Spatialising Illustration

Mitch Miller

Mitch Miller is an Illustrator and PhD Student at the School of Design, Glasgow School of Art.

In 2001 he co-founded *The Drouth magazine* and has published books, essays and articles on a range of cultural and political subjects. Past projects include the web- documentary *Boswell in Space* (www. boswellinspace.org), and a period as resident artist at the Red Road Flats Cultural Project. He is currently working with clients such as Glasgow Life, Glasgow Museums and Collective Gallery (Edinburgh) on a number of socially engaged, documentary illustration projects as part of his insane scheme to draw all of Glasgow in dialectogram form.

Contact Information

Illustrator and PhD Student at the School of Design, Glasgow School of Art
Email: mitchell.miller@btinternet.com

Illustrating space as collaborative, socially engaged practice: The first report from the DRAW DUKE STREET residency

The DRAW DUKE STREET Project

A dialectogram is an invented, slightly tongue-in-cheek word combining 'diagram' with 'dialect' or 'dialectic' to describe large, detailed drawings of places in Glasgow. Each of these images sit somewhere between a map, an architectural plan, comic strip and diagram, using techniques from these disciplines to contain and arrange information on their subject within the image. The drawings use ethnographic methods to collate personal narratives, local knowledge, feelings and imaginings about place, to create a unique social and aesthetic document. The dialectogram bears a slight resemblance to the intricate and beautiful satirical maps of Adam Dant, but the method and style of the former developed with no knowledge of this artist's work and was initially a gradual, piecemeal response to the difficulties of creating complex documentary drawings of life in the east and north of Glasgow. While Dant successfully subverts and satirises the informational drawing in his work, dialectograms offer a much 'straighter' documentary treatment of their subject and also, require sustained engagement with communities to gather the raw materials and shape the final piece. Furthermore, as I will later demonstrate, dialectograms owe much more to the literary and visual culture of Glasgow.

The dialectogram has been used to create documentary illustrations of the Red Road Flats as part of the Red Road Cultural project (now acquired by the People's Palace Museum), and to record the living arrangements of the travelling showpeople of Glasgow's East end (Fig. 1, 2). The DRAW DUKE STREET residency (*Market Gallery*, 30th of October to the 16th of December) was the first of a series of case study dialectograms for my PhD. These case studies centre on locations that are; in deprived and marginal areas; 'hidden' from public view or; are in a state of transition.

DRAW DUKE STREET set out to work with locals and a team of volunteer researchers to create a 10 metre long dialectogram of the stretch of a high street in the Dennistoun area of Glasgow between two local rail stations. Duke Street (probably named for the Duke of Montrose, who held lands along its route) is one of three major thoroughfares that connect Glasgow city centre to the east. The area covered by the drawing, with its stark contrasts between the relatively affluent north side and much poorer south sides of the street (Fig. 3) displays many of the features that makes Glasgow's east end one of the most deprived in the UK (McCartney, 2011).
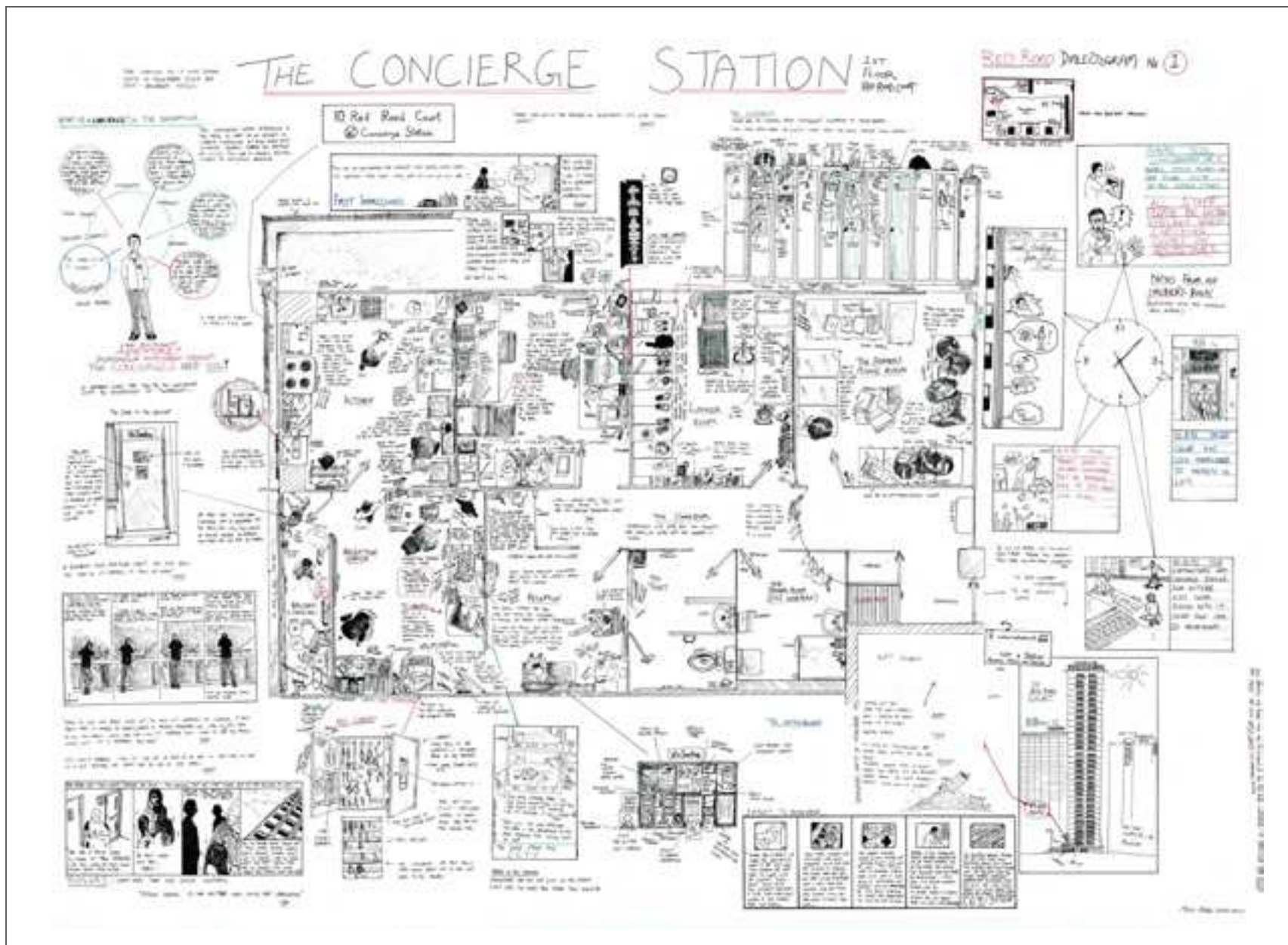
Fig 1. Red Road Dialectogram No.1: *The Concierge Station,* Mitch Miller, 2010 (http://tinyurl.com/pj76jxo)
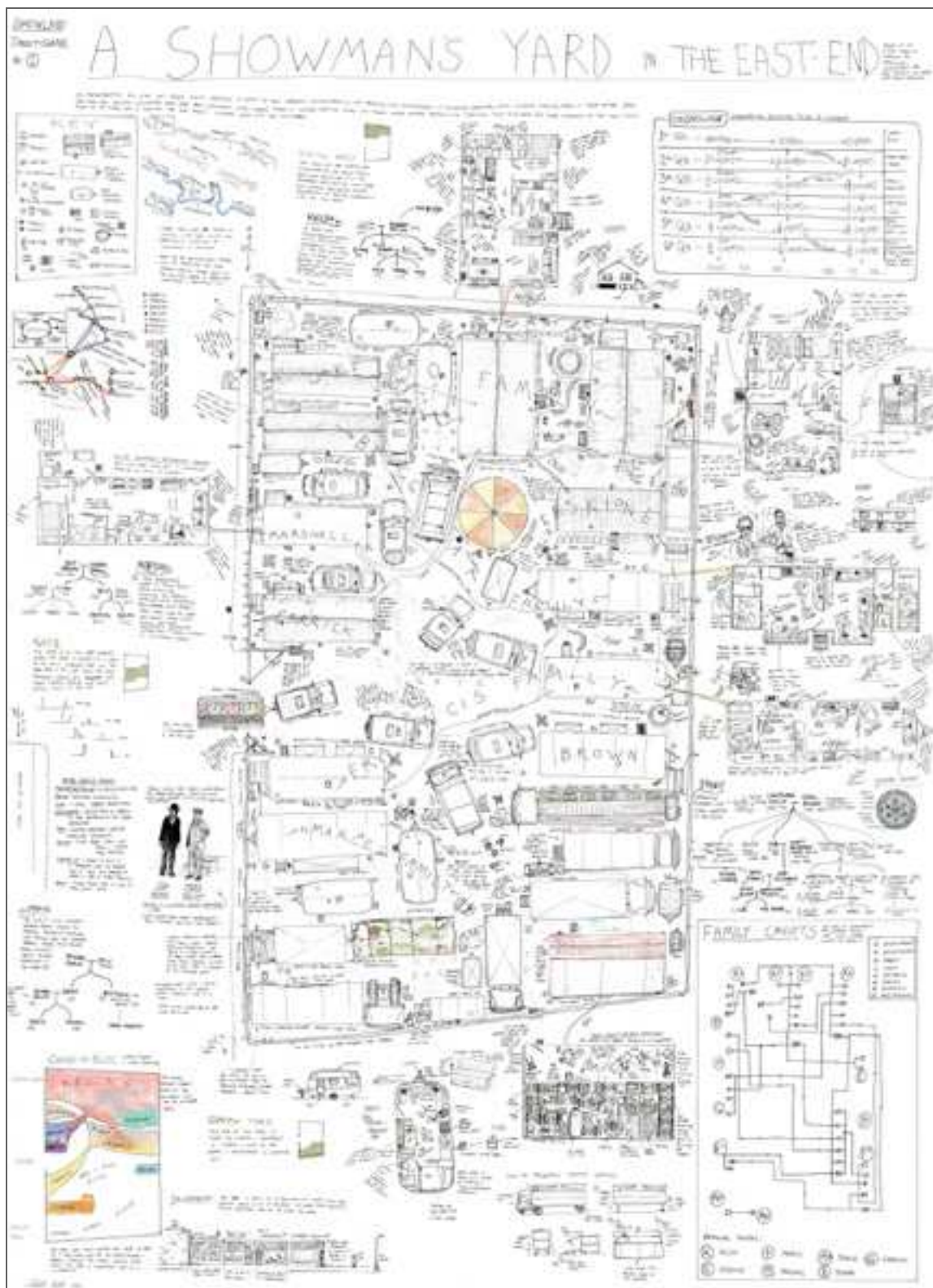
Fig 2: *Showman's Yard in the East End, Pencil and ink on mountboard,* Mitch Miller, 2012
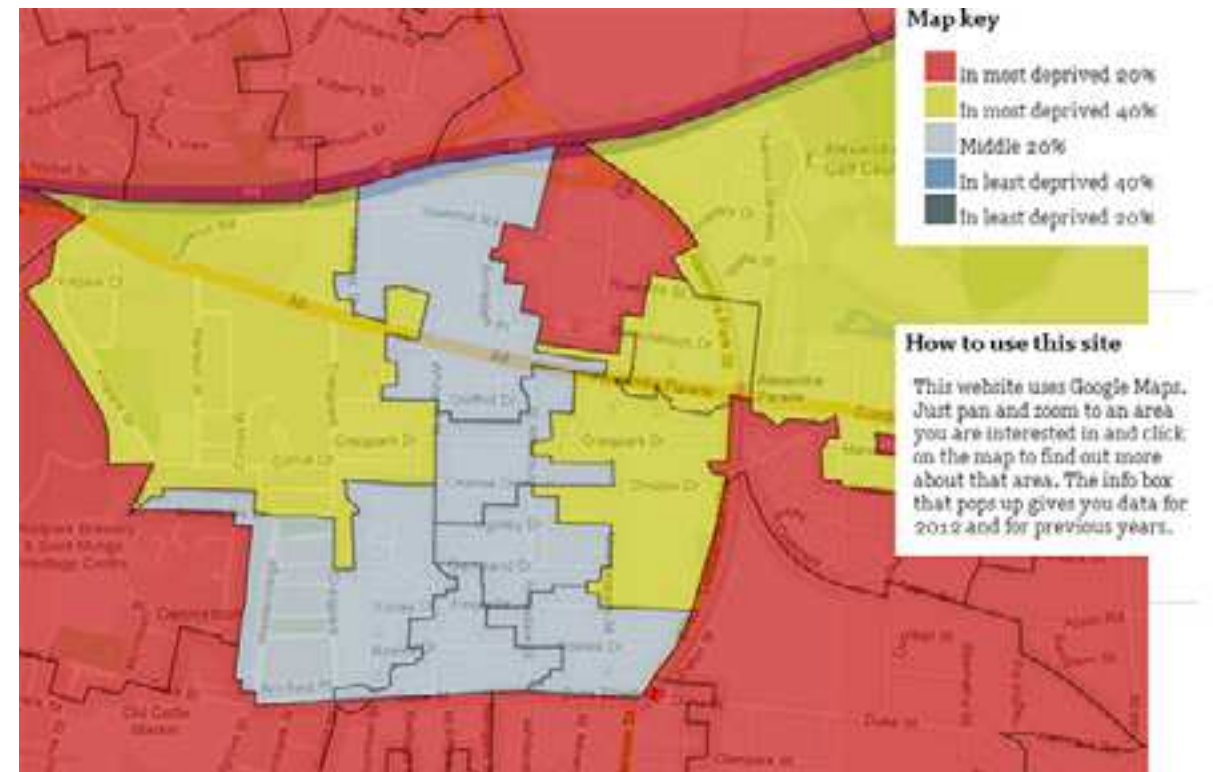(http://tinyurl.com/ccavzle)

Fig 3: Social Deprivation levels in Duke Street, from *Map of Social Deprivation in Scotland,* 2012

The residency was designed to incur changes in the practice and the practitioner. In describing these changes, it seems appropriate to use the first person in this article. I was investigating - and disrupting – how *I* was used to working, and trying to challenge *myself* to consider new practices and ways of thinking about them. Among the latter, I wanted to investigate my belief that dialectograms are a 'socially engaged' creative practice, a claim I will admit to have undergone little serious self-reflection before I started the PhD project. This case study was a chance to begin to address the question of how dialectograms fitted a "socially engaged" model. In his *Living as Form: Socially Engaged Art from 1991-2011*, Nato Thomson outlines the development of "socially engaged" art:

> In recent years there has been a rapidly growing movement of artists choosing to engage with timely issues by expanding their practice beyond the safe confines of the studio and right into the complexity of the unpredictable public sphere. The work has many names: "relational aesthetics," "social justice art," "social practice," and "community art," among others. These artists engage in a process that includes careful listening, thoughtful conversations, and

community organizing. (Thomson, 2012: 7-8)

In this case study I wanted to look more closely at how dialectograms may already fit a socially engaged model and explore whether this could – and should – be expanded through greater collaboration. By choosing to work in an open studio in a deprived area of Glasgow, and by making a process of listening and talking to local people as core to the manufacture of these drawings, I already felt I ticked a number of these boxes.

Change would also come through working under pressure. Somewhat paradoxically, my plans were also much more ambitious than previous projects; the drawing would in fact, be eighteen times larger than its usual A0 dimensions, yet engage with a much more diverse and complex space than in previous works. The Market Gallery offered me a place on its programme of studio projects that run on a six-weekly basis throughout the year. This was nowhere near the ten-week residency I had hoped for (previous dialectograms typically took several weeks just to research). Given the proximity to Christmas, I was able to negotiate a seventh week to exhibit the drawing in the gallery, and decided to work within the six-week limit and see what could be achieved. This relatively short time period in which to research, plan and execute the drawing meant that regardless of

whether it was ready, the dialectogram would be hung on the 7th of December. Applying these pressures gave me the opportunity to test my practice and introduce new approaches that could potentially become part of the 'rules' of making dialectograms. I framed this process around the 'emancipatory action research' cycle defined by Ortrun Zuber-Skerrit (1992) and its goal of effecting radical change within a system or organisation – in this case, the system of practices that had built up around myself. For the purposes of this paper, I would like to explore some of the background to the work, explain why the case study was set up in this way, then through a narrative account of the project, give some attention to the role that 'spatialising illustration' played in suggesting changes to my practice.

Ethnography and the Everyday: The theory and practice of the dialectogram

Dialectograms are creative works, but they do relate closely to two distinctive academic disciplines; ethnography, and the philosophy of everyday life. Ethnographic fieldwork is used within anthropology to study the structures, practices and contexts at work within human cultures observation, consisting of observation, informal interviewing and participation in the community being studied – very similar to the "listening" and "thoughtful conversations" involved in

socially engaged practices (Burawoy, 1991: Blomberg et al, 1993). In creative fields product designers have used ethnography to investigate the 'needs and wants' of their users, understand how the products are used and shape them accordingly (Wasson 2000). Historically, Illustration has played an important role in anthropological recording and note taking, mainly to create components for the ethnographer's final synthesis of their studies into an 'ethnography' (El Guindi, 2004).

This somewhat subservient relationship with the ethnographic tradition has changed, as illustrators have begun to use these techniques to create standalone creative works. The 'artist as ethnographer' is a trend been noted and problematized by Hal Foster within the fine art tradition, while new research networks such as *Artful Encounters* brings artists and arts academics together with anthropologists and other social scientists to explore these problems (Foster, 1996, Artful Encounters, 2013). Limitations of time and space make it impossible to work through all of these problems in this paper; suffice to say that as well as offering new and exciting opportunities to the illustrator, ethnographic technique presents her/him with an additional set of concerns, particularly with regard to ethical practice Some excellent examples of how illustrators have seized these opportunities can be found on the *Reportager* network

run by the illustrative journalist Gary Embury. *Reportager* brings together illustrators who produce works of illustrated journalism and ethnography in a range of styles and approaches. Embury notes a shared sensibility between dialectograms and *Reportager* member Olivier Kugler's travelogues (Embury, 2013: 67). While it fits more definitely within the 'gonzo' journalistic tradition, Joe Sacco's method involves spending long periods of time with communities, often participating in certain activities and taking a very reflexive approach to how he gathers his material, which means his comics journalism is an useful touchstone for ethnographic practices within illustration (Hedges and Sacco, 2012). Ethnography is used very successfully within the socially engaged practice of Julien 'Seth' Malland. Malland's highly participatory street art projects operate as a filter for the skills and abilities of the communities he engages with, and in giving away the autonomy and authority of the creator to them, resembles Nicolas Bourriaud's notion of presenting new 'models of action' to the practitioner who wants to work in the community (Bourriaud, 1998:13). Malland's recent work enabled villagers in Southeast Asia to apply their own crafts and skills to create murals and demonstrate the value of their own traditions and lifeways (Manco, 2012). This example inspired me to encourage more participation and interaction in DRAW DUKE STREET.

It should also be noted that dialectograms' focus on social engagement as both practice and theme has many forerunners within the visual culture of Glasgow itself. The most relevant of these to the visual approach I take would be writer and illustrator Alasdair Gray's time as Glasgow's 'city-recorder' with the People's Palace social history museum (Gray, 2010: 173-198), in which he produced new works for the purposes of expanding and enhancing the collections of the museum, and generated these by working closely with local communities and networks. In addition to portraits of notable Glaswegians and painted landscapes of east-end streets due to be redeveloped or demolished, his illustrations incorporated documentary detail through writing notes or included found objects and personal effects onto the images, as shown in this image of the *Third Eye Centre*. (Fig. 4)

If ethnography has provided me with the necessary tools to work within this tradition, then it is in the sizeable literature on the philosophy of everyday life that the ingredient that turns technique into actual methodology can be found. A particular inspiration is Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life*, a text much read by socially engaged practitioners and practitioners of "psychogeography" (Coverley, 2010). In it, he describes how those without established power structures – usually characterised as the 'consumer' but

Fig 4: *Ken McGrath in his Office at The Third Eye Centre with Secretary Linda Haase and View Through the window behind of Scott Street,* Alasdair Gray, 1977

in his system as 'the user', produce culture of their own from the products made by the authorities, corporations and other 'producers' (everything from consumer goods to buildings, religions, roads or laws). In his system the producer is 'strategic' – they work from a secure position of authority (a town hall, an architect's office or company head office) and are reinforced by legal and commercial legislation. The consumer or user is by contrast, 'tactical'; they consume these products, but do so by thinking on their feet and 'making of' them what they will. It is a form of 'soft resistance' where outright opposition or self-expression is impossible. De Certeau gives several examples, such as the ways in which Native Americans subtly altered the Christian rituals imported by the Spanish (as part of their strategy to pacify the natives), by adapting their own folk beliefs and traditions to the new culture. His clearest demonstration of the dichotomy between strategic producers and the tactical users is the example of the synoptic view enjoyed by an observer looking down from New York's World Trade Center; the view of the streets below is expansive and 'privileged', but is unable to register the ground level realities of walking on and using those streets, especially the shortcuts, conversations and dalliances that are part of the everyday use – and meaning – of the streets. De Certeau identifies parallel 'poaching' techniques in of language (between competence and actual usage)

and sees an appreciation of these practices as a Marxist, regards these as the basis of a new radical and emancipatory politics (de Certeau, 1988).

Again, we can link this to my local context. The Glaswegian novelist James Kelman "tactically consumes" literary norms in creating his own 'workerist' literary style, but takes this further and incorporates it into *modus operandi* of his alienated, marginalised working class characters (Miller and Rodger, 2012). I first identified this link when I visualised a location from a Kelman novel (Fig. 5). This image that my own practice, could, like Kelman's, be framed as the tactical consumption of illustrative traditions such as the map, architectural plan, diagram or comic strip, to illustrate environments according to how they themselves, are tactically consumed.

DRAW DUKE STREET as action research: Setting up the case study

Following Zuber-Skerrit's advice I examined my existing methodology to see how it would hold up against the difficulties posed by the Duke Street brief and to identify changes I would like to bring about. One of these was giving participants more opportunities to influence the drawing. In previous dialectograms there was potential

Fig 5: *Matt's Room as described in Kieron Smith, Boy,* Mitch Miller, 2012 (http://tinyurl.com/psg47d7)

for the participant to request changes and corrections, but to date, none have been willing to suggest any at such a late stage in the process. At earlier stages in the drawing process it is hard to see how the drawing will pan out, while others have been reluctant to see it before it is finished. I have had more luck when showing small, rough sketches during the early stages of the work (Fig. 6a, 7) than showing the participant a latter stage in the actual finished work itself. A past participant in the Red Road Dialectograms, who had seen a drawing in its early stages, but preferred not to see it before it was finished explained why (and how the 'surprise' enhanced his experience), while raising important ethical concerns:

> It was quite a surprise to see it like that, and everybody likes surprises, so instead of getting told about it […] the way you done it [with the big reveal] wid be better. But I suppose if you'da says speak to the people that are involved, and say look, do ye WANT tae see it? Ask them, get an opinion and say look I'm gonnae be putting this [detail] in you know, before it, you could dae it that way. I suppose you don't want tae finish it, and then a guy go "look, you cannae put that in, I told you that in confidence" or whatever […] so I suppose it would make sense that way.

(interview with Concierge Station Participant, March 2013)

The problem of encouraging participation is frequently encountered by design ethnographers who find the public are unwilling to make changes, either because they feel unqualified to speak up, or the product looks too finished (Blomberg et al, 1991:140). The other problem, of what is and is not confidential, can be difficult to keep track of when the fieldwork takes place amid the cut and thrust of everyday life, but this comment establishes a general principle of checking at various stages during the process whether a participant want to input on the final form of the drawing, one which I tried to put into practice in this case study. The gallery was used as an open studio where locals could come in to see the work underway and potentially, participate by giving informal interviews.

By putting myself into a publicly accessible space, I hoped it would be easier for the community to take a look without feeling self-conscious or intrusive (as they might if coming into my studio on an arranged visit, or if I was a visitor in their home or workplace). Participation would be further integrated into the project through engaging a team of volunteer researchers to gather information from the shops and public spaces along the street., as I would have no time to do this myself.

I also ensured that informed consent was secured through release forms and applied Meskell and Pels' principles of 'embedded ethics'. This involved being strongly connected to the research site and giving preference to my responsibilities to the community I was working with, rather than more traditional models aimed at protecting professional rights (Meskell and Pels, 2005: 3). I made a commitment to stick to the rules I had set for the residency – opening from 10-6pm at set hours, during which I was at their disposal and could be 'interrupted' at any time (see below). I took it upon myself to explain, whenever asked, what I was doing and exactly how I would use their contribution (it was helpful to have the 'target' walls where the drawing would be hung, and past dialectograms nearby, to give them an idea of what I was trying to accomplish).

I also kept a blog entitled *The Duke Street Diaries* (DSD) that documented my thoughts, feelings and intentions and recorded visitor numbers to give some record of the levels of activity and engagement with the community (we recorded 202 visitors between 30th October and 7th of December). Finally, I invigilated the free exhibition that ran from the 7th which offered up the chance to incorporate feedback from local residents and participants in the specification of the final piece, although visitor numbers were overall, very low.
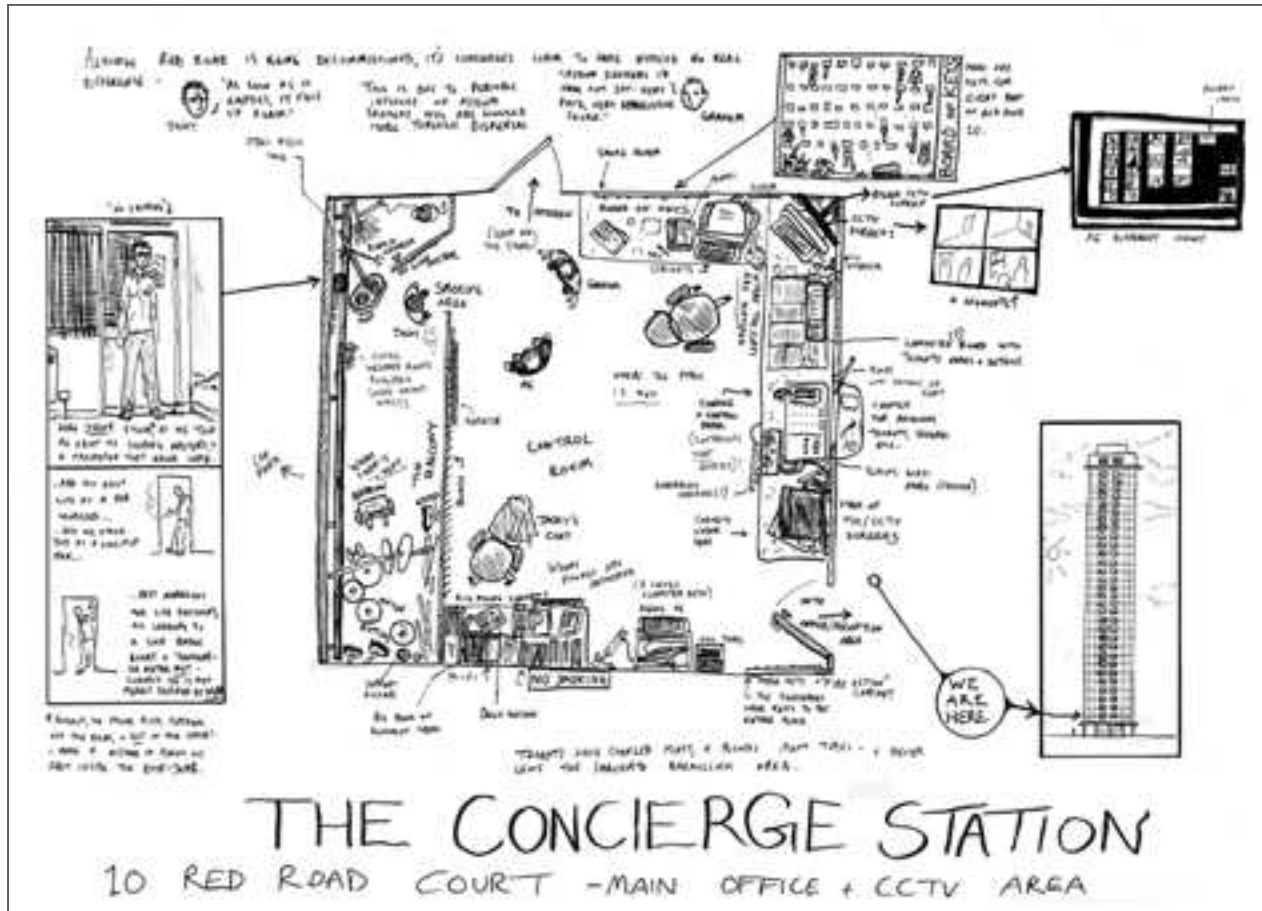
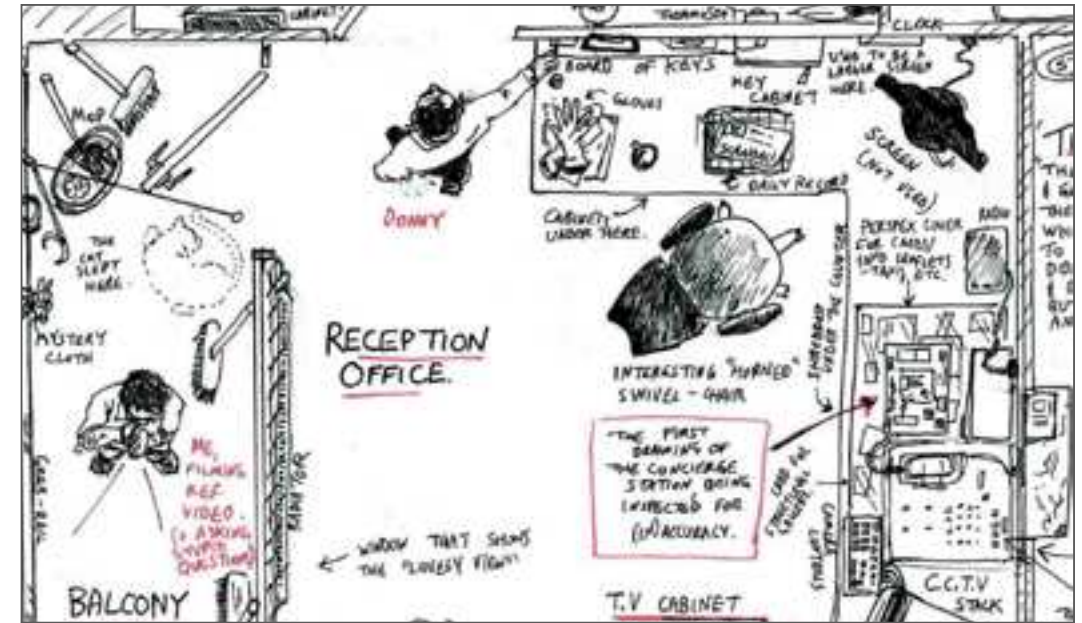Fig. 6: *Concierge Prototype,* Mitch Miller, 2009

Fig. 7: Detail from *The Concierge Station* with prototype drawing being shown to participants, Mitch Miller, 2010

Fig. 8: Detail from *Duke Street Dialectogram,* Mitch Miller, 2012

DRAW DUKE STREET as Spatialised Illustration

Whereas previous drawings such as the *Concierge Station* illustrated a microcosmic 'story world' within Red Road it was immediately apparent that Draw Duke Street would deal with shared space that contained different modes of use, access and occupation. Consequently, this drawing had to contend with a range of different subjective relationships people had with the street, what the theorist of space and 'the practice of everyday life' de Certeau describes as 'the ciphered river […] a mobile language of computations and rationalities that belong to no-one' (de Certeau, 1988: v). To this end, the 'peeks into' the interiors of shops that can be seen on the drawing were accompanied by narratives drawn directly onto the street and pavement areas, with comic strips used to capture smaller, imaginative interactions and insights (see Fig 8)

As well as a setting for the work (Fig. 9a, 9b) the space of the gallery was also a tool. Its function could be as practical as exploiting my location to check details or using the available space on my 'target walls' to work out the appropriate scale of the drawing. Beyond that, the space helped me to build trust and offer a safe environment for working with my subjects. Being visible, both as a collector of information and, through the workspace as I went through the process of using the material I had gathered was also beneficial. Not only

Fig 9a, 9b: *Views of Market Gallery, October-November 2012*, Mitch Miller, 2012

could I, in a Goffman-esque sense make it clear what role I was playing while trying to 'get inside' the community, but it embedded an ethic of my being open to scrutiny and on display to the community I set out to study and depict, a principle of public access and partnership articulated by Meskell and Pels (Meskell and Pels 2005: 8). I honoured this principle by making the space more open to, and welcoming of visitors from the street. Some weeks earlier I had participated in a community event at which locals had indicated the breezeblock and white cube aesthetic of the gallery was intimidating and off putting. I set out to offset this as much as possible by rearranging and tidying the space and ensuring it was well heated (it was usually very cold). I provided an urn, beverages and biscuits located next to historical displays and gave much of the gallery over to community services, providing a notice board, a small reading-room and wall space for local artists and poets to hang their work. Some of these works were eventually incorporated into the drawing.

Once enticed through the door, locals were encouraged to ask questions about the project and, if they were interested, record an interview. In these cases it was important to both the ethical and methodological framework I set up, to show that I was available and valued the time they were giving me, and was ready to do nothing else but listen. I would stop drawing, make tea or coffee for the visitor and either do the interview on the spot, or arrange a better time. As many participants would forget or not be able to come back I made getting an interview a priority over anything else. This helped to create an atmosphere of openness and approachability that was vital if the work was to succeed. In many respects, it did; of the 30 hours of interviews we recorded over the six weeks, twenty hours came solely from the drop in facility. While very fruitful, the success of the drop-in approach created difficulties in terms of actually producing the drawing. With as many as twenty visitors in a day, work became very slow. Some participants also began to regard me as a friendly ear and began to drop in regularly, beyond the 'official' research interaction, a situation that, operating an open studio, could not easily be prevented. This led to an extension of working hours with the studio closed from 6pm, in order to try to make up drawing time. In short, the open approach could not really be reconciled with drawing as easily as it could with the principle of conducting original research interviews. It worked very well in gathering information and informants, but was in many respects, a victim of its own success.

I was however, very much a fixed point in the project; my ability to engage directly with the community was limited to my daily walks to the gallery, my trips out for lunch, and early morning or evening visits to the political and public spaces of Dennistoun such as meetings with the community council, the local writers group the conservation society and the local library. This met with some success, with the local public library offering access to a number of community groups such as the Bounce and Rhyme playgroup, several of whose members came to be interviewed at the gallery; Dennistoun Community Council is currently looking at ways of financially supporting the dissemination of the drawing; the Conservation group providing archive material and oral histories and the writer's group contributing poems and personal accounts directly to the drawing itself. Not all of these opportunities for social engagement could be realized at the time, but there is potential for doing so at a prospective phase two of the project.

The gallery was also important for coordinating my team of volunteers. Fifteen people came forward, with nine being able to commit to the project. Of these, two carried out archival research, two helped with the install and the remaining five went out in the field. This solved some problems, while causing others; my lack of experience in running collaborative projects of this scale left me ill prepared for the additional work required to properly orientate and guide the volunteers. Another problem lay in giving these researchers the tools to collect the

information; I had never had to explain how I worked to others before. I soon abandoned any concept of the volunteers as 'proxies' for my style and sensibility. As the first interviews came in using the very basic questionnaire I had drafted, I realised that I had failed to notice an opportunity to make the most of the volunteers. I began to encourage them to draw upon their own backgrounds, perspectives and practices in carrying out the research, which led to more diverse – and interesting – information coming back.

This outsourcing of my usual tasks went beyond what was originally planned. As the pressure of the final days mounted and I became increasingly desperate, I asked the volunteers to listen to interview recordings and direct me to specific segments and quotes. More than one volunteer would listen to the same interview in case any one of them missed something. I was very reluctant to give this aspect of the work over; in previous projects this process of listening had been a crucial, and rather private aspect of forming my thoughts about what the drawing is going to look like and what it would contain, It felt like giving a major part of myself away and also, like I was abandoning my duties. I accordingly, noted feelings of guilt and unease in my blog (DSD 30 December 2012).

Nevertheless, the ways in which each researcher's take on the material differed slightly from the other was in itself interesting and had there been more time, could have led to much more diverse, subtle treatment of the material.

As the final week loomed with the drawing still looking very sparse and unpopulated, I decided to abandon the open studio concept and work with the shutters of the gallery down from the morning through to the late evening. This was a difficult choice made between 'the delicacies of the concept' and 'the needs of production' (DSD, 1 December 2012), the rationale being that I needed to produce some sort of illustration to display on the 7th and demonstrate to my collaborators that the project had an actual purpose. While gallery staff and locals understood the pragmatism of the decision, I was very aware that I had broken one of my own rules and potentially compromised the embedded ethics of the project. This was offset against the obligation I felt to allow community members to see their contributions realised in the drawing, though even then, lack of time meant that a poem written for inclusion in the drawing and a huge amount of usable material did not make it into the exhibition. In the event, a coherent piece was produced, but it was by no means a finished one (Fig. 10).
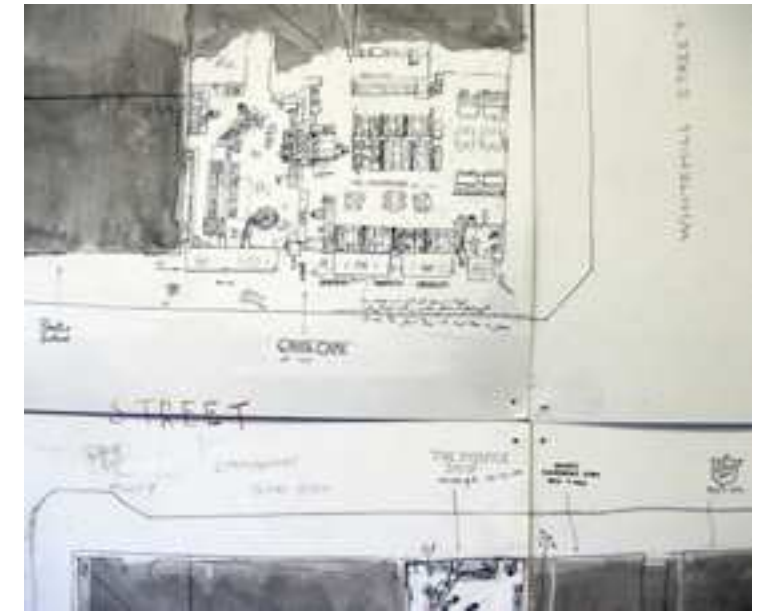

Fig. 10: *Eastern corner of Duke Street Dialectogram,* photo by Damon Herd, 2012

Fig 11: Panoramic View of *Duke Street Dialectogram,* photo by Stuart MacMillan, 2012

Fig 12: Detail of *Coia's,* from *Duke Street Dialectogram*, Damon Herd, 2012

DRAW DUKE STREET as…failure?

A glib conclusion from this case study is that it is not possible to create a drawing of such a large space, of such a large size, in this style, in less than six weeks. Nevertheless, the unique conditions of the residency created a hothouse effect that allowed a great deal to be achieved, very quickly. (Fig. 11, 12). It was in many respects a 'campaign' that raised awareness of Duke Street and used its visibility to create the conditions for further work within the community to finish the drawing.

I began with questions over how well engineered my process of social engagement actually was, and whether putting my own methods under pressure could suggest new and 'emancipatory' alternatives. I do not have conclusive answers to these at present, but the account indicates that if I can be reconciled, and readied for the additional pressures created by collaboration, these may may indeed exist, and that spatialising the illustration process has played a major role in doing so. As I go on to apply my initial findings in my next case study in Govan, the spatial dimension will be central in establishing the 'rules' of the dialectogram as a socially engaged practice.

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List of Illustrations

(all dialectograms can be viewed at www.dialectograms.co.uk/the-archive)

Fig 1. Red Road Dialectogram No. 1: *The Concierge Station* (Mitch Miller 2010)

Fig 2: *Showman's Yard in the East End, Pencil and ink on mountboard* (Mitch Miller, 2012)

Fig 3: Social Deprivation levels in Duke Street, from *Map of Social Deprivation in Scotland* 2012 https://sites.google.com/site/scotdep2012/ (last accessed 21 January 2013)

Fig 4: *Ken McGrath in his Office at The Third Eye Centre with Secretary Linda Haase and View Through the window behind of Scott Street* (Alasdair Gray, 1977)

Fig 5: *Matt's Room as described in Kieron Smith, Boy*. (Mitch Miller, 2012)

Fig. 6: *Concierge Prototype* (Mitch Miller, 2009)

Fig. 7: Detail from *The Concierge Station* with prototype drawing being shown to participants (Mitch Miller, 2010)

Fig. 8: Detail from *Duke Street Dialectogram* (Mitch Miller, 2012)

Fig 9a, 9b: Views of Market Gallery, October-November 2012 (Mitch Miller, 2012)

Fig. 10: Eastern corner of *Duke Street Dialectogram* (photo by Damon Herd, 2012)

Fig 11. Panoramic View of *Duke Street Dialectogram*, (Stuart MacMillan, 2012)

Fig 12: Detail of *Coia's*, from Duke Street Dialectogram (Damon Herd 2012)