I would like to say a massive thank you to my life partner Kim Streets. I thank her for our late-night conversations about chaos, hope, fragility, and death. For never getting sick of my ramblings and for wearing sunglasses on bright days so at least I was never burdened by the rolling of her eyes.

Prologue

An inconvenient pandemic

It is difficult to write about anything that happened during 2020-2022 without considering the Covid pandemic. It is not something that can be ignored, circumvented, or retrospectively written out of this PhD study. The impact of Covid can be felt within what it was possible to do but also in what it was possible to think. The concept and proposition for this study were to explore the artist-residency as a method of enquiry. By this I mean the artist's position in a complex set of relations that emerge when an artist's practice is embedded within a location. Covid and the associated restrictions meant that the actions and relations I hoped would emerge within the creative-event of my residency at an adventure playground could not evolve in the ways I had anticipated. I write this prologue in the summer of 2022, six months after the end of Covid restrictions and associated legislation in the UK. The experience has changed many things on different scales within lived ecologies. The experience of the pandemic is central to this study and in varying ways forms part of everything that follows.

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Glossary

Aesthetics

I use of the term *aesthetic* throughout this study to describe the qualities of materials, actions, and events and how they relate to feelings. I recognise that aesthetics is a branch of philosophy though I do not locate its meaning within a specific philosophical context or fixed singular definition.

Artist

For the purpose of this study the word *artist* generally refers to a visual artist working within an established and ongoing personal art practice.

Artist-in-Residence

The term *artist-in-residence* is used to describe how artists work outside the studio often in a broad social context. The relationship between the artist, the context and artistic practice is complex and entangled. The term is commonly understood in the art sector as an artist working within a specific location or organisation for a fixed period of time.

Assemblage

Assemblage is an important concept for Deleuze and Guattari it underpins many of their other concepts, yet they never fully explain its meaning.

Translated originally from the French term *Agencement* the word suggests an active set of vibrant relations within a middle space.

Body-without -Organs

Deleuze and Guattari borrow this phrase from the radical playwright Antonin Artaud. It is an important concept for the chaotic middle of this study. I draw on it as I struggle with the interrelationship between the individual as embodied within a person and the role of the subjective position in the thinking making doing of research-creation.

Creative-event

I use the term *creative-event* as a marker, a way to define an area of interest that is not fixed or complete. *Creative-event* is a way to discuss the collective and expanding nature of residency, research and making art without generating fixed categories or boundaries.

Diffraction

Diffraction is used to describe how two things interact in complexity after they come together. For example, the building of a platform for loose parts play and the reading of philosophies of immanence.

Field

A term I borrow from ethnography I use the term *field* to refer to the elements of the study that were within sites of practice and were not located within the university. I also use the term to refer to specific areas or fields of research such as research-creation.

Fold

The *fold* is a concept used by Deleuze to think through totalities. Instead of reaching an edge or a boundary, there is consistency. The boundaries become folds and continuity.

Life

Life or *a life* is used by Deleuze to point towards something that is larger than an individual singular bounded human. His notion of *a life* encompasses flow and movement and challenges where one thing stops and another starts. The concept of *a life* is important when considering the plane of immanence or consistency which are central to his ideas on materialism.

Newsense

Newsense is a word I made up for the purpose of this study, I describe it as a concept. For a while I hyphenated the two words to new-sense or used brackets new(sense). However, it felt useful to invent a new word. It is intended to stand in for nuance, new sense, nuisance, and nascent. As a dyslexic, I see this word as all these things at once, in this context it makes a complete *newsense* of itself.

Opacity

I use the term *opacity* in relation to its common usage as a noun: The quality of being difficult to know about or understand because things have been kept

secret or are complicated. I was inspired to use the term after reading Glissant's (1997) *Poetics of relation* and his ideas connecting opacity to Antillean Diaspora theory. I have found this theory useful in relation to thinking through power relations and what it is to be fully known. The concept of the secret plan of practice grew from reading Glissant's work and draws on his insights.

Artists Practice

Practice generally refers to the ongoing ideas that constitute the work of the artist. It suggests the continuation of themes, consistencies, refrains and ongoing areas of concern.

Proposition

The *proposition* is central to research-creation as an approach to finding out. It presents an alternative to a research question. On one level it is a statement that can be agreed or disagreed with on another it provides a stimulus for speculation.

Ravelling

Ravelling is the second concept I developed for this study it is presented as a coming together, a knotting and tangling of threads that do not centrally position a human actor.

Residency-as-method

I developed this term at the start of my PhD study to challenge the sedimented understanding of what constituted a residency and its possible relations to doing research.

Speculation

Speculation is used as a word that challenges what may be possible and opens alternative realities. My interest was sparked by the work of Alfred North Whitehead (1957) in his book *Process and Reality* and through reading the *Lure of Whitehead* (Gaskill and Nocek, 2014) and trying out ideas of speculation within my artistic practice to challenge what I believed possible.

Study

The terms *study* or *this study* are used to talk about everything that I consider to be part of this doctoral thesis. This is not limited to the written text presented here. It includes the things I have made, relationships and encounters across the full five years of this *study*.

Work

As with study, the term *work* is drawn from the language of the artistic crit group. Work refers to what the study of the PhD does and what it brings to the world.

Research Journey

I began working on interdisciplinary research projects within universities in 2010. Before this time my encounters with research had been as a subject of study. Sometimes for ethnographers researching artists or as part of research projects evaluating aspects of my creative work in schools. From 2011 onwards I became involved in projects that focussed on working with communities to co-produce and generate living and situated knowledge (Facer and Enright, 2016). Funded and supported through the AHRC's Connected Communities programme, these projects were time-limited, and my role varied. Sometimes I would be commissioned as the artist-in-residence at other times I was employed as a filmmaker or videographer either to document the process or to help co-produce films with young people (Appendix 1).

I began to write and co-write papers as part of this work (Appendix 2) and delivered keynote papers at conferences and symposiums. In 2018 I decided to apply for a Vice Chancellor's Doctoral Scholarship Award at Manchester Metropolitan University to interrogate the research approaches and concepts I was involved with. I wanted to work outside the constraints of a goal-orientated time-limited research project. I identified a gap in the literature concerning the role of artists' practice and its complex relationship to doing research with communities.

I set out to explore the proposition that the artist's-residency is a method of doing situated research. The largely accepted definition of a residency within

artistic commissioning is to position an artist's art practice in relation to a site or location for an extended period and to produce new artworks. To propose residency-as-method is to speculate on its potential by expanding how the concept can be activated within the thinking-making-doing of research. My aim was to focus on processes and flows in relation to how research is conducted and specifically the role of artistic practice within it.

I began my study in October 2018. As I embarked on planning my research approach and exploring different kinds of literature and methodologies, I became aware of conflicts and difficulties. All my work within the domain of academic research to this point could be understood as my art practice intervening within established research methodologies. My position changed through the process of developing my personal project where I was in control of research questions, study focus, and methodologic approach. The idea of art intervening became problematic as it felt impractical for my art practice to intervene in a process I was in control of. I struggled to make sense of an emerging fault line between what I was intending to study and the methodology and ontologies I was encountering through reading new literature.

During the first year of my study I was inspired by the writing of Ellsworth (2005) and Stewart (2007). I was drawn to research exploring sites of informal learning and theories of affect. I was looking for ontological foundations to make sense of theoretical orientations within social science research. I read extensively exploring Feminist New Materialism, Actor-network theory, the

post-human turn and speculative realism including object-oriented ontologies. This dive into theory was an attempt to question the positioning of a singular human subjective at the centre of making art and followed a concerted effort to make my study less anthropocentric. I was looking for an ontology that could flatten value structures and generate a theoretical middle that was not at the centre of everything.

The shock of Covid coupled with feeling lost and losing a connection to my arts practice forced me to acknowledge that my personal story and identity would play an important part in developing my study. I began to research auto-ethnography using visual and sensory methods (Pink, 2015) (Pink, 2020). It was during this period and through working on the pilot project that I struggled with refining research questions that could remain open to the emergent nature of my work. Specifically, I could not generate a question that would shape an inquiry into the concept of residency and its affective relationships to my work at the adventure playground.

By late 2019 I had completed my pilot project and was planning my residency at the adventure playground. As I started to work on the site I began to take detailed ethnographic field notes. These charted my actions thoughts and feelings; they were important in that they made the work different to how I had worked previously. They were written firstly as an aid to memory to enable reflection and to an extent separate thinking from the making and the doing. They also charted ideas where they emerged and plotted a timeline. As the project progressed and I became interested in

speculative approaches and process philosophy I moved away from ethnographic methods, yet I continued to keep detailed fieldnotes. I found the thinking space they enabled valuable especially as my practice was developing as a hybrid involving not only thinking-making-doing but also writing. I was borrowing a method from ethnography to enable me to encounter the world differently and make something new.

The spring of 2020 brought with it Covid restrictions and my fieldwork was paused. I began to adapt and shape my study to what was possible within this new environment. I could no longer research with young people or try things out at the playground. This forced me to change my plans and explore new possibilities. I began a close reading of all the collaborative writing of Deleuze and Guattari and this challenged me to think differently about the world/cosmos and what might be possible for my study. The idea of using an existing methodology to explore a subject of study, for example, the ethos and implementation of loose parts play lost relevance as a response to the global crisis. It was at this point that I adopted research-creation as an approach as it appeared to afford an opportunity to respond to the fast-changing context with a focus on affective relations between human and nonhuman actors. Research-creation also allows the artist/scholar to pay attention to the contingent and a future that is yet to come. This approach led me to move from establishing research questions to developing responsive propositions that evolved and were refined over time.

Research-creation is concerned with things that emerge, the future that is not yet known. Propositions give direction and flow and afford opportunities to speculate. The three core propositions I put to use in this study emerged through the thinking-making-doing process of the creative-event of my residency. They come from the middle of the -thinking-making-doing and have changed over time, responding to what was needed in the moment. The proposition's purpose, in contrast to a research question, is that it does not strive for clarity or look for answers. It is not so much a 'what if' question as a 'this is' statement of truth that can be disagreed or agreed with. To explain how this works in practice I will explore the first core proposition of this study.

Proposition 1

Arts practice is about sensemaking and nonsense-making from a particular subjective position.

The proposition can hold a direct contradiction and open discussion. This proposition speculates that art practice has two opposing aims, to make sense and nonsense. These aims may or may not be in balance, as a proposition they ask us to speculate about their relation. Is art practice cycling between these two aims or are both points aspired for at the same time?

To propose arts practice is associated with a particular subjective position is to suggest both a strength and a weakness. Again, the proposition presents

a position and a statement of truth but also something to be disagreed with. The traditions and sedimented practices of art are some of the parts that define an arts practice. Traditions linked to the imagination, the muse, and the individual genius cannot be ignored or removed from the process of art making. This proposition does not aspire to find an answer or a better understanding of what these traditions mean. It is a thought tool and an enabling device that proposes new potentials that manifest within futures that are unknown.

Propositions

Proposition 1

Arts practice is about sensemaking and nonsense-making from a particular subjective position.

This proposition problematises the bounded and situated human actor within the research assemblage. It emerged from the idea of the artist as an author in control of meaning-making, an individual subject with something to communicate to others. The proposition grew from a struggle to develop an identity as an artist/scholar and interrogate the nature of my artistic practice. It proposes a way of encountering art as a contradiction this fits my pre-conception of art. The proposition therefore presents a challenge to think differently.

Proposition 2

Arts practice follows a secret plan, this plan unfolds in the future and is not written in the present. The plan's value lies within its opacity.

This proposition presents a way to understand art as embodied and unknowable. It suggests one way that art practice may differ from other practices is its relation to an emerging future. The concept of what is present but unknowable and apparent through its absence emerged from this proposition.

Proposition 3



Figure 3: Platform nearing completion (Source: Steve Pool 11:2020)

My final proposition is the finished platform at the playground. It is central to this project and proposes many things in their own way that have proved difficult to bring to words. The platform proposes a legacy beyond the writing of words.

Introduction

This study has emerged from a four-year journey through thinking-making-doing. It performs its work in the middle space of art practice, academic scholarship and building adventure play equipment. When I began, I had no clear idea where I would finish or the direction I would take to get there. I had the desire to extend my understanding of how art works in research. This desire was all-consuming. I had reached the edge of a life as a journeyman artist and hoped to fold myself into a different mix. At times I lost my way and wanted to write about failure; at times I lost my way and wanted to run backwards; at times I lost my way and became a rabbit in new materialist headlamps. To lose your way allows a finding of yourself. At the very least it enables an ability to recognise new landmarks to navigate by. I consider my contribution to new knowledge as heuristic and in process. By this I mean it is a practical approach to problem-solving, it is not guaranteed, and it is not perfect or logical. It is nevertheless sufficient in that it moves thought forward. I take tiny steps and walk a minor line within the in-act of thinking-making-doing.

This introduction is intended as a reader's guide. In using the phrase *this study*³ I am referring to the holistic process of doing my PhD. As I present this work as research-creation, I include all aspects of the in-act of thinking-making-doing within the creative-event of the work (Manning and Massumi,

³ See glossary

2014). In so doing it responds to sites and situations and is always in-process.

In this introduction, I will elaborate on the direct impacts of the Covid 19 pandemic in relation to this study. I go on to briefly describe the aims and content of each chapter with a rationale and context, situating each in a wider context concerning its contribution to new knowledge. The writing that follows is not fully sequential, it is emergent, meaning that ideas dance through different facets of the thinking-making-doing and are not fully represented within the written text.

Propositions

This study begins with three propositions, one of which is a photographic image of a platform for loose parts play. I built this structure in the middle space of this study. The image is a stand-in for the actual thing and makes a second proposition through its limitations. Today, If we were to visit the playground and sit on the platform we would hear the wind rustle the oak tree, the sounds of young people playing elaborate games, the background smell of the barbeque, the squirrels gathering acorns and dropping them on the tin roof, the distant call to prayer from the mosque blowing in on the wind or the roar of the crowds as a goal is scored at one of the city's football grounds. In his book *Process and Reality* Alfred North Whitehead (1957:264) proposes that;

‘Spoken language is merely a series of squeaks.’

Written language can only reach towards and represent elements of the propositions I hope to make. I suggest that some aspects of knowing and new knowledge are concerned with the lure of feeling in a world beyond representation.

In adopting research-creation as an approach I orientate this study around propositions rather than research questions. The proposition within research-creation enables research to address a specific issue, to narrow its depth of field without tasking itself with providing answers to specific questions constructed in advance of actions. In a time before the event unfolds (Manning, 2015).

I will now describe how my adoption of research-creation as an orientation was also a response to the pandemic. The impact of the pandemic is present in much of the writing that follows. It feels important to acknowledge it from the start.

Some words on research-creation

When I began this study in the winter of 2018, I had hoped that my research methods would evolve from the field. I had extensive experience of working as a visual artist on cross-disciplinary academic projects within communities. Although this commissioned work was diverse, on each project I would try to

draw on and expand my personal arts practice. I would find a place for it in the fine grain of the projects as they developed. In this work, I believed my role was to challenge and extend established ways of thinking and draw the work of research closer to the needs and aspirations of the communities we were working with. As I began this study and independently developed my own research project, I became aware that I was not fitting my arts practice into an existing structure, or methodological approach. I was no longer able to work with my artistic practice to unsettle and ask questions about established ways of doing research. I acknowledged that by building my own research project from the bottom up I would require new ways of thinking-making-doing.

I do not present the art practice within this study as research. I do however draw on concepts and propositions from research-creation. I will expand on these ideas in Chapter 1 and demonstrate why I have chosen to work in this academic field. However, it feels important to explain that I choose not to make a clear distinction between thinking, making, and doing. In their book *Thought in the Act*, Erin Manning and Brian Massumi (2014) hyphenate the terms thinking-making-doing to identify what they describe as the event of research-creation. I adopt this way of describing the creative-event and proposition of research-creation in that it holds and presents thinking-making-doing in a singular space. Research-creation strives not to reduce or parse (Manning, 2020) separate elements from the in-act of creation, it draws on Massumi's (2011) writing on the event to generate an expanding singular form where edges become folds and the concept of the event is

always future-orientated, immanent and in process. I use the term research-creation to describe the thinking-making-doing practice of my PhD study. I present the entirety of this work as a creative-research event which I refer to in my writing as *this study*. I propose that this study is not fully contained, explained, or completed within this written text and request that the unfinished and dispersed nature of *the work* of this study is held in mind by the reader.



Figure 4: Coronavirus in the Onions (Source: Steve Pool March 2020).

March 2020

In March 2020, the world changed. I look back at my fieldnotes and blog entries to unpick the eventual unravelling of multiple lines of thought and enquiry. Doing research with people in the time before the Covid pandemic,

the time during and the time after has required a shift in approach and an acceptance of what was not going to be possible. On a local level, there was a change in priorities, thoughts, and questions. Ideas that had seemed relevant and important faded into futures filled with doubts, fears, and unknowns. The scale of the change brought with it the impossibility of pushing forward with intended plans for collaboration. Reading through my fieldnotes there is a change in tone, a time before and a time after. On all levels of life, there was adaptation. Keeping things going as best we could had become a priority for individuals and organisations. Looking back and reflecting on my writing from the time, I am struck by how fragile everything seemed, a fragility that was impossible to ignore or navigate around. My planned research was now illegal, Covid restrictions prevented working directly with people and it was against the law to share a physical space with others. My research plan aimed to unpick residency-as-method of enquiry. I conceived the artist's residency as a complex web of relations between people, places, materials, actions, and the creation of new objects. The pandemic bumped me out of a focussed groove located in physical research sites into a world of daily solitary walks and isolation. Everything was about to change; the world was held at a distance.

The jolt of Covid was compounded by the scale of the pandemic and the scale of the response. Questions that had felt important, for example, what seemed like a burning issue concerning the autotelic nature of both play and art became difficult to ask or to prioritise. I wrote a blog entry that questioned whether Emperor Nero was justified in playing his fiddle while Rome burnt. I

suggested that if the fighting of the fire was pointless, if it was impossible to extinguish, then it may have been better to have music at the end of things than to suffer in silence. The orchestra on the Titanic that played as the ship sank were perhaps playing as there was nothing else to do and, as lovers of music, they did not want to drown quietly. Making sense of this PhD study from where I was, in the time of Covid, in the full thick of the change became impossible. I chose to build something, a new structure outside, where children could play. There was nothing else I could do. Looking back from the summer of 2022, it is difficult to remember how we felt at the time, in reading my blog and fieldnotes I am reminded of the uncertainty and the impossibility to think past the present to imagine what would happen next.

Blog post (24th March 2020)

At least two weeks since I last posted. No excuse other than the end of the world. We are locked down and in the house for at least three weeks. On Thursday I got told my fieldwork could not continue if it is face-to-face. This made me think how strange it was that my voluntary work only became research when I sat and wrote fieldnotes about it. This was the only thing that made it research, the turning it into text. But now it's all finished and put on hold probably for longer than we all think.

We are moving apart and coming together. We, that is my generation, have never known anything like this so we can't be of that much help.

This post feels like the video recording that the captain of the star ship leaves that gets found on the empty ship by a group of new arrivals that have no idea what happened to the crew. Then the aliens come.

I had completed eighteen months of my PhD. I was struggling with the relationship between writing, research, and making art. I felt conflicted when trying to write about arts practice in a meaningful way. The writing distanced me from the making, a reification was taking place. The artwork became an object held within a written text and in some ways diminished. The text I was producing for my PhD study felt inadequate and disconnected from the life of the work. I was searching for a language and vocabulary that afforded space for art to hold onto non-linguistic meaning. Deleuze and Guattari⁴ (1995: 88) would perhaps call this arts enunciation into the world. I aspired to underpin thinking and actions with clear and situated explanations and logical arguments with clarification within written language. I found that even at the cutting edge of post-qualitative approaches (St.Pierre, 2012) did not afford a space where I felt I could write constructively about art. I had embarked upon a thankless task and the enforced pause had made this more apparent.

Many journal articles in the field of educational research (MacLure, 2013; Hickey-Moody and Page, 2015; Miles and Springgay, 2020; Springgay, 2020) that I had previously found useful when fitting arts practice into established research projects were no longer helpful. I recognised at a late

⁴ Deleuze and Guattari discuss the social character of enunciation in Chapter 4 of *A Thousand Plateaus*, November 20, 1923: Postulates of Linguistics.

stage that although this writing works with practices of process philosophy affect theory, and immanence they did not align with my feelings and experiences of developing my art practice within my project which I was building from the ground up. I found inspiration in ideas drawn from post-philosophies, yet these did not help me to navigate the historic methodological issues that seemed baked into the disciplinary approaches within the educational and social science department supporting my research. The post-qualitative turn (Green and Green, n.d.) provides a position to critique sedimented and established modes of thinking and doing within the social sciences. They enable researchers to ask questions about the nature of the realities that their discipline hopes to understand. I will expand on this in Chapter 2, my literature review where I trace an idiosyncratic thread of thought through process philosophies, the materialism of Deleuze and Guattari's as a rationale for my adoption of research-creation and the propositions it affords.

A Telling Tale

When I look back on this time, I am reminded of a story my mum, a reception teacher, used to tell about a child in her class. This story holds truth that is difficult to put your finger on - good stories often work like this. A truth about feelings of not fitting in, a truth that can live in a story.

The child had been attending school for a few months and seemed on the surface to have settled in. As part of the daily school routine, my mum would

teach the reception class Yoga in the school hall. At the end of the Sun Prayer, she would lead the children through a relaxation session. She would ask them to focus on their breathing and the flows of energy in their bodies, the sound of their heartbeat from the inside, the distant bird song, and the wind in the corn fields. Often children would fall asleep or drift into their own private space. On one occasion the boy in the story woke up, laid on his back and stared up at the bright ceiling lights and exclaimed -

“What is this strange place?”

This is how I felt when I entered the space of the university. Laid on my back staring up at the ceiling, vulnerable and exposed. It was somewhere that should be familiar, yet it felt alien, a place like a school where I would never really fit in. Even before Covid wrecked things nothing was really working. For research to work for me, it needed to be something that could hold a family story told and retold to wrap around meaning. The research I was engaged in had to accommodate living knowledge and allow for a kind of writing that could hold its relevance alongside other forms of thinking-making-doing.

A Brief Mapping of the Territory

The Time Before: The Pilot Project

The pilot project was developed in partnership with Dr Abigail Hackett. I was commissioned as artist-in-residence on her research project exploring the

emergence of literacy in young children. My role was to develop creative activities that would provide opportunities for communication and engagement and support the project outcomes more generally. I hoped to use this opportunity as a test bed and pilot project. I intended to think through practice and try and locate how it worked and where it emerged by adopting a more explicit and transparent approach. (See *Appendix 2 project descriptions*).

For this project, I helped to produce an exhibition and a large-scale projection event and integrated this work into Abigail's research project's aims and ambitions. This body of work developed under external constraints, I was joining an established project that had a defined endpoint determined by funding and projected outputs. The parameters of my role were shaped by the aims and objectives that were pre-agreed. I was fitting my PhD research and practice into an existing set of relations. Although aspects of this work felt very familiar, the PhD study created a meta-layer of reflection. This would lead to the problem of creating epistemic distance, doing my own research demanded a different relation to thinking-making-doing. I found it difficult to write as I was finding myself immersed in the work. I began to take and catalogue photographic still images from each workshop session that at the time I imagined as a form of visual ethnography. On the pilot project, I did not take fieldnotes or keep written records other than on my blog. I knowingly involved myself in the making of artworks that were concerned with research. They were made in conjunction with research. I developed these works explicitly as part of my residency and part of my research study. I worked

towards identifying elements of the project that could be written about as arts practice yet struggled to find a place to write from.

As the project moved towards completion, I identified creative-actions and decisions that had emerged from tentative flows of affective creative thought. I knew that there was complexity, yet it was difficult to bring this to writing without creating closed objects with defined edges, ready for deconstruction and analysis. I became aware of a logic of practice that was reliant on opacity and this awareness began to undermine the ground from which it grew. I had imagined the delivery of the project as a pilot, a space to find things out and to consider what I could take forward. However, everything from this point onwards was to be diffracted through the global experience of Covid 19.

Blog post-May 15th, 2020

On the impossibility of making art objects

I now have space to get around to the things I thought I would do when I found space. The only thing I thought stopping me from doing them was not having the space.

This morning I came up with my best excuse so far in that whatever I do

apart from drawings with coffee and a Graphite pencil⁵ in the back of a notebook will become the 'thing'.

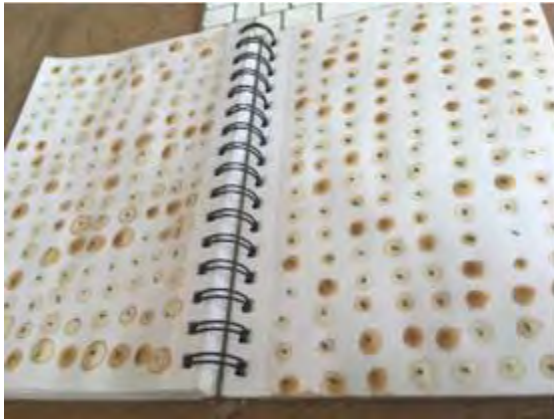


Figure 5: Lockdown Sketchbook (Source: Steve Pool: May 2020)

*My arts practice is a bit of a mush but one of my few successes is to carry on as an artist but avoid the "thing" that art gets hung on. I used to think of this as the simulacra. I understood this to be the golden calf, the distraction away from the truth by the false idol or image of the truth. I read in Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* that simulacra in ancient Greek mythology are the essence of the thing that comes off as a skin and communicates its thingness to the senses. In writing this down though I'm not sure it makes any sense or if I dreamed it.*

The worry is that anything that I make about something becomes a representation of that thing rather than part of it. The other bits and bobs of art in the work are always marginal but still part of the project. The unicorn's horn, Carlos the Binaural Head, and the pirate ship's wheel, these things are

⁵ Reference to Anthony Gormley's drawings *Reflections from Home no.4*: he produced in lockdown. [Reflections from Home No.4: Antony Gormley, Norfolk, England – Kettle's Yard](#)

minor gestures holding a position in the middle of things.

The idea of going to my shed and renaming it a studio and making an art object about a research project is not what I'm doing or what I'm interested in. For me, it would be a useful distraction but for the project, where art is worked with at a distance, producing an object for an inevitable reductive decoding would be an abomination.

This feels like a useful way to think about the lack of desire to make anything. Firstly, why would I do something to muddy the already opaque water, secondly it would be confusing and deliberately distracting, thirdly it would be bad art and bad research. This is important, the writing, reading, and thinking, the making can wait until it's on the inside again and not a thin skin like Teflon to fly off and strike my senses with its form but not let anything stick.

In giving away the secret of the secret plan of practice, I crossed the Rubicon and stepped into a world where ideas, thoughts, feelings, and art are imagined as things that can be captured in words on screen and paper. There is no route back from this personal betrayal yet, as with any new territory, opportunities for travelling a different path emerge. Everything I had read and done as part of my PhD had brought me to this point, the slow realisation that for art practice to exist within and among other forms of knowledge it could not be looked at directly or understood specifically, it must remain opaque from the outside and the inside.

Building Platforms

I was entering a world where my identity as a visual artist working within research was brought into question. The value of a specific form of writing and its relationship to art objects and art production did not fit my expectations, experience, or capacity. I felt unable to find a place or space to develop a voice that was relevant to the people in the places I was working and that would also meet the needs of the university. Working through the concept of knowledge and what it means to know within the academy and its relation to work within communities is central to this study. Having avoided reading and writing for most of my life I wondered what had brought me here. I wondered again what I was doing writing at a university, an outsider in both language, belief, and practice; lodging within what felt like a dysfunctional home.

My position in mid-March 2020 felt precarious. I needed to build some edges and clear boundaries between my inner life, my artist life, my scholar life, and my ability to hold things back so that other interesting things could emerge. I needed a clever idea, an event, a facet of practice, a flow, a muse, a *raison d'être*. I decided that to contain all these thoughts of inadequacy and changing positions, to hold onto the middle space of my PhD journey I would construct a real and metaphorical platform. On the surface, it would be a new area within an adventure playground that would afford opportunities for loose parts play activities. All the trajectories of the life of this PhD study both actual and virtual would end on the platform.

Concepts and turning points

I then read Deleuze and Guattari (2008) *What is Philosophy* I found it frustrating that I had not found this text earlier as it offers somewhere to start. It is their last book together, written in their older age. As authors, they recognised the difficulties of their earlier work and although it offers no roadmap or guide, the book gave me the ability to recognise the importance of the difficulty of developing new concepts. The reason that much of their writing cannot be read sequentially is that you have read the rest of it for any of it to make any sense and if all of it makes no sense then neither do the fragments. In Chapter 1 they are clear that the purpose of philosophy is to invent new concepts. If you are interested in doing philosophy better a provisional new concept than a well-understood existing one. I took this as a challenge and a point of resistance, I refused to be deconstructed and decided instead to produce and work through my own concepts, on a virtual and actual platform.

Introducing The Concept of Ravelling

Ravelling is a new concept that helps me think through arts practice in the context of research-creation and the creative-event.

When I was a little boy and was expected to be smart for a funeral or a wedding, I would often struggle to tuck my shirt into my trousers. My mum would say,

“Straighten yourself up, look at your shirt it’s all ravelled up.”

This is the start of a ravelling, a memory that sticks for reasons that remain opaque, a memory that is singular and multiple, specific, and dispersed, a memory that holds more than it should and floods into the present at points when it is difficult to present yourself. I am aware of the potential Freudian associations of my mum actively tucking my shirt flaps into the front of my Y fronts, yet this is not where I aim to dwell.

My concept of a ravelling allows for the things that go on inside your pants to go unspoken. Covid 19 fell on all of us and shifted the ground of our lives, most things that we were used to doing had to stop or radically change. This happened to such an extent that it was difficult to imagine what had come before. I produced the concept of a ravelling and followed the threads that were broken, splicing together some loose ends and straightening my trousers.

Doing research

My intention had always been to work with the children and staff at the playground to explore how to activate loose parts play (Nicholson, 1971;

Rorabaugh, 2019) and self-build play equipment (Kozlovsky, 2008; Sutton et al., 2014; Koszalinski and Playground, 2017). I wanted to research what actions we needed to take to embed this approach into day-to-day activities at the playground. I believed that this research project would be valuable as although loose parts play and young people actively building play equipment is recognised as a gold standard within the adventure play (Wilson, 2009), it is not something that happened in a sustained way at the playground where I was in residence. I was planning to adopt a creative approach to co-producing research with young people using film and audio recording. I am now unclear if I was planning this or always had an obscured intention of subverting it. Whatever I had imagined, the course of the project was radically shifted by the pandemic as the playground was closed to the public and eventually closed to me.

Everything that was planned in relation to working with young people became impossible. When it came to picking things up again, I focussed on the physical building of a covered platform. The digging and reprofiling of the landscape, the idea that the new space would afford new paths and desire lines and the new use of space. I would spend days and days outside on my own thinking things through, struggling to find building materials and not risking going inside the building to brew a cup of tea. Over the first summer, I would wake early and read twenty pages of *A Thousand Plateaus*, I would then gather my tools and work the landscape to build a platform where all the trajectories of the practice of becoming a scholar/artist would end up. A place of actions and events and things yet to come. It was a happy summer where

I recognised that making something actual in the world that children could play on had an intrinsic value beyond research. One key to happiness in the time of Covid was to recognise activities that are worthwhile.

Distinct elements of the travelling of my PhD in March 2020

Residency: Early Literacies

The delivery of this project was now complete. I helped develop an exhibition and run multiple workshops, projected a film onto the museum building and took part in a final sharing event.

Playground residency

I had been working in residence for 6 months - this involved repair work and general maintenance. I developed den-building workshops with young people and worked alongside students from the Sheffield School of Architecture. I had full ethical approval to work with young people from Manchester Metropolitan University (MMU) and was developing strategies for informing participants about the use and remit of the research. I had developed an interest in loose parts play and the ethos behind children building their own play equipment and changing their environment.

Assembling the Bits

As part of my residency, I successfully applied to Arts Council England for a funded project called *Assembling the Bits*. (See Appendix 1 list of projects.) I had intended that this would provide time and funding to focus on work at the playground. I felt that by working on an art project alongside and woven

through a research project I could explore how these two approaches and my identities within them interacted.

Methodology

From reading Erin Manning (2016c, 2020), I was interested in the potential to activate thoughts from the field of research-creation within my study. I felt it offered the potential to work with artistic modes of thinking and doing research that focussed on thoughts and actions rather than art objects. I was reading literature on research-creation (Manning and Massumi, 2014; Loveless, 2019b; Cambre et al., 2020) and trying to work out how to bring this reading to the residency at the playground.

Theory

I was reading articles and books (Bennett, 2010; Barad, 2013; Maclean et al., 2015; Taguchi and St.Pierre, 2017; Hickey-Moody, 2020) to understand if a new-materialist orientation would provide an ontological foundation for my research work. I was reading extensively struggling to find a place within the theory I encountered that could help my thinking about process and emergence.

A year after the start of the pandemic I wrote: -

Blog Post – 12th April 2021

Doing a PhD as a 53-year-old is complicated, especially as a dyslexic with a few personal issues with writing and reading that bubble under the surface of my overconfident smug interior. I don't have imposter syndrome - I have been working in the academy on and off for 20 years. I do have some insight into what I'm good at and why I continue to live and work at the edges of academic projects. I always knew that the PhD would locate me within a system that I have previously managed to navigate as a knowing outsider. As I move toward the end of my funding and consider what to do next it seems more critical than ever to reconnect with the distance that gives me a certain desirable agency within research projects. I was never intending to become an academic, rather I was intending to understand what it may mean to be a 'becoming academic'.

*PhD study is what Deleuze and Guattari would call an apparatus of capture, a war machine, perhaps that over-codes the territory of thought creating striated space. This is not bad, when you read *A Thousand Plateaus*, they keep reminding us that striated space is necessary, that it is not bad in itself. Yet I am secretly drawn to their ideas of the nomad and smooth space. The royal or state science and the associated war machines feel at the very least invasive. I want to be a sorcerer, alchemist, artist, or, at the very least, present myself as something that is not sedimented in a fixed structure. I am of course all these things. I am working out how to write a PhD without becoming something else. It is an interesting process, a trick of the eye, a*

deflection of attention and then it will be done. Not to be read of course, but also not to jump through a hoop. I am not sure if a becoming academic looks like me. I am certainly different to when I started, and I am enjoying the process. Yet occasionally I notice I am not laughing as much as I used to, and I am not thinking thoughts that flow or just feel like the right kind of thoughts. On these days I remember why I called this blog MYPHD and wait for the clouds to shift.

Overview

Chapter 1 Method

In this chapter, I introduce research-creation as a mode of enquiry and situate it within its historic context drawing on key texts. I explore how research-creation with its focus on the proposition relates to my artist/scholar practice. To do this I provide context by describing how it differs from Practice-as-Research (PaR) approaches in the UK. I then differentiate research-creation from other creative and artistic methods used in research. I recognise this is a broad field with exemplary work and approaches from both scholars and artists with many connections to the thoughts and experiences I explore within this study (Barone and Eisner, 2011; Rousell, 2020a) However for multiple reasons I discuss within a later chapter I chose to experiment with research-creation to develop practices and approaches that affords the potential for visual art to work in new and productive ways within the academy. This proposition concerning the potential of visual art is critical to this study in that it positions the thinking-making-doing-writing that follows within a distinct category and genre. This study is intended to be read

while keeping this context in mind. The middle of this chapter uses stories from the pilot project to illustrate through examples how thinking with research-creation and the concept of the creative-event expanded possibilities, speculations, and the edges of the study. Finally, I interrogate Manning and Massumi's (2014 p 83 - 133) 20 propositions for research-creation and relate them to actions within this study.

First Interlude: My Personal Journey through Theory

I use short interludes to explore personal thoughts and trajectories and give context to my position and personal history.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

I scaffold my PhD study from three entangled perspectives. In keeping with research-creation as an approach, the literatures I have drawn on are situated at the intersections between thinking-making-doing. I review the literature as I encountered it through the unfolding of the creative-event of my residencies. I hope to provide theoretical and historical context, yet I am aware that at times this sits uncomfortably with an approach that prioritises emergence and the lure of possibilities. I adopt three perspectives as they represent my changing identity and my personal development in relation to the journey of this study. Firstly, I discuss how art does work within research in different ways to locate research-creation within its historic and theoretical context. Secondly, I explore some key texts that have informed this study and that have become part of the creative-event of my residency (Truman, 2021). Finally, I review some key literature that discusses the adventure play

movement that relates to the thinking-making-doing of the creative-event of my residency.

Second Interlude: 1968 and all that

Here I trace back ideas within my personal arts practice to provide a context for specific theoretical choices and the historic importance of Deleuze and Guattari's writing to my thinking.

Chapter 3: Pilot project

In this chapter, I explain the rationale for including a pilot project within this study. I provide context and background in relation to working with Dr Abigail Hackett on a project researching the development of early literacy practices in young children in a UK town. I then describe the project in detail and illustrate key moments when I felt arts practice gained significance in relation to my emerging ideas concerning the artists' residency. These moments surfaced through our work together and shared reflections. Finally, I identify key points that inform the planning and unfolding of the second element of this study which I refer to as my residency at Pitsmoor Adventure Playground.

Interlude 3: Where is the residency located?

In this interlude I discuss the spatial relations of residency and propose some ideas and terms that I will turn to in later chapters.

Chapter 4: My trajectory into Adventure Play

In this chapter, I adopt an auto-ethnographic approach to explore my relationship as a visual artist to adventure play and my personal involvement in the playground that became one of the geographic locations of my residency.

Fourth Interlude: Mending the Zip wire

Chapter 5: The Playground Residency-The Time Before

In this chapter, I draw on my personal blog and fieldnotes to explain my workings out. I explore each of the three core propositions by relating them to specific occasions to illuminate and problematise thinking-making-doing. I present a journey from the start of the process to the point of my second-year review panel meeting. I introduce practical making actions and encounters with materials and my tentative explorations of the creative-event and how it evolves through the process of thinking-making-doing.

Chapter 6: Things That Came in the Middle

In this chapter I talk through five material encounters that emerged within the process. These are moments that for opaque reasons jump from the pages of my blog and hold a certain slant truth. They are gathered here to include them within this study; they wriggle too much to be held elsewhere. I provide some thoughts and commentary but they are offered as vibrant and poetic

moments that hold meaning that is not fully transferable to text. They are offered as stories, myths and telling tales.

Chapter 7: Building the Platform: Making a Ravelling

Everything stopped and the space within the event that was in process and emerging began to slip away. The space was held in the event's flow and its becoming; it was never flat. Every part of it was in process. The event was manifested and as such made its own sense, carrying everything forward. There was no inside or outside. It felt like everything all at once together, singular, like a fully inhaled breath.

This chapter is offered as an example of research-creation. The writing and images aspire to make something new. The chapter is held within the context of this study yet is intended to have a level of autonomy. I describe it as an experiment in research-creation. An effort to practice what I preach and make something new that is part of thinking-making-doing.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

In conclusion, I address the three initial propositions and two additional propositions that emerged through the work. I go on to discuss some final thoughts and the contribution to new knowledge this PhD study.

Chapter 1: Method

An exercise in research-creation

'When the artist refuses to produce an object as the object of her work, when the artist refuses to be the subject of the work when the philosopher refuses to write at a distance, when the work becomes the practice when the practice invents its own language, research-creation deeply threatens the power/knowledge that holds the academy in place.' (Manning, 2020:221)

In this chapter, I will introduce research-creation as a mode of enquiry and situate it within its historic context drawing on key texts from my literature review. I will explore how research-creation with its focus on the proposition relates to my artist/scholar practice. To do this I will provide context by describing how it differs from Practice-as-Research approaches in the UK. I will then differentiate research-creation from other creative methods used in research that are often but not always identified as Arts-Based Research approaches (ABR). I will expand on research-creation as a developing set of practices concerned with process that affords the potential for visual art to work in new and productive ways within the academy.

I will go on to describe how I have activated key concepts from research-creation both foundational and practical in relation to the thinking-making-doing throughout this study. By foundational I mean the key principles or propositions of research-creation and by practical I refer to how I and others

have worked with these principles as a mode of enquiry. This will include an exploration of the writing of Erin Manning (2016c) who draws on the philosophical writings of Deleuze and Guattari (1977, 2008; Deleuze, 2001), Alfred North Whitehead (Whitehead and Sherburne, 1957) and Gilbert Simondon (1992) to develop a specific philosophical orientation for what research-creation is and more importantly what it can do.

In her writing individually and in collaboration with process philosopher Brian Massumi, Manning (2014) develops an approach to research-creation that focuses on the work that art does within the event of a creative enquiry. This work questions the position of both arts' historic autonomy and the established traditions of a singular human subject operating from a personal position to the author and generating material and immaterial art objects. I will then elaborate on the process of doing research-creation through an example from the pilot phase of my study. I refer to this as an experiment in research-creation. This example aims to illustrate how the event of research-creation emerges within the process of doing research-creation and is not something that can be mapped in advance of the creative-event. I demonstrate how research-creation does not operate as a distinct method that can be theorised in the abstract and applied to answering a research question. Research-creation is associated with process philosophy and therefore involves the concept of immanence. It is future-oriented, concerned with how things become, and the not-yet. This makes it a useful approach when thinking with yet unmade critically engaged arts practice. It is not a research method or methodology in a traditional sense in that it can be

applied to pre-existing questions or procedures. It cannot study something already present, instead it pays attention to the in-act of the creative-event and orientates toward a future that is always to come.

I will draw on relevant fieldwork conducted while performing the role of the artist in residence within a research project which culminated in an exhibition at a museum in a town park (See *Appendix 2 - list of projects*). My ambition in the middle section of this chapter is to provide an example of research-creation rather than a description or representation. I have tried to work with research-creation within the context of an artist residency and explore potential affordances. I recognise that there are problems with adopting this approach and present the example as a pilot project, a try-out and a creative experiment. An experiment that folds place, art, research, thinking, writing and experience and tries to make something new.

My understanding of research-creation is informed by the writings of Erin Manning and Brian Massumi.(2014:83). In their book *Thought in the Act* they outline twenty propositions for research-creation, I address each of these propositions individually and think through them in the context of my fieldwork.

In conclusion, I will expand on how research-creation underpins much of the work within this study and provides an assemblage, an active arrangement or *ravelling* where visual art practice, creative actions and their unfolding relationships to sites emerge from thinking-making-doing. Art objects,

creative processes, new concepts, written research outcomes and ongoing dialogues provide lines of flight from research-creation assemblages.

Historic Context

Originating in Canada and North America in the early 2000s the term research-creation is applied to research which foregrounds artistic practice and is used by funding bodies and research institutes to help to validate and provide funding streams for enquiry that employs artistic approaches within research establishments (Loveless, 2019b). Research creation as a category of inquiry is contested. Both artists and scholars have used the term to define very different approaches and orientations (Cambre et al., 2020). The term has generated much debate. It is not a clear methodological approach or bounded set of disciplinary practices. There is debate over whether it is a term that should be capitalized or hyphenated or treated as a noun or a verb. For my study, I use research-creation as a tool to open discussions about what can happen to art practice within the world of research within universities. What are the potentials of art practice, and what can it propose, rather than its uses or application? There are long-running debates about what art is or should be doing within different fields and different ideologies, methodologies, and disciplines. I hope that research-creation affords relevance, direction and context within the complex field of my inquiry. By drawing attention to acts of making and thought in motion and flow, the approach is well suited to understanding the nature of an artistic residency. To recognise why this approach is necessary and the potential it

affords to my study, I will consider the broader context of thinking through research-creation rather than other identified artistic approaches. For example, Practice-as-Research or the use of artistic/creative methods within social science enquiries.

Over the past decade the term research-creation has emerged as a way to describe how art practice or the 'work' (Pahl and Pool, 2021) of art can be activated within research (Truman, 2021). Historically the word research can create separation or bifurcation between the object of a study and what is to be found out through the application of research methods. Research-creation proposes a way of doing creative research that works with philosophies of immanence. Research-creation involves creative practices that are embedded within the worlds they hope to understand. Writers such as Manning, (2016c) Loveless, (2019b) and Truman (2021) hyphenate the term research-creation to emphasize the singular nature of the concept. In other words, and for this study, I define research-creation as a holistic way of working with both art and philosophy to create something new that is concerned with finding things out. It conflates theory and practice into a singular process that emerges within the creative act and is not divided from it. It sets itself against formal social science methods (Manning, 2016a). By this I mean methods that can be applied to and fully described externally to the process of doing research. Research-creation is not limited to describing a set of relations or an active assemblage that is already fully present or theorized as complete.

Some writers and artists in the field refer to their work as part of the post-qualitative turn (St Pierre, 2012). Post-qualitative research recognises some of the perceived problems that are baked into established social science methodologies both quantitative and qualitative. Elizabeth St Pierre (2019) points out that the issues of working with established social science methods from the position or the ontological propositions of post philosophies are problematic (I discuss this position in more detail within my literature review) For example in her 2019 paper ‘Why Post Qualitative Inquiry?’ she questions the relevance of developing research questions prior to embarking upon the process of doing research within sites. The post-qualitative turn within social science emerges from an array of post-philosophies. These include post-structuralism with its commitment to rethinking language and post-humanism which questions Descartes's concept of mind-body duality (St.Pierre, 2017). To adopt ontological positions that question what it is to be human, the nature of collective realities, the limits of scientific knowledge and the real proposition that Jesus came back from the dead (Whitehead and Sherburne, 1957) requires a shift in what is conceived as knowledge concerning the proposition of doing research.

It is difficult to write a PhD within a social science department without adopting the language and traditions of established research practices and paying attention to disciplinary histories and knowledge. There are also established ways of seeing artistic approaches within the visual arts and their intersection with other disciplines. It is not uncommon for artists to self-identify their work as an inquiry or knowledge production (St. Pierre, 2020) in

its own right, independent of institutional validation. However, I turn to ideas within research-creation to focus on the process and hold a space open for practice within the frame of my specific PhD study. I did not set out with this as an intention which is in keeping with a research-creation orientation. I could not know what would emerge. Initially, I explored sensory and visual ethnography, autoethnography and co-production as potential methods. None of these approaches afforded the space for art practices to *live* (I will discuss the idea of *a life* proposed by Deleuze (2001) within my literature review) research-creation afforded the potential for practice to remain fluid within the frame of this study.

Clarifying Terms

I use the term 'research' within this study as a verb to mean investigate and explore. I recognise and work with the historic weight the word carries. It is useful as an artist embarking on a program of research validated within a university Education and Social research institute, to have a language that identifies some actions as distinct from what I have done before within my personal art practice. I recognise that in embarking on a program of research I am not simply making art or running an art project. To call this work research is to generate this distinction and is useful as I think through what may constitute a territory or area of enquiry. More importantly, it draws attention to understanding how art interacts with the world as an active and expanding assemblage.

Research-creation affords an unfolding and an opening-up to what can be and what is more-than. It is sensitive to the way many artists imagine the process of making and creating art and builds on philosophies of immanence. This is to orientate forward; to think of what is not-yet or what is always about to be, a future emerging from an unfolding present. As an artist I am concerned with creating something new, following the flow of ideas and thoughts and things and perhaps in a minor way changing the potential of what can be. For this reason, research-creation affords a way to think and write about the complex and messy nature of the kinds of research or systematic investigations that can emerge through the in-act of doing research-creation.

I refer to the holistic process of completing my PhD as *this study*. This includes the writing of content and the process of making art. In keeping with the process orientation of research-creation this study makes no clear distinction between written and other creative outcomes that emerge through the work.

The Broader Context

I will now outline the different ways that art works with research projects within the academy and explain the distinct position that is afforded by research-creation within my study. I self-identify as a freelance visual artist and as such my work is not institutionally validated. Although I have extensive experience working collaboratively on research projects neither I

nor the institutions I work with consider my contribution to take the form of Practice-as-Research⁶. When I am asked by an artist why I am not doing a practice-based PhD the simple answer is that I would not have received the support I would require to undertake it. The more complex answers lie within the fine grain of this study. My understanding of how art works within the academy and research is important to explain how I ended up searching for and adopting a research-creation approach as an alternative to established research methods.

In the UK, the practice-based PhD began to gain traction within universities during the mid-1990s. The position of Practice-as-Research (PaR) as a mode of enquiry has extended beyond the visual and performing arts. PaR provides an opportunity for creative practice to be included in and assessed as research. PaR PhD studies usually include a submission of artistic practice for example an exhibition or series of events supported by a written thesis of around 40,000 words sometimes referred to as the exegesis. The relationship between text and creative practice is complex and differs between institutions and studies. Artists are expected to develop and refine complex arguments and positions within their writing and as with any PhD, the study must contribute to new knowledge production. Many artists working outside of the academy would describe much of their creative process as research. They will apply for funding for research and development; they rehearse, sketch, plan, explore, and use different processes to explore their

⁶ I go on to explain this term in more detail here it is used to artworks and practices that are considered research in and of themselves.

worlds. Many artists who teach within universities maintain a studio practice that they would not describe as Practice-as-Research, they imagine this work as no different to any artist working outside university contexts.

There is a long tradition of practice-based research in many disciplines other than fine art such as design, architecture, and engineering where it is considered that the discipline is rooted within the practice and cannot be solely judged by theoretical work external to this. The term Practice as Research or PaR has developed a specific meaning within universities. In the mid-1990s, the field expanded responding to the demand for doctoral level study within art and design and recognition for practice-based approaches to the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Underpinned by the theoretical work of scholar artists such as Robin Nelson,(2013) and Paul Carter (2004) PaR has developed a broad base within UK universities, yet it does not suffice as a description for all artistic practice or all artistic research that takes place there. PaR developed against a backdrop of changes within art production and its relationship to the social world, it may involve galleries and established art methods and structure and it can also be presented as a fully developed mode of research or a methodology. It could be argued that, in comparison to traditional artistic approaches to art production, PaR implies a more systematic and measurable approach to finding out about the world through artistic exploration. PaR projects can focus on artistic methods and artistic outputs, or they may align with hypothesis-driven empirical research. Here, art practices are used to test theories within larger and cross-disciplinary teams, however, the outputs of this type of research may still be

manifested within a creative form, for example, dance is used to explore and present movement, or film and video to explore the politics of space. PaR does not necessarily require a written outcome; it presents research outputs through an artistic form; it is not merely a catalyst for conversation or a means to gather data for a later linguistic interpretation. It is helpful to frame PaR as research, where questions and contexts are articulated through the practice itself and the primary outcome of the research enquiry is an artwork or series of artworks that generate new knowledges through this aesthetic, conceptual and technical practice. However, in reality, PaR often includes a form of critical-reflexive writing and documentation that sits in proximity to the practice. This usually takes the form of a portfolio of work including, but not limited to, the artwork(s), associated documentation and a complementary set of writings that articulate and give context to different aspects of the research.

Alongside Practice-as-Research, and in some cases not distinctly separate from it, there is a turn within some areas of social enquiry to the implementation of artistic and creative methods. This has grown from a recognition that some approaches to conducting research, such as the interview or the questionnaire or focus groups, have limitations, especially when exploring private thoughts, ideas, emotions, and the imagination. Within this study, I refer to these as arts-based-research methods (Kara, 2015; Leavy, 2017). I understand this broad category differs from research-creation in that it draws on art processes, traditions, and practices to augment and extend established research methods.

This field is fast-moving and effective in that it provides innovative techniques for working with people to generate and co-produce living knowledge (Facer and Enright, 2016). However, many of the projects that adopt these methods situate the work of knowledge production within a familiar conception of research and research methods. For example, the artistic element of the process is often employed to capture data or evidence that can be interpreted or 'written up'. Or arts-based research can be used as part of large cross-disciplinary research projects (Pahl et al., 2017) that are driven by social problems or sets of well-articulated yet fixed research questions. As an artist with extensive experience in working on research projects that draw on and work with artistic approaches and methods, I need to make a distinction between different practices, their relative positions and the work that they do within this study (Pool, 2015, 2018; Pahl et al., 2017) Art and creative methods present a large and growing field that is not clearly defined within the literature⁷. It concerns multiple artforms including creative writing, visual arts photography and video. Within each discipline, there are sub-groupings. For example; ethnographic filmmaking as a distinct genre, or verbatim theatre as a tool for community enquiry and debate. Yet it remains important to be aware of the context and the danger of how language is used to represent approaches that may appear in many respects similar yet rely on very different foundational and philosophical positions to scaffold them. I work as a practitioner across multiple sites and try to generate an adaptable, fluid approach. Each research project evolves within the event of the

⁷ I use arts and creative methods here in its broadest sense. I recognise the significant literatures and contributions of ABR scholars and practitioners and other approaches that work sympathetically with creative and artistic ways of generating living knowledge.

research yet for pragmatic reasons must take account of the epistemological positions, desires, feelings and beliefs of all participants.

Thinking through research-creation

I come to research-creation as it affords the potential for me to work in a space that acknowledges complex relationships and interconnections between thinking and making. It can generate a field of complexity and flows that crisscross the worlds of critically engaged contemporary art practice, art criticism and research within the academies. By academy, I mean higher education institutions that are involved in constructing knowledge frameworks through publication and how this relates to processes of validation of what they identify as knowledge. As an artist and now as an artist/scholar, I am at heart a practitioner who aims to work within communities. My experience of research follows the same flow as my practice, they are *ravelled* together. This involves fitting in with, working alongside, attending to the minor and being part of an assemblage that affords opportunities for art to become part of actions.

As research-creation has general and specific meanings that emerge within its applications in practice, it feels important to locate and describe how you are *doing* research-creation as you are doing it. To do this effectively for this study the definition emerges and is extended explicitly from the context and the work within sites of practice. A site of practice is not limited to a geographic location or a bounded event. I turn to research-creation as it

opens a potential to work with theory, thoughts, things, and texts embedded within the *doing* of the project. It is the *in-act* of research-creation that affords the possibility for enquiry and art to hold together within the space of enquiry/research/doing. To move towards an understanding of what this position brings to this study it is necessary to return to Manning's (2016a) thoughts on the potential of the research-creation and explore their philosophical origins and more importantly work them through lived aspects of research. This does not mean applying them as a method to research in the field rather it means attuning to the work of the residency in a way that enables research-creation to be active and in process. It is the potential for what exceeds both words and language that attracts scholars/artists such as me to this field. To look for the 'more-than' concerns the recognition of the milieu which I consider to be the spaces emerging between doing and thinking, recording, capturing, presenting, representing, and letting go.

In the opening two chapters of Erin Manning's *A Minor Gesture* (2016) she outlines her specific understanding of research-creation and its potential to challenge established patterns of thought. For Manning the minor gesture is not opposed to the major in thoughts or actions, rather it runs in tandem, alongside and intertwined. Drawing on the future-oriented concepts of immanence, Manning positions research-creation as work in a minor key.

Deleuze and Guattari (2008:16-34) suggest that the purpose of philosophy is to come up with new concepts. In their writing together they produce a complex web of interrelated ideas that provide an alternative structure of

thought in relation to the material world. It is important to recognise that each concept does not work in isolation rather they are part of a philosophical plane of consistency. The concepts emerge from working through, a tentative following of lines of flight and the building of assemblages, what they would describe as an enunciation. The idea of the minor and how Manning puts the concept to work within research-creation draws on the wider philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari (see literature review). As with the work of Deleuze and Guattari, Manning draws on philosophies of immanence, specifically the work of Henry Bergson (Rubidge, 2010) on time, and Alfred North Whitehead on the speculative nature of reality (Gaskill and Nocek, 2014). Manning turns our attention to what is not yet realized or actualized, always speculating on the potential of what is to come. This way of thinking positions art in the space of the not yet realised, freeing it from the shackles of the autonomous art object, the purely representational object and opening the potential for alternative ways of understanding.

'This idea of research-creation as embodying techniques of emergence takes it seriously that a creative art or design practice launches concepts in the making. These concepts-in-the-making are mobile at the level of techniques they continue to invent.' (Manning and Massumi, 2014: 89)

Manning and Massumi (2014) present research-creation as deeply entwined within the co-composing of art making and philosophy through the concept of

thought-in-act. Within this sentence, lies the potential and challenge to think and act differently.

To take this thinking into a project, I need to make fundamental changes in the way my thoughts are organised and expressed. To embody techniques of emergence it is necessary to question relationships to time, to reach towards what is always on the edge of becoming. This involves a re-orientation of how to think through the subjective concerning making-thinking- doing. These reorientations that are always in process redraw mental maps and change the nature of what was previously considered a territory, a domain, or a discipline. By opening yourself to new ways of thinking and acting, research-creation orientates thinking forward.

I will now attempt to diagram how the work of research-creation unfolds within a project. I will reference the emergence of research-creation as a concept as it joins the flow of the creative-event of my study. This working through is not an example, illustration, or vignette; it is a coming to writing and image, of the thought-in-the act of thinking-making-doing as proposed by Manning and Massumi (2014). My writing aims to follow a flow of thoughts, actions and things in the flux of coming together as an event. I am conscious as I edit and read back what follows that in drawing attention to aspects of the unfolding event, I bring them into focus and construct them in the middle space through written text. Structurally it is difficult to bring an aspect of an event from the edges, from a smooth space of an event's flow to a striated space of structured words, perhaps from flow to language. A clear and

focused analysis of a minor gesture can force a structural shift where whatever is described seems to take on a major position. It brings it to recognition and codification and hence the foreground. In the case of objects, it can free them from the complex web of the assemblage and present something with a defined edge that is already complete, final, or published.

Something partially obscured, glimpsed in the peripheral vision comes to the imagination and in clear view, it can assume fully formed hard edges.

Deleuze and Guattari suggest that it is possible to avoid a direct gaze through a process of diagramming (De Landa, 2000). This is not to draw out or to map connections rather it suggests laying out the unfolding lines of flight, horizon lines with no horizon, parallel lines that will never meet. In writing the event of research-creation, a language that unfolds from the specific yet has the potential to encompass the totality of the event is needed. The nomadic language of the metallurgist discovering the potentials of new amalgamations, through a process of smelting and mixing, trying things out in the crucible (Deleuze and Guattari, 1995).

My work on the pilot project took place in the spring of 2019 and culminated in a joint exhibition in a local authority museum. The writing that follows is an experiment that aims to try out research-creation in relation to my residency which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. Some of the thoughts and writing emerged at the time others are later reflections. The writing tries to capture aspects of the experience in a form that allows for art practice to

breathe and hold a space for contingent actions and thoughts that emerged in process. The jumps of thought are intended to illuminate disconnected moments briefly like a flickering torch, they are flashes rather than illuminations.

Thoughts-in-the-act: Ghosts

As you step through the doors to the museum, *Ghost*, a contemporary work by the British artist Mark Wallinger, confronts you. This large lightbox fits into a space only just big enough for it, there is no room to get any distance, to step away from it. *Ghost* holds the whole area with its presence. It is unclear if the work is cleverly backlit or well-lit from the daylight coming from the window above the door. Perhaps the light is the memory from episodes of TV hospital dramas where life and death, broken bones and tumours are illuminated on a lightbox mounted on the wall of ward 11.



Figure 6: Mark Wallinger's Ghost (source: online Wallinger, n.d.)

When I return to the memories of doing research-creation in the museum, *Ghost* haunts them, not as a memory but as a feeling. Perhaps this could be

an example of what Erin Manning and Brian Massumi describe as a 'friend to research-creation' in their book *Thought in the Act* (2014:64-66). They suggest that if something is considered an inspiration, a starting point or even a context, it can deny its vitality. Break it from the flow of things and fix it on the outside of the work.

The outside brings friends.....They populate. They participate. They provoke. But they are not influences in any direct sense or even inspirations. They are 'distances. Outsides that resonate from within.
(Manning and Massumi, 2014:64)

Ghost is hard to ignore even if it goes unacknowledged. It is entangled with every visitor's experience of the museum. Too big to just walk past. It is an in-your-face artwork. For me, it is a reminder of how an art object can do work; can create a movement. The work that *Ghost* performs is different for everyone who visits the museum. Its influence is complex. It is layered through the space; you carry it in your mind's eye as you walk through the building. To give the work due credit only a glimpse of what it is can come to language in a written text. Even then, the text needs to be reaching toward something else. Something new.

This is *Ghost* for me ; 1

Mark Wallinger was on the edge of the Brit Art movement and on the edge of lots of things. He is successful but not fully acknowledged as part of the mainstream. He is a collector's artist in that his work holds capital as an investment. He also maintains a position as an artist's artist; a serious artist who does not make his way through teaching or plumbing. He is rare like the unicorn.

Over the years I have worked with his art in schools and galleries as part of education projects. I suppose you could say I follow him as somebody making good art. When you have this kind of relationship with other artists you keep their thinking in the periphery, the edges of your mind. As with vision, the peripheral is a thing you are very aware of but do not look at directly. Through his work Wallinger suggests the concept that the United Kingdom is the Kingdom of Heaven. This idea is threaded through his thought and flows through *Ghost*. In his video work *Threshold to the Kingdom* people arriving in the UK walk in slow motion through the security gates at London City Airport to the orated words of the Bible's fifty-first psalm by the Italian composer Gregorio Allegri (c. 1582–1652). The Gregorian chant stirs an affective flow and hair shivers on the back of the neck. This piece works without irony or effort to capture the passing of shared affect. These are found in the moments of greeting, in the music through time and in the moment of watching the work unfold. My educational commission in

response to *Threshold to the Kingdom*⁸ was for Leeds City art gallery in a project that involved working with their permanent collection. I played with Wallinger's central idea of crossing a threshold into heaven, changing the threshold from the airport terminal to the doors of a school hall. The open doors to the school hall or the Kingdom of Heaven, for a moment, in a moment. After practising walking in slow motion, I made a film of a hundred children walking through the threshold. This was a new piece of work imagined to make something new collectively. It was not an imitation or a copy rather it was a mode of working that enabled the original piece of art to continue to do work in the world. I sent Wallinger a copy of the film via his agent, I don't think it ever reached him. I think he would have liked to see where his ideas flowed. If I think back now, I can see two Sikh boys in blue turbans moving with careful deliberation in a slow-motion dance across the highly polished parquet floor, one crumples to his knees as the choir sings through a tinny speaker in the background; this is more a feeling than a memory. I bring this feeling to *Ghost* as the horse watches me through his startled X-ray eyes.

⁸ wallinger-threshold-to-the-kingdom-t12811 @ www.tate.org.uk,' n.d.)



Figure 7: Threshold to the Kingdom, Mark Wallinger Video still (source: online)

What *Ghost* means to me: 2

I know that *Ghost* is an X-ray of George Stubbs's painting of *Whistlejacket*. I have seen the *Whistlejacket* painting in the flesh twice, once in its home at the National Gallery and once at the Mappin Art Gallery in Sheffield on one of its national tours. I have poor knowledge of the history of art; my 1980's fine art degree had little art theory, history, or philosophy; it was a scratch degree where we all tried to make art up as we went along. Our greatest fear was to be derivative; ignorance was liberation. We did have the odd Wednesday afternoon lecture on issues such as The Shaman in Contemporary Practice, The Post-Punk Aesthetic or, What Has Heidegger Ever Done For Us? The never to be famous visiting lecturers would turn up

with attached prosthetic horns and give a talk on the divine, the sacred and the profane. I encounter *Whistlejacket* like everyone else, an eye and mind untrained in the dark arts. I do not hold any privileges by training or natural ability. My working eye is the same as everyone else's.

The painting is surprisingly modern; it sits on a flat taupe background leaping out of context. Perhaps *Whistlejacket* is Wallinger's 'friend', as it strikingly points to a sense of the real. Stubbs is well known as an anatomist of horses and spent many hours at the dissection table as well as the easel. He painted horses from the inside to let us understand the outside. He painted through an age of enlightenment. *Whistlejacket* marks a moment of realism in painting that was never to be surpassed in relation to the horse. How could it be as in the 1760s the horse was placed at the heart of things, of movement, freedom, of work and all of this was held within the seeing eyes of the audience feeling the painting's connections. This is not a second-hand truth, it is my truth, only just realized in the moment of encounter, not actual until it falls out of me as words articulating a feeling. It is never a case of doing justice to an artwork in words, words are a way to catalogue, to capture and to over-code, not to bring us closer.



Figure 8: Whistlejacket, George Stubbs (1762) (Source online date of photograph unknown)

What *Ghost* means to me: 3

If *Ghost* is to be seen as a friend to research-creation, then it feels important to talk about what it is and why it is significant. A problem that can be encountered when writing about what is minor within the world is that through the writing, we begin to construct the minor in the image of the major or the

royal. In writing about how I use the concept of research-creation within my work I shine a light on what would normally be peripheral, on the edges, something to walk past quickly. Writing tends to bring the outside inside, to create something that moves to the centre. Whether this is the plot of an unfolding story or a person's unravelling. Writing has a start and a finish and a full stop and brackets a page that separates it from the world that is experienced as it unfolds. Encounters with writing are usually drawn out along the lines of text, the reading fills a space of time. In this piece of minor writing, it is important to talk about a work of art as a friend. Art and the idea of what art is are entangled. However, the writing here does not intend to bring something to the foreground or the major key. The writing is a description of the ground, or the background, the surface from which the minor emerges. The horse leaps from the canvas but cannot be frozen with words.

Made in 2003, *Ghost* is an x-ray of an oil painting. (Wallinger, n.d.) We are used to seeing these in BBC 4 programs about great paintings as they often reveal what is painted underneath, the earlier versions, the layers of restorations and the original intentions and mistakes. Here we feel the skeleton of the horse, its frame that animates its flesh, then the muscle, sinew, and bone. The only addition to what could be called an assisted readymade (Duchamp) is the horn of a Unicorn. Walking past the painting with the Senior Curator, he points out that the horn is an image of a Narwhal's tusk. I knew this, I had noticed it as the Narwhal gets called the

Unicorn of the Sea - like all large sea mammals, it is a reminder of the great return to the oceans.

I jump: *to four Narwhal tusks lent against the wall in Whitby Museum next to an original map drawn by Captain Cook and protected from the light by a cloth drape.*

I jump: *to a terrorist on London Bridge being pushed back with a fire extinguisher and a Narwhal's tusk pulled from the wall of an exhibition centre.*

What one person sees as a cheat 'That's not a Unicorn's horn really' another sees as a point to jump from. Good art that can act as a friend is a place to jump from. From nowhere to nowhere.

I Jump: *to my first residency in Museum driving to retrieve a canoe paddle from the ethnographic store that belonged to a missionary called Chambers, one of the last to be eaten by cannibals.*

When *Ghost* was installed at the museum, Mark Wallinger came to the opening event. I ended up going out for a meal with him and members of the great and the good. I sat next to him and told him about my work in schools with *Threshold to the Kingdom*. I noticed he had Rizla cigarette papers and, as is my way, I asked him for a cigarette. I 'blagged a rollie.' I wanted to stand outside the restaurant under the sky and smoke with him, away from

the rest. He didn't smoke; the Rizla were for rolling into tiny, elongated strips that he arranged on the table. This is what I remember.



Figure 9: Wallinger's Prison Rollies (Source Steve Pool 09:2019)

I Jump: to Barry Flannigan making pots in his wheelchair days before he died.

Our histories through art and our encounters with art objects are seen as friends within our research-creation. I wonder how well do we need to get to know our friends and what opinions should we form of them?

This encounter with *Ghost* is a flash, a single moment where all these thoughts are entangled, with art as part of a flow of ideas. This is part of the art-making process, the feeling of ideas as we move through the world.

Only the surface of the work can be reduced to a set of things.

What was seen as reality was an intention to paint the fantastic.

Things are not what they seem, there is no reality behind anything, only magic.

All these things can be said but for *Ghost* to work as a piece of art they need to be felt. Not noticed, but felt like a shiver up the back as you walk across a gravestone with an understanding that the people we have known are ghosts.

Things-on-Strings

I will need to give some context to write about the Extra-Ordinary-Objects exhibition in any meaningful way. Context is not a friend in relation to research-creation. The problem with trying to describe any context is that it has edges and although there is lots to be said for speaking of the outcomes of art as boundary objects (Loveless, 2019b) it does not feel like the right time to carve out territory even if it is on the edges. With research-creation's origins in philosophies of the not-yet, earthed up in the rhizomatic becoming of a world always in process, there is an inherent and ontological problem with locating projects. This occurs when we focus on the context of the past, of what actually happened as opposed to the 'what is to come'. To provide context is to locate and although the alternative is to be at sea or all over the place there seems to be no middle ground or path. This is a problem we encounter where research-creation affords its path of resistance to previous ways of thinking and a step towards new ways of thinking through acting.

At this point of marking territory to make sense of things, it is possible to see how research-creation does not mark a territory or produce fixed boundaries. Research-creation has the potential to unfold into all aspects of life, to take account of and pay attention to a flow forward, to remain open and not complete, both within the future but also looking backwards to the past with no division at a point of the present. It is not that we cannot talk of position or orientation or edges, it is that all these notions of division and reduction and categories distract us from entanglements that are the ongoing of becoming reality, there are no singular fixed points in the flow.

It would be nice to cherry-pick from a series of philosophical positions to jump from a Narwhal's tusk to a terrorist attack. This is where art lives its life; in the license to jump into the abyss and to land where you land, hitting the void running. For research-creation to do work in an expanded field (Loveless, 2019a) art needs to give up on some of its advantages in order to land itself within other disciplines. If art is to be taken seriously within philosophy, it needs to take philosophy seriously. Deleuze and Guattari (2008:19) insist that philosophy is the creation of new concepts to work through life. In their final book together, *What is Philosophy* they go on to outline how art and science exist upon different planes, planes of consistency with different immanent potentials. They suggest that art follows its own ordering and it is within the immanent fecundity of this ordering that research-creation affords its potential.

How then do we write about a project without providing a detailed context?
How do we describe the context of a research-creation project, without a mapping of edges? These two questions are a challenge to be worked through within the emerging and unfinished unfolding of research-creation projects. They are questions that present problems that cannot be fully resolved only further expanded through their opening up.

Working backwards from an object

I will now attempt to open the event of my research-creation project from an art object. I do this by reversing the order of things and following the threads of an object of art to its becoming rather than describing an event and then writing an object into this space. I intend to show what thoughts research-creation can help us move towards and why it is useful for this study.



Figure 10: Unicorn made from a pull-along toy. (Source: Steve Pool 12:2019)

You cannot not have your meta-physical cake and eat it

Artists think they can have a bit of everything; we think we are in a top-class bistro creating fusion cuisine. Many of us are having Kentucky Fried Chicken in a Pizza Hut. Like the enormous all-you-can-eat world buffet restaurants, we gorge ourselves on the simulacra of regional cuisine without ever tasting the real thing.

For art to be taken seriously, it should not present itself as a separate ingredient in the cake of knowledge. It should not propose that art is the only way to bake a decent cake; rather it asks, 'Is a cake the best thing for us to try and half bake?'

My homage to a Ghost

A plastic child's toy bought from eBay, the plastic has faded to a translucent yellow, an aesthetic specific to the plastic of a certain era. Oversized red wheels are mounted on eccentric axles so the horse wobbles along when pulled by a string. The string has been replaced with a curtain cord, but not by me.

A piece of deer horn was bought from Chesterfield market on a Thursday fifteen years ago. Foraged from a box that contained mother of pearl and bone. Probably from a Little Mesters workshop (small independent grinders and cutlers who worked across in Sheffield in the 18th and 19th centuries), it was intended for making pen knife handles.

I Jump: *My original intention was to use it to learn to nap flint tools. It was used in a film as a prop when I regressed to the level of caveman in a reconstruction of Theroux's cabin in the woods. I was a character from Walden, I had cold feet and ate plain food in a forest in the Lake District. I cut the bone with a hacksaw that I made in a metalwork class aged 12. It reminds me of the smell I imagine my toenails making as I burn them on the fire.*

I Jump: *If this was cast in bronze and painted so it looks just the same, would it get taken more seriously as art?*

I Jump: *You never expected anybody to think this assisted readymade was a serious piece of art or that it registered Ghost as a friend and suggested the mystical nature of childhood.*

I Jump: *You are not disappointed; you are pleased. It lives in your background noise.*

I Jump: *You think this writing is clever but really you hate it, you are exposed.*

This object is not the art it is a signpost to the art. It is trying to play with the uncanny in the space of an exhibition. It is made with love and it is for itself. It is not meant to be read as a text. It is not important if anyone gets it as it clearly gets itself.

Before I started to think I was performing research-creation, it was just part of a flow - the background static of my practice that was never supposed to be made visible or brought into dialogue with anything else. This textual scrutiny can only lessen it as a thing. Explanation is the enemy of art, it is of no importance if people understand it, it is of importance that it understands itself.

Is that it then? Is that all there is to say? Even this much stops the flow.

The horse on wheels becomes a reference to the magical nature of childhood through Wallinger's *Ghost as a friend*. Perhaps this is enough for

now as it holds a thought that research-creation can emerge as a series of minor gestures that do not have to add up to something bigger. Unicorn-on-Wheels, a whole and new object does not cut or diagram, nor does it represent or reflect or diffract anything. It is a half-baked idea that justifies itself by the fact it is present and not absent.

But what about the light streaming through the window?



Figure 11: Light from Stained Glass Window (source: Steve Pool date unknown)

The reflected lights from stained glass flowed down the stairwell of the museum projecting this modernist colour field painting on the fossil-filled stone floor. I was carrying the objects and the texts up the stair to the display cabinets. The light was fleeting and low in the winter sun, the magenta singing its frequency between the red and the blue. It only lasted around 20 seconds like the shimmer of a rainbow. This moment pushes itself into the event of research-creation, it draws attention to the floor, it humbles and it is a return to the world. Although I photographed the event on my phone, I was not part of its authoring, neither perhaps were the builders who fitted the

window, or the architects that planned the orientation of the house. This thing that pushed itself into the event of the exhibition. The light is experienced yet has no author however it is doing something within the creative-event. Here we encounter the force that opens spaces for the more-than to enter the event. In most of the ways we encounter the world, the light shining on the floor, like the rainbow outside the window, is something present yet possible to separate. Manning would say to parse from the rest of the experience, to chunk and therefore to manage. On a normal day, I would account for my state of grace with an unshared Haiku.

At the foot of the stairs

Light makes its colours known.

On fossil-filled slabs.

Research-creation as a process engaged with the minor gesture allows the encounter with the light on the stairs to become part of the research without having to do anything towards the research. In the writing, the encounter becomes more than a metaphor or a tool to illustrate or represent anything other than itself. It enters here in text and image and life to be for itself, to not stand in for anything but the time of the encounter. In many other forms of research, the light colours on the stones would have to become something else, to represent something else to be counted as valid within the research assemblage. Here, opening the surfaces of the event to its own shifting patterns of light on a fossil floor can be nothing more than what it is, yet it participates in research.

What does this mean for research-creation?

There is something that needs to be written before what I have just written. In the art school crit, the question that often gets asked and the only one you really need an answer for is 'why?'. In art, it is fine to keep this answer to yourself though you must feel the reply in its relation to what you then do. In research-creation, the question remains the same, but the answer requires a fuller and more externalized consideration. In trying to explain myself to Abi (Hackett) my co-researcher I would use the metaphor of the secret plan. She would ask me during the project and within our reflections the 'Why?' question and I would resist. Part of this resistance is based on experience and realising that people do not really want to know the reason. They enter into the speculation with a level of forced autonomy and become emancipated as spectators, (Rancière, 2004) This is one of the things the work can do.

Abi was interested and confounded by the removal of my ideas from the site of practice, an early years' playgroup setting. In our interviews she talks of all the ideas she worked with coming from the field of practice she and her research were entwined within. She looked to sticks and stones and natural objects and children's modalities of communication, their more-than language, evolving identities and dispersed selves across space and community. She struggled to reflect or show this within an exhibition within a museum that has to meet multiple agendas hopes and desires. The

museum spaces seemed to not fit what was needed. Something did not feel quite right.

After lots of messing about and playing with thoughts, I decide that the important thing to reflect on are *things on strings*. Mainly because I like the way the phrase slips from my tongue and turns neatly into italics.

I Jump: *This focus on a thing in italics is part of a secret plan that I keep to myself - so much so that I am not sure what it is. It is a secret to me, but I am fully aware that it exists – it is not an essence or a thing or an ideal or a becoming it is all and none of these things. In an unguarded moment, I tell Abi about the secret plan. This was not in the secret plan. I only realize this as I am telling her.*

If I think of this as research-creation and I walk with the theory, I carry for a while the notion that the thing on a string falls out of a hotchpotch of fragments of thoughts that do not add up to anything. It is not a sum of sense-making parts, there is no sentence. This is an attempt to lay down some fragments – ten pieces of a 1000-piece jigsaw puzzle. The rest are lost.

I Jump: *I had read about transitional objects where Winnicott talked of them, I knew that attachments to objects were part of our joint research project.*

I Jump: *I thought of objects joined to bodies breaking down the edges of our bodies. I remember reading in Barad's 'Meeting the Universe Halfway' - Niels Bohr's description of how a blind person's stick grasped hard becomes an extension of the body, yet grasped gently becomes an object to be discovered in itself (Barad, 2013).*

I Jump: *There was only one thing on a string in the playgroup, a segmented crocodile. It could move between stations, from the dinosaur world to the world of shaving foam and breakfast cereal, the object justified its own movement.*

I Jump: *The idea of pulling along behind – entering the space after the person pulling felt very different to pushing into space. This excluded the doll in a pram or any push-along toys. People who bought me push-along toys were irritated that they were excluded, as they did not feel the difference. They did not know the secret plan.*

I Jump: *I knew that pull-along toys would be part of most people's childhood memories.*

I Jump: *The Fluxus artist Nam June Paik would drag musical instruments around on strings.*

I Jump: *Gordon Matta Clark would walk through New York with a magnet on a string picking up bits of scrap metal.*

I Jump: *Toys on strings seem to be a worldwide phenomenon and they persist to each generation, there is a classic thing on a string.*

I Jump: *Something vague about St Elmo's fire; a recurring theme or motif. The strand of electrons that make us glow before we are struck by lightning.*

I Jump: *Things on wheels are funny.*

I Jump: *The jumping does not stop when the work is shown.*

These threads do not weave into a map or sense, they are threads that flow through ideas, feelings, emotions, and attachments. They are what Ernst Bloch writes as traces (Bloch and Nassar, originally 1930) they do not come together to make sense.

There is a danger in research-creation of seeing the outcomes of an art process as interventions or starting points or catalysts for something else to happen. Things on strings and unicorns are not this; neither are they great pieces of art. They are flows that are and flow in and out of meaning and shift their shapes as they encounter the wider world, they are fleeting and exist in moments of exchange. They would not exist without the research project but they do not sit comfortably within an external framing. Perhaps it is at this point that a jump to research-creation can position things differently. Perhaps is a good word. It is good not to be sure of some things.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I introduced research creation as a process that works with art and philosophy to expand on the thinking-making-doing of the creative-event. I explain how I came to research-creation and why it afforded an approach and orientation that worked within my study. I go on to give historic context and differentiate research-creation from other forms of research that work with artistic practice. This includes drawing on key literature in the field of research-creation specifically the writing of Erin Manning. I introduce concepts from Deleuze and Guattari including smooth and striated space, diagramming and thoughts on metallurgy that have shaped my personal understanding and experiences of the thinking-making-doing of research-creation. Finally, I aim to produce a text that is an example of research-creation in that it holds the thinking-making-doing of a project in a single place with the aim of producing something open and new. The premise of this writing is to illuminate the artistic process. The text is experimental and can be read as a standalone example of a research-creation event. Or more specifically the realisation that an effective approach to doing research would have to be permeable enough to enable the light from a stained-glass window falling on a museum floor to enter the *ravelling* of the work/residency/creative-event/study.

20 Propositions for Research-Creation

Thoughts Applied to Practice

Manning and Massumi (2014:83-134) in their 2014 book *Thought in the Act* outline 20 propositions for research-creation. They use proposition in the sense of a proposal and a guiding principle. They apply the propositions to three iterations of the Sense Lab - an organisation which runs research-creation projects that Manning has established in Montreal. The ideas they present are illustrated through collective works on projects or as they prefer to call them, events. Their intention is not to write a manifesto or a set of rules or practices for others to adopt. Rather for Manning and Massumi the purpose of the proposition is to keep repeating the question; What if we were to think in this way? They then try and work the propositions into the life of projects, to thread them with varying degrees of success into complex webs of emergent relations (2014:137).

In adopting research-creation as an approach, it feels important to consider how it works as an ethos and what underpins it. It is important to avoid collaging the bits that seem to fit specific projects or the fragment that appears to do some useful work within alternative methodological approaches. I will now work through their 20 propositions reading them as things to be considered, as proposals or a call to action. I will locate some of the thoughts their writing holds into the acts and the event of my research-creation project. Some seem to fit well, but others are harder to place, what feels clear is that to do research-creation in the way that Manning and

Massumi suggest, all 20 points and the *what if* question that assembles them should be considered.

Propositions For Research-Creation

Proposition 1

'Construct the conditions of speculative pragmatism'
(2014:89)

To construct is to put in place, to start to build, to speculate on what is possible, what could be different. Working as artist-in-residence involves complex relationships to thinking and doing and dwelling. It emerges from histories of collective experiences and habits. These relationships owe a debt to something that is lived and taught as we grow into the body of an artist. A speculative pragmatism asks us to reconsider what this debt does and who is the creditor. The conditions we construct ask; what is it to be more-than an individual? More than a bounded- subjective? More than simply in a position?

Proposition 2

'Invent techniques of Relation.' (2014:91)

To hold an adventure playground, a philosophy of immanence, a life in art, a large platform with a tree growing through it and a PhD thesis within a shape that can be recognised requires sophisticated techniques of relation. These can only grow within the flesh of what is to come. Everything is pushed forward and nothing is pinned down. The technique of relation is the ongoing

multiplicity of the event that collide and rub up against each other. In my work, the event tells a story not the finished stories we find in books but the open stories we hear ourselves telling in the moments of their inceptions.

Proposition 3

'Design Enabling Constraints.' (2014:93)

This is more than seeing a problem as an opportunity or dealing with a problem as it emerges. All projects have constraints, but these are not always boundaries, edges, or limitations. I must write 80,000 words and submit this text for scrutiny, I have little say in how this writing is to be structured or presented as it must conform to the genre of writing that is recognised as a PhD. This design of a certain type of production into the practice of research-creation enables something new to emerge. A difference in possible relations that is a meeting in the middle but not a meeting of half ways. Manning and Massumi do not think they are developing a set of rules, an artistic dogma or an assertion of control. Perhaps there is a slip from the minor to the major key as the web of philosophy is activated. As they draw attention to the minor it becomes a special term that struggles to recede.

(2014:96)

Proposition 4

'Enact Thought.' (2014:97)

How to get people thinking, how do we get people thinking together? This is the aspiration and the thing so hard to notice that it can be missed.

Sometimes thoughts are not about something or not about the same thing, yet they can still connect. I jump in thought from a unicorn to a Narwhal's tusk, to Captain Cook's voyages of discovery, to a terror attack in London, to a fire extinguisher going off in my face, to mottled coloured light on the floor of a museum. The museum curator may jump to the idea of the fake, the impossibility of the mythical, the problem of getting the painting through the museum door. I am not sharing the same thoughts, but I am still thinking with the curator, the researcher, the museum visitor, the parent, the child, the unicorn, Stubbs, and Wallinger.

Proposition 5

'Give play to affective Tendencies.' (2014:98)

To attend to how people feel, to make them uncomfortable without feeling uncomfortable, is to be attuned to the more-than of the event. Common sense would say that the challenge and the difference from the norm should remain within a category that is acceptable to all participants. Again, we are

in the middle, which is not a meeting of the half ways. When you spend a lot of time in a place it becomes apparent that there is no single normality, nothing real from which to deviate, only new relations. To give play to affective tendencies is not to redraw territory or to occupy it, rather it is to allow for the stretch in all things.

Proposition 6

'Attend to the Body' (2014:100)

A word about looking after everyone, paying attention to the aches and pains and needs we have in common and share apart. The sharing of food, the sharing of the work, the digging, the dirt, and the resting. My body entwined with my masculinity is always somewhere on the line. A connection to the generations of people who build and make with their hands. To attend to is more than to take into account. It implies an active consideration of what the us in us is made of. Attend to the body, consider the flesh in the thought in the act. It is hard to ignore a body with organs when it aches and yearns. We all breath in the same air.

Proposition 7

'Invent Platforms for relation' (2014:100)

It is ironic that my research project has built an actual platform in an adventure playground intending to be a site of relation. The actual platform

is lived example as opposed to metaphor. To invent a platform of relation for Manning and Massumi is to set up a system of procedures that is operative but not yet afforded a specific function. This platform that affords a space for the event to emerge is constituted within the relations of the event in action, yet it is unclear how different this platform is from what has happened before, and what research-creation adds. The edges of my platform are surrounded by a rail and netting but there are multiple ways to get on and off it. This is again a material truth and not a metaphor. This proposition is supposed to let us know that some structure is needed and not everything is left up to chance but the structure is a platform of immanent potential. Not a planning of how things will unfold. The Platform can be diagrammed but not as a timeline or Gantt chart it must draw itself into the world.

Proposition 8

'Embrace failure'(2014:103)

To embrace failure is not to re-invent failure as success. There is a danger in the research that aims to study failure in that it can turn failure into content and claim it as data. There is a danger in art to say that there is no such thing as failure as anything that is part of the event of art can add something new. Projects, as opposed to research, can fail and art can do bad as well as good. Not paying due attention to the seven points above could be considered a failure of research-creation, a collapse of the thought-in-the-act. Massumi and Manning are warning us that all the things we try and establish

may break down or may never work. The platforms of relation and the actual platform which is not a metaphor could crumble under a weight of expectation. To embrace the potential of failure is to lessen the weight of expectation. This warning is easier to understand and agree with than to live through.

Proposition 9

'Practice letting go' (2014:103)

To practice letting go is to recognise what we are holding onto. In moving from the role of artist to the role of artist/scholar there is a need to let go of things. In some respects, this may feel like a letting go of authorship, yet I let go of the idea of the single author every time I work with someone else. Manning and Massumi talk of letting go as a gift, as an enabling constraint, a limit that extends the territory of the limitation. Letting go of thought is a struggle, to let go of the thought of when to stop, the thought that an edge is reached, the thought that another edge is unfolding. To practice letting go is not to consistently let go of control, identity, technique, or position, it is to be able to feel what we are holding onto. The things we hold dear, the thoughts we cling to and that cling to us. Letting go is not trusting in the process it is letting go of the process.

Proposition 10

'Disseminate Seeds of Process.' (2014:105)

Where things go is a problem. There is a secret world of ideas and thoughts that become secret codes of practice and communication. The idea of dissemination is held in the notion of expansion, the way that thought expands. I am very alone in my thought but I am very connected in my actions. I build and make and talk and the world of my residency is a collective one. The sensemaking takes place within the site of the work and within the time of the work but there is an element of performance here. I am performing research-creation as I hope it is a way to cross between diverse territories not as a person but as a set of ideas. Not within the written text but within the milieu of active and affective agents that are part of an expanding creative-event. Dissemination is explosive, it is small molecules flying out from the middle, collisions, and diffractions moving into view. Manning and Massumi describe the process of dissemination as a structure or an approach to the expansion of ideas. I look to the expansion of the event, the ebbs and flows and movement that begin to make a *newsense*. Dissemination is how the event moves. It is an expansion, not a plan.

Proposition 11.

'Practice care and Generosity Impersonally, as Event-Based Political Virtues'(2014:108)

"All it assumes is the eventful integration of group differentials, in and for the singularity of an event, for only as long as the event sustains its self-organizing process. (2014 :110) .

We are together but we do not assume we have everything or anything in common. We are brought together through the unfolding event; we are singular and irreducible. This proposition holds contradictions, it denies the possibility of a common interest or a common sense. It is a start to thinking about the multiplicity of the event as it expands, the art without author, the dislocation of the subjective. The proposition grows from the fragmentation of the individual, where care is not directed from one to the other or from the singular to the group. Care cannot be located, as the event is neither temporal nor spatial or both; the event is emergent.

Proposition 12

If an Organisation Ceases to Be a Conduit for Singular Events of collective becoming, Let It Die. (2014:110)

A singular event of collective becoming, is this a way to imagine an artist's residency that aspires to move beyond a singular thread of practice? The collective becomings of the imagination that unfold from the bricolage of improvising, that emerge within the event. When this collective becoming ceases, is this the actual real end of the residency? The event where many flows can live together and become. This proposition warns of the danger of sedimentation and the stickiness of striated space where the flows and meanings become fixed. The death of the organisation or the way that the organisation unfolds itself is the end of the residency.

Proposition 13

'Brace for Chaos' (2014:113)

How a work comes to experience is important for both the work and the experience. The form or as Manning and Massumi suggest the 'genre' of how work is shared is a means of distributing the sensible ⁹(Rancière, 2004). Chaos is an enabling constraint that breaks open this distribution. The form breaks from its formatting, the discourses and grooves do not align or work together, they explode. The genres collapsing, open possibilities. The impossibility of order creates chaotic conditions that can only be worked with and embraced as they unfold, they cannot be contained or planned for.

⁹ The authors refer to Ranciere in their text (2014:113) I acknowledge the logocentric nature of the concept yet find it useful here in relation to the way institution power validates what counts as knowledge.

Proposition 14

'Render Formative Forces' (2014:114)

To set in motion a meta-modelling of emergence. To go back to the space before the space we are in without deconstruction. To start from where we are, without knowing where that is or what/who we are. To not take anything as the current or given state of things. To be open and be part of the openness of things without moving towards the closing of things. All these ways of being require more than the saying of them to mean anything at all. There is a danger for words to remain as words and not in any way to be part of the event. Words like the lines of a drawing can render the visible but more often reproduce or represent the visible.

All this said there is only so much chaos that an event or a project can handle and however much we want the world or event to unfold within a certain set of enabling constraints, the world can spit our genres and our unfolding back at us.

Proposition 15

'Creatively Return to Chaos.' (2014:116)

This is not a proposition; it is a reminder to prepare. A project plan for an artist's intervention, a jolly lark in the woods with books and swims and lashings of ginger beer. Collective thinking, talking, and doing before and

after and in the event. Every time we are pulled into the event as project. I am reminded that in the end, you must do something. I have no school of like-minded artists scholars; I have no paper or books to share. I do have a shared history and shared work, shared politics, and shared commitments and these can hold a lot of chaos. They can be part of the event but this is not an artist's playground it is a real playground with real children, real needs, real desires and real outcomes.

Proposition 16

'Play Polyrythms of Relation' (2014:117)

This proposition talks of speaking adding up to more than the words on the tip of the tongue that reach another's ear. Speaking of and in the event is not like writing, the inscription and the meaning that unfolds are within bodies not fixed as texts. Bodies tend to change shape and move, to become different, at the very least to age or if not age to decay. The polyrhythm is not a cacophony of chaos or hysteria of words, it is the complexity of the lived event as it unfolds within its own framing. I spent three days screwing decking board to a frame, sometimes on my own and sometimes with other people. I had many conversations with myself and with other people. Lots of things were said and the meaning is somewhere between what was said and what was made. The noises of materials and the hustle and bustle of the world unfolding around the edges of the platform.

Proposition 17

'Explore New Economies of Relation' (2014:120)

'Lines of flight are immanent critiques of capitalism in action.'

(2014:123)

I have sat and thought about what I am doing with myself. I take my seat and begin to type. I write these lines and I wonder what I serve. The event of this work is a small new economy of relation. The work affords the imagination an opportunity to continue, to follow the line of flight, to avoid capture by the war machine of capital. Ignorance is a safety net. It is only necessary to escape when the trap door is closed and locked. Part of the escape is to be unaware of the capture, to deny the walls of the room whether padded or wallpapered with anaglypta. To emboss is to repeat a pattern in paper usually with a stamp, it is neither to inscribe nor to print; it is the making of something new by the pressure of bringing two things together. This is an economy of relation that adds to a form without adding to or cutting away from a surface; perhaps this is a new economy of relation. Thought, theory, making, community, play, all in relation, all holding back the thoughts of money, of futures, of capital. The playground, the platform resists the symbolic value that flows around the event but through ignorance does not capture it. It may be best to close the barn door even if the horse has bolted.

Proposition 18

'Give the Gift of Giving' (2014:127)

The gift is the gift that keeps on giving. To volunteer is to gift your time and not expect anything in return. In giving time it is lost, at least it is not retrievable. I will never get that six months back. To remove the gift from an exchange of objects is to force giving into process and not object which brings into question the idea of exchange. Exchange is quantified and measured. To volunteer is a gift of time, the gift of giving is a reminder that there is no requirement to give something back. I give to an internal and an external process of change and expect nothing back, what comes back I will accept as fare exchange.

Proposition 19

'Forget, Again' (2014:131)

I have forgotten what I am supposed to forget. I have remembered the thing before the last thing I forgot. Was it an axe given in exchange before one was given in excess, or perhaps the alcoholic's penultimate drink? I remember that I have forgotten these two important things again as I write them down.

Proposition 20

'Proceed'.

Conclusion

In conclusion to this chapter on method, I have added four of my own propositions that developed through working with ideas from research-creation during the first residency and the pilot phase of this study. These propositions underpin much of the work on my second residency at the playground. They are important in relation to how I worked with research-creation as a process and present a platform for the structure of Chapter 7 which is presented as an example of situated research-creation in process.

Proposition

Research-creation affords a mode of enquiry that does not orientate around a set of research questions.

To develop and refine a research question that explores the existing state of things sets in motion an event that is situated within a fixed past. The question orientates around what is, rather than emerging in the future states of things. Crafting a good research question in advance of a research project is not useful in research that orientates itself around what is not yet, the immanent, things on the cusp of becoming. The question that would give space to the emergence of a unicorn in my story of the work at the Museum would be impossible to formulate before encounters within the creative-

event. By this, I mean the materials in all their relations. To ask questions that allow for the unexpected is to over code the unexpected before anything unexpected happens. Structured questions can narrow the depth of field of research. They locate thoughts-in-the act to the specifics of the context of what happened rather than the speculative *more* of what could be about to happen.

Proposition

Research-creation attempts to question the individual subjective author or spectator and places itself within the milieu or middle of things.

This middle is spatial and temporal and so questions the idea of the beginning and the end of the research. It holds all parts of the creative-event in flow. The light on the paved fossil floor in the museum, streaming from an upstairs window can flow into the research as a specific relation as it cannot, in any way, be ignored. The light invades the milieu and becomes part of the research not because the territory of research is extendable but because the possibility of ignoring such intensity is not ontologically viable in a framework of concepts that orientates towards the creative-event.

Proposition

Research-creation allows for the accidental and the chance encounter with the stuff of life, the material of the event to become more-than representation.

Aesthetic understanding is closer to feeling than to representing. Research-creation attends to the presentation of thought -feelings that are not always mediated through representation. Art can present as well as represent. The plastic unicorn pull-along toy can mean something if we choose to decode its constituent parts; if we break off its horn and oil its wheels and write it into text. As research-creation, it can also feel like something that cannot be ignored, that can be more-than it seems and that has a potential to live beyond its representation.

Proposition

Research-creation can help us to think through artistic ways of knowing that can be more than arts linear history or the art-world-context.

Art struggles to break from the chains of its habits. Through attending to what is immanent, becoming and unfinished arts potential emerges *in* a future where old habits and expectations are easier to ignore or to place on the back burner. The research breaks the chains that attach the dog to his vomit. (Beckett in Massumi, 1992:51)

First Interlude: My Journey through Theory

I was born into a world of practical science where people earned their credibility and validation from what they could do. The world appeared simple, a place where objects can be located and understood in space and time and many things were taken for granted. People's personal value was often linked to ability. For the men, this usually involved manipulating materials with their hands or the skill to carefully select the best tools to make things-do-jobs. Mixing cement, or gobo, or mix as it was affectionately and variously called. Chopping down trees, mining coal, raising, and killing rabbits, chickens, ducks, and pigs. There was little time for thinking, little time for metaphysics, and little time for anything not considered practical. The half-serious life advice passed on from my granddad, which I carry forward: -

'Never buy out with a mouth

Or plant anything you can't eat.'

A protestant work ethic, coupled with a harsh and vicious Old Testament God gratefully ignored. Lots of love yet little music or what could be described by others as 'joy for its own sake'. I often wonder why I decided to become an artist. I suspect it was the need to escape from what I began to call the tyranny of the pen with its associated tentacles. Writing and reading do not feel like a natural state for me, they make me itch. Engaging with words fixed on paper or on screens feels uncomfortable. Like healed breaks in old arthritic legs, with careful management I can escape the pain for years

yet when I start to write again, the aches come back into my body like difficult memories returning in old age.

This is not to say that as a child I did not struggle with my own existential problems. In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari (1977:19) recount a story where the inspirational, if strange, playwright Antonin Artaud describes the moment he became critically aware of his own existence. I remember a similar moment in the garden at home in 1973, where I first paid attention to my nature and perceived myself as separate from everything else. I did not require a mirror or the still water of a pond as I was not concerned with my reflection or representations of what I was on the outside. This moment was singular yet Cartesian, I was aware of my independent thought so therefore I was, in the garden, playing with a ball, aged 6, alone, mainly in my head, not fitting in, learning to play chess, also in my head and at the same time. From the instance, I recognised I was alive; I remember that I began to fear my own death. The millennium was 27 years away and I imagined myself as an old man with a quiff of grey hair worn in a side parting like my dad. Or perhaps I would be dead because of the, then and still current, policy of mutually assured destruction through the annihilation of nuclear war.

As for many people, my first encounter with ontological thought didn't really last very long. It was a fleeting moment of Cognito that passed like a case of badly trapped wind. If I had trapped wind as a kid, my mum would tell me to go outside and jump up and down and not come back in until I had, 'done a big trump.' My fear of mortality and the agonizing encroaching death by fire

preceded by loose teeth and hair loss was treated with the same parental concern. A very practical and self-initiated bodily shaking until the associated feelings and gas was expelled.

After this first encounter with the acceptance of my own mortality, I would replace thoughts of death with blind panic and bury them. I was too busy thinking about girls, not that they seemed to be thinking much about me. I did my A levels and went to art school, I was interested in making things, in making art. There was little theory in the good old-fashioned British art school of the early 1980s. We were forced to teach ourselves what it is to grow a practice from scratch, even our short personal histories were somehow erased. The old way of teaching art or rather 'making artists' is to immerse the tender 20-year-old, full of self-confidence in a vat of human shit (often their own). The very loose structure of being with other people in a studio with very little intervention from tutors holds things in place. Toward the end of the three years of a degree you emerge, wash yourself down, and set to work with the fragments that are left. It goes without saying that this form of education, based on a misguided notion of a rite of passage ends up with many more casualties than success stories. Even the success stories can end up hanging themselves in their wardrobes or embarking on a lifelong quest to return to the vat of shit from which they were re-born. The people who make art schoolwork for them are the people who learn to make it up as they go along. This making up and the progression and the moving forward is about hope. A belief proved through experience that something rather than nothing will happen. Essentially this is the sense-making or *newsense*

making that comes out of immersive art school training. Simply put, you must make up your own sense and this becomes a practice. Because you are lost and in such a mess, you and your work become co-joined. How you feel affects your state of mind and in turn this generates who you are.

I've travelled the world as a journeyman artist and through all the work I've done in schools, communities, art galleries and universities, I have held onto what I consider a line of practice. Now I could quite carefully construct this as a Deleuzian line of flight (Stengers, 2008) from the complex assemblage that enunciates from the event (de Freitas and Curinga, 2015) the *agencement* (Mazzei, 2017) of vibrant connections that create the shape of a *life* (Deleuze, 2001:27). Yet it's much easier to talk of sense-making, of lines, of following ideas through to a self-defined conclusion. Of a practice that generates and pushes forward, a reason to do something. The idea or perhaps the *identity* of working as an artist along a line of practice is that of connections, you don't just do something on its own. You look forward and see a gap, a space in the line of the work that needs attention. Practice does not follow linear time; it flows with the time of the encounter. Therefore, you can pick up ideas from years ago, they are not neglected they are present in the moment of practice which is thick and long and is not made from time that can be reduced to minutes or seconds. The time of practice does not elapse, the time of practice stacks up and maintains itself; the time of practice is a *ravelling*.

What or who will unravel and how far will the threads splay? All practice is fragile, surety brings habits and familiarity. The intention is to keep

everything on the edge of thought and action, to keep all potential and relations open. Practice is inscribed onto the lives we lead and the ways we move forward, practice is an enunciation that is forever on the edge of becoming.

This tradition that birthed my practice is steeped in individualism and is not the best place to shape a worldview that does not centralize the human subject as the knower of true nature. However, art manifests itself in forms that are pre-symbolic, art does not have to represent or stand in for something else. We pretend it does, as the blue pill of representation is somehow easier to swallow yet most of us feel art in our bodies as experience.

I still have the muscle memory of the old way of working. I am writing more and getting better at it so I can turn my hand to the article or the book chapter and perform in the academic genre. Create a wall to fold thought against, spin out a metaphor to spark a dim light in a dark room and challenge certain certainties from the inside. Yet little of this seems to seep into my PhD writing. The process of doing a PhD has created a schism between thought and action, the mechanism has ground to a halt.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Introduction

This literature review scaffolds my PhD study from four entangled perspectives. In keeping with research-creation as an approach, the literatures I have drawn on are situated at the intersections between thinking-making-doing. I review the literature as I encountered it through the unfolding of the creative-event of my residencies. I hope to provide theoretical and historical context yet am aware that at times this sits uncomfortably with an approach that prioritises emergence and the lure of possibilities. I adopt four perspectives as they represent my changing identity and my personal development in relation to the journey of this study. Firstly, I will discuss how art does work within research in different ways to locate research-creation within its historic and theoretical context. Secondly, I will explore some key texts from the field of research-creation. I will go on to discuss ideas from Deleuze and Guattari including the need to create new concepts that form part of the creative-event of my residency (Truman, 2021). Finally, I will review some writing on the adventure play movement in relation to the thinking-making-doing of my residency.

My empirical research has taken place through two visual artist residencies, The first within an academic research project exploring early literacy practices which I describe in detail in Chapter 3. The second is within an adventure playground over two years which provides the platform for Chapters 4, 5 and 6 (*see Appendix 2 for specific project information*).

Through adopting propositions (Manning and Massumi, 2014:83) from research-creation I have aspired to fold arts practice and research together to produce new knowledge. Research-creation (Manning, 2016b) draws on the philosophical and theoretical insights of several writers including Alfred North Whitehead (Whitehead and Sherburne, 1957) and Deleuze and Guattari (2008) to challenge accepted ways of performing research (Loveless, 2019). This literature review is constructed to provide a backdrop and rationale for the work of this study specifically how reconsidering my understanding of art practice from my own experiences has opened spaces for new thoughts and new practices within art and research.

Through working with the concept of *assemblage* I propose that the artist's residency operates as a mesh of interconnections. I suggest that it is helpful to describe the residency process as a *ravelling*. I define this as a coming together, knotting and tangling of threads that do not necessarily centrally position a human actor.

I will demonstrate how my practice works with the concept of the assemblage (Manning, 2016) drawing on the collaborative writing of Deleuze and Guattari (1995, 2008). This line of thought affords an opportunity to pay attention to the idea of the artists-residency as a set of complex relations to place, identity, and materials through the singularity of the creative-event (Massumi, 2011). A central struggle of this research study is the difficulty and agentive possibilities of the singular individual authorship of artworks and how this relates to residencies in process. I address this tension by writing a narrative

of my personal journey through research, this writing is presented as an interlude or intervention into the text. My intention is to make visible the changes that have been enunciated by presenting the work of this study as research-creation embedded within a personal art practice.

How art does work in research.

There is a growing literature that pays attention to the place of artistic practice within social research. In the handbook of Arts-based research Patricia Leavy (2017) states that.

‘While the arts are worthy unto themselves, purely for the sake of artistic expression and cultural enrichment, they are also invaluable to research communities across the disciplines.’ (Leavy, 2017:3)

There are many valuable ways that artists are working on different levels and roles within the academy taking part in research. I personally have worked on many research projects, (*see Appendix 2 for list of projects*) sometimes training people in techniques and practical skills, sometimes challenging approaches and practices and regularly using art to engage participants in ideas and developing a shared rationale for broad research enquiries. As part of these projects, I have often produced or co-produced art objects though this was rarely central to the commissioned work. In the thick of it, within the day-to-day responsive nature of this commissioned work, I rarely consider how to categorise what I am doing. I do not see myself as making

art or doing research - I speculate that I am in the process of working collaboratively to co-produce something new. In this study however it is critical to position the thinking-making-doing within a context that both describes what it is aiming to achieve and in so doing explains how it differs from other practices within and outside research that have implications on what is discussed in later chapters.

Arts-based research can draw on artistic methods and techniques to bolster existing methodologies (Pink, 2015, 2020). This includes applying art techniques such as collage (Chilton and Scotti, 2014), participatory filmmaking (Hackett et al., 2015) and poetry (Faulkner, 2016). Some research projects embed artistic approaches within the fine grain of projects (Graham et al., 2015; Pahl et al., 2017). Within much of this work, the term art is used to cover a broad spectrum of creative activities. It is difficult to draw any clear definition of an arts-based method beyond the use of techniques that are familiar in the production of art. As these techniques become more familiar within the context of research, they become part of social researchers' toolkits. I use arts-based research (ABR) in the context of this study to categorise arts-based methods as techniques that augment and shape research outputs in other disciplines usually with a written text-based outcome. The primary purpose of ABR is rarely to produce standalone art outcomes even if these are understood as research (Pool, 2018). It is important for this study to make a distinction between using an ABR approach within a research project and research-as-creation (Chapman and

Sawchuk, 2012). In creation-as-research, creation is required for research to emerge, it is at the centre of things.

To illustrate this, I will give two examples of hypothetical projects.

Arts-based methods

A research project is commissioned to explore how young people move around a museum. It develops the research question “How are young people between 9 and 13 able to access our museum displays? A dance practitioner and a storyteller are commissioned to work with young people to encourage conversations about their interactions with the space. After the arts-based intervention a researcher from the university conducts interviews with the young people to ask them about their experiences, she uses a semi-open interview structure and transcribes and codes the resulting recordings. This is then used as a data set and feeds into the overarching enquiry and produces a written report or journal paper.

Research-as-creation

A group of 9 to 13-year-olds produce a story that involves movement and dance. They are asked to use their knowledge to create a performance that will help museum staff understand their lived experience of how they feel within a museum display. They work with a storyteller and a dancer experienced in co-production to develop a new piece of work. What happens after this is unclear.

Practice-as-Research (PaR)

There are literatures that expand ideas of Practice-as-Research approaches in the UK (Bolt, 2006; Carter, 2004; Nelson, 2013). However much of this scholarly work focuses on the interplay between written texts and the outcomes of creative practice and is closely linked to work within higher education arts institutions. The artistic turn (Coessens et al., 2009) suggests that hybrid scholar/artist identities are emerging within multiple fields of enquiry where artistic practice plays a central role yet this positioning often raises questions of validity within an evidence-based approach (Coleman and Macintosh, 2015). I discuss PaR in more detail in the opening of Chapter 1 in relation to methods. PaR often foregrounds the art object or art event as the point where new knowledge and new understanding emerge (Candy et al., 2011). The central role of the art object and how the material outcomes of art production relate to generating new knowledge and understanding was not central to my approach (Barrett and Bolt, 2013). I aimed to re-evaluate my role as an artist working within research so as to fully integrate the thinking-making-doing and written outcomes as a singular assemblage. This is what I describe in this study as a *ravelling*. In Chapter Seven of this study, I aspire to challenge the form of PhD writing through an experiment in research-creation. My aim is to flatten the relationship between written text as research and artistic outcome as research and hold both within the same territory. Chapter 7 is not intended to present a piece of art–practice as research rather it aspires to experiment with research-creation and create something new that is not fully art or fully research (Oliver, 2018).

The Artist-Residency

The artist-in-residence is a flexible term that can be used to describe many different processes that involve artists working in a broader social context. In common use by arts organisations, artists and art funders it can be described as an artist working within a specific location or organisation for a period of time. A key aspect of a residence is that it is situated outside of the studio.

The residency is defined partly by the fact that it is not simply an artist working within their personal studio, although this does not mean that they are not developing a studio practice. For example, a painter may simply move their space of work to a new location, perhaps setting up within a school or even another studio complex. The artist may not be required to respond through their work to the new location although the intention of the work may be to disrupt processes and patterns of behaviour within the host organisation. Beyond this simple definition, there are no set parameters in relation to the length of time, what artefacts are produced or the involvement and relationships with people and place. Other terms such as artist placement or artist intervention are sometimes used instead of residency yet there are no clear parameters or working definitions and these terms are often substituted or used to describe the same or similar process.

Historically the artist in residence can be traced back to the renaissance when court artists and the patronage of individuals would provide artists with an income and a place to work. However, for the context of this study, I am

most interested in how artists in residence programs have evolved over the last 50 years.

What constitutes an artist's residency is well understood from the perspective of commissioning. It would be fair to suggest that a residency differs from a workshop or series of workshops in that it happens over a longer period and at least at critical points draws on an artist's individual creative (studio) practice. There is not necessarily a requirement to produce or show new artworks and the work of the residency could involve institutional change or the generation of conversations (Kester, 2004).

For the purpose of this study, the artist in residence is understood to be situating an artist within a milieu, a set of complex relations to objects, people and processes. This does not necessarily mean being in residence within a geographic location or an organisation or a project though it could involve all three. Residency foregrounds the artist's encounters with the material world and strives to de-centre the artist as the sole author of an artwork or series of artworks or as an individual producer of research outcomes.

Lithgow and Wall (2019) refer to the embedded residency as a mode of working within an organisation with a focus on institutional change. Within the embed residency, they suggest the artist residency program has a tripartite orientation. Firstly a focus on the 'dailiness' of activities, secondly on organisation routines and thirdly on mechanisms for knowledge exchange (Lithgow and Wall, 2017). The complex set of connections that are

suggested by the term 'embedded residency', position an artist within, yet distinctly separate, from what can only inadequately be described as a situation or set of complex relations. However, for the purpose of this study 'embedded residency' both as a term in language and as a typology lacks the necessary fluidity when applied through the lens of research-creation and situated research. This is because working definitions of the term 'residency' necessarily create boundaries that construct space through a set of relations. Lithgow and Wall are aware of this and turn to a Deleuze-Guattarian ontology to draw on concepts such as striated and smooth space, the molecular and the molar and the overarching notion of the assemblage to rethink residency. However, in laying these concepts onto existing relationships, traditions and practices, issues arise that begin to define edges and capture territories.

For example, in my work at the adventure playground, I have constructed a residency that holds in relation to multiple funders and trajectories. The residency as such is an ongoing process of becoming as relationships emerge through the flow of actions. Within this milieu are formal boundaries and informal becomings. In the spring of 2019, all my formal face-to-face work with the staff and children at the playground was suspended due to Covid 19 restrictions. The formal research and nature of my residency were put on hold, yet the sets of relationships merely changed direction. I began to work on a building project that did not require any direct contact with others and took place outside. Although my research was put on hold the residency continued, informally and without a direct research outcome (at

least not one that involved other human actors). In describing this relationship as an embedded residency, the term is not flexible enough to accommodate this level of transformation. There was no longer arts practice or a formal structural relationship to an organisation. The shape of the perceived relationships had collapsed, there was no longer a recognised thing to embed or a viable position/space for it to be embedded. Yet the residency continued. Conducting research in a time of Covid brought with it many challenges, it also made more apparent many of the external constraints that shape how research is conducted. The shifting set of relations that I describe here as the artist's residency, is one of the few concepts that remained consistent across and through my study. This flexibility feels like something familiar, a group of interwoven ideas that come together to form what I will describe later in this study as a *ravelling*. From an artist's perspective, the line of practice is not linear. Artistic practice is not tied to residency rather it is *ravelled* to it, this is one of the key strengths of visual practices that written language can never fully unravel, as meaning often sits out of its reach.

I propose the artist's residency takes place across time and space through multiple encounters, concepts, and relations. This expansive approach that crosses the space, practice, project, and event worries notions of a subjective response to a defined environment. It requires a rethinking of what residency could be and what can be imagined through it, creating leaks and edge bleeds.

Over the past 30 years since my art school training in sculpture, I have developed a diverse visual arts practice. This work is deeply entwined with my relationship with the material world of objects and things. This has provided a consistent line through my practice directing and informing my work and enabling me to follow a thread of ideas. I bring this approach to residency, not as a departure from existing definitions or practices as it is part of and draws on long traditions of artistic practice. However, to locate residency within research-creation rather than art production several theoretical shifts are required.

My empirical research has emerged within a three-year artistic residency placement in an adventure playground. This has involved working closely with playground staff and young people during a time of challenge and change. Although aspects of this residency have involved the creative production of new things, the territory of the work has been fully engaged in process and not the production of singular autonomous art objects. I have drawn on ethnographic methods and research-creation to develop a hybrid methodology. This approach was necessary to understand how artistic practice, specifically the artistic residency can function as a method of enquiry within the expanding field that includes post-qualitative social research. (Hickey-Moody and Page, 2015).

Research-creation

Research-creation allows the problematising of how artistic work can contribute to collaborative research projects (Pool, 2018). As with the work of many contemporary visual artists, the genealogy of my practice is eclectic and nonlinear. Within research-creation I turn to literatures that are most concerned with art as *a way* (Manning 2011)

Key texts from my reading on research-creation

Research-creation in relation to this study is a specific field that brings together artistic practice and process philosophy. I am interested in bringing thoughts and concepts from the field of research-creation to better understand the role of the artist in residence within interdisciplinary research. I now discuss the work of three scholars who have guided my approach and go on to explore some of the philosophical writing that underpins the key concepts.

A Minor Gesture

Erin Manning (2016) constructs her concept and application of research-creation across several books and articles both as a single author and with Brian Massumi. The work is concerned with art practice and art within the academy and aims to ask critical questions about current approaches to adopt ideas and concepts from process philosophy to speculate on alternative epistemologies and ontologies.

One of her clearest propositions for the potential of research-creation is presented in Chapter 1 of her book *The Minor Gesture* which called against

method. Here she outlines her key concerns and demonstrates why research-creation affords the potential for art to work differently within the academy.

How to make art at the end of the world

Loveless' (2019) book makes a major contribution in that it helps to validate research-creation as an approach. However, the approach and many of the examples are embedded within art departments and art practice within the academy. The book makes connections between Canada and the UK and explains Practice-as-Research and trans-disciplinary work. Some key ideas that I draw on in this study are the boundary object, described as an edge marker something between art and research. Art in an expanded field where Loveless turns to on Rosalind Krauss (1979) important essay *Sculpture in an Expanded Field* to question institutional definitions of where art making starts and stops. An exploration of disciplines and the human capacity to be in love with multiple even oppositional things at the same time. The book is, practice-oriented and useful for artists. The examples that are used to explore the ideas are problematical and illustrate difficulties as well as potential. There seems to be a recurring problem when examples of research-creation in practice are brought to writing. I try to address this within the images, texts and actions of Chapter 7.

Feminist speculations and the practice of research-creation: Writing pedagogies and intertextual affects

In her book, Sarah Truman (2021). provides practical steps to putting research-creation to work within research. She makes the case for fully integrating cultural production including art making into her own research and art practice. She demonstrates how small pieces of theory, such as Nietzsche's concept of eternal recurrence, can be put to work in research-creation projects. In her collaboration with David Ben Shannon (2018) she uses walking and music composition to explore new conceptual and political philosophies of space to question peoples' encounters with the landscape. In her writing with Stephenie Springgay, she explores the concept of the speculative middle, walking methodologies and the possible application of research-creation approaches in schools and other settings. (Springgay and Truman, 2017, 2018; Springgay et al., 2020)

Thought in the act

Erin Manning and Brian Massumi (2014) collaborate to develop a book that proposes research-creation as a way to think through a wide range of creative encounters and strives to present the conceptual and the aesthetic as singular. Bringing Massumi's thinking that concerns the event (Massumi, 2011) and activist process philosophy of affect (Massumi, 2015) and some of the concepts Manning was developing around affect (Manning, 2007) the book makes 20 propositions for research-creation. I discuss these in detail in Chapter 1 and try and think through them in relation to my residencies. They then use these propositions to think through projects they have

developed in Sense Lab their research centre in Montreal. The final chapter of the book is an honest and intimate insight into the impossibility of working with ideas and concepts in an unpredictable and less-than-ideal world.

This later section of the book is rich in some of the issues and contingencies that only become apparent in the middle space of projects. Inspired by the value of sharing the difficulties of research-creation in the world I aspire to make an original contribution to the current literature on research-creation by weaving together thinking-making-doing and sharing this within the fine grain of my residences as they developed.

How my experiment in research-creation engages with Deleuze and Guattari

Through the process of reading and working with theory over the three years of this study, I have taken several different deep dives into a breadth of diverse literature. As an artist/scholar dyslexic, I am aware that these dives are not deep enough. However, there comes a time when a metaphor needs labouring, a point where you need to come up for air. There is no space or time within this final writing up of the work to explore in-depth texts I do not intend to draw on directly. However, each phase of reading, thinking, and doing has had an influence on my current work and is an important part of the journey of this research project when imagined as an artists-residency. To tell the story of my work in the field I will focus on the thoughts of others that have made a difference. There are minor lines of thought and literatures that at points have been central to my study but have now become less central because they have ebbed and flowed in relation to my work in the

field. Within the third section of this literature review, I will adopt a research-creation approach to theoretical concepts (Loveless, 2019). I will explore how a research-creation orientation can work with distinct concepts and aspects of theory and put them to work within the detail of site-specific research projects. This approach has evolved through my work in the field, adapting and shaping my thinking to be permeable to my creative practice.

'The concept belongs to philosophy and only philosophy'.

(Deleuze and Guattari, 2008:34)

For Deleuze and Guattari, (2008) philosophy is embedded within the history of western thought as they are unapologetically philosophers in that tradition. From the Stoics to Spinoza, they looked for the minor refrain, the thoughts that were never fully formed or accepted that described the potentials of what is always immanent. The not-yet, that is present everywhere, that is felt to be always on the edge of becoming. In their last book together, *What is Philosophy*, they describe the process of philosophy as the creation of new concepts. They go on to expand on multiple concepts that they identify as emerging from a plane of immanence. This is presented as a continuously unfolding conceptual absolute, there is no potential for anything beyond this plane, no God and no metaphysical realm. Inspired by the possibilities of developing new concepts I have tried to create some within the thinking-making-doing of this study. I consider the ideas of *newsense* and *ravelling* as new concepts that emerged from doing research-creation. The concept of *ravelling* proposes a mechanism to be put to work within the unfolding of an

artist's residency. It is this element of the philosophical process that draws me towards research-creation as a productive methodology. Creating a new concept could be viewed as an act of arrogance or naivety yet from a position of a visual artist working within the world of improvised adventure play, I feel like something worth trying.

Significant philosophers, or *Conceptual Personae* as they identify them, can establish new planes if an existing plane reaches a limit in what it can hold. Kant is presented as a *conceptual persona* who heralded an age of enlightenment and sedimented many concepts that are still deeply embedded within western thought. Deleuze and Guattari present their thinking as a new plane of immanence where multiple concepts emerge. They are against Freudian ideas (1977) of the divided self and create a way of thinking where the mind and body cannot be imagined or described in terms of separation. Later in *What is Philosophy* (2008) they describe two planes that are distinct from the plane of philosophy. Firstly, the plane of science which is limited to the self-imposed boundaries of the speed of light and absolute zero. Unlike some of their contemporary thinkers, they make a distinction between philosophy and science. Secondly, they establish the plane of art that for them functions beyond what we understand as representation. To work with any of the many concepts that are found within Deleuze and Guattari's writing, it is important to acknowledge the distinct plane of immanence constructed through their work and the interdependence of any thinking that emerges through their concepts. Much of the writing and thinking in this study is concerned with the structures of thought outlined in A

Thousand Plateaus (1995). I draw on the idea of the plane of immanence and the plane of consistency as a form of thinking that challenges relationships within the material world.

This is essential yet difficult as the plane does not exist before the concepts rather it becomes through them. It is constituted but not fixed by the ever-expanding field of ideas that are put to work. In their introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus* (1995), the authors are keen to instruct the reader to tackle the book in any order but to leave the final chapter until the end. This is useful advice, but it is not an invitation to dip in and out, it is rather an acknowledgement that what we can take from the book will not follow a linear path. Thoughts are described as rhizomatic and not arboreal. I take this understanding into my empirical fieldwork and my idea of a *ravelling*. An arboreal approach to being an artist in residence would imagine a tree-shaped program of work. There would be a trunk and branches, a start and a finish, roots drawing water from the ground and holding structures secure. Arboreal thinking allows for a temporal journey that can be mapped, it affords opportunities for planning, anticipation, and predicted outcomes. A rhizomatic approach changes temporal relations, in that it slows things down and condenses the present moment into a thick present. This allows for a more experiential conception of time and its passing. Deleuze draws on the work of Henri Bergson who makes a direct correlation between time and the subjective. Living within this concept as part of the territory of residency was a central and recurring theme within my research.

In later chapters of this study, I aim to move towards sharing an experiential understanding of how these thoughts come to my work through deep descriptions that draw on ethnographic approaches to spin a yarn into a *ravelling*.

In 1968 Gilles Deleuze was already well established as a philosopher having published numerous books that developed a line of innovative thought and holding a teaching post at the progressive Vincennes University. Félix Guattari was a political militant and the director of an unusual psychiatric clinic at La Borde. Their writing partnership was to span three decades. My first encounters with aspects of their thinking were always second-hand, their concepts such as the rhizomatic, or the abstract war machine sprinkled on conversations usually involving art. As I immersed myself in their writing, I recognised the challenges it posed to how I was working and the way I approached making art and doing research.

I enter this space of thinking with enough arrogance to drive me forward and enough naivety to give me optimism. I am confident however that in attempting to position a new concept within lived experience I am working within the spirit of the original texts in an effort to live *a life* that holds their thoughts as refrain (Stengers, 2008). I was hobbled by an inability to even attempt to think of something new and like many researchers struggled with a rush to the application of concepts within established and sedimented structures of thought. Concepts emerge within the collaborative writing of Deleuze and Guattari, multiple interconnected concepts are proposed and

refined over four decades in their work together and as sole authors. As with much of their writing, these concepts do not stand alone and are not fixed or systematically explained. It is difficult to connect the thinking through to practice. However, I have found them, and the plane of immanence from which they emerge, of considerable value as tools to help me think about art practice differently as it unfolds in the space of both residency and research.

The deep relationships to place, people and materials and temporality that develop within artist-in-residence programs resonate with the concept of assemblage (DeLanda, 2016). This is more than a structured relationship of multiple and different component parts, thinking through assemblage enables a change in the perception of what constitutes a territory. It helps to reframe how we consider the edge of something and holds Deleuze's concept of the fold (Deleuze and Strauss, 1991) in opposition to the cut or edge. The concept of the fold helped me to work with the complexities of thinking through the creative-event as a singularity. This challenged the way my brain worked in relation to finding and categorising where *the work* of the study appeared to stop. I explore the nature of the edge and the fold through a detailed description of mending the zip wire as an interlude between Chapters 4 and 5. The assemblage of Deleuze and Guattari's concepts become levers that move thought by shifting some of the unquestioned foundational ontological blocks that we are often unaware of. This became imperative as I started to recognise many of the ideas both considered and ill-considered that I take for granted, ideas Guattari would call axiomatics, (1995:158-9) that are riddled with uncontested contradictions. It became

clear that ideas I had used to think through art practice, building on embodied knowledge, contributed to some of the problems that emerge through the work of this study. Moving forward was not a process of parsing, or sifting through what I could understand, the work was to develop new ways of understanding.

For example, a focus on an individual subjective identity that is distinctly separated and bounded from everything else is historically important and remains current within arts practice. The idea of a personal vision and creative genius runs through art history, it is a history built on the small steps of the individual artist and the multiple structures both physical and conceptual that scaffold this. It is not surprising that artists, many of whom have been through an art education system that encourages extreme ideas of individual vision and a personal muse, find it difficult to produce work rigorously within communities that do not consider themselves artists or connect with an authorised art discourse. The romantic idea of what it is to be an artist persists and flows in and out of how artists can work in an expanded field (Krauss, 1979; Papapetros and Rose, 2014).

I look to the writing of Deleuze and Guattari to help me work through a relationship and connection to this history and to provide an alternative foundation for my thinking. This new way expands the idea of the self and challenges sedimented and structural axiomatics of how the subjective can function within different ecologies (Guattari, 2005). This change in thinking is not straightforward, it is not a retrofitting of new ideas into old systems, it is a

passage from one way of being in the world to another, and as such requires me to learn new ways of writing and reading. Texts that cannot aim to provide clarity within the old ways of reading and writing about art practice.

Philosophically, the works of Deleuze and Guattari present an ontology that considers and extends the potential of the material world and as *Conceptual Persona* produces a new plane through which new ways of experiencing can take place. Central to this is a move towards what Deleuze (2001: 27) in his later writing began to call *a life*, for Deleuze, *a life* emerges as the totality of things, it is not flowing through matter or animating space, it is the limit of all there is. The material world is central to the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari and as with new materialist thought, this material is not set against or defined in difference to the human mind or the human body. The critical work of Deleuze and Guattari's project is to shatter materialist thought patterns and to put into question all philosophy in the major key that precedes them.

Finally, I return to assemblage or *agencement* as there is potential for a concrete process of reconstitution of thought. The term suggests the active, entangled and immanent, emerging from a set of relationships and in process. Never an endpoint, never an underpinning, a flow of relations that is always open a potential within themselves for what is to come. This does not mean that my writing or thinking is essentially Deleuzian. My aspiration is more straightforward, I draw on art practice in the domain of social science research to make something new. However, Deleuze and Guattari present

the potential of an alternative way to feel *life* in all her relations, an ontology, more dislocated, that challenges and makes visible the ways I used to think the world. In simple terms, to write materialism is to suggest that there is something else, the difference that defines it. Deleuze offers the potential to think of materialism without the distinct category or territory of matter.

Although intoxicatingly seductive, I face the problem of matter as territory as I encounter it in the world. I turn to Deleuze and Guattari not because they offer solutions to problems, but because they offer useful processes, to develop concepts within a feeling, moving a spatiotemporal web of creations, it is thinking that helps me to be in one place and bide a while.

Adventure play and play theory

The available literature on play is extensive and crosses disciplinary boundaries including health, education and psychology and games studies. In the early stages of my PhD study, I read key texts by Brian Sutton Smith's *Ambiguity of Play* (2009) and the work of Stuart Lester (2019) and Wendy Russell (2010; Lester et al., 2014; Maclean et al., 2015). I then engaged with some of this literature focusing on key contributions that shape play-worker identity and that develop the ethos of the adventure play movement. (Allen, 1956; Ward, 1961; Nicholson, 1971; Sturrock and Else, 1998). I also explored government guidance on play practices produced by Play England and The UK government (Wragg, 2015; England, 2017; UK, 2020). I engaged with writing and documentation on adventure play primarily as research for developing creative -events within the in-act of a research-

creation event. As I continued with thinking-making-doing, I realised that this study does not aim to contribute to the knowledge or understanding of adventure playgrounds and the adventure play movement. As with any artist's residency, it is essential to understand from a practice-oriented perspective the site or location of the residency. Specific ideas and concepts that were drawn into the unravelling of the work became an important resource or what Manning and Massumi call a friend to research-creation (2014:63-66). The literatures were helpful in effectively working through a located practice and doing research-creation within the folds of an artistic residency. However, they are marginal to the core ambition and contribution of this study. For example, the theory of loose parts play as outlined by Simon Nicholson (1971) and more recent texts on loose parts play as an approach (Sutton, 2011; Casey and Robertson, 2016; Cowman, 2019; Rorabaugh, 2019) have played a significant part in how my residency at the playground has developed. It is woven through the project and provides focus and meeting points. It helped me to find a common ground with playworkers and a shared ambition and understanding. It offered an opportunity to explore together how to bring something new and sustainable and shape and inform change at the playground. Personally, it encouraged me to think deeply about ethos, relevance and relations to ideas like assemblage sculpture and temporary art practices. Philosophically ideas from loose parts play connected to materiality and the assemblage of the residency. Through my residency, I began to develop an expanded view of what could constitute a loose part and extended this to people, emotions stories and events. I do not however present this as a finding or use loose parts theory as a metaphor or

reference to assemblage. Loose parts play and the history of the adventure play movement are important elements of this study though they are not the subjects or objects of the creative-event.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined how art encounters research to illustrate how research-creation differs from other forms of research approaches that work through artistic and creative methods. I discuss the artistic residency as a method and expand on how it is currently understood and my experience of working on them in practice. I go on to discuss some of the key literature that underpins research-creation and forms its theoretical base. Specifically, how key texts present a rationale for working with art practice and process philosophy to think research differently. Collectively the literature scaffolds an approach to research that pays attention to artistic practice without centralising a singular subjective human actor. I briefly expand on some key works in the field and explain how they have shaped my approach to enacting research-creation within the thinking-making-doing of an artistic residency. I go on to explore how thoughts from Deleuze and Guattari manifest within research-creation and their specific contributions to my study. This writing is intended as an introduction to frame Chapters 6 and 7 by explaining and justifying why I began to develop and apply my own concepts and how they perform work. I conclude with an explanation of how I have worked with literature about the adventure play movement and where this sits in relation to the thinking-making-doing.

Second Interlude: 1968: Art History

1968 was a year after my birth. People-kind were on the cusp of reaching the moon and had no issue with calling themselves mankind. 1968 was a point in the minority/Western world history where the established ways of thinking lost their structure and began to collapse. The crises happened in politics, philosophy, in the study of language, where structuralism emerged briefly to be quickly challenged by poststructuralism. Art was directly involved in activism, creating happenings and interventions and manifestos for change. Many artists carried on as if the business was usual, following a historic line from conceptualism through minimalism through to pop art and talking in bars about the end of painting. At what was then considered the edge of the mainstream the transglobal Fluxus movement emerged, arts field expanded and began to move into new contexts (Miles and Springgay, 2020). In Fluxus, art and music moved away from producing the autonomous object. Alan Kaprow was writing his scores, a set of instructions on how to realise a work, rather than the work itself. John Cage was composing with sound that challenged what would be considered music. Artworks were able to escape the gallery and many traditional boundaries between art forms such as sculpture, painting, theatre and musical composition began to blur. The poststructuralists turned to language and continental philosophers such as Irigaray, Foucault, Derrida and Deleuze and Guattari, developed concepts and critiques that constructed and deconstructed a multiplicity of realities. I decided to start my journey into theory in the summer of my first year on planet earth, the dawning of the age of Aquarius. There is always something that came before that shapes the moment of the now.

The first written record I can find of the influence of Deleuze and Guattari is in a shared project blog from 2007. I was working as an artist-in-residence in an object-based school loans collection in Leeds. Following a conversation with a friend about process and emergence, I wrote a blog entry about a becoming sausage. At a time when I was happy to construct thinking in my own way, to accommodate concepts into making. Without worrying very much about the rights the wrongs and the rest, I applied the concept of becoming to the carving of a sausage.



Figure 12: Becoming Sausage (Source: Steve Pool 2007)

Not put off by the fear of OCD I post a becoming sausage. But you must take this with a pinch of salt. Is this an exploration of space and our personal relationship to it through scale? Is there a connection between the personal

relationship to a site and a bit of what you fancy methodological approach to creating or perhaps defining? On a higher level is the project saying something about the personal and the external and giving back control of representation to its function rather than an externally established set of rules.

(Blog post-September 2007)¹⁰

This blog post comes from a residency in a collection of objects for schools to loan (Pahl et al., 2010). The collection no longer exists and along with all sorts of other provisions we used to take for granted, people have almost forgotten why it was useful. I learned a lot about the concept of residency on this project and a lot about what I wanted and what I was striving towards. I wanted to make interesting art that afforded interesting experiences. The idea of becoming was abstracted from a conversation with a friend who was reading Deleuze and going through the necessary mental transformation that journey engenders. The becoming sausage was to form part of a work called *“Four Representations of Breakfast, None of them Real.”* This work takes ideas seriously but layers them with irony and plays with art history and philosophies of representation. It is a way to work with theory playfully without foregrounding it or representing it. The becoming sausage is a reference to Michelangelo’s notion that he was releasing existing forms from within the marble or wood he carved. It speaks ironically of potentials, the not-yet of art and my idiosyncratic understanding translated through my

¹⁰ <https://artemisartists.blogspot.com/2007/10/becoming-sausage.html>

friend's truncated explanation of what Deleuze and Guattari were trying to say about becoming. Fourteen years later and with hindsight I see few problems with this approach to thinking with others when making art. However, there are clearly problems if this approach is adopted by an artist/scholar writing a PhD. There is a need for a deeper level of engagement and a reorientation of what the work is for, its purpose and its position. In returning to this project, to the *becoming sausage* and reflecting on residency-as-method I am reminded of the need for opacity¹¹. This is part of the secret plan of practice that falls apart if it becomes known. The consistency of practices, the *newsense* that it is difficult to articulate the creative-event of the in-act of thinking-making-doing.

¹¹ See glossary for explanation of how I use the term opacity.

Chapter 3: Pilot Project

Introduction

In this chapter, I will explain the rationale for including a pilot project within this study. I will provide context and background in relation to working with Dr Abigail Hackett on a project researching the development of early literacy practices in young children in a UK Town. I will then describe the project in detail and illustrate key moments when I felt arts practice gained significance in relation to my emerging ideas concerning the artists' residency. These moments surfaced through our work together and shared reflections. Finally, I will identify some key points that would inform the planning and unfolding of the second element of this study which I will refer to as my residency at Pitsmoor Adventure Playground.

When planning my PhD study, it became apparent that I would need to develop a working definition for how I intended to use the term *artist residency*. Throughout this study, I explore the artist's residency-as-method of doing research. I use my personal experiences in this historic context to look for the potential of research-creation to do things differently. I aim to question, worry and open potentials. I interrogate multiple artist residency definitions and understand and illustrate my thinking with examples from my practice across multiple projects. This includes a short clarification of the currently accepted definitions of residency within arts practice and how this informs commissioning. I acknowledge the important role of the expectations of artists, venues and commissioning agencies. I draw on the work of the

Artists Placement Group¹² and their idea of the *incidental person* who was frequently involved in promoting systemic change within the organisations (Bishop, 2012) to inform my approach.

I recognise the importance of traditions and established understandings in communicating the way artists relate to the spaces and sites of practice. This includes the studio, the gallery and the wider social environment. However, this study has developed as a journey with an ambition to reimagine residency within a specific context of doing research or what I now describe as doing research-creation (see *Chapter 1 on method*). My rationale for developing a pilot study at an early stage of the process was to emphasise the importance of trying things out by putting ideas to work within research projects. In retrospect, with the gift of hindsight, I recognise that I was not ready to try some things out. However, at the time and with the gift of foresight I was acutely aware that without trying things out there was no real way to become ready.

Early in the process, I presented at an artists' conference in Leeds I produced this PowerPoint slide to explain what my PhD was about to other artists.

¹² The artist placement group was an artists led organisation established in the 1960s it actively sought to reposition the role of the artist within a wider social context, including government and commerce.

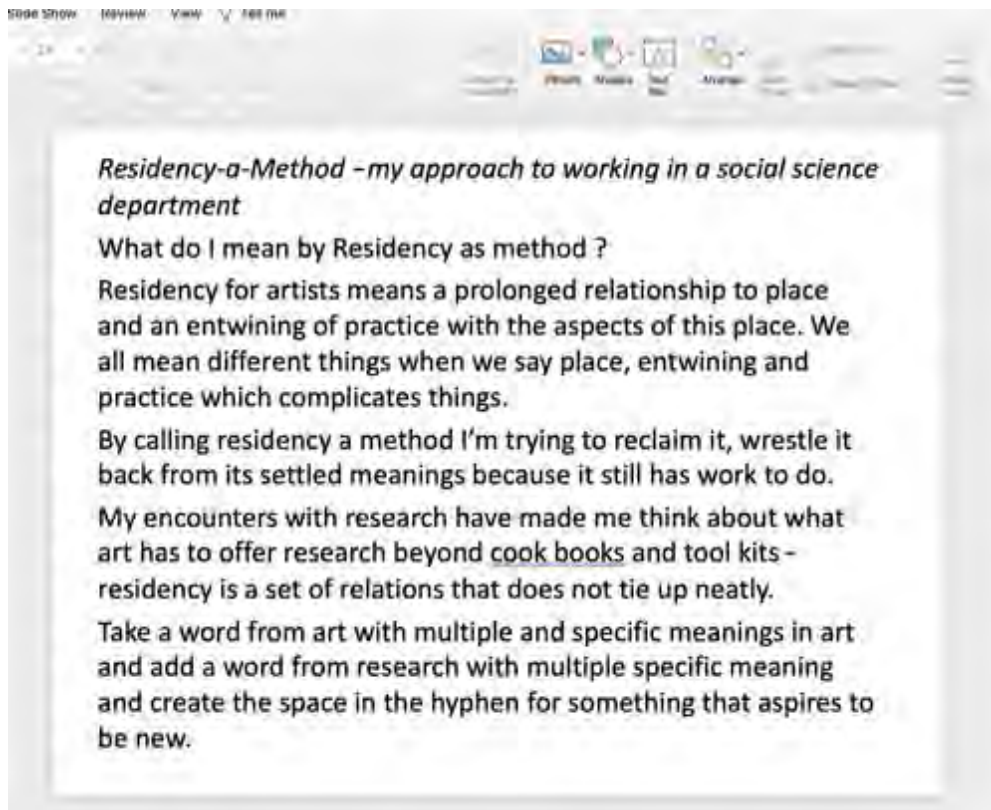


Figure 13: Slide from PowerPoint (Source Steve Pool; screen shot 2019)

I explained that my ambition was to develop the concept of residency-as-method to help extend artists' ability to participate in interdisciplinary research. The residency was a platform or an approach that could be applied to a creative-research environment and contribute to the creation of the events that followed.

In November 2018, a single month into my study, I felt a need to engage in actions and start to explore and develop through doing. I was keen to get stuck in and see what happened next. This felt necessary as I was unable to describe what I meant by residency as an abstract concept, for me it was

something that emerged in the doing of a residency. I intended to develop a specific and located definition of residency by doing a residency.

I had worked as a visual artist and filmmaker on research projects for fifteen years before embarking on my PhD study. This work was important as it brought me to a point where I needed to understand my role better and find a vocabulary to explain how this role functioned. I was often employed and contracted to do specific tasks, yet it felt like there were always greater expectations. These expectations were on two levels, firstly personal, growing from my commitment to developing a holistic arts practice. Secondly, my co-researchers looking for something different, often within the fine grain of projects, often in process and therefore difficult to account for or to quantify.

I identified creative work on research projects as part of my freelance portfolio. I described myself as a journeyman artist - this phrase originated in medieval times and comes from the French *Le Jour*, which means to be paid by the day. Journeyman also sounds like you move around a lot. I imagined this portfolio of freelance projects as part of my art practice. I attempted to draw lines between disparate projects and seek out and apply for work that would allow these threads and traces of thoughts to flow together.

I have an interest in visual communication, affect and modes of language that precede written or spoken forms. I am interested in the parts of art that are impossible to talk about or write about.

The Emergence of Literacy in Very Young Children

In 2018, I was commissioned to work as an artist-in-residence with Abi Hackett on her ethnographic research study exploring the literacy practices of children aged between one and three years. Based in a regional town in the UK. The study took place over two years within ordinary, everyday community contexts. These contexts include community playgroups, parks, farms, outdoor spaces, and a museum.

Abi drew on feminist, posthuman and new materialist ideas and arts-based methods to build a picture of how young children employ and combine different methods of communicating. This included the agencies of sounds, gestures and movements, in different contexts of their everyday lives. The overall aim of the research was to provide a more complete account of children's literacies, enabling deeper exploration of the role of materiality and its place in literacies (Hackett, 2021).

The research project explored how literacy was woven through the way young children experience the world. This would include the significance of objects whether educational, playful, or every day in childhood meaning-making. We partnered with the local museum to share some of our findings through a co-produced exhibition.

I have collaborated with Abi on other projects (Hackett et al., 2015). Abi and I have a good working relationship and understanding. We both strive to balance the needs of the project and its research aims with the needs and aspirations of the people we work with. We would both describe our

practices as deeply respectful and situated. We share a commitment to be fully immersed in the complex milieu of the spaces we work and research within. This milieu includes but is not limited to people, objects, ideas, emotions, smells, light, touch and time (Springgay, 2020). We question the possibility and usefulness of epistemological distance, yet both recognise the traditions, rigour and value of our respective disciplines, visual art practice and ethnographic research with communities.

As part of this research project, we committed to co-producing an exhibition in a temporary project space at a museum in a regional town. We hoped to collect and display objects and images that would share some of the ideas that were immersing within the fine grain of the project. This included affirming the significance of everyday objects, movement through space, mark-making, sound and light. We wanted to engage with the multiple and rich ways young children communicate with adults and each other as they are on the cusp of developing spoken language.

My role was to develop a series of creative workshop activities that would run as part of parent and toddler sessions in a community setting. Our focus was on space and young children's interactions with materials within the context of communication and language development. This is an example of a pre-existing research project that I join as an artist facilitator. In relation to Abi's project, I am not technically a researcher or a subject of research. Although I imagine this placement as an artistic residency it was not commissioned as such. As part of this work, there is an essential engagement with relevant literature within the field of early literacy

development. I would describe this as research that enables me to understand the work at hand and the most effective approaches to addressing the requirements of the project. I do not cite this literature or Abi's research here as it is not the focus of my study.

How the project unfolded

Last week I started working with Abi in a playgroup. We are hoping to make my work on this project an active part of my PhD - a site of practice or residency. As I have not done my ethics or RD1 yet, I'm working with Abi as a freelance artist, working within and through her ethical procedures. This feels like a strange position to be in as it suggests the work is different and must sit within a different category.

(Blog Entry 13th December 2018)

The project had to begin within three months from the start date of my study. I had not had a chance to fully consider methodology or a theoretical framework. The commission was like other research projects I had worked on yet making it part of my PhD study changed the way I approached the work. I planned to think through and document decisions and to explore what would flow from the event of the project.

Day one: 21st November 2018



Figure 14: Tissue Paper Workshop (Source: Steve Pool 09/2018)

I filled the car with materials and drove to the venue in the afternoon. I visited the playgroup to look at the space and attended a planning meeting with the playworkers and support staff. Abi had been working with the group for a year and had developed good relationships with the staff and parents. I brought an assortment of materials, some of the drabber colours of tissue

paper left over from a previous project where I had been collaging forest landscapes in a school. A roll of white printer paper I had acquired from the scrap store¹³ that seemed to keep unrolling forever it rolled through my projects like a yellow brick road. I had deliberately not thought about what I was intending to do other than transform materials with the children and try and have an impact on the space. To a greater or lesser extent, this is what I always do within workshops. I call it formalism as it involves ordering shapes colours and textures into new patterns and systems. Sometimes this ordering will turn into something recognisable like a castle or a ship or a skyscraper or a unicorn, but this is never a pre-considered intention.

I kept things simple, as a group we gradually transformed the tissue paper, squashing it into balls tearing it into strips, and organising and disorganising. I was aware that I was doing this project as part of my PhD study. For this reason, I wanted to make something that held aesthetic intentions¹⁴.

Something that would photograph well. The activity had to feel different to the everyday activities at playgroup but not so different that they felt strange. The white paper created a holding form, I began to process the tissue paper into shapes, busy, purposeful with apparent direction. I imagined I was inviting the children to help build or help destroy. At some level to join in the process and make this process a collective act. Two pieces of green Duplo were added to the green section of tissue paper - this made me smile as

¹³ A scrap store sources and sells recycled materials.

¹⁴ In *Pragmatics of the Useless* Manning (2020:44-46) talks of aesthetic yield though at this early stage of the project I was not aware of research-creation or how it activates aesthetic thinking. I use aesthetic here to refer to a set of principles underlying my personal arts practice which I elaborate later.

taxonomies became extended beyond the edge of the paper. Abi began to mess my patterns up throwing the tissue in the air. I felt vaguely annoyed as in my artist's mind my arranging and disarranging seemed to be going somewhere. I was working out what tissue paper could do. I recognised I was over-investing, becoming childlike and precious, thinking about a capturing a photograph and a memory and a certain level of completion.

At points it began to look quite good, then we lost it, overworked it. I began to throw the paper into the air letting it fall slowly to earth as tissue paper does. I performed¹⁵ as an artist and the children played. It was a good start to get a feel for the place and the project. In hindsight I had perhaps paid more attention to aesthetics and the way things looked and felt than I would have done generally, there was an element of performance. The PhD and the residency had made the way things looked feel more important. No other adult would notice. I like to think the children did.

I recognise that there are literatures that are concerned with community arts and youth arts and their relation to politics power and research. I have worked within the sector successfully in different roles for over thirty years. At this early point in project however my concern was how to do the best to make something happen, how to start to change the space with young people. I was fully committed to the materials and the people in the moment to do the best I could within the immediate relations.

¹⁵ In running workshops as a visual artist there is often an element of performance. This is not to say that the work is not serious or part of a practice. Rather it is the performative nature of creating and opening a space of difference which is part of the agency of the artist facilitator.



Figure 15: Tissue Paper Workshop 2 (Source Steve Pool 09/2018)

We had a few quick chats in between the bits that are the chaos of a good playgroup. It reminded me of a thousand fragmented conversations I had as a dad at home. The swinging between the deaths of parents, the choice of school, the tips on what to feed a baby or if sleep training was a useful tool or emotionally destructive. As is always likely to happen in a conversation with me and Abi, we got onto Deleuze. Abi told me that Deleuze didn't like metaphor he would ask, 'Why not use the real thing?' I always think through visual metaphors. I can write, but my thinking is not fully present in written texts or reproduced images. My thinking is founded in deep and rich stories that speak of a disjointed and broken set of experiences. My most overused words are 'it's like when' followed by a story that nobody can connect to what I'm talking about.

(Blog Post 13th Dec 2018 two weeks after first session).

Tracing an Aesthetic

Within the folder of images archived from the first day's activities, I had saved a series of photographs of small-making experiments with masking tape. I had made them as I sat in the background of a national conference on socially engaged arts practice. They were three-dimensional doodles; I photographed the objects in good natural light on the smoky mustard green of my then-new coat. I edited the images on my phone and tried to present them as an artwork. In the context of socially engaged art as a turn, a movement, an intermedial form I was ironically playing with formalism. It was a thing that happens alongside other things. The aesthetics of making, the

idea of processing and organising materials into new shapes and forms is a minor current. It is a warm wind of practice, a rationale, and a reason. For me it is a flow that is present in the background like the buzz of a transformer in an old fluorescent electric light. Practice can be a background noise that our brain filters out so we can hear other things. I imagine, because I have now forgotten, that I archived these images as a form of visual ethnography. A juxtaposition to encounter and interpret at a later point, in this moment I am relieved I have no written notes.



Figure 16: Making Shapes from Masking tape (Source: Steve Pool 10/2018)



Figure 17: Finding a Common Thread (Source: screen shot Steve Pool 06/2022)

Day 2 - 4



Figure 18: Long Exposure (Source: Steve Pool 10/2018)

I developed workshops for three more playgroup sessions planned with Abi, we wanted to do things that were different but fitted in. The playgroup is set up around stations and carousels of activities where the children move freely around. A table of dry pasta, a table for drawing, a table covered in breakfast cereal and white shaving foam. Duplo in a box next to plastic animals and an undersea world on a plastic tray originally intended for the mixing of cement. I notice how some objects, a grumpy doll in a pushchair and a pull-along toy crocodile, can move around the space. Other objects get put back where they belong, they have a home. The Duplo pieces in their box, the plastic dinosaurs in the land before time area.

I bring my new pop-up gazebo; it looks like the ones the police use for forensic investigations at a murder scene. I aim to make a place that is separate, another station for the carousel, a station that will be open for exploration. The gazebo is a holding form, it has an entrance, and children can choose to enter it or not. I have been to the scrap store which is a charity that repurposes waste materials for art. I take Abi along; in the car, I try to explain how I think materials afford different choices. I explain that some materials are raw and some are cooked.

Raw material is stuff that can be made into something else, something new. These are materials like card or paper or clay, sticks, stones, wood, plain fabric, string and the tape and glues used to fix and build. Cooked materials are cut-out shapes, coloured feathers and stickers, a jam jar, or a milk bottle top. These are things already and they struggle to hold onto their original

identity. The lines between the cooked and raw are arbitrary. However, it is a useful language of description.

“Look I have found a raw carrot.” In stating that the carrot was raw there is an implication that a carrot could be cooked. This is the way theory used to enter my practice. I would catch an idea and weave it in, disrespect its origins and ignore the extended context. Pragmatically cherry-picking when something felt it might be useful. In saying a material was raw, I was implying that a material could be cooked.

I lined the base of the gazebo with brown paper and lit it from the rear, the space was set up as an invitation for children to experiment, it was a den, an installation, something new. It was different and fitted in. I was only loosely aware of the overarching research aims of the project or Abi’s ambitions for her work. I think this was intentional, though it could be a habit. At some level the activity I was running had to keep its own form and integrity; to do something for its own sake and to be present in the moment of its emergence.

A word on ethics

I have many images from these workshops. They are archived in raw format; I have deleted all the images where children can be identified. What remains are images of things and parts of people with obscured faces. During this project, I was in the process of applying for ethical approval for my research

through the University's system. I did not have a clear understanding at the time of what this meant or what I was seeking approval for. I was not intending to research the children or their families in relation to a specific research question. I was working within a project that had full ethical consent from all participants and I was collecting images for that project that were distinct from my research. The process of applying for ethical consent did not fit what I was doing as I had no idea what shape this doing would eventually take. I could explore my own feelings, thoughts and experiences but could not involve others as participants in my PhD study. To continue to work in a space with others without independent ethical permissions or procedures in place meant I had to define the space of the residency and clarify that it was not the same as the space of my PhD study. Edges and boundaries developed and became externally fixed by the regulated procedure. I am aware of the importance of following ethical procedures and guidelines and the reasons these systems have evolved to protect participants. I have done extensive work with young people around choice, informed consent and the right to say no. I am committed to questioning structures of power and the historic and potential harm of research on individuals and communities. I personally found it impossible to navigate the ethical application process with integrity within a project where I was not sure what I was going to do, where it would end up and what would emerge. As a pilot project, it was useful to face this problem and try and work through it. After three revisions, my application for ethical approval was accepted, the project delivery was nearly completed and what I had applied to do made little sense anymore in relation to the thoughts, ideas and stories that were

emerging. My conception of residency as an open-ended method that was driven by flows of complex evolving relations did not fit with the university ethics system. Put simply, it felt difficult to ask permission or to fully inform people about an idea, thought or action that was yet to come.¹⁶ As my involvement in Abi's research project had received ethical approval, the images, films, and research contributions that were part of this project could continue. Any elements of the work that I could identify as part of my independent PhD study could not at this point include human participants. What constituted participation became problematic.

A holding-form

The idea of a holding-form came from my work with drama practitioners. It could be the space of a stage but more usually within the context of workshops with participants, it is a space where actions or an action takes place. This could be a circle of rope, an area marked off with tape on the floor or drawn with a finger in the air. In a previous project, we wrote of a chest of drawers presenting a holding form for the work of a project (Pahl et al., 2013).

The gazebo was a defined space intended as an invitation. During the first session with tissue paper, I actively made myself part of the making process. I had decided to engage in and encourage children to work alongside me. I

¹⁶ I had hit the ground running and could not fully research alternative ethical approaches such as ongoing consent. I was also conscious of the complexity of the research project and the work already undertaken around ethical approval. I could constructively continue my research at this point without involving human subjects. At a later point I would review my ethical application and include Abi Hackett as a research participant.

had discussed this with Abi and we agreed that for future work it would be useful in relation to her research to take a step back. We wanted to create spaces the children could activate without adult interference. I organised materials that could suggest actions such as objects for sorting, a box of chalks for drawing, pegs for hanging, coloured acetates sheets for looking through and paper as raw materials. We also added cooked materials, used plastic bottles, coloured feathers and twigs collected from outside.

Eventually, bits of pasta and toys scavenged from the other play stations began to creep in. Sat on the floor in front of the gazebo I began to think about my PhD study. I was searching for a way to make this project different to a project which was not part of my PhD study. I would always document activities and collect images and film clips as we went along. At the back of my mind was the knowledge that one of the outcomes of this work was an exhibition in a space at a local museum and we would need images of the process. I wanted to shift things and work differently to give a focus for my PhD study to produce something that felt more than documentation. I wanted to explore the potentials of sensory and visual ethnography in relation to my arts practice. My priority was not to author artworks yet the creative process of representing what was taking place in the playgroup began to operate in a similar way to making artworks. I recorded the first session with the camera on my phone but made the decision to bring my DSLR camera and lenses, a proper camera, to the next session.

Motion Blur and long-exposure photography

I find it difficult to write about the decision to use long-exposure photography to capture children's interactions with our intervention within the playgroup. I find it difficult to call what we did an intervention. In the detail, the written discussion and information feel like a distraction from what was happening. Although relevant, the detail is something that would never normally be surfaced outside the frame of a PhD study. It feels impossible to write about small decisions or intuitions without bringing them to the foreground and therefore presenting them as centre stage. I will discuss later the idea that the processes of art and of practice on occasion need to remain opaque. Prior to embarking on this PhD study, I would have captured these images because it felt like the right thing to do. The interrogation would have stopped there. This does not mean it would have remained unexamined. I would have always been aware that the decision would have emerged from a complex set of relations I would never have discussed what the reasons were or written them down. The reasons for taking long-exposure images are listed below:

1. From my experience as a photographer using film.
2. From time in the darkroom as an art student,
3. From a desire to make something different.
4. From reading about the thick present.
5. From the contradiction of a still image capturing movement.
6. From the need to demonstrate a level of control over the camera.

7. From the observations of the changing light.
8. From observations of what was static and what was moving.
9. From the need to blur people's faces.
10. From the potential to make something beautiful.
11. From seeing images used in research that faked the effect.

There are other reasons I have forgotten or never actually acknowledged.

The problem with writing practice is that the sum of the parts never adds up to the whole. The shining of a light on part of the object invariably does not illuminate the whole subject. The point of writing and the point of research is to move towards an understanding as best we can. My overlong explanation of taking long exposure images and paying attention to motion blur is offered as a cautionary tale.

Taking long exposure still images

The workings of a camera and a specific technique within photography are specialist concerns. It is not important to fully understand how an image was taken to appreciate its qualities. However, it feels relevant to give an explanation here and to propose that my aim was to capture time and how it unfolds within children's spaces. I wanted to avoid freezing things and capture flow and movement. Some technical knowledge is important in the context of explaining practice in a written form. It is not important to practice.

Photography captures an image by letting light fall onto a sensitive surface, the image used to be fixed, to be captured through a chemical process.

Digital photography uses the same principle except that the light falls onto a sensor and the information is recorded digitally. The images and the process are very similar, a modern DSLR camera like my Canon D6 is almost identical to the equivalent film camera with the exception that the roll of 35 mm film is replaced by a 35mm digital sensor. When a camera is set to record images in a raw format it will record and store all possible available information. It will not process edit or make decisions about the image it presents on a computer screen. This is different to a phone where the image will be edited using sophisticated software that uses algorithms to provide what the phone's software identifies as the best image. The phone set in automatic mode will also assess a situation and set the parameters such as shutter speed and aperture to produce what it has been programmed to consider the correct exposure. The modern smartphone is only a camera in that it takes images. The phone is also an automatic editing suite that can learn. I have stopped using my DSLR camera to document activity as to use it is to create a distance, a lens that I can get behind and a position outside, looking in. I prefer to use an honest, hastily taken image from my phone.

The phone tends not to get in the way, it is familiar, every day and usually completely adequate. Smartphones are smart, they are versatile, and most can now be used as manual cameras - they do however feel different to a manual camera.

When taking long-exposure photographs it is essential to open the shutter on the camera for longer. You can do this in two ways - firstly, turn down the sensitivity of the sensor, this is called the 'sensors ISO'- the term dates back to film cameras. The second is to shut down the camera's aperture to let in less light. The first will not radically change the qualities of the image, (higher ISO does increase the amount of digital grain) the second will alter the depth of field, the area of the image that stays in focus. If a camera shutter is left open for three seconds, it will capture an image over three seconds. Things that are moving will blur, if they are moving fast, they will become barely visible traces. Things that remain static for the length of the exposure will be clear and appear in focus. The camera must not move, if it does, this will cause another type of blur called camera shake. The camera must sit on a tripod to avoid slight movement when pressing the shutter release button, it is wise to use a cable release attachment or auto timer.

The first time I took images at the playgroup I discovered that the parameters of my camera settings were not able to provide long enough exposures to get the range of motion blur I was hoping for. The ISO would only dial down to 50, and I could take long exposures but felt unhappy with the depth of field which made the stationary objects appear in artificially crisp focus, the images lacked sufficient movement. For the next session, I brought my ND filters, these screw to the front of the lens and reduce the amount of light entering the camera. They allow for a greater level of control.

As children move at different speeds, in and out of spaces and my camera was in fully manual mode it was difficult to predict results. In this situation, you must bracket exposure which is basically taking many different images at different settings. I was after a picture that captured the feel of the activity. I was invested in this technical creative process. It helped me to stay out of the intervention and sit on the outside twiddling knobs and changing lenses.

While I was working on taking photographs things got very noisy. Children began to bash the acetate sheeting with wooden spoons. I took some video and grabbed my audio recorder, the noise in the room broke into my thinking bubble and demanded attention.



Figure 19: Motion Blur (Source Steve Pool 11/2018)

Fourth and Fifth sessions

The final two sessions at the playgroup changed in priority. We had met with the museum staff and the fact that we were going to produce an exhibition became a driver shaping what we did. We refocused on the importance of objects and their role within early literacies. We wanted to explore materials and objects from the natural environment. I took many photographs and we set up stations for activities, I also recorded activities with my 360-video camera. My focus was to gather materials that we could use within the exhibition. As my contribution to the event and to extend the work, I offered to produce a large-scale video work that would be projected onto the museum building. I focussed on collecting still and video images of the playgroup for this event. I tried to shape activities where the children would be able to help produce content for the projection work. Many of the children seemed to be on the cusp of using spoken language - the room and the outside felt full of communication and exchanges. I began to understand Abi's research better and I became interested in what was valued and what was resisted.



Figure 20: Making a Film for Projection (Source: Steve Pool not known)

The Exhibition



Figure 21: Things on Strings (Source: Steve Pool (09/2019))

We had planned to put on an exhibition from the start of the project. The museum was a partner and had allocated us space in their temporary exhibition room. We aimed to co-produce the show as much as possible with parents and young people from the playgroup. We visited the museum and saw the gallery and used the museum space as an alternative venue for the playgroup. The selected space had four exhibition cases. We decided to develop different themes and a rationale for a different theme in each case. One would look to the museum's collection to find objects that represented

childhood. Another would focus on Abi's research. I would be given a third case as artist-in-residence and the fourth would hold images of childhood that could be added to by museum visitors. We introduced a light table and drawing activities so young children would be able to interact with and add to the space. We had a strong rationale in that we hoped that the exhibition would validate and legitimate the significance of community playgroups within the town. The museum display gave us an endpoint to work towards and a place to bring ideas together. We hoped that doing an exhibition in the museum, a public space near to a well-used park and playground would encourage families to visit the museum space more often.

I offered to design the text panels - a role I would come to define as acting as a creative technician. Although I did this for pragmatic reasons, it did further complicate my position in adding another specific role where I would need to work within different parameters. To operate as an artist within research projects requires a certain predisposition and paying of attention. I was learning through the pilot project that through fulfilling multiple roles simultaneously I was muddying the waters. As part of my research however it was useful to be providing a service that was not considered to be my artistic residency. It gave me an edge or, to reference Deleuze (Deleuze and Strauss, 1991), a fold to work back from. I had anticipated that this shift in role would be straightforward as in other research projects my position was often very fluid. I would be a photographer, filmmaker, workshop facilitator, conference discussant and co-writer of books and articles. Although my role was multiple and flexible it would often lead to a direct material output - a

film, a book, a creative-event - these outputs helped me to find a way of working. I could operate as a visual artist and continue a line of practice that was present yet often invisible.

I began to call this 'the secret plan of practice' as it seemed a useful way to acknowledge that something was present but impossible to know. I introduce the term when it became apparent that the aim of my study was not to explain practice or to make it transparent. The idea of fully knowing something leading to understanding was deeply embedded within what Bourdieu identifies as the 'epistemological unconscious' (Bourdieu, 1992). I knew from years of working as a visual artist that the trick of producing work was to believe in its possibilities. On a fundamental level, to overthink it is to kill it, as it foregrounds thinking over feeling.

To follow Deleuze, the consistency between the virtual and the actual is enunciated in a middle space of practice. And here is the leap into a philosophy of immanence where everything and nothing is present. Arts practice relies on relations in flow. The apparatus we construct to measure or capture its elements, to make it visible or transparent can annihilate the invisible and indivisible poetics of its relations.

Within the creative-event of the exhibition my role of designing the panels for the printers complicated everything. Looking back, I think this was because as I began my PhD study my position changed. Often when trying to do research it is necessary to hold things at a distance. I was hoping to unfold

sets of relations that held space open for my arts practice. The complication became apparent as I tried to unravel arts practice from the rest of what was happening, removing it from the mix. I have often slid art in from the edges and not drawn attention to it as object or specific. At points this seemed to just happen, at other points arts intervention was more openly considered. As all the plans were secret, they were rarely negotiated with others.

Telling Tale

Extract from an interview Steve Pool and Abi Hackett:¹⁷

Steve: Within the traditions of artists is an idea that we are more sensitised to the aesthetic world. Whatever specific field we work in, music or the visual arts. We just accept that a trained violinist is more sensitised to violin music than someone who is not. So, when it comes to a selection of images I think

–

‘Why can’t we use those photographs because they are obviously the best?’

I had put my artist head on. I was in residency – this is about practice – this is about me doing the best I possibly can.

But I had to keep reminding myself that all aspects of my privilege – my right to think I know better is problematic.

¹⁷ After completing this project, I conducted three interviews with Dr Abi Hackett. These were transcribed and became part of my data. Extracts are taken from the transcript with small edits for clarity of meaning.

If I'm not bringing this specialism though if I'm not bringing this trained sensibility, what am I bringing? I don't really believe this at all – I don't think I'm any different to anyone else I don't think I know best.

Selecting the images for the exhibition

Our original intention was to co-produce the exhibition with the parents and carers and the workers from the playgroup. The time involved in producing an exhibition and the requirements from the museum in relation to how the work was presented restricted how we were able to involve people. It felt difficult to not take a lead and steer things and therefore hard to develop a feeling of equality. Abi worked with people to select photographs and objects for display. We supported two visits to the museum and provided activities and refreshments for the children. However, we still felt there was an issue with how people imagined or visualised what the exhibition would be and how they could contribute.

I provided an edit of my photographs that we were to use as illustrations through the museum display. I had captured lots of the objects in situ and taken stills that aimed to capture the feel or what I came to refer to as the affective buzz of the playgroup. I included some of the most successful images that used motion blur. Abi fed back that the playgroup users did not like these images. They saw them as blurry and much preferred the crisp images that showed children actively engaged and focused on activities. I would describe these images as PR shots, I have tried to emulate the style of

an events photographer taking an image that could be used to promote the project on a university website. These images strive for clarity in relation to giving information and carrying a clear message. Children are presented in a way that suggests they are happy, well cared for, engaged in learning, and well-behaved. I take good public relations pictures; I try and be fully present. When I am performing as a photographer I consider the frame and its edges, I use fill flash and correct my white balance, I shoot in RAW format and carefully edit. I like to be behind the camera lens and have the viewfinder clamped to my face. I like the distance it gives me and the ability to become both invisible and visible. Everyone changes when they know they are being photographed, everyone who is aware of the camera is complicit in a process of representation or choosing not to be represented.

In knowingly investing in taking images that I hoped I would be able to explicitly write about as part of my practice, I had inadvertently created a situation where I felt ownership and authorship. For my PhD study, this was an interesting moment of clarity or transparency, where I could extrinsically identify what I refer to as my artistic practice. For the project and the integrity of co-producing the exhibition however, my over-investment and disappointment that participants did not select what I considered the 'best images' was a problem.

This issue generated questions about what it means to be an artist in residence and how the status and role and preconceptions of what it is to be in residence are linked to the autonomy of art and the value given to an

artist's perception or unique vision. If this project had not been part of my PhD study, it would still have become part of my practice. I would have taken every aspect of it seriously and considered the multiple outcomes as part of the event of art.

If I had found myself in a quiet moment, I might have moved myself out of the milieu I may even have taken similar photographs with long exposures. However, I am sure that this element of the creative process would not have fallen out of the research project as something distinct or separate or problematic. In identifying an aspect of the work and considering my art practice I had cut it from the active assemblage of vibrant relations and changed its state and status within the flow of the work¹⁸.

The place of art within research and practice, the relationship to authorship and arts autonomy was to emerge at critical moments throughout this study. This was one of the first times I remember feeling the difficulty in relation to personal introspection and trying to do research. The problem this *telling tale* represents was the beginning of a quest for an alternative way of doing research and my eventual turn to post-philosophies and research-creation as a best-fit orientation to speculate research as the thinking-making-doing of an arts practice.

¹⁸ I use work here as a term that encompasses all aspects of the project. It is often substituted for practice yet relates more to a specific creative-event than an ongoing embodied relationship to making art.

Extract from interview Steve Pool and Abi Hackett:

Steve: *It would have been completely different if the museum had offered me a residency and part of it was to go into a playgroup and work with you (Abi). The practice here would be in a completely different position – a different set of relationships.*

Abi: *What would you have done differently in the group?*

Steve: *Nothing.*

Abi: *Laughs – so what would have been different?*

Steve: *I would have used all the images that I liked - it would have been my exhibition; it would have been my work. There is a form to a traditional residency.*

Abi: *Do you think you would have done the same thing in the group but the things you did after would be different? What you took into account?*

Steve *How we kicked off with the tissue paper on the white holding form and the squidging it about and the making order and the kids coming and making disorder and you coming and encouraging disorder..... I would have worked into it and gone with it. I would have done something visually formal from that starting point. I don't think the parents would have understood*

what was going on and I don't think the public would have liked it. It would have been a critically engaged contemporary show as that is what I see my work as. It would have started a different conversation about a very small-scale aesthetic experience that is the realm I imagine I'm working in. The work would have been about me – what I thought and felt, it's hard to say it on tape. and this is when it gets difficult with the more-than-human and the human encounter with the world of aesthetics. I keep thinking art does rely on the human ego and the human drive. You talk about materiality within an objective space but the ego and the idea and the desire are always there in art. In some philosophical and theory discourses art is liberated from the subjective individual – but that is hard if you are an artist.

Dividing the Cases

The decision to delegate different display cases to different aspects of the project was originally pragmatic. We only had our contribution to think about and it provided a means to bring things together. Having a physical space to fill with material things that presented my role as an artist on the project drew that role into a crisp focus. Artists do exhibitions and an artistic residency often finishes with a display of something material. I worked as an artist in residence at the museum in 2006. My concerns over the past 16 years seem remarkably consistent as illustrated by this extract from my project blog,

I'm now reading a long biography of Chalmers which Simon (museum curator) printed out for me from the worldwide Missions website. I'm trying to

track down some 1980's surveillance cameras and monitors, contacting an orthopaedic trauma surgeon, I'm toying with the idea of starting to make a replica paddle although Antonia Lovelace the Ethnographic curator at Leeds suggested getting someone from Papua New Guinea to make it and FedEx it over. Am I obscuring or making a concept visible? Perhaps I'm struggling to find the edges of it so I can work out where the space is in between.

Blog post- Artists and museums (March 15th, 2006)¹⁹

I was/am interested in the sets of relations that construct the world and the potentials for coding and over-coding. The implications of territories and boundaries and what it means to be afloat in the stream of time. The change that took place in the sixteen years between my respective residencies was a move towards process, a recognition that everything was in flow and the inadequacies of the snap-shot or sound bite or published art object to say anything that does not feel stuck in the present.

Abi asked me to explain myself and my ideas on a few occasions and I resisted trying to justify my decision with words. I became interested in the relationship between speaking, listening, and doing within a logic of artistic practice. The trying to bring to the surface aspects of artmaking that I felt needed to remain hidden became an issue of discussion and a key thematic that would shape in later work.

¹⁹ <https://artistsandmuseums.blogspot.com/2006/03/cake-analogy.html>

Things-On-Strings

Extract from interview with Steve Pool and Abi Hackett:

Steve: *It went from us working very collaboratively in a thinking-doing space into the exhibition where it felt everything had to be compromised.*

I had read about transitional objects, I was thinking about what objects could get moved around anything with a string on it can get pulled, it can be a toy on wheels, but it can be a stick with a string tied to it, the string legitimises its movement.'

When you get an idea like that, in practice not in academic work, you train yourself to believe in it and this gives you the motivation to realise it. As soon as you start to ask questions like – what about things that you push along? You can answer them by knowing that these are completely different, I don't need to find out why they are different. I don't look outside to theory I don't care what anyone else thinks or says about things on strings. I must take the idea to its conclusion.

I made the decision to fill my case with children's pull-along toys. I wanted to take an idea and let it develop its own inertia. I was focused on producing something that felt like part of my arts practice and this felt safe as it was contained within a case. Abi was interested in my justifications for the decisions I had made. She pointed out that there was only one pull-along object at the playgroup and that the decisions I appeared to be making were

not grounded in the shared experience of the playgroup. I tried to explain myself by suggesting the case was an art object. An intervention that asked questions about display, museums, meaning and space. The things-on-strings case was an artwork that I produced as I felt I had been given the licence to produce an artwork. It is an example of why certain things should not be written about in a way that aims to make them transparent.

Extract from an interview with Steve Pool and Abi Hackett:

Steve: It's a museum so they (thing-on-strings) can be historical.

I talk to people of different ages about which thing on a string is iconic.

I search eBay looking for an aesthetic quality that I'm not bothered about describing or understanding. I feel it.

I bring the knowledge I know about museum collections.

I know the caterpillar pull-along is a classic like the Fisher Price dog and the phone.

I know the objects will resonate with an audience.

I am not precious about detail. Over-didactic explanations in museum cases get on my nerves.

Not having a label on things that are self-evidently on strings was political and transgressive but as you said before (Abi), in a minor way. I almost wanted to number them; 1 thing on a string, number 2 thing on a string, number 3 thing on a string, to be nasty – to over-make the point. The point is the objects were part of an artwork they were a collective they were a

*readymade*²⁰. It was about not trying to fit into the paradigm of the museum display so there is a little devilment.



Figure 22: Unicorn on a string (Source: Steve Pool 09/2019)

I only assisted two objects that I displayed in my cabinet, the rest were ready-made, objects displayed simply as I had acquired them. The objects I changed were a plastic horse on red wheels I turned into a unicorn using a piece of antler and I repaired the feet on a pull-along centipede. I remembered the centipede from my own children's growing up, but I had struggled to track one down, our own was long gone to a car boot sale or friends' kids' house. I eventually found a broken example on eBay but two of

²⁰ Marcel Duchamp would call objects he exhibited as artworks in galleries readymades. Sometimes as with the case of "In advance of a broken arm" the original object in this case a snow shovel would not be changed. In other works, Duchamp would add something or combine two objects together for example in Bicycle Wheel where he attached a wheel to a painted wood stool. He referred to these works as assisted readymades.

its feet were missing so I carved replacements from plywood and painted them to blend in. My case in the museum aimed to reference the artist's innate capacity to change one category of an object into another category of object. It was not meant to be taken seriously. I was speaking in a minor key, the ideas in the work were not supposed to be understood or extracted. The idea was that the museum visitor would pass them by. The art was layered in as background noise.

The Projection

Extract from interview Steve Pool and Abi Hackett:

Steve: I would have done the projection even if it was not part of the PhD. As I felt it would have opened a space that was free, less constrained – a different set of expectations. I'm looking forward to doing it, to making it very visual. I suppose that's the thing, the visual and that's the same with the things-on-strings – it's how they look, how they make you feel. I like the lines and what they mean conceptually, a pulling into the world and that's where the idea came from. I must have seen the crocodile being pulled around. The point is to never unpick it, never go back to the kernel and always flow with the multiplicity. The kernel has not come from a singular point it has come out of and into a thousand nodes of interrelation, a web or network or assemblage or whatever floats your boat.

The Secret Plan

Extract from interview Steve Pool and Abi Hackett:

Steve: *I suppose from where I am I've always had a sort of secret plan. I've not thought too much about the secret plan but I've always known it was there*

Abi: *Like a backup plan?*

Steve: *No, not a backup plan – a secret plan, but I've never really known what it is – it always fitted in, and I was always working on it. Letting it flow into and out of the work. On shows, on projects, in art and in writing. I could draw on this secret plan and bring it into the work, to make sense. It was never about making money it always felt part of a practice, a singular practice. But until now I never thought about the secret plan it just became apparent that some of the things I do are in it and others are not part of it.*

If you just wanted to build a cardboard box castle, if all you want is to put three cardboard boxes together and stick some tissue paper on them why would you want to work with an artist? It's because I bring the secret plan and that's what you want. Even if you don't know you want it you want the momentum that something coming in, something alive, would bring to the project. If I just sat and built towers of Duplo with the kids, I wouldn't have felt like I was doing what you wanted me to do. You wanted me to do something that would be different from what you do yourself which would be different to

what happens in playgroup. That wouldn't be disruptive in the sense that it would upset everybody. There are parameters to it. But you had an idea that I would come and do something that you would add to the project.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have explained how I developed a pilot project to explore ideas about residency. I have drawn attention to issues concerned with embedding my PhD study within a pre-existing research study and the implications of this for where my residency was located. I then draw parallels between this work and my previous experiences working as a freelance visual artist and filmmaker on research projects. I go on to describe activities that I delivered within the project and map how this work is part of what I consider an ongoing creative practice. I discuss the importance of materials and process and developing activities that allow for the unexpected to emerge. I explain in detail the rationale for taking photographs that use motion blur to capture the flow of the creative-event and explain how I associate this approach with my personal PhD study. I use the production of a museum display and outdoor projection event as a telling tale. I aim to draw lines, moveable lines of distinctions between aspects of my work as a heuristic tool to help position residency within the complex creative-event of research. This approach is expanded within the ghosts and unicorn section of Chapter 2. Finally, I turn to an interview transcript which locates the emergence of my concept of a secret plan of practice within the fine grain of this study.



Figure 23: Projection on Museum (Source: Steve Pool 01/2020)

Third Interlude: Where is the residency located?

To recognise the difficulties that emerge from this question it is important to unpick the implications and complications of what is being asked. In asking this question certain assumptions are brought into play. Firstly, a residency is something that can be located and secondly a location is somewhere you can place something. It is tempting to start simply by finding a definable point or set of coordinates that present a location or set of locations where a residency becomes. For example, I have worked in residence with Abi Hackett on a research project. I have been an artist in residence at an adventure playground. I have suggested that I have been in residence within Manchester Metropolitan University. I have proposed the idea that I am in residence within the frame of my PhD study. None of these potential locations adequately position the concept of residency when it is proposed as method. The edges of these sites or positions are too clearly defined, they are fixed coordinates within an identified space. They propose a space that already exists rather than a set of potentials within a space that is yet to come. The concept of residency that I hope to develop within the practice of this study has a relationship to space and time that enunciates or proposes alternatives to a method that emerges from definable objects within the limits of fixed locations. The value of residency-as-method of enquiry is its potential to enable complex sets of relations within a field of practice to remain in flow and that this mode of relations engenders new possibilities for art-oriented²¹ research. As my study progressed I began to recognise the

²¹ I use the term art oriented research here to cover numerous defined approaches including ABR (Leavy, 2017) and PaR (Bolt, 2006) and research-creation and Artography (Rousell, 2020b). I recognise

problem of method (Manning, 2015) in relation to practice. In my original proposal and application, I had understood and used the term method simply to mean a way of doing something. If residency-as-method is understood as a proposition it has done its work within this study as it has driven thought and opened space for speculation. I aim to weave the concept of residency-as-method through the process of thinking-making-doing and this study in its fullness is an experiment in this. It is important that the terms are defined and brought to meaning within the fine grain of the writing that follows.

It is possible to define some key characteristics of a residency to help us to recognise what it is and pin something down. However, a more logical place to start would be to suggest that my residency in relation to this study is located within my head. It is a mental construct, concept or thinking tool. I am using it to think and do things differently. My choice to adopt the term residency originates from a desire to bring something that had a familiar and sedimented meaning within the sphere of arts practice into the realm of post-qualitative research. I was aware of the multiple problems that this necessarily produces yet believed that these problems would generate propositions that could be useful within the field of art-oriented research that I consider myself part of.

A manifesto is not strictly a proposition, it is a statement of intentions and guiding principles. Perhaps this list can become a lexicon, which is a little

the depth and complexity within this field and expand on this further in my literature review. For the purpose of this interlude use art oriented to refer to my encounter as a practitioner with the uses of art in research

less dogmatic. A lexicon suggests ideas are open for further interpretation. It is easier to add to a lexicon than a manifesto though neither are written in stone. Things written in stone are more commandments and can become dogma - a thing to be avoided when you are not sure of your intentions. Residency-as-method cannot be fixed or fully controlled though it may have characteristics that can be recognised. The process of reimagining residency for this study is a mechanism for introducing ideas and feelings from an artist's perspective into post-qualitative enquiry. I use it as a tool to work through the problematic of a singular subjective bounded human individual as the researcher or artist with opinion, position and knowledge.

A Lexicon of Residency

1. The residency does not exist within a single space, it moves across spaces.
2. The residency has a beginning and an end. It is temporarily located.
3. There is only a single residency, the location of the residency expands and is defined by actions.
4. There are things that are not inside the space of the residency, these define its edges.

5. The residency is a set of relationships that emerge in the world through actions²². The individual scholar/artists subjective position is important as an actor and defines the location of the residency.

6. The residency is a space where new things are created and made. The residency is a creative-event, an *apparatus*, an *assemblage*, a *network*, a *mesh*, and a method.

²² This interlude and lexicon were written as the concept of residency was emerging through the thinking-making-doing of my work at the playground. The examples that follow in later chapters are structured to share a nomadic journey and the lines of flight which emerge from this rhizomatic approach to creating something new.

Chapter 4: My Trajectory into Adventure Play

1992. We moved to Pitsmoor²³ and I would walk past the adventure playground but as I had not yet had any of my own children, I didn't really know what it was. We didn't have anything like this in Cawood, the small North Yorkshire rural village where I had grown up. The closest I got to it was 'playing out' or 'going cross-fields' as we would say. This would involve days out at my friend's and next-door neighbour's farm. It was close to a village called Biggin which consisted of two farmhouses and around a hundred and twenty acres of mixed livestock and arable land. I remember playing in the truck that was towed behind a tractor collecting the grain from the old combine harvester. We would let the barley cover us as it flowed from an L-shaped pipe above our heads. Our eyes stinging and noses filling with black string-like dust, blown into hankies, and then tucked in our pockets. This was 1976 or thereabouts, the farmer would send us to the only shop in the village to buy ten Woodbine cigarettes and a packet of Beechnut chewing gum. Our child-time was seasonal, long summers consumed by playing with and in bales of straw. We would use them to build giant and complex dens in stubble fields before the fires came. In autumn we would make trollies using wheels from old prams and salvaged timber, we would bend long nails to hold the axle in place. The wheels would always develop an eccentric wobble when collecting wood for bonfire night. Shooting birds with an air rifle, building boats from scrap metal, riding motorbikes, and playing elaborate narrative games; all these moments hold the child-oriented places of my

²³ Pitsmoor is a district of Sheffield where I live and the adventure playground where I based my residency is geographically located.

growing up. This was my slow time. The time I spent as a child. The time where you become, evolving a subjective and your notion of self. Parents and other adults were completely absent. Not just from my memories but also in reality. They were not watching from any side-lines or keeping an eye out, we were on our own. In the morning my mum would package us off across the fields for the day and we would return filthy and full of secrets to eat our tea and watch cartoons at ten to six in the evening before the News and bed. Often before my dad got in from work.

For the first few years of living in Pitsmoor, I would walk past the playground and wonder what went on there. It seemed from the outside very urban and contained. It resonated with some things I remember from growing up but it also felt like a response to a lack of something. Perhaps a recognition that for many young people growing up in the city playing out was not a safe option. I have a misty memory of watching the staff team building equipment from the gate and wondering what they were up to. I was twenty-three and in the middle of doing my house up and had no time or intention to volunteer to do anything.

1994 -2000

Holly, my eldest child was born in 1994 and I became a dad at home. I didn't really visit the playground very often as there wasn't much for babies to do there. The next-door neighbours of my best friends' kids were regulars and as I watched them running home, I began to get an idea of how the

playground, or the “venture” as they called it, worked as an extended family for many of the kids in the area. They would call in on their way home from school, get a snack from the tuck shop, meet some friends, hang out and sometimes play. I didn’t really think about it very much though, it was just there. I began to realise that the playground for city kids growing up was a bit like the farm for me. It was an in-between place that afforded the potential for children to make it their own, to have an increased level of autonomy and control over how they occupied space. Adults were there, looking out for you to an extent, but you really had to look after yourself. As I had more children and became an even fuller-time dad at home I developed more interest in what was happening at the playground. Initially, if I am completely honest with myself, my real focus came from an aesthetic perspective. Even though in this period of my life I didn’t really have what I would call or identify as an arts practice, I remained interested in the reuse of materials and how things were made. Specifically, how some objects wear the story of their making and lives in the patina of their surfaces.

There is a category of things I have self-identified that I like to look at; these include allotment sheds, homemade toys, things that now get called scratch models, improvised tools to do specific jobs, things that are mended both well and badly, old tins and jars filled with nuts and bolts in garages and sheds. There is something that draws me towards objects and ideas that are built from scratch with found materials. These one-off objects or makeshift things can hold their space differently from the manufactured or the mass-produced. Perhaps they share a common ancestry or have a family

resemblance to art objects? Though they have evolved into something very different. It is the use of raw as opposed to cooked materials that holds some of this aesthetic appeal, although reuse and incorporating traces of previous uses is also important. A material develops a use for itself within the time of making rather than having it predesigned. It is the scratch aesthetic that first drew me to the playground, the alchemy of making, the idea then unthought that something can be turned into something else, something new. The building materials form objects that are sedimented with layers of meaning which are like fossils within the stone, they eventually become part of something new. I was drawn to the idea that you would build something of your own invention from scratch for yourself, adventure playgrounds are places where stuff should emerge from chaos. I also saw, living in close proximity to the playground, how it worked to build community and extend relations. How this was critically outside the structure of formal education and to an extent adult regulation. The kids appeared to be in charge.

One day in 1996, I was pushing Tom (my middle child) past the playground in his pushchair. The staff team had erected a giant cut-out dinosaur on the side of the zip-wire slide. It was painted green and I remember Tom being desperate to go see what it was, he kept saying monster and pointing furiously from his buggy. I didn't go through the gates much at this time as it wasn't really set up for toddlers and, to be honest looked a bit dangerous or at the very least hard work as a parent. I did not feel fully part of the community and still considered myself a newcomer and outsider. I do clearly

remember or feel a memory of seeing Patrick²⁴ there. With his bright bleached short hair, we sat on the grass together and had a chat and a cup of tea when the playground wasn't open. I remember noticing that he had something about him, something to be admired, his energy perhaps, possibly something less easy to put a finger on. He had a way of drawing or hooking people in. He hasn't lost this knack; in fact, he may have gotten better at it. There was a story he told me about two women working at the playground before he got the job, somebody holding them captive at knifepoint. The story felt familiar though I'm not sure how true it was or if the truth really matters. Looking back now it feels like a cautionary tale, but it may well be a historical fact or an amalgamation of different historic facts from multiple places. I have found that many youth workers will tell you something, a story that holds a truth, even if it is untrue, to gauge your reaction. It is a technique to help sort through people. If I rack my brain I did start visiting the playground more regularly now, as the kids got a bit bigger and Patrick made the place feel more welcoming. It became a little more like home. I became a co-occupier, a community member and a volunteer.

On the day they erected a big slide, I remember Holly (my eldest child) being too scared to go down it and Tom going down multiple times head-first. He bashed his mouth and it filled with blood but he insisted on going down again and again. He climbed a tree – to the very top branches like a squirrel and got told off by the playworkers. Tom was very physical and his interactions

²⁴ Patrick was the lead playworker between 1994 and 1998. He returned to manage the playground when it became a charity in 2016 and continues as project lead.

with the site never conformed to any expectations of equipment designs or playground staff. I don't think the playground ever really felt like a place for my kids - I should probably ask them. - so I did.

Tom and Holly got back to me. I had to ask a few searching questions to get somewhere as they were both very protective of the playground. Tom had very few real memories, I think it had become a small part of all his growing up and playing outside. He did remember when the armed police came and they had to hide in the building but did not want to mention it as he thought it would paint the area in a bad light. Holly was more honest, she said she never really felt like she fitted. She could see how it was some children's safe place. She said her safe place was at home and she didn't really need another one. They both were proud of it as a place and felt it was important. Alice²⁵ didn't really play there much. I wasn't as involved and as she grew up I was working farther afield and doing less building at the playground.

The only other memory from this time was Tom in the sandpit getting covered in cat shit and me washing him down against the wall. Like the prison cell scene from Rambo *First Blood*. I made him stand in a prone position as I hosed him down. It is funny how smelly things stick in the brain and so in the memory. I don't really remember my two girls, Holly and Alice playing there, I don't think their friendship groups went much and I think they probably found it all a bit difficult. They knew it wasn't really their space and it

²⁵ Alice is my youngest child

only aggravated the inner feeling that they didn't really fit in that well around here.

The ten years I spent looking after my kids have not really featured much in my idea of myself in relation to research or work. Until I started to work backwards to the start, I had no intention of including it here, yet it does mark the start of my being present at the playground. In the first instance, I took my kids there to play, less than I would have liked but often enough to leave a lasting impression. Thinking back, it feels like a different life which to an extent it was. A life much simpler. However, as it enters my writing now it punctures thought, it forms part of the extensive assemblage of the work that brings us from there to here. It extends its story into the work and carves new territory.

2000 – 2010

There was little change or transition at the turning of the millennium in terms of my relationship to the playground. The first three years of the new century saw Alice (my youngest child) going to school aged five and me trying to pick up a thread from my first degree in fine art sculpture. The time I spent at home with my kids varies in my mind's eye, getting shorter and longer depending on the day I choose to look back. I did do odd bits in between but in relation to my life history I would say that from 1994 until 2004, I was fully engaged with child-rearing and little else. The story of picking up from where I left off involves many forward and sideways steps and the adventure

playground comes in and out of focus. I will tell the backstory only where it seems relevant and leave the gaps opaque as they will take us too far away from the point.

I stepped back into work through applying for and getting a Millennium Award to make a new sundial for the house in the local park. This does not really connect to the playground but as it is about time it can act as a retrospective marker or a point of transition. It was a complex and difficult thing to make. Looking back now I must have developed my making skills as I could not have made something so complex from a standing start. I continued learning about making through doing DIY projects in my house. There is very little in terms of artefacts that I made that survive from this period, even as images. The things I did make are very important in my life narrative, these things are friends, family, journeys and conversations. Physical things that still exist serve as reminders but they are not all that I have made.

Just after or even alongside making the sundial I got deeply involved in Burngreave's 'New Deal for Communities'. This was the New Labour government's attempt at area-based renewal and regeneration. It was to focus on five thousand households in places that were considered stuck within cycles of disadvantage. I sat on the community steering group, did many consultation events, applied for a job as a development worker, took advantage of funded childcare. I then began to get burnt by the flames of area-led regeneration which always promised more than it could possibly ever deliver and always delivered less than you would have considered

possible. This does relate to the playground, as when I flew out of the New Deal process, I began to volunteer there. In focussing my attention on a smaller perspective, I gained an insight into how the bigger picture functioned. I aimed to do work that mattered and brought something new into the world.



Figure 24: Building a Castle (Source: Steve Pool 2004)

I built a large castle play structure in 2003, this was the first piece of actual adventure play equipment proper that I made. It's ironic that whenever I start a new project at the playground, I must take two days out at the start to do running repairs on this slowly rotting monster. I built it around the same time as New Deal for communities started. I remember I paid myself £480 and felt guilty which was strange considering how much work I put in. I see the money not as payment, it is more an enabling amount that allows me to work there as I don't need to be working somewhere else. I applied for the money from the Sheffield Children's Fund through the Adventure Playground Users' Group which I had helped set up. Although I was paid, I was also a big part

of bringing in the funding. I acted as chair for at least six years navigating a New Deal application for £160,000 and a whole bunch of Sheffield City Council mess in terms of relationships. Looking back, I would say this is where I cut my teeth as a pragmatic community activist. This perhaps is a big part of who I am, though I rarely recognise it and would never describe myself as such.

This work predates any real encounters with the university or what I have started to refer to in my writing as my trajectory through theory. I knew nothing of research around play or the ontologies of play. However, I was working directly with Perry Else the co-author of the now renowned Colorado paper (Sturrock and Else, 1998) which introduced the *Ludic Cycle* proposing the inception of play at the start and annihilation of play at the end of a circular process. I remember this as a time of ignorance and action with an associated feeling of liberation. In his book, *Small Change* Nabil Hamdi (2013:133) proposes that ignorance is liberating in that you cannot be constrained in your ambition by limitations that you are unaware of. I was inspired in my community work by Hamdi's notion of the small actions that could grow to become part of major and systemic change (Hamdi, 2013:98)

I have clear moments and instances of memory from this time all circulating around in my head and body as feelings. I remember drinking pop; it was cherryade out of a 3-litre bottle that I shared with Steve²⁶. He would bring salt fish and ackee with rice from his grandma's. He only started sharing it with

²⁶ Steve was the lead playworker who replaced Patrick.

me after he persuaded her to make a double portion. I remember the stories people would tell us. How the playground building had once been a garage even though it didn't really have any access for cars. How it used to be better or used to be worse or used to be different. Tom occasionally still went there to play with his mates. When he was in year seven he took his new friends from his school who had travelled across the city. A young man was attacked near the playground, he escaped only to be killed later, shot at a local park which is about a mile away. The adventure playground was surrounded by armed police and all the kids were locked in the building by the staff for a couple of hours.

There is an area at the back of the playground where people sell and hide drugs, it is called 'up top' or the old recreation ground, 'The Rec'. I sometimes walk the dog up there; it is a nice spacious place with great views across the city. This is a story we tell for affect; it is a true story about one of many young men who have died in violence within half a mile of my house. This is a sad fact; the death continues and will continue. There are few things anyone can do to try and change things. Building adventure play equipment, encouraging a love of life, providing positive role models and above all getting people to mix more will not do any harm. The sense of loss is peripheral to my day-to-day life, but the deaths punctuate things, they are punctures in things. The loss gets into the mood of a place and an inability to do anything about it has led me to try to be involved in doing something else.

These times are dim memories now. In the moment and at the time the pace of stepping back into something that looked like an arts practice from the full immersion of looking after three small children was like a roller coaster ride. To be honest though, the playground has always been there as something I do, something I'm proud of. If things had gone slightly differently with a different momentum and direction the trajectory of adventure playground equipment builder could have taken me with it. Yet the New Deal for Communities that flowed out of the New Labour government also seemed to manifest itself in a new deal for freelance artists. This potential pulled me in a different direction and I was drawn into working for Creative Partnerships²⁷. I would do this to earn some money but also to naively attempt to change the very fabric of the education system and make life better for kids in school.

This takes us to 2008. I helped to draw down £160,000 pounds of New Deal money for the playground and built some new equipment. This included monkey bars, a climbing wall and a watch tower and we bought off-the-shelf play equipment from a local company. Mechanical excavators and dump trucks came, and I ordered thirty cubic metres of wood chippings that came on three trucks. The kids hot-wired the digger and the dumper truck and drove them around the site on a night. I worked with my friend Lisa who was very organised, she had been an artist but gave it up to work in the world. One day she told me that I was one of the only things that made her still like art. This was a nice thing to say and a nice thing for me to hear. I am

²⁷ Creative Partnerships was a Arts Council England funded national project that focussed on creativity within education mainly key stages 1 to 4.

not sure how much I thought about play through all this, I hadn't really thought much about the adventure play movement or loose parts play or history or context. My commitment came from seeing the way the playground worked to build community, the way play built relations. The work was to try and put something back and to keep something going. I had by this time cut my teeth and they were sharp; my main work was in Nottingham and Leeds in school after school after school. My work at the playground was as a volunteer and I suppose on my own terms an activist with a small a.

2008 – 2012

During the ten years of the New Deal for Communities program, there was a lot of wrangling about how the money should be spent. The old Labour slightly paternalistic council thought they should have had the money in the first place. Blair's babes, I think with some justification, decided that if the local council hadn't managed to sort an area out for 50 years it was not to be trusted to spend £55 million wisely. I can see the thinking that led to the approach but a lack of local capacity coupled with bureaucracy and faux accountability led to inaction. I helped design and build some of the development. A climbing boulder, a set of monkey bars, a structure at the back designed to look like a WW2 prisoner of war camp observation tower and the fire pit, which is still there. I made this with stone sets salvaged from a demolition site at the back of our house; a fallen terrace, slum clearance now replaced with small flats. I didn't think that much about how to involve

the kids in the designs. I also didn't think much about if I was excluding them.

There is something about paying attention to the terrain and movement. To watching how the kids play and how to incorporate this into any design or making project. The site and the materials influence the outcomes. For example, the kids loved to play diablo which is a version of tiggly-off-the-ground. Steve²⁸ would organise this to run across the whole playground and everyone present, adults and children would play. You could only be tiggled when you were on the ground, so we built lots of stuff that connected existing play equipment together, platforms, buried telegraph poles – rope swings so you could traverse the playground off the floor. Nobody had a conversation or did a drawing or asked children what they would like. Equipment would grow and evolve and to an extent respond to play. Although the kids were not involved in building it directly.

We closed for six weeks and did loads of landscaping, some equipment was bought in and fitted by a contractor. We moved the kick pitch or Muggers as it's called and had a tennis court marked out and a net put in. I did a lot of project management and a lot of hands-on building. It felt good to be part of making something happen.

²⁸ Steve was the lead playworker at the adventure playground from 1999 -2006

New Deal money had to be spent 'with and for the community' so me and my friend Lisa²⁹ established the Pitsmoor Adventure Playground Users group. This was a device we established to draw down funding as the playground was still run by the local authority who were then unable to apply for New Deal funding directly. I was the chair and Lisa was the treasurer and we had other people come and go but it was very hard to engage volunteers in management and fundraising. After the big redevelopment Richard,³⁰ who was then in charge at the playground, left and Steve took over as manager. Steve was a great playworker but something happened that was beyond his control and he had to move on. I had less to do with the playground for a while, my kids had got too old for it, and I was doing more community-based work in my day job. It began to feel like a busman's holiday. I helped with an occasional repair or lent some tools, but I can't remember whom it was staffed by – perhaps it was casuals or temporary staff. I asked Zac³¹ who was working at the playground then and he said there wasn't really a project leader on site and that it was managed by the council's play officer but they had a big portfolio. We talked about other people who were there, Denise had managed things for a while, but my memory is a bit vague. Towards the end of the council-run period, I reconnected a little more. Lisa had been more consistent but was becoming frustrated and discontent. She and I had struggled for years to try and stop the council from trying to hand responsibility for the playground over to a community group as by default at

²⁹ Lisa was an artist who ran the local newspaper, the Burngreave Messenger.

³⁰ Richard had a management role and would work at the playground and had other responsibilities in his local authority job

³¹ Zac is a playworker who has worked at the playground for ten years.

that time this would mean me and her. One of the last things she did was a big repair to the platform at one of the ends of the zip wire. Rohan, her boyfriend, did the work - he was handy and did a good job.

This reminds me that in the interim, the time between being a full-time dad and a full-time artist, I had spent a day in my workshop welding together the tensioning device for the cable on the zip wire. I had become absorbed in the job and forgotten an important early Creative Partnerships meeting in a school. I hadn't forgotten the meeting but time folded in the space of my workshop and when I came out into the light the time of the meeting had drifted away. I was cross with myself, it felt like something I would not do but I did. This was a change in attitude I can identify as a point of professionalisation; not only did I buy a diary, but I also began to look in it.

This brings us to 2015 - me and Patrick crying about the playground getting closed and the setting up of the independent charity that now runs it.

2014 – 2021

I can't quite remember how I got hooked back into working at the playground. The impending closure seemed like an inevitable result of the then coalition government's austerity program with its squeezing of urban local authority budgets. I know I was around when it came under threat but I was at the edge of things. I was not part of the new group of people who were coalescing to form an organisation to help to save it. Six years since the

crash, four years into the coalition government's austerity and to be honest the council were not going to carry on paying the £120,000 a year to keep the site open. There was talk of it going over to be run by 'Connections' the outsourced local youth service. There were ideas floated to take away the staff and run it as an open playground. In the end, it became a new community charity with a focus on play. Patrick was given a paid job at the helm and Yannina³² who had a long history within the play and community sector was selected as the chair of the new board. Fran was funded to act as treasurer and fundraiser. We were awarded a little kickstart money from a benefactor and then successfully drew down Big Lottery and Children In Need funding and established sustainable provision.

I can't really remember what happened next, I am not sure if I did some volunteer work or attended a meeting or just got chatting with the team as I walked my old dog. Perhaps somehow Patrick co-opted me to be fully committed in that way he has where you don't know how it happened you just recognise it has. I do remember chatting to the landscape architect academic Helen Woolley (2015). She wrote an article that included the playground that did a lot of damage in relation to academic engagement and how it can impact on community organisations. I had asked Kate³³ if there were any opportunities to work with the playground, which was really asking were there any opportunities to draw down or access some funding. My paid work on projects was becoming less about schools and more about bridging

³² Yannina is the chair of the playgrounds management board.

³³ Kate is an academic who I collaborate on projects and writing.

between community organisations and the university. I would say this was about building relationships, more than research or knowledge creation. I was moving across and between two fields and theorising this movement as a practice of connection. At least I was thinking this to myself in my errant (Glissant, 1997)³⁴ wanderings.

A Leap of Faith

This was the first project where I was commissioned and funded to work as an artist on an academic enquiry at the playground. With a focus on the utopian imagination, the project resulted in a large-scale joint exhibition at Somerset House in London.



Figure 25: The Utopia Project (Source Steve Pool: 2016)

³⁴ Glissant uses the term Errantry in poetics of relation to describe sacred wanderings in the development of relational identities.

I made a large sign that said utopia and was supposed to reference the Hollywood sign on the Los Angeles hillside above the studios. The idea was to suggest the playground was a childhood anarchic utopia. I tried to work with the academic Geoff Bright (2016) who writes about social haunting. He introduced me to Colin Ward (Ward and Golzen, 1978) and his writing on adventure play in his book *Anarchy in Action* (1961). In the end, Geoff was too stretched on other things to get involved in the project. My best memory from this work was wheeling a box from my home to the playground that I had made from the negative bits of plywood left over from making the sign. I made a film of the journey and hosted it on YouTube which I set to the soundtrack of *Fitzcarraldo*.³⁵

³⁵ *Fitzcarraldo* is a 1982 West German epic adventure-drama film written, produced, and directed by Werner *Herzog*. A large boat must be moved across a mountain to gain access to a rubber plantation to raise funds to build an opera house.



Figure 26: On the Road (Source Steve Pool 2016)

Perhaps it is in these moments of whimsy where I feel I am taking the piss out of myself that I get the closest to my practice. Something so esoteric that really feels obvious if you are aligned with the practice. It is ironic and is supposed to remain hidden, a reason to put things together that would not otherwise come together. The great post-modern preoccupation with juxtaposition. The fact that few people will have seen the film or recognise the soundtrack is not an issue. The fact it foreshadows the building and moving of a pirate ship from my backyard to the playground is only apparent in retrospect. The film follows the moving of a steamship across a mountain in the Andes to collect rubber to fund the building of an opera house. Even as I type this I am tempted to sneak off and watch it to share a short passion and private moment with Werner Herzog. I worked hard on this project - I

made a nice film with Patrick and the kids at the playground. I also made some stickers and did an interesting collaborative piece of work with some architecture students. I made a tricky film that seemed quite straightforward but if you stuck with it, it descended into a small piece of madness that only just navigated hyper-chaos. Johan Siebers, a philosopher with an interest in the writing of Ernst Bloch worked closely with us. If you engage with Johan, you can let the intellectual work just bubble away as he will pick up whatever there is and turn it into glowing thought.

I had taken it into my self-imposed remit to try and keep Patrick interested in working at the playground as we needed him. He likes a challenge and to talk and to think, the trips to London and Bristol, the interesting encounters, and the conversation this project prompted were important. However, the making of simply a sign did feel on the surface and as I worked through this project, I gradually concluded that to be successful in relation to the playground I would need to make something more substantial for the kids to play on.



Figure 27: Pirate Ship at Thorpe Arch Trading Estate (Source: online date unknown)

As a child, I had played on an old barge with my brother. It was in amongst World War 2 munitions bunkers converted into furniture shops at Thorpe Arch Trading Estate. I have always been interested in the utopian nature of pirate communities, their isolation, defiance of rules and the quest for hidden treasure, usually gold. I decided I would build a pirate ship - this idea was not thought through. I think the plan to build it predates any application for project funding, for example, the artist's legacy project (see project list in Appendix 2). The idea followed from the artist's studio project (see Appendix

2) it became about trying to make something significant happen for the playground beyond a research outcome. I had a feeling that this may be the end of the AHRC's Connected Communities Program, our last project so I really wanted to put something back into my community. This putting back became folded into practice, I was not really making art objects, yet I was concerned with what made sense and what had value for the community I was both part of and working with.

Pirate Ships and Artist's Legacies



Figure 28: The Lucky Gordon (Source Steve Pool 2017)

In relation to the assemblage of the parts that make up the whole I perhaps got too concerned with the making on this project. I can recognise this now as I don't really remember the academic, or perhaps theoretical part of what we were supposed to be doing very well. I went AWOL³⁶ at times and left

³⁶ AWOL refers to absent without leave in the armed forces in the UK

Kate Pahl, the project's PI to do too much of the work in relation to meeting our projected outcomes. It felt nice to be making again and making at scale. At the edge of what I am capable of. I did get really stuck in and immersed myself, both mentally and physically for many months. I would go to sleep and dream of snagging problems, of fixings and steps and transportation and how children would eventually move around safely on the structure. This presented a clash of priorities and an inability to step away from the work at hand. I did turn up for the rest of the project. I discussed things and thought things through collectively, but I was completely absorbed in building, and this took over from academic and arts practice for a period. I had to prioritise getting it done or it wouldn't have gotten done. I have few regrets about this, a shift back to doing something rather than writing about doing something felt essential. This immersion in the material act of making is an interesting thing to think about in retrospect. I have flashbacks to cold days with frozen hands working mainly on my own to finish things off. I had gone as far as I could go in terms of working in the academy and involving the playground without putting something back for the kids and the extended community. This became part of taking things more seriously (see appendix 2) and treating the work as less of a game and less as an opaque piece of artistic practice. The playground sits on a fault line where my academic life meets another potential, the more pragmatic life as a maker of adventure play equipment. My artist life, with its coherent longitudinal opaque obsession with a line of practice at best stops mattering and at worst gets in the way of doing anything that matters.

It feels important that I talk about the pirate ship or write about it as having symbolic potential. What it can mean to me and others and what it potentially represents. I write about the pirate ship as a material text in a book chapter for Kate Pahl and Jennifer Rowell's *Living Literacies* (2020). It holds a lot of symbolic meaning for me and it certainly isn't what I would consider an artwork or art object. To articulate why it is part of my practice as a visual artist requires a nuanced and specific insight into what the category, platform or definition of art can hold. The object itself is not autonomous - it is embedded within the assemblage of an ongoing process, the continuation of an event (Massumi, 2019). Unlike the accidental utopia box that spent a few years as a compost bin before its eventual disintegration, the pirate ship is too big a statement to be on the edges. It sits in the middle of things; people move through it to navigate around the playground. In the blog posts I wrote at the time I talk of making a statement, a mark on the landscape, about making and using my body, sometimes punishing my body, for the crime of not doing enough. Or at least putting it on the line, working out what it is capable of. In his book *Art, Disobedience and Ethics* Dennis Atkinson (2017:41) explores the flows of connections between the thinking of Spinoza and Deleuze. He tells us that we are never sure of what a body or a mind is capable of that lead to unknown capacities to think and act. This project pushed me to the very edges of my capacity to make and think.

I would talk ironically and not so ironically to Patrick about us both searching for redemption. He thought this was funny, I think I needed redemption from doing a project where all I made was a sign that said utopia, rather than

attempting to help to build Utopia or at least build something that makes things a little bit better. This was a practical response to Ernst Bloch's (Bloch and Mackinnon, 1988) distinction between a concrete utopia and an abstract utopia which had provided a guiding thought or kernel of focus for much of my work. I realised that this project would be the end of the AHRC Connected Communities program, like Creative Partnerships or any program that is concerned with making a change there must be a natural lifespan. Things evolve and the lines of action flow in and out of places. This is not a bad or a good thing.

PhD until the present moment

The completion of the pirate ship and its launch on a bright hot summer afternoon in 2018, seems like a long time ago now. I kept talking about it as if I were the Alex Guinness character in the film *Bridge over the River Kwai*³⁷. The British army captain gets so obsessed with the building of a bridge that he forgets he is doing it for the enemy. His final words as he falls onto the plunger which detonates explosives strapped under the railway bridge are "What have I done?". I know it's not like that but it did take a lot of effort and I probably neglected other things that I should have done. I did rob Peter to pay Paul. Looking back two things really struck me about making the pirate ship. The first is it takes so long for a new piece of equipment to become part of the playground, and to be fully adopted by the kids. Secondly, the

³⁷ *The Bridge on the River Kwai* is a 1957 film directed by David Lean.

thing that actually made me want to explore self-build and loose parts play (Nicholson, 1971) for my PHD is the limitations of fixed play equipment in relation to the opportunities it affords children to imagine differently.

The pirate ship does work as a text, something that holds a lot of personal meaning and represents me trying to put something back into the community. I succeeded in making something for the kids to play on that demonstrates an investment of money, time and care. However, it does not afford as much potential for imaginary games as I had hoped. It does sculpt some special connections, creates new flows and movement and provides something central to the playground as an iconic feature.

This chronology apart from some repair and maintenance takes us to the start of building a platform for loose parts play. I need to bring this trajectory to an end as I believe it has ended and as I began my study something different started.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I tell the story of my relationship with the adventure playground and how over time my life has entangled with it. I begin by offering an insight into my own childhood, my memories of play and how this relates to ideas of freedom and autonomy. I go on to talk of my role as a parent and my relationship to adventure play through my own children's experiences as a community member and playground user. I then work

through the historic timeline of my involvement with the adventure playground and explain how I began to build play equipment and how this relates to and differs from making art. I describe how the building of play equipment was a way to act ethically and try to contribute something of value to my own community. The chapter presents a ravelling where the entangled lines of my involvement including my PhD research, artistic practice and work as a volunteer, cannot be untangled. I describe how I research and develop ideas for new equipment, how young people are involved and how this relates to what I understand as working ethically. I have made a commitment to helping build the playground as a community and as a safe place for children to play, this desire is part of this research and one of the reasons it has taken place, it is a real-world outcome. I explain the justification for exploring and promoting self-build and loose parts play (Nicholson, 1971) for my PhD in the context of the limitations of fixed play equipment and the constraints these structures place on children to imagine differently.

I explore the nature of the event of residency, in its difference from other work I perform at the playground. Pushing back the markers that make an action either art or research, both generating and extending an assemblage and speculating on lines of flight. This complex set of relations and how they unfold into a yet unknown future is what I consider the process of doing research-creation.

I call this a trajectory as it suggests a flow and a movement forward. For this study, all my trajectories move towards the platform I built as proposition number three in the creative-event of this residency/study.

Fourth Interlude: Mending the zip wire

I now tell the story of mending the zip wire at the adventure playground. I use this as a marker, to try and find an action which is not part of my PhD study or part of my art practice. This interlude aims to further develop the concept of what I describe as a ravelling. I try and define what is inside and outside the ravelling of the work of this study by finding something which is not part of it, something that resists been woven in.

I plan to write a descriptive story of how I mended the zip wire at the adventure playground. I have no intention of writing this as more than a story and the process of repair was never more than a fixing. It struck me after I completed the mend that this action was very far removed from research or what I understood as doing a PhD. Unlike other encounters in the field, it was also removed from my art practice, from aesthetics and from philosophies that look to what is immanent and becoming. It was at least and at most, in the moment, an act in and of itself. I wonder if this neutrality, this apparent neutrality, this imposed neutrality, will give/provide a baseline. Any activity which is less mundane than this act of repair has the potential to transcend the world of the mundane and become other, become something other than what it is.

This writing needs its prologue, as without this declaration of position metaphor and simile will slip through the edges of description. The tensioning of the cable, through its action of drawing things tighter, will, within this text, add tension and slip into a world of unintended extra meaning. The small mistakes that compound bigger mistakes that lead to a setback will

become stand-ins for other thoughts and processes and mistakes. The effort is not to move towards more than the everyday and the mundane, the effort is to hold thought and action within the event, in and of itself, located and bounded.

The repairing of the zip wire was a job I first did at the very start of my PhD. The first drawing on my blog is a doodle of the tools I will need and the thoughts I was processing. I reference a safety harness as I had recently fallen from a ladder and although my body had bounced, my brain and confidence had taken a rattling.

Starting this process of writing a PhD, before reading all the books I was about to read I was happier with metaphor. Things, thoughts, and ideas appeared to become other things more easily. The little drawing, I did in biro in my new sketchbook was a way to calm myself during my first formal supervision. It was an aid to my memory, not the image itself but the act of making it. Metaphors came more easily then as they did not get scrutinised and their meaning seemed more fluid, more adrift. Life felt more liquid, it would ebb around written text that stood like rocks diverting and blocking the flows of a river. Canoeists call them stoppers, real things not metaphors.

It is interesting though coincidental that the funded part of my PhD began and ended with this same job, doing the running repairs on the zip wire. The first repair is historical and enters the PhD as a metaphor and story. The second fights for its position as a unified and singular event held in the

mundane and everyday. The simple parts add up to something not very big, writing about it does not make it bigger. Perhaps this everydayness is an example of the minor gesture as an aspect of research-creation as discussed in Chapter 2. Yet any naming or giving of value or citation has the potential to shift it into something else. This something else is the problem with both metaphor and any form of representation. The first mending of the zip wire took place before the PhD started and the second mending initially sat outside the writing of the PhD yet there is something useful layered into this action. As I sketched ideas and worked out and thought about impact and stresses, I wondered if this was something to set other things against. This event that had slipped through the web could hold enough difference to define itself as something else and could be moved into view. For this to have value it would have to be without any hint of aestheticisation or appropriation. Not to be taken as for or against art. For it to do work in writing it will have to hold the repair-event and speak from inside it. I hand this writing to the reader and ask that it be read in good faith it flowed from a chapter on adventure play and it merely recounts the story of two repairs.

In-difference

It began with a single strand of wire springing from the 12mm steel cable that eventually teased itself from the other strands, becoming visible from the ground. The zip wire has two ends, one with a platform for launching yourself from, the other with a stop and a big spring that is supposed to slow you down and allow you to get off at the other end. At the platform end of the

zip wire, the cable runs over the end of a telegraph pole. It threads through a cast steel eyebolt that is welded to a piece of flat section rolled steel bar, this is 5mm thick and 25mm in width. I made this fixing 20 years ago in my workshop, it had worked fine with the previous wire for the best part of ten years. The current wire had only been up for 3 years so I was surprised it had worn and decided that it must be due to increased use and multiple kids hanging from it at any one time. I climbed a ladder to check it more closely. Patrick footed the bottom to make sure it didn't slip. I felt reasonably secure though a part of me had to hold my breath to step past the point I fell off the same ladder a few years ago. I had to get past this as I would be up and down this ladder a lot if I was going to attempt this repair. I was not keen to take on the responsibility for this job as the zip wire is a difficult piece of equipment as it has moving parts. Anything with moving parts eventually wears out, this is not a metaphor it is a fact. I was also reluctant to start on the repair as it was not something that would ever really fit within my PhD writing. It could be manipulated to fit with slightly ironic interpretations of events and lines of flight, yet it would never really fit as it was simply a repair. If I were an anthropologist, it could be seen as an attempt to gain currency within my community of study. As I am the actual bloke that repairs everything that breaks then the repairing of the zip wire was just life, not residency or art or research, it is everyday and mundane.

On close inspection, two strands of the 16-strand cable had splayed and were peeling away from the core of the wire. There was little real chance that it would snap in the short term yet once something gets noticed there is

a responsibility to pay attention to it. It is also a responsibility to notice things, this fraying of the wire is a good example of a good safety procedure. As I have said, everything with moving parts eventually wears out. I decided that we should close the zip wire and we locked up the seat with a large rusting padlock. All the kids were cross about it and said it was their favourite thing. I felt guilty and had a massive internal urge to say out loud that the broken zip wire was not really my problem even though I knew it was or would be. This is because it wasn't anyone else's problem.

I went home and thought about a quick and temporary fix. It did not come straight away but at night. I worked out that if I moved the cable a few inches then the point of friction would be on a new point. 14 strands of steel wire are plenty in the short term to support kids in flight and although not fully confident in this solution I was confident enough to give it a go. I purchased a tensioning pulley from Amazon with a pulling capacity of two tonnes, it came in three days, and I played with it, thinking I had worked out how to use it. I did not read the instructions. Two days later I found my Stillsons³⁸ and an adjustable spanner in my plumbing bag and set off to the playground. When I arrived, I rummaged in the metal container for a coach bolt to use as an anchorage point. I climbed the ladder and lashed the top of it to some pieces of decking. I had fixed these to the old telegraph pole a few years before so I could feel safer. I brought out my safety harness but didn't put it on, I did make everyone wear hard hats as since the operations on my carpal tunnels in 2006, my grip has weakened and I am liable to drop things like spanners

³⁸ Stillsons are a type of adjustable spanner, mine are made by Stanley.

on people's heads. I had found a 100 mm long eyebolt, I hit it with my lump hammer to start it off, so it began to bite and then screwed it into the old telegraph pole using the extension from a socket set as a Tommy Bar. I did not think of it as a Tommy Bar at the time and I certainly did not think of use value or Heidegger or Derrida. It is only at the point of writing that the extension bar from the socket set needs any type of name or explanation. I will now need to pause to find out the origin of the term Tommy Bar. Not because it has any significance to the doing but because it has reminded me that sometimes within texts like this, it is necessary to take a jump over the fourth wall.

A Tommy Bar is a short piece of metal often used with a box socket. I have no idea where the name came from, but I speculate it originated from British soldiers in the first world war who were called Tommies. It is a nice term as it relates to an object in use, the bar is just a bar until it is pushed through a hole and used to tighten something. So, in many ways, it has a connection to Heidegger who seemed to prefer to work his ideas out using the example of a hammer or "Manchester screwdriver" as they are affectionately known in the trade.

This jump is not important unless you are up a ladder and are asking someone to pass you something. On the ground is a giant pile of random tools. You shout from your lashed-in position, lump hammer stuck dangerously in your back pocket.

“Can you pass me the half-inch extension out of the socket set – I need to use it as a Tommy Bar.”

It is like working on academic projects when you get stuck for the right word up a ladder and need to ask someone to pass you something. For example, if this writing was within my PhD this passage could be read as an analogy or a simile though not a metaphor. I could propose the Tommy Bar was part of the becoming of an agential cut within the complex relationship between the wood, the eyebolt and the human power asserted through the Tommy Bar. I could argue this both seriously and ironically. Although I would hope I would be able to find a more appropriate way to bring this sort of discussion to the work. On the playground, there is an action and a result of that action. I took the extension used it as a Tommy Bar and screwed in the eyebolt that would act as an anchor point for my new two-ton pulley tensioner.

As I hit the end of the eyebolt with the hammer, I could hear that the timber it was going into was not sound. It thudded rather than twanged, it sings out its condition in onomatopoeia. My dad told me about telegraph poles going rotten from the inside. It is strange, the rot does not have to creep up from the bottom or the top it just rots from the sapwood. The tiny sapling that became the tree gradually loses its strength and the rot spreads outwards from the tree's beginning. The bolt with a temporary Tommy Bar catches for four turns and then spins with ease like it is trying to anchor itself in soft cheese. When the poles are transported, they have floated down rivers in giant temporary organic rafts, sometimes they end up in the sea where tiny

marine creatures bore into the timber creating channels for the oozing black preservative to penetrate. I found the date stamp on the pole; this one was from 1981 - a good vintage. It was nice to have a date stamp to emphatically reference the pole having a life before. Its job was to carry electricity to people's houses. Most things we build with at the playground have had a life before, even new timber has spent many years as part of a tree. The date stamp is like the annular rings within the timber now rotting away. It gives us something to work back to.

The quick repair is looking less likely now, but I consider the triangulation and the strength in the structure left standing. The design is ill-considered in relation to what it is expected to do it is over-engineered yet has built-in weak points. The pole tilts the wrong way, so each stress and impact refer its considerable leverage to try and lift itself out of the ground. The bracing legs join the pole at what has become its key stress point and the point it is rotten. In the past, I have attached bits of timber and plywood to try and spread the effects of multiple impacts and triangulate the forces. I decide the pole is not going to snap or fall soon. It is safe due to its initial over-engineering. I force the eyebolt further in to reduce the effect of any leverage between the tensioner fixing and the pole on this precarious soft cheese anchor point. I take my new tensioner and hook one end in the eyelet of the wire and the other to my eyebolt. I move the handle back and forth and take some of the slack out of the wire, everything, although compromised, seemed to be going well. I then tried to tighten a large threaded mechanism I had welded

together in 2003, optimistically I had sprayed it with WD40 lubricant³⁹, but it was rusted solid. I had a flashback to three years ago. It was in trying to crack the corrosion on this 20mm piece of galvanised stud⁴⁰ that I lost my footing on the ladder and fell. This was the only fall I have ever had where there was time in the air to reflect on the slowness of the falling. After twenty minutes of effort, with spanners on the bolt I decided it was not moving. It was at this point that I realised I had somehow, in tensioning the wire, clamped the tensioner to the pole. On its underside is a mechanism, difficult to operate even with clear access that allows you to gradually slacken the pulley. It was completely stuck, and I was completely stuck and had a real dab on⁴¹, this means feeling sweaty in the local language. Geoff⁴² arrived with a can of super-strength WD40 that one of his friends had borrowed from Sheffield Forgemasters⁴³. He got me to slow down a little. He suggested slackening the other end of the wire, this involved moving the ladder. We moved everything to the other end of the zip wire. I had rebuilt this three years ago, so everything was a bit easier. I had made it so it could be climbed safely with a piece of timber to support the ladder. I greased all the moving parts. Pete footed the ladder, and I turned the stainless-steel bolts on the rusty stud one-quarter of a turn at a time, the wire gradually slacked off but was still very tight. I thought about trying to take the wire off altogether but gave up on this as I was getting tired and could not think of how to do it without taking a risk.

³⁹ WD 40 is a type of penetrating oil used to free rusty fixing, it rarely works.

⁴⁰ Stud is another name for threaded bar.

⁴¹ I use the term dab on as it is language specific to working on a hot day in Yorkshire.

⁴² Geoff is a volunteer at the playground, a former steel man he helps me with repairs.

⁴³ Forgemasters is an internationally renowned large scale metal forging plant.

There was no real reason why I couldn't just walk away at this point. The zip wire was just out of order with my new pulley stuck high up on the side of a pole well out of the reach of children. Given this, I still found this situation close to intolerable. It was a symbol of my inability to achieve anything at all, to be further away from fixing it than when I had started four hours earlier. I took my ladder to the other end of the runway again lashed the top to the wood fixing point and hit the tensioner with my lump hammer. I also walloped the soft cheese fixing and then bashed it with the end of a blunt screwdriver. Nothing happened but as is the way with this kind of situation after several vicious strikes and nearly giving up the thing flexed and released its grip. I spent ten minutes hammering bits of what turned out to be monkey metal⁴⁴ back somewhere close to their original shape. I put most of the tools away and went home. I started thinking about all the problems as I walked back through the cemetery. I was frustrated and a little bit angry in taking on this thing that was not part of my PhD and could never find its way into my writing yet was taking up so much brain space.

An Aside

What marks the boundary between work that can flow into my PhD writing and work that is on the outside? The indistinct line I have marked in the sand carries a level of ambiguity. When I play with these thoughts of

⁴⁴ A soft metal often used to describe cheap casts in the antique trade. Originated in its use making Brass monkeys for holding cannon balls in the Napoleonic wars.

defining edges in the past it is the aestheticisation of processes and things that give events a level of slippage.

In the early months of my residency when I was repairing the toilets, I treated the toilet flush tanks as works of modernist art. I photographed their Bakelite vandal-proof surface in a makeshift photographic studio in my old dining room. The intricate, technical side of fitting the toilets got downplayed, underlaid with a false irony that I believed allowed for slippage. On the surface, I wanted to talk of changing flush tanks as a creative-event (Massumi, 2011) in contrast to an appropriation. I was playing with process and with materials that both masquerades as and become sculpture or at least play at sculpture. To write about this more honestly within a practice each action is folded into a layer cake of masquerades. The masked ball of art dancing into the world.

In a justification to myself and others or in a more duplicitous form of writing, I could talk of the event of mending the toilets as an ongoing process of gaining the trust of research participants. As an activist, I could draw attention to the fact I am addressing the most immediate problem that comes to hand and taking direct action. In a philosopher's way, I could say I am exploring the nature of the event of residency, pushing back the markers that make an action either art or research, both generating and extending an assemblage and speculating on lines of flight. In the end, I have mended the toilets so the playground can stay open and as I am an artist in residence- this act if not part of making art must still be considered. I am an artist and

odd job man, this is essentially a fact and however much my actions are aestheticised wine will not become blood, and a repair will not become art.

Ideas emerge through writing - they are not thought of and written down. In this moment of writing, I have realised that the boundary between research and residency lies in the ability to make an event aesthetic. The aesthetic experience involved in the event of making something new.

At the start of the lockdown, I spent two days removing nails from wood donated by a local building company. The timber had been torn from what was historically a local police station and is now a mosque. Pulling the nails and preparing the wood for reuse is a mundane and repetitive job. I write on my blog that each nail clings to its original purpose and that very little about its removal feels accidental. In the middle of last year, I carefully placed 1000 nails on the top of a weather-patinated blue picnic table. I asked the playground staff not to move them so they would rust and leave their iron oxide trace on the surface of the bench. Later in the year, a volunteer would paint the table with fresh blue paint to freshen things up. At the same time, the toilets I had repaired would be changed and the aesthetic flush tanks I had photographed and fitted would be thrown in a skip. The physical traces of these moments of making something new and repairing something old are now erased. At each point of removal, I noted this and felt a little of what I could only truly describe as minor grief.

The mending of the zip wire is a technical task and although there is an element of pleasure and satisfaction in creating an effective and safe repair there seems little opportunity for anything hidden or in excess, either ironic or real. There are materials and things and tools, the returning to things I made twenty years ago, there are stories and there are potential risks and dangers. There are interactions and mistakes yet none of these seems to afford me any opportunity to make the mend aesthetic. This is not to say that it would be impossible for this to happen. For another artist or another practice, it may be possible to make this mending of a thing aesthetic⁴⁵. It affords so many memories of speed and danger for so many generations of children, it is their favourite thing at the playground. All I can say is at this moment of mending and this moment of writing I cannot bring the event of mending the zip wire into practice or into a residency and the fact it sits outside is a good way to think more carefully about what is on the inside.

On Mending the Zip Wire Again

I rang my dad again and asked him how telegraph poles rot. He told me that they could rot from anywhere and that the centre of the pole did not have to rot from the top or the bottom. I decided that we⁴⁶ could fix the zip wire by using a piece of box section steel which we could bolt through the pole and would span the rotten area. This would mean it could be fixed in solid timber. I decided to replace all the fixings and use a D bolt to attach the wire at the

⁴⁵ See glossary in relation to how I use of the term.

⁴⁶ This we refers to the playground as a collective organisation.

ramp end, which would pass through a hole in the box section, leaving no potential friction between the wire and fixing points. We would then tension the wire from the other end using the tensioner I had bought and the large mechanism I had originally made which was less exposed to the elements and still worked as a tensioner. This was a solution to the problem, and I was confident that if we saw it as short-term it would be safe and effective. We planned a date and I waited for my finger, which I had cut with a Stanley knife blade, to heal. There is a danger in this writing that it becomes too much of a story and the act of the mending will become aesthetic or at least in the writing of it poetic. This secondary representation of the event of mending must not cross this line or its fundamental point within the structure of this PhD will be lost.

To explain this further I will return to the box section of cold-rolled mild steel I used for the repair. It would be easy to draw attention to the fact that this material has a history. It had once been part of a soft play area that was purchased by a man who lived near Park Hill flats who was going to erect a structure for his kids in his garden. His wife thought this was not a priority and we inherited them along with a large rope bridge that ended up recycled and used to mark the edges of the platform I was building. The box section has a history, it was probably imported from a Chinese steelwork that filled the hole in supply which appeared when under Thatcher's Government, Sheffield reduced its production of hot rolled steel. There are very few, if any, materials that do not carry a history or a symbolic meaning, however this short piece of scavenged box section does not carry its history into this repair

or this writing. It could be brand new and purchased from Amazon for the job. The fact it was lying around and had a history can in this instance be ignored. The ability to ignore the provenance of materials is another reason why this repair sits on the edge of the PhD and is not inside it.

I have just moved my workshop into the cellar of my new house, and I used my old Wolf pillar drill to make four 13mm holes in the steel. The box section had already been fitted with an eyelet in its former life so all that remained was to bolt it to the pole and attach and tension the zip wire.

I picked up my friend who was volunteering and drove to the playground. We spent around an hour looking for the cable tensioner which had been pushed to the back of the container. I had asked for it to be put in a safe place which is always a mistake, much better to ask for something to be put in an obvious space. I climbed the ladder and removed the cable clamps from the steel cable on the opposite end of the runway. The idea was to slide the end stop and the spring along about three metres, there was enough cable, and we could remove the offending worn section altogether. It is at this point that something interesting should happen, a moment or a jump to something that would make this repair job seem or be representing more than it was. But nothing happened. I slackened the cable removed the eyelet and lowered the wire to the sand. I then undid the end stop and slid it three metres up the wire. I went to work at the other end drilling a hole through the telegraph pole and bolting through with a piece of 13 mm stud bar as I could not buy any bolts long enough. I used stainless steel stud and

Nylock bolts⁴⁷ as I was aware that I may need to move them at some future point. I placed a large square washer on the underside and tightened it with two adjustable spanners. This is awkward as it was at a funny angle and I somehow managed to drill so the stud came out between two supports joists meaning I could only turn the nut in quarter rotation increments. I didn't come down the ladder to get a ratchet and a socket set as I roughly calculated that although the socket set would be more efficient it would take an age to find. I suspected the socket would be lost in one of my many work bags. With the box section in place, I threaded the cable through a thimble. This is a specially made eyelet that prevents the wire from rubbing. I had only recently become aware of them and hadn't used them before. I secured the cable with four steel wire rope grips. I had checked setting up a zip wire in the blue book which is the affectionate name we give to Risk and Safety in Play (Potter, 2003). I had done this previously as I was a little worried about the whole job, it held some problems that I could not address with fully satisfying solutions. The book instructed that on 13mm wire rope you should use four fixings, there was a specific way around they needed to go to make sure they worked. I had been completely unaware of this so checked myself with a scratch on the surface of the mind about not assuming I know more than I do and a regular double-check with the blue book is always to be advised.

This story has very few jumps or lines of flight - it is a clean task that does not afford the opportunity to spin any post-structural spiders' webs.

⁴⁷ A nylock bolt has a small plastic insert which locks the bolt in position and stops it working loose.

However, within the detail, it still holds something minor and something significant. The tensioning of the wire required me to learn something new and build something back better that would make it easier to maintain in the future. To tension the wire in the past I had adapted an old engine hoist that I had taken from my grandad's garage. We had used it to pull up tree stumps. It did not work well, and I suspect that my grandad had inherited it from the local council where he worked, probably, as he was no thief after it had been inspected and condemned in the 1960s. The new tensioner I had purchased pulled up to two tonnes I had attached it to the zip wire while it was on the ground with 2 wire cable grips. I fastened a cross beam to the support structure so I could fix an anchor point in the best position. This time leaving good access to the release mechanism. I had watched a YouTube video on how to do this, but I had also worked it out for myself beforehand in my mind's eye. I think I would say that within the tensioning process, there is a certain level of elegance in this improvised solution. As I laid in bed the night before, building the flow of the repair in my dreams, going through each stage in sequence multiple times I could feel an elegance, something of a minor engineering achievement.

I am not sure if these decisions can be thought of as aesthetic, yet they do operate in a very similar way to aesthetic thoughts⁴⁸. The difference is singular and clear. The repair job has an endpoint. It comes as Patrick slides down the wire to test it and the kids start using it to have fun. There is little

⁴⁸ I identify a similarity in a process of thought but do not suggest that they are aesthetic in that they do not form part of my creative practice or creative artmaking. This decision is individual and subjective.

consideration of what something looks like or what something may mean in relation to other things. Importantly for this study, there is little in the process that remains opaque, the opacity of any thread of practice or thought or feeling is absent. If I attempt through habit to add opacity and feeling to the flow of this story, it seems laboured and drawn out. Painted on the surface of life rather than emerging from within it. This is not to say that the mending of the zip wire does not have value. For the kids and the staff and probably for me, it's one of the most valuable things I have done this month. Each time a child shoots down it I can see my value and the work that the residency allows. Yet the act is held within its ordinariness. Nobody would notice it, and nobody would consider it part of a PhD which is why it marks the outside of it.

This story is included to suggest that there are edges to what I consider this study in relation to my work at the playground. Many of these edges such as the mending of the zip wire are folded back into the thinking of the work. There is a recognition that a fold may require an edge to wrap around.

Chapter 5: The Playground Residency

The Time Before

In this chapter, I will draw on my personal blog and fieldnotes⁴⁹ to try and explain my workings out. It will present a journey from the start of the PhD process to the point of my second-year review panel meeting. At Manchester Metropolitan University this was called the RD2 or progression milestone. This point marks a transition as the process proved difficult and challenging in relation to how I was able to bring the work of the PhD study to art practice. By this, I mean that meeting the specific criteria for completing a doctoral study did not feel like part of the secret plan of my practice. For example, connecting my writing to existing literature, adopting a methodology and developing research questions did not sit comfortably with my approach to the thinking-making-doing of art. I needed to separate aspects of the PhD study from what I have been calling the secret plan of practice. It also coincides with the start of the Covid pandemic and the series of lockdowns that followed. I have edited and proofed the blog posts to make them more coherent and focused. I have also added a commentary with the benefit of hindsight. The blog represents the substantive work of my PhD in relation to thinking and writing, it explores thoughts and ideas in the time and context of their emergence. At the time of their writing, I had no intention of using the blog posts in this way, yet I have found that they provide the most useful approach to move a dialogue that is embedded within an arts practice

⁴⁹ I took detailed fieldnotes as I worked on my residency in the playground. I recorded my thoughts feelings and ideas at the end of each visit. Some of these notes were used within blog entries others remained private.

towards where it needs to go. It holds a struggle and a freshness and an insight I have been unable to find in more formal types of writing. It is, after much consideration, and failed efforts the best I have to offer. The blog entries are selected to give an impression of my wonderings. It is a painterly and expressionistic representation of my errant, nomadic wanderings. I present an introduction followed by three stories each of which relates to one of the core propositions outlined at the start of this study.

Introduction



Figure 29: First Day of PhD - notebook sketch (Source: Steve Pool 11/2018)

This is a drawing from my sketchbook from a meeting about a project. It is a doodle to distract my hands and, in some way, help me listen by getting me to think about something else. The day before I was also in the middle of building a zip wire so I drew from memory all the tools I would need for the next day's work. They are specific, actual, and not symbols. The chain pull was my dad's from when he worked as a linesman for Yorkshire Electricity Board in the 1960's; it is for tensioning wires. I have had it for about twenty years and have not used it yet. The hammer was bought for me by a friend for helping to put up his MA show at the Royal College of Art. It was the same year that Gavin Turk presented his now famous blue plaque - we worked in its shadow. It is an American roofer's hammer - it used to have a sticker on it that said 'Estwing - King of Hammers' - it's forged from a single piece of steel and has a leather handle. I hope I've made the point that these things are very specific, they are what you need to do a job. The job is at height - it requires two hands - it is impossible to do the job safely, without an element of measured risk.

This feels a bit like the start of the PhD and my current reading feels like the start of working out what tools I will need to get ready. Some of the tools feel very familiar, some of them, like my mighty Estwing, feel like the supreme king of nail hammers of thinking; others feel more difficult to use. Like the old chain tensioner which was condemned as it was broken in 1966, which can, if nudged and aided with shims of copper, do the job we ask of it.

(First Blog post 8th October 2018)

I wrote this blog post three days after my first PhD supervision. I include it here as it helps to position the substantive chapters covering my work in the field what I refer to as the playground residency that lives in the middle of this study. I aim to write the story of my residency that pays attention to my thoughts, feelings and aspirations. It remains relevant firstly as I wrote it at the beginning, and I need to start somewhere, and secondly, as it is a description of my failed quest to amass the tools and skills that would enable me to write how I want to write about art, practice, and research, the tools I then thought I needed. The four-year journey has enabled me to look for and learn to use new techniques, to break through sedimented thought and to build what Deleuze and Guattari (1995:483 - 495) would refer to as new apparatus of capture. I have moved towards better understandings of actions and events yet deep within the middle of things I acknowledge the desire for a space of opacity, where thought is obscured. There is a need for the recognition that something is in fact present, that it wriggles, is slippery and defies capture, specifically from spoken or written language.

The introduction of research and new ways of thinking requires consideration of what it is possible to hold onto. The rationale and purpose of a personal arts practice are embodied and felt, they are not fully reducible to a written text. Something will always be missing. If I continue the metaphor that I introduced in my first blog post, I began in the first week of my PhD study; I have not discovered the specific tools that are needed for a specific job. I am still even as I move to completion unsure of what tools I will need or what will be considered a good job. So, I pack an odd assortment of the things and

thoughts that may come in handy, tools that can be used to do multiple jobs, knives used as tin openers, washing up liquid bottles used as water pistols, bricks used as axle stands. The thinking tools of this PhD study are always the things that can be brought to hand and turned to a purpose for which it may not have been intended.

I have not found a clear pathway through the hyper-chaos, yet I have found a multiplicity of pathways that form nomadic routes of return and irregular refrains. The following chapter is not written to make sense of things it is written to tell stories that aspire to make a *newsense*⁵⁰ of themselves. To make propositions.

An Aside

Crossing the Fourth Wall

To cross the fourth wall the performer moves to the edge of the stage and speaks directly to the audience. In a stage whisper they illuminate the plot or tell us what a character is thinking. Crossing the wall is used as a trick to emphasise the territory of the stage and a reminder that we are watching a drama unfold. The form of PhD writing is something that must be learnt and the structure of an argument is something to be laid out and built. The form or gestalt of the written PhD study, for me, is at times inadequate to communicate what is and was going on. This stuff of the study, the working

⁵⁰ See glossary for an explanation of the concept of *newsense*.

through of things in a complex and worldly assemblage is slippery, amorphous, exceptional, and ordinary. To cross the fourth wall of a text is to look the reader in the eye and speak directly to an audience as individual. There is a danger of breaking the spell, shattering the suspension of disbelief, and removing the essential components that constitute the play or the text. This impromptu pitch invasion during the match, this grasping of metaphor, as the stalker wearing only a bucket hat at the test match runs across the wicket and the TV screen. At the point they make the decision to bare all there is no other action that seems appropriate.

In this chapter, I will take off my metaphorical clothes and run naked across the page to illuminate something that feels essential. Things that cannot be held within a form of writing that strives for sense and clarity over felt experience. I hope to make a *newsense* of myself. As with any show of nakedness, apart from the moment of our birth, the stickiness of our flesh can feel uncomfortable to the eye. I had hoped that the chapters that precede this to structure a territory, a platform, a placeholder, a gap that could enable my nakedness to go unnoticed. I had hoped to demonstrate, if not mastery, then a competence in writing that would dress me in an unfamiliar territory.

To bring the emotional and felt space of an arts practice to the territory of the written word without partially diminishing it and reducing it to the everyday and mundane has proved beyond me. The boundaries, edges, frame, and definitions, all feel textural yet struggle to be held within a written text. The

addition of images as simulacra can help to illustrate thoughts and reference things in space and time yet they feel like representations of the surface of things. Photographs are like a seasoning scattered through words. It is like having salt and pepper on tomato sauce for your tea.

Each story I have selected is an attempt to present a proposition. This focus draws on research-creation as a methodology that works with propositions instead of questions. Some of the propositions are clear and others are embedded within the detail of the story. I have tried to explain in as simple terms as I can what the story proposes. I borrow from Ernst Bloch's approach in his book *Traces* where the true proposition is told within a series of stories or through the tale as a trace (first published in 1928).

The First Story from the Field

Proposition 1

Arts practice is about sensemaking and nonsense-making from a particular subjective position.

The story of repairing the toilets at the playground grew from the desire to transform something that could be considered mundane into an event that I could present as both part of my PhD and part of art making. I aspired to treat the repair as a boundary object something that held a middle space. Loveless (2019:32) uses the idea of the boundary object to help to hold a middle position between disciplines. I wanted to find an action that involved thinking-making-doing that was not easy to pin down and describe as art, or

research yet was clearly part of both. This was an attempt at sensemaking and nonsense-making.

My first story starts with a blog post on the 10th of January 2019. I was yet to receive ethical approval for my research study. I had started to build a relationship with the playground that was specifically related to my PhD study. I was reading Brian Massumi's (2011) *Semblance and Event* and was taken with the idea of the singularity. The blog post holds an excitement and a knowing-naivety. At its heart is a vibrant contradiction rather than an oxymoron. I was trying to change the edges of the task of repairing the toilets at the playground through both art and philosophy and both fail in a spectacularly grotesque yet quietly endearing way.

I treat the flush tanks as sculpture and try and document them, fetishising their appearance, their dual-skinned Bakelite construction. I attempt to raise the act of fixing the toilets into an event and a speculation. It was an art act to illustrate a flight of the speculative imagination. In my blog post I am asking the reader to see the toilet repair as a landmark and a frame of reference from which to plot a route. The toilet repair was chosen as a focus as it was necessary to have working toilets for the playground to open and for the residency to continue. The toilet repair however seemed contingent on the frame of the residency.

It would not be appropriate to commission an artist in residence to repair a broken toilet, yet it is equally inappropriate to prevent an artist in residence

from repairing a toilet and encouraging an audience or reader to speculate on the potential of this repair as art. The context and writing and recording I choose to share is not part of the art event. It is a speculation⁵¹ and justification of an exploration of residency as a method.

Toilets



Figure 30: Art Image of Flush Tanks (Source: Steve Pool 01/2019)

I have been thinking and reading (Gaskill and Nocek, 2014) about Alfred North Whitehead. I was taken by his idea of flights of the speculative

⁵¹ See glossary for the use of speculation.

imagination. On a you tube clip the speaker Arthur Holmes⁵² describes the concept as like an early aviator who had to keep dropping from above the clouds to find points or landmarks to navigate by. You could use these established locations to plot a course and then you were able to fly back into the clouds.

I've done that this week with flush tanks. I went to the adventure playground where I'm intending to do my fieldwork and two out of three of the toilets were not working. I was asked if I could fix them and after careful inspection decided that both flush tanks needed replacing. They were made from thin plastic and were leaking. At this moment the heart of my PhD is contained in the concept of the 'event' where the event's edges, or lack of them, present as a singularity or perhaps a flow. This causes pragmatic problems as the idea of a project constructs its edges the things that are considered inside and outside. Thinking with the concept of the event folds these edges back in rather than creating boundaries it creates flows. There is a difficulty in deciding what is part of the event and not part of the project whether an object, a process, an artwork, a method, or a residency. Thinking with the concept of the event has helped me to see the potential for art and the language of art to be fully present within the event or at least to move towards a more connected sense of things.

[\(10\) A History of Philosophy | 61 Whitehead's Process Philosophy - YouTube](#) (22 mins 17 secs ironically there is only audio at this point the screen is blank, or a cloud descended)

Everyone (apart from me) that I describe the flush tank plumbing repair to, as an event or an action that constitutes part of the event, an unfolding, thinks I'm taking the piss. This is a good thing and for the first time in the last three months, I feel like I have really found a place to start. Something both pragmatic and speculative, the fixing of the toilet, the restoration of flow.

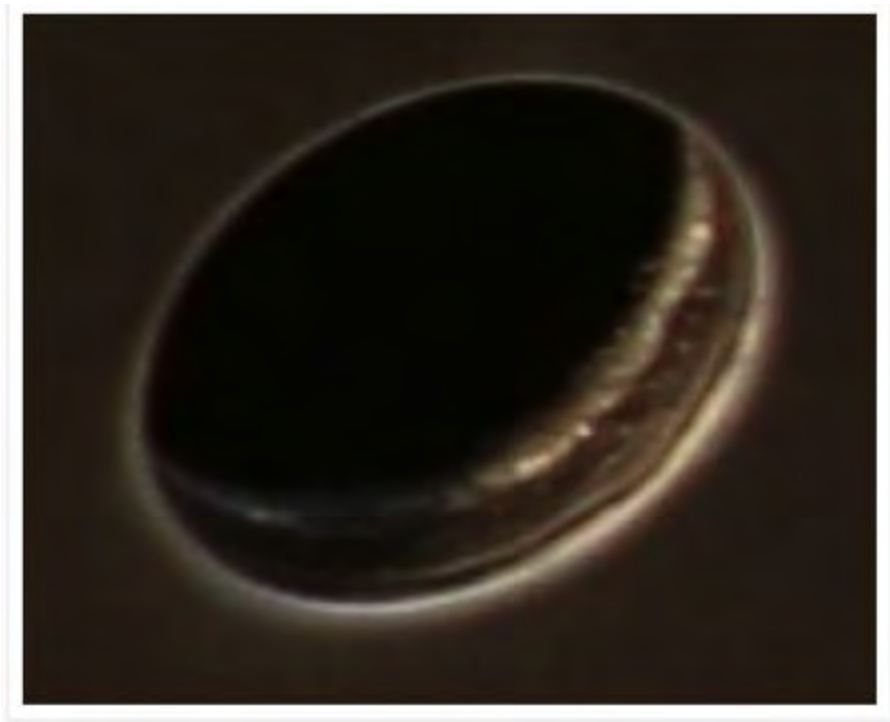


Figure 31: Finding and Photographing Detail (Source: Steve Pool 01:2019)

I started yesterday by photographing my new flush tanks. I set up my lights and did fifty-eight pictures. I tried to do mock studio photos so I could talk about mannerism, and then I did some close-ups. I knew when I started that my heart wasn't in it. I knew that if I were to use the images, as art and not kitsch I would need to do them in a studio and take them better. I wasn't photographing the cisterns as a joke, yet I was not trying to make art. I was however aware that the photographing was part of the event. When they

arrived from eBay - new old stock - I was reminded of the beauty in the detail of plumbing.

The fact that I know that in 2004, a toilet pan changed from an 8-litre flush to a 7-Litre flush to save water. I know from bitter experience only to use brass screws to fasten the cistern back to the wall, I know that after 4 years silicone sealant begins to eat into PVC pipework and leaks will appear. I remember reading Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance (Pirsig, 1999) and being surprised that it was about Zen and the art of motorcycle maintenance. Water will always find a way - you can only ever do a job if you have the skills to put right any damage that you are likely to do. The nut that holds the pipe in place will either turn or sheer, there is no middle ground.

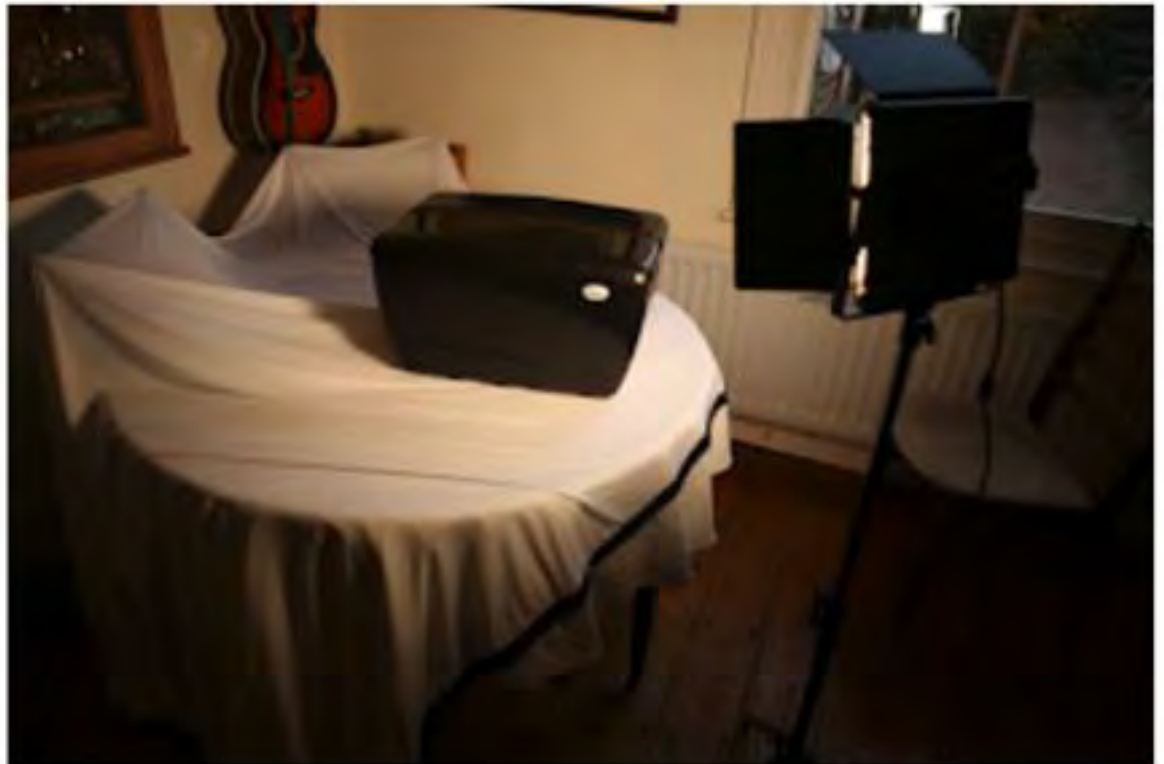


Figure 32: My Studio Set Up (Source: Steve Pool 01:2019)

Fitting the Toilets 28th Jan



Figure 33: Removing the Old Flush Tank (Source: Steve Pool 01:2019)

I fixed the toilets. It was not difficult; it would have been more of an event if I had had a flood, or a load of shit had got stuck in the pan as I hadn't set the cisterns for a 9-litre flush. When you fix something, you make a decision about how far you go, and how much you replace. Do you try and keep something going a little bit longer with a quick fix or do you just rip out all the old stuff and replace it? Often something that has worked fine for years suddenly breaks down when you put a new bit in the system. The pressure increases or some unknowable tiny change makes something that is on the edge of breaking, break. It is not the butterfly effect, the connections

between action and effect are much more localised, in fact, they all become within a single toilet cubicle. I need to talk about and articulate the issues in a clearer way - something feels like it needs mending and I'm not sure how much to replace.

End note

The mending of the flush tanks is important as it signifies an act that appears disconnected from either making art or doing research. Until this point, all my actions at the playground were justified to build relationships and trust with potential research participants. I did not need to do this on a personal level as I have a long history of working with the playground both running projects and as a volunteer. However, I did need to establish a way of working that would allow me to be an artist-in-residence but remove myself from creating identifiable art objects with young people. The playground had an established idea drawn from experience and knowledge of the community arts movement of what an artist in residence would do. This informed how they felt they should behave and the expectations of what I would deliver. They also had established expectations of their role within this relationship.

I was looking to create an event that would bring the practice of the residence into the everyday life of the playground and differentiate it from what was understood as the role of an artist in residence. Within my art practice prior to commencing a PhD study, I was attuned to the aesthetic qualities of materials and processes. For example, I have always liked the

feel of the spaces behind things, the mark a picture leaves when you remove it from the wall. The space of unpainted bricks behind the flush tank in the image above - I think of these absent spaces as inscriptions. I call this the *presence of something in its absence*. There is an element of irony in paying attention to this act of repair, there is also politics and seriousness.

Fixing the toilets references Duchamp's work *Fountain*⁵³- this upside-down urinal mounted on a gallery wall is an art history event, that opened possibilities for art. Duchamp's action proposes the Midas touch of the artist turning anything she touches, even the most mundane object, into art. The mechanisms of art with its context, its galleries and its history transform the everyday object into an artwork by removing its other everyday function. I was bringing art back into the world of usefulness by fixing a dysfunctional toilet which was never art, only broken. This work references the need for toilets and the bodily processes that go along with them. I was paying attention to what was happening in the world while searching to find somewhere for thought and practice to fit in.

I used the fixing of the toilets to formulate this proposition.

The process of repairing the toilets is part of an artistic residency.

⁵³ <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/duchamp-fountain-t07573> Famous work by Duchamp from 1919

I was looking for something that would muddle things up in relation to the edges of the work. On the day I photographed the flush tanks I felt ridiculous, I was wasting time, and I was being frivolous. The flush tanks are very sculptural, they have a clean form that holds attention, and they are vandal-proof and insulated to prevent the water in them from freezing when used outside. I placed them on a white plinth but this reference to sculpture here was too literal. I could not turn to the plinth even ironically. Such a simple signifier lacked the necessary ambiguity; it made the action transparent.

At this point in my research, I had not received ethical approval to work with participants. Perhaps if I had received full approval then things would have followed a different course. I was however working with staff and children at the playground, building dens and changing spaces. I was doing this as part of an Arts Council England-funded project called *Assembling the Bits* (Appendix 2). A working title that had somehow stuck. It is important to note that the external constraint of working within the ethical parameters of the University in relation to research created a hard boundary. A fixed territory that would determine what was possible to include as research and what made sense as a PhD study. This edge resonates throughout the rest of this study and creates its territory, it is resistant to the fold.

Second Story from the Field

Proposition 2

Arts practice follows a secret plan, this plan unfolds in the future and is not written in the present.

The plan's value lies within its opacity.

During the summer of 2019, the playground residency became central to my practice. I was aware of multiple contradictions and problems with definitions and roles. The balance between how identities are constructed from the inside and the outside began to create fault lines within my art practice. I was developing my understanding as an artist/scholar which required a different and new relationship to personal practice. I began to recognise the need for opacity and how this differed from choosing to be deliberately obscure. The concept of opacity that I encountered in Glissant's (Glissant, 1997:189) *Poetics of Relation* helped me to acknowledge the importance of recognising that some parts of what I was involved with could not be fully known and this not knowing held a power and a purpose. Glissant's work refers to the collective experience of the middle passage, the life of the plantation and what he refers to as creolisation. Glissant's conceptualisation suggests that in not rendering themselves legible or transparent to a dominating colonial Euro-western world order other hopeful and speculative futures could remain possible. I adopt parts of this thinking to better understand what I refer to as the secret plan of practice. Opacity applies to what is felt and thought as well as seen. This holding blog post is an effort to locate myself within a tradition of participatory arts practice, it is an attempt to find a place within an

authorised historical art discourse and propose my position within it. It feels important here as it marks a point of clarification in an identity that I felt was under threat and on the edge of a slippage. This post proposes a territory and a frame, perhaps the building of a stockade where once there was a hacienda as proposed by Kelly (1984) in his book *Storming the Citadels* which remains the manifesto for the community arts movement.

Holding Post 17th May



Figure 34: Building a Planter (Source: Steve Pool 06:2019)

I was trying to think of a clever title, so I wrote 'Holding Post' and then looked for ages of pictures of me holding a post at the adventure playground. I couldn't find one as I take all the pictures. On Monday, I went to a conference called the 'Failure of Participation' (Cartiere and Schrag, 2022) in

Edinburgh. At the back of my mind, I am bothered by what is called 'social practice' and in its more expansive form 'participatory practice'; I feel uncomfortable with it.

When I work as Poly-technic⁵⁴ we say that we are artists in the world, not the art world. We say this as we are not working in a validated tradition - we do not follow the notion of an institutionally formed definition of art. We see art as part of life and in turn life as part of art. This assertion is fundamentally ontological, and it makes redundant the age-old question; is it art? By refuting art as a distinct category separate from life. In this way it moves us on from the circular question of whether something is or isn't art - we leapfrog this binary as it doesn't really matter to the argument if it is or isn't.

The greatest problem of relational practice is how it can turn the abstract into the real. I use these terms, the shift from the abstract to the real to refer to a way of thinking about art that potentially turns everything into its object. For example, some social artists can speak of people as the material of their practice. When Joseph Beuys⁵⁵ coined the phrase 'social sculpture', he wasn't carving artwork out of the social space to be claimed by him as an author. The term was more that every aspect of our social space can be felt as art. Essentially utopian, Beuys offers us a totalising approach to art and life where neither is the raw material for the other. Somewhere social arts or

⁵⁴ Poly-technic is the combined social arts practice of Kate Genever and Steve Pool - we have worked together on commissioned projects since 2007 years. Poly-technic.co.uk

⁵⁵ Joseph Beuys was a conceptual artist and teacher known for producing artworks with a mystical quality. He was involved in establishing the green party as an important political force in Germany.

the social turn forgot this and tried to paint pictures with people rather than pictures of people and most of the people were not bothered or aware.

It's not easy to raise these concerns with the failure of participation in art in relation to my PhD study yet the fields are entwined.

Yesterday I was helping to make a planter with my friends at the adventure playground. I was also doing a PhD, but this cannot be counted as I do not yet have ethical approval confirmed through the university's governance on research ethics. From an ontological position of what constitutes research, the fact my research must start and stop in relation to the systems of the university reminds me of internal validation and contained logics. I am also doing a relational, participatory social artwork funded through Arts Council England around the notion of assemblage and sculpture.

It feels impossible to extract any element of anything that I am currently working on from anything else. This totalising way of thinking about the world is very seductive. It does not allow for the edges of territory to coalesce, words like transversal, plane, immanence, affect and phantasm all deny metaphysics but in the trope of metaphysical thinking.

I have never really bought into the social turn⁵⁶, I don't like making people into objects and I don't think that socially speaking, art provides good value

⁵⁶ I have worked as a socially engaged artist on multiple projects for over thirty years. At the time of writing, I was struggling with how the social turn did not to a large extent consider what had gone before. This includes the community arts movement and the principles cultural of cultural democracy. I make this statement in relation to my personal arts practice not as a general critique of the field.

for money in terms of delivering social change. The failure of participation is not my failure, but I enjoyed the conference. Art aspires for things it is unable to achieve. This is more than ambitions and endeavour; it is blatant self-aggrandisement and a deceit. The transformative power of the arts always neglects to consider what is being transformed into what. For example, the sad people into happy people? People who present a risk into people who are no risk. The fat into the thin and the thick into the clever? The failure at the heart of things feels like the people who want art to be seen as useless and for its own sake, autotelic to use a more academic term, also want art to have enormous agency. There is a contradiction at the heart of things and in the hearts of people. It is lucky that most of us don't care.

I think I have something to say about the edges of things and that's where the reading is drawing me. I feel that the edges of disciplines and the edges of the world are talked about a lot but rarely articulated well through any knowledge-producing practice. There is lots of work about the liminal and the edge-lands and the spaces between. There is also lots of work about totalising ways of thinking.

I like this messy post, somewhere in it when I look back in the future, I will see a struggle that at a later point I will work through better - it is a good mess of a holding post that requires a screen print to finish on.

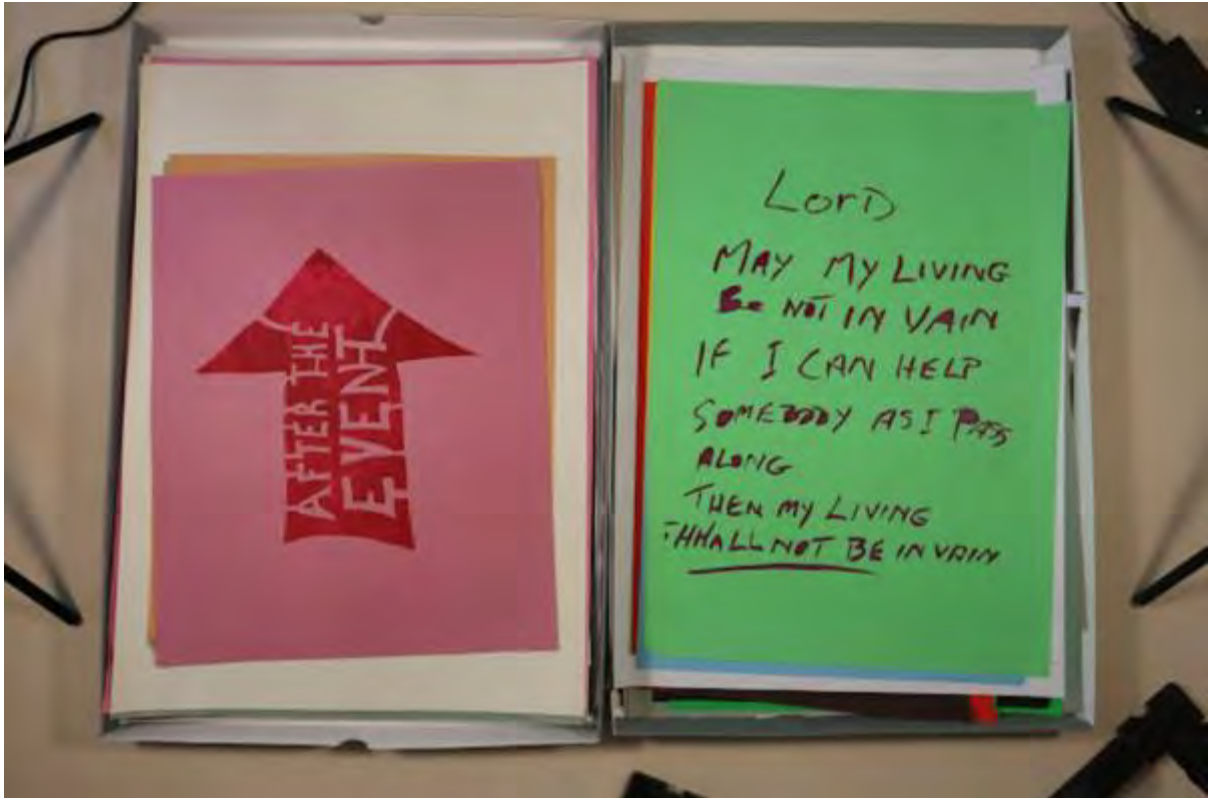


Figure 35: Screen Prints After the Event: (Source Steve Pool from work as poly-technic 08:2028)

End Note

I was coming to terms with the shift that was needed to move from making participatory art to doing research. Although the issue was not resolved I was becoming uncomfortable with how the research was changing how I felt I could work. Within my participatory arts practice, I had developed an opaque and reluctant yet embodied, rational, and unwritten set of principles⁵⁷. A tacit knowledge of the direction of the work, a line of practice that connected everything to a singular creative-event. I would bring this

⁵⁷ The poly-technic does have a manifesto that can be found here [Manifesto | Poly-Technic](#)

approach to research projects, to my commissions, and to participatory arts practice. Best described as an invisible ongoing feeling it had become an essential element of making sense of things and providing movement. I was always happy for it to be part of something else as I wasn't aware of it in the conscious sense of awareness. It would hold its form and make sense of why I was doing something. It was something I only really became aware of when it was absent.

This story marks a shift in a territory where an old way of working that had until this point remained opaque became visible and therefore required attention. I could no longer use art and personal practice to make sense of doing research. This story does not make a proposition, it marks an edge.

Third Story from the Field

Proposition 3



Figure 36: Platform nearing completion (Source: Steve Pool 11:2020)

The third core proposition for this study is an image of a platform I built to encourage loose parts play at the adventure playground. It is difficult to respond to this image in written text, yet the platform makes a proposition all the same. The building of the platform began shortly after my mid-point review meeting it presents a taking back of space and a building of a territory. In some ways, it provides a response to the first two propositions, it grew into the future from an opaque practice that formed part of a secret plan.

I end this chapter with another intervention where the field expanded and then quickly shrank. There is a point of transition from one way of working to another.

It is impossible to extract the formal PhD process from the actual experience of performing an artist scholar identity within a university education department. My progression review meeting at the end of year two is a marker that pulls me back to the reality of where I was and how much there was left to do.

I tried to talk about mending the flush tanks as part of an art event. I am not sure if I was able to do the idea justice, though it did make sense to me at the time. I was aware that there was a certain quality to how the academics within my department experienced and valued art. Art was created in an image that was useful, something that offered difference, it is affective, ethereal, temporal, aesthetically playful and engages with and opens spaces

for further dialogue. I was not in any way trying to shock or make an anti-art statement I was merely trying to propose the possibilities of what happens if mending toilets is considered part of an artist's residency.

What does it do?

What does it say?

Are there any actions that I can put in place that will legitimise this repair as both art and research?

As my interrogation continued, I talked about ethnography and fieldnotes and learning to dwell. I did not talk about practice or opacity; I was not prepared to offer this concept up for critique and integration as I felt this was the point of it. I could not give the review panel what they wanted.

I got a good battering at the meeting; this did not make going forward any easier. I could not explain why I was keeping something close to my chest, I felt like everyone in the room was waiting for the grand reveal. In the progression document, I had to repair, I replaced the mending of the toilets with a nice image of coloured tissue paper and a picture of an early Picasso assemblage piece. This act was cynical and ironic, and nobody seemed to notice so I carried on. I was allowed to progress to the next year of study. I told everyone who would listen that I would concentrate on feminist new

materialism and refrain from mixing my metaphors and telling jokes about my flat ontology.

My Review Meeting

The biggest thought is how the writing has helped the thinking move on and how the writing has become about making something new. It holds the struggle of the year.

Art is not a philosophy or a concept in the true sense nor is it a method or a methodology. It is something that wriggles away from capture. The review process feels like moving back to art, not in a 'to the barricades' defensive way as if I have been threatened, but more in a loving way as if my old friend has come to walk with me for a while. To walk out of friendship rather than duty or loneliness.

I have ended up at a crossroad and feel like I need to quote Ruskin – he is in my PhD for this reason as he was a thinker who understood the artists of his day. Better I think, than Deleuze or Lacan as they created art and the artist in the image of their own desire or drive, the artists of the gap and the void. Ruskin gives us the artists in full flight, in the lofty mountains of the alps, Tintoretto's rapture or the cold Gothic beauty of a northern cathedral.

'And nothing is ever taken seriously or as it is meant but always, if it may be, turned the wrong way, and misunderstood; and while this is

so, there is not, nor cannot be, any hope of achievement of high things; men dare not open their hearts to us, if we are to broil them on a thorn-fire.'

John Ruskin *Modern Painters, Volume 2* (Ruskin, 1880)

This indeed is the point as I have had my heart broiled on a thorn fire. The fears, the fast-rampaging flames crackling all around, yet my heart slowly cooks in a pan of congealing ontological stew. Ruskin is in my progression because of his difficulty; I am told that we need to stay with the difficulty. My problem is one of capitulation, I am aware of what it is thought I should do with my work, I am aware of its logic and its neatness, the course of least resistance. Yet I am at a point of refusal, and I am not sure where to locate the stoppage. As Ruskin tells us, nothing is ever taken seriously or how it is meant but always turned the wrong way: and misunderstood.

I found this image in a sketchbook from 1984 - it is part of the artists way - it is what we bring in all our difficulties and it does not flatten well.

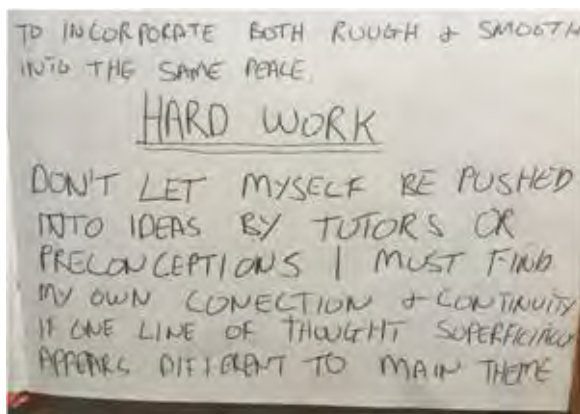


Figure 37: Sketch Book (Source art foundation 1984)



Figure 38: Plasticine Vegetables made in Workshop at Science Museum sleepover with Richard Wentworth (Source: Steve Pool 2016)

- 1. In the end I am doing a PhD and although I can mess with the edges, I need to make what I write into something that can be marked as a PhD.*
- 2. The conception of knowledge at the university is not like that outside the university. It is faith-based in that it believes in itself.*
- 3. This is not an opportunity to be honest or to perform - the path is somewhere in the middle.*
- 4. Everything you read you forget.*

5. *It is easier to represent a green bean than Lollo Rosso⁵⁸. Sometimes the best thing to do is take the easy option.*

6. *The best writing, like the best walk, ends up where it sets off. Dad doesn't always have to run back to get the car.*

When you try to be an artist the drive to realise your ideas becomes a big part of who you are. The motivation for the work, the priority, is to hold it together against multiple forces, a subjective position dispersed across ecologies is difficult⁵⁹.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I explore the three core propositions for this thesis in relation to events that present significant points of change. I use my writing from historic blog posts and to revisit specific moments that hold the affective charge and poetic nature of my thinking-making-doing. As an introduction, I turn to the developmental stages of my study and consider my position as an artist with a strong sense of coherent personal practice. In my first story from the field, I respond to core proposition one, which concerns sense-making and nonsense-making in relation to the secret plan of practice. I tell the story

⁵⁸ Lollo Rosso is a red leafed lettuce that I had attempted to model in plasticene shown the image:40.

⁵⁹ Bold text in the original blog post.

of fixing the toilets at the adventure playground and present this action as a boundary object and thought experiment that sits between making art and doing research. I explain how this became problematic as the idea became overworked and over-explained.

The second story from the field begins with a discussion of opacity and how it relates to power when making art. The story illustrates my struggle with participatory arts practice as an approach and how my work as an artist/scholar within my playground residency evolved as something different that no longer made sense within this context. This story aims to give some insight into the idea of a secret plan of practice that is introduced in proposition two.

The final tale responds to the third core proposition. An image of the completed play platform or tree house. It gives an account of the collision of thinking-making-doing to the structures and expectations of successfully completing a PhD within my university department. It explores the crises of confidence that I encountered at my progression review meeting as a threat to my practice and problematic in relation to any continuity of sense-making or finding my way. It responds to proposition three as the desire to build the platform structure emerged from this threat and encounter. The need to build something solid into the world. This chapter aims to tell stories that make a *newsense* of specific events and acts and draw them into an expanded field of my opaque secret plan. It can only be partially successful.

Chapter 6: Things That Came up in the Middle

In this chapter, I will further explore the three core propositions that underpin this study by presenting examples of what Manning and Massumi (2014) identify as thought-in-the-act. Each story revolves around an encounter with the material world and expanded ideas of art and research. The intention is not to draw direct parallels or attempt to provide examples, or applications: the stories are prehensions, telling tales and speculations about what a body and mind are capable of.

I give five examples that have gained significance over time they are part of the ravelling of this study. I place them here as they do not fit well anywhere else. I remember a conversation with a bin man about the rubbish that sticks to the bottom of the dustbin. He described how he would hit the bin three times with a clenched fist, if this did not shift the last bits then no amount of extra banging would move them; they were staying put. These events are sticky, they form part of the coiled and knotted ravelling, they are the snags, bits to be left in or worked around as the tangle is too dense to tease out. It is now impossible to find a loose end, a place to start, and it is this tangle that holds these stories in the middle. Maggie MacLure (2013) describes the things that stand out in research as data that glows. These stories are like sticky toxic radioactive waste with an indefinite half-life. In their own way, they glow and shine a slanted light that partially illuminates a changing landscape. They are stuck fast; however hard we bash the bottom of the bin. I edit and re-write texts extracted from my blog and provide a short commentary; I do this to capture the essence of the time that holds thoughts

in the action. I have selected moments that mark the start of ideas and the development of concepts. The blog extracts link them to a timeline, but this is not to suggest they emerged as an unbroken line, though there is progression. I do not present anything as complete they are simply fragments of my thinking that shape this study. They are not fully thought through or connected in explicit ways to the research field or my experiments in research-creation. They are some of the moments that glow brighter than other moments and so demanded inclusion in the middle.

Event One – Covid

The first event marks two key realisations. The imposition of edges by events beyond my control, and the realisation that for my PhD study to be of value I needed to fully embrace the concept of working in the middle of thinking-making-doing. I recognised that just building a platform, a space for play to happen, was not, in the *newsense* of a PhD study, enough. At this point the lack of a way forward, a concept or approach was constituted as present by its absence, by the holding space it left. I began to take the thinking-making-doing of research-creation more seriously in the search for a way forward. The concepts of the frame and the edge and the fold became central to my thinking as I struggled to make sense of things in the time of Covid restrictions.

The Machine Stops

Blog Extract: 9 March, 2020



Figure: 39 *In the Darkness* (Source: Steve Pool 03:2020)

A recurring theme or refrain that runs through my art practice is the potential for something to be represented through its absence. The empty chair at the dinner table, the missing letters in the sign above a shop, the worn corners on a piece of wood caused by the friction of children's hands. The absence proposes what was there. Yet also presents the possibility of something different, a speculative line of flight.

I have no fieldnotes or blog posts from lockdown, the time of building the platform, nothing on paper to track my actions or locate me at the playground within my time of exile. I built the platform mainly on my own, officially as a volunteer and I worked only when this complied with the national and local lockdown rules. My university demanded a moratorium on any face-to-face

research, and this established a defining edge, a cut-off point, what was possible to include as part of my study and what was not. The internally constructed territory of practice was defined by new boundaries that could not be officially folded into the mix.

I remember the relief of stopping my residency at the playground due to the first Covid lockdown. I was pleased to be able to step away for a while and conscious that I would learn something about limits through having a hard cut imposed from the outside. The playground was closed for ten weeks; we were only allowed out of our houses for an hour a day for exercise. I began to read more closely as this was all I could do. My final act at the playground was to clear a space to build the loose parts platform. It was an unused space where the children didn't go, a place of possibilities. I cleared brambles and gauze bushes and tried to imagine the space differently. I read 'The Machine Stops' by E M Forster (2021 originally 1909)

This enforced break was the point where the idea of territory became more central to the study. I could no longer propose that my practice was fully opaque, that it was something singular that could not be traded in or brought to research. This former constructed position stopped making any sense. The gap that was constituted by my inability to continue to work at the playground and build play equipment for children to play on, brought into focus the need for the work to become hybrid, to bring together thinking-making-doing. To try and work out how to do research-creation in the world.

Event 2: A trip to the Allotments (New)sense and madness

As the national lockdown extended, I began to read ‘*A Thousand Plateaus*’ and became absorbed in working and building at the playground. In this time, I felt I was living on the edge of chaos. The work was valuable, yet my blog posts have an edgy hint of madness. It is impossible to ignore this period, to write it out of my study as though it didn’t happen. Yet it is impossible to comment on it from the outside, the position of the now. During this time, I developed the concept of the ravelling, the idea of *newsense* (see Glossary) and challenged my understanding of a fixed identity through the concept of the Body Without Organs. I struggled with being a real artist to the extent that, I had to stop the struggle to remain a person, a body with organs. It was good to get to the other side of what I was going through, a difficult time to bring to writing. It lives as part of this work and sits uncomfortably in the middle space.

Blog Extract: 7th June 2020

Glissant and Deleuze are Shadows



Figure 40: Allotment Door (Source: Steve Pool 06:2020)

"She ended up knowing so much that she could no longer interpret anything. There are no longer shadows to help her see more clearly, only glare. (Henry James ⁶⁰in Deleuze and Guattari) (1995: 218)

I feel like I am coming to the end of something. I am a becoming chrysalis. Not a butterfly but the genetic soup that can still twitch the cocoon from the

⁶⁰ Reference to Henry James book 'In the Cage' about a telegraphist who becomes obsessed with hidden codes.

inside. Like the flex of a liquid muscle. Reading Glissant and Deleuze and Guattari on a morning and flopping around in the afternoon, writing fragments - six sentences at a time, like getting blood out of a stone. Playing games of online poker with mental excuses running through my mind like the telecast used by a news presenter. The weeks are all rolling together. The grass needs cutting, something different needs to happen.

The biggest thoughts of the week,

What is it for something to be opaque?

Why does Deleuze think it so important to prick the life of the world with a pointed drill?

How smooth and striated space functions to hold back the chaos (the thinking of them together and then holding this).

How the encounter with art; when it is new (for the academic with plexiglass and coloured oils or ink and white paper) is something different to those of us who spend a life submerged in the flow of it. For good or bad.

I thought again of the intermedial,⁶¹ Fluxus raises her ugly head. Working with unfixed forms or forms that are matter out of place in contexts like

⁶¹ Dick Higgins co-founder of Fluxus restored the term intermedia to in The unconventional publication Something Else Press (Poggenpohl, 2019) he uses it to suggest the potential of the liminal and space between media to develop new propositions for culture.

research, or schools, or playgrounds.

The art world is striated space - culture is capital and relative. There is a base and a superstructure.

Glissant writes of the opaque and Deleuze and Guattari write of facialisation⁶². They say to become a body without organs is dangerous and we should move gently into this valley. They tell us the tool needed is a file and not a hammer but still ask us to stitch up all our holes, our mouths and anuses and cut new ones. The cutting is extreme the Body without Organs is a set of Punctum⁶³ and ruptures.

Artaud coins the phrase, but he is mad - he owns a walking stick that belongs to St Patrick, to Jesus, and the Devil and goes to Ireland, to Galway, to return it to all three. This detour was a reminder of the stories that carry us away - I lost my great-grandad's walking stick because I had too many sticks and it got muddled. I was supposed to be looking after it as it connected to his hand as an extension of his body. Perhaps the lost walking stick of my great-grandad Jack is a body without organs. I have nowhere to return it to, that is now and here.

I'm lost in music, caught in a trap, there is no turning back. Vaguely as I read

⁶² Chapter 7 of 'A Thousand Plateaus' is called Year Zero: faciality It links to the concept of opacity in that they suggest a disintegration of the face and the self to become imperceptible. I use it here to demonstrate the depth of my fall into thinking-making doing.

⁶³ The Punctum of an image is taken From Roland Barthes 'Camera Lucida' which he defines as the sensory, intensely subjective effect of a photograph on its viewer.

on and find my organs receding, I am wondering if I am less afraid of dying as I am dismantled in my oneness. I hope this is the point of the effort, to be less frightened of my own death would be a result in terms of the difficulty of the journey.

I'm also working through an idea that the reason I couldn't make any work in my workshop was that it is separate from the world I work in - removed from the actual sites of practice. This is not a bad thing but making an artwork currently makes no sense or is a (new)sense⁶⁴ - the term I'm coining along with other words I'm coining.

Afterword. The idea of performing artist is on my mind. Judith Butler⁶⁵ says that you perform who you are within the subjectivity of time and that rather than being an artist you are being being an artist (or not). So, I'm performing being an artist by making art and referencing art - I'm turning an inflatable aubergine into a bean. I am referencing a piece of work called 'The Negative Meaning Wears the Trousers'⁶⁶, I am both silly and clever I am being a bean and performing being being an artist at the same time. It is and is not my masterpiece. It is one of the silliest things I have bothered investing my time in. It is how I feel - the work is too clever for its own good and too

⁶⁴ This is the first time I use the term *newsense*, the new is bracketed here, later I decide to make up a new word and do not use brackets.

⁶⁵ I do not cite here as I use this blog as an example of what felt like a decent into chaos, the Butler reference here came from watching Zizek seminars on YouTube it does not feel appropriate to reference a specific paper or the actual seminar.

⁶⁶ ['Trouser - Word Piece', Keith Arnatt, 1972, printed 1989 | Tate](#)

silly to be taken seriously. Why is language so full of homophones if its intention is to make sense and not a (new)sense of itself.

Event 3: The Scream of a Tin Roof

The moment that the roof started screaming brought many things into focus. The event had an immediacy. It was an enunciation in that it presented two very different things coming together. I had accommodated the living oak tree into the design but had not taken account of its needs. This relates to thinking and making. I was thinking difference with Deleuze and Guattari and coming back to earth trying to layer these thoughts into making. When I tried to create an event that would accommodate both art and life a fault line and a disjuncture manifested. To hold onto the thing itself I needed to take a break from the world of thinking and be in the making so as to let the making and the ravelling of the creative-event shape a *life*. This marks a true return to practice, where the making of something new is the coming together of all the parts. Not so much a mixing or a combination but the part of a *life* that should never make it to a written text. I had forgotten how to flow into the making and this loud rebuttal was an enunciation of the axiomatic, insisting on attention. This is a return to the circle, the pushing things together that struggle to fit, the making and the thinking, the art and the research, the living tree and the man-made structure. It is about giving things enough space to accommodate each other.

Blog Extract July 20, 2020

An Oak Tree



Figure 41: Tree Scaping on Roof (Source: Steve Pool 2020)

I worked out I hadn't left enough room for the tree to move, and it was making a terrible noise in wind – metal against the bark. For a moment the metaphor and the reality glowed with an abstract intensity heightened by the obscurity of its origin. I had made something rigid and fixed in concrete foundations married with something that was flexible, full of fibre and sap. I have watched tree bows move in the wind and instructed by John Ruskin (1869) in his 'Elements of Drawing', attempted to capture in pencil the spaces between the bows rather than the things themselves. I know enough about trees to have not made an error in the measurement of gaps. The noise amplified by the diaphragm of the tin roof created an ugly screeching that seemed to condense in my ears. The obvious cause of the discord took a while to recognise – I wonder if this is the axiomatic – the clear and transparent cause of something that remained unsure but ever-present. I

had given the static branch a good 40 mm of clearance to allow for annual growth but not for immediate movement. In the moment of realising my mistake, when I un-ironically twigged what was going on, I noticed a moment's lag in the real thing happening and its potential for entering the space of writing. For an instance, the actual thing was a thing with meaning, it was what I can best describe as a pre-metaphor, a gasp, a scream, a groan. Two materials and thoughts animated by the wind cause discord. Meaning is held in a moment before entering a system of signs, all that it needs is the refrain and the breeze on the face that anticipates an enunciation. A non-human scream of two things forced to work together where the closeness is painful and destructive to both.

Event 4: Rusty Nails

Rusty nails marking a table can be seen as art because they do not serve any other purpose. There is something intentional about their arrangement and then the waiting for the rain. This is arts playfulness that fell from the edges. This is the kind of art that is concerned with aesthetics but can only happen because of something else. It is an example of how something changes if it is forced into focus and loses its accidental nature. It is this nature which makes it interesting. This is one of the problems I've encountered bringing art to research, the more we try to hold onto the more we lose.

Blog Extract: 9 March 2020

Ambiguity



Figure 42: Marks Left by Rusting Nails (Source: Steve Pool 08:2020)

Blog Post: 13th August 2020

Most people would probably not see the marks that the nails left on the table as serious art or art at all but that doesn't matter as I can call them artwork with a level of clarity and certainty. Making a giant territorial platform for loose parts play to take place on is much more ambiguous. For most people it is clear what it is, an area, a summer house, shade, shelter, storage, a frame, a ground, a surface, the thing that comes before art, perhaps at best the stretching of a canvas.

So, it is not its failure to be art or its queering of arts definitions or anything fuzzy that is important, it is a deliberate striving for ambiguity neither one thing nor another and importantly not in a process of becoming one or the other. Some objects can live with ambiguity.



Figure 43: View from the Roof (Source Steve Pool 10:2020)

Event 5: The last or penultimate bull print

And the sweat from my back makes a print of a bull's head with horns on the kitchen floor. I am presented with something from outside it is impossible to ignore, that drives itself into the thinking-making-doing and becomes part of the ravelling of the creative-event. The edge of the platform moves through my body and bleeds into the image of a bull, a becoming Picasso

representing art, work, and residues. The platform is not finished it flows into the world.

In Proposition 17 “Explore New Economies of relation” of their manifesto for research-creation Manning and Massumi discuss limits and thresholds. They use an example of lastness (2014:125) from Deleuze and Guattari concerning the impossibility of an alcoholic’s final drink. They suggest it is only possible to consume the penultimate drink as the last one marks a change and transition into something else. The blog post that follows recognises a threshold and the danger of becoming something different. This was not to be the final bull print but like the other blog references here it marks a transition and a limit. I will return to this sense of loss, thresholds, and acceptance in the next chapter.

Blog post: June 30th, 2020

Bull Print



Figure 44: Sweat Making the Sign of the Bull (Source Steve Pool 10:2020)

I am like the alcoholic artist giving up everything that makes me an artist, the art object, the internal codes, and the attempt to communicate them. The deep long-term relationship to a tradition and the questioning and erosion through instrumentalism of all those traditions. This is the denying art three times in the garden before the cock crows. The dissolving of the subjective position into an over-expanded field. The denial of the gallery or critically engaged discourse of other artists. The taking on the mantle of researcher,

ethnographer, of PhD student, community worker of play worker, activist, or avatar.

This is a liturgy of de-territorialisation of assaults and over-coding. The point is to come to a threshold so that a territory is visible; to come to the brink of something different. The last glass of rum before death or oblivion and then to make sure that what is left is not located in the false notion of an independent internalized subjective self. Laid bare and open with its back to the machinic machine; its life in proximity to the void, two holes for eyes and a chasm for a mouth.

And then a re-coding within a written text, a writing of a new territory that is supposed to make sense of things. My future self already looking back on this writing in the thickness of the now, can see a rite of passage and a getting to the end of the book - the last book or the penultimate book. Was it lock down or was it a mini episode? What was I thinking when I got obsessed with the sweat from my back making the face of a bull on the kitchen floor? The artist asserting an unassailable territory or the threshold of something else. The last or the penultimate bull print?

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have drawn from my blog to tell stories from my residency at the adventure playground that present moments of change. All the posts are from a 3-month period when the country was in lockdown due to the Covid 19 pandemic and I was reading *A Thousand Plateaus* (Deleuze and Guattari,

1995). The five stories illustrate facets of the thinking-making-doing of the creative-event. I present them here in the penultimate chapter of this study as I feel they offer an insight into the affective space of the work. They are offered as a gap filler to point towards something absent, the constituted gap of the practice that cannot be fully represented in writing.

The aim is to suggest a flow of thoughts that run through experiences to help to connect with the affective nature of what it is to be in residence. Each story contains an aspect of thinking-making-doing. The first introduces the Covid 19 pandemic and its impact on how we were able to live within the material world. The second is a trip to the local allotments where a shadow is cast on an old door painted long ago in the colours of the Jamaican flag. This blog extract feels manic and disjointed as it references multiple concepts and ideas from Glissant and Deleuze and Guattari I include it here as it marks an edge and a descent into hyper-chaos it provides an instance of *newsense* at work. The third story is included as a reminder of forcing things together that may not fit, it is not intended as a simile or metaphor it simply recounts something that happened. Story four is an aside and points to a minor moment when an embedded arts practice appeared at the edge, the beauty in the everyday and the impossibility to ignore or explain aesthetic connections. The penultimate bull print is an attempt to talk about lastness and transition. These stories are offered as a portmanteau they are in conversation and their combined meaning is hopefully just out of reach.

Chapter 7: Building the Platform

Making a ravelling

Everything stopped, and the space within the event that felt in process and emerging began to slip away. The space was held in the flow of the events becoming, it was never flat always persistently bumpy, every part was in flux. The event was manifested and as such made its own sense, carrying everything forward. There was no inside or outside, it felt like everything all at once together, singular, like a fully inhaled breath. It felt right, not an assured right in the sense of a clear direction, but fecund and dispersed, rich with propositions and vital becoming potentials.

Then it collapsed. The softness of the edges between life's lived ecologies hardened and territory was marked out by rules and regulations and habits. Masks that hid our faces, degrees of separation that became more than two metres. All our relations were put at a distance. The smooth space became striated, nomadic thoughts could not wander across an ecology of planes. Ideas lost their magic. It was difficult to accept that the machine had stopped, so I kept going. The day looked the same, time was slower but still advancing. At that moment the external forces of national law, university policy, personal safety and fear of death burst the bubble, replacing it with a cage. Everything was prepared but nothing was allowed. I could not continue with my PhD in the form that I had anticipated. This was a minor difficulty as in the bigger scheme of things it started not to matter, the mattering fell away. Looking backwards from after the event everything had brought me to

this point of crisis. Covid was only one of the many straws weighing down the camel's back.

When everything stopped, I became overwhelmed by a need to make something real. To bring something new into the world. To build something separate that made a *newsense* and in so doing find something I could value. I needed a reason to move, to keep going, to surprise myself with what was possible. The I and the me became important; the first person reared their ugly heads. What follows is a grappling with my emotions, thoughts and feelings and an effort to make a *newsense* of events that were beyond any personal control. I hope that it enunciates or announces an instance and example of research-creation at work in the world. At the very least it is an attempt to work with research-creation to uncover something in a minor way from deep inside the ravelling. Within this hopeful writing, is the belief that through engaging with research-creation as an idea, as thought in the act, I can break some of my habits in art.

Becket tells us that habit is the chain that attaches the dog to his vomit. In *What is Philosophy* (2008:164) Deleuze and Guattari suggest that art must first overcome opinion. To do this it must cut a hole in the firmament/umbrella to let the light in. In my own minor way, I am working with no grand plan but an intention to cut through my habits and illuminate a journey as a creative-event. My ambition is to make art within a practice and bring this to research. I am a becoming dog chained to my vomit, a nomad, an artist of no fixed abode, a vagabond looking for a platform.

I do not know, or rather cannot articulate in writing, why I had an overwhelming feeling that this was necessary. This turn to making and shaping and building comes in the middle space of this study which is not fully attached to the start or the finish. This is a time of building a platform where the material structure itself became a proposition. A proposition that will never come fully to words. This is the point of it, this unwritten proposition drives things forward. It is carried into the text that follows as essential to creating *newsense* and to the *ravelling*. The platform, built in the corner of an adventure playground, affording opportunities for play and interaction is the *ravelling*. Not its representation in image or text. It is in and of itself the proposition for this piece of research-creation. The text is an attempt, as good as I can manage, to get close to this proposition, yet all writing is representation. I introduce my concept of *a ravelling* concerning *newsense*. I follow the instruction of Deleuze and Guattari (2008:16) and make myself part of the business of philosophy, which they define as the development of new concepts. I do this in the middle space of making doing and living. The text that follows is not easy, it looks for neither clarity nor sense. It is written as a *ravelling*, my experiment in research-creation as anti-method. What I have written before in this study generates the edges that create a middle to write this text from. Take it or leave it.

An experiment in research-creation

The idea to build a platform as part of my residency came to me in an instance and made complete sense. I remember it as a single moment of inspiration that emerged slowly. The moment of inception must be all at once as this identifies it as art and therefore part of a practice. I was sitting at the playground; it was the tail end of summer. I was waiting for a clever idea, I always worry that the idea will not come, and this often gives me psychosomatic toothache. A singular muse drifted into view, it emerged from the ever-growing problem of finding the edge of anything. I embarked on the making with commitment and a knowing irony, although my tongue was never fully in my cheek. I accepted that in the literal building of a physical territory, an object/thing/artefact, in space I was making a physical metaphor. Bringing it to the world. It would represent the struggle of holding a place within the chaos, of holding chaos at bay. I was lost within complexity and needed to start with something simple. Not to make things simple but to simply start somewhere.



Figure 45: Building Platform 1 (Source Steve Pool 03:2020)

It starts with a practical explanation that presents the reduction of an opaque practice to reasons. Not all the reasons can be written, the reasons that are absent are constituted by the gaps, formed by the spaces that are held open by an absence. Important things cannot be represented here. I will try to get as close to them as I can, you will need to find the time to bear with me or take a step to the side.

And I jump: -

I will explain the secret plan that was not yet in my head. The becoming plan that was an anticipation of what was always to come. The plan that existed in the future moment but was not started in or extended from the present moment. This is what I mean when I say a ravelling, the coming together of

things in a future space. A travelling is not a new concept it is a thinking tool to help me bring thoughts to writing, for the sake of insight and not explanation.

The platform is a territory, a material thing in space, children now call it the treehouse, they have adopted it as part of their play space, their childhood, and their memories. It is the centre of a PhD study, of childhood games, of my current writing. It is a territory in the world, it asserts itself and has a reach. Perhaps it has gravity. In this chapter alongside images that represent its' becoming I will pay some attention to the importance of the frame, the edge, the fold and the act of building something into the world with your hands.



Figure 46: Working Hands (Source Steve Pool 02:2020)

And I jump: -

Talk of Spinoza and the idea that we do not know what a body or a mind are capable of.

Talk of Deleuze and Guattari and their multiple concepts that helped me to cope better with death.

Talk of the state war machine of capture and explain why the building of the platform resists capitalism.

Talk poetically about art, life, and the weakness of the ageing body.

Demonstrate that I have unravelled reading, writing, and thinking and in so doing become something new.

There are things, there are thoughts, there are actions and there is change. This is what I mean by a *ravelling*. Art got all unravelled up and lost its way. Therefore, I needed to build a platform, to stand on, to make on, to sit on and drink tea from a thermos flask. I needed to enunciate something new into the world, object/thought/action/event. Perhaps not art, perhaps many things all at once. Something that can be written as a *ravelling* and not an unravelling. A thing and not a representation of a thing, itself and not something else. The platform, the thinking, the making, the dwelling, the importance of the frame and the folding of the edges are mine. In the world before, where I was a self-identified artist and not becoming artist/scholar this writing down of the *ravelling* would be unnecessary. The *ravelling* would be present but unacknowledged. The plan would be secret and nobody cared. This is the crux of the issue in bringing feelings to writing. Art resists chaos in its own way, art unleashed is resistance and it is reluctant to be captured. Writing and much academic work that follows method are machines of capture. Art, like many animals, can live in a zoo but it does not breed well in captivity.



Figure 47: Building Platform 2 (Source: Steve Pool 06:2020)

Before the first lockdown, we decided on a location for the loose parts play platform. I asked four architecture students to walk around the playground each becoming the corner of a square. They carried orange string and when they found themselves in a potential location would pull it taught. This was the sketch of the first frame. The place in the image above, at the back behind the zip wire, was then a becoming bramble patch. In 2005, I had made a pathway and built a tower at the highest corner that overlooked the whole playground. I described it as a World War Two watch tower. It had a space underneath that made a good, enclosed den. I once found beer cans, used syringes and human shit in there and had to clean it up. Something

does not have to be relevant to be important. Eventually, some kids burnt the tower down, we used to have a lot more fires especially if we had made something new. The archaeological traces of the path were still there, an old telegraph pole and some rotten half-buried timbers. Only the concrete foundations of the old watch tower survived, nobody at the playground remembered it as it predated all the current staff and kids. I remembered the view from the top looking into the distance and thinking how green the city looked when you were high up.

I had no plans or drawings; I was reading 'A Thousand Plateaus' and was taken with the concept of smooth space and the nomad.

And I jump: -

There is a discussion of the journeyman and the Gothic (Deleuze and Guattari, 1994:400) in the treatise on nomadology that resonates with my reading of John Ruskin's (1854) The Nature of Gothic. I understood this to mean that there is a big difference between making something from a plan and allowing something to grow from what is to hand. An example is a Gothic cathedral where the scale of these buildings is used to force the point. The materials talk back to the maker and inform their use, this works to create something new, not even present in the futures mind's eye, becoming from a ravelling of relations. It is proposed that the Gothic cathedrals grew and were not fully designed and shaped in representation before they were built. They became through dwelling in the moment of their construction. The

Gothic cathedral is used to open thoughts on smooth and striated space. The space of the nomad and the royal science, the war machine, and the state's machines of capture. Ruskin believed that architects with their royal science and detailed plans had never surpassed the achievements of the great Gothic builders in magnificent scale and rude detail. Deleuze and Guattari find something similar within the Gothic, a ready reckoning relationship to space and building that is not fixed and decided in the present. It cannot be held in semblance in AutoCAD plan or detailed drawing on parchment. It is the Gothic relationship to smooth space that I ravel into the mix of my building. I dwell with the work in all its relations, using my body as a measure and marking things in chalk on the floor. Using my spit instead of a pencil to locate where to drill holes.

I had a thought in my mind's eye that concerned the meaning associated with a tree house. I remember the family home, built in the jungle in the old pre-war Tarzan films. The ones starring Maureen O'Sullivan as Jane, Johnny Weissmuller as Tarzan, and Johnny Sheffield as Boy. I had always liked the improvised house built from timbers from a shipwreck in a Swiss Family Robinson. All the mod-cons and gadgets of a modern kitchen are replicated from shells and beach ephemera. Both these houses are built far from modernity, and both manage to shape nature to support human needs. An elephant attached to pulley powers a lift into the trees, coconut shells become bowls, seashells the cutting edge of saws. The house can work within the fantasy of film but would never make the cut in the reality of abandonment to nature. I am drawn to an escape to the wilderness, the

deserted island, the deep jungle, the post-apocalypse, Zombie or otherwise. I find hope in the creation through human ingenuity of the comforts of home, against all odds. This is part of the *ravelling*, of the forward dreaming of the loose play platform. The lost island, the hidden forest, the place where rules are changed because no rules can be policed. The potential utopia of the far away. The streams of the warm winds of home are generated through building something new, separate, and self-contained. The home that can be open to the elements yet affords safety and protection are part of the *ravelling*. Tarzan is an English lord cast adrift and raised by apes. Romulus and Remus are close to nature, the becoming dog, and the wolfman flow into the secret plan. But only on the edges.

Is this Guattari's (1995) concept of the nomad or becoming an animal or both? Nothing is equal but everything is there. The nomad wanders and wanders, the artist wanders, and wanders. In the *ravelling* of the secret plan, we do not pay attention to the colonial nature of Tarzan and the problems with centuries of harm and destruction. It is possible within the secret plan of practice to just take what is felt. Me the eight-year-old, being isolated, and self-isolated for all sorts of reasons. Sat on my bedspread, wearing my mum's swimming hat. I found reason and comfort, a warm wind on my face, in the treehouses in a black and white movie on a portable TV.

And I jump: -

I know that Cheetah would smoke cigars and one of the chimpanzees that played him lived into his 80s. I know that at the end of his life Johnny Weissmuller, an Olympic swimmer, went mad and would swing from chair to chair in the old people's home. These myths enter the ravelling of practice, and they shape what grows in a minor way. Perhaps they are things that should not be brought into service and written about, yet they are parts of the ravelling. They are uncomfortable only when they are made explicit. For them to function they do not need to be brought to the surface. To make yourself a body without organs you need to stitch up all your orifices. Close off all lines of flow and physical connections. If Deleuze is brave enough to tell me to stitch up my arse, then I am required to confess that when building the platform, the films I had watched as a child were at play. They form part of the ravelling, along with everything else.



Figure 48: Building Platform 3 (Source: Steve Pool 05:2020)

Because it was never planned or measured out before, the platform grew. The lengths of wood I'd bought were too short and I began to have to joint things together and add legs to support the joins. This is the first time the platform exceeded its frame. It did this so it could fit into the landscape, fit with a profile that was already there. This landscape was part of the *ravelling*, the oak tree in full leaf, the fragments of old play equipment that I had built before I knew about the new *ravelling*. The long structural legs (on the right of the image) reach up to support the end of the zip wire. I had fallen twelve feet from my ladder and landed on the soft grass. It is the only time I have fallen far enough for time to elongate; I fell through smooth space.

Most of the ravelling is on the surface but each supporting leg that holds the structure above ground needs to be dug below ground. Digging at the playground is never easy. I know that the ground is virgin, it has never been built on or cultivated as it carries its strata close to the surface. The reason that a ravelling is useful is that unlike photography it can help us look below the surface of things.

The topsoil is dry and full of stones, the occasional archaeological find, the broken back of a hot wheel's toy car, the green glass marble, the ubiquitous Curly Wurly wrapper. This layer is no deeper than the length of the blade of the spade and needs to be loosened with a mattock. Keep the hole tight and do not break up earth so reducing movement and therefore the amount of concrete needed. Next comes a layer of sandstone, consistent but broken, it connects to the body through jarring the hands, carpal tunnels tighten, the nerve is constricted in advance of numb fingers and sleepless nights. They wake me up twisting to the position they had maintained for nine months in the womb. The sandstone comes out in lumps, some of it will be put back in the hole, some of it is piled up under the brambles. The work is slow, methodical and dirty. I am digging holes through the layers with no intention of writing about it. Digging serves a purpose and in the moment at least avoids metaphor, form follows function, there is a purity of function in digging holes. Next comes a layer of coal, a narrow seam only eight inches deep. It is crumbly and friable only noticeable in places because of its blackness . It has a crisp edge that does not bleed; I know it is carbon from millions of years ago, it is hard to see anything that was once living in this blackness

that holds millennia of sunlight. Everyone is surprised how close the coal is to the surface.

I am digging these holes and reading about strata and layers in *A Thousand Plateaus*. I reach the section where they write of digging so deep that the earth screams. How delicious and attractive this moment where I am digging through strata and reading about sedimentation, smooth and striated space, the nomad and the royal science. How easy it would be to write in poetic metaphor and not detailed description. At this point I had stitched up my eyes lids and my mouth to become a body without organs so all I can offer to the travelling is a description, a representation, a chicken without giblets. It feels important to represent what I encountered when I dug a metre below the surface and discovered what would be holding the platform above ground. As I was aiming for a light footprint.

Just below the coal is a light layer of dry clay, this is gannister, the clay that Benjamin Huntsman used to make his crucibles for mass producing carbon steel. The earth is a potted history of the city. It provides a map of the origins of the industrial revolution which is taught in schools across the world. We dig a post hole at the point of origin of the greatest story, the start of the human disaster, the beginning of the end of things. I scale back in to focus on how I feel and in the moment of smashing through the second layer of sandstone at around 700 mm, I remember burying my dog. I wrapped him in his sheepskin rug and noticed his embroidered collar. I carried his stiff body up from the car. I'd dug the hole in the same striated earth in the garden of a

friend not far from the playground. The hole was not quite deep enough as the dog, who in later life had become less and less flexible, was in death as stiff as a stuffed museum exhibit. I had to lift him out of the shallow grave and get my dad to chop through a tree root with an axe he had brought from home. Since that moment, every time I dig a hole through different strata, I think of burying my dog. My dad's experience with using an axe cut through striated space like a thought, like an axe, like a shovel. It is impossible to bury emotion in the ground. Feelings flood back into the ravelling. A ravelling is not a collection of strands it is a single thing, a rope, a person, a platform, a hole, a dead dog, and an abstract machine of capture.



Figure 49: Building Platform 4 (Source Steve Pool 05:2020)

The space is mapped out. We have completed the frame, although it will change and adapt and grow in some directions, the basic outline is in place. I am working on my own most of the time. As all the holes are filled, I have stopped thinking about my dead dog. I realised that it is easier to imagine within a frame, that having edges is important. It is critical at this point for this concern to be expressed as practical and about building something rather than the fabrication of a giant complex metaphor. The raveling is a thinking tool that enables thought to move in a specific way. To consider building the platform as metaphor is not helpful. The platform is a thing in the world, it is not a thought experiment or a representation of something else. It is not art object or artwork, sculpture, intervention, or monument. It can pretend to be, it can step into the role, or perform all these things, yet its essential form is the improvised architecture of adventure play. The platform in its emergence is gloriously contented in only having to perform its function, its semblance and not representations.

This moment, the moment of building a structure, fixing joists on hangers, triangulating, and aiming for some sort of solidity is very practical. It is a turning away from theory towards an immersion in doing. I am dirty and tired and, in some ways, ruined. I wake up unable to walk, muscles unused to this level of physicality only starting to work again each morning through more abuse. Is this some masculine assertion? Am I fighting to hold back ageing? I am a becoming maker, bending materials to a will, an assertion of the body and the flesh, blood sweat and real tears. I am immersed in my ability to shape and make things, to build something new from the ground up. This is

still the beginning of the build yet so many things are decided by the frame. The limits are set, and the edges are real edges. They can be extended but this is just another way to affirm that the edge is already established. In moving it we acknowledge its location.

And I Jump: -

I am still reading theory, chugging through a chapter of A Thousand Plateaus and integrating new concepts. Metallurgy, faciality, mechanisms of capture. I am taken with Artaud and his journeys in mind and in body. There is a reference to his trip to Galway to return the staff of Jesus, St Patrick and the Devil, to an imagined owner, perhaps a mixture of all three. He is placed in prison for the night, for being an artist, prophet, madman. I wonder about my journey and the holding of things dear. It is not an accident that I am building, my practice and politics have driven me to it. There is a bottom line of clarity, children will play on this thing. They will adopt it and it will become part of their memories and then those memories will connect with my childhood memories and dreams and things that are not fixed, counted, or understood. This is the simple line of practice and the driver. The realisation that at points the actions and the doing must be in-place, in-relation, growing and forming a ravelling. The reading and the thinking must recede like the tide and a hairline. It is not finding a place for them to fit in, it is holding them back, so they don't get in the way. In the thick of making, making must make sense for itself, it cannot be made sense of. Later I will think that this is a state of grace, I will also think it is what Deleuze means when he insists that

the abstract and the real are held within the same plane of consistency, of immanence but I can't think this in the moment of grace. The two things exist in the same plane and at the same time, but I can't do them together. For most of us, for most of the time, the cat is either dead or alive. To be scooped up from the road with a coal shovel or to be stroked as it cleans its claws on your woolly jumper. All parts of the ravelling are not always in view. The knots and binds are sometimes hidden behind other knots and binds.



Figure 50: Building the Platform 5 (Source: Steve Pool, 06:2020)

It is starting to become something that cuts a space out of the terrain marking a platform and a territory. In this moment/movement, making takes

precedence; there is no space for thought outside the making. No finished abstract plan to project into the future is anticipated or diagrammed. This goes against the common rules of building from scratch with raw materials. Going against the rules does not make it art in process or object yet it operates as part of an arts practice. Plans and diagrams present something abstract in advance of the real; they are prehensions that beget propositions, yet they shrink the places of the possible. They are by design drawn to limit options, to order chaos before chaos can emerge. Designs of the mind, mapped in detail narrow what it is possible to propose and hold the proposition within a groove. Making and thinking are both part of dwelling and one pays attention to the other, yet they are not a singularity unless we can imagine them as part of a ravelling, a knotting, twisting, snagging.



Figure 51: Building the Platform 6 (Source: Steve Pool 07:2020)

In taking shape it forms itself. The momentum of the initial thought that it is the spark of the secret plan of practice pushes it on. My son comes to lend a hand and we build our scaffold from spare timbers as we go. Working in the rain I cannot help but see the readymade scaffold built from things that are to hand as bricolage. Much of the timber is not cut or fastened in place

securely, it is just good enough, a temporary construction. The risks assessed, I run out of screws. I start to borrow them from where I have been, and the structures begin to wobble as we stand on them and balance a beam on our heads. A silent and brooding personal aesthetic pushes in like a secret fetish. When I was young my mum had a swimming hat festooned with plastic rubbery flowers. The plastic was in a state of slight decomposition, its smell, a mixture of chlorine and rubber. I would sometimes take it to my room and put it on my head, breathing in the smell and feeling the pressure of its elasticity on my head. This was an object that had become a fetish. The hat had aesthetic qualities, it was designed, it was manufactured, it had a function. Yet my interest in it was as a fetish, an object full of enchantment and magical power and desire. I did not want to turn my platform into a version of my mum's swimming hat. I was looking for honesty and redemption through making. There are moments that slip and glitch and spin from the ravelling. Improvising a collage of shabby-bodge-build adventure play platforms with my son in the rain is a line of flight and an unravelling. Follow the line down the rabbit hole and fall into chaos and performance.

And I Jump:

I am cutting a slash in the firmament to let some light in, holding to my plan and avoiding the threat of fetish and opinion. All these things, the ravelling that is emerging from the chaos are in the flow. My concept of art does not fit, I cannot overthink it, I cannot over-code it. I cannot write it and bring it to

sense. I aim to enunciate a minor art which I understand as to announce it, announce it through its making into a world that does not yet exist.



Figure 52: Building the Platform 7 (Source: Steve Pool, 07:2020)

It doesn't feel like research, and it doesn't feel like art, yet it would not be happening without both. I am working on three planes, up on the roof, in the ground and on the platform. Each position gives a different perspective. I fitted the roof timbers on my own, an Amish barn raising for one. A central joist was too long and pushed a cross beam out into a gentle arch. This is a mistake and not a refrain, the mistake is not to be confused with the refrain. The frame was intended to be square; the mistake can only be read as a

mistake as it has no other meaning, it is outside the ravelling. I drill three holes to fix the galvanised steel sheet to the roof and miss the joist, this is a good mistake, part of the ravelling. Over the coming months, the holes go rusty and I seal them with a bolt and washer. Moss has grown on the platform decking where water has dripped from the hole, the mistake has cut through two levels. This mistake has made its way into the ravelling. Only some mistakes become part of things, some mistakes become refrains and connect the lines; motifs that I can follow through the structure as it emerges. They become one of the threads that hold things together, as important as screws and bolts and metal brackets.



Figure 53: Building the Platform 8 (Source: Steve Pool, 09:2020)

The tree grows through all the planes, from the soil through the platform to the sky. It is an oak tree and so presents conceptual art and a glass of

water⁶⁷ and the 7000 Oaks of Joseph Beuys at Documenta 7⁶⁸. It was an obstacle that needed to be accommodated, a boundary object and an enabling constraint. When I accommodated its life into the structure, I wanted it to cut through the frame. This is the first aesthetic decision, to put something already growing in the offset middle. I do not deny aesthetics are at play in other decisions, the choice of roofing material, the size of timber, the rough by-eye bodily measurements, and the just good enough yet over-engineered practicality of adventure play equipment. The tree growing through, uniting the three planes in arboreal splendour is an accommodation, a bringing something alive and present into the event of the platform. The kids now call it a tree house, perhaps it's a house for a tree. The tree was part of the secret plan that flows at the back of things. There was no muse or epiphany or conscious decision to include an oak tree it was just already there and demanded attention or felling with an axe. This accommodation is part of a practice where the ideas are shaped in their becoming or their coming into the world. The firmament or roof to protect us from the elements needed piercing as the platform and the shelter it offered grew into the world.

I did not make the hole in the roof large enough to accommodate the movement of the tree. When the wind got up it began to rock the structure. Leverage and nature combined to create a wobble. The tin roof scratched into the bark and the whole structure began to scream. The noise was so

⁶⁷ An Oak Tree is a conceptual work from 1973 by artist Michael Craig-Martin, it takes the form of a glass of water on a high glass shelf in a gallery.

⁶⁸ In 1982, for *documenta 7*, Beuys proposed a plan to plant 7000 oaks throughout the city of Kassel, each paired with a basalt stone.

loud I had to wear ear defenders and climb a ladder back up on the roof to address the mistake. The bark had torn from the tree and the steel was bending. In this moment I knew that this would reach out and flow into writing, the tree and tin were screaming too loudly to be ignored. I cut two slots with the junior hacksaw I had made in metalwork in my final year at school and folded the metal over with my nail hammer. I was surprised at myself, I had seen trees move in the wind, this was a silly mistake to make, I had tried to incorporate nature but not anticipated how much it moves. This mistake becomes a story and enters the ravelling, it lives on the edge of metaphor and holds meaning within itself. It enunciates the scream of the earth as it is captured by the structure of the platform/ frame/territory it is a reminder that when two different forces come into play something must often give way. The story is not separate from the platform it is part of it, the mistake as a refrain that announces itself with a scream on a windy day. The idea is powerful but needs to slip away and become part of the fabric of the whole thing and not a distinct story outside it; this is the nature of the refrain. It becomes recognisable within its enunciation. It is the mistake unconsidered that becomes part of and the mistake considered that needs to be corrected.



Figure 54: Building the Platform 9 (Source: Steve Pool, 09:2020)

I bought a container to go on the platform to store the loose parts so they would not get in the way and trip people up. The platform had grown from the landscape and even though it was three times bigger than I thought it would be it did not have a space for the container. I dug into the bank with a mattock and spade, three days of digging to reprofile the ground. I also cut down an established oak tree, fixing its trunk to the fence with ropes so it could only fall one way and not exact any revenge. This change of plan and extension of the platform, pushing it back into the hillside was a big decision. I was frustrated that I had not anticipated the problem, I liked the

platform/treehouse, the space I had made so much that I could not locate a container in the middle of it. The platform had developed its own logic and aesthetic, it was making its own sense of what felt right and what felt wrong. When you make something or build something from scratch it develops autonomy and independence. Art objects can do this, but it is not what makes them art. I felt the platform develop its independence and it told me that it could no longer be a platform to host a storage container despite all the extra work this entailed, I had to listen to it.



Figure 55: Building the Platform 10 (Source: Steve Pool, 10:2020)

I am moving towards the end stage where all the major work is done but there remains just as much to do in finishing off. There have been fragments

and moments where thinking pushed in. The central accommodation of an oak tree for itself and for affect and the chopping down of its sister tree to make room for a shipping container. There is love and care and pragmatic brutality bending the space to a will. In the making and the doing and the building it is possible to get lost in the detail and for thoughts, ideas, and feelings to flow in and out of the event of making. The platform started as an idea and grew into the landscape, it accommodated concepts from *A Thousand Plateaus*, some days I would be nomad metallurgist growing a space through improvised trial and error. Other days, I was state war machine bending the terrain to my will, imposing myself on it. The Swiss Family Robinson building my island home, Tarzan taming his jungle. In the middle of making, it is hard to think of anything else, the making must take over and follow its own logic to make a *newsense*. I understood this already, but I need to be in the middle of making, within the concertina of time it generates to really know this and to see it as part of the secret plan. We need to stand in the middle of the making, be absorbed in it, become the core of the travelling and at the same time to be lost in the tangle. For all the want of trying, I could not dissolve the idea of myself into the making; I became part of the making yet can only talk of this loosely in words from a position outside.



Figure 56: Finished Platform with Tree (Source: Steve Pool 01:2020)

I didn't anticipate that the squirrels will drop acorns onto the corrugated steel, and they would ping and bounce off, I didn't anticipate the view from the roof. It felt quiet and lonely up there on my own during lockdown. I didn't anticipate how the platform would change the way people moved around the playground, opening new routes and desire lines, changing the places where the feet of children would wear the grass back to the earth. I did not anticipate that it would become part of everything else so quickly. I knew I would forget how hard it was to build before it was finished. I worked hard at

giving it edges and making ways to get on and off it, up ramps and steps and down slides. The edges of the frame were accessible.



Figure 57: Adding the Slide (Source: Steve Pool, 06:2021)

And then it was finished and ready to be handed over into its usage. Part man, part animal, part story, part research, part journey and part ending.

The platform on three levels that grew out of the middle and made a *newsense* of itself. Justified firstly by the children playing on it, making stories, shaping things, painting the bark of the tree, drawing the view, creating shadows in the late evening sun. It is an achieving at the limit of what my body and mind can do. I have been tested and it makes an enunciation. It says as it creaks in the wind, that this is not research or an art

object, not sculpture, or monument, not installation or intervention or fetish. it is a difficult object that sits in the middle of things. It is the heart of a travelling and aches to reveal itself without unravelling.



Figure 58: A Thousand Plateaus on a Sunny Day (Source: Steve Pool 08:2021)

End Notes

I imagine myself as nomad war machine moving through smooth space. I imagine this as I had no plan, only movement without speed. The points on the journey are not destinations or stopping points, they are made by the journey itself. Their location was unknown, they became points only when I stopped. The adventure playground is a nomadic state and art and play are nomadic war machines. Play is as close to the steppe, to the desert and to the sea as I can get in practice. Unlike a school or a university or other machines of the state, play and art in an adventure playground are nomadic

becomings that resist chaos and resist the pull of sedentary striated space. Every thought, every monument or edifice enunciates through movement resistance to staying still. I have built a territory and through the many routes that are used to climb on it and get off it, from slide to ramp to the reprofiled earth, nomadic children follow their process creating desire-lines in the dry earth.

This is an enunciation, a ravelling, a singular thing with a life of its own. It is an effort to bring thinking and making together. The platform is a proposition that I cannot bring to words. It is not an explanation, representation, or monument. It is not a metaphor, art, or research. It proposes that art, play, research and residency can be held in nomadic space and become a ravelling. Its proposition is singular.

This chapter should be read in conjunction with 1227: Treatise on Nomadology in *A Thousand Plateaus* and Chapter 7 of *What is Philosophy; Percept, Affect, and Concept*. It does not attempt to explain expand or apply concepts; it ambles with them a while in a smooth space. This chapter is an ever-changing landscape, the oasis, the edge of the forests receding, the shoreline, the dense grass of the steppe where we can ride at speed stood-up in the stirrups. Where a reference flows from memory to text and so escapes the state war machine of capture or bibliography.

And I Jump: Thinking about Territory (Blog post-April 2020)

I work it out properly then lay it onto Deleuze and Guattari - this is the right way around for theory. Many academics do it the wrong way around or perhaps their right way is my wrong way. The thing that I do is act as a nomad in residence - not settled in any one place and not carrying a bag of tricks or identifiable set of skills. As Holly says,

"Dad, anybody could do what you do but nobody ever would."

This is what I do - what everyone could do but what nobody ever would - which leads me to thinking about territory. I thought about not giving away my practice and the complete and only sense of keeping this opaque secret in the darkness of the lived moment. The notion of arts practice as the secret plan, the plan that is, that must remain, a secret, even to me. This is the point, if it becomes public it claims territory, when it is private it allows me to proceed or perhaps the art to proceed in a smooth rather than striated space. As the art object or thing that is peripheral or ignored, it sits outside of everything else. It is neither minor nor major nor molar nor molecular, it is nomadic. If it is unseen, it does not become part of the meaning-making where it is mounted to a board, put in a frame, or placed on a plinth. It can become what it can become; it holds a potential for emergence. In putting it forward as a plan before it becomes, it is fixed, held in layers of striated space, captured. The plan was never what the journey was about anyway, it was merely a node in the nomadic war machine of residency.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

'To try and sum it all up, my contribution to new knowledge is a potato rather than a branch.'

(Steve Pool in conversation with Tim Neil on a dog walk 4th September 2022)

This study took place over four years in multiple locations, it is a collection of events held in words and images that aspires to make a *newsense*. It strives to be more than a completed written text. This document charts my journey as a visual artist engaged in researching the social, by this I mean research that is concerned with people, things, and interactions, within space. Its purpose is not to pass a doctoral qualification, rather it aims to enact an artistic residency-as-method and follow some of the threads that spin from this enactment. Hopefully passing my PhD will be one of these future threads. This duplicitous position has evolved from the need to look both ways at once and to remain fully present in the middle. I desire to feel part of the world of research and part of the world of art. Before embarking on a PhD study, I would do this easily, I was in many ways a natural Janus. It is the trying and the desire that brings with it the difficulty. Initially, when things began, I would fold identities together to avoid bifurcation and to accommodate false binaries. At the end, and in a conclusion, I had to accept that even a light fold marks a territory and therefore requires a transition, a becoming, of sorts.

I am lucky to be able to carry my individual identity as a visual artist out the other side, beyond the fold. I am more exposed, frayed at the edges and vulnerable. I feel relieved that to a large extent my artist self is fully intact and remains in the complete darkness of the lived moment. This darkness makes some of my writing difficult to fully digest and on many levels the project of my PhD study hard to follow. I feel like a vast archaeological dig, perhaps an Anglo-Saxon burial mound where every part of the terrain is dug out, put through a sieve, mapped, drawn, and photographed. All the important artefacts are discovered and removed, oyster shells, weapons, jewellery, talismans and the bones of favourite dogs. They are mounted in museum cases to be labelled and examined; they represent something. Finally, the soil is put back and covers things over, everything is changed by what was taken, what was valued and what was left. Until the next future dig lays everything bare and open to the elements.

In this final chapter I will draw together some thoughts, observations and concepts that emerged from the interactions between doing research and maintaining an artist identity through thinking-making-doing within multiple sites of practice. I have lived this work and this living has involved struggle. I am still all ravelled up with it. I recognise that the writing-thinking work of this study is a further ravelling and coming together. It is not presented as a systematic untangling, the undoing of knots, or an unravelling. There are no conclusions, only thoughts and movement in process. This study aspires to live with a *newsense* that is always just around the next corner, a false summit to climb beyond.

To draw an endpoint, I will discuss the three propositions I presented at the start of this study in relation to my work as artist-in-residence. I will then discuss two additional propositions that have emerged through the process of writing. I will go on to discuss the implications of this to pedagogy. Finally, I will outline what this study adds to the field of research-creation, and how it is necessary, timely and useful.

The ambition of this study is to expand the concept of the artist-in-residence as a method of enquiry within social science research. When I began, I was not aware of research-creation and its use of the proposition as an orientation for research enquiries. In retrospect however, I had always intended the study's title to act as a proposition rather than as a research question. I have proposed 'Residency-as-Method' from the very start of this study, and it has provided a point of return and of focus. The phrase became the deliberately opaque and difficult response to the recurring question from friends, family and eventually me.

'What is your PhD study about?'

I am unsure when I decided on the three core propositions stated at the start of this study, they certainly evolved from the work of my residencies. They were refined over the four years and are focused on thinking-making-doing to enable a form of writing that paid attention to an embodied, affective, personal art practice. To hold onto a line of practice that was concerned with

process and improvisation I found it necessary to abandon a way of doing research that was orientated around research questions that were established prior to starting the work of the residency, the creation, and the research.

Proposition 1

Arts practice is about sensemaking and newsense making from a particular subjective position.

In response

The process of making sense of things and the concept of *newsense* have become part of my art practice. They are now in the secret plan and as a result are hidden and always in process and movement. They are thinking tools, or friends to research and to making art that helps me feel forward and speculate on what may come next. They are minor and marginal and at the edges, best identified through stories, telling tales, and spinning a yarn.

Newsense has no rationale, manifesto or set of rules, it is a made-up word without a hyphen that helps me to think about the impossibility of finding fixed meanings that stick. *Newsense* does not come easily to writing, it is something that emerges through practice. It acts as a loose description of thoughts and feelings; it is a new word and is nomadic in nature. I use it to unsettle and propose meanings that are in process, rhizomatic and to come.

As a concept, the meaning of *newsense* is useful in relation to art if it remains unfixed, in the present moment and full of future potential.

The concept of *newsense* articulates how art can make itself difficult by generating new, alternate trajectories and meaning. The concept of *newsense* proposes a line of flight from the assemblage of the creative-event. As the *newsense* is immanent and everywhere it is always on the cusp between the two states of sense and nonsense, it is affective, felt and in process. By this I mean the potential for making *newsense* is always present but not yet realised, it remains on the edge of becoming sense. In this way the *newsense* is an instance of meaning moving forward beyond the present, avoiding making edges, yet creating folds.

Building the physical platform at the playground became possible when it felt like the right thing to do when it moved into the creative-event of my residency and became a part of the secret plan. In Chapter 3 I introduce the idea that the secret plan, the reason to do something, and the hidden rationale that sits behind the actions of thinking-making-doing within a practice. By this, I mean I had no idea prior to doing something what I was going to do, what would happen or what sense would emerge. Yet there were feelings, flows, actions and new things, this is what I began to describe as *ravelling*.

The subjective was always a problem, the bounded individual human subject with an opinion who thinks they have something to say. The subjective brings

with it the impossibility of ignoring the anthropomorphised elephant in the room. Proposition 1 draws attention to this problem of the subjective bounded self with something to say through the making of art. The subjective acted as a great attractor, a force at the heart of things that kept pulling me back. The ideas of self, of position, of desire of artistic tradition are baked into my secret plan they are hidden and can recede, but they are always present. This is the position I recognise in myself; it is not an endemic condition of artistic practice; new generations can spawn new traditions.

Proposition 2

Arts practice follows a secret plan, this plan unfolds in the future and is not written in the present. The plan's value lies within its opacity.

In response

This proposition grew from the middle of this study and it is designed to be useful for artists working within research. It responds to proposition 1 in that it pays attention to the individual subjective position and opens an opportunity for this to recede from view, to fall into the background noise. It proposes the impossibility of explaining everything in words, it is a response to the accusation of trying to be deliberately obscure.

The idea of the secret plan of practice was born out of the recognition that it is impossible to know everything in advance. Working as an artist on research I have always felt the pull of a secret plan and always resisted trying to fully uncover its nature. The secret plan is a fracture and a fault line, it is a crack, a tear in the firmament and an underground river. Throughout this study I am wary of losing sight of my practice by laying it open, this presents a necessary contradiction. At the start of things, I had intended to be fully open about everything, for practice to be shared understood and jointly owned, dispersed across ecologies. There was no fear that this would result in an inability to make new work or produce art objects as this material production was never an intention or a hope. The fear of being fully seen is that in becoming known I would lose the ability to feel what should come next. Something that would fit the secret plan I would be able to recognise, to feel its value. That practice would come into view, and as it was enunciated, I would feel its *newsense*. Things that are secret derive their potency from being hidden, a secret can remain in the background, invisible, opaque, a part of things we can never fully know. The concept of art, with its secret plan of practice presents the possibility of alternative ways of knowing within a future we can never fully know in advance.

Proposition 3



Figure 59: Platform Nearing Completion (Source: Steve Pool 09:2020)

Response



Figure 60: Children building a cardboard forest. (Source: Steve Pool 09/2022)

The platform is in daily use. The children at the playground call it the treehouse. It has established a new area at the playground where we run projects and art activities. Loose parts play happens intermittently, the

container I built is now full of materials that don't fit anywhere else. I decided that loose parts play at our playground is about more than arranging materials or building structures. The platform made me think that the parts could extend to people, to ideas, to celebration, performance and music. The platform is part of extending and creating events, both formal and informal, it is a structure that affords possibilities.

An additional proposition emerged through the process

Proposition 4: The contribution to new knowledge is a potato rather than a branch.

Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of assemblage and rhizome underpin and over-code this study. They are the forms I see when I close my eyes and imagine my PhD as a feeling and as a journey. The concept and imagining of residency as rhizome enable new ways of thinking-making-doing within my research as an artist that equates with method. As method it affords the possibility of a different way of doing research, of paying attention to and accounting for the immanence of the creative-event and projecting research forward. Rhizomatic thought does not rely on a human actor as conduit or central trunk, as root and branch. The rhizomatic forms the introduction to *A Thousand Plateaus*, (1995) it prepares the terrain for working through, a speculation on the possibilities of thinking differently. I present this study as a rhizomatic contribution to new knowledge - a potato and not a branch. This is not to say it is a good or even preferred way to think or act within research. It

is the only way I could move through research and stay within the frame of the secret plan of practice. The only way I could become artist/scholar rather than remain one or become the other.

The thoughts that stuck

Chapter 1

I explore research-creation as an approach to finding out. I introduce how Erin Manning (2015) sets it against method by explaining how established approaches within social science are not always appropriate in research that foregrounds artistic modes of thinking-making-doing.

I follow this with an example or cautionary tale I present as an experiment in research-creation. I look to research-creation as a 'way' to what Erin Manning (2016c, 2020) describes as the artful or the aesthetic yield held in process within the creative-event. I did not start out with this journey in mind. I did not start out with anything other than a desire to find things out and continue to work and hold onto the identity of a visual artist contributing to knowledge production. I wanted to find a way to describe and develop the work I was already actively engaged in, which I felt was located on the outside of established disciplines. The experiment aspired to write a text that was open enough to accommodate the unexpected moment when light from a stained-glass window fell across my path as I carried objects to an exhibition space. This minor event did not shatter the earth or cut into the

shape of things, yet it was insistent and in clear hindsight is part of the creative-event that makes up the work.

I worked through Erin Manning and Brian Massumi's (2014) 20 propositions for research-creation and applied these thoughts to my research in an effort to find relevant language of description for freelance visual artists working across disciplines within the university.

Chapter 2

My literature review is a tangle of influences, thoughts, concepts and ideas. The writing, not for want of trying, fails to do what it needs to do. I am still not fully aware of what it needs to do. I am reminded of Deleuze and his thoughts on the alcoholic and his penultimate drink, the one before the last where he remains an addict and does not become something else. Perhaps if I can produce a satisfactory literature review, I will transition from artist to scholar. Not because I have learnt to write better, but rather that I have learnt to search for clarity and emerge from the shadows. I clumsily attempted to demonstrate that I have done the work and I cleverly demonstrate that I should perhaps not have bothered. Luckily the literature review is submitted as the penultimate draft, the final draft remains in the bottom of the glass.

Chapters 3 – 6

Within the next three chapters and associated interludes I aspire to revisit the project work and provide an expanded view of my thoughts feeling and

actions. I draw on fieldnotes and blog posts to create a backdrop and provide context. These chapters consider the impact of the Covid pandemic and associated lockdowns. Collectively they map my journey through a complex set of relations including my encounters with theory and how it related to the field. These chapters are written with the benefit of hindsight, they collectively provide an attempt to diagram the in-act of the creative event of my residencies. In Chapter 3, I introduce the idea of raw and cooked materials, the difference between joining in with an existing research project and starting my own from scratch. Chapter 4 maps my relationship to the adventure play movement and my interactions with Pitsmoor Adventure Playground over the last 30 years. I expand on how this relationship relates to my changing identity through this study and contributes to establishing edges and frames for the residency. Chapters 5 and 6 draw on blog posts to revisit significant moments and tell stories that collectively aim to give an insight into practice. They draw on ideas and concepts I have found within research-creation, yet they are not examples of research-creation.

Chapter 7

The penultimate chapter aims to present an example of research-creation. The writing uses images of the platform I built at the playground in process. The intention is that the writing and images together with the actual platform in situ combine to produce a *newsense* within the in-act of the creative-event. The secret plan of practice is one of the threads or lines of flight that flow

from this travelling. This chapter is the territory, platform and endpoint of this study, the intended destination of all trajectories.

Relevance to pedagogic practice

This study was produced with visual artists who are working or hope to work with institutions of higher education in mind. It was written to provide insights into how a personal art practice can unfold within research projects and point towards potentials and difficulties. I present it as a heuristic in that it works through problems and contradictions that emerge through the process of bringing my arts practice to doing research. It follows my less-than-perfect problem-solving approach into residency-a-method and efforts to generate new knowledge. The pedagogic intention is to provide examples of thought in action and strategies to hold a space open for artistic practice within social research. My aim is not to be critical of forms of arts-based research that work with artistic and creative approaches to augment and expand established methodologies within the social sciences. The intention is to expand the field by providing lived examples of how a process-oriented personal arts practice can be integrated with other methods of knowledge production. For example, the struggle to turn to the proposition rather than the research question is central to this study yet this transition was not straightforward and required a robust and practice-driven approach to stay with the difficulties. Its purpose is to challenge the research institution and the structures that validate research and knowledge.

From a personal perspective, I have learnt about the importance of time and commitment to place and ideas. The privilege of having focus and the affordance of a long-term study to lift you above the constraints of short-term funding and project-driven outputs is an important element of this study.

This study is also relevant to academic researchers who hope to work with artists to develop and deliver research projects. My experience of working on multiple interdisciplinary research projects has taught me to never make assumptions about the knowledge, understanding or experience of collaborators or participants. This study is an example of how I brought my concept of practice to research it is only one of many examples and maybe the exception that proves the rule. However, there is the potential for this singular experience to become part of a multiplicity of experiences that will collectively present a more nuanced or *newsense* understanding of how an artists practice figures within research.

Contribution to the field

I aspire to contribute to the field of research-creation. I have approached this in a pragmatic way yet have avoided the urge to see this as an application or use of a specific method. My aim was to better understand the form of the work I do with universities, with academics from multiple disciplines. This understanding was to inform my practice and enable me to enact research-creation within a field of enquiry. To do this I had to build a theoretical position that could hold the new way of working and understanding. My hope

is that my journey presents a singular and individual encounter that will resonate with others, including artists and academics engaged with artistic and creative modes of enquiry. At its core is the struggle to fit in and make things fit an existing yet hidden practice. This study's success lives at the edges of its failure.

My field is narrow, perhaps it is only a footpath. In this moment, I am a solitary walker, a becoming pedestrian. The idea of mapping this study's contribution onto a field, any field does not make sense. The concept of a contribution and a field in relation to knowledge production is part of a different conversation.

Critical within this process is the effort to tackle how traditions of the gifted individual with a unique personal vision that scaffold art production and arts value can operate and work within research. The idea of individual vision and the position manifested through the production of art objects appears as the elephant in the room within many trans-disciplinary research projects. The artist is often located at the centre of the work making it difficult to extract the singular bounded human subjective from any arts-oriented enquiry. I have made play equipment and helped to produce a museum display. Within the frame of my research and through my work and writing, I have acknowledged and paid attention to minor moments where practice as I conceive it became visible. However, this study has not been about producing art, or the art that has slipped from the edges. The PhD process has presented an enquiry into the method and the complications that emerge

when creative production encounters research within a singular field of practice.

My final proposition

Proposition 5: *This study is a research-creation project exploring residency-as-method.*

Final thoughts

This feels more like an art practice, the looking at the work and feeling that it is unfinished, feeling that it holds a lack at its centre and this lack pushes the work forward. The lack drives a desire to make it again and make it better.

My contribution to new knowledge is practical in that it takes research-creation as a way of doing artistic research and puts it into the world. I ask what academic research approaches can contribute to the domain of art, rather than the other way around. As a freelance artist, I had brought my wares to the academy and laid them bare, allowing them to be used. This study was never an effort to fully step into the world of the university, it was more an encounter where my contribution was to maintain a healthy distance and stand up for the value of opacity, the thoughts, feeling, emotions and sensitivities that will never be fully captured in writing or framed on a wall.

I get asked to do talks about creative and artistic approaches to research and will often talk about fitting in or working with a personal art practice. I do not suggest that this practice needs to be critically engaged or part of any radical art movement. However, there is a need for art practice to follow a line of

sense or as I refer to it within this study to make a *newsense* of itself. I do not propose that this is for every artist on every research project, I acknowledge that there are many ways that art and artists are used within the academy through approaches that are symbiotic and valuable. I contend within this study that for some artists, working within the academy on research projects, the *newsense*-making of personal practice is a valuable and sustaining aspect of the travelling that flows from the in-act of the event of doing research-creation.

Proposition 19 from Thought in the Act

'Forget, Again' (Manning and Massumi, 2014:131)

I have forgotten what I am supposed to forget. I remembered the thing before the last thing I forgot. Was it an axe given in exchange before one was given in excess, or perhaps the alcoholic's penultimate drink? I remember that I have forgotten these two important things again as I write them down.

And I jump: -

'The painter observed the effect his explanation had had on K. and then, with a certain unease, said, 'Does it not occur to you that the way I'm speaking is almost like a lawyer? It's the incessant contact with the gentlemen of the court that has that influence on me. I gain a lot by it, of course, but I lose a lot, artistically speaking.'

(Kafka and Muir, 1992:101)

After showing and trying to sell the protagonist Joseph K a series of dark and very similar landscape paintings Titorelli, the artist in Kafka's book *The Trial* (1928) gives the excuse above as explanation for the poverty of his practice. I jump now to a new set of ideas and projects to find redemption and grace and to atone for crimes I am only vaguely aware of.

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Waller, M. 2001. *Ghost*. large digital print 2950 x 2490x 180 mm.

Appendix 1. Projects

List of projects and people with dates and funders

Assembling the Bits. Arts council England project funded through the grants for the arts scheme by Arts Council England. This project explored connections between loose parts play and assemblage sculpture.

Poly-technic. The collaborative social arts practice of artists Kate Genever and Steven Pool who have worked together on funded projects since 2005. poly-technic.co.uk

Literacy in very young children. Research team. Abi Hackett. This project looks at children aged between one and three years, and their literacy practices in ordinary everyday community contexts.

Voices of the Future. Research team: Artist in residence Steve Pool. Kate Pahl (PI) with lead team Caitlin Nunn, Peter Kraftl, and Simon Carr, and Samyia Ambreen (RA) collaborating with children and young people to re-imagine treescapes. NERC funded three years (2021–24).

Odd: Feeling Different in the World of Education. Research team: Rachel Holmes (PI), Kate Pahl, Amanda Ravetz, Becky Shaw, Steve Pool, Jo Ray (RA), with Alma Park Primary School, Manchester, UK. AHRC funded three years (2018-2021).

Taking Yourself Seriously: Artistic Approaches to Social Cohesion. Research team: Kate Pahl (PI), Steve Pool, Zanib Rasool, and Andrew McMillan (Co-Is), with Katy Goldstraw (RA) in collaboration with ARVAC with Vicky Ward. AHRC funded one year (2017-2018).

Communicating Wisdom: Fishing and Youth Work. Research team: Johan Siebers (PI), Kate Pahl, Richard Steadman-Jones, Hugh Escott (RA), Steve Pool artist in residence Filmmaker, Andrew McMillan, Marcus Hurcombe (youth worker). The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) funded one year (2013–14).

Co-producing Legacy. Research team: Kate Pahl (PI), with Amanda Ravetz, Helen Graham, and Steve Pool (Co-Is). AHRC funded one year (2014).

Imagine. Research team: Steve Pool- Artist in residence Kate Pahl (PI from 2014), with Sarah Banks, Angie Hart, and Paul Ward (Lead Co-Is). Included the 'Park Hill' project led by Prue Chiles, with Paul Allender, David Bell, and Louise Ritchie. The Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) funded for five years (2012-2017).

Language as Talisman. Research team: Kate Pahl (PI), Jane Hodson, Richard Steadman-Jones, David Hyatt, Steve Pool (artist), Hugh Escott (RA), Andrew McMillan, Cassie Limb (artist), Marcus Hurcombe (youth worker), Deborah Bullivant (community researcher). AHRC funded one year (2012).

'A Reason to Write'. Research team: Steve Pool and Kate Pahl with Gooseacre Primary School. Creative Partnerships funded one year (2010).

'Researching Community Heritage' also known as 'Portals to the Past'. Research team: Robert Johnson (PI), Brendan Stone and Kate Pahl (Co-Is), with Steve Pool, Hugh Escott, Marcus Hurcombe (youth worker). AHRC funded one year (2014).

Appendix 2 Publications

Everything and nothing is up for grabs: Using artistic methods within participatory research. Pool, S. (2018) University of Bristol.

'What is the role of artists in interdisciplinary collaborative projects with universities and communities?' *Valuing interdisciplinary collaborative research: Beyond impact.* Pahl, K., Escott, H., Graham, H., Marwood, K., Pool, S. and Ravetz, A. (2017) Policy Press Bristol pp. 131–152.

'Doing Research-Creation in School: Keeping an Eye on the Ball.' Pahl, K. and Pool, S. (2021) *International Journal of Art and Design Education*, 40(3) pp. 655–667.

'From the Horse's Mouth: Working as a Digital Artist on Research Projects.' *In Creative Education, Teaching and Learning.* Pool, S. (2015) Springer, pp. 92–102.

'Dividing the drawers.' *Creative Approaches to Research.* International Association for Qualitative Research, Pahl, K., Steadman-Jones, R. and Pool, S. (2013) 6(1) p. 71.

'When the workshop is working: The role of artists in collaborative research with young people and communities.' Graham, H., Hill, K., Holland, T. and Pool, S. (2015) *Qualitative Research Journal.* Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

'In amongst the glitter and the squashed blueberries: Crafting a collaborative lens for children's literacy pedagogy in a community setting.' Hackett, A., Pahl, K. and Pool, S. (2017) *Pedagogies: An International Journal.* Taylor & Francis, 12(1) pp. 58–73.

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'Living your life because it's the only life you've got.' Pahl, K. and Pool, S. (2011) *Qualitative Research Journal.* Emerald Group Publishing Limited.

'The work of art in the age of mechanical co-production.' *After urban regeneration: Communities policy and place.* Pool, S. and Pahl, K. (2015) Policy Press Bristol pp. 79–94.

'Visual digital methodologies with children and young people: Perspectives from the field.' *In Visual Methods with Children and Young People.* Hall, M., Pahl, K. and Pool, S. (2015) Springer, pp. 164–185.

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