

AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE AND ACTION  
IN PARTICIPATORY ART

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study is to explore the diverse ways that aesthetic experience is tested by participatory art. The study will show the part played by participatory action in changing the conditions in which aesthetic experience arises. It will be confirmed that when the philosophy of action is taken into account then explanations of participatory art are enhanced.

There are many descriptions of aesthetic experience and it is generally assumed to be a cornerstone in explanations of art. In one of the leading accounts aesthetic experience is associated with disinterested perceptions where the individual is free of any practical concern for the object of experience. In recent explanations of contemporary art there is less emphasis on aesthetic experience and there is a tendency to suggest that background knowledge and interpretation are equally as significant as perception in the experience of art.

‘Participatory art’ is a category of art that explicitly demonstrates this state of affairs. In contemporary criticism participatory art is a term used to describe art that favours an audience composed of active contributors rather than detached viewers. These are artworks that encourage moments of engagement by an audience such as the moving of elements in the work or the movement of the participant’s body. It could be said that the observable actions of participants mediate between perception and knowledge in participatory art. Such work opens up a space where assumptions made about the experience of art can be challenged.

The present study explores how aesthetic experience is affected by the introduction of human action in participatory art by exploring three exhibitions of participatory art at The Tate Modern, The Barbican and Dundee Contemporary Arts. In this study it is suggested that participation in such artwork may be a consequence of deliberation, spontaneity or may take place within a social group. Therefore the aesthetic experiences and actions that are identified in these artworks are examined from the standpoint of reason, the body and social convention through the respective adoption of analytical, phenomenological and institutional/sociological perspectives.

## Introduction

### Origins

From the 28<sup>th</sup> April to the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 1971 there was a retrospective of the work of American artist Robert Morris at the Tate gallery in London. As part of this exhibition Morris presented a number of large and simple objects that the audience were invited to physically engage with. Corresponding with the Keeper of Exhibitions and Education of the Tate, Morris explained the aim of this work. “Time to press up against things, squeeze around, crawl over – not so much out of a childish naïveté to return to the playground, but more to acknowledge that the world begins to exist at the limits of our skin and what goes on at that interface between the physical self and external conditions doesn’t detach us like the detached gaze.” (Newman, M. & Bird, J. 1999: 96). Morris had some explanatory photographs made that were exhibited alongside the objects. These show the gallery staff participating ‘appropriately’ with the works as a guide for the public. (Fig. 1a & 1b)



Fig. 1a & 1b

The exhibition opened for five days and then was promptly closed by the Keeper of Exhibitions and the Director of the Tate, “a number a people, given the chance actually to climb on and push around objects in a gallery, went over the top – pieces were damaged, members of the public suffered minor injuries.” (Potts, A. 2000: 249). The show reopened with the participatory artworks removed a short time later. Reviews at the time made unfavourable references to playgrounds and assault courses. A more positive review describes the energy of the opening: “By the end of the private viewing the place was a bedlam in which all rules of decorum had been abandoned as liberated

aesthetes leaped and teetered and heaved and clambered and shouted and joined hands with total strangers.” (Newman, M. & Bird, J. 1999: 104).

This study concentrates on contemporary presentations of this kind of art. During visits to the Tate Modern and The Barbican Gallery in London and Dundee Contemporary Arts I came across artworks with a similar spirit to Morris’ objects of the early seventies that encouraged physical participation from the audience. The works that I came across are as follows:



## **The Unilever Series**

**Carsten Höller**

**'Test Site' (Fig. 2)**

**10<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2006 – 15<sup>th</sup> April 2007**

**Turbine Hall**

**Tate Modern**

**London**

**Fig. 2**

I took part in this work in mid-December 2006. It was a series of chutes that extended from the second, third, fourth and fifth floors to the ground floor of the Turbine Hall. Participants were invited to slide down a chute on their backs. When I visited participants were initially asked to queue for a free ticket. Tickets were stamped with a time at half hourly intervals. At the appropriate time you were permitted to participate in the work. This involved going to the required floor and queuing in order to be fitted with a protective hat, elbow-pads and knee-pads. An attendant then gave you some brief instructions. You sat at the top of the slide in a cotton bag and pushed yourself forward into the chute. The drop took five to ten seconds. In my experience it was a wild ride that left me trembling slightly.

In an interview Höller describes his work: "A slide is a sculpture you can travel inside." (Honoré, V. 2006). This description highlights how 'Test Site' has two main aspects. These two aspects are "the visual spectacle of watching people sliding and the 'inner spectacle' experienced by the sliders themselves." (Tate Modern. 2006). From one perspective it is a sculptural object that can be contemplated. Its architectural scale and its use of plastics and metal present the observer with numerous opportunities to evaluate its aesthetic properties. From this perspective an observer can also witness the crowds who participate in the work. Participants gather at the tops of the slides, zoom down the slides and gather at the bottom to become spectators themselves. Höller states that

individuals may remain as observers if they want, “it would be a mistake to think that you have to use the slide to make sense of it.” (Honoré, V. 2006).

From another perspective a participant has an opportunity to travel inside ‘Test Site’ at high speed. In this sense the work offers a practical experience that helps you to travel efficiently and provides you with a physical and emotional experience because you drop at such an unnerving rate. Höller adopts an objective point of view on his work and underlines that ‘Test Site’ can be explained in practical terms as a transport system or in relation to the architecture of the city. He proposes that ‘Test Site’ is an opportunity for participants to study their own responses to the work and a chance for an audience to assess if ‘Test Site’ could have an architectural function. He describes it as “a large-scale experiment” (Honoré, V. 2006). Höller also emphasises that ‘Test Site’ offers an intense experience for each participant. He is especially interested in the potential of his work to transform the personal disposition of each audience member. There is a private aspect to participation where sliding induces states “[...] somewhere between delight and alarm.” (Honoré, V. 2006).





Fig. 3

## Trauma

**Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Christopher Wool**

**'Untitled, 1993' (Fig. 3)**

**7<sup>th</sup> July 2001- 2<sup>nd</sup> Sept. 2001**

**Gallery 1 and 2**

**Dundee Contemporary Arts**

I took part in this work as part of the group show 'Trauma' in mid-August 2001. It consisted of a pile of posters about 30cm high. Each poster was in portrait format and was 152cm high and 101cm wide. Participants were invited to take a poster away and gallery staff maintained the height of the pile. On my visit to the gallery I took away a poster and it had to be rolled up because of its size. This was a collaborative work by Gonzalez-Torres and Wool. Gonzalez-Torres supplied the participatory format and Wool supplied the text for the poster. Gonzalez Torres has produced numerous versions of this format using images and plain sheets of paper. Wool had previously produced an untitled painting with this text on it in 1990. The text is by Raoul Vaneigem and is quoted from Greil Marcus' book on Punk and Dada 'Lipstick Traces' (Marcus, G. 2002).

Gonzalez-Torres' previous paper and poster works have all encouraged audiences to actively take ownership of examples from a stack. These examples have been described as "souvenirs of a public exhibition event" (Fuchs, R. 1997: 89). In this sense 'Untitled, 1993' can be described as having a public dimension when it is a stack of posters in the gallery and a private dimension when a participant takes one away. Fuchs describes these public and private aspects to



the work in more detail as “the artist’s deliberate manipulation of the mechanics of reception.” (Fuchs, R. 1997: 89). From the outset the work permits an active engagement with the stack of posters. Fuchs suggests that the underlying participatory character of this work allows Gonzalez-Torres to stress how a particular, introspective and private experience of art integrates at a fundamental level with a more general social, cultural and public experience of art. Consequently Fuchs claims that in Gonzalez-Torres artwork a participant “functions as a living interface between the private and public spheres.” (Fuchs, R. 1997: 90). The participatory act of taking ownership is a concrete embodiment of how the individual experiences art in a social context.

Fuchs also highlights the ephemeral format of Gonzalez-Torres work. He describes it as “production with the aim of renewed disintegration.” (Fuchs, R. 1997: 93). A sense of disintegration inheres in the work yet with each new production of the work the disintegration is restored. The break up of the work *is* the work. Fuchs suggests that this approach to art production is part of Gonzalez-Torres’ response to the AIDS crisis in the mid-nineties. Gonzalez-Torres lost many friends and himself died an AIDS related death in 1996. It can be suggested that by making dispersal an integral constituent of these works Gonzalez-Torres paradoxically preserves their wholeness.



**Tropicália - A revolution in Brazilian Culture**

**Hélio Oiticica**  
**'Tropicália'**  
**(1967) (Fig. 4)**



**Lygia Clark**  
**'Six Sensorial Masks'**  
**(1967) (Fig. 5)**

**16th Feb. 2006 –**  
**21th May 2006**  
**Barbican Art Gallery**  
**London**

**Fig. 4 & Fig. 5**

I participated in both of these works in April 2006 during the exhibition 'Tropicália – A Revolution in Brazilian Culture'. This exhibition focused on the diverse Brazilian cultural movement known as 'Tropicalism' that had a multidisciplinary approach to art production, an empathy with the emancipatory potential of popular culture, an interest in collective participation and an engagement with the harsh social and political realities of late 60's early 70's Brazil. The curator described the exhibition as "an attempt to understand the logic guiding the work of Oiticica and Lygia Clark and to set their work in its proper context." (Searle, A. 2006)

Oiticica's 'Tropicália' is a sprawling installation that incorporates tent-like structures called 'Penetrables'. These are environments that you enter and move through. They are inspired by Oiticica's experiences in the favelas or shantytowns around Rio de Janeiro. There were cordoned-off pits of hay, water and sand, tropical foliage in pots, caged cockatoos that constantly called out and a maze of cubicles with a television tuned to a current television programme at its centre. Participants were expected to take off their footwear and wander through the installation. It has been suggested that in this installation Oiticica intended to comment on the radical value of 'tropicality'.

“Oiticica called attention to the dangers of a superficial, folkloric consumption of an image of tropical Brazil, stressing the existential life-experience that escapes this consumption” (Ostoff, S. 1997: 7).

Clark’s ‘Six Sensorial Masks’ is a series of fabric hoods that are piled on a table. Participants are invited to try on a hood. Each hood highlights a different sensory attribute. One hood has mirrors placed over the eye-holes, presenting the user with a disturbing close up reflection of his or her eyes. Another has herbs and spices packed into a pocket at the front that produces an olfactory sensation and another has maraca like objects positioned over the ears to produce an auditory sensation. Clark has stressed that during this period her work was not about art objects, her own self-expression or art history but about a kind of therapy where the sensory experience takes precedence. She stresses the purifying nature of her art. “The instant of the act is the only living reality to us” (Clark, L. 1965: 100). There is a sense in which participation is essential to this work; you have to be wearing it to experience it.

While this study mainly concentrates on these three contemporary presentations of participatory art, references will also be made to other participatory artworks that have similar properties. Occasional references will additionally be made to a pilot study of a participatory artwork called ‘Renascent Scission’ that I carried out at Gray’s School of Art in 2007 (Appendix I).

## **General outline**

This study will therefore primarily concentrate on *participatory art* from the participant’s perspective. The artworks selected as examples for this study represent participatory art that openly invites *participatory action*. The selected artworks encourage participants to slide, to take possession, to enter or to wear an artwork. When you encounter this art you are active rather than passive because it involves “activated spectatorship” (Bishop, C. 2005: 11). Two consequences of ‘activated spectatorship’ will be explored in this study. Firstly modernist accounts of aesthetic experience will be compared to accounts of the experience of participatory action. This will demonstrate how ‘the aesthetic’ is tested by participatory art. Secondly explanations of human action will be compared participatory art. This will show the diverse ways that participatory

action may be captured and therefore the variety of ways that participatory action interrogates 'the aesthetic'.

## **Objectives**

This study accepts the possibility that aesthetic experience may have a role in an experience of participatory art while recognising that this role may be defined by the presence of participatory action. Consequently it is acknowledged that aesthetic experience may no longer have such a privileged position because the ordinary experience of action is influential in participatory art. Participatory art is no longer solely linked to special experiences that are detached from everyday life but also the experiences that constitute everyday life.

The main objective of this study is to reach a fuller explanation of participatory art by exploring some of the more influential philosophies associated with aesthetic experience and human action. Within this main objective a distinction can be made between an explanation of art and an exploration of philosophy. Given that this study springs from research that took place in an art school rather than the philosophy department of a university the primary concern is to generate new knowledge about participatory art rather than to independently test the soundness of a series of philosophical arguments. Therefore philosophical arguments about aesthetic experience and human action will be placed at the service of new knowledge about participatory art.

In this study it is suggested that participation may be a consequence of clear deliberation, spontaneous feeling or may be influenced by a set of social circumstances. Therefore it is an objective to explore how the aesthetic experiences that are identified in participatory art relate to reason, the body and social convention. Another objective is to look at the role played by action in participatory art. As with aesthetic experience the relationship of action to reason, the body and social convention will be considered. Consequently analytical, phenomenological and institutional/sociological perspectives will be adopted in order to explain aesthetic experience and action. It is also an objective to find out if explanations of the changing role of aesthetic experience in participatory art can be informed by explanations of participatory action. Can arguments about aesthetic experience be supported by arguments about action?

I would say that this study involves a measure of cross-disciplinary research because it incorporates the study of analytical, phenomenological and institutional/ social approaches to aesthetic experience and action. The study contributes to knowledge about participatory art by comparing ideas about aesthetic experience with ideas about human action that have not been considered until now. It is suggested that an exploration of this relationship will help participants to understand some of the experiences that are encountered in participatory art.

### **Theme: Aesthetic Experience**

Richard Shusterman suggests that analytical approaches to aesthetics have moved from an interest in the “evaluative” and the “phenomenological” to an interest in the “descriptively neutral” and the “semantic” (Shusterman, R. 1999: 32). According to Shusterman this shift reflects a more general transformation within culture. As a consequence of the effects of all new media from TV onwards, the dominant mode of communication is changing. We are moving from a “unified experiential culture” to a “modular, informational one” (Shusterman, R. 1999: 37). Contemporary art is influenced by this state of affairs and this is described as the “anaesthetic thrust” in contemporary art (Shusterman, R. 1999: 29). For Shusterman aesthetic experience appears to have been superseded because it has too many associations with an outmoded form of art appreciation that valued pleasure and sensation. *Interpretation* is now the favoured term and the tendency in analytical approaches to aesthetics is to appraise art in terms of detached definitions and meanings rather than on the basis of how it makes you feel. Nonetheless Shusterman does not completely disregard aesthetic experience. He suggests that given the possibility of an aesthetic experience you are drawn to it and that the point of such experience is to emphasise “what is worth seeking in art and elsewhere in life” (Shusterman, R. 1999: 37).

Shusterman is arguing that the role of aesthetic experience should not be overlooked in favour of analysis and interpretation. In this study I will recognise that aesthetic experience is simply one experience among the many experiences that an artwork can offer and I will cast doubt on the prominent role given to aesthetic experience by modernist theories of art. Following Noël

Carroll I will argue that “aesthetic experience is neither the only, the central, nor the best kind of appropriate response to an artwork” (Carroll, N. 2001: 61).

When aesthetic experience is considered it is often straightforwardly associated with a perceptual experience. Looked at in more detail aesthetic experience can be described as a feeling of pleasure that arises from a set of perceptions that are caused by an artwork. It is also frequently claimed that this feeling of pleasure has a special, intrinsic value. Carroll describes the ‘traditional account’ of aesthetic experience, “an aesthetic experience of an artwork involves contemplation, valued for its own sake, of the artwork.” (Carroll, N. 2001: 44). On the basis of this brief description there are therefore three assumptions made about aesthetic experience that can be examined: its origins in perception, its association with pleasure and its supposed inherent value.

### **Perception and pleasure**

In his discussion with George Dickie, Monroe Beardsley proposes that aesthetic enjoyment is “the kind of enjoyment we obtain by the apprehension of a qualitatively diverse segment of the phenomenal field [...]” (Beardsley, M. 1982: 42). For Beardsley the enjoyment produced by aesthetic experience arises from the perception of the aesthetic properties of an object or event. An individual becomes aware of an artwork’s properties primarily by looking at, listening to, smelling, touching or tasting a phenomenon.

On the other hand Dickie suggests that perception is not necessarily the primary experience in an encounter with an artwork. For Dickie there are other aspects in your encounter that have an important bearing on your response to the work. At the very least you have a recognition that you are directing your attention to a ‘phenomenal field’ that is in fact an artwork and not an ordinary object. You may also be aware of an artistic tradition or technique that is embodied in a work. In general you have some knowledge, no matter how basic, that goes hand in hand with your perceptions.

For example you may view a painting and see that it is full of flowing movement but you may not know that it was painted in 1955. The first part of this statement is a description of the “aesthetic object” (Dickie, G. 1974: 149) of the painting; the second part of this statement can only be determined by an historical analysis of the painting. Dickie accepts that the aesthetic aspects you

may come across in an exhibition may be distinct from what appear to be 'extrinsic' historical aspects of the artwork. However he does not accept that just because your perception of the work can be separated from your knowledge of the work that perception is necessarily the fundamental ground for an experience of art.

Dickie proposes that prior to your encounter with the art you must *know* that your perceptions are going to be the primary focus in the upcoming experience. You use your knowledge to 'clear your mind of thoughts' in order to have the proper aesthetic experience based on perception. This seems to suggest that your ability to be sensitive to the aesthetic properties of art does not arise 'naturally' but is grounded in cognition. "Beardsley's distinguishing between intentions and aesthetic objects presupposes this background knowledge but does not call attention to it" (Dickie, G. 1974: 171).

Carroll is equally concerned with the role that knowledge plays alongside perception in aesthetic experience. He suggests that a focus on the perceptual in aesthetic experience leads to an increasingly restricted understanding of what counts in art. Rather than stress the importance of aesthetic experience he favours other 'non-aesthetic' factors such as when you look for a meaning an artwork, try to discover its underlying formal structures or try to figure out its symbolic order in a "gamelike" manner (Carroll, N. 2001: 10). This is described as "interpretative play" (Carroll, N. 2001: 11). He points out that placing interpretation on equal standing with aesthetic experience can be justified because it is so evident in education, in criticism and in artistic practice itself. Like Dickie, Carroll accepts that the aesthetic and the interpretative can be differentiated but he cannot see how it can be proved that aesthetic experience is more fundamental or operates at a deeper level than interpretation. In fact he suggests that like aesthetic experience, interpretation can be associated with pleasure because you can enjoy deciphering a complex theme or comparing an artwork to historical precedents.

On the basis of these claims it can be suggested that the encounter with art is cognitive as well as perceptual, that interpretation is as significant as aesthetic experience and that interpretation can lead to pleasures that are similar to the pleasures of aesthetic experience. Just as Dickie and Carroll have suggested that cognition and interpretation often supplant aesthetic experience, in this study I aim to show that participatory action similarly displaces aesthetic experience. I

will show that the presence of participatory action confirms the significance of cognition and investigative interpretation in participatory art and that participatory action may produce its own pleasures.

### **Intrinsic value**

When he considers the intrinsic value of aesthetic experience Carroll traces a connection between the aesthetic theory of Kant and the modernism of Adorno. He suggests that Kant's notions of 'disinterestedness' and the 'freeplay of the imagination and understanding' are used by Adorno in an 'allegorical account' of aesthetic experience. Kant's terms are made to act as signs for a general criticism of the dominant values in society. Where Kant proposed that disinterestedness is an experience free of practical or ethical interests; Adorno reworks this to mean an experience free from economic or political interest. By surrendering to a disinterested aesthetic experience you are making a tacit comment on prevailing social values. Where Kant proposed that in aesthetic experience there is a freeplay of the understanding and imagination "since no definite concept restricts them to a particular rule of cognition" (Kant, I. 1997: 108); Adorno reworks this to mean an aesthetic experience that is "holding forth an alternative kind of reason, whose possibility also indicts instrumental rationality." (Carroll, N. 2001: 55). Therefore aesthetic experience and contemporary society are engaged in an adversarial relationship. Aesthetic experience functions as a worthy model for the way things ought to be outside of use value, rationality or profit.

Grant Kester takes a similar perspective when he comments on modernist avant-garde theory. He notes that when art is defined to the extent that it is at odds with its societal surroundings it operates as a form of "semantic resistance" (Kester, G. 2004: 32). Art is the critical 'other' of advertising, commodification, popular-culture, kitsch, public relations, mass media and political spectacle. The difficulty and interpretative complexity of art stands in opposition to the surrounding culture and remains "utterly unpalatable to the appropriative powers of consumer culture" (Kester, G. 2004: 32). Peter Burger similarly contends that aesthetic experience offers the individual a kind of refuge from the ravages of day-to-day experience. It offers "a communicative experience which is not subject to the imperatives of means end rationality and allows as much scope to the imagination as to the spontaneity of behaviour" (Burger, P. 1984: 25). In art reality is not presented in instrumental terms and



ideas are not introduced within a rational framework. From these standpoints aesthetic experience presents you with a strong feeling of alienation or an extraordinary epiphany. In either case your habitual point of view on society and culture is disrupted by the shock of aesthetic experience.

For Carroll the credibility of these modernist accounts of aesthetic experience rests on an arguable assumption. If aesthetic experience is explicable as freeplay and disinterestedness and if freeplay and disinterestedness stand in opposition to the prevailing values of instrumental rationality and the market economy then it is clear that aesthetic experience cannot be reduced to advertising and profit motives. However according to Carroll there is no definitive evidence that freeplay and disinterestedness actually are the primary ingredients in an account of art. He has argued that 'interpretative play' is as important as aesthetic experience and this does not arise from the notions of freeplay or disinterestedness. Interpretation emerges from the background of knowledge you may have about art history and tradition. Interpretation involves many 'definite concepts' and 'declarations of interest'. In this way he is able to cast doubt on the authority of the modernist account of aesthetic experience. Other kinds of experience and knowledge deserve as much attention as aesthetic experience in accounts of art. "[The allegorical approach] presupposes that aesthetic experience is a matter of disinterested freeplay of the imagination, untethered by determinate concepts. These features of aesthetic experience must obtain if aesthetic experience is to be allegorized as a site of resistance against exchange value and instrumental reason" (Carroll, N. 2001: 57)

On the basis of these comments I will assume that the modernist account of aesthetic experience that is put forward by Adorno cannot be straightforwardly applied to participatory art. Following Carroll I will acknowledge that art does not necessarily always stand in opposition to 'instrumental reality'. Instead I propose that aspects of instrumental reality and its everyday concerns are integrated into participatory art. I will recognise that you employ background knowledge, concepts and other types of interest when you are a participant in a participatory artwork.

## Theme: Action

It could be suggested that human action is such a pervasive occurrence in everyday life that it often passes without remark. For example in the morning I may go into my kitchen intending to read the newspaper. I open the window shutters. This allows light into the room where the cat is sleeping. The light gives the cat a fright and she runs out of the kitchen. This series of events could be described as opening the shutters, letting light into the room or frightening the cat. I may take one perspective and think that this adequately covers my actions or I may take the whole story together explaining it as a result of my plan to read the paper. It could be said that situations like this happen to you everyday in multiple ways and you rarely pause to examine them. Nonetheless you do have a sense that there is an underlying kind of sequence that can be used to explain your actions. If my friend complained that when the cat ran out of the kitchen she knocked over a vase I would explain the sequence of events that led to the accident by pointing to the reason why I opened the shutters. I wanted some daylight to read by.

When human actions are discussed reasons like this become very important and are often talked about in the same breath as intentions. My immediate intention in opening the shutters was to let light in. A more overarching intention was to read the paper comfortably. An even more distant intention may have been to check the cinema listings in order to make arrangements for the rest of the day. Therefore there are guiding intentions that deal with the here and now and intentions that organize events at a higher level. In this example it is also clear that I had clear reason for opening the shutters. On another day I may have opened the shutters because that is what I always do in the morning or I may have opened the shutters absentmindedly while talking on the telephone. In these cases I was acting out of habit or spontaneously. These examples indicate significant kinds of human action that do not involve clear reasons.

Human action is a key theme in this study because a distinguishing property of participatory art is the way that it invites actions from a participant. Participatory art invites you to physically act in relation to the work in some way or other. Claire Bishop has one explanation of what these actions may mean. In a description of 'relational aesthetics' she states, "Such work seems to derive from a creative misreading of poststructuralist theory: rather than the

*interpretations* of a work of art being open to continual reassessment, the work *itself* is argued to be in perpetual flux" (Bishop, C. 2004: 52). She is suggesting that just as interpretations of artworks are often unstable, the ability to touch, move or alter a participatory artwork perceptibly reveals this instability. Participatory art literally and tangibly reveals to the audience the interpretative process. Interpretation is remodelled into a type of publicly observable behaviour. Your actions in relation to an artwork become a concrete embodiment of how you experience art.

The aim of this study is not to suggest that participatory art crudely prioritises *behaviour* in explanations of art. However there are some terms associated with behaviourism that help to clarify the role that theories of human action can play in an explanation of participatory art. From the perspective of behaviourism human action can be described as a "molecular concept" or as a "molar concept" (Care, N.S. and Landesman, C. 1968: xiv). As a 'molecular concept' action is described in very specialist terms linked to the stretching and movements of your muscles. As a 'molar concept' action is described in more everyday terms with no reference to physiology or nerves. An action is 'walking down the street' or 'lifting a box'. Behaviourism also provides the terms "peripheral" and "central" behaviour (Care, N.S. and Landesman, C. 1968: xiv). 'Peripheral behaviours' are events that are observable outside the body and 'central behaviours' are events that occur within the body such as feelings, thoughts or moods. From this scheme Care and Landesman are able to suggest that 'Theories of action' deal with how people actually intervene physically in the world. The theory of action deals with "molar peripheral behaviour" (Care, N.S. and Landesman, C. 1968: xiv).

In this study action will be explored from an analytical perspective, a phenomenological perspective and from a social perspective. From the analytical perspective there are a number of interconnected viewpoints associated with explanations of action. The viewpoints that have a direct bearing on this study question the role of causality by asking: Is action caused by a preceding psychological event or mental state? They question the role of intention by asking: When you intend to do something is this a private plan or part of shared language? They also question the role of the will or volition by asking: In what sense are you a free agent if something outside of yourself or another person causes you to act? They additionally question the naturalistic

view of human action by asking: Is an action best explained in terms of nerve signals and physical movement?

Unlike the analytical approach, phenomenology considers action in a way you might consider perception. Just as your senses can distort or heighten your perception of your surroundings so can your actions, "action does not merely take place within the world, but rather contributes to its constitution."

(Waldensfels, B. 1997: 11). From a phenomenological perspective action is explained in terms of its direct relation to 'the body' and how it is associated with existence as a "vital infrastructure" (Waldensfels, B. 1997: 11).

Phenomenology helps to explain spontaneous, impulsive and habitual actions that do not have any reasoned basis but play a key role in behaviour. In this sense a phenomenology of action recognises that behaviour can fall outside of intention and clear goals. Through phenomenology "[...] we also recognise purposeless, useless, anti-economic, celebratory gestures in the human being." (Flusser, V. 1985: 168)

From a social perspective action moves out into the wider world where the consequences of taking a rational view or a 'living' view of action are explored. When action is understood in this way then it is suggested that the role of 'practical reason' is being explored. "Practical reason is reasoning which is used to guide action, and is contrasted with theoretical reason, which is used to guide thinking." (O'Neill, O. 1998: 613) From one perspective your actions can be understood in instrumental terms. This helps you with immediate solutions on how to act without giving you an overall guide for why you should act in such a way. From another perspective you already know what your goal is but this goal doesn't supply you with the particular method for getting there. From another perspective it can be suggested that it is best not to explain practical reason in terms of means or goals. Instead the reasons for your actions can be explained in terms of 'norms'. Norms are like a set of basic rules that act as "identity-constituting personal projects" (O'Neill, O. 1998: 617). Gender, age and ethnicity are examples of norms that could guide your actions. This view explains how practical reasoning may follow rules but doesn't offer any way of questioning the rules. Another standpoint on norms suggests that they can be too specific and can only be applied to specific individuals and groups. It is better to appeal to "the world at large" (O'Neill, O. 1998: 617). The only kind of practical reason that ought to be respected is the kind that is acceptable to the widest public rather than limited interest groups. This view offers external

justification from which to criticise prescribed norms but also risks being overly general. When action is examined from a social perspective in this study these themes of instrumentalism, means and ends and particular and universal norms will inform its underlying structure.

The intention of this study is to demonstrate that when the philosophy of action is applied to explanations of participatory art then there is no simple division between physical behaviour and psychological meaning.

### **Theme: Participatory Art**

Participatory art has emerged under many aliases and in many forms through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I would say that Allan Kaprow's explanations of the 'Happening' are a pertinent historical reference point for this study. In his text 'Assemblages, Environments and Happenings' (1965) Kaprow outlines some of the distinguishing features of the period's performance art. He is critical of performances that rely on theatrical conventions where the audience is separated from the show, declaring that their separation should be as indistinct as possible. He also proposes that the Happening does not necessarily need to be explained as 'art'. Instead he suggests that it could just as easily be described in terms outside of art such as sport, biology or engineering. He hopes that Happenings will be able to extend spatially, spreading out across venues and locales to become a global phenomenon and furthermore he speculates that Happenings may question the nature of time. The duration of a Happening does not need to be limited to the few hours of theatrical convention. It has the potential to last for months, years or even be endless. At his most ambitious he imagines a kind of 'open-ended general world score' that could be used to choreograph the action of everyone and everything including the natural environment, animals and the weather. Kaprow's views are a useful precedent in this study because underlying all of his explanations of the Happening is a commitment to the inclusion of participants and recognition that 'ordinary action' can refresh your understanding of art. "By avoiding the artistic modes there is a good chance that a new language will develop that has its own standards." (Kaprow, A. 1965: 706).

Claire Bishop develops the term 'participatory art' to describe work that involves "activated spectatorship" (Bishop, C. 2005: 11) and identifies three

main social themes that have become linked to such art since the sixties. These are *Activation*, *Authorship* and *Community*. *Activation* describes the intended outcome of participatory artworks where your participation prompts you to action in other spheres of life. The participatory artwork generates a sense of freedom that provides the impetus to make wider social or political changes. *Authorship* describes the way that the creator of a participatory artwork surrenders some of the power they may have as the originator of the work. The artist becomes less dominant in the generation of meaning for the work. This is seen as generating a more equal social model. *Community* describes the manner in which the collective characteristics of the participatory artwork may be emphasised by its creator. The cooperation that occurs in the collective is contrasted with the isolating effects of dominant forms of individualism. Participation acts as “a restoration of the social bond through a collective elaboration of meaning” (Bishop, C. 2006: 12).

I would say that the works by Höller, Gonzalez-Torres, Oiticica and Clark that are the focus of this study fall under Bishop’s categories and that to a greater or lesser degree they explore the notions of activation, authorship and community that are proposed as central themes of participatory art. However it is problematic to focus on a specific set of gallery-based works and classify them as being representative of all participatory art. Therefore I suggest that it is worth taking a broader perspective on participatory art where gallery-based and community-based participatory art can be compared.

The exhibition spaces that housed the artworks under consideration in this study may be looked at from a positive perspective. They could be described as sites that encourage a liberal and multicultural outlook on culture. They provide spaces for the imagination and offer opportunities for aesthetic experience. They generate a sense of community amongst their audiences and they support the aesthetic education of their audiences without relying on the didactic methods employed in other spheres of life. You may learn something without the self-conscious awareness that you are improving yourself. From a more critical perspective it could be said that these venues serve the interests of dominant commercial and cultural elites. As a consequence they do not represent marginal groups but impose a specific form of community on diverse audiences. It could be said that these institutions assume that the experience of art is intrinsically valuable, isolate aesthetic experience from day-to-day life and decontextualise art in order to control it. “It is presumed to be of a higher order

possessing universal aesthetic quality that purportedly makes a better person of whoever experiences it." (Hein, H. 1998: 304)

According to Michel Foucault the museum or gallery can be understood as a "discursive formation" (Danaher, G. Schirato, T. Webb, J. 2000: 21). This discursive formation generates knowledge about art and aesthetics and this knowledge is dependent on three main factors: the discipline, the commentary and the author. Art is 'owned' by numerous disciplines such as art criticism, art education, art practice, curatorial practice and the art market. If art ever ends up in court then it is critics, educators, artists, curators and dealers who are called upon to give their judgement. For Foucault when a critic judges an artwork he or she is providing a commentary on art. In providing a commentary on art the critic is referring to his or her knowledge and this knowledge is based on what the critic has read or seen. In order to maintain your position as a critic you are continually assessed within your discipline to make sure you are making the appropriate commentaries. You must be tested to make sure you 'fit in'. For Foucault the main way of securing your position is to be comprehensively aware of important artists and you must also provide commentaries on favoured theorists in your field. This is how the 'truth of art' is established.

As is evident in this brief description of Foucault's theory of discursive formation, the 'truth of art' is the result of the actual situations where it is being discussed. There is no disinterested essence of art that transcends the discipline, the commentary or the author. The 'truth' of the situation arises in a complex of argument, strategy, expertise, influence and power. The 'truth' is not pure but a consequence of "chance encounters, institutional politics and practices of patronage and favouritism" (Danaher, G. Schirato, T. Webb, J. 2000: 38). However for Foucault an important reward for any discourse that manages to achieve a degree of dominance in this process is the opportunity for its supporters to claim that their discourse is essential and universal. This is typically accomplished by demonstrating that a discourse is grounded in authoritative historical precedents. The further back in history you can trace the genealogy of your discourse the more legitimacy it has as a 'truth'. Therefore from Foucault's viewpoint the current 'truth' of the gallery as a special site for the contemplation of contemporary art is a result of the successful imposition of the values of a dominant cultural group. This dominance is guaranteed because they have effectively connected the current role of the gallery with precedents

that have taken place during the historical development of the art market and the gallery.

The participatory art that is the focus of this study is gallery-based. It is therefore suggested that these works are dependent on the gallery to an extent. They do not radically challenge the gallery's dominance as a discursive formation in the manner of community-based artworks. On the contrary it could be said that they accept the historical role of the gallery. Nonetheless these works are not exhibited in a straightforward manner. They redirect the resources of the gallery and reappraise the conventions of the gallery. In this way I suggest that they provide participants with opportunities to readdress the gallery's role in presenting art.

Discussions about community-based art can lead to polarisation. The museum and gallery tend to be cast in a negative light while environments outside of these contexts are viewed affirmatively. Art in a museum has been compromised while art in the community retains its integrity. I would disagree with this view and am inclined to say that both contexts share similar challenges. As mentioned above it could be suggested that the museum can be criticised for representing a dominant cultural elite. However community-based artworks can be criticised in much the same way. It is often assumed that community art projects represent the values of a community and that the community has either determined the content of a project or has actually been instrumental in the production of a project. Ideally an artist becomes integrated with the community and in turn the community becomes enfranchised through creative artistic labour and establishes a degree of artistic authority through the project. Nonetheless it can be suggested that such projects do not always represent a community. Under the guise of being community-based, art projects can be imposed on communities or artists can assume that they have the right to speak for a community. Community-based art projects can equally serve the interests of a cultural elite and treat a community as an undifferentiated group who need to be 'educated'. Following Grant Kester I would suggest that it is more reasonable to take a pluralist view and acknowledge that there are difficulties and benefits to be found in both contexts. "Rather than posit a hierarchy between museum-based art and projects developed in non-art environments, it is more appropriate to think of these as two equally productive sites, each with its own appropriate strategies and potential compromises." (Kester, G. 2004: 189).



Miwon Kwon's discussion of the term 'community' will shed some more light on the current definition of participatory art. For Kwon the term community is frequently associated with a particularly narrow meaning. She explains how community arose in different forms in a city wide community-based art project in Chicago called "Culture in Action: New Public Art in Chicago" in the early nineties (Kwon, M. 2004: 104-134). She points to four main forms of community, the first of which is the 'community of mythic unity'. In this formation community becomes an "overgeneralised and abstract projection of commonality" (Kwon, M. 2004: 120). An artist may bring together a previously disparate group and name it as a community. She then describes the notion of a 'sited community'. In this instance a group exists prior to the artist's involvement and this identity is employed in the project. There are also 'invented communities (temporary)' and 'invented communities (ongoing)'. In the temporary invented community Kwon suggests that a group is organised around the creative objectives of a project only for its duration and disbands at its end. In the ongoing invented community, a group forms in similar manner around the objectives of an art project, but the group's life extends beyond the period of the project and achieves some independence and success in its own terms.

These definitions of community show the diverse ways that community-based art projects can approach the issue. The participatory artworks that are the focus of this study do not address the general issue of community, however it could be said that these works fall under either the 'community of mythic unity' or the 'invented community (temporary)' category. The works of Höller, Gonzalez-Torres, Oiticica and Clark could be negatively described as forming a sense of 'mythic unity' because by being exhibited within the art institution the community is reduced to crowds of 'gallery goers' or 'art lovers'. For example tourists, students and local residents are combined into a 'community of participants'. More positively these works could be described as presenting a temporary and invented community. Admittedly they only involve a short period of participation so they are not community-based art projects in the strict sense but they do bring groups together for the duration of the work.

Another way to come to a clearer definition of participatory art is to consider some explanations of what is actually achieved when participation is given a central role in an artwork. What is so significant about participation? Miwon

Kwon looks at how participation may surface as 'artistic labour', Grant Kester explores the possibility that participation emerges as 'dialogue' and Vilém Flusser considers participation in terms of communication theory.

For Kwon a community-based art project must represent the community and this process of representation is guaranteed in two main ways, either "[...] when the idea or subject of the artwork is determined by the community, or better yet if it *is* the community itself in some way" (Kwon, M. 2004: 96). One approach to transforming the community actually into the subject of the artwork is to generate a situation where community members become part of an artistic collective along with the artist and engage in the production of the artwork. So community members may discuss plans for a project, carry out the construction of an installation, have an exhibition or produce video-art. Kwon claims that this kind of participatory creativity makes some political assumptions about the role of 'artistic labour'. "A culturally fortified subject, rendered whole and unalienated through an encounter or involvement with an artwork, is imagined to be a politically empowered social subject with opportunity (afforded by the art project) and capacity (understood as innate) for artistic self-representation (= political self-determination)." (Kwon, M. 2004: 97).

Kwon questions the assumption that participatory action is automatically a liberating experience. Community members may collectively engage in the production of a work but it is arguable whether they inevitably achieve creative self-awareness. She questions whether 'artistic labour' can only be understood as a trouble-free episode of positive creativity. Kwon's doubts about the meaning of 'artistic labour' firstly show how the participatory actions in the work of Höller, Gonzalez-Torres, Oiticica and Clark are not 'artistic labour'. The participatory actions that are the focus of this study: the sliding, the taking possession, the entering and the wearing are far more ordinary and everyday. By contrast, for example, if you were involved in a community collective that was making a video you would have many more opportunities to be creative. An aim of this study is to find out how such ordinary and relatively uncreative actions may influence your experience of the artwork. Secondly Kwon shows that it is important to evaluate participatory action. It should not always be assumed to be a positive artistic experience. I would say that from one standpoint the participatory actions encouraged by the works in this study provide opportunities to critically appraise your role as a participant. Are your

participatory actions in any way creative? Do you feel any camaraderie with the artist or other participants? Are you being manipulated?

Kester uses the term “dialogic art” when he refers to community-based art (Kester, G. 2004: 1). For Kester the aim of a project is to cultivate a series of dialogues. This perspective shifts the focus from the art object to a focus on the communicative possibilities that the art object may spark off. A project cannot be explained solely in terms of its form or interpreted with reference to its position within an artistic tradition but in terms of how it may generate discourse. The encounter with art extends beyond the artefact into “[...] the very process of communication that the artwork catalyses.” (Kester, G. 2004: 900). In a sense Kester is suggesting that communication itself becomes an artistic ‘material’ for the dialogic artist. By becoming more involved in the process of communication it could be said that dialogic art begins to include a more heterogeneous set of media and methods. Dialogic art can no longer be evaluated in visual terms because its main outcome may be to generate a discussion, a social formation or a new set of links within a community. Kester proposes that dialogic art employs similar “transdisciplinary deviations” to those employed in classic avant-garde art such as Fluxus, Happenings or Situationism (Kester, G. 2004: 51). It is an art form that is not necessarily associated with a particular discipline but goes *beyond* the notion of a disciplinary field or is found *across* different disciplinary fields. “[...] the meaning of a given dialogical work is not centred in the physical condition of a single object or in the imaginative capacity of an individual viewer. Instead the work is constituted as an ensemble of effects, operating at numerous points of discursive interaction.” (Kester, G. 2004: 189).

Kester loosens the ties that participatory action may have with a particular artistic method or medium and focuses instead on the way that participatory action becomes a dialogue. The dialogic artwork rests on a “process of communicative exchange rather than a physical object” (Kester, G. 2004: 90). I would suggest that there are similarities between the way that Kester explores dialogic art and the way that participatory art will be investigated in this study. He draws attention away from the object towards the process of communication and suggests that this process is transdisciplinary. In a corresponding way this study will concentrate on the way that participatory action cuts across disciplines.

Just as Grant Kester emphasises the discussion and communication that can be generated by new forms of 'dialogic art', Flusser's communication theory is relevant in an explanation of participatory art because he similarly stresses the dialogue that can be generated by photography, television and digital technology. This notion of dialogue introduces a new participatory ratio between the producers and recipients of culture. Flusser also looks forward to a role for art that is comparable to Kester's interest in the communicative potential of art. He imagines a future where "Art would no longer work at things ('oeuvres'), but would propose models." (Flusser, V. 1973: 34).

According to Flusser the image was the earliest form of communication and its dominance was maintained up to and beyond the invention of writing. The image has a synchronic nature. "An image is a surface whose meaning is suspended in the moment: It 'synchronizes' the situations that it represents as a scene." (Flusser, V. 1978: 37). For Flusser the image presents a mythical world-view and communicates with immediacy. The onset of writing introduces a new form of communication. With text comes a logical way of thinking and "linear historical consciousness" (Flusser, V. 1973: 22). Writing establishes a diachronic world-view that fundamentally leads to science and the analytical method. Flusser argues that in the current situation, with the advent of photography, television and digital technology, the image is being re-established as the dominant mode of communication. However this does not mean that communication is returning to the myths of the past, rather new media present communication in the form of a "techno-image" (Flusser, V. 1978: 40). Techno-images may be images but they do not represent actuality in the way that early images do. They are assembled from programmes or have linear forms of thought incorporated into their structure. For Flusser the 'techno image' heralds an approaching dominant model of communication.

"First, I mean that it will no longer be the centralized senders but everyone sitting in front of an image-producing terminal who will be able to dictate his own programs to the apparatus. Second, I mean that all of these 'own programs' will be compatible, feeding and correcting each other. That in this manner a continuous dialogic programming of all apparatuses will be generated by all participants." (Flusser, V. 1985: 169).

With this statement Flusser accurately predicts current models of online communication and it could be argued that these are a dominant form of

communication. For Flusser communication is no longer historical or based on linear texts, communication is now “posthistorical” (Flusser, V. 1973: 34). You no longer stand outside the image or the text and reflect on the message; you are now able to modify images that are constructed out of texts. You adopt a new position in relation to history because you are able to develop other combinations of history. Communication is no longer solely a “discourse” where a message is simply transmitted by a sender to a receiver (Flusser, V. 1986-87: 18); communication can also be a dialogue where exchanges and interaction accrue between participants to form new messages.

I would suggest that Flusser’s views on ‘posthistorical’ communication and networked dialogue have a bearing on explanations of participatory art because his suggestions capture the new model of communication that is intimated by participatory art. The works of Höller, Gonzalez-Torres, Oiticica and Clark seek dialogue in the form of active, bodily participation so it could be said that they establish a new relation to history for their participants. They do not present their art as a discourse or a fixed historical consciousness but present it as a dialogue that encourages contributions to their work’s history. In this sense they present a ‘posthistorical’ model of communication in their work.

This study therefore recognises from the outset that there are particular problems associated with the museum or gallery space and the site-specific community art space. The main case studies for this thesis were exhibited at the Tate Modern, The Barbican and Dundee Contemporary Arts therefore this thesis will concentrate on the problems associated with participatory art exhibited in museum and gallery spaces.

This study could be criticised because it overlooks key terms that are associated with participatory art such as ‘the community’ and ‘the site’ and I should instead consider artworks where all the key terms linked to participatory art are in play. In this way the importance of ‘the community’ can be weighed up against ‘aesthetic experience’ and the role of ‘the site’ can be evaluated alongside ‘action’. I agree that this approach could be profitable. Participatory art is such an overarching term and includes such a multitude of methods that a more eclectic set of case studies could have been employed. However I feel that by taking such a broad view the study would not have properly grasped the full meaning of the all the key terms. It is suggested that by concentrating on gallery based works and the association they may have with ‘aesthetic

experience' and 'action' I have been able to bring out the full meaning and these terms. It is suggested that this approach does not artificially narrow the scope of the study but offers a more fully concentrated set of intentions.

When the term 'participatory action' is used in this study Kwon, Kester and Flusser's explanations of what participation can achieve will be used as a guide. Therefore participatory action will not be considered as 'artistic labour' but thought of as ordinary action in the day-to-day world. It will also be recognised that this ordinary action has the potential to be 'transdisciplinary' because it brings diverse disciplines and practices together. It will additionally be acknowledged that participatory action proposes a dialogic and 'posthistorical' rather than a discursive and historical model of communication. It will be shown that participatory art opens up a space for testing the boundary between aesthetic experience and ordinary experience, that it is a practice that employs a variety of different methods and that these methods traverse the discipline of aesthetics and communication theory.

It could be argued that by presenting everyday action in a 'transdisciplinary' and 'posthistorical' context that participatory art questions some of the values of modernism. For Jurgen Habermas the dominant version of modernism involved a critical reflection on the specifics of the three main disciplines of science, morality and art. The overarching aim of this specialisation was the general benefit of society, however according to Habermas the findings of these disciplines were not distributed as expected. "The differentiation of science, morality and art has come to mean the autonomy of the segments treated by the specialist and their separation from the hermeneutics of everyday communication." (Habermas, G. 1983: 463). Habermas traces a familiar trajectory for modern art where it becomes increasingly autonomous and begins to lose relevance in the face of 'everyday communication'. Nonetheless he remains committed to modernism because in 'everyday communication' all the three fields of the enlightenment project are co-ordinated around one another. Science, morality and art are integrated into life because day-to-day life involves logic, practical choices that have ethical consequences and expressions of imagination. For Habermas modernism should aim to bring these areas together, not treat them autonomously. In this sense the high modernism of the twentieth century failed because it was narrowly specialist. This casts doubt on modernist practice as described by Clement Greenberg.

“The essence of modernism lies, as I see it, in the use of characteristic methods of a discipline to criticize the discipline itself – not in order to subvert it, but to entrench it more firmly in its area of competence.” (Greenberg, C. 1960: 754).

Instead modernism should be viewed as a process where fields of knowledge become more integrated.

“A reified everyday praxis can be cured only by creating unconstrained interaction of the cognitive with the moral-practical and the aesthetic-expressive elements” (Habermas, J. 1983: 464).

## **Structure**

Aesthetic experience and participatory action are themes that inform the structure of this study from the outset. It is assumed that participatory action is a human action and it is supposed that because this human action takes place in an art context that it is associated in some way with some kind of aesthetic experience. It is additionally recognised that aesthetic experience and human action have been explained from many philosophical perspectives. On these grounds it is proposed that if some central philosophical perspectives on aesthetic experience and human action are identified and these perspectives are then compared to the properties of some participatory artworks then some key properties of participatory art in general will be revealed.

Chapters one to three are devoted to aesthetic experience and participatory art. Chapter one offers an analytical explanation of aesthetic experience in participatory art. The aim of this chapter is to establish the position that is held by aesthetic experience in participatory art. Does aesthetic experience fit in alongside the practical and social experience of participatory action? Chapter two offers a phenomenological explanation of aesthetic experience in participatory art. The aim of this chapter is to learn if the ‘feel’ of aesthetic experience changes in participatory art. Do the new practical and social experiences introduced by participatory action change aesthetic experience? Chapter three offers an institutional explanation of aesthetic experience in participatory art. The aim of this chapter is to discover how the conventions of participatory art respond to the conventions of the art institution. How do the rules of participatory art relate to the rules of the art institution?

Chapters four to six are then allocated to action and participatory art. Chapter four provides an analytical explanation of participatory action. The aim of this chapter is to find out if participatory action can be rationally explained. Do you clearly plan or have a reason for participatory action? Chapter five provides a phenomenological explanation on participatory action. The aim of this chapter is to reveal what participatory action may 'feel' like. What role do the body and the temperament play in participatory action? Chapter six provides a social explanation of participatory action. The aim of this chapter is to explore what social values may influence participatory action. How does participatory action come to light in the context of the wider social world?

The participatory artworks that are selected as the primary examples for this study took place in three exhibitions that I personally attended. Numerous secondary artworks by other artists also appear throughout the study to support or illustrate aspects of the discourse, as do references to the 'Renascent Scission' pilot study (Appendix I). Chapters one to three (On aesthetic experience) each take a different exhibition as their main case study. Chapter one considers Carsten Höller's 'Test Site'. Chapter two considers Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Christopher Wool's collaborative work 'Untitled, 1993' and chapter three considers Lygia Clark's work 'Six Sensorial Masks' and Hélio Oiticica's 'Tropicália'. Chapters four to six (On action) then the same works in a different order. Chapter four considers Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Christopher Wool's collaborative work. Chapter five considers Lygia Clark and Hélio Oiticica's works and chapter six considers Carsten Höller's work.

Throughout each chapter the relevant philosophical perspective is explored and at key points in the discussion the findings are compared to the properties of the selected case study. A set of proposals is then reached for each chapter. The proposals on aesthetic experience and action are then evaluated to identify their similarities and differences. An overall set of proposals is then put forward. These draw on the way that claims made about aesthetic experience and action support one another. This structure is illustrated in Fig 6.



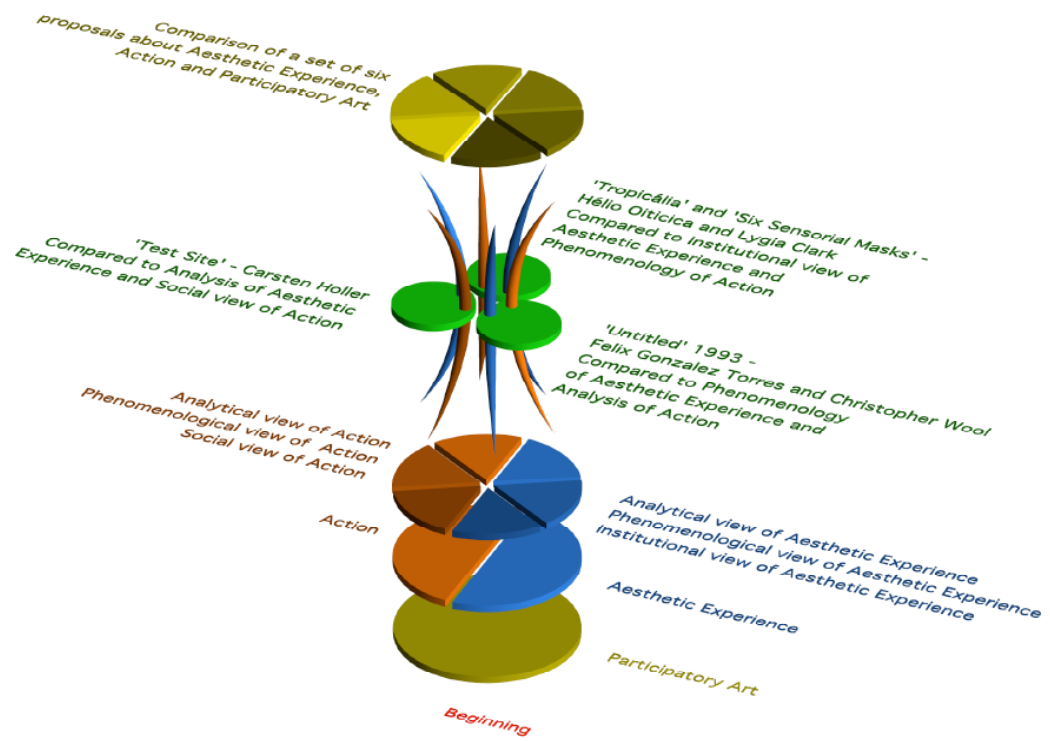


Fig. 6

## Methods

### Actual and Reasonable

This study is composed of six chapters that arrive at a series of proposals on aesthetic experience and action in participatory art. The study brings analytical, phenomenological and institutional perspectives on aesthetic experience together with analytical, phenomenological and social perspectives on human action. Each of these perspectives is compared to my own experience of specific participatory artworks with the aim of contributing some knowledge about key properties of participatory art in general.

It is suggested that participatory art arises in the context of numerous uncontrollable variables and heterogeneous situations. The temperament, social background, gender, age and education of one participant can diverge dramatically from another as well as the participant's perceptiveness, mood, experience and knowledge of art. The situations in which artworks are shown and the social groups that view the artwork additionally influence this variability. This leads to many competing perspectives and ambiguities about what is true about participatory art. As a result a *qualitative* research approach will be adopted for this study. I have to ask if my responses and the responses of others are true and plausible given that the responses of participants cannot be interpreted with certainty and it cannot be assumed that my own responses to a participatory artwork can be upheld as definitive.

A truth condition can be used to offset the overt influence of any beliefs I may personally have about participatory art. From this standpoint I can ask: Is aesthetic experience *actually* embodied in participatory art in this way? And: Is participatory action *actually* like this? Following Williams, "By virtue of the truth condition on knowledge, in ascribing knowledge to someone we are doing more than characterize his subjective state: we are implying something about the world around him." (Williams, M. 2001: 19).

Nevertheless I would say that there is no categorical certainty about the truth conditions of participatory art in this study. Consequently the plausibility of a proposal about participatory art will also be taken into account and not simply whether it is true or false. Truth will be closely linked to belief and the proposals in this study will be gauged in terms of their credibility. From this

point of view it will be asked: In the context of participatory art is this a convincing claim? Given this link between truth and belief, knowledge about participatory art becomes “a highly prized state of belief” (Klein, P.D. 1998: 269).

It is recognised that a measure of objectivity can be introduced into knowledge about participatory art to counterbalance personal belief but that this knowledge will not have any clear certainty. Given this it is suggested that the aim of this study is not to establish truth and falsehood but to explain and support the reasonableness of its proposals. Following Chisholm: “Thus we might say that one belief is more reasonable than another, or more exactly, that one belief is more reasonable for a given person at a given time than is another belief.” (Chisholm, R. 1977: 6)

### **Justification**

It could be said that this description of what may be known about participatory art does not clear up any ambiguity. Asking what is *actually* true and whether a belief is *reasonable* are quite vague ways of testing a proposal. What will tie these two terms together are the justifications that are given for saying that a proposal is actual or reasonable. Following Roderick Chisholm it is suggested that a way to justify what you know is to locate “a kind of stopping place” (Chisholm, R. 1977: 2).

A proposal must be subjected to questioning until you come to a point where you seem to have a more basic type of evidence for your knowledge. So you may ask: ‘How do you justify saying that participatory art involves participation?’ And I could answer: ‘I witnessed groups of people taking part in an artwork in a gallery’. You could ask further: ‘How is this evidence justified? You could be making it up’. And I could answer: ‘I am a reliable witness’ or ‘Other participants will support my claims’. According to Chisholm what is known can be justified by tracing back what is proposed to a more basic evidence that he terms the “directly evident” (Chisholm, R. 1977: 2) and this tends to be perception of a situation in ‘ideal’ conditions. Williams suggests a similar approach although he includes evidence other than perception. He talks about a “reliable source” (Williams, M. 2001: 25) and this can include the testimony of a dependable witness or a recognised and authoritative text.

Alongside the notion that what is known about participatory art can be traced back to a more basic foundation there is also the notion that what is known is dependent on the way that sources of evidence jointly back one another up. “They are ‘mutually supporting’ just as the poles of a tepee are mutually supporting” (Klein, P.D. 1998: 269). Chisholm similarly suggests that even a perception in ‘ideal’ conditions is not a basic enough ‘stopping place’. You also have to acknowledge “the importance of the mutual support that is provided in part by the logical relations that certain propositions bear to each other.” (Chisholm, R. 1977: 85).

A series of ‘stopping places’ and the notion of ‘mutual support’ will be used to substantiate the proposals made about participatory art in this study. One ‘stopping place’ is my personal experience of the participatory artworks that are the focus of this study. In these artworks I directly participated in actions that involved descending down a chute, taking possession of a poster, entering an installation and wearing experimental garments. Another ‘stopping place’ are the photographs and discursive accounts of these participatory artworks made by the artists or by critics and journalists who have witnessed the works. These show what the works look like and highlight the artistic intentions and interpretative perspectives to be taken into consideration. One other ‘stopping place’ is the document of the pilot study ‘Renascent Scission’ (Appendix I). The intention of this document is to offer an accessible and less formal account of some of the issues associated with participatory art and to demonstrate the interest that art students have in these issues. These sources of evidence are all compared to the theoretical discourse of the thesis and this is where the ‘mutual support’ for the proposals that are made about participatory art builds up. In this sense my own explanations of the properties of specific participatory artwork may be a ‘stopping place’ but they also require the ‘mutual support’ of the discourse of others.

### **‘Adequate Grounds’**

Going further it is suggested that there are two ways to justify what may be known about participatory art. Michael Williams suggests that from one perspective justification relies on “adequate grounding” and from the other perspective it relies on “personal justification” (Williams, M. 2001: 22).

When the 'adequate grounds' are taken into consideration then the evidence that is used to support a proposal is looked at with some objectivity. This means that when an example of participatory artwork is used as evidence in this study then the 'facts' of the work are taken into account. What are the 'facts' of an artwork? According to Chisholm: "First, that there are states of affairs, some of which occur or obtain and some of which do not occur or obtain; and second that there are attributes or properties, some of which are exemplified or instantiated and some of which are not exemplified or instantiated." (Chisholm, R. 1997: 87). From this perspective it is recognised that there are facts about artworks that can be more or less reported neutrally such as scale, medium, duration, date and location.

However a contradiction emerges when an overtly objective explanation of a participatory artwork is favoured. If I assert that an individual's participation can be verified in the same way that physical properties of a simple object such as a block of wood can be verified then this makes participation external to a human explanation. In this case I neutrally register participation and the relationship between an artwork and human explanation is abandoned. The fundamental necessity of interpretation is overlooked. It is suggested that the most reasonable way to resolve this problem is to accept that an artwork's properties are not absolutely objective and that your experience of them is not absolutely personal. In this study my personal perspective and the perspective of others are compared to one another and considered in the light of the properties of a number of participatory artworks. I personally witness and interpret participatory action and support my claims with the claims of others who have views on aesthetic experience and action. Accordingly the adequate grounds that are used to justify proposals about participatory art are not strictly based on impartial evidence. It must also be considered in terms of the reliability of the witness and the dependability of the interpretation. The theories and properties that are ascribed to participatory art are supported to a large extent by personal justification. In this way 'adequate grounds' must always be taken together with 'personal justification'.

### **'Personal Justification'**

'Personal justification' assures the soundness of a theory about participatory art by making sure that the theory emerges from a representative overview of the field of inquiry. For example does this theory take into account the main

problems associated with an analytical approach to aesthetic experience? Does this theory bear in mind the main arguments about the social nature of action? The soundness of a theory in this study accumulates through a comprehensive comparison of arguments associated with aesthetic experience and action. The reliability of this approach is additionally supported by the careful employment of reasoned argument. Following Robert B. Burns it is suggested that the notion of *triangulation* is used to ensure the reliability of the discourse on theories linked to participatory art. (Burns, R.B. 2000: 419).

How can I 'personally justify' using my own experience to make claims about participatory art? Following Chisholm it could be said that my explanations arise from "properly accredited sources of knowledge" (Chisholm, R. 1977: 122). I perceive the work, I call on a store of past experiences to compare it to, I reflect inwardly about the work and I can use reason to explain aspects of the work. However each of these sources of knowledge can in turn be influenced by the mood I was in when I encountered the work, by the response of other individuals in the gallery, by a willingness to show approval towards the work given my research interests and by my social and educational background. All of these factors make my explanation highly conditional. It is suggested that the notion of the *case study* can justify the support that participatory artworks give to this study, (Burns, R.B. 2000: 459).

## **Triangulation**

Triangulation informed this study from the beginning. The earliest sources of information about aesthetic experience and action came from three key encyclopaedias in Glasgow University Library. These are:

CRAIG, E. Gen. Ed. 1998.

*Routledge Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*. London, Routledge.

DRUMMOND, J. Gen. Ed. 1997.

*Encyclopaedia of Phenomenology*. London, Kluwer.

KELLY, M. Chief Ed. 1998.

*Encyclopaedia of Aesthetics*. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

As key words emerged during my reading I constantly checked to see if they appeared in these three encyclopaedias and began to cross-reference between the entries in each encyclopaedia. The entry in an encyclopaedia is

accompanied by an initial explanation and after this the most important texts associated with the entry are listed. Key terms such as action and aesthetic experience began to emerge in the research. A clearer picture of participatory art began to form in parallel with this exploration of key words. Given that it is relatively contemporary phenomenon the main initial sources of information about participatory art came from a series of databases. These were:

<http://www.jstor.org>: A cross discipline journal archive

<http://www.theses.com>: An index of theses published in the UK and Ireland

<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com>: An arts abstracts database

In this way I was able to establish a series of correspondences and was able to refine the scope of the literature review as my reading progressed. The tripartite structure of the project's discourse surfaced from this method. It was recognised that an explanation of how aesthetic experience and action are embodied in participatory art could be achieved by taking a rational, bodily and social perspective.

Robert B. Burns suggests that triangulation justifies qualitative research in two ways. It does this by: "checking out the consistency of findings generated by different data-collection methods [and by] checking out the consistency of different data sources within the same method." (Burns, R.B. 2000: 419). With reference to the first way of using triangulation: one 'data-collection method' in this project is an extended philosophical discourse that takes in numerous perspectives on aesthetic experience and action, another 'data-collection method' is a reflection on my own experiences and experiences of others while taking part in participatory art. Throughout this project these two methods are constantly weighed up against one another in order to achieve a credible explanation of how aesthetic experience and action are embodied in participatory art. With reference to the second way of using triangulation: 'different data-sources' using the same method are compared to one another. A tripartite approach is used where aesthetic experience and action are considered from an analytical, a phenomenological and an institutional/social standpoint. Correspondences between these standpoints are then used to support any proposals made about participatory art.

## Case Study

The examples of participatory art used in this project took place in exhibitions that I personally experienced and this is the main reason why they are used. I am able to remember the event and consider my own participation and the participation of others. These observations can then be weighed up against other critical interpretations of the work and also against the main philosophical discourse of the project. It is suggested that a useful way to present my experience of these artworks in the context of this project is as a series of case studies. The case studies in this project are based on models used in social science but they do not strictly follow the practices recommended for an empirical study in social science. Rather the case study is an approach that provides some justification for the use of my own experience as evidence in this project given that my observations can be influenced by factors like personal temperament, social background etc.

The chosen participatory artworks in this project can be presented as a set of case studies because each artwork forms a “*bounded system*” (Burns, R.B. 2000: 460). Each work was shown for a limited period in a specific location. In order to be explained as a case study Burns also suggests that you should know what it is you are explaining. He describes this as “the unit of analysis” (Burns, R.B. 2000: 460). For this project the ‘unit’ is aesthetic experience and action in participatory art. This is understood through my own experience and the observed behaviour of others in a group of participatory artworks. An important purpose of the case study is that an explanation of the particular case can represent the general class that the case belongs to. The case studies in this project represent participatory art that openly invites participatory action.

It is suggested that it is appropriate to describe these case studies as “observational case studies” (Burns, R.B. 2000: 462). According to Burns for an observational case study in social science the researcher identifies a specific location, social group or activity that is going to be observed and then tries to be sensitive to the influence that they may have on what they are observing. In this project it is a particular activity that is the focus of each case study rather than a specific location or social group. Each case study is considered in terms of the aesthetic experience and the action of the participant. For this project I was both a participant and an observer in these case studies. I took part in the artworks and watched others take part. As I observed and participated in these artworks



I behaved in the way I would usually behave when visiting a gallery or museum. I did not have any special plans or procedures to follow. I did not notify the galleries that I was visiting. I arrived in mid-morning or mid-afternoon. I spent one or two hours in the exhibition space taking in the work alongside other exhibits that may have been there. I did not identify myself as a special type of participant or observer by interviewing other participants but was part of the general audience for these artworks. In this sense I was able to remain unobtrusive and get a sense of a 'typical' day in the life of these works. Within each chapter in this project theories about aesthetic experience or action are developed and these are compared to my findings in the artwork case studies. The main outcome of these comparisons is the emergence of a discussion. Given that this project springs from research in art rather than philosophy these discussions will be valued on the basis of the new knowledge they yield about participatory art. Therefore these discussions place philosophy at the service of new knowledge about art. During these discussions the theory and findings are mutually reconsidered because the philosophical discourse is supported or questioned by the findings in the artwork case studies. It is a process of interpretation that develops when my interpretation is compared to the views of others. If it is recognised that artworks tend to generate multiple and conflicting interpretations then it must be recognised that it is in the process of discussion that my own personal experience begins to gain some credibility as it is confirmed and opposed by the views of others.<sup>1</sup> In this way a set of proposals about participatory art is generated. Burns describes this as "explanation building" (Burns, R.B. 2000: 473).

## 1.0 Analytical Explanations of Aesthetic Experience in Participatory Art

### 1.1 Introduction



Fig. 1

#### *Context*

The features of 'Test Site' (Fig. 1) that made the strongest impression on me were its sculptural appearance, the sense of being part of a large crowd of people who all had the same goal, the staggering force of the high-speed descent inside the chute and the unsteadiness I felt as I stood up after sliding. As I surveyed the work's appearance I was distracted by other activities like queuing, talking and reading. When I felt that I was part of a social group this was reinforced by the conventions of queuing, talking and reading. As I plunged down inside the chute I was dimly aware that the intensity of the experience was threatening to overwhelm me and when I felt a bit shaky in the aftermath of the experience I also felt slightly elated.

#### *Problem*

When I participated in 'Test Site' I would say that I enjoyed the experience despite its more harrowing characteristics. After an experience of 'Test Site' you could say that 'you had to be there' or 'you have to experience it first hand'. I was also struck by how many experiences the work seemed to offer. During my participation I looked, talked, anticipated, waited, descended and recollected. I

could not say that the experience rested on my direct participation because during my participation I had opportunities to observe the whole experience as a detached spectator. I also could not say that the experience was solely aesthetic because I also had to think practically and socially while I took part in the work. It is suggested that there is a need to explain how aesthetic experience relates to social and practical experience because social and practical experiences are so predominant in a work like 'Test Site'. It is proposed that this will help artists and participants to understand the role played by aesthetic experience in participatory art.

### *Resolution*

It is put forward that an analytical perspective can help to explain how aesthetic experience is embodied in participatory art. From this point of view it is recognised that aesthetic experience is either regulated by a psychological attitude or controlled by the objective conventions of the artwork. Aesthetic experience surfaces from an internal experience or an external set of practices. These ideas are relevant because it could be said that through the introduction of observable action participatory art casts doubt on the idea that there is a schism between inner and outer experience. From this viewpoint it is suggested that an understanding of the role of aesthetic experience in participatory art can be demonstrated.

### *Summary*

This chapter will look at some basic issues in aesthetic experience and aesthetic attitude theory. The argument can be summarised: Is aesthetic experience introspective? Is it governed by a special psychological viewpoint? It can also be asked: Does the object of experience determine aesthetic experience? Phenomenological and objective descriptions of aesthetic experience will be introduced and views on the reality of subjective and objective perspectives on aesthetic experience will also be investigated. George Dickie's examination of the conventions of aesthetic experience will be considered in detail. His thoughts on the art institution, aesthetic distance and aesthetic disinterestedness will be appraised. Monroe Beardsley's examination of the phenomenon of aesthetic experience will also be considered in detail. His views on the aesthetic viewpoint, aesthetic enjoyment and the intrinsic value of art will be considered. The debate between Dickie and Beardsley will also be discussed. These accounts will provide an analytical perspective on participatory art and throughout the chapter they will be compared to aspects

of 'Test Site' by Carsten Höller. These comparisons will provide an analytical explanation of how aesthetic experience is embodied in participatory art. In these comparisons the various philosophical discourses on aesthetic experience will be used as a means to reach a fuller understanding of participatory art rather than a means to discuss aesthetic experience per se. Therefore these comparisons will place accounts of aesthetic experience at the service of explanations of 'Test Site'. This will help to answer the main question of this chapter: What position does aesthetic experience hold in participatory art?

## **1.2 Aesthetic experience**

### **1.2.1 Basic Issues**

In 'Test Site' I participated by queuing, receiving instructions and sliding down a chute. These activities could all be described as everyday actions. I have done similar things in other more usual circumstances. However because they took place in the context of an artwork there was also a sense that I should have a special awareness of my participation. There was the possibility of aesthetic experience. In 'Test Site' how did an everyday awareness of my activity relate to the special awareness intimated by the artwork?

One approach to aesthetic experience tries to resolve two competing arguments in an ongoing debate. The gist of the first argument is that aesthetic experience is governed by a special psychological viewpoint. This aesthetic viewpoint is distinct from social, practical or historical viewpoints. The second argument claims that aesthetic experience is determined by the objective attributes of the object of the experience. This object may be a thing or an event. There is of course a conciliatory position that combines elements from both arguments. At both poles of the argument Collinson suggests that there are "logically necessary conditions" (Collinson, D. 1992: 157) that provide a viewer with a means to have an aesthetic experience. In the first argument the condition is that you acquire the correct psychological attitude. This attitude makes aesthetic experience possible.<sup>1</sup> When looking at a painting you may be asked to surrender to your perceptions and empty your mind of any biographical knowledge you have of the artist. Work by Frank Stella (Fig. 2) may cause you to concentrate on your experience of the colour, line and shape of the painting without any regard for its subject matter. In the second argument the conditions are the formal conventions that make up the object. These conventions may be

things like rules that control how the elements of an object relate to one another. In this respect Frank Stella plays with a central convention of painting; namely that a painting is square or rectangular.



Fig. 2

Monroe Beardsley looked at the reasons why someone has an aesthetic experience rather than a non-aesthetic experience. He claims that in order to have an aesthetic experience you have to adopt the correct aesthetic attitude in order to perceive 'aesthetic qualities'. This can be illustrated if the situation is considered where one person sees a patch of blue colour as 'refreshing' while another person just sees a neutral patch of blue. The former sees aesthetic qualities and the latter does not. There appears to be an additional feeling attached to the perception that brings out the aesthetic qualities of the colour. Beardsley describes this as "a special achievement in the employment of the familiar faculties" (Beardsley, M. 1982: 97). Ordinary perception is being used but in an exceptional way. What makes it so special? He proposes that in such situations you more readily yield to what is given in a perception. You are at ease with a less focused perception and take in a more general set of relationships. He talks about the "unfettered *power* of seeing as seeing is freed from subservience to a practical end" (Beardsley, M. 1982: 100).

George Dickie took a more objective stance to aesthetic attitude theory. He proposed that the aesthetic attitude is only a way of directing your *attention*. You can just as easily pay attention to the social, biographical or economic aspects of an object. Aesthetic experience is not an ambiguous psychological phenomenon that occurs in an individual. To distinguish aesthetic attention from other kinds of attention you focus on the objective properties of the object and the knowledge of artistic conventions you bring to the object. It is an outcome of the objective properties of the works themselves and the objective practices for viewing works. By emphasising the aesthetic properties and conventions used in the production of an artwork Dickie reconnects aesthetic

experience to the object of experience. Collinson agrees that Dickie provides good reasons to question the psychological aspects of the aesthetic attitude. If you spend too much time looking inward then the object of experience stops being important. Nevertheless she points out that this proposition can just as easily be reversed. You can just as easily say that if you spend too much time looking outward then the awareness that you may have an experience as an individual begins to recede. Collinson suggests that Dickie's notion of aesthetic attention "does not carry with it the rich phenomenological possibilities that are traditionally associated with aesthetic perception" (Collinson, D. 1992: 164).

An objective of this project is to show how participatory art questions the role of 'aesthetic perception' in your encounter with art (§ Theme: Aesthetic Experience). This issue is outlined in a different way in Michael Fried's essay 'Art and Objecthood' where he defends a position similar to Collinson. (Fried, M. 1967). In this essay he argues that there is a need to distinguish between 'modernist art' and 'the theatrical'. For Fried "*Art degenerates as it approaches the condition of theatre*" (Fried, M. 1967: 831). In this statement Fried is not rejecting drama as an art form. He is not saying that plays are not art and actors are not artists. He is proposing that art should be experienced in a specific way. He favours clear divisions between painting and sculpture stating "*What lies between the arts is theatre*" (Fried, M. 1967: 831). At the time of these declarations Fried was responding to minimalism and particularly Robert Morris' work. He was critical of the way that Morris' work became "an object in a situation – one that, virtually by definition, includes the beholder." (Fried, M. 1967: 825).

Fried's distinction between the "authentic" (Kester, G. 2004: 49) modernist work and the theatrical minimalist work has its basis in his understanding of how you perceive time in an encounter these works. He proposes that there is "Presentness" (Fried, M. 1967: 832) in your experience with the authentic modernist work. Your encounter has a marked sense of totality and directness that differs from more ordinary encounters. You are led to disregard your surroundings and your perceptions are forcefully sharpened. An experience of the theatrical minimalist work on the other hand has "*duration*" (Fried, M. 1967: 832). Your encounter with the work accumulates through time. You notice the context of the work and your presence in that context and begin to assemble meanings in much the same way that you build up an understanding of a plot when you read a novel. The authentic work therefore has a transcendent

element to it because its aim is to suspend your usual modes of thinking. The theatrical work is impure because it calls attention to your usual use of the symbolic order and modes of thinking.

Fried supports the role of 'authentic' modernist aesthetic experience when he differentiates it from ordinary experience. He demonstrates the potential of aesthetic experience to 'short circuit' your habitual viewpoint. However the current thesis is not examining the role of aesthetic experience in modernist painting or sculpture but its role in participatory art. Consequently the part aesthetic experience plays cannot be outlined in straightforward terms. Additionally history has shown that since Fried formulated his position on minimalism, numerous 'theatrical' art forms have emerged to become a legitimate part of art history such as land-art, conceptual art, performance art, installation art, site-specific art as well as participatory art.

Rosalind Krauss' offers a more positive outlook on minimalism. For Krauss, minimalist art does not act as a "transparent pane – a window through which the psychological spaces of the viewer and creator open onto each other" (Krauss, R. 1977: 70). According to Krauss minimalism questioned whether artworks must have a clearly distinguishable surface beneath which a complex meaning can be discerned. Minimalist artists were exploring prevailing notions of how meaning is understood i.e. that ideas and feelings 'well up' from a private inner space to be inspected in a public exterior space. For Krauss this is especially evident in the way that minimalist works employed ordinary materials that had not been overtly manipulated by the artist such as plywood, sheet metal, felt, bricks and fluorescent lights. Rather than assuming that the artist must imprint their ideas or feelings onto a material, they place significant conceptual emphasis on the forms that the materials have prior to their involvement. They were seen as being ordinary materials-in-the-world. Minimalists accepted that the meanings of their materials had already been established by the world-in-general before they were used in their art. For Krauss this way of using materials indicates a way of understanding how meaning is formed. Just as the meaning of a house brick is determined by its common use as a building material, minimalism proposes that ideas and feelings may also be conditioned as part of a public experience. These unadorned and basic materials were not differentiated from other objects in the world and they were not seen as harbouring or bearing some special psychological insight. In this sense minimalist art did not offer a transcendental

moment of 'presentness' to the viewer, but showed that an encounter with art might be a publicly negotiable experience. Your experience of art could be something that can be discussed and is something that stands in relation to other kinds of experience. Rather than being isolated as an exceptional 'immediate' experience minimalist practices "share in the extended flow of *duration*" (Krauss, R. 1977. my italics: 198).

These perspectives show that the idea of aesthetic experience is clearly problematic. It must be acknowledged that the modernist attitude of 'presentness' creates difficulties given that the focus of this project is participatory art and that artistic development since the sixties has shown the significance of 'duration' in the encounter with art. Krauss acknowledges that minimalist practice offers a valuable perspective on how meaning may be shared in an encounter with art. If a conclusion is to be drawn from all of this it must be that it is important to explain your experience in participatory art as 'durational'. Your experience is not only perceptual but as is pointed in the introduction, it is also cognitive and interpretative (§ Theme: Aesthetic Experience). In participatory art aesthetic experience shares space with numerous other experiences and these other kinds of experience frequently cause you to question the status of 'the aesthetic'.

### **1.2.2 Feelings or thoughts**

When I first witnessed the architectural scale and throng of participants around 'Test Site' I began to more fully appreciate the work. However I was unprepared for the actual experience itself. I was taken aback by the impact that sliding down a chute made on me. I had an initial grasp of what 'Test Site' involved but how did this relate to what I underwent during my participation?

It could be said that a phenomenological account of aesthetic experience deals with the role of inner experience in art and an epistemic account of aesthetic experience deals with the role of objective conventions in art, (Iseminger, G. 2003). A phenomenological account concentrates on what it feels like to have an aesthetic experience and stresses the inner, psychological aspect of aesthetic experience. When you undergo an aesthetic experience a phenomenological account asks: What kind of impression does it leave you with? An epistemic account focuses on how this experience brings about these aesthetic feelings or thoughts. From a more objective perspective it asks: What perceptions are you



using and how do they cause aesthetic feelings or thoughts? In epistemic accounts it is the objective conditions in your encounters with artworks that shape aesthetic experience. Your aesthetic experiences arise from artistic conventions that are used in a premeditated way by an artist.<sup>2</sup>

Gary Iseminger looks at the difficulties presented by phenomenological accounts of aesthetic experience when he discusses the related notion of aesthetic attitude. According to aesthetic attitude theories, in order to have an aesthetic experience of an artwork you have to quell any other mental states that may interfere with your aesthetic attitude. You must inhabit a particular mental state. You have to contain any knowledge or contextual interests you may have in an artwork to allow for the aesthetic attitude to surface. The situation is portrayed as “different states of mind competing for mental space” (Iseminger, G. 2003: 106). Iseminger points out that this portrayal tends to imply that the aesthetic attitude is embattled and must be sheltered, “there is a strong temptation to make the mind safe for aesthetic experience” (Iseminger, G. 2003: 106). As a consequence aesthetic attitude theories are liable to impose numerous limitations on what is an acceptable state of mind for aesthetic experience. The attitudes that suit aesthetic experience become increasingly restricted. In this way aesthetic experience becomes associated with a remote sensibility purged of unsavoury associations. Taken to their logical conclusion aesthetic attitude theories tend to sideline other attitudes that pay attention to the biographical detail, social context, history and politics of an artwork.

Iseminger’s approach supports the side of the argument that highlights the known aspects of aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience is placed in the context of knowledge and it is recognised that aesthetic experience may occur in conjunction with other kinds of experience that may offer different perspectives on the situation. Practical, social and historical experiences all have a part to play in an epistemic account of aesthetic experience. This is particularly reinforced by the conditions of ‘Test Site’ where practical or social experience may be called upon as much if not more than aesthetic experience. In my experience of sliding in ‘Test Site’ practical considerations were at the forefront of my mind as I sped through the chute. As a consequence aesthetic attitude theories that tend to disconnect the aesthetic from the practical or the social are questioned by participatory art like ‘Test Site’. In stressing the need to protect the aesthetic attitude from contamination by other states of mind I would say that valuable relationships with other kinds of experience that may

well inform and enhance aesthetic experience are being overlooked. This view can be supported if the position that is adopted in the introduction to this project is taken into consideration (§ Theme: Aesthetic Experience). From this perspective, cognition and interpretation are as important as perception. What you may know about an artwork and what you think it may mean have as much influence as your perception of the work.

In order to advance an explanation of aesthetic experience in the participatory artwork I suggest that an explanation settles on the *threshold* between felt experience and the known experience. Aesthetic experience in participatory art is not just about what you feel because you have to call upon your social and practical knowledge in your encounter with the work. Höller confirms this by emphasising the experiential aspects of the work as a unique encounter and also the pragmatic aspects of 'Test Site' as a "transport system" (Honoré, V. 2006). In order to get a feel for the aesthetic experience there is a sense in which you have to experience the artwork for yourself and slide down a chute 'in person'. However in 'Test Site' there is also a sense in which known objective conventions are used in a planned way to produce aesthetic experiences for participants. There is a sense in which the artist has calculated numerous perceptual factors. Höller indicates that "Test Site" was a "large-scale experiment" (Honoré, V. 2006) that required architectural planning. For example he no doubt had to work with engineers to calculate the speed of participants as they slid down the chutes and the physical impact that would be made on participants as they shot from the outlets.

### 1.2.3 Realism

A distinctive feature of 'Test Site' is that it involves the combination of subjective psychological experiences and objective physical experiences. 'Test Site' generated a special awareness in me even though I took part in fairly ordinary actions. It had a powerful effect on me and I did not anticipate this even although I had an informed understanding of the work. Two explanations have been put forward for this. Aesthetic attitude theories support the recognition of a special psychological viewpoint to regulate experience. The other position supports the recognition of the influence of the objective attributes of an artwork such as artistic conventions and properties. This explanation was also articulated in another way. Phenomenological accounts stress the private and 'felt' aspects of the experience and epistemic accounts

stress the public and 'known' aspects of the experience. Each view rivals the other and there seems to be a fairly even distribution of evidence to support the adoption of either claim. One position asserts a subjective reality; the other asserts an objective reality. In order to clearly capture the nature of this combination it seems pertinent to explore the actuality of each perspective. How real are subjective and objective perspectives on aesthetic experience?

When thinking about aesthetic experience a realist would say that you are responding to a thing that actually has aesthetic properties. A non-realist would say that it is your state of mind that allows you to experience that thing as aesthetic.<sup>3</sup> For example you may say that you had an aesthetic experience of 'vibrant collective activity' when you took part in 'Test Site'. (Fig. 3) A realist may state that 'Test Site' had this vibrancy because vibrancy was a real property of the situation. A non-realist cannot assert that the situation is vibrant. The experience of vibrancy is a property that a person may exhibit or undergo; it is not a property of the situation. Therefore the experience of vibrancy can only exist as an affective response. In a sense you can only imagine 'Test Site' as being vibrant just as another may just see that it is busy.

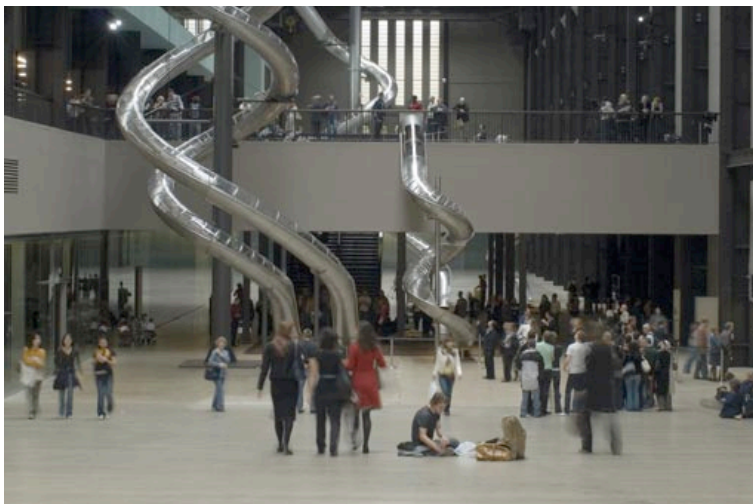


Fig. 3

Zangwill differentiates between aesthetic realism and non-realism by looking at how they impact on your ability to make aesthetic judgements. For a realist an aesthetic judgement rests on aesthetic experience. If this experience has a content that represents an aesthetic situation then the judgement must reflect the situation in order for the judgement to be accurate. For a non-realist an aesthetic judgement also rests on aesthetic experience, however the content of the experience is not conceived as being representative of an actual aesthetic

situation. For the non-realist the world does not actually have any aesthetic properties. You can only adopt an aesthetic attitude towards the ordinary properties of the world and this makes aesthetic experience available to you. As a realist you are able to compare your judgement to the reality of the aesthetic properties. As a non-realist there are no actual properties that your judgement can be compared to. For the non-realist it therefore becomes difficult to justify favouring one aesthetic attitude over another. Therefore Zangwill is able to conclude: “[...] when it comes to explaining the normativity of aesthetic judgements, the realist is ahead” (Zangwill, N. 2003: 78).

Nevertheless Bender argues that there is no reason to suppose that a belief in the properties of an object is any more real than a feeling that is a response to an object. It may be conceded that feelings that are a response to an object may be more difficult to demonstrate and justify than a rational argument that establishes a belief about an artwork’s aesthetic properties. Nevertheless it is also reasonable to say that the feelings produced in response to artworks do seem to exist. If it is acknowledged that states of belief and states of feeling are real then it can be said that affective states should not be excluded from an account of aesthetic realism. Internal aesthetic experiences as well as external aesthetic facts are acceptable as starting points in a realistic aesthetic judgement. Internal experiences can form: “realistic truth-conditions” (Bender, J. 2003: 87).

Looking in more detail at the implications of aesthetic realism Bender points out that realism is generally applied to physical phenomenon. For example it tends to be accepted that the physical properties of an object such as its weight remain true regardless of how that object is perceived. Its properties can be verified objectively. However when you discuss the aesthetic properties of an object you are partly considering your subjective reaction to these properties. In this sense he suggests that aesthetic properties mainly have “a relational character” (Bender, J. 2003: 83). He stresses that a contradiction emerges when aesthetic realism is discussed. If you assert that aesthetic properties are real in the same way that physical properties are real then this suggests that aesthetic properties can be verified in an objective manner. Aesthetic properties become external to human responses. If this is the case then you are turning your back on the relational character of aesthetic properties. The most reasonable way to resolve this problem is to accept that aesthetic properties are not absolutely objective or that your experience of them is not absolutely subjective. Aesthetic

experience is a response to the physical world so the experience must relate object and subject in some way.

It seems that realism is the least complicated approach to aesthetic experience. If it is accepted that aesthetic properties really do exist in the world then an accurate aesthetic judgement about an object should reflect the aesthetic properties of that object. Nevertheless Bender points out that if realism is applied too rigorously then it implies that the really existing aesthetic features of an object can exist independently of human aesthetic experience. As though you can imagine the aesthetic features of an object simply waiting to be confirmed by an accurate aesthetic judgement.

Similarly there are difficulties if aesthetic non-realism is strictly applied. In accepting this position an aesthetic experience becomes your felt response to the artwork during an affective mental state. However if 'Test Site' is considered from this perspective there is the possibility that as a participant you may be harbouring an attitude or mood that strongly influences your felt response to the artwork. You may not be in the mood to participate at all; you may hold a general scepticism about the aims of participatory artworks in general or you may be in a buoyant mood that causes you to freely sing the artwork's praises and enthusiastically take part. Bender indicates that if this non-realist explanation is adopted it can still act as basis for a type of aesthetic realism. I would propose that in spite of their ability to dominate an aesthetic experience and regardless of their ability to complicate any account of aesthetic experience, feelings still form a real foundation for aesthetic experience. Affective states may offer a less dispassionate perspective on an artwork but there is no reason to deny that they are not real. Although they can lead to a positive and negative bias towards an artwork, emotional states make a real contribution to aesthetic experience.

I would therefore accept that the aesthetic features of an object and the experience of those features are interdependent. In this way the 'relational' characteristics of 'Test Site' become its main aesthetic features. There are measurable objective properties occurring in this work. It has sculptural properties. It is made of metal and plastic structures. The heart rates or brain activity of individuals could also be measured as they participated in the work, but it could be said that these are not the artwork's main aesthetic properties. It could be said that the main features are those given in descriptions of the ride

as stimulating or alarming, descriptions of the experience of anticipation or achievement at having taken part as well as descriptions of the sense of being part of a large group of participants. These cannot exist independently of your direct experience of the work. I would therefore say that aesthetic experience in 'Test Site' is embodied in the relation between the objective properties of the work and the experiences of participants.

### 1.3 The conventions of aesthetic experience

Various explanations of how aesthetic experience may be embodied in the participatory artwork have been explored. It was initially established in the introduction that your experience of art involves cognition and interpretation as well as perception. It was then shown that it is appropriate to consider the *durational* aspects of this experience rather than its *presentness*. This led to the recognition that aesthetic experience must *share space* with social and practical experiences in participatory art, that aesthetic experience rests on the *threshold* between the felt and the known and that it offers a *relational* realism that links the work as an object to the participant's experiences.

All of these explanations of the experience of art demonstrate how participatory art reveals that there is no clear gulf between 'the aesthetic' and other kinds of experience. These explanations highlight how participatory art via its emphasis on the durational, its recognition of other modes of experience and its focus on the threshold and the relational, brings various practices and disciplines together. It could be said that like minimalism, conceptual art, performance art or installation art, participatory art interrogates modernist aesthetic practice. As has been mentioned in the introduction it introduces "transdisciplinary deviations" that cut across and go beyond the notion of the discipline of aesthetics. (Kester, G. 2004: 51. § Theme: Participatory Art).

It is suggested that in order to trace the path of participatory art as it cuts across the discipline of modernist aesthetics that an examination of some of the key assumptions of modernist aesthetics will be valuable. The aim of this exploration is not only to show the extent to which participatory art does in fact diverge from modernist aesthetics but also to show that there may be aspects of modernism that can help to throw some features of participatory art into sharper focus. It is proposed that the influential discussion by Monroe

Beardsley and George Dickie will help to introduce some of these central issues. Their arguments about the art institution, distance, disinterestedness, the aesthetic viewpoint, aesthetic enjoyment and the intrinsic value of art will help to show the role that 'the aesthetic' may have.

### **1.3.1 Institution**

In works like 'Test Site' you often learn how to behave because there are textual or aural instructions available. You also understand the rules not simply by looking at the work or by reading about what to do but by other means such as watching or listening to others. In 'Test Site' it seems appropriate to consider the extent to which these kinds of public conventions influence your aesthetic experience and if they provide a sympathetic context for aesthetic experience.

George Dickie argues that the main shared characteristic of artworks may be found in their "non-exhibited" rather than their "exhibited" aspects (Dickie, G. 1974: 23). The exhibited aspects of an artwork are the visibly evident features of a work: its size, composition, colours etc. The non-exhibited aspects of an artwork are the history and theory that inform your experience of the artwork. Since the 'readymade' and the 'objet trouvé' contemporary artworks have often exhibited properties that are identical to the exhibited properties of an ordinary object. The objects of art are frequently the same as objects that can be bought in shops or found on the street. However by being presented with such objects audiences are required to consider the conditions within which art objects are exhibited. Such objects point to non-exhibited properties such as: Who says such an ordinary object can be art? Dan Flavin used off-the-shelf fluorescent light fittings and tubes for his works (Fig. 4). These works not only have a mesmerising visual purity but also present ordinary objects as art.

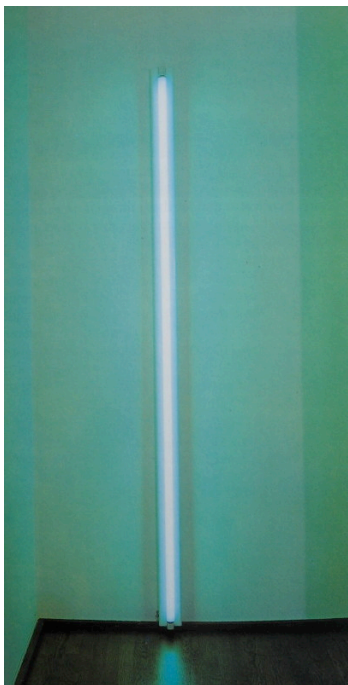


Fig. 4

If it is accepted that non-art cannot be distinguished from art on the basis of its exhibited properties because artists have long been exhibiting non-art objects as art. If it is also accepted that an artwork's non-exhibited properties must be relied on such as the knowledge that informs an experience of the artwork; then it could be suggested that art is embracing a more conceptual state of affairs. Dickie suggests that this leads to a consideration of how these concepts are organised. Is this knowledge arranged systematically into something that can be understood as an art system? He proposes that when art is described as being embedded in such systems of knowledge then "*the institutional nature of art*" is being considered (Dickie, G. 1974: 29). The art institution is like a custom or tradition that has been developed in order to identify art from non-art in the same way that the more formal legal institution allows you to identify what is legal and illegal.

Taking 'Test Site' as an example, there are aspects of this work that could be described as having non-exhibited properties. There is the general background knowledge that allows you to differentiate the nature of this participatory artwork from similar participatory situations that are not artworks such as when you may be involved in market research. You also know that it is different to a fairground ride not simply because it looks different but because it takes place within an art institution. These conclusions may be based on your knowledge of theories associated with participatory artworks or knowledge about this specific artwork picked up prior to your encounter with the work.



There are also non-exhibited properties that surface because to an extent there are instructions that can be referred to. There are texts and gallery attendants to advise you so there is a sense that additional information is necessary in an experience of artwork. By the same token it is also the case that many of the artwork's non-exhibited properties were not essential in an experience of the work. Many participants such as children did not need instruction and were focused on the fun of the event or for others without any prior knowledge of participatory artworks, observing the behaviour of other participants prompted their participation. I would argue that these were *exhibited* properties of 'Test Site' and as such these properties informed behaviour. However whether the exhibited or non-exhibited properties of the work influenced behaviour, in each case I would suggest that 'Test Site' involved the experience of 'duration' rather than 'presentness'. The experience was cognitive rather than simply perceptual.

### 1.3.2 Distance

In 'Test Site' you could stand back and survey the work as a whole or as a participant you could become involved in all sorts of other behaviour. As a viewer your role seemed relatively simple but as a participant you actually entered the work and took part in other practical and social experiences that tended to make it more difficult to explain your experience as a whole.

The idea of distance is used to explain what is special about aesthetic experience. It is an attitude that a viewer may choose to adopt while scrutinising any kind of object or event. You introduce a distance between yourself and the focus of your scrutiny. This distancing allows a viewer to disregard any practical issues that may be associated with the object or event, giving the viewer the freedom to consider the object or event within a new frame of reference. It deters any distractions from interfering with your aesthetic experience. Edward Bullough uses the example of fog at sea (Bullough, E. 1996: 248). As a passenger on a ship you may distance yourself from the practical properties of danger that the fog presents in order to appreciate its aesthetic properties. For Dickie the main purpose of the idea of distance is to make sure that you do not mix up your ordinary affairs in the 'real world' with the extraordinariness of the aesthetic experience. An additional feature of the idea of distance is that it may increase and decrease. A viewer may become more or less distant from an object or event. While taking

part in 'Test Site' a substantial sense of fear may cancel out any possibility you may have for aesthetic experience. There is no distance for appreciation (Fig. 5a). While participating in 'Test Site' you may also become more interested in the structural engineering of the work and not pay full attention to the experience as a whole. (Fig. 5b)

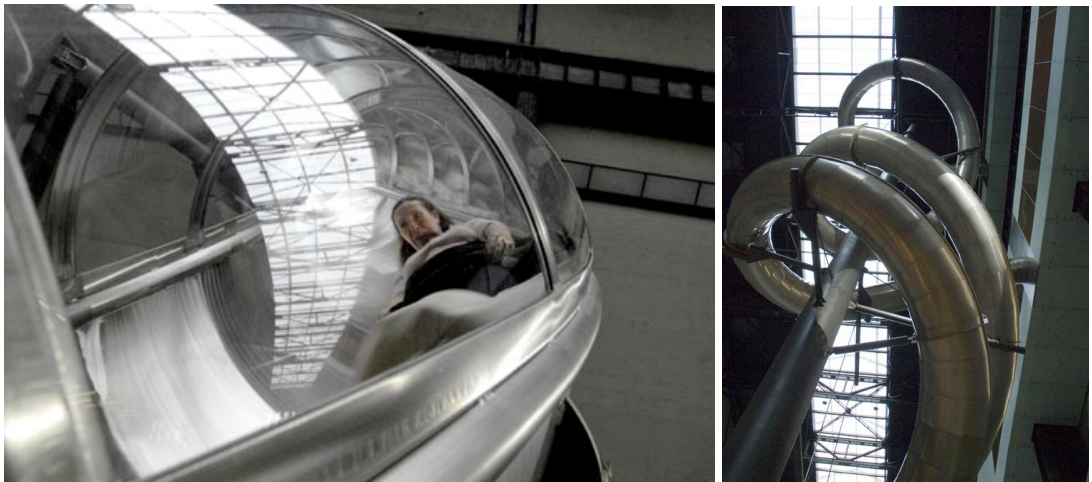


Fig. 5a & Fig. 5b

In this sense it can be said that distance helps to explain the different experiences of each viewer. It regulates between your aesthetic experience and your practical affairs. Dickie describes it as “a special psychological force that blocks the ordinary impulses” (Dickie, G. 1974: 93).

Dickie challenges the theory of psychological distance by considering a theatrical example. A jealous husband is watching a play. The play's narrative closely resembles practical events that are occurring in the jealous husband's life. According to the distance theory the practical properties represented in the drama undo any aesthetic properties that may be experienced. The drama's resemblance to actuality causes a reduction in the necessary distance. Following this reasoning Dickie points out that if the husband is relying on distance to appreciate the drama and if the distance is reduced to the point where he is unable to appreciate the drama aesthetically then it follows that if distance totally collapses and the husband identifies completely with events on the stage then this may cause him to jump on the stage to tackle his 'rival'. According to Dickie the distance theory implies that this kind of situation is possible. Distance is used to block out your regular responses to situations, so if a jealous husband does jump on the stage to tackle a rival he is acting normally because he has no distance between himself and the represented events.

Dickie supports this claim by looking at the example of pantomime. Within many pantomimes there are strong participatory elements. Audiences are repeatedly asked to respond to events on stage. Audiences are able to consider the practical properties that are involved in responding to a request from the stage but equally are able to resume considering the aesthetic properties of the drama immediately after their participation. For Dickie the distance theory spends too much time concentrating on the psychological states of audience members. Distance theorists have “mistaken the functioning of an institutional convention against spectators participating in some works of art for the functioning of a psychological force” (Dickie, G. 1974: 104).

For Dickie it is institutional conventions that determine how you behave when experiencing artworks. You do not jump on the stage to confront a villain in a theatre because you comply with the conventions of theatrical performance. He highlights theatrical conventions such as the arrangement of seats in one direction, a raised stage, the dimming of the house lights, the curtain going up and coming down again. Such conventions seem hardly worth remarking upon. They are applied so unreflectively that their significance goes undetected. However these examples show that there is a body of knowledge that is already understood prior to an experience of the work. It is not an inner psychological distancing but an awareness of the knowledge about how to behave when experiencing a work that influences whether you should pay attention to the practical properties or the aesthetic properties of a work.

Take the following example. Two people may enter a shop selling reproduction Bauhaus furniture. One person may be aware of the conventions that exist in museums where a viewer wouldn't dream of sitting on the chairs. The other just treats the furniture as you normally would in a furniture shop and sits down. It is the latter individual who has followed the correct convention in this case. In the context of a furniture shop, practical as well as aesthetic properties may be considered. Again, in a gallery one may come across a monitor displaying a video art piece. Beneath the monitor there may be set of headphones. The convention in such a situation is that viewers are invited to experience the soundtrack to the work by wearing the headphones. One viewer may be aware of this convention and confidently wear the headphones. Other viewers without prior experience of this convention may be more inhibited.

Using Dickie's position on convention it can now be said that as a participant in a participatory artwork if you are informed of the facts of a situation then you understand the relevant conventions. It is these conventions that determine your behaviour towards the artwork and lead you to attend to the aesthetic, practical, historical or participatory properties of the artwork. For Dickie there is no 'psychical distance': "no special kind of act or state of mind exists to suspend action or anxieties" (Dickie, G. 1974: 112). In 'Test Site' numerous conventions prompt you to queue, receive instruction and take part. The examples of the shop and gallery also demonstrate that there is not such a clear division between your experiences of the practical properties and aesthetic properties embodied in an artwork. One may move between contemplation and action or engage in each simultaneously. I would say that a consequence of recognising the proximity between the practical and aesthetic properties of an artwork leads to an understanding that aesthetic experience is more involved in the real affairs of the world and as such it is a state of attention that is in general quite robust. Accordingly aesthetic experience does not need to be safeguarded from practical knowledge by the insertion of some distance between the two. In 'Test Site' moments of contemplation and activity coincide and follow from one another throughout the artwork. I would therefore say that the conventions that are considered appropriate in 'Test Site' have some parallels with the conventions of the shop rather than the gallery.

If 'Test Site' is considered from the perspective of a theory of psychological distance then it could be said that there is an aspect of this work where distance becomes an issue. In 'Test Site' there is the distinct possibility that participants may lack the distance required in order to have an aesthetic experience. A significant feature of this work is that you surrender a degree of control when sliding down a chute and this is an aspect to the work that is not determined by convention. The rules of the work are left behind once you abandon yourself to the pull of gravity in a chute so in this sense the work encourages a very direct and uncontrollable response. During this kind of activity you may experience anxiety but this state arises as a response a practical concern for your own well-being. It is a practical anxiety that can come about in many other more ordinary states of affairs. It could therefore be said that in order to appreciate the action of sliding down the chute from an aesthetic perspective you would have to adopt a certain degree of distance to any anxiety you may feel.

### 1.3.3 Disinterestedness

During my participation in 'Test Site' a number of factors combined to make it difficult to have an objective view of the work. I was influenced by the behaviour and attitudes of fellow participants. They lacked the reserve and inscrutability that gallery goers usually have. It was also extremely difficult to take a neutral view of the actual action of sliding because it was so intense.

'Disinterested awareness' is described by Dickie as "the alleged individual power which when exercised makes accessible the aesthetic features of objects" (Dickie, G. 1974: 115). It is a situation where a viewer disconnects any external associations an artwork may have in order to properly experience the aesthetic properties of the work. <sup>4</sup>

From Dickie's perspective there is no need to adopt a special psychological outlook that excludes other kinds of experience in order to have an aesthetic experience. Instead he suggests that you either pay attention or you do not pay attention to an artwork and when you do pay attention you may have different reasons for paying attention. For example, a journalist, a student and a tourist may be looking at the same painting. The journalist is considering the article she is going to write about the exhibition. The student is considering how the painter's work relates to his own work and the tourist has turned away from the painting and is remembering how he used to live in the place depicted in the painting. In the first two cases the viewers are attending to the work but their attention has different motives, in the last case the viewer is inattentive to the work.

Dickie asks how you should address artworks that include moral content. A war correspondent may capture an image that conveys moral outrage. If the disinterested awareness theory is followed then the moral must be isolated from the aesthetic, yet the intention of the work was to address a moral issue. Surely by ignoring the impetus to create an artwork in the first place you are ignoring a main constituent that contributes towards a full appreciation of the artwork? If you always detach your awareness from a work's historical context, its emergence from a social context, the artist's biography and the artist's state of mind in producing the artwork, then you may be dispensing with a crucial enhancement to your appreciation of that artwork. Dickie argues that a theory of disinterested awareness sharply divorces other kinds of knowledge from

aesthetic experience and fails to account for art forms like documentary where *interested* awareness is the primary constituent of the experience. "In short, how can the theory which seeks to explain the phenomenon of the experience of art try to explain away what is obviously such an important aspect of some art and an important reason for experiencing that art" (Dickie, G. 1974: 134).

Considered in the light of the participatory artwork, disinterestedness seems a remote concept. In participating with an artwork you may be calling on practical or social experience so immediately your experiences of the artwork are being associated with experiences external to the artwork itself. I would say that Dickie's concept of attention offers a provisional framework for the diversity of experiences that may be called on in a participatory artwork. A child may be drawn to the potential fun in 'Test Site', an adult may be genuinely keen to participate, some may feel obliged to take part and others may prefer to remain disinterested. Each may attend to the work with different motives in mind.

Nevertheless 'Test Site' could be considered in a disinterested way if its sculptural properties were being appreciated. From this perspective you would be adopting the role of a spectator who was not practically participating in the work but who was evaluating the work in formal terms with reference to its shape, colour, structure, materials and composition. Höller himself accepts that detachment is an appropriate approach to his work, "it would be a mistake to think that you have to use the slide to make sense of it." (Honoré, V. 2006).

It could be argued that this kind of disinterested art appreciation may enhance your encounter with 'Test Site'. Such an appreciation may produce different qualities of experience therefore plainly saying that you attend or do not attend to 'Test Site' leads to an impoverished understanding of the phenomenon of aesthetic experience. However this view becomes difficult when the 'transdisciplinary' nature of participatory art is taken into account. From this standpoint 'Test Site' questions the assumption that your experience of art is purely perceptual, traversing the discipline of aesthetics to reveal that there is no schism between your ordinary experience and aesthetic experience. I would suggest that 'Test Site' opens up a space that changes the emphasis in your experience from perceptual to cognitive experience.

## 1.4 The phenomenon of aesthetic experience

### 1.4.1 Aesthetic viewpoint

There were two main ways of experiencing 'Test Site'. You could be a spectator or a participant in the work. As a spectator you remained outside the work and kept participation to a minimum and as a participant you accepted the invitation of the work and became engaged with its procedures. As a spectator you could appreciate the features of the work as a whole but as a participant you became involved in all sorts of other behaviour. In this way participation seemed to complicate the issue of how to adopt an aesthetic viewpoint on 'Test Site'.

Monroe Beardsley initially characterises aesthetics as being caught up with all sorts of other concerns. He proposes that confusion may be reduced if you discriminate between the perspectives that may be taken on the objects of your attention. Beardsley points out that when you appreciate a building you consider practical, engineering and aesthetic viewpoints simultaneously yet they deal respectively with how well it functions, if it is structurally sound and if it is aesthetically inventive. What you ought to do is control your focus. This allows you to determine if the building succeeds in the area you are focusing on. In terms of practicality its occupants can be asked if it is a comfortable place to live. When looking at it in terms of engineering physical laws are referred to and when focusing on it from an aesthetic viewpoint you compare it to past and current architecture in order to identify its aesthetic accomplishments. The main point Beardsley makes is that each viewpoint requires a different group of *values* to determine the success of a building.

"To adopt *an* aesthetic point of view with regard to X is to take an interest in whatever aesthetic value X may possess or *that is obtainable by means of X*"  
(Beardsley, M. 1982: 21)

Beardsley moves on to ask: What exactly is an aesthetic value? His main aim is to demonstrate that aesthetic value can be clearly differentiated from other values. He states that the aesthetic value of an object is "the value it possesses in virtue of its capacity to provide aesthetic gratification" (Beardsley, M. 1982: 21). So you may take pleasure; find inspiration, be fascinated or be entranced by an object. Each of these states may be classified as gratifying, but what is it about

the object that allows you to attain these states? Beardsley proposes: “[...] formal unity and/or the regional qualities of a complex whole” (Beardsley, M. 1982: 22). If an artwork is extensively unified, incorporates forceful regional qualities and a degree of complexity then it can be given aesthetic values. These kinds of gratification are unique to aesthetics and form the main constituent of aesthetic value. As evidence for this theory Beardsley points to art history where there is general agreement that there are many iconic artworks that offer this kind of gratification.

Beardsley’s method of discriminating between the numerous perspectives that can taken on an artwork seems useful but can an aesthetic point of view be adopted on a participatory artwork? Can practical and social viewpoints be separated from the aesthetic in such works? Is it possible to say that aesthetic experience is caused by the formal unity, regional qualities or the complex whole of a participatory artwork? The formal unity of ‘Test Site’ as a sculptural or architectural object can certainly be grasped. It could also be suggested that the work has regional qualities because there are various sites where your attention settles in order to appreciate any aesthetic values. Alongside the regional qualities of ‘Test Site’ as a sculpture there are regional qualities in the sight of watching participants drop through the chutes of ‘Test Site’, in viewing participants as they suddenly emerge at the base of a chute and there are also regional qualities in the image of large groups of spectators clustered around the base of the chutes. The complex whole of ‘Test Site’ could even be described as the way that all its disparate elements come together to present a discernable atmosphere of collective experience. (Fig. 6)



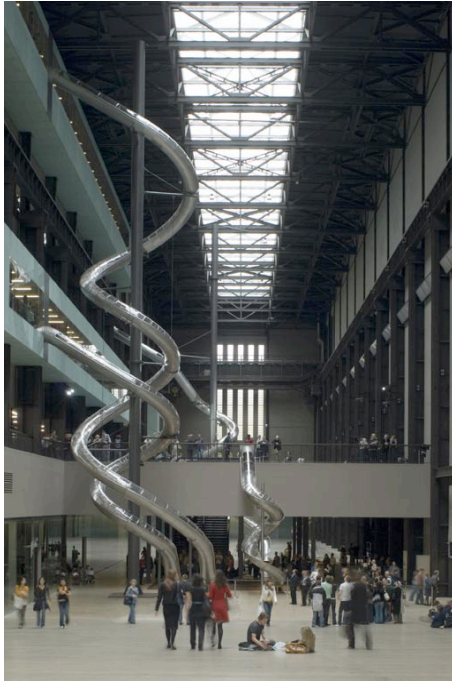


Fig. 6

Therefore it can be said that the aesthetic values of 'Test Site' can be considered in isolation from its practical values just as they are in architecture. However it is noticeable that Beardsley assumes that the values of formal unity, regional quality and the complexity of the whole that produce the aesthetic viewpoint are encountered from the perspective of a detached viewer. Each of these terms may be embodied in 'Test Site' but it should be acknowledged that a significant and over arching intention behind a work like 'Test Site' is that you do not simply view the work as a detached viewer but that you also participate in it. I would propose that as a detached viewer you have opportunities to reflect on the aesthetic values of 'Test Site' but because it encourages participation rather than detachment it brings sets of values together to create an overall encounter with the work. In this sense when you are a detached viewer, your experience of 'Test Site' may rest on a particular range of values such as formal unity, regional qualities and complexity but when you participate, which is the main aim of this work, your experience broadens in scope. As a participant aesthetic values begin to more closely associate with social and practical values.

#### 1.4.2 Aesthetic enjoyment

When I took part in 'Test Site' it was clear that many people were enjoying themselves however this seemed to be different kind of enjoyment to that which is customarily associated with the experience of art. It seemed less

serious and more inclusive. 'Test Site seemed to question the role of the particular kind of enjoyment associated with aesthetic experience.

Beardsley explains how aesthetic enjoyment can be differentiated from other forms of enjoyment. You may enjoy the virtuosity of an artist or reminisce about the historical period that he or she was active in but this kind of enjoyment is not aesthetic. The former is an appreciation of his skill and the latter is an appreciation of social history. Beardsley thinks that the aesthetic may be separable and looks for further evidence. This can be found if you look at drama. A play may have a tragic ending. A Hollywood producer may come along and add a happy ending in an adaptation for cinema. This may appeal to your ethical side but for Beardsley this does not lead to an increase in aesthetic pleasure. Happy endings do not directly increase aesthetic enjoyment. Ethical appreciation and aesthetic appreciation may influence one another but they are based on different values. They are independent forms of appreciation that "[...] cannot be weighed on the same scale" (Beardsley, M. 1982: 38). A consequence of this conclusion is that many other kinds of enjoyment are then excluded in order to determine a place for aesthetic enjoyment. Moral, personal and intellectual enjoyment is ruled out as are emotional and physiological enjoyment. Beardsley confines aesthetic enjoyment to a very specific starting place resulting in this definition:

"1. *Aesthetic enjoyment* is (by definition) the kind of enjoyment we obtain by the apprehension of a qualitatively diverse segment of the phenomenal field, insofar as the discriminable parts are unified into something of a whole that has a character (that is, regional qualities) of its own.

2. *Aesthetic value* is (by definition) the capacity to provide, under suitable conditions, aesthetic enjoyment.

3. *Positive critical criteria* are (by definition) properties that are grounds for aesthetic value.

From propositions 2 and 3 it follows that:

4. Positive critical criteria are (analytically) properties that help or enable an object to provide aesthetic enjoyment." (Beardsley, M. 1982: 42).

What are these 'positive critical criteria'? The main criteria are "unity, complexity and intensity" (Beardsley, M. 1982: 42). Whenever there is an effort to establish the degree of aesthetic enjoyment that an artwork is capable of producing then these criteria may be used as a rough guide. In a work like John

Chamberlain's below (Fig. 7) all of these criteria can be evaluated. You can concentrate on how Chamberlain creates a unified composition. In looking at its complexity you can take note of how the crushed car parts have been integrated into its unity and in judging its intensity you can study the twists and distortions and flat areas of the work's 'regional qualities'.



Fig. 7

Beardsley pays particular attention to the criterion of 'unity' asking: "*Why* does unity function as a guide [?]" (Beardsley, M. 1982: 44). He justifies this criterion in two ways. It is suggested that it is what people often generally say when they are talking about artworks. If a cross section of viewers is asked about a painting for example, the likelihood is that a majority would say something like it is harmonious, well arranged or balanced. He also refers to Aristotle's *Poetics* where Aristotle parallels plots in drama with natural phenomenon: "they should be based on a single action, one that is a complete whole in itself, with a beginning, middle and an end, so as to enable the work to produce its own proper pleasure with all the organic unity of a living creature." (Aristotle. 1984b: 2335). For Beardsley 'unity' is not only a commonly used criterion but also one that has a long philosophical history.

How do Beardsley's positive critical criteria inform an explanation of the participatory artwork? If it is assumed that aesthetic enjoyment can be absolutely differentiated from other kinds of enjoyment then the criteria of unity, complexity and intensity seem broadly suitable. However in the context of the participatory artwork this approach to discriminating what produces aesthetic enjoyment is problematic. It has been suggested that participatory art

cannot be easily explained in aesthetic terms but tends to traverse the discipline of aesthetics. In this sense 'Test Site' is unlike the Chamberlain sculpture that has been used as an example. As a participant in 'Test Site' you are no longer detached from the work. Your experience is more closely associated with many other kinds of enjoyment during participation and as a consequence the criteria for evaluating 'Test Site' become less specific. All the kinds of enjoyment that Beardsley seeks to exclude from his account of aesthetic enjoyment such as social, personal, intellectual, moral, practical and physiological enjoyment may potentially be encountered when you participate in 'Test Site'. I would say that in participatory art a broad scope of types of enjoyment should be considered alongside the specificity of aesthetic enjoyment.

Nonetheless it is suggested that Beardsley's notion of the centrality of unity in promoting aesthetic enjoyment helps to explain an important aspect of a work like 'Test Site'. As a participant you experience the work as having a beginning; prior to sliding you wait in a queue and when your turn arrives you wait in anticipation at the mouth of a chute. At its middle there is the actual act of sliding down a chute. It also has an end when you are shot from the exit of a chute onto a crash mat and can then join others who are observing the event. As an individual each participant experiences the unity of the work but there is also an overarching sense of unity that assembles each person's participation into a collective participatory effort that encompasses everyone. (Fig. 8a & Fig. 8b)



Fig. 8a & Fig. 8b

### 1.4.3 Art for its own sake

After taking part in 'Test Site' I certainly felt as though I had been through an extraordinary event. 'Test Site' offers an intense and forceful participatory experience. It could be said that the experience of sliding down one of the

chutes in 'Test Site' was the central experience of the work that was worth trying 'for its own sake'.

When something is valued 'for its own sake' it has intrinsic value. The usual value of an event or object is dependent on factors external to the event or object. It may be used for a purpose for example. You value a coat because it keeps you warm or because you like the way it makes you look. Therefore to test for intrinsic value this "other regarding value" is removed and the object is imagined on its own. (Beardsley, M. 1982: 46). Does it still have value? There are parallels to this approach in art. Does the central experience of sliding in 'Test Site' continue to have aesthetic value after all the 'external factors' have been removed? What remains if Höller's biography, his intentions in making the artwork, the art historical context that it may be placed within and the social context from which it emerges is disregarded? If a value does remain then in this sense Beardsley is able to suggest that the experience provided by 'Test Site' may be something that has intrinsic value.<sup>5</sup>

Beardsley recognises that aesthetic values are often described as intrinsically valuable. Art sometimes does not need any excuses. It is often pursued without justification. Nevertheless he concedes that this explanation may not be adequate and this leads him to look in more detail at the relationship between aesthetic experience and aesthetic value. His position can be characterised by the following series of questions: What good is that artwork? It can be replied: It has aesthetic value. In answer to the question: What good is aesthetic value? It can be replied: It has intrinsic value. Beardsley considers other replies that may be given if it is not accepted that aesthetic value is intrinsically valuable. It could be asked: "Why should we cultivate aesthetic experience?" (Beardsley, M. 1982: 69). To artists and people who value aesthetic experience the answer to this is self-evident but Beardsley asks this question from the perspective of a layperson. He wants to develop a sound defence for aesthetic experience. He does this by showing the correspondences that can be drawn between the rewards of art and the rewards that are achievable in other areas. In this sense he wants to "[...] connect aesthetic evaluation with other and already acknowledged forms of value" (Beardsley, M. 1982: 69).

Beardsley justifies aesthetic experience by summarising a broad spectrum of potential explanations. He describes how a contemporary interpretation of 'catharsis' may validate aesthetic experience. Aesthetic experience may produce

“short term adjustments within the psyche” (Beardsley, M. 1982: 71). He also considers how aesthetic experience may help to improve the feelings, the imagination or the perceptions and concludes that aesthetic experience may fundamentally enhance “the whole personality structure” (Beardsley, M. 1982: 72). Beardsley suggests that aesthetic experience may contribute towards a growth in sensitivity through an enhancement of your ability to interpret and understand the emotions, imagination and perceptions of the self and of others. Quoting John Dewey, Beardsley proposes that aesthetic experience “[...] forms a habit for all other experiences” (Beardsley, M. 1982: 75). Aesthetic experience may generally offer a ‘type’ on which all other experiences can be based on.

How does this discussion inform an explanation of participatory art? Can the participations that are invited by ‘Test Site’ be justified along similar lines? Beardsley proposes that aesthetic experience may contribute towards improvements in the personality. The aesthetic value of ‘Test Site’ can be justified in these terms if it is suggested that ‘Test Site’ has a cathartic element. Höller mentions that he is interested in this aspect of the experience, “[participants are] affected and to some degree ‘changed’” (Honoré, V. 2006). If catharsis is understood as an experience of purification that is induced by an intense experience then ‘Test Site’ can be explained in this way. In participating in this work you literally ‘take the plunge’ and give up your self-control for the period of the slide. As a participant you undergo a cleansing experience because you overcome your customary caution and reserve. In this way participation in a work like ‘Test Site’ can result in something like a sense of renewal.

### **1.5 The debate about aesthetic experience: Conventions and phenomenon**

When the debate between Beardsley and Dickie is applied to an artwork like ‘Test Site’ it can be outlined like this: From Beardsley’s point of view when you have an aesthetic experience in ‘Test Site’ it arises from a special attitude that you adopt. This attitude rests on a set of values that are particular to aesthetic experience. They produce a specific kind of enjoyment and they are worth cultivating because they provide an exemplary and rewarding experience. From Dickie’s point of view aesthetic experience in ‘Test Site’ is simply a kind of attention that has to compete with other kinds of attention such as your practical engagement with the work and the social exchanges you may take

part in. Aesthetic experiences only arise in 'Test Site' because it takes place as part of the art institution and uses artistic conventions. Beardsley defends the special-ness of aesthetic experience by claiming that it gives you feelings of unity that you don't come across in any other experience. Dickie argues that this is a simplification of what happens when we experience art.

The point of contention between Beardsley and Dickie is Beardsley's claim that an artwork that has the objective property of 'unity' can cause an aesthetic experience that has the subjective property of 'unity'. Dickie doubts that 'perceived unity' translates into "a special unity of experience" (Dickie, G. 1974: 188). For Dickie when a direct correspondence is made between objective and subjective unity an unwelcome sense of vagueness enters into descriptions of aesthetic experience. For Beardsley a unified melody produces a unified feeling. These are "the affects evoked by the work" (Beardsley, M. 1982: 83). Dickie agrees that there may certainly be a unified melody. This is "the work of art as perceived" (Beardsley, M. 1982: 83). However for Dickie a perception of objective unity does not directly equate to a subjective feeling of unity.

Dickie is also critical of Beardsley's notion of the 'feel of unity' because he is too eager to associate 'affects' with aesthetic experience. Beardsley specifies that art must generate feelings in a viewer. However there are situations where the intention of the artist is not necessarily to induce an emotional state in a viewer. There are artworks where no emotional response is involved. Some art may only require perception or a thought. Dickie proposes that you should be more inclusive when considering what makes up an aesthetic experience: "the complete range of aesthetic experiences has to be examined before a general conclusion can be drawn" (Dickie, G. 1974: 192). In some of the key works of conceptual art this is precisely what is demonstrated. In a work like Joseph Kosuth's 'One and three hammers' (Fig. 9) the artwork stimulates thoughts about an intellectual proposal rather than any emotional state.



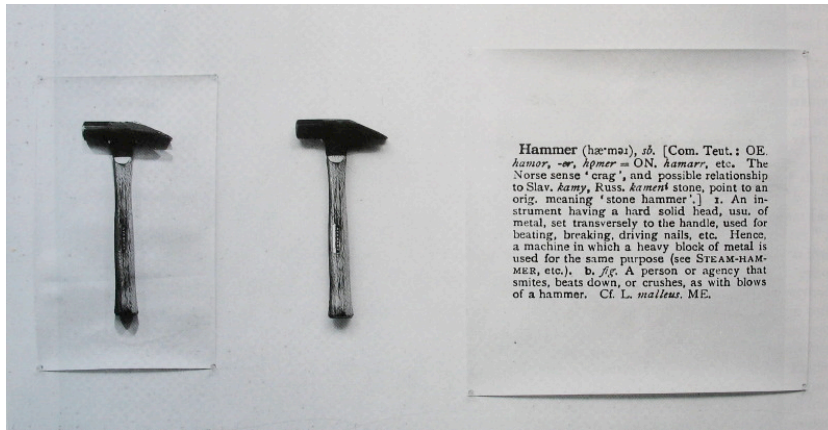


Fig. 9

Beardsley counters Dickie's arguments against the unity of aesthetic experience by considering the concept of unity in more detail. One way he thinks of unity is in terms of 'coherence'. He gives a definition of coherence: "one thing leads to another, continuity of development, without gaps or dead spaces, a sense of overall providential pattern of guidance, an orderly cumulation of energy toward a climax, are present to an unusual degree." (Beardsley, M. 1982: 84). Beardsley argues that this description not only describes the objective properties of an experience of coherence but also describes the way that feelings build on one another. For Beardsley feelings can combine in the same way that the objectively perceived world does. Feelings can act "[...] as though they belong with each other and to each other" (Beardsley, M. 1982: 85). On this point Dickie finally concedes that 'coherence' does seem to describe the way that feelings may be said to unify in the experience of an artwork. He states that Beardsley is "[...] probably right in thinking that it is possible for feelings to cohere" (Dickie, G. 1974: 195).

'Test Site' is a work that has many constituents. It involves the brief experience of sliding down a chute that can be easily grasped in one example but there are other experiences that surround this central experience. There is the experience of anticipation and the experience of all the events that immediately precede and follow the actual sliding such as when you receive a ticket, wait in a queue, witness crowds of other people spectating or participating and receive instruction. After sliding you are checked to make sure you are okay and you then begin to have a memory of the total experience. It is suggested that all of these features play a role in forming the full experience of 'Test Site'.



According to Beardsley the distinctiveness of aesthetic experience rests on its capacity to give you a feeling of unity. When 'Test Site' is considered in this light it could be suggested that it has objective properties that could be described as unified. From this perspective it could be said that after participating in the work all the experiences that you may have had at each stage cohere. Even although the queuing, receiving instruction, spectating and participating induce a diverse group of thoughts and feelings it is proposed that at any point during your participation in 'Test Site' you can stand back and reflect on the total experience and see that it forms a whole. It could also be said that you have a personal experience of completeness after having participated in 'Test Site'. As soon as your own participation is over this changes your experience of the artwork. Your completed participation casts a shadow over the total work. It changes your feeling of expectation to recollection. Originally you only saw the work from the outside as an observer now you are able to see the full work as a participant.

From another perspective it could be suggested that during the various stages of actual participation you are presented with feelings that pull away from one another. You are concerned with the immediate practical problems that 'Test Site' presents. You have to deal with queues and safety precautions. You are also directly concerned with the social exchanges that are necessary part of the work such as communication with attendants and other participants. Furthermore it should be recognised that too much stress is often put on the affective aspects of aesthetic experience. When 'Test Site' is considered from this perspective it could be said that it involves aesthetic experiences that generate a heightened feeling of stimulation but it can also be said to be as much about a direct physiological experience of movement and can also be said to involve an intellectual challenge to your knowledge of the conventions of art appreciation. For a participant an experience of 'Test Site' may involve aesthetic feelings, physical sensations and thoughts about the nature of art that do not come together into a sense of overall unity. It could be said that during actual participation you do not have the required detached attitude.

In this project it has been established that participatory art tends to go beyond the discipline of aesthetics. It encourages a cognitive and interpretative approach to art that stresses 'duration' rather than 'presentness'. I would suggest that Beardsley's insistence on the feeling of unity generated by aesthetic experience tends to run counter to these explanations of how you may respond

to participatory art. It should be acknowledged that as a participant in 'Test Site' a significant part of your experience is not strictly aesthetic experience. Therefore the importance that Beardsley attaches to the feeling of unity generated by an aesthetic experience of art diminishes in participatory art.

## **1.6 Conclusions**

This chapter took an analytical perspective on aesthetic experience. The objective was to find out what position aesthetic experience holds in participatory art. Given that participatory art involves social and practical experience from the outset it is suggested that aesthetic experience must be appropriately articulated in relation to these other kinds of experience and explained with these other concerns in mind. In participatory art aesthetic experience can no longer be considered in isolation from other experiences.

I would say that participatory art demonstrates that there is no clear break between private aesthetic experience and more public social and practical experiences. Participatory art does not remain focused on the discipline of aesthetics or stay within its "area of competence" (Greenberg, C. 1960: 755). It cuts across aesthetics to broaden the scope of what may be included in art. Participatory art shows that your experience of art has 'duration' rather than 'presentness'. It shows that your background knowledge about a work and your search for its meaning count as much as any immediate feelings or perceptions you may have of the work. Participatory art via its recognition of other modes of experience and its focus on the 'threshold' and the 'relational' brings various practices and disciplines together.

Aesthetic experience in participation has been explained as an artistic convention. The main terms in this account were distance, disinterest and attention. I would say that it is difficult to justify distancing special aesthetic experiences from other experiences that are integral to participation. Social and practical experiences introduce aspects of the ordinary world into an experience of the work so that the proximity of aesthetic experience to other experiences has to be recognised. I would also say that disinterestedness is problematic because social, practical and aesthetic experiences form attachments in participation and make the participant 'interested' in experiences other than the purely aesthetic. I would say that describing aesthetic experience as a type of attention is useful because it provides a suitable measure of flexibility that

corresponds to how you may move between different kinds of experience in participatory art: You may pay attention to a practical issue and then pay attention to an aesthetic state of affairs.

It has been suggested that in participatory art you may fully participate, spectate-and-participate and fully spectate. I would say that a property of participation is that it allows you to bring aesthetic, social and practical experiences together and a property of spectatorship is that it allows you to individuate aesthetic experience from social and practical experience.

On this basis it is possible to say that as a spectator or during moments of standing-by while you participate you are able to separate your aesthetic viewpoint from other social or practical viewpoints. As a spectator you may appreciate the architectural grandeur and the sense of community that 'Test Site' generates. You may view the sculptural properties of 'Test Site' or be a witness to the collective atmosphere of the work. As a participant you may also experience a private feeling of catharsis. These kinds of experience can be compelling and personal. Nonetheless it should be acknowledged that a key aim of participatory art is participation rather than spectatorship. This introduces a complex of experiences into the encounter with art that causes you to question the role of the modernist aesthetic and the value of focusing on the discipline of aesthetics.

I would argue that 'Test Site' does not promote a set of feelings, values and enjoyments that are specifically associated aesthetic experience. It involves cognitive, practical, social and communicative experiences that broaden the scope of the kind of values and enjoyments that can be associated with art.

## 2.0 Phenomenological Explanations of Aesthetic Experience in Participatory Art

### 2.1 Introduction

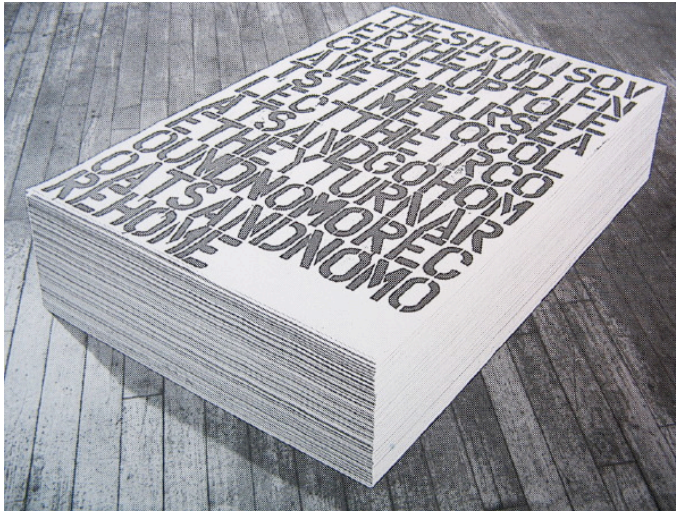


Fig. 1

#### *Context*

When I encountered 'Untitled', 1993 (Fig. 1), I initially surveyed it from a distance but as I approached the stack I became less interested in its appearance and more aware of my potential role as a participant in the artwork. I quickly read the text of a poster, decided to take one, rolled it up and walked away. The lasting effect of this work is the memory of this action and not its appearance or where it was situated in the gallery. It is also revealing that this episode stands out as the most memorable aspect of the group show that this work appeared in. I remember feeling that I wanted to own a poster. This was definitely an incentive but I did not feel that possession of a single example really gave me the full concept. I also remember believing that by taking a poster I was contributing to something and my actions made me think of other people who had also taken a poster. My participation in this work was also an occasion where I made a connection with the gallery staff because I was uncertain about whether I could take a poster and after I had taken one I realised that attendants were handing out elastic bands to stop rolled posters from unfurling.

#### *Problem*

It seems that my experience of 'Untitled', 1993 was comprised of an aesthetic experience of looking at the work and a series of practical and social

experiences that made up the participation. On the other hand it could be suggested that there is not such a clear distinction between aesthetic, practical and social experience. It could be said that these experiences intersect and have an influence on each other. The part that participatory art plays in combining different kinds of experience together will be considered in this chapter. Participatory art invites participation that is both physical and contemplative and introduces observable actions alongside private responses. It is proposed that an explanation of how aesthetic experience integrates with social and practical experience will help artists and participants to understand how aesthetic experience is changed in participatory art.

### *Resolution*

It is suggested that a perspective that deals with aesthetic experience as a phenomenon can explain how aesthetic experience is changed in participatory art. This perspective tends to question the kind of dualism that emerges when the 'bodily' senses and the 'cognitive' senses are clearly divided. This is an important view to consider because participatory art similarly interrogates the separation between the 'bodily' and the 'cognitive'. This perspective also tends to challenge approaches to aesthetics that stress a definite separation between the subjective world of the viewer and the objective world of the artwork. This is an important issue because in participatory art observable actions are introduced alongside private responses. From this point of view it is suggested that some explanations of how aesthetic experience is changed in participatory art will be demonstrated.

### *Summary*

This chapter will concentrate on some aspects of the aesthetic theories of Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger and Hans George Gadamer. Nietzsche stresses the bodily aspect of aesthetic experience. His aesthetic theories are useful in this account of how aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork because he is the originator of some key ideas that diverge from the analytical approach to aesthetics. He gives a phenomenological account of the experience of art by concentrating on what you *feel* when you experience art rather than trying to *reason* how these experiences come about. For Nietzsche the experience of art is founded on non-cognitive states. He claims that states of dreaming and intoxication are the impetus behind the desire to experience art. Furthermore he suggests that these

non-cognitive states are achieved through the body as a whole and not just through the 'cognitive' senses like sight or hearing.

Heidegger's aesthetic theories are valuable in this account of how aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork because he advances the phenomenological perspective on aesthetic experience. Like Nietzsche he claims that the impetus to have aesthetic experiences is not based on cognition. Instead he claims that an elementary state of being termed *Dasein* offers a practical familiarity with the environment. You have an interpretative approach to the world that is revealed in your fundamental practical engagements with your surroundings and this lies beneath cognitive approaches to situations. Like Nietzsche Heidegger concentrates on the feel of aesthetic experience rather than trying to reason how these experiences come about.

The philosophy of Nietzsche and Heidegger provides a phenomenological description of the encounter with art through references to 'the body' and 'man'. The usefulness of these kinds of generalisations in the discussion about participatory art will also be assessed in this chapter. Michel Foucault's explanations of the modern subject will be called upon in order to provide a commentary on appeals made to the authenticity of corporeal experience and the notion that there may be an essential human nature that can be described as 'man'.

Gadamer's aesthetic theories are valuable in this account of how aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork because he develops the interpretative aspect of Heidegger's concept of *Dasein*. Following Heidegger he builds on the idea that an understanding of the world has its basis in an elemental state of being. Gadamer claims that this state of being is essentially interpretative. This leads him to stress the importance of interpretation and conclude that the most appropriate approach to philosophy is interpretative or *hermeneutic*.<sup>1</sup> For Gadamer hermeneutics extends universally. Hermeneutics is considered to be an essential constituent of being and can be applied to every aspect of life not just written texts.

These accounts will provide a perspective that explains participatory art as a phenomenon and throughout the chapter these findings will be compared to aspects of 'Untitled', 1993 by Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Christopher Wool. These comparisons will provide an explanation of how aesthetic experience is

embodied as a phenomenon in the participatory artwork. Again it is emphasised that in these comparisons various philosophical positions will be used as a means to reach a fuller understanding of participatory art rather than a means to discuss aesthetic experience as such. Therefore these comparisons will place accounts of aesthetic experience at the service of explanations of 'Untitled', 1993. This will contribute to the main question of this chapter: Does the 'feel' of aesthetic experience change in participatory art?

## 2.2 The bodily and the cognitive senses

When I took part in 'Untitled', 1993, I felt a measure of confusion about my participation. Was the decision to lift, roll up and take away a poster an important part of my experience of the work? Or, on the other hand was the act of taking a poster incidental to my appreciation of the work; once I got it home and put it on my wall then I could really appreciate it.

Carolyn Korsmeyer's work on the sense of taste is relevant to this problem. She wants to find out why some senses are considered to be more important than others. She proposes that the dualism of the *cognitive* and the *bodily* senses cannot be uncritically accepted and questions the assumptions that these terms rest on. For Korsmeyer they are supported by an arrangement of apparently self-evident and eternal pairs: "mind over body; of reason over sense; of man over beast and culture over nature. [...] the elevation of male over female" (Korsmeyer, C. 1999: 30). These assumptions have to be examined because such simple binary pairs are rarely seen together without some kind of emphasis that places one above the other. For Korsmeyer this kind of weighted binary structure leads to the abandonment of one term for the other. The bodily senses are traditionally neglected because they are associated with concerns that are uncritically considered to be inferior i.e. the sensual, the natural and the feminine. This results in "the comparative theoretical neglect of everything that is categorized with the inferior terms" (Korsmeyer, C. 1999: 30). In this way she claims that the bodily sense of taste can offer a new perspective on some old philosophical problems.

Just as Korsmeyer claims that the bodily sense of taste can offer a new perspective on some old philosophical problems it is claimed that a bodily participation rather than a cognitive engagement with an artwork can offer a

new perspective on aesthetic experience. Korsmeyer argues that Plato and Aristotle established attitudes to the cognitive and the bodily senses and that these attitudes continue to be accepted. Her intention is to point out that the current attitude to the senses has its roots in a set of archaic beliefs that have since been disproved by science: “Greek analysis of the senses where revised long ago; the value structure they employed has been naggingly persistent” (Korsmeyer, C. 1999: 33). The current attitude to the senses accepts that the visual and the aural are the best candidates to be linked to aesthetic experience. These senses operate over distances, promote “[...] stillness, or stasis [...]” and are linked to states of contemplation (Collinson, D. 1995: 119). There is no criticism of those who have a tendency to seek out these kinds of experience because it is believed they lead to more elevated states. On the other hand those who seek out taste and touch are criticised because it is believed that these senses do not lead to more elevated states. These senses depend on physical contact, require movement towards the object of attention and tend to concentrate on immediate desires. Gonzalez-Torres produced many works that directly address the issue of taste and touch called ‘candy spills’. They are similar to his stacks of posters but literally involve the appetite (Fig. 2). A ‘candy spill’ consists of wrapped confectionary piled in a corner. The viewer is invited to take a sweet and the pile is kept at a steady size by gallery staff.



Fig. 2

Korsmeyer looks at the reasoning Plato and Aristotle applied to their explanations of the ‘hierarchy of the senses’. She locates the primary division in



this hierarchy between the 'cognitive' senses and the 'bodily' senses. The cognitive senses are sight and hearing; the bodily senses are taste, smell and touch. A division occurs between these two groups of senses because of the distances that are required for each to function. Sight and hearing can function at extended distances while you have to be close to an object to experience its taste, touch and arguably its smell. The cognitive senses are considered to be superior to the bodily senses because of this ability to function at a distance. Distance allows an individual to give an overall appraisal of an object or situation. Korsmeyer also suggests that when you look or listen your attention is not diverted to the body. The visual and the aural "[...] draw attention away from the body of the perceiving subject to the object of perception external to the body" (Korsmeyer, C. 1999: 21). The bodily senses on the other hand depend on contact with phenomena. As a result smell, taste and touch tend to force you to take the body into account during perception. The immediate circumstances of the body are drawn into the frame and you encounter the perception "'in" the body" (Korsmeyer, C. 1999: 25).

The ability to function at a distance makes sight and hearing 'cognitive' because the introduction of distance between the eye and the object or the ear and the sound tends to suggest that these senses can offer a degree of objectivity. You may be deceived by what you see or hear but there is also a sense that what you see or hear has some independence because it is at a distance. Korsmeyer claims "This distance fosters the impression of the separation of mind from body and the potential freedom of mind to explore worlds of intellect [...]" (Korsmeyer, C. 1999: 17). Sight and hearing correspond to the kind of detachment required when you are engaged in abstract thought. They give a sense of the possibility of a world beyond the body and allow you to conceive of generalities. On the other hand the bodily senses fail to achieve this elevated state. They keep you anchored to the body and its appetites. Causing you to reflect on what is most pressing and specific to your needs. Ernesto Neto's sculpture 'Humanoids' (Fig. 3) makes a direct appeal to the bodily senses by inviting participants to become enveloped within the soft material of the work. It could be said that Neto is exploring the assumed hierarchy that splits the 'bodily' senses from the 'cognitive' senses.



Fig. 3

Korsmeyer examines how Plato and Aristotle treat the role of appetite in relation to the senses and points out that there was a general conception of the body and soul that was shared by Plato and Aristotle. The rational part of the soul was understood to be at the top of the body in the head or heart. The passionate part of the soul was thought to be between the heart and the stomach and the appetite was thought to be in the stomach and below. The rational soul was protected from the influence of the appetites by the passions.

For Plato the dominance of the appetite was considered to be a danger. It was a potent force that had to be “[...] kept chained like a wild animal” (Korsmeyer, C. 1999: 16). Plato was generally distrustful of all the senses because they only give access to the world as it appears. Aristotle tends to be more tolerant of the bodily senses but the hierarchy between the cognitive and the bodily senses remains. He supports the idea that sight and hearing are higher senses because although they give pleasure you do not say that you over-indulge in them in the way you may criticize those who over-indulge in taste and touch. The visual and the aural promote a contemplative attitude. Korsmeyer quotes from Aristotle’s *Eudemian Ethics*, “[...] if one sees a beautiful statue, or horse or human being or hears singing, without any accompanying wish for eating, drinking or sexual indulgence, but only with the wish to see the beautiful and to hear the singers, he would not be thought profligate any more than those who were charmed by the sirens.” (Aristotle. 1984a: 1949). When you take pleasure in the cognitive senses you are not drawn by your appetites to the object of your attention. The object of your attention is considered in a disinterested and thoughtful way. However Aristotle does not absolutely exclude taste and touch from contemplation. An excessive appetite for these experiences is met with disapproved but the appetite becomes acceptable when

it is employed with restraint; knowledge may be achieved from senses like taste and touch but only if they are closely monitored. They offer potent pleasures and can be over-indulged so they should be regulated.

I would say that participatory action asks you to consider if putting a poster on your wall and standing back and looking at it is the main experience of 'Untitled', 1993. This work invites you to lift, roll up and take a poster and it is suggested that these actions cause you to question the association of the visual with objectivity and that this leads to a reconsideration of the role of practical engagement. In 'Untitled', 1993 the body is called upon and this suggests that such work requires a reassessment of the straightforward dualism that underpins the division between the bodily and the cognitive senses. I would say that participatory art instigates a more lenient hierarchy between the bodily and the cognitive senses. This leads you to review the structure of categories that the senses are ordered within. Participatory action in 'Untitled', 1993 asks you to reacquaint the self with the way that the body is drawn back into the frame by the bodily senses. In Torres 'candy spills' the role of the appetite is literally presented to participants when they decide to take a piece of confectionary and in 'Untitled', 1993 by taking a poster you demonstrate an interest in ownership of an example of the work. Such participatory action associates the work with the idea of the desire for possession and it could be suggested that this leads you to query the conventions that surround the appetite to own and touch art.

## **2.3 Nietzsche**

### **2.3.1 The metaphysics of flux**

An appealing aspect of 'Untitled', 1993 was the way that you could take a poster but the work ostensibly remained the same. I was aware that many people had participated in the work but it continued to appear as a minimalist pile of neatly stacked posters. The work was undergoing an incessant physical change yet appeared continuous.

Nietzsche explores this sense of change that underlies the appearance of stability in his discourse on the metaphysics of impermanence. Consistent with this idea is a sense that the ultimate grounds of reality can be described as being in 'flux' or 'becoming' (Young, J. 1992). An overwhelming volatility is at the

root of being and this stipulates that all things that are created are inevitably destroyed. For Nietzsche if this state of affairs is acknowledged then it suggests that history should be looked at in a different way. If the underlying nature of history is 'becoming' then the idea that history is a progression or may have a purpose is an illusion. If history is grounded on 'becoming' then to say that it started at one point and is advancing to another point is a contradiction. Human beings may feel as though they can impose purposefulness on history but ultimately history is the ceaseless reappearance of the same fundamental relationship. This relationship dictates that all order ends in disorder, that this disorder then produces order *ad infinitum*; consequently history is not a linear but a cyclic process.<sup>2</sup> Robert Morris demonstrates this kind of ongoing process in the work 'Continuous Project Altered Daily' (Fig. 4a & Fig. 4b) where he manipulated and then cleared away a variety of raw materials for a three-week period.



Fig. 4a & Fig. 4b

When he discusses the 'Open Work' Umberto Eco makes similar observations about the underlying properties of reality. He suggests that in the twentieth century it was accepted that a degree of uncertainty and ambiguity was integral to many scientific theories. Modern science revealed that indeterminacy is a primary aspect of reality. Eco proposes that art acts like an "epistemological metaphor" (Eco, U. 1989: 90) and that the properties of the 'Open Work' present the indeterminacy of reality. Just as modern science highlights the uncertainty at the basis of many definitive scientific principles the 'Open Work' highlights the way that art can be 'in progress'. While modern science proposes that there may be no all-encompassing set of principles to explain reality, the 'Open

Work' questions the underlying stability of an artwork's properties by presenting art that has yet to be completed by the participant. "The discontinuity of phenomena has called into question the possibility of a unified, definitive image of our universe; art suggests a way for us to see the world in which we live, and, by seeing it, to accept it and integrate it into our sensibility. The open work assumes the task of giving us an image of discontinuity. It does not narrate it; it *is* it." (Eco, U. 1989: 90). It could be said that for Eco the constant renewal and incompleteness of a work like 'Untitled', 1993 is a presentation of the underlying unsettledness of reality.

For Nietzsche art can allow you to experience this indifferent, chaotic, 'becoming' of the world. When you have an experience of art you inhabit non-cognitive states like dreaming or intoxication and in these states you are able to achieve primary insights into life. In a state of dreaming or intoxication you achieve a metaphysical awareness of the flux at the heart of life.

How does this discourse contribute to an explanation of how aesthetic experience as a phenomenon is embodied in the participatory artwork? If it is accepted that a feature of the participatory artwork is its openness to participatory action then there is sense in which the artwork could be said to actually be in a state of flux. It is constantly being altered, transformed and is always 'in progress'. This is the case in 'Untitled', 1993 where the stack of posters is continually being depleted and renewed and is never finally static, complete or whole. If it is accepted that such work is in an actual state of flux then there is a possibility of drawing an analogy between the metaphysical flux that Nietzsche claims lies at the heart of life and the actual state of flux that is presented in the participatory artwork. Just as an experience of an artwork may allow you to come to an awareness of metaphysical flux, a participatory action embodied in an artwork allows you to play a part in the actual flux of the artwork. It could therefore be said that the actual conditions of flux of the participatory artwork are an acknowledgement of the metaphysical flux at the heart of life.

### **2.3.2 The 'loss of self' and the body**

When I took away a poster from 'Untitled', 1993 there was no crowd or queue. Only a gallery attendant witnessed my participation however I did have a sense that I was part of an absent collective of previous participants.

When Nietzsche describes how you may experience art he generally favours a Dionysian as opposed to an Apollonian attitude.<sup>3</sup> The Dionysian attitude gives an insight into the fundamental unity and flux of being whereas the Apollonian attitude enhances and regulates the ordinary world as it appears to us. In his discussion on how you may be said to 'lose yourself' in the Dionysian art of dance and song Richard Schacht quotes from 'The Birth of Tragedy'. "The essence of nature is now to be expressed symbolically; we need a new world of symbols; and the entire symbolism of the body is called into play, not the mere symbolism of the lips, face and speech but the whole pantomime of dancing, forcing every member into rhythmic movement" (Schacht, R. 1995: 491). Nietzsche is enthusiastic about the possibility that through your involvement in the event of the Dionysian artwork you may become part of a collective liberation. Schacht points out how Nietzsche refers to situations where a 'loss of self' is achieved in the experience of rituals or celebration through "the destruction of the *principium individuationis*" (Schacht, R. 1995: 491). He suggests that as part of a dancing or singing crowd you may become depersonalised. Through this process you are then able to briefly identify a deeper unity at the heart of reality and in a sense become part of this unity as part of a communal group.

How does Nietzsche's enthusiasm for the possibility of 'collective release' enhance an explanation of how aesthetic experience as a phenomenon is embodied in the participatory artwork? He favours Dionysian arts like dance and song and there is a sense that through participation in these activities a certain 'loss of self' is achieved. Although it would be misleading to suggest that the aim of every participatory artwork is to generate a similar 'loss of self' there is a sense that as a participant in a participatory artwork you surrender a certain amount of personal autonomy. You briefly forgo your own willingness to act freely in the world for the benefit of an engagement with the participatory artwork. A participatory artwork like 'Untitled', 1993 may not always engender a 'collective release' but it can definitely be said that a collective event may occur among its participants. You contribute to the collective action of acquisition that occurred during the work's exhibition.

In 'Untitled', 1993 I definitely had a sense that while I participated I was in some sense puncturing the normal atmosphere of the gallery. My participation displaced my usual seriousness and my regard for the norms of 'gallery behaviour'.

Related to this is Terry Eagleton's suggestion that Nietzsche's understanding of aesthetic experience is determined to a large extent by the role of the body in general human affairs. His approach suggests that you "[...] return to the body and attempt to think everything through again in terms of it, grasping history, art and reason as the unstable products of its need and drives." (Eagleton, T. 1990: 234). Eagleton stresses Nietzsche's materialist sympathies in his description of his philosophy. For Eagleton Nietzsche uses the body as the basis for an explanation of all reality. Reality surfaces from a material and bodily involvement with your surroundings. Reality becomes an effect of bodily needs. Nietzsche's aim is to reveal the unstable material energies of the human body that underlie more rational motivations. The human body therefore acts in order to encourage "the ruin of disinterested speculation", (Eagleton, T. 1990: 234).

How do Nietzsche's ideas about the body and aesthetic experience contribute to an explanation of how aesthetic experience as a phenomenon is embodied in the participatory artwork? 'Untitled', 1993 invites participants to act on the work therefore by considering a participant's action of lifting, rolling and taking, the movements and gestures of a body as a whole are being considered. It could therefore be said that Nietzsche's recognition of the unstable energies of the body that lie beneath rationality illuminates how action tests the divisions that are placed between the body and cognition. Bodily participation rather than a cognitive engagement in a work like 'Untitled', 1993 offers a new perspective on aesthetic experience because it causes you to consider why thought that arises from simply looking is so highly regarded and why awareness that is an outcome of bodily contact meets with disapproval. Nietzsche re-establishes bodily drives at the heart of philosophy in an effort to disturb the impassiveness of rationality. It could be said that participatory action is a reminder of the bodily foundation of aesthetic experience. It opens up a space where the ordered break between the body and cognition can be interrogated.

### **2.3.3 'Metaphysical comfort'**

I would say that an important property of my participation in 'Untitled', 1993 was its ordinariness. My simple participatory actions were surprising because they were so mundane and appeared curious in the context of a gallery. The

day-to-day flavour of my participation confounded my expectations of what may constitute an encounter with art.

At one stage in his development Nietzsche claims that art does not deal with ordinary appearance but that its aim is to expose the 'reality' that lies behind the everyday world. He suggests that the underlying reality is an unstable state of 'becoming' and human reality is a consequence of the erratic energy of the material body. Nevertheless an organised social world for human beings continues to exist. People continue to commit all their efforts to ensuring that common values like reason endure as an impetus for human action. How does Nietzsche explain this? How can confidence in the progress of human affairs be maintained after having been presented with the essence of being in an experience of Dionysian art? Young quotes from 'The Birth of Tragedy', "[...] knowledge kills action; action requires the veil of illusion" (Young, J. 1992: 42). Having gained insight into the 'becoming' of being there is a sense that this causes a certain amount of anxiety. In order to be released from this anxious state it therefore makes sense to stop believing that you may alter your circumstances. Your knowledge of 'becoming' kills your action and you drift into passivity. The only way to overcome this docility is to assert yourself while acknowledging that your assertion has its basis in an illusion. It is better to have experienced the underlying reality of being and then face the illusion of ordinary life with knowledge of this experience rather than without it. Young quotes from 'The Birth of Tragedy'. Nietzsche describes this kind of return to the ordinary affairs of life after such insights as a "metaphysical comfort" (Young, J. 1992: 45). You return to life quietened by new awareness, with a restored sense of your place and a more benign attitude to others. Without this kind of experience you collude with the unexamined illusion and custom of progress. You are unable to address the reality of being and therefore unable to place the illusions of ordinary states of affairs in their proper perspective.

In another stage of his development Nietzsche changes his perspective on this sense of overarching 'metaphysical comfort'. Art may offer you the consolation that there are truths hidden beneath the appearance of order and reason. Art may calm you during times of disenchantment with the dominant social order but it also relieves you of the impetus to actively change that dominant social order. By looking to art to present and comment on the reality of your circumstances any need to actually change the current reality is forestalled. For Nietzsche at this stage art alleviates any dissatisfaction that may be felt about



social conditions by distracting you from these feelings of dissatisfaction and dulling any dissenting energy you may have. Young quotes from 'Human all too Human'. Nietzsche claims that the points of view offered by art "[...] hinder men from working for a real improvement in their conditions by suspending and discharging in a palliative way the very passion which impels the discontented to action." (Young, J. 1992: 64)

Young points out Nietzsche's solution to this paradox in 'Human, All too Human'. Nietzsche looks at what artists do and suggests that they spend too much time concentrating on developing their art at the expense of developing their lives so he proposes that this should be reversed. Art is no longer a narrow practice focused on a restrictive set of artistic values associated with particular kinds of artwork. For Nietzsche it can now be all behaviour. If you are to change your surroundings then you have to go directly to your surroundings and employ your creative abilities within life not art. Nietzsche is sceptical about the kind of culture that emanates from galleries, describing it as: "the art of works of art" (Young, J. 1992: 82). Therefore while not entirely abandoning the context of art for the context of life, Nietzsche does suggest that art can have a place among the ordinary artefacts and affairs of life. He remains convinced of the value of art but also recognises the need to attach art to a humble origin. Salim Kemal highlights Nietzsche's proposal that artist and non-artist have the same starting point: "Every activity of man is amazingly complicated, not only that of genius, but none is a miracle" (Kemal, S. 1998: 270). Andrea Zittel produces work that tests this relationship between art and day-to-day life (Fig. 5). She produces artworks that are in a sense experiments in design and in another sense experiments in installation art. Her work imitates utility furniture and social housing. This encourages participants to use her environments like any other living space. These environments also act like space saving devices. They are domestic capsules that can be folded away and transported elsewhere and are often presented in public contexts.



Fig. 5

Nietzsche suggests that artists should look directly at the context of life rather than the context of art in order to bring about a direct transformation of their surroundings. He recognises that art becomes an ineffective consolation in the face of an unsatisfactory social order and suggests that art should be incorporated into efforts to change the social order. How does this discourse contribute to an explanation of how aesthetic experience as a phenomenon is embodied in the participatory artwork? It could be suggested that Nietzsche is readdressing the balance between art and life in his aesthetic theory. He provides a compensatory viewpoint for the way that art is generally venerated for offering a degree of consolation in the face of a harsh reality. He does this by emphasising the value of the ordinary and the everyday. This kind of situation brings to mind the manner in which commonplace actions become an important element in a participatory artwork like 'Untitled', 1993. The unsophisticated ordinariness of taking a poster away highlights the possibility that there may be no clear division between aesthetic experience and ordinary experience. Participatory action reveals a space where the encounter with art extends beyond the discipline of aesthetics and connects with other orders of cognition.

#### 2.3.4 An activist approach

It could be said that when I took ownership of a poster in 'Untitled', 1993 that I was spurred on by the work to act. My participatory act was observable evidence that some kind of feeling or idea had been transferred from the artists

through the work to me. As though my act was an externalization of an internal interpretation.

Young looks at a later stage in the development of Nietzsche's thought where he proposes that descriptions of aesthetic experience should be strictly centred on the mental state of the artist. Young quotes from 'The Will to Power'. According to Nietzsche "[...] the effect of works of art is to excite the state that creates art" (Young, J. 1992: 120). I would agree that action is very much part of the initial stages of the creative process. As an artist you have to do something to make a work. Write down a note or do a sketch at the very least. If the point of art is to replicate the creative state and if an artist is involved in 'willed' states when he or she is being creative, then according to Nietzsche the viewer should also be in a 'willed' state of creativity. Young refers to "Nietzsche's activist vocabulary for talking about artists" (Young, J. 1992: 121). Nietzsche's theory therefore runs counter to theories that argue that the encounter with art is defined as being 'will-less' or 'disinterested'.

His account of the need to stimulate the energy of creativity within the viewer seems at first glance to be extremely suitable in an explanation of how aesthetic experience as a phenomenon is embodied in the participatory artwork. The participatory artwork invites participants to act on the work, just as the artist was originally engaged in actions to create the work. Is a work that invites an active response simply making the creative process more accessible? Is the work a vehicle that transfers the values of creative activity literally 'into the hands' of the participant? I would suggest that this explanation is too straightforward. It supports the view that creativity emerges through the feelings and emotions rather than arising from thought and the intellect. It also suggests that through artistic skill this feeling becomes embodied in the artwork. The viewer then experiences the artwork and the creative feeling is transferred to the viewer. This model assumes that the participation is one-way. It places all the emphasis on the artist's feelings and intentions. On the other hand I would suggest that it is more appropriate to take in a fuller account of role of the participant. The artist may have intentions and feelings for their work but the participant is in a position to interpret these intentions and feelings for him or herself. Similarly the artist may grant participation but the participant is in a position to accept or decline the offer to participate. I would suggest that a more reciprocal model is necessary in an explanation of

participatory art. The 'energy' of participation flows in two directions. The artist offers an invitation and the participant chooses to take part.

## 2.4 Heidegger

### 2.4.1 Dasein

Although in galleries it is normal that viewers are not permitted to come into direct contact with an artwork, in other situations this kind of behaviour is not so unusual. Is the attitude that you ordinarily inhabit where you are generally inquisitive about the world present in a work like 'Untitled', 1993? Does this work encourage a more everyday and direct experience?

Martin Heidegger stresses the non-cognitive basis of the encounter with art and suggests that in this encounter there is something that happens prior to your knowledge about the situation. For Heidegger a *state of being* is the elementary state and you build on this elementary state when you attempt to understand the surrounding world or the self. Before the conception of an object and a subject you have a bond with the world and he describes this as *Dasein*: "For *Dasein*, before arriving at any such cognition, finds itself always already in commerce with other things in ways which presuppose a certain primordial access to them, a practical orientation or familiarity which is already a kind of understanding before the event, and which lays the ontological foundation of all more formal knowing." (Eagleton, T. 1990: 290). Heidegger suggests that your experience of the world has at its core a state of being that is primarily about a proximity and directness to your surroundings. *Dasein* presents a kind of reactive situation. Eagleton has described this state of being as "a domain of 'openness'" (Eagleton, T. 1990: 291).

How does the prominent role that Heidegger gives to a non-cognitive experience of art contribute to an explanation of how aesthetic experience as a phenomenon is embodied in the participatory artwork? Some valuable correspondences may be drawn between Heidegger's sense of a primitive state of being and the state that a participant may encounter during participation. It could be suggested that the state of 'openness' presented in *Dasein* has parallels with the condition of 'openness' that is present in the participatory artwork. Rather than present itself as an object to be scrutinised in a detached manner, a participatory artwork like 'Untitled', 1993 is presented as an invitation to

directly participate. It is presented as being fundamentally modifiable and responsive to direct action. A practical engagement with 'Untitled', 1993 becomes comparable to the practical state of being that is the primary link you have with your environment suggested by Heidegger's explanation of Dasein. Just as Dasein has a basic practical encounter with the world prior to cognition, practical participation becomes the basic connection that a participant has with 'Untitled', 1993. Practical participatory action becomes a central experience in participatory art.

#### **2.4.2 Practical orientation**

When I took a poster from the stack in 'Untitled', 1993, I concentrated on being careful as I rolled up a poster. I was focused on a distinct set of practical concerns that eclipsed my appreciation of the work as an art object.

Heidegger describes the fundamental encounter that an individual may have with the world as having a 'practical orientation'. You engage with the world as a practical rather than as a theoretical being. This derives from the priority he gives to the "work-world" (Moran, D. 2000: 233). Forms of labour or craft and the rudimentary uses of materials fascinate him. Heidegger extends this description of the 'work-world' by dividing his definition into two categories. The first category is "Zuhandenheit (readiness-to-hand)", (Moran, D. 2000: 233) and the second category is "Vorhandenheit (presence-at-hand)" (Moran, D. 2000: 233). Both of these categories direct you towards a basic approach to the environment that is governed by an impulse to touch, manipulate and use your surroundings, as opposed to an approach which is determined by a disinterested, theoretical gaze. Zuhandenheit may be described as a situation where a participant is engaged and fully interacting with his surroundings. For example a stone-mason while working with his chisel and hammer on the stone, is engaged in an ongoing practice where his tools "withdraw" (Ihde, D. 1997: 690). They become extensions to his body and to an extent they become transparent in his action. His work cannot be separated easily into constituent components or qualities of experience. It is 'to hand', and occurring. His tools and medium are: "[...] there in the light of an action oriented toward an end" (Goldmann, L. 1977: 36). Vorhandenheit is a condition intimately associated with Zuhandenheit but occurring with different objectives in mind. It is a situation where tools or materials are perceived from a more theoretical perspective. Heidegger describes this as occurring in situations where a tool

fails to function efficiently. He sees it as a disruption to the process. The 'wholeness' of the act comes under scrutiny and is appraised. It can also be viewed as a scientific approach to your surroundings. It is described as "[...] things standing on their own, available for inspection" (Moran, D. 2000: 233). It is a moment where your clear theoretical interest in the world is severed from your impetus to manipulate your surroundings. Marijn van der Poll integrates a practical experience directly into her participatory chair design 'Do Hit' (Fig. 6). When customers buy a chair they are given a sledge-hammer and a sheet steel cube. They then have to pound the cube into the shape of a chair. I would suggest that in participating in this work you inhabit a 'work-world' similar to that described by Heidegger. Your relationship to the hammer and cube would alternate between full interaction and detachment.



Fig. 6

For Heidegger the world is not at a distance and it is interpreted in terms of the practicalities of the situation and in terms of the tangible variables that these practicalities may present you with. You may become part of a 'whole' practical engagement with your surroundings where you are unable to isolate each facet of the experience or you may 'inspect' your practical engagement with your surroundings to evaluate the experience. The 'work world' gives you a sense of being able to move through a range of attitudes. In your practical involvement with your surroundings you can move from being completely occupied to being more remote. This highlights the variable reciprocity that occurs when an individual becomes more or less absorbed in their practical activity.

How does Heidegger's description of the 'work-world' contribute to an explanation of how aesthetic experience as a phenomenon is embodied in the participatory artwork? His account has value because it describes a practical engagement with the world as a basic aspect of your interpretation of your surroundings. In a similar way it could be said that a practical engagement with the world is a basic aspect of an explanation of the participatory artwork. From this perspective the central experience of practical participation presented by an artwork like 'Untitled', 1993 can be described on a shifting scale that gradates from captivation through distractedness to complete detachment. Participatory action could be explained as moving through degrees of attentiveness. Taking a poster could be an action that you are very aware of doing or that you do without thought.

Although Heidegger is talking about the relationship between a craftsperson and his or her tools, it is suggested that the basic idea of the 'work world' could be extended into the world of the participatory artwork. Nonetheless it is also recognised that it is arguable that the idea of work should be regarded as the best way to structure an understanding of practicality. Bernhard Waldenfels refers to Aron Gurwitsch's descriptions of how children play with ordinary objects, "[...] the pluriformity and polyvalence of things gets lost when the status of things is derived from the normal expediency of tools." (Waldenfels, B. 1997: 14)

### **2.4.3 'The body' and 'man'**

It could be said that Nietzsche and Heidegger make a number of assumptions about human nature that reinforce a particular view of the participating subject. It could be said that their views on 'the body' and 'man' create a very general and modernist conception of the audience for participatory art. For Nietzsche 'the body' acts to guarantee the authenticity of an experience. Nietzsche uses the materiality of the human body's needs and motivations to show that there is division between human nature and human rationality. An essential and 'lived' sense of agency is opposed to a more straightforward and rational agency. For Heidegger *Dasein* is used to describe a pre-cognitive state of being. From his perspective you inhabit a universal state before you reflect and think about your specific circumstances. Heidegger proposes that everyone has access to this undifferentiated openness to experience.

Each of these conceptions of the subject posit a universal human being who has a 'natural' feeling for life. However from another perspective it could be suggested that this 'natural' agent does not fully represent the subject. It could be said that these features do not exist prior to a discussion about the subject and are not commonly applicable to all subjects; rather these features are a consequence of taking a particular view on the meaning of individuality. "[...] Once spoken for and declared, the rights of "Man" - no matter how parochially interpreted to suit the needs of just certain "men" - will take on the dubious ideological status of a timeless and universal truth." (Ingram, D. 2003: 249).

Michel Foucault presents another view of the subject that cannot be described as arising naturally. For Foucault your sense of self is to a great extent conditioned by your situation and the complex of social forces that affect your situation. "Foucault shows that the subject is not natural but takes different forms in different historical periods. In other words, rather than being the free and active organisers of society, we are products of discourses and power relations, and take on different characteristics according to the range of subject positions that are possible in our socio-historical context." (Danaher, G. Schirato, T. Webb, J. 2000: 118).

Foucault tests the idea that 'human nature' is hard-wired into the subject from the beginning and queries whether "[...] there is something biologically given, unchangeable, a foundation for whatever it is we do with our mental capacities" (Rabinow, P. 1984: 3). For Foucault this biological perspective is just one discourse that is seeking a position of power among many other competing discourses. He questions the possibility that there is a fixed kind of human nature that should be privileged. "His main tactic is to historicize such supposedly universal categories as human nature each time he encounters them" (Rabinow, P. 1984: 4).

For Foucault social forces impose norms on the notion of the subject. From this perspective your identity is wholly influenced by the disciplinary structures of numerous public institutions. "[The] constituted subject can be seen as a victim caught in the processes of objectification and constraint [...]" (Rabinow, P. 1984: 10). According to Foucault dominant versions of the human subject have arisen from sets of conflicting discursive formations. From Foucault's standpoint the regulative norm of the heterosexual, financially secure, law abiding, married, male, young, white, sane and healthy individual is historically determined and



as such must be historicized rather than held up as a norm. Foucault's approach is "a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects, etc., without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout the course of history." (Foucault, M. 1980: 59).

Following Foucault the notions of 'the body' and 'man' put forward by Nietzsche and Heidegger cannot smoothly represent the truth of the subject. The idea of subjectivity cannot stand outside an argument and act like a kind of gauge to compare the success and failure of the argument's conclusions. It has to be accepted that whatever position is taken on the subject, it is a *particular* position and as such it does not guarantee the truth of an argument but only supports one position in relation to another position. "Where relative systems could still cohabit in the single world of modernity, postmodernity involves the recognition that, to a large extent one's relative systems construct the world" (Ermarth, E.D. 1998: 589). However, Foucault implies you are not simply free to construct your version of human nature on a level playing field with everyone else. The prevailing version of human nature that is held up to be 'true' arises from the most powerful discourse. For Foucault the truth of human nature is connected to the most powerful discourses in medicine, law, technology, education etc. Doctors, psychiatrists and teachers do not *discover* the truth of human nature. For Foucault these discourses do not have a disinterested access to an objective perspective that allows them to say what is true. They are engaged in a strategic struggle in support of their version of truth. For example teachers *produce* truth about human nature through their integration with the values of the teaching institution, through their familiarity with the procedures of teaching and through their expertise with the mechanisms of power that these institutions employ. For Foucault the truth of human nature does not hover above the disputes about how people learn or who should be excluded from learning. "Truth is a thing of this world [...]. Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true." (Foucault, M. 1980: 72).

On the basis of this discussion I would say that the account of 'the body' and 'man' proposed by Nietzsche and Heidegger do not represent the truth about subjectivity. Following Foucault our conception of subjectivity has changed throughout history and now numerous institutional discourses have objectified human nature. For Foucault the truth of human nature is an *effect*; it is the

outcome of a social and historical context. Ideas associated with the subject are the upshot of the conflict between competing discourses and as such are connected to the authority of the discourse that emerges as the most powerful in these conflicts.

From this perspective it could be said that the notions of 'the body' and 'man' used by Nietzsche and Heidegger are an effect of discourses that focus on 'authentic' and 'natural' corporeality. It could be said that this experience addresses an ideal and context free view of bodily experience that is without gender, ethnicity, social status or history. Nevertheless I would also suggest that if human nature is constantly placed under harsh scrutiny then the coherence of identity becomes extremely uncertain. If the critique of human nature becomes so thorough that the idea of agency is absolutely dispersed then it could be suggested that this gives too much power to institutional controls. With this in mind I suggest that it is problematic to hold up 'the body' and 'man' as being entirely representative of 'people in general'. Instead human nature can also be explained as being constituted by sets of power relations and to an extent predetermined by the roles provided by society.

## **2.5 Gadamer**

### **2.5.1 Experience**

Korsmeyer, Nietzsche and Heidegger have shown how participatory action may influence aesthetic experience in participatory art. Korsmeyer has shown how participatory action allows the bodily senses to be considered alongside the cognitive senses. Nietzsche has shown how participatory actions can act as a reminder of how your experience of art is ordinary and corporeal. Heidegger has demonstrated how participatory actions can place practicality into the centre of your experience of art.

During this exploration it has been assumed that in 'Untitled', 1993, my participatory action appeared alongside my aesthetic experience and that this aesthetic experience was influenced by my participatory action. Participatory action changed the conditions in which aesthetic experience arose. The corporeal and practical nature of participatory action in 'Untitled', 1993 somehow unsettled and changed my understanding of aesthetic experience. I suggest that Hans George Gadamer can help to explain how aesthetic

experience may be understood under the new conditions of participatory action.

Gadamer examines the idea of *experience* in an effort to displace aesthetic theories that tend to emphasise the subjective experience of art over the object of art.<sup>4</sup> Experience is considered to be something like a basic ‘unit’ of information in the human sciences. For Gadamer the mistake that is made when experience and knowledge are connected in the human sciences is to say that experience can be reduced to sensations. If you were to ask someone about their experiences of a memorable event for example, they would describe it as a series of experiences that stuck in the memory. Some of these experiences may have a degree of unity and some of them may be composed of smaller elements like sensations. Nevertheless in a description of an event you would generally hesitate to start your descriptions from the ground up with the basic sensations that compose each experience. In this way Gadamer is able to claim that if experience is looked at like this “we find a concept of life that restricts the mechanistic model” (Gadamer, H.G. 1975: 53). Sensations may be the building blocks for a strict analysis of the data of experience but lived experience, when it is being reported or described refers to “unities of meaning” (Gadamer, H.G. 1975: 56). For example if you were to describe your experience of a work like one of Gonzalez-Torres ‘candy spills’ (Fig. 7) you could focus on the specific sensation of tasting the confectionary or you could describe your overall encounter with the work. One description concentrates on the important sensation of the work, the other concentrates on the overall experience of the work. I suggest that a description of the overall encounter does a better job of capturing the feel of the work than detailed descriptions of sensations.



Fig. 7

Gadamer also explains the concept of experience in terms of the untranslated German word *Erlebnis*. *Erlebnis* could be described as experience you have ‘in person’ throughout everyday life. Gadamer describes it as a state of affairs that means “to be still alive when something happens” (Gadamer, H.G. 1975: 53). You have direct experience of the evidence of situations rather supposing, imagining or gathering information from others about the situation. Gadamer points out that experience understood in terms of *Erlebnis* is closely associated with a life as it is lived. You may make every effort to detail every aspect of an experience to another but only you can comprehend the experience itself unless that other has a similar experience. A significant aspect of experience does not survive when it is described. He proposes that there is “a contrast between life and mere concept” (Gadamer, H.G. 1975: 58). In this sense Georgia Warnke is able to say “*Erlebnis* is supposed to signify the wholeness and intensity of human experiences against scientific abstraction” (Warnke, G. 1987: 28). For example I attended a major retrospective of the sculpture of Auguste Rodin at the Royal Academy in the winter of 2006. I had seen a number of smaller Rodin studies over the years and knew his major works from art monographs but it was not until I had an actual experience of the major work in the rooms of the Royal Academy that I began to comprehend his achievement, particularly the surface qualities of his works (Fig. 8). I had seen representations of this but only began to fully appreciate it when I experienced it ‘in the flesh’.

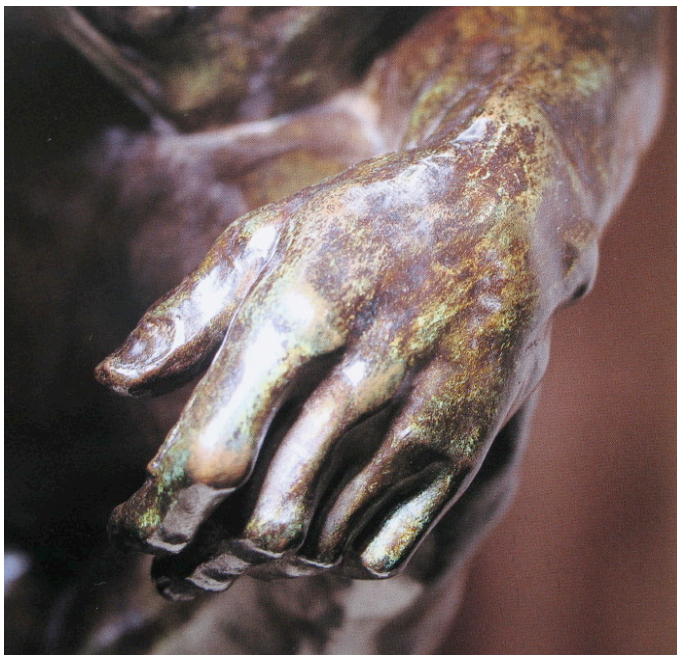


Fig. 8

Gadamer further examines the consequences of applying this interpretation of experience to aesthetic theory. For Gadamer *Erlebnis* is a direct experience that you can only have 'in person' and it is distinct from the ordinary course of life. Gadamer suggests that if the reasoning of *Erlebnis* is followed then it tends to unravel the unity of your experience of art. It isolates all the people who may be having an aesthetic experience from one another and it separates aesthetic experience from ordinary life. "Basing aesthetics on experience leads to an absolute series of points, which annihilates the unity of the work of art, the identity of the artist with himself and the identity of the person understanding or enjoying the work of art" (Gadamer, H.G. 1975: 82). If your experience takes precedence in your appreciation of the artwork then if an artwork has multiple viewers then it follows that the artwork offers a multiplicity of experiences. Additionally, according to this interpretation of *Erlebnis* these experiences cannot be fully captured in a description or concept so there is a sense in which they will only ever remain as subjective phenomenon. Viewers may reach a consensus through discussion but fundamentally the numerous experiences of the artwork do not integrate. I can show you photographs of works I saw at the Rodin exhibition and we can discuss my experience but fundamentally you will only appreciate Rodin by directly witnessing the work 'in person'.

Gadamer also asks if your experience of the artwork is considered to be separate from the usual course of your life yet is able to influence your ordinary life he wants to know how these distinct areas relate to one another. It could be said that aesthetic experience understood as *Erlebnis* may disclose a momentary breakdown in the connectedness of ordinary experience and this explains why aesthetic experience can sometimes be so extraordinary. Experience understood in terms of *Erlebnis* is also described as "a new mode of being *one*" (Gadamer, H.G. 1975: 58). In this way the unity of an experience can be differentiated from more general inchoate experience. There are memorable and forgettable experiences. This sense of the distinct nature of certain kinds of experience can be described as having the qualities of an "adventure" (Gadamer, H.G. 1975: 60). I have had aesthetic experiences when I have been climbing in the mountains where the ordinary world seems to fall away leaving me with an impression of nature that is very difficult to communicate. On a cloudy day there can suddenly be a break in the cloud and your altitude and the surrounding mountains are briefly revealed to you. It is like an involuntary experience that takes your breath away. Caspar David Friedrich captures this kind of experience in the work 'Morning in The Mountains' (Fig. 9).





Fig. 9

Gadamer wants to find a way to connect these kinds of fleeting experiences to more usual experiences, however *Erlebnis* does not offer a way of integrating this experience into ordinary experience. He accepts that the immediacy of the aesthetic experience exists and has value, but does not accept that such immediacy can offer a basis for ordinary experience. For Gadamer an explanation of aesthetic experience must do more than describe it as 'immediate' experience, cut off from 'usual' experience. It must "[...] achieve that continuity of self-understanding which alone can support human existence, despite the demands of the absorbing presence of the momentary aesthetic impression" (Gadamer, H.G. 1975: 83).

Gadamer's response to this issue is to offer a different basis for aesthetic experience. Instead of experience understood as *Erlebnis*: the special, direct experience that you can only have 'in person', he proposes that experience is explained in terms of *Erfahrung*. This is a more objective and systematic approach to experience. Georgia Warnke describes the application of *Erfahrung* in science: "The concept of experience established in the natural sciences focuses on the repeatability of procedures and results, on the confirmation that one experience is able to give to another." (Warnke, G. 1987: 26). Warnke goes on to suggest "The concept of *Erfahrung* that interests Gadamer, however is articulated by the notion of a "learning" experience, an experience that in a sense cannot be repeated and serves to negate our previous views." (Warnke, G. 1987: 26). If *Erfahrung* is taken from a scientific perspective then you are able to return to a prior incident and replicate that incident in the present and therefore recapture the event. From the other perspective of *Erfahrung* that Gadamer favours, this is not possible. In this situation a 'lived' experience is

considered rather than a dispassionately observed event. During such occasions you cannot return to prior experience in an objective manner. You cannot fundamentally 'unlearn' experience. Past experience is always filtered through present experience. For Gadamer you are always within history and all your experiences of past events are shaped by your current historical situation.

When integrated into a description of aesthetic experience *Erfahrung* alters the conception of aesthetic experience and also alters explanations of how aesthetic experience relates to ordinary experience. Initially *Erlebnis* describes an immediate experience of an artwork that can only happen 'in person' and is distinct from ordinary experience. When *Erfahrung* is coupled with *Erlebnis* then this helps to create an explanation that brings together the immediacy of aesthetic experience with the unbroken course of ordinary experience. It helps to explain aesthetic experience as part of a 'learning' experience not just a sudden, surprising instant that stands outside the rest of experience. You submit yourself to such experiences and emerge from them having undergone a change. Aesthetic experience may be something direct. You may not be able to exhaustively describe the experience. It may be that it has to be experienced in person and it may be an experience that is distinct from ordinary experience. Nevertheless all of these properties of the experience occur in the midst of the general course of everyday experience: "Since we meet the artwork in the world, and encounter a world in the artwork, the work of art is not some alien universe into which we are magically transported for a time. Rather, we learn to understand ourselves in and through it, and this means that we sublimate (*aufhaben*) the discontinuity and atomism of isolated experiences in the continuity of our own existence" (Gadamer, H.G. 1975: 83).

Gadamer's notion of experience and how it is relevant to participatory art can be more fully illustrated if Dominic McIver Lopes and David Saltz's discussion on the nature of digital interactivity is considered. They try to determine whether participants in an interactive artwork are paying attention to the experience of an instant of performance or the experience of the overall set of interactions that make up the interactive artwork. According to Saltz as a participant your performance exists within the work's frame "interactive performance environments provide contexts within which actions are performed" (Saltz, D.Z. 1997: 123). Saltz also sees similarities between improvised music making and the interactive artwork because improvised music embodies a sense of the 'immediate', appears 'impulsively' and happens

‘in-the-moment’. Saltz emphasises the aesthetic properties of the ‘instant’ of the participant’s performance and takes these to be representative of interactivity.

On the other hand Lopes suggests that Saltz is mistaken in his understanding of how participants direct their attention while they are interacting. Lopes criticises Saltz for focusing on the instant of performance of an interaction at the expense of an appreciation of the entirety of all the interactions. I would say that Saltz does not consider the outline that this process leaves behind. He detaches the instant of interaction from previous instances and future instances and imagines the presently occurring instance to be the essential and only significant event of an interaction. He suggests that one aspect is representative of the whole and seals it off from previous and successive events. Conversely Lopes suggests that you are able to direct your attention to more than one situation at a time. You may be focused on the instant of interactivity but you can also monitor the progress of the artwork. You may recognise the spontaneity of actions in a presently occurring interaction but likewise you may, *at the same time*, grasp the whole sequence of interactive instances. “It is possible, indeed usual, to attend simultaneously to properties of a performance *qua* performance and to properties of the work performed.” (Lopes, D.M. 2001: 79). Lopes demonstrates that a full appreciation of an interactive artwork is both an awareness of the performance of an action and an appreciation of “different histories of input” (Lopes, D.M. 2003: 110).

I would say that Lopes’ definition presents a more convincing sense of the build up of events in interactivity. It hints at a more accurate reflection of an interaction as an accrual of affects that gives a broader and more inclusive sense of interaction. For Lopes interaction involves the immediacy of the action of interaction *and* an awareness of the overall set of interactions. I would suggest that this explanation of interaction corresponds with Gadamer’s explanation of aesthetic experience. Gadamer claims that *Erfahrung* connects the instantaneity of the experience of art with a chronicle of events that make up a history and connects the experience of art with the everyday world in which the artwork appears.

The suggestion that interaction is like a chronicle of events can also be supported by the views of Krauss and Kester on the ‘durational’ properties of the experience of art. From their viewpoint your experience cannot be strictly described as ‘immediate’ in the way that Michael Fried suggests (§ 1.2.1). You



build up an understanding of an artwork and this experience integrates with how you generally have experiences in the world. Kester also shows how conceptual art made 'duration' one of the prevailing conditions of contemporary art. Conceptualist works by Marcel Broodthaers or Vito Acconci allowed the viewer to move through the space of the artwork and to read the artwork in a way that you would read a text. They introduced 'non-visual' elements into their works like texts, sound recordings and participatory action. These kinds of experience lack the kind of *synchronic* 'presentness' approved by Fried. When you move through a space you tend to experience the accrual of time and when you read an artwork you are building up an understanding of the work in a *diachronic* way. For Kester this places the viewer in a completely new set of circumstances.

"This catalyzation of the viewer, the movement toward direct interaction, decisively shifts the locus of aesthetic meaning from the moment of creative plenitude in the solitary act of making (or the viewer's imaginative reconstruction of this act), to a social and discursive realm of shared experience, dialogue and physical movement." (Kester, G. 2004: 54).

Scott Snibbe's 'Deep Walls' (Fig. 10) demonstrates how interaction can be seen as an accumulation of events that take place within the realm of shared experience. His work captures the silhouetted movements of each participant as they move in front of a screen. These movements are then played back alongside previous participant's movements in a grid to form a history of participatory actions.

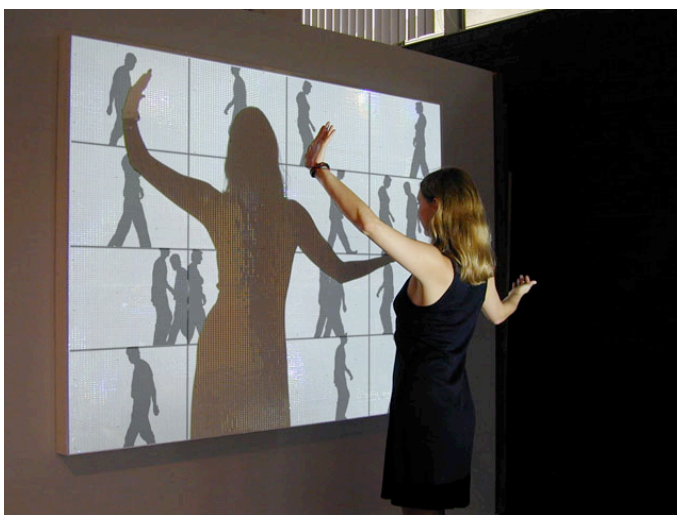


Fig. 10

How does Gadamer's description of *Erfahrung* play a part in an explanation of how aesthetic experience as a phenomenon is embodied in the participatory artwork? His description shows how an experience of an artwork like 'Untitled', 1993 becomes part of an accrual of participatory experiences. Each participant takes from the artwork and in this way participation is specific for that moment yet each participant is a witness to all prior participations. *Erfahrung* suggests a way to connect the instantaneousness of a participatory experience with the set of previous and successive participations. It links the instant of participation with the overall participatory artwork. Taking a poster therefore becomes a unique, unrepeatable event that is part of a history of participatory events rather than just a repeatable series of similar participatory instants. Lopes' explanation of interaction also confirms the idea that 'different histories of input' should be considered in participatory art and not simply specific instants of participation. From this perspective 'Untitled', 1993 is not presenting a special parallel region of experience that is discontinuous with everyday experience. *Erfahrung* shows how the participatory action of taking a poster becomes a factor in an awareness that permeates into ordinary experience. As Kester suggests participatory action becomes part of the 'realm of shared experience'. It becomes something analogous to a learning experience that can be integrated into other aspects of a participant's experience.

## 2.6 Conclusions

In the previous chapter it was recognised that aesthetic experience has to be articulated in relation to the practical and social experiences that participatory art introduces into your encounter with art. Aesthetic experience is no longer isolated from these other experiences. In this chapter the objective has been to find out if aesthetic experience responds to these other experiences and consequently if the 'feel' of aesthetic experience changes in participatory art.

Participatory art introduces practical and social experiences into your encounter with art. I would say that this changes the conditions in which aesthetic experience comes to light. A student raises this point during the 'Renascent Scission' pilot study when she asks of the work "So therefore the aesthetics would change would they?" (Appendix II: Audio I). You could argue that aesthetic experience is not necessarily responsive to its changed conditions. However I suggest that if aesthetic experience has to be articulated in relation to other kinds of experience in participatory art and cannot be considered in

isolation to these other kinds of experience, then it *does* respond to its changed conditions. I suggest that these new conditions put aesthetic experience to a kind of test. The participatory actions that take place in participatory art offer a way of exploring the limits of aesthetic experience to see how receptive it can be to practical experience. Based on the different phenomenological perspectives considered in this chapter I would say that participatory action successfully transforms the 'feel' aesthetic experience.

The conditions that produce this transformation are brought about by the way that participatory action causes the body and the practical encounter to be factored into aesthetic experience. When the body is incorporated into aesthetic experience then the distance between participant and artwork is altered. Your physical proximity to the artwork prompts you to regard the bodily aspect of your encounter with art and a degree of simplicity and directness presses forward in aesthetic experience. However it should also be recognised that the role of the body in participatory action should not be used to generalise the audiences in participatory art. Participation should not be reduced to an essential bodily experience and participation should not be referred to as a kind of universal state of being. Rather these ways of looking at participatory action are grounded on particular explanations of 'the body' and 'man' and should therefore be understood to be a consequence of discourses that highlight the authenticity of the corporeal. Following Foucault I would suggest that it is equally important to historicise these discourses and give 'the body' and 'man' a gender, an ethnicity and social position.

From one point of view the phenomenon of aesthetic experience can be associated with immediate inner experiences that are discontinuous with everyday life. Stress is placed on the isolated instant and this is disconnected from preceding and succeeding events. I would say that this does not tell the full story of aesthetic experience in participatory art. A richer explanation of aesthetic experience in participatory art comes to light if the notion of learned experience is adopted. Learned experience is not an isolated incident that can be objectively separated from the rest of life but is accumulative and unrepeatable. It is continuous with ordinary experience and takes place as part of a history of events and adds to this history of events. In this way experience in participatory art is not simply about the individual instant of participation but how this instant links to the work's history of participation, how these instances unite to form a work and how this work relates to a wider world. This view is

reinforced when the claims put forward by Fried are compared those of Krauss and Kester. For Fried the instant of timeless 'immediacy' offers a genuine modernist aesthetic experience. Krauss and Kester, on the other hand, suggest that it is more appropriate to consider other kinds of experience outside of this optimal moment of modernism. From their standpoint your experience of art is more like a chronicle of events or series of episodes that have 'duration'.

### 3.0 Institutional Explanations of Aesthetic Experience in Participatory Art

#### 3.1 Introduction



Fig. 1a & Fig. 1b

#### *Context*

A memorable aspect of 'Tropicália' (Fig. 1a) was the way it presented an incongruous collection of experiences and diverse situations side by side. This prompted my curiosity and encouraged me to investigate every nook and cranny of the installation alongside other participants in the work. At some points there was a cheerful air and there was a holiday atmosphere, at other points a more disturbing atmosphere prevailed when the installation began to resemble a shantytown. The inclusion of some live cockatoos also gave the work an unstable and volatile feel. 'Tropicália' additionally had an unexpected practical dimension because in order to enter the work you had to take off your footwear. In my encounter with 'Six Sensorial Masks' (Fig. 1b) I had a clear impression that this work was not to be contemplated at a distance. The hoods lay in disarray on an anonymous white plinth and as I arrived someone was picking one up. While I tried a few of the masks on I felt slightly absurd and a little self-conscious just as I have felt in the past when I have been in clothes shops and tried on ill-fitting garments.

### *Problem*

It could be suggested that the aesthetic, social and practical experiences of these participatory artworks are all distinct and that each has a specific role. This is the analytical explanation where aesthetic experience is articulated in relation to other experiences in participatory art. It could also be said that they influence one another in various ways. This is the phenomenological explanation where aesthetic experience is changed by participatory art. Aesthetic experience is influenced by other experiences in participatory art and is changed from the 'inside'. However it could also be suggested that these participatory artworks use rules and it is the way that these rules are applied that determines how aesthetic experience is distinguished from social and practical experience or how aesthetic, social and practical experiences influence one another. Aesthetic experience is understood as being determined by artistic conventions. This is the explanation that will be taken into account in the current chapter. In this account rules from social and practical life influence the rules of the art institution. The art institution in turn regulates the rules of participatory art, therefore participatory art is transformed from the 'outside'. Equally participatory art introduces new rules in the art institution and this causes the art institution to accommodate these changes. It is proposed that an explanation of the receptiveness of participatory art to the influence of the art institution and an explanation of the receptiveness of the art institution to the influence of participatory art will help artists and participants to understand how sets of aesthetic, social and practical conventions are brought into play by participatory art.

### *Resolution*

It is suggested that an institutional perspective can explain how aesthetic, social and practical conventions play a part in the relationship between participatory art and the art institution. From this perspective the assumptions that have accumulated around the art institution are explored. The development of aesthetic experience, the development of its relationship with social experience and the changing role of artists, galleries and museums are considered socially and historically. From this standpoint it is suggested that an institutional explanation of the relation between the conventions of participatory art and the art institution will be demonstrated.

### *Qualifications*

It is suggested that a social and historical reflection on some of the assumptions that inform the present institution of art is relevant in an explanation of the participatory artwork because it places the participatory artwork in the context of art history. There are a number of observers who point out that the historical lineage of the participatory artwork can be traced back to the Happenings and Fluxus art of the 50's and 60's, (Bishop, C. 2005, Paul, C. 2003, Arns, I. 2004). It has also been suggested that the origins of these groups can be found in the avant-garde art of Dada and Constructivism at the start of the last century.<sup>1</sup> If it is accepted that there is a relationship between participatory art and avant-garde art then it is proposed that an institutional explanation of how aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork will benefit from a reflection on institutional explanations of avant-garde art theory.

### *Summary*

This chapter will ask how aesthetic experience is socially and historically determined by the development of the art institution. Aesthetic experience will be explained in terms of artistic conventions. The subjective phenomenon of aesthetic experience is rarely even mentioned in these discussions because attention tends to focus on the publicly shared and collective experience of the artwork and the social and political implications that this may have. The art institution's distance from social life and engagement with social life will be assessed. The origins of the autonomy of aesthetic experience will be examined as will the role that the historical avant-garde had in attempting to reconcile the autonomy of art with ordinary life. The way that avant-garde art highlights these contradictions by confronting aesthetic experience with ordinary experiences will be considered. The historical formation of the artistic field will also be considered from a sociological perspective. The close link between the historical formation of the artistic field and the aesthetic attitude that props it up will be examined as will the relationship between the apparent magical power of the artist and the support structure of the artistic field within which he or she operates. More recent enquiries into the status of the participatory artwork will then taken into account. Experiments in 'relational aesthetics' and methods used to integrate art with social life will be explored. These accounts will provide a perspective that explains the institutional conditions of participatory art and throughout the chapter these findings will be compared to aspects of 'Tropicália' by Hélio Oiticica and 'Six Sensorial Masks' by Lygia Clark. These comparisons will provide an institutional explanation of how

aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork. Once more it should be pointed out that in these comparisons philosophy will be used as a means to reach a fuller understanding of participatory art rather than a means to discuss the institutional nature of aesthetic experience on its own. Therefore these comparisons will place institutional accounts of aesthetic experience at the service of explanations of 'Tropicália' and 'Six Sensorial Masks'. This will contribute to the main question of this chapter: How do the conventions of participatory art respond to the conventions of the art institution?

### **3.2 Critical distance and social effect**

One feature I noticed when I took part in 'Tropicália' was the way that it employed a peculiar assortment of strategies to engage the participant. It made direct appeals to your senses by inviting you to walk through different kinds of material such as sand, bark, straw and water. You could lie down in odd hammocks and you could investigate cave-like mazes. There was a caged parrot that would occasionally cry out and there were tropical plants everywhere. I would say that these could all be described as aesthetic experiences. At the same time there were references to social issues associated with Brazil. I could not help but compare the sprawl of the work to a shantytown and the surrounding tropical plants made me think about the rainforest and its indigenous cultures. I would say that these features gave the work a political tone. In 'Tropicália' there appeared to be a tension between aesthetic experience and political awareness.

Peter Burger traces the relationship between the aesthetic and the political back to when the original avant-garde movements of Dada and Constructivism emerged from aestheticism.<sup>2</sup> Aestheticism elevated art and turned its back on the norms of ordinary life. This position was also central to the avant-garde but they additionally presented a new anxiety about art's "social functionless-ness" (Burger, P. 1984: 51).

Artists of the avant-garde were faced with two main questions. The first question is: Should art have social consequences? The second question is: Should art have a critical perspective? These questions are usually answered by referring to the distance between art and life. The first position is that art should be connected with social life in order to have a social impact and the second



position is that art should maintain a distance from social life in order to comment on it. If the first position is taken then it can be argued that if art becomes overly integrated with everyday life then the ability of art to be critical is dissipated. On the other hand it can also be argued that by engaging with social life art begins to have actual social consequences. If the second position is taken then it can be argued that this kind of remoteness can reduce art's relevance and influence. On the other hand it can also be argued that a certain amount of remoteness from day-to-day life is required in order to maintain a critical edge.

An aim of the Dadaists and Constructivists was to somehow address the relationship between life and art. They were not happy with aestheticism's withdrawal from ordinary life and questioned the 'social functionless-ness' of art. They wanted to integrate art more fully with life. Kurt Schwitters created a series of grotto-like 'Merzbau' (Fig. 2a), spaces in outhouses that were part of various homes he had in Germany, Norway and England: "I am constructing an abstract sculpture (cubist), in which one can come and go... I am building a composition without frontiers [...]" (Curtis, P. 1999: 165). Lazar El Lissitzky created 'Prouns' (Projects for the establishment of a new art, Fig. 2b) that were supposed to act as a basis for the re-conceptualisation of everyday life and architectural space.

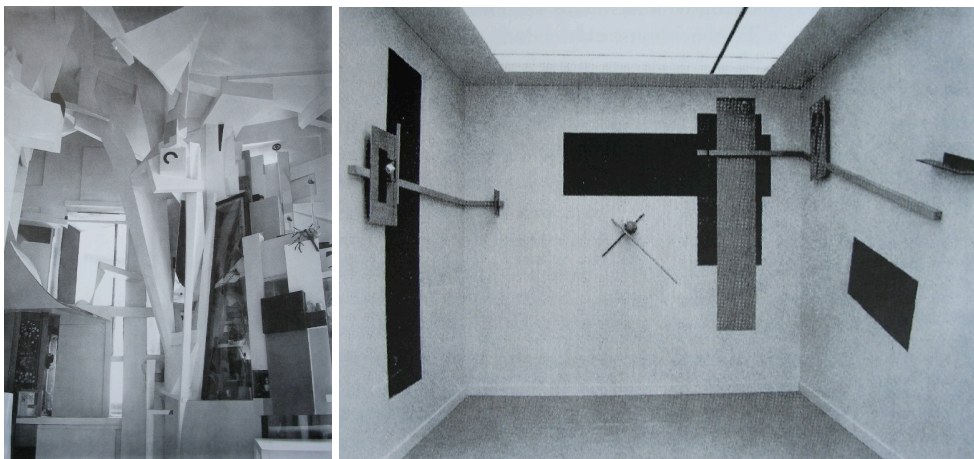


Fig. 2a & Fig. 2b

Burger points out that it is contradictory to expect that a critical distance can be maintained if art is entirely absorbed within ordinary life. The impetus to *refuse* the norms of ordinary life cannot be easily combined with the impetus to *incorporate* the norms of ordinary life. "In Bourgeois society art has a contradictory role: it projects the image of a better order and to that extent

protests against the bad order that prevails. But by realizing the image of a better order in fiction, which is semblance (Schein) only, it relieves the existing society of the pressure of those forces that make for change. They are assigned to confinement in an ideal sphere" (Burger, P. 1984: 50). Art opposes the dominant social order but in doing this it only offers consolation in the face of the realities of ordinary life.

It could be suggested that here Burger is aligning himself with the modernism of Adorno. From this viewpoint aesthetic experience operates outside of use value, rationality or profit. Aesthetic experience has an 'adversarial' relationship to the dominant values of society becoming a "site of resistance against exchange value and instrumental reason." (Carroll, N. 2001: 57). However Carroll has shown that 'interpretative play' has as significant a role to play in your experience of art as disinterestedness (§ Theme: Aesthetic Experience). On his account 'interpretative play' does not involve such a categorical denial of the values of the social order but actively implicates these values in your experience. Therefore if your experience involves 'interpretative play' that is grounded on social values as well as disinterestedness that denies social values then it could be said that the 'adversarial' role of aesthetic experience is exaggerated. Your experience of art does not stand in such extreme opposition to society.

Jacques Rancière considers the social and critical aspects of art when he describes the predicament of what he terms critical art. He claims that the purpose of critical art is to present "an appearance of resistance that bears witness to the non-necessary or intolerable character of the world" (Rancière, J. 2004: 83). He proposes that Martha Rosler's photographic series 'Bringing the war back home' epitomises the situation of critical art (Fig. 3). In response to the Vietnam war Rosler reassessed the tradition of socially satirical photomontage, producing a series of collages that brought together representations of the 'American Dream' and photojournalism that documented the events at the front line. These images were originally published in the underground press at the time before becoming recognised as artworks in their own right.



Fig. 3

Rancière points out that to have any kind of social impact then this critical perspective has to be communicated. However the paradox is that in order to be widely communicated it runs the risk of being co-opted by the dominant social order that it aims to undermine. Rather than accept that this situation can simply be described as a relationship between politics and aesthetics and that these terms can never mix, Rancière offers an explanation of their relationship that stresses the numerous ways that politics and aesthetics interconnect. This description hinges on the recognition that critical art has “to negotiate the relation between the two aesthetic logics that exist independently of it”, (Rancière, J. 2004: 84). For Rancière aesthetics and politics are not as cleanly separated as Peter Burger claims. In considering critical art he describes the way that politics is present within its aesthetics and aesthetics is present within its politics. One policy advocates that art become part of life in order to have a social function. The other policy suggests that art may be critical but only by being distant from ordinary life. Critical art does not just relate to a monolithic idea of politics separate from art but to two opposing policies within art. It is drawn towards an engagement with ordinary life and “the connections that provoke political intelligibility” (Rancière, J. 2004: 84), but must also find an orientation that allows it to separate from these connections and find a basis for its dissent in a critical distance that “[...] feeds the political energies of refusal” (Rancière, J. 2004: 84). Rancière is therefore proposing that at its source critical art is heterogeneous. It employs two ‘logics’ that differ from one another. An example of this may be found in the group ‘Atelier Van Lieshout’ (Fig. 4) who for a spell established an autonomous free state in Rotterdam, Holland that aimed to produce all the necessities of contemporary life. It was a community of artists and like-minded people who devoted their creative energy directly to the development and maintenance of their community. They created and exhibited

living spaces, plumbing, food, weapons and numerous other 'basics'. Art was removed because it became unnecessary, but it only became unnecessary in view of the fact that it formed the foundations of new life praxis. They created an ideal situation where life and art dissolved into one another but where art remained the privileged term.



Fig. 4

I would suggest that the question about whether art should be connected with social life in order to have a social impact or art should maintain a distance from social life in order to comment on it is relevant to an explanation of the participatory artwork. This is because such art invites participatory actions that appear to bridge the gap between social life and art. It could be suggested that participatory action literally connects the ordinary actions used in everyday life with the critical perspective that can be adopted in aesthetic experience. Rancière's explanation of the situation is useful because he embeds politics into aesthetics and transforms the contradiction into a positive feature of art. The contradiction becomes a diversity of approaches at the basis of art. This discourse contributes to an institutional explanation of how aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork because it positively addresses the heterogeneity of approaches at the foundations of art. In this sense participatory art accentuates rather than regulates these diverse objectives. Participatory art does not defuse the situation but calls attention to the volatility at the centre of art's paradoxical aim to be critical and also to have a social effect.

This plays a part in an explanation of how the conventions of participatory art are influenced by the art institution because 'Tropicália' celebrates a similar kind of instability. It brings incongruous elements together to demonstrate the conflicts between critical distance and social consequences. In my experience of 'Tropicália' there was a sense that the work disturbed many of the standard

practices of a gallery: participants were asked to take off their footwear, there was a live animal involved and most aspects of the work were to be experienced in a visceral and tactile way. At the same time there was also a festive sense of carnival surrounding the work that promoted an atmosphere of relaxation. It was an artwork in a gallery and therefore could be appraised on the basis of artistic criteria so in one sense it was separate from ordinary social life. In another sense it introduced the informalities of ordinary social life and day-to-day practice into the gallery space. It could be said that this work does not resolve the problem of whether art requires critical distance or social connectedness but it does bring the issue into clearer focus.

### **3.3 Withdrawal and connection to the everyday**

When I was involved in trying on some of Clark's masks I was presented with separate visual, aural and olfactory aesthetic experiences. Each mask isolated you from your surroundings in order to focus your attention on a specific sensation. However by wearing the work you were also engaged in other experiences that were not aesthetic. The work had a functional aspect and this presented another perspective. I did not just reflect on the sensation that each mask presented but was also aware of how it fitted and the fact that people were looking at me. In this sense the artwork was inextricably connected to practical and social considerations. I would say that this aspect of this work questioned the separation between aesthetic and ordinary experience.

#### **3.3.1 Autonomy**

Gregg Horowitz describes these links between art and practical and social factors when he develops Burger's claim that the autonomy of art is an "institutional fact" (Horowitz, G. 2003: 753).<sup>3</sup> For Horowitz art does not mysteriously have an automatic entitlement to remain detached from the values of ordinary life; the autonomy of art is not *naturally* given. The autonomy of art is determined and tremendously influenced by other cultural, social, political and economic institutions that support and contribute to art. When Clark's masks are considered in this way I would say that they make references to other cultural institutions like fashion or the theatre. Horowitz recognises that because the autonomy of art is so thoroughly determined by other institutions outside of art then the conditions of this autonomy are constantly open to dispute and renegotiation. The independence of art from life is not a static



concept but an idea that has to be continually restructured in relation to new institutional forces that may claim to have an influence on the autonomy of art. The autonomy of art is “[...] actively produced and reproduced within the totality of the social formation” (Horowitz, G. 2003: 753). An artist like Hans Haacke was instrumental in the 70’s and 80’s in dealing with the art world’s relationship with big business and government. A work by Haacke such as ‘MetroMobiltan’ (Fig. 5) exposes the relationship between corporate business and art. This work emphasised the contradiction between the ethics of a business that supported South African apartheid yet also sponsored exhibitions of African culture.



Fig. 5

### 3.3.2 Relative Autonomy

Horowitz points out that although the autonomy of art is determined to an extent by forces outside of art, there is also a sense in which art must have its own system of definition. Like any institution it must have its own rules otherwise it would be completely shaped by external forces and would be unable to be described as an institution. These rules are used to define art’s apartness from ordinary life and are also used to create a set of values within the art institution. Rules are implemented to exclude from the art institution or include within the art institution. They are also used to determine categories within the art institution. From this perspective there are rules to explain why a painting differs from an illustration. Horowitz notes that during the implementation of these kinds of rules a paradox surfaces. If art has autonomy from the organising principles of everyday life and exists in opposition to the efficiency of other kinds of institution then it seems contradictory that art should exist as an institution. Nevertheless this is what takes place because art

needs its own categories. To exist it must create standards but by doing this it adopts some of the values that it declares itself to be independent of. The art institution itself undermines the autonomy of art. Horowitz suggests “what art seeks to expel remains *legislatively active* within it, [...]” (Horowitz, G. 2003: 753), concluding that any attempts to discuss the essential nature of art as being completely independent of ordinary social life are misleading. For Horowitz the autonomy of art can only be described in terms of ‘relative autonomy’. Being an institution, art can only define itself in relation to other institutions and ordinary social life.

### **3.3.3 Absolute Autonomy**

Horowitz looks more closely at the consequences of the persistent belief that art is ‘absolutely autonomous’. It could be argued that ordinary social life is so demeaning that the only source of human values can be found within art. In making art the focus of values you may then turn your back on the demeaning values of ordinary social life. Horowitz points out that this shift not only elevates art as the only appropriate focus for contemplation but also simultaneously deprives ordinary social life of any worth. However this does not constitute an absolute negation of the values of ordinary social life. Autonomous art defines itself in relation to these values through their denial; so they persist as denied values. Horowitz suggests that this denial will never be shaken off if this position is adopted: “[It is] this voiceless yet inescapable fragment of disdained life which lives at the core of artistic autonomy – and to which the aestheticist must remain unresponsive – that wreaks its vengeance on aestheticism” (Horowitz, G. 2003: 757).

### **3.3.4 Non-artistic reminder**

Horowitz suggests that the avant-garde artists not only wanted to demonstrate that the art institution did not have absolute autonomy from ordinary social life but they also wanted to disturb the possibility that aestheticism could lead to an “integral life” (Horowitz, G. 2003: 758). If art is set up as the only source of value then this implies that you can live solely according to aesthetic principles. For Horowitz by unleashing aspects of ordinary social life into the autonomy of the art institution the avant-garde brought some recognition of the denial at the heart of aestheticism. Aestheticism may offer a better world but to do this you indirectly comment on the bad social world by turning your back on it.

Aestheticism doesn't work to change the social world it disregards it. For Horowitz aestheticism cannot adequately fulfil its role as the only way to live life because the denied values of ordinary life such as economic and social problems continue to endure, "[...] the avant-garde impulse is the non-artistic reminder in art of the human needs that art has left unsatisfied" (Horowitz, G. 2003: 758).

In Horowitz's explanation of the relative and absolute nature of autonomy he describes the way that the art institute remains linked to other institutions, no matter how much it may renounce the link, because it employs similar rules to these other institutions in order to become an institution itself. He shows how the connection lingers in a stifled form in aestheticism, claiming that one of the main spurs of the avant-garde project was to liberate this repressed feature of the art institute. He proposes that within the avant-garde project everyday social reality was to be encouraged within art as a 'non-artistic reminder' to show that aestheticism cannot meet every need.

This plays a part in an institutional explanation of how aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork because it places another complexion on the status of the participatory actions that are invited by the participatory artwork. Just as the art institute declares itself to be independent of the values of other institutional practices yet employs these practices itself and just as ordinary social life persists within aestheticism in a stifled form, it could be said that participatory art highlights values that had previously been seen as separate from art and presents them as being suppressed in the experience of art. Participatory art brings social and practical values to the surface of art. From this perspective participatory action is not introduced from outside the art institute but acts as a catalyst to release the social and practical values that are always there and which persist in a hidden and denied form. In this sense participatory action is not inflicted on art or imported into art. It is present in order to restore social and practical values into your experience of art. In doing so it acts as a signal to show that there are aspects of social life that persist within your experience of art and that these challenge explanations of art that diminish the value of social experience.

This situation is evident in 'Six Sensorial Masks' where it is essential to participate in a practical action in order to experience these works. There is no question of an alien action being introduced into this work; action is its



fundamental constituent. Once you are wearing one of the masks you have to make adjustments to your stance and to the features of the mask to fully experience the sensations it offers. It could therefore be said that this work acts as a catalyst. It releases the latent social and practical values present within the experience of art.

### **3.4 The 'pure gaze' and the artistic field**

When I took my footwear off to wander around the installation of 'Tropicália' or when I started wearing Clark's masks I would say that these commonplace practices shaped my experience of these works and referred to institutional contexts other than art such as fashion or the theatre. Horowitz has shown how avant-garde art produces 'non-artistic reminders' of how institutions external to art influence the autonomy of art. Pierre Bourdieu questions the autonomy of art still further by considering how social and historical forces have determined the role of aesthetic experience.

#### **3.4.1 The 'pure gaze'**

Pierre Bourdieu questions why certain ideas should be entitled to represent the experience of art and recommends that the historical ground on which these ideas are founded should be explored. He casts doubt on the idea that aesthetic experience has an "ahistoric essence" (Bourdieu, P. 1989: 255). He wants to examine the assumption that an experience of art is somehow natural and that there is a pure viewpoint that is the same for everyone and has always been the same for everyone who has ever looked at art. He proposes that this assumption is arrived at because those with cultural authority take it for granted that their own aesthetic experiences represent the aesthetic experiences of the majority of people. In place of this assumption he points to the social and historical circumstances that determine these kinds of claims.

He suggests that the only way to recover a true understanding of aesthetic experience is to counter the "active forgetting of history" (Bourdieu, P. 1989: 256). This occurs when aesthetic experience is described in essentialist terms. He does this by examining the historical development of what is described as the 'pure gaze' from two perspectives. He considers it from the perspective of those active as artists. This group want to maintain their autonomy from other fields of culture. They argue that art has its own unique sphere of influence.

They promote the view that their work is produced with only aesthetic experience in mind. It comes from an unpolluted aesthetic source. Their products therefore require a special aesthetic attitude in order to be appreciated. He also considers the 'pure gaze' from the perspective of the education of the cultured individual. He considers the 'pure gaze' to be an achievement that is arrived at through the study of art history and an experience of museums and galleries. From either perspective he suggests that when aesthetic experience is understood as something 'pure' this glosses over the way that the very specific experiences of a very specific group of people have been upheld as the exemplary way of experiencing art. The 'pure gaze' "implicitly establishes as universal to all aesthetic practices the rather particular properties of an experience which is the product of privilege, that is, of exceptional conditions of acquisition." (Bourdieu, P. 1989: 256). In his painting 'Higher powers commanded: Paint the upper right hand corner black' (Fig. 6) Sigmar Polke satirizes this state of affairs. He comments on the mystifications of the cult of artistic genius and the elitism of art connoisseurship.

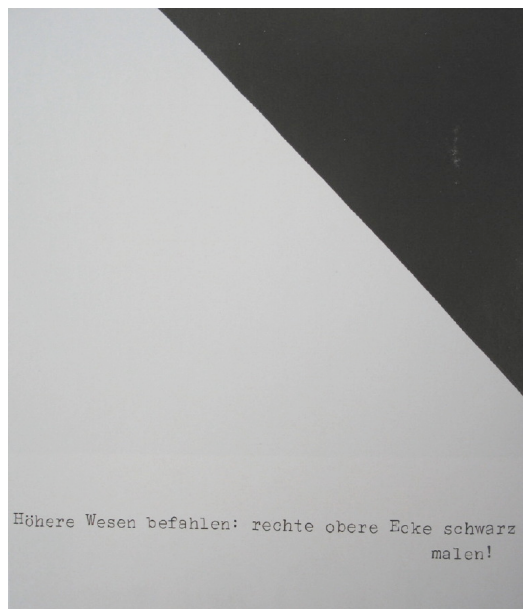


Fig. 6

Bourdieu claims that the 'pure gaze' is an outcome of the desire on the part of artists to keep art autonomous and is a product of a specific educational background. He criticises the way that these two viewpoints champion the 'pure gaze' as the correct way to look at art. In what way does this enhance an institutional explanation of how aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork? It could be said that there are parallels between the way he questions assumptions about the 'pure gaze' and the way that the

participatory artwork questions assumptions about aesthetic experience. If it is assumed that a 'pure gaze' is necessary in order to appreciate an artwork then it could be said that this assumes that a work is produced with only aesthetic experience in mind and that this requires a special aesthetic attitude in order to be appreciated. A participatory artwork does not rely on a special aesthetic attitude in order to be appreciated. It incorporates practical states of mind and ordinary actions that in this context could be described as 'impure'. These impurities are states of mind and actions that may well be imported from other institutional contexts. Such works are not created for a 'gaze', therefore it is suggested that participatory action is incompatible with the 'pure gaze'.

In 'Tropicália' this is illustrated by the instruction to take off your footwear before you enter the arena of the work. This practical requirement has more in common with the rules found in public swimming pools or in temples. In 'Six Sensorial Masks' participants are invited to try on a fabric mask. You find yourself rifling through a pile of masks in a similar way to the way that you might select a hat at a jumble sale. From Bourdieu's sociological perspective do you become familiar with the conventions of these artwork's in the way that you normally would because they are ordinary conventions or do you need the correct cultural background in order to know how to act? There is a sense that these kinds of responses to the work are not informed by an education in art and its conventions. They involve a more general and straightforward involvement found in day-to-day experience and do not require sustained periods of study in museums or galleries. Consequently it could be argued that you receive confirmation that a hands-on approach to the artwork is suitable in a gallery when you see a fellow gallery-goer rummaging through a pile of fabric masks on a table. On the other hand it could also be said that the actions required by these works do require an art education. In order to transgress the 'pure gaze' that is the usual policy of the art institution such work requires the special kind of confidence that education provides. This can only be achieved when it is recognised that other kinds of convention can be employed while appreciating the artwork. It could be argued that the recognition of what is an appropriate and inappropriate convention when appreciating an artwork can only come from a certain amount of knowledge of art.

### 3.4.2 The artistic field

As I took part in 'Tropicália' and 'Six Sensorial Masks' my participatory actions not only disturbed any possibility of a 'pure' aesthetic experience but they also altered my role in the gallery. I was no longer simply a viewer of artefacts and no longer felt like such a self-contained observer. I was also a spectator or participant. As a spectator or participant my responsibilities and position broadened to encompass other spectators and participants. I would say that Oiticica and Clark broadened your perspective on the field of art by encouraging a different kind of relationship between agents.

In his explanation of the artistic field Bourdieu asks "Who [...] created the 'creator'[?]" (Bourdieu, P. 1989: 258).<sup>4</sup> Instead of trying to identify a fundamental starting-point from which the idea of creativity springs Bourdieu goes in the opposite direction. He refers to a study made by Marcel Mauss, (Mauss, M. 2001). In this work Mauss tries to find out why audiences are so willing to suspend their beliefs for a magician. Mauss looks for an explanation in the apparatus, in the magician and in the beliefs of the audiences. He finally concludes that an explanation of the phenomenon can only be found in a reflection on "the entire social universe in whose midst magic evolves" (Bourdieu, P. 1989: 258). Bourdieu proposes that a similar approach must be adopted in order to explain the transformative power of an artist's signature. An artist is just one element in a composite arrangement. The artist is necessary to make the actual work but not sufficient to validate the work as art. Without the support structure of the artistic field the artist cannot validate what he or she makes.

Bourdieu elaborates on this theme by identifying what artists and the artistic field depend on for their mutual continuation. Artists require educational certification that proves their basic artistic competence and also have to establish a link between their signature and their celebrity. The artistic field requires educational institutions that produce and nurture the ideas of the field. It also requires places to exhibit like museums or galleries and numerous intermediary staff like dealers, critics and historians. For Bourdieu these numerous mediators and institutions are all antagonistically trying to establish what is and what isn't art. All of these forces are interdependent on one another and their roles intersect in complicated ways. In this sense Bourdieu is able to propose that the role of the artist is not so clearly defined within the field. The

edges of the various roles within the field blend into one another. The artist is rarely the sole interpreter of a work, the work's fate is decided by many kinds of audience along with numerous institutions and the work's position within art history is determined by the fate of many other kinds of work. Bourdieu states: "the 'subject' of the production of the artwork – of its value and also of its meaning – is not the producer who actually creates the object in its materiality, but rather *the entire set of agents engaged in the field*" (Bourdieu, P. 1989: 261, emphasis mine).

This adds to an institutional explanation of how aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork because by describing the art-world as a field of agents Bourdieu offers an interesting perspective on the way that the participatory artwork provides a role for the audience and the way that the artist surrenders a degree of authority in his or her role as the creator of the work. By pointing to the relationship between the artist and the audience and altering this relationship such work could be said to reveal the ambiguity of the circumstances in which agents in the field are engaged. Rather than cause you to discriminate between agents in the field and confirm their independence from one another, such work stresses instances of overlap between the agents in the field and in doing so highlights their mutual dependence and infers the general co-dependence of all agents in the field. By pointing to the instances in the experience of art where roles such as audience and artist can be said to coincide such work compels you to test the distinctions that form the basis for many of the conventions of the artistic field.

While participating in 'Tropicália' I had an experience that emphasised the interdependence and the ambiguity of the roles that are adopted in the artistic field. While walking through this work I came across a maze-like set of cubicles that grew increasingly dark as I investigated them. Vine-like rags obscured the path and at the centre was a black and white television tuned to a current television programme. Oiticica has interpreted this part of his installation as a comment on the myth of an innocent tropicalism. You weave your way to the heart of the 'jungle' to find a mediated image. Upon leaving this den I negotiated the vine-strewn corridor again just as another participant entered. My presence gave her a shock and she shouted out. I had to explain that I was only another participant and not part of the experience. Initially I understood my role to be as a participant. Then another person interpreted me to be part of the experience of the artwork. After this surprise I then adopted the role of a

guide to Oiticica's work explaining what the situation was. I would suggest that this incident gives a sense of the way that the roles of agents in the artistic field intersect.

### 3.4.3 The codes of art

In my encounter with Clark's 'Six Sensorial Masks' I very briefly considered the work in aesthetic terms as sculptural objects. I knew that Clark's work was participatory but nevertheless as I approached it I saw a random pile of different coloured fabric objects sitting on a white plinth (Fig. 7a & Fig. 7b). However another person picked up one of the masks and this was confirmation that the work was primarily participatory. Bourdieu tackles a similar situation when he looks at how artistic codes and everyday codes are employed in your encounter with art.



Fig. 7a & Fig. 7b

Bourdieu claims that the perception of art is similar to a decoding process and proposes that when artworks are decoded the rules and practices employed in the process tend to be overlooked. The process is so taken for granted that it is not remarked upon. Bourdieu's description of the codes of art resembles George Dickie's description of the conventions of art (§ 1.3.2). Just as Bourdieu suggests that an experience of art is mainly determined by an approved set of customs Dickie suggests that there is a body of knowledge that is already understood prior to an experience of art. Like Bourdieu, Dickie also suggest that this knowledge of how to behave is unnoticeably integrated into aesthetic experience.

Bourdieu claims that in a successful perception of an artwork there is a tacit agreement between the artist and viewer that creates the impression that perception in art is an immediate experience. If the viewer employs the same

codes as the artist then this generates a sense that the ideal encounter with an artwork is direct. Perception is like the successful matching of viewpoints, “the culture that the originator puts into the work is identical with the culture or, more accurately, the *artistic competence* which the beholder brings to the deciphering of the work” (Bourdieu, P. 1968: 216). As an educated viewer it is assumed that you understand the classifications and groupings that are useful in the perception of art. Bourdieu suggests that these accruals of knowledge efface themselves during the perception and that as an educated perceiver you are unable to stand outside yourself in order to register the specificity of the codes that you are employing in perception. Educated viewers “do not see that which enables them to see” (Bourdieu, P. 1968: 217).

Bourdieu considers the situation when there is an unsuccessful match in the decoding of a work. This would be when you are not aware of the required interpretation because you lack the cultural background to appreciate an artwork. In this case it is suggested that being without knowledge of the how an artistic style or method should be appreciated you employ an everyday realism and common sense in the decoding of the work. Therefore one decoding system is substituted for another. On these grounds Bourdieu is able to question the primacy of the idea of a ‘fresh eye’. It is often considered an asset in the art world if a viewer comes to art with no knowledge of how to respond to the art. Inexperience guarantees ‘authentic’ responses. It can be said that such simplicity is highly valued in art because it tallies well with the idea of a direct aesthetic experience that is unadulterated with other kinds of knowledge. This idea begins to lose credibility if Bourdieu’s principle is applied because a viewer cannot escape applying a way of decoding the artwork in one way or another. Without the specialised knowledge about artistic style or method you do not inhabit a pure state of aesthetic experience; you use everyday criteria in order to appraise the work.

Bourdieu claims that aesthetic perception is a decoding process with rules that are usually overlooked. Artists and cultured audiences are primed to understand these codes, therefore there appears to be an accord between art and aesthetic perception. This creates the false notion that the ideal aesthetic perception has some ‘immediacy’. Without this ‘artistic competence’ and an ability to share the same codes as the artist, Bourdieu suggests that viewers call upon their everyday experience in order to appreciate an artwork. In this way Bourdieu claims that there is no such thing as an ‘fresh eye’ at the root of

aesthetic experience because when a viewer is 'innocent' of the codes of art, he or she does not inevitably have a pure experience but tends to employ the codes of realism.

This discourse contributes to an institutional explanation of how aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork because participatory art does not require that participants have some kind of 'pure' experience but fundamentally incorporates everyday experience into its constitution. I would say that the introduction of this set of everyday codes provides a new perspective on the way that artworks are usually experienced. A participatory action sheds new light on the requirement of 'artistic competence' that had previously been concealed; challenging the suggestion that only a specific set of conventions are intrinsic to an experience of art. This position can be underpinned by the claims made about aesthetic experience by Krauss and Kester. From their standpoint your experience of art is like a chronicle of events that have 'duration' in the everyday world rather than an instant of 'immediacy' proposed by Fried (§ 1.2.1).

This position can also be supported by Kester's view on the 'transdisciplinary' nature of dialogic art (§ 1.3). If 'Six Sensorial Masks' is considered from this perspective then it can be shown that by making participatory action such an integral part of her work Clark offers participants an opportunity to traverse the discipline of aesthetics. Indeed Clark emphasises that her work is not about an aesthetic experience but is best understood as a sensory therapy (Fig. 8). She is proposing that the ordinary 'duration' of day-to-day experience is adequate in order for participants to fully experience her work. According to Clark "The instant of the act is the only living reality to us" (Clark, L. 1965: 100).



Fig. 8



### 3.5 'Relational Aesthetics'

#### 3.5.1 A community of viewers

When I recall the episode where I was mistaken as an actor who was part of 'Tropicália' and then found myself explaining myself to other participants I would say that this shows how meaning was produced in 'Tropicália' as part of a publicly observable discourse rather than as part of a private psychological experience. I participated in 'Tropicália' as part of a group of participants where the exchange of information and ideas about the work was encouraged.

Nicolas Bourriaud stresses that current 'relational' art practice emphasizes the importance of shared meaning and suggests that the preferred audience for such work should be addressed as a community of viewers rather than a set of private viewers.<sup>5</sup> Meaning is an outcome of a publicly observable discourse and not the exclusive province of "*private symbolic space*" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 14).

It could be said that Bourriaud's views on the public nature of culture resemble George Dickie's. According to Dickie's 'institutional' theory of art, aesthetic experience is more forcefully influenced by objective and public situations than a subjective and private sensibility (§ 1.3.2). Dickie is critical of explanations of aesthetic experience that emphasise its psychological dimension. It could also be said that Bourriaud's emphasis on the shared nature of meaning in the experience of art has similarities to Hans George Gadamer's approach to aesthetic experience (§ 2.5.1 endnote<sup>4</sup>). For Gadamer the "radical subjectivization" of aesthetics has marginalised the role of aesthetic experience, (Gadamer, H.G. 1975: 36). He questions the association aesthetics has with introspective states of mind and instead argues that art can be associated with more objective kinds of knowledge. These views also correspond with Grant Kester's suggestion that participation can lead to an experience of art that is more open to discussion and closer to a "social and discursive realm of shared experience, dialogue and physical movement." (Kester, G. 2004: 54).

The work of Mark Dion shows how art can function in this more publicly negotiated domain (Fig. 9). He recruits participants to take part in pseudo-archeological digs where the recent history of a site is revealed. He then categorises and displays the findings in the manner of a 19<sup>th</sup> century museum.

Presenting taxonomies of ordinary objects in 'curiosity cabinets'. This example shows the results of a dig in New England. Dion's work demonstrates how art can incorporate the objective conventions of other disciplines in order to test the assumed subjectivity of aesthetic experience.



Fig. 9

### 3.5.2 'The Interstice', 'Social Aesthetics' and 'The Public Sphere'

'Tropicália' was made up of a series of environments. One of these environments was a room sized chipboard box with foam mattresses in it. Another environment was a polythene enclosure in which was placed a pool of cold water. Neither environment seemed particularly hospitable yet it seemed that Oiticica was suggesting that you were free to have a nap or have a paddle in the water. These kinds of invitations seemed bizarre in the context of a gallery but also demonstrated the utopian ambitions of 'Tropicália'.

Bourriaud speaks of the relational artwork as an "interstice" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 16).<sup>6</sup> A relational artwork offers "other trading possibilities" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 16) where the usual rules of value and purpose fall away. So for Bourriaud the work provides an opportunity for other forms of sociability outside the strictures of capital. As a 'social interstice' it offers alternative patterns of living. He argues that because these works are operating as 'social interstices', the artists are not attempting to *represent* any social conditions. A relational artwork operates under another set of rules and is "defined in relation to the alienation reigning everywhere else" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 82).

In his discussion on 'social aesthetics' Lars Bang Larsen describes his conception of participatory art that provides opportunities for the "transgressions of various economies" (Larsen, L.B. 1999: 172). The two

principle economies for Larsen are the 'social economy' and the 'aesthetic economy' and he suggests that art-institutional space is a key location for experiments that combine the social and the aesthetic. Art-institutional space is not simply a means of excluding aspects of ordinary social life from the mysteries of aesthetic experience. He argues that it ought to welcome social institutions extrinsic to the art institution but should not ask them to conform to their usual utility or function. It becomes a basis on which the boundaries of the art institution and social institutions are tested. It acts as an arena where the boundaries of the arena and the conditions of play are continually open to negotiation, "art and the art institution as resource become frames for activity that is real, because social interaction and the observation of its effects are allowed without conceptual rigidity" (Larsen, L.B. 1999: 172).

For Simon Sheikh the gallery forms part of a wider art world that he describes in terms of the "public sphere" (Sheikh, S. 2004: 1). He describes the modernist ideal of the 'public sphere' that reflected a specific attitude to the artwork, its context and the viewer. An artwork was a self-sufficient object, presented in a stable context to a universal audience. This approach has since been scrutinised, particularly by artists and critics involved in public art and on the basis of this scrutiny the art object's meaning was seen to be dependent on its heterogeneous context and highly differentiated audience. Artworks can be presented using numerous materials and methods, in places outside of the gallery to diverse social groups. This leads Sheikh to ask if the 'public sphere' of art is fragmenting. There is now no "generalized bourgeois public sphere" (Sheikh, S. 2004: 4). Instead there is the possibility of a more pluralist approach where the 'public sphere' is constituted by a series of formations that may be in competition with one another or allied with one another. From this standpoint it therefore becomes important to trace how these various formations connect and conflict with one another.

Sheikh expresses dissatisfaction with recent efforts to explain this process of fragmentation as a straightforward acceptance of the market economy. He acknowledges that there is value in questioning the traditional universalizing role of the gallery where dominant social values are perpetuated under the guise of disinterested edification but he is also uneasy about the role of consumerism and the entertainment industry in the 'new museum'. The market cannot offer a solution to the fragmentation of the public sphere because this kind of fragmentation provides the most fertile ground for marketing. The

market perpetuates this situation to an extent. “[...] Fragmentation and difference can be mapped in terms of consumer groups, as segments of a market with particular demands and desires to be catered to and to be commodified” (Sheikh, S. 2004: 6). For Sheikh unity and autonomy are absent in the plural series of public spheres that make up the art world. The spaces of art should now be seen as an opportunity to explore the emergence of alliances and discords between viewpoints. The variations that exist between public spheres can be seen as positive disjunctures where new approaches to culture can emerge. “I would suggest that we take our point of departure in precisely the unhinging of stable categories and subject positions, in the interdisciplinary and intermediary, in the fragmented and permissive – in different *spaces of experience*, as it were” (Sheikh, S. 2004: 6). For Sheikh therefore the modern gallery space may present the illusion of a unified and unbiased perspective on art but in actual fact the best way to approach something resembling a balanced view can only be achieved when these forms of ‘public sphere’ are critically compared to other methods of presenting and exploring art such as art sited within other institutions, in collaboration with other ‘non-art’ specialists as well as artist run spaces and community-based public artworks.

How do Bourriaud’s, Bang Larsen’s and Sheikh’s discourses contribute to an institutional explanation of how aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork?

I suggest that Bourriaud’s notion of the relational artwork as an interstice could be described in two ways. Firstly if the art institution is viewed as a place where the experience of art is controlled then the interstice could be seen as an idealisation of the space of art. From this perspective the interstice is determined by the regulations of the art institution. Therefore the ‘freedoms’ it promotes are limited. They only exist at the invite of the art institution. This structure is highlighted if Bourdieu’s point on this issue is reiterated. He suggests that you bear in mind “[...] the entire set of agents engaged in the field” (Bourdieu, P 1989: 261). If the art and the artist are dependent on the structures of the art system then so too must the interstitial space of the relational artwork.

On the other hand if the more benign aspects of the art institution are taken into account then the interstice suspends the usual codes of action used in the art world and the social world and becomes a basis on which the boundaries of the

art-institution and other social-institutions are tested. The interstice becomes an agency where the different aspects of the art world and the social world are open to negotiation. In this sense the interstice becomes a means to develop alternatives to the way art is experienced. It becomes a means of inventing new kinds of exhibition and new relationships with the social world.

For Larsen responses to art are not absolutely determined by a curator or the apparatus of the gallery or museum structure. This means that there is always the possibility of an unforeseen innovation when the social and aesthetic economies come together. From this perspective it should be kept in mind that there is always the potential that the gallery can permit combinations of experience that are 'without conceptual rigidity'. There are opportunities for an artwork to generate something that extends beyond the influence of any artistic or social institute.

Sheikh criticises the modernist self-sufficient object in the stable gallery context that addresses a universal audience. It could be said that the participatory art that is the focus of this thesis relies on a stable gallery context and addresses a universal audience of gallery goers. However it is arguable whether these works can be aptly described as 'self-sufficient objects' because they do not confine the participant to a specific aesthetic experience. I would suggest that to an extent they represent Sheikh's emphasis on the 'unhinging of categories'. They are 'intermediary' works because they positively encourage practical involvement and allow for publicly negotiated responses that cut across the discipline of aesthetics.

From one perspective it could be said that the authority of the art institute had an adverse influence on 'Tropicália' (Fig. 10). Its innovation was neutralised by the prevailing institutional conditions of the Barbican. You were still aware of the white walls of the institution. However from another perspective 'Tropicália' was free to negotiate new modes of operation for art and the social world and allowed for the possibility of unexpected connections. I would prefer to recognise how the art institution presents a broad range of permitted ways of experiencing art. When this is acknowledged then it can be said that 'Tropicália' is a development in the search for alternative ways to experience art. That its influence extends beyond the regulation of the art institution and that it plays a role in the disturbing the orderliness of the aesthetic gallery space.



Fig. 10

### 3.5.3 Form

In 'The Codes of Art' I pointed out that I briefly examined the shape and colour of Clark's 'Six Sensorial Masks' before recognising that the work was participatory and would require a different perspective. Bourriaud looks at the relation between these two perspectives in terms of 'Form'.

The basis for Bourriaud's conception of form doesn't rest on the organisation of a set of material rules that refer directly to an underlying medium, but to a looser series of "possible encounters [and] conditions for exchange" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 23).<sup>7</sup> Bourriaud indicates how artists have adopted types of organisation that have developed in the broader context of the social, commercial and business world. He mentions the way that artists now view their role in terms of their relation to an "overall social arena" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 31). Artists are now creating "micro-utopias" that enhance ordinary experience rather than making efforts to create all-embracing utopias (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 31). The term "operative realism" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 35) is introduced to describe the practice that artists have of adopting and altering social or business models in a way that produces a "wavering between contemplation and use" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 35). Artists create pseudo-socio-business concepts that aim to "re-stitch the relational fabric" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 36). Furthermore, Bourriaud stresses that the gallery is no longer considered to simply be a space for the contemplation of artefacts. He draws attention to the way that various artists have reconsidered the gallery space as a site of public surveillance, a production workshop, an information service or a distribution centre. It has become a "laboratory" (Bishop, C. 2004: 51). Vito

Acconci created an early example of this approach in the work 'Service Area' (Fig. 11a & Fig. 11b). For the duration of the show Acconci directed the post office to send his mail to the exhibition space. During this time he would show up at the gallery to pick up his mail.

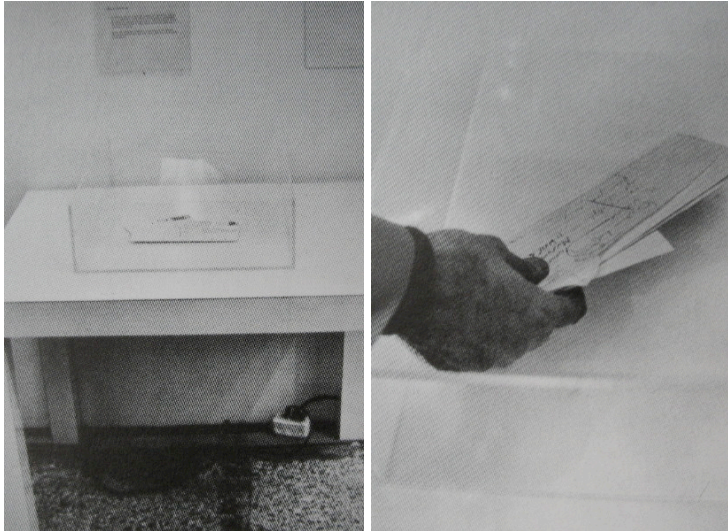


Fig. 11a & Fig. 11b

How does this contribute to an institutional explanation of how aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork? Bourriaud's desire to loosen up the terms of what may be called *form* is useful and it could be said to resemble Horowitz's description of the strategies of the avant-garde. Just as Horowitz proposed that the avant-garde impulse involved releasing a "non-artistic reminder" (Horowitz, G. 2003: 758) of unreformed social life into artworks in order to disturb the integrity and autonomy of aestheticism; Bourriaud notes that relational artists are adopting 'non-artistic' social or business models to reconfigure the gallery as a distribution centre or as an information service. The relaxation of what form may mean in contemporary art could be described as a means to ensure that the integrity and autonomy of aesthetic experience continues to be scrutinised. I would suggest that 'Six Sensorial Masks' introduces a non-artistic model into the gallery by encouraging participants to wear the work. When I encountered this work I would suggest that it produced a situation where participants engaged in the kind of roles that they would normally adopt in a retail situation when they are trying clothes on or in a theatrical situation when they are dressing up for a performance.



### 3.5.4 Co-existence

On the basis of Bourriaud's explanation, the relational artwork calls attention to the shared aspects of your encounter with art. You experience art as part of a community of participants. As part of this group there is the possibility of having aesthetic and social experiences that test the influence of the institute that hosts them and a new definition of form embraces a diverse selection of methods outside of art. The exhibition space is now turned over to other kinds of social organisation. I would say that all of these aspects of the relational artwork emerge in 'Tropicália' and 'Six Sensorial Masks'. In my experience these works did not isolate me from other participants but caused me to consider my role in relation to the participation of others. I would also say that these works allowed me to integrate other kinds of social and practical experience with my aesthetic experience.

Bourriaud notes that the underlying interest for all relational art is "the sphere of inter-human relations" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 43). Traditional aesthetic issues like form, style and content have been replaced with an impetus to create audiences and a desire to enable alternative models of social relationship between these audiences. Through this description a more conciliatory version than that offered by earlier models of socially engaged art is offered. Bourriaud doesn't want to align himself with any grand utopian project, preferring to portray 'relational art' as something occurring on a local scale with affiliations to everyday experience and independent approaches to politics. Moreover he contrasts the imaginative attitudes of those working in relational art with the prevailing imaginative attitude of past modernists. He suggests that modernism was "based on conflict" while relational art is formed around "co-existences" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 45). By referring to contemporary art practices that use pseudoscientific principles to turn the gallery into a laboratory or use social and business models to turn the gallery into a distribution centre Bourriaud suggests that at its foundation relational art has assimilated the features necessary for the critical integration of art into general social life. He proposes that relational art is no longer produced in an atmosphere of absolute confrontation and is instead presented alongside the dominant social order. It operates in the spaces in-between to offer "moments of constructed conviviality" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 44).



Bourriaud's discourse contributes to an institutional explanation of how aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork because he is addressing one of the key questions raised in the introduction to this chapter by Burger, Horowitz and Rancière. He is asking to what extent art should be connected with social life in order to have a social impact and to what extent art should maintain a distance from social life in order to comment on it.

It could be said that Bourriaud's notion of *co-existence* is problematic because it sidesteps the contradictory nature of the relationship between art and social life. If Burger and Horowitz's more rigorously modern position is adopted then critical distance is not easily reconciled with having social consequences. From this perspective when art becomes absolutely integrated into ordinary life in order to have social consequences it tends to lose its critical distance or when art becomes absolutely separated from social life in order to maintain its critical distance it tends to lose any social consequences it may aim towards.

Bourriaud's claim that relational art can co-exist with ordinary social life but can also be critical of ordinary social life seems to eliminate the contradiction at the heart of the dichotomy. Relational art could be described as a compromise because the reconciliation of socially integrated art with critically distant art can never be categorically achieved.

Looked at positively Bourriaud offers a conciliatory version of socially engaged art. He does not support large-scale confrontation but small-scale subversion. Contemporary art, being relational, seeks *relative* rather than *absolute* integration with ordinary social life so in a less stringent sense co-existence gives rise to a degree of criticality. From this perspective the relational artwork can then be integrated within social life and have actual consequences while maintaining its critical edge.

For Bourriaud by directly engaging with social life, relational art has an ability to be "dovetailed within strategies of existence" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 100). There is a correspondence between this explanation of relational art and the way that Claire Bishop explains participatory art (§ Introduction. Theme: Participation). Bishop proposes that one of the main themes of participatory art is *activation* (Bishop, C. 2006: 12). According to Bishop participatory art is able to stimulate a renewed sense of freedom and this prompts you to apply this attitude in other areas of life. Participation galvanises you into contributing to wider changes in the social and political arena. In this sense participatory art

plays a role in social life in the way that Bourriaud suggests that relational art merges with other 'strategies of existence'.

I would say that Bourriaud contributes to an institutional explanation of how aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork because the terms *form*, *interstice* and *co-existence* change the emphasis in the discussion about the extent to which art integrates with ordinary social life or the degree to which it must maintain its autonomy as an institution. Bourriaud is at least acknowledging the changing nature of the terms of art production and the changing nature of how artists might engage with a changing social world.

### **3.6 'Relational Antagonism'**

#### **3.6.1 Criticism of co-existence**

In 'Tropicália' and 'Six Sensorial Masks' Oiticica and Clark were not only inviting you to take part in their work because they liked the idea of participation. You were encouraged to take part for a reason. In Oiticica's case he intended to convey some of the qualities of the living conditions in the favela of Rio de Janeiro. Clark's aim was to cause you to focus on and consequently heighten your experience of bodily sensation and action.

Claire Bishop looks at how participation relates to social themes and meaning when she addresses Bourriaud's phrase "criteria of co-existence" (Bishop, C. 2004: 67). Bishop is critical of the way Bourriaud concentrates on the structure proposed by relational art at the expense of social, historical and political aspects of a work. Bishop questions how he isolates the notion of participation from these other aspects of an artwork. She points to his treatment of work by Rikrit Tiravanija. Many of Tiravanija's installations tend to resemble a dining hall/kitchen/seminar room/library where viewers are free to cook, read and socialise (Fig. 12a & Fig. 12b).

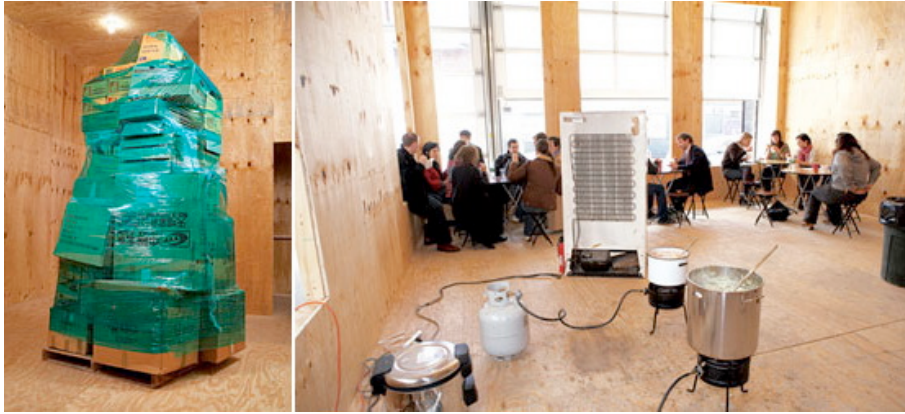


Fig. 12a & Fig. 12b

Bishop comments “[...] *what* Tiravanija cooks, *how* and *for whom*, are less important to Bourriaud than the fact that he gives away the results of his cooking for free” (Bishop, C. 2004: 64). Bishop notes that Bourriaud isolates the relational aspects of the work but this seems to be all he does. He identifies that the artwork may be mainly about relationships but he does not examine why an artist wanted to cause them or how these relationships are defined against a broader set of social circumstances, “[...] although the works claim to defer to their context, they do not question their imbrication within it” (Bishop, C. 2004: 65).

Bishop contends that Bourriaud doesn’t ask whether such relationships are successful because he considers their existence is enough to prove their worth. He suggests that their mere appearance is itself “democratic and therefore good” (Bishop, C. 2004: 65). Bishop is not convinced. She asks “what *types* of relationships are being produced, for whom and why?” (Bishop, C. 2004: 65). Bishop is indicating that participation should not be assumed to be straightforwardly progressive or politically advanced. It is just as likely that participation can be used in a manipulative way. For example businesses frequently monitor your spending patterns under the guise of ‘participation’.

It could be suggested that ideas associated with participatory or relational art underlie all art. At the very least audiences perceive, think or imagine during their experience of art and in a very broad sense this is participation. It therefore seems more pertinent to ask what manner of participation is being invited in an artwork. Bishop suggests that the means used by artists to invite participation should be considered. There should be a way to “analyze *how* contemporary art addresses the viewer and [...] assess the *quality* of the audience relations it produces” (Bishop, C. 2004: 78).

Bishop offers a different perspective on the idea of co-existence. From this perspective it is not enough for an artist to simply promote relationships between participants. She wants to know if participatory relationships serve a purpose. She asks if a participatory relationship occurs within or in proximity to other social institutions. She asks what means are used to invite participation, how it comes about and how the quality of a participatory relationship can be gauged. In asking these kinds of questions about participation Bishop indicates that you have to pay attention to the whole work, not just its relational aspects. Consequently an artwork's structure cannot be separated from its content and neutrally described as 'relational' or 'participatory'.<sup>8</sup>

In what way does this play a part in an institutional explanation of how aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork? Bishop's recommendations are valuable because by recognising that participation must be considered in terms of the artwork as a whole she ensures that participation does not become remote from other experiences. She counters the idea that participatory art can be adequately explained with reference to an exclusive set of rules of participation. From this perspective the participatory actions that occur in 'Tropicália' should therefore not be isolated from the political and social context of the rest of the work. All of the artefacts and environments of 'Tropicália' refer to the living conditions of the favelas in Rio de Janeiro. The tropical plants, the exotic animals, the cheap tarpaulins, the beat up television set and the informal construction of the architecture present elements of social experience and it is within this presentation that participatory action occurs.

If Bishop's notion of 'relational antagonism' is taken into account I would say that these works retain their integrity. Bishop would ask: How and why is participation being offered in this work? Both Oiticica and Clark developed an extensive vocabulary in order to justify their work in terms of art, sociology and psychology so they did not ever justify their work simply with regard to its participatory qualities. Clark's primary intention in inviting participation is to heighten the participant's experience of his or her own action: *"It is not a question here of participation for participation's sake, [...] but rather for the participant to invest his or her gesture with meaning and for this act to be nourished by thought, in the process of bringing the participant's freedom of action to light"* (Clark, L. 1965: 101)

These reflections help to further define the purpose of participatory action that was established at the beginning of this thesis. Initially it was proposed that this project would focus on participatory action that was closer to ordinary practical action rather than participatory action that was in Kwon's terms 'artistic labour'. The aim of the project was to consider an audience participating in everyday action rather than to view the audience in terms of a 'creative collective' who collaborate in the making of the artwork (§ Theme: Participatory Art). Following Kester it was also proposed that the communicative and transdisciplinary aspects of participation would be highlighted. From this perspective participatory action traverses different disciplinary fields (§ Theme: Participatory Art). The part played by participatory action in this project is therefore 'everyday' and 'transdisciplinary'. On the basis of Bishop's argument it is also important to consider participatory action with reference to the total content of the artwork and the political and social context that the artwork arises within.

### **3.6.2 Democracy and antagonism**

Throughout the large group show that 'Tropicália' and 'Six Sensorial Masks' were part of there was a pervasive atmosphere of social involvement. The whole show was indeed a document of a particularly free and optimistic moment in Brazil's history in the late 60's and early 70's prior to a harsh military clampdown. It therefore seemed likely that by being participatory these works were in some way contributing to the advancement of social equality.

According to Nicolas Bourriaud relational art is inherently democratic because it generates 'dialogue'. Referring to Laclau and Mouffe (Laclau, E. and Mouffe, C. 1985), Bishop argues that Bourriaud has not sufficiently considered the nature of democracy. She states that Bourriaud's version of democracy contains too much harmony. It appears in his discussion on relational aesthetics as a straightforward experience of togetherness and co-operation. While recognising that the concept of a utopian society is essential as an imaginary goal of democracy Bishop argues that such a utopia is not practically achievable. Instead she argues that a fundamental feature of all democracy is the situation where "relations of conflict are *sustained*, not erased" (Bishop, C. 2004: 66). She does not mean conflict between opposition groups who have abandoned the

possibility of communication. She is proposing that without opportunities to openly discuss differences of opinion and a forum for dispute where views on social life can be modified then by definition you don't actually have democracy. For Bishop democracy revolves around "antagonism" (Bishop, C. 2004: 66). This antagonism is defined by Bishop as *both* the "conditions of possibility for the existence of a pluralist democracy", and "the condition of the impossibility of its final achievement" (Bishop, C. 2004: 67). She proposes that any aesthetic theory that attempts to characterise participation as undemanding and without discord is overlooking this significant feature of the process.

Bishop's criticism of Bourriaud's 'relational aesthetics' is at its most convincing when she argues that his conception of the participatory relationship is based on a false impression of the nature of democracy. The antagonism that is an essential part of the process is overlooked in favour of a static ideal of co-operation. From Bishop's perspective the co-operative nature of democracy becomes exaggerated in Bourriaud's version of the relational artwork. The relational artwork smoothly creates new social encounters between participants. This discourse contributes to an institutional explanation of how aesthetic experience is embodied in the participatory artwork because it highlights the contradiction that emerges when it is claimed that participatory art is democratic.

This contradiction emerges when the nature of gallery exhibitions are considered. Galleries tend to limit the kind of audience that will experience artworks. It is common knowledge that the profile of gallery goers tends not to be representative of the 'general public'. If artists are hoping to provide new social encounters in galleries then these are not emerging from a cross section of society but from a select group of art enthusiasts. If the social groups in such situations tend to be like-minded then it is unlikely that the kind of disputes that generally occur in more representative cross-sections of society will materialise, so any 'co-existence' that may occur in a relational artwork is a misrepresentation of social conditions and therefore not democratic. From this perspective the audience of 'Tropicália' could therefore not strictly be described as representative of a 'general public' because it was installed in the Barbican Gallery and being a gallery the participants were present mainly for art. In this sense there is a certain amount of common agreement among participants from the outset.

Nevertheless this does not rule out the possibility of spontaneous differences. In the “Whitechapel Experiment” in 1969 at the Whitechapel Gallery (Bishop, C. 2005: 107) Oiticica mixed his works and installations together and encouraged participants to combine these experiences. As part of the 2007 exhibition there was a display of Oiticica’s ‘Parangolés’ works. These are capes designed by Oiticica that were made of mixed fabrics and blankets to be worn by participants (Fig. 13a & Fig. 13b). Bishop defines the term ‘Parangolé’ as “a slang term meaning an ‘animated situation and sudden confusion and/or agitation between people” (Bishop, C. 2005: 107). By encouraging some cross-pollination between his works there is a sense in which Oiticica was actively pursuing antagonistic situations in the gallery. He wanted to create the spectacle of carnival in the space of art and this involved turbulence and confrontation not a calm ‘co-existence’.



Fig. 13a & Fig. 13b

### 3.7 Conclusions

The analytical explanation has shown how aesthetic experience is re-articulated in participatory art. The phenomenological explanation asked how the ‘feel’ of aesthetic experience changes in participatory art. The current chapter has offered an institutional explanation of aesthetic experience. From this perspective aesthetic experience is explained in terms of artistic conventions and it is shown that participatory art changes these artistic conventions. It is also shown how the artistic conventions of participatory art question the conventions of the art institution. I would say that these questions demand some changes to the art institution and that these changes lead the art institution to address broader social issues.

Participatory art questions artistic conventions by offering you an opportunity to compare the experience of art with the everyday practicalities of your participatory actions. I would say that the presupposed immediacy and purity of artistic competence that is usually associated with an experience of art is disrupted by the 'durational' and 'transdisciplinary' nature of these everyday practicalities.

Participatory art questions artistic conventions by accentuating the underlying and diverse social and critical forces of the art institution. These are not alien forces that are introduced into the art institution. They are already there but are kept in check. Participatory action does not resolve these contradictory forces but makes them more evident. It acts like a catalyst and brings them to the surface so that you are encouraged to establish your own equilibrium with the roles that these forces play in your encounter with art.

Participatory art additionally questions artistic conventions by addressing its audience as a group of participants rather than as individual viewers of art. When an audience is approached as a collective I would say that this leads to a consideration of the interconnections between the various roles within the art institution. A collective audience provides grounds for questions about how these roles are differentiated, particularly the role of artist and audience.

With these questions comes a change to an explanation of the art institution. From an affirmative perspective the art institution allows for a relative social integration of art and gives rise to a degree of criticality. It provides opportunities for the new strategies of participatory art. The art institution operates like an agency that is flexible enough to incorporate diverse practices from other social, business and commercial fields and is resilient enough to adapt to any trials that these practices may present. From a negative perspective the bringing together of socially integrated practices with critically distant art can never be firmly achieved. The art institution co-opts the social potential of participatory art and neutralises any critical distance it may achieve. In this sense an acceptance of a measure of social integration or criticality within the art institution is a compromise. If it is recalled that other institutions outside of art can shape the art institution and that its conditions are open to discussion then it is suggested that the art institution is not a fixed idea. It is "[...] actively produced and reproduced within the totality of the social formation" (Horowitz, G. 2003: 753). If the art institution is liable to being



restructured then I would suggest that a negative approach overlooks the potential emancipatory properties that can be revealed through the art institution's responsiveness to change. The art institution still provides unforeseeable opportunities for aesthetic and social innovation. I would suggest that by adopting an affirmative perspective on the art institution you embrace the possibility that participatory art can generate publicly negotiated responses that cut across the discipline of aesthetics. You acknowledge that the 'intermediary' nature of participatory art potentially 'unhinges the categories' of the art institution.

Nevertheless it should also be acknowledged that there is always the possibility that the art institution can reduce participatory art to a neutral and formal set of rules. Participation becomes cut off from social concerns. In this sense as well as being defined as 'everyday' and 'transdisciplinary', the social context and meaning of participatory art should also be taken into account. Likewise just as participation does not take place in an impartial context, it does not always arise in a consensual environment. Participation can materialise in the middle of active dissension and if participation is removed from this context then it becomes idealised and excessively stable. Accordingly it is proposed that participation is more accurately captured in the context of discord and ongoing discussion. Claims concerning the 'democratic' potential of participation should be treated with care.

## 4.0 Analytical Explanations of Participatory Action

### 4.1 Introduction

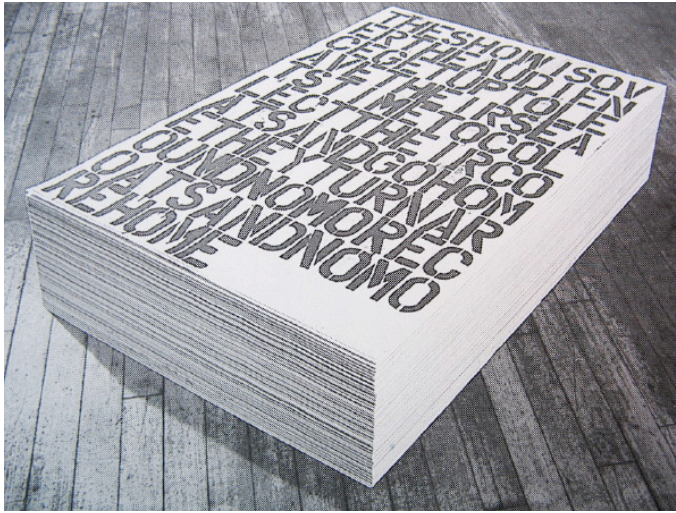


Fig. 1

#### *Context*

When I initially experienced 'Untitled', 1993 (Fig. 1), I treated it in the same way I would treat any other artwork. I looked at it from a distance and gradually got closer to it all the while wondering what it was made of and considering if I could place it in my memory. Had I seen something like this before in a magazine? When arriving at a reasonable distance I realised that it was a pile of posters and had a vague recollection from an article I had read that in these kinds of artworks you were allowed to actually take one of the posters from the pile. I was not entirely certain of this, but I was in the mood to give it a go and take the consequences from the gallery attendants. On lifting a poster from the pile I was extremely surprised by the brief feeling of excitement I got in this simple action. While I rolled the poster up in a manner that was unexpectedly clumsy, I turned to look at a gallery attendant to check for possible signs of disapproval. There were none, my actions had passed without comment. They were an accepted part of the routine of the exhibition.

#### *Problem*

I participated in this work and my behaviour was considered to be relatively unexceptional. From one point of view my actions were the norm and no one stopped me, the conventions of the work permitted the taking of a poster. However from another point of view I was not sure about the conventions of

the work and this caused a degree of personal ferment because I thought I was potentially breaking a convention. I was drawn towards the work, lifted and rolled up a poster and left the work all the time looking and moving. I was aware of numerous contradictory thoughts and emotions. I was trying to remember if participation was allowed so I was not sure how free I was to act. This uncertainty was overcome by a quick estimation that there were few risks involved. I was also aiming towards a goal but was driven by an impetus to act. Once my participatory action was achieved I then placed my behaviour in the wider context of the gallery to check for any problems. I would say that these conditions highlight how participatory action is comprised of a puzzling group of diverse elements. It is proposed that an explanation of the diverse elements that produce a human action will help artists and participants to understand what might trigger participatory action.

### *Resolution*

It is proposed that an explanation of these diverse elements may be found if human action is explained from an analytical perspective. The analytical philosophy of action explains human action in rational terms. This means that action is described as intentional and when it is described as intentional it means that a reason is given for it. The presupposition that is made in a rational account of action is that when a reason is given for an action a bit of extra information is provided about what is being done. This has been described as a “*rationalization*” (Davidson, D. 1963: 3). A rationalization explains an action “by revealing something that the agent was aiming at in performing it, and, therefore, something that makes the action “reasonable” or “agreeable”, to some extent.” (Mele, A.R. 2003: 71). It is suggested that this viewpoint will explain participatory action to participants and artists as a deliberate and conscious procedure.

### *Qualifications*

This account of human action has a broad application but it must be accepted that actions do not necessarily have any goal in mind and that actions can occur simply to produce the experience of action. You may act without any thought, in anger or fear. You may engage in an action because you ‘feel like it’: You may feel like whistling. All of these actions may be intentional but can they be described in the terms of a rationalization? This is where the analytical philosophy of action runs into difficulties. It also becomes problematic because it is suggested that participatory art involves actions that are equally resistant to

a rationalization. Participatory action can arise because you simply feel like participating, without any goal in mind and for the sake of action.

### *Summary*

This chapter will introduce some of the topics associated with the analytical philosophy of action. It will look at how an action can be distinguished from what is not an action and how actions are distinguished from other actions. This chapter will also explore the widely accepted causal explanation of action. Its origins in Aristotle's thought and its relationship to natural science will also be considered. Arguments against the causal explanation made by Ludwig Wittgenstein will also be taken into account and the central category of intentional action will also be explored. On the basis of this general exploration of action the work on intention and action theory by the prominent philosophers Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe and Donald Davidson will then be investigated in more detail. Anscombe's work 'Intention' has been described as "the founding document of contemporary philosophy of action." (Thompson, M. 1998: 280). Her views on action develop on Wittgenstein's idea of the will and action and are also influenced by Aristotle. Davidson's action theory develops Anscombe's ideas and provides arguments that support causal explanations of action. His work also reveals the extent to which actions can be explained in human terms or if they are complicated physical behaviour. These accounts will provide a rational perspective on action and throughout the chapter these findings will be compared to aspects of 'Untitled', 1993 by Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Christopher Wool. These comparisons will provide a rational explanation of how action is embodied in the participatory artwork. In these comparisons the discourse on action will be used as a means to reach a fuller understanding of participatory art rather than a means to discuss the philosophy of action per se. Therefore these comparisons will place accounts of action at the service of explanations of 'Untitled', 1993. This will contribute to the main question of this chapter: To what extent can participatory action be rationally explained?

## **4.2 General Issues**

When I took part in 'Untitled', 1993 alongside the action of taking a poster I also walked toward and away from the work. As well as directing my thoughts towards my actions I was also considering other things like the work's possible meaning and working out if it was practical to take a poster away. I would

therefore suggest that it is useful to understand how significant actions and thoughts can be differentiated from less significant actions and thoughts in a work like 'Untitled', 1993.

#### **4.2.1 Basic questions**

When action is thought about the simplest question to be asked is: What is an action? It could be said that an action is something that a person does. It is the carrying out of an act. Normally it would also be said that a person moves their body or a part of their body when they carry out an act. Additionally, when a person carries out an act it is usually said that they do it because they have a reason to act. So I could describe one of my actions as something that I do that involves moving my body for a reason.

This initial description of action is adequate for most day-to-day practicalities. Human action is so central to human affairs that it seems impractical to consider action in any way other than as something that is necessary if things are going to get done. Nevertheless because human action is such a deeply embedded and universal aspect of life many philosophers have attempted to capture and describe what human action may be. When contemporary philosophers look more closely at the common sense view of action they engage in 'Action theory'.

Alfred Mele suggests that a more detailed look at action stems from the simple kind of question asked at the start of this section. When action is looked at it should be asked: (a) *What is an action?* (b) *How are actions to be explained?* For Mele the first question causes you to ask a further two related questions: "How are actions different from events that are not actions? How do actions differ from one another?" (Mele, A.R. 2003: 65)

#### **4.2.2 Action and non-action**

In his examination of Aristotle's philosophy of action David Charles provides a helpful description of how Aristotle created distinct groups of human action from the general diversity of all human action. This helps in a reply to the question: 'How are actions different from events that are not actions?' According to Charles, Aristotle emphasised that you should always consider a wide range of human action and not narrowly focus your attention on rational

action. In this sense this scheme could be treated as a spectrum of human action. It could be said that just as parts of a colour spectrum can be more visible and less visible then it can be said that at certain times it may be more appropriate to embrace a broad range rather than a narrow range of actions. The following scheme is developed from Charles' treatment of Aristotle's system (Charles, D. 1984: 104):

Falling asleep, waking up and moving during sleep are not actions.

- a. Involuntary Processes: Birth, Breathing, Pulse of blood, Similar bodily processes, Growing old, Death.
- b. Intermediate processes: Coughing, Sneezing, Blinking, Blushing, Sighing, Frowning, Sneering, Sexual arousal, Biting one's lip, Raising eyebrows, Raising heartbeat.
- c. Intentional processes not supported by practical reason (*Central case of agency*): Sensual desires (Impetus to look, listen, taste, smell and touch), 'Instinctive' behaviour.
- d. Intentional processes supported by practical reason (*Central case of agency*): All other actions.
- e. Intentional states: Remaining at one's post, Refraining from action, Being at rest.

George Wilson offers a similar though less detailed account of what may be called an action. He suggests considering the intuitive sense you have of what action may be. When you are passive then this is not an action, when you are more controlled then this is an action. There are "[...] the things that merely *happen* to people – the events they undergo – and the various things that they generally *do*." (Wilson, G. 2002: 2).

#### **4.2.3 Differences between actions**

In attempting to formulate a reply to the question: 'How do actions differ from one another?' Jennifer Hornsby's suggests that it is useful to distinguish

between the *action* and what you *do*. For example I may take a sweet and you may take a sweet from one of Torres 'Candy Spills'. (Fig. 2)

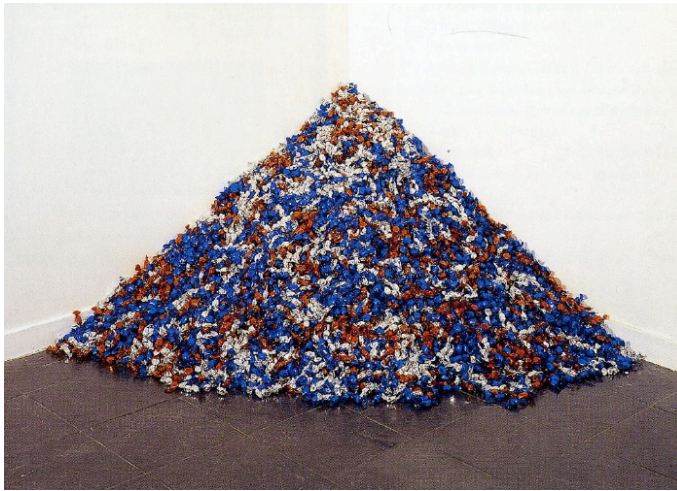


Fig. 2

When it is said that you *do* things you are not being so specific, so in this case you would tend to say that we have done the same thing. For Hornsby action captures things more precisely: "'action' is given a definite meaning when actions are taken to be a species of events: it denotes particulars of a certain sort – concrete items in the spatiotemporal world" (Hornsby, J. 1998: 37). Therefore the two instances of taking a sweet are two distinct actions. I took a sweet and this was a distinct event in time and space and you took a sweet and this was also a distinct event in time and space.

When considering how actions are distinguished from what is done, a break occurs with the way action is usually thought about. It feels as though there must be an increase in the refinement of the account of action and an almost forensic attitude to the nuances of human action has to be adopted. This is definitely a tendency in action theory and it can be clearly presented in the different approaches that can be taken to 'individuate' straightforward actions. The main approaches to action 'individuation' are the "fine-grained" account and the "coarse-grained" account (Hornsby, J. 1998: 37). There is also a way of looking at action in terms of increasingly basic actions. Jennifer Hornsby (Hornsby, J. 1998: 37) describes a situation where an aeroplane pilot presses a lever and this causes the engines of the plane to shut down. In a *fine-grained* account of this situation two actions occur. The first action is the pilot pressing the lever and the second action is the engines shutting down. In a fine-grained account the pressing of the lever happened at one point in time and the shutting

down of the engines happened at a point in time afterwards. There are two distinct events and therefore two distinct actions. In the *coarse-grained* account of the situation only one action occurs. The pressing down of the lever and the engines shutting off happen at the same point in time. When you describe them as happening at the same point in time then there is only one event and if there is only one event then there is only one action. However in the coarse-grained account this single action is *describable* in two different ways. It can be described as 'The pilot pressed the lever' or as 'The engines shut down'. When the situation is looked at in terms of *basic actions* it is said that moving an arm is more basic than pressing the lever and this is more basic than shutting down the engines. At the start there is a primitive sort of action and at the end a more complex action and each action depends on the preceding action.

In asking what is an action the differences between action and a non-action have to be considered. When action is looked at in more detail there are three main explanations: the fine-grained, coarse-grained and the basic action account. In what way does this contribute to a rational explanation of how action is embodied in the participatory artwork? It is suggested that the participatory artwork focuses on the central cases of agency proposed by Charles. 'Untitled', 1993 invites an action that is supported by a practical reason or supported by a more intuitive or sensual reason. You would take a poster because you reason that they are free or because you like the way it looks. In 'Untitled', 1993 you may weigh up the options or you simply reach out and take. In my experience I thought about what I was doing and was relieved that my actions were tolerated. Hornsby differentiates between action and doing. From this perspective participants could be described as doing the same thing. Everyone takes a poster. However as *actions* the participation of each individual is particular to the moment of its occurrence. I would say that this is the most appropriate method to differentiate participation because it highlights the uniqueness of each participant. When considering action individuation it is suggested that the coarse grained account is adopted. The other accounts may be useful in a legal context where these kinds of minutiae can be relevant but in the context of the artworks that are under discussion here this kind of refinement is not strictly necessary. It seems more appropriate to rely on descriptions of action rather than sharp distinctions between events and times.



#### 4.2.4 The causal explanation of action

In my encounter with 'Untitled', 1993, I briefly deliberated on my actions but I did not articulate my thoughts or have to argue in favour of my actions. Neither did I have to concentrate on my actions in any special way because they did not require any expertise. However my action was not a purely impulsive either. I had a rough awareness of my motives and the consequences of my actions. I wanted a poster and if I took one I could put it on my wall.

The previous section has helped in a partial reply to the question '*What is an action?*' When the question, '*How are actions to be explained?*' is asked you are travelling over far more difficult terrain. Intuitively most people would agree that when you try to explain an action you tend to give a reason for the action. If asked 'Why you are wearing a hat?' you would give the reason, 'It is cold and I want to stay warm.' You want to be warm and you work out that a hat will keep you warm.

The dominant explanation of action that can help in an understanding of this state of affairs is the *causal explanation*. Aristotle developed the most widely accepted causal explanation of action. In 'The Nichomachean Ethics' he states: "The origin of action – its efficient, not its final cause – is choice, and of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end." (Aristotle. 1980: 139). Aristotle suggests that action is caused by a combination of psychological states like desire and reason.

There is a central account of action in Aristotle's theories that is most relevant in the current explanation of action. An action may be analysed as an event that is an "Intentional process supported by practical reason" (Charles, D. 1984: 104). Here action may be identified as the acceptance of a desire to act on a conclusion arrived at through thought and inference. In this account the desire to act is *rational*.

Aristotle compares desire to assertion. When you assert something you affirm or deny a proposition. When you desire something you pursue or avoid it. So in having a rational desire, you are active towards the intellect. You pursue what is reasonable and true and avoid what is unreasonable and false. Nevertheless Aristotle objects that rational desire cannot adequately explain all your actions. He warns that "Intellect itself, however, moves nothing [...]" (Aristotle. 1980:

139). The intellect may be involved in an action but for Aristotle it must be activated in some way. In this sense desire becomes the trigger for action. It is desire that has the job of “rendering the syllogism valid” (Charles, D. 1984: 90). In this work by Jurgen Bey the chair is supplied with on extremely short leg (Fig. 3). Other actions are therefore necessary before you can sit on the chair. You reason that it is better to have a stable rather than an unstable chair and your desire to have a stable chair turns your thought into an action. By acknowledging the links between *intellect* and *desire* in action Aristotle provides a prototype explanation of the causes of rational human action.

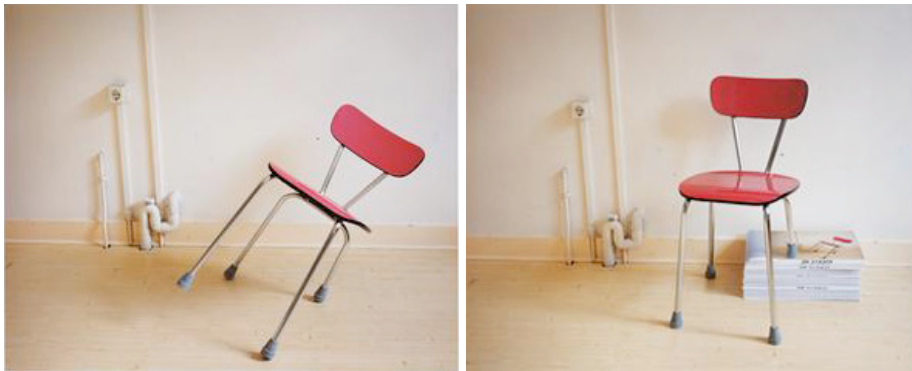


Fig. 3

When a causal explanation of action is given then your reasons are described as being the cause of action. Your reasons are also considered to be a psychological state and it is claimed that these states cause actions. Alfred Mele describes the causal explanation: “It typically is embraced as part of a naturalistic stand on agency, according to which mental items that play causal/explanatory roles in action bear some important relation to physical states and events.” (Mele, A.R. 1997a: 4). When a causal explanation of action is adopted then the claim that psychological states are in some way realized as physical events or states in the brain is accepted.<sup>1</sup>

In such discussions about action, references have traditionally been made to *acts of will* or acts of *volition* to bridge the gap between the mental and the physical. However terms like this caused difficulties for Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein, L. 1953, 1958). He argued against the causal explanation of action where mental states are used as a basis for the reasons that cause action. Wittgenstein presented numerous arguments that cast doubt on explanations where action is seen as being caused by ‘internal’ experiences such as volition

or acts of will. Two of his arguments will reveal some of the assumptions that are made in the causal explanation of action.

In the first argument Wittgenstein describes a practical situation: "I deliberate whether to lift a certain heavyish weight, decide to do it, I then apply my force to it and lift it." (Wittgenstein, L. 1958: 150). He compares this situation with other situations like speaking. The former situation tends to be thought of as a "full-fledged case of willing" (Wittgenstein, L. 1958: 150) however he suggests that it is a mistake to think that the former situation is representative of all action. He points out that a 'full-fledged' description of speaking can be given but this kind of description is very specific and does not usually apply to speaking. I could say I pondered on what to say, weighed up the arguments and said something, but this is too special. Speaking usually happens in an impromptu manner with little planning. It is assumed that in the lifting case, because the various features of the action such as deliberation, decision and exertion can be differentiated that this should be done generally whenever action is explained. The impression is created that the force of the action is distinguishable from all the psychological states that occur prior to the action. This gives a sense that when you engage in action, you engage in a separate state of willing. It suggests that before acting you always think it over.

In the second argument Wittgenstein describes another practical situation. A mirror is used to guide the drawing of a geometric shape. He advises attempting to draw the shape by only looking at the mirror. Naturally this gives a sense of detachment from what are normally considered to be your actions. Natural action becomes more difficult and you begin to focus on the correct movements of your muscles in more self-conscious way. This is instructive because it exposes the way that you are inclined to picture your will as being somehow prior to your actions. The experience of drawing in the mirror shows that "one is inclined to say that our real *actions*, the ones to which volition *immediately* applies, are not the movements of our hand but somehow further back, say the actions of our muscles." (Wittgenstein, L. 1958: 153).<sup>2</sup> Wittgenstein proposes that you do not decide by an act of will which muscles to move in order to make your hands move in order to successfully complete the drawing. The idea of will has to be flexible enough to accommodate a more direct willing where you do not consider an intermediate series of events. A false impression of action is given if it is seen as willing and *then* action.

As an alternative to these images of a preceding will that causes a subsequent action Wittgenstein claims that willing *is* action. "Willing, if it is not to be a sort of wishing, must be the action itself. It cannot be allowed to stop anywhere short of the action." (Wittgenstein, L. 1953: 160). Wittgenstein refers to numerous occasions such as speaking, writing or walking when you could ordinarily say that you do not deliberate or think of yourself as acting on the basis of a separate will. Speaking, writing and walking are central examples of action and on these kinds of occasions there is often an absence of pre-meditation. It could be said that by saying willing is action in this way Wittgenstein is doing two things. Firstly he is bringing willing 'to the surface'. He does this with the reminder that when action is explained you should not forget that actions are ordinarily understood as bodily movements that are observable. By suggesting that the will does not 'stop short' of action he is arguing that an underlying psychological explanation of action should not always be pursued. He is suggesting that actions can also be explained within the context of known patterns of ordinarily observable human behaviour. Secondly he is trying to explain what it means to be active because when he says that willing is 'the action itself' he does not turn willing into a mechanical physical event. Rather he is saying that the experience of the will in action is not necessarily something deliberate that mulls things over. He is saying that it also resembles a transitory instant of attention: "*Doing* itself seems to not have any volume of experience. It seems like an extensionless point, the point of a needle. This point seems to be the real agent." (Wittgenstein, L. 1953: 161). To demonstrate the oddness of treating all action as though it is premeditated Bruce Nauman produced a series of videos where he meticulously choreographed walks around his studio (Fig. 4). He planned his movements in a grid-like diagram that showed that he was to take a step at right angles to his last step and that he had to move his legs to be at right angles to his other leg so that his body would always form a 'T' shape. By carefully scripting a casual action that is not exactly a dance move Nauman highlights the absurdity of describing all actions in their 'full-fledged' sense.



Fig. 4

Aristotle provides the blueprint for the causal explanation of action. Action is an outcome of a combination of reasoned thought and felt desire. The modern account of this explanation describes thought and desire in term of physical states in the brain. On this account these physical states cause physical actions. Wittgenstein argues against this mechanical explanation but also argues against the conventional anti-mechanical explanation that involves volition. He argues that action should not always be thought of in terms of willing and that action does not simply follow after willing. Things like walking can be thought of as an embodiment of willing. On this basis he reconsiders action as the fleeting experience of an agent. In what way does this discourse contribute to a rational explanation of how action is embodied in the participatory artwork? If 'Untitled', 1993 is considered from Aristotle's perspective then this kind of structure might describe the state of affairs:

I reason that I can take a poster. (It is allowed)

I am in a state where I want to take a poster. (I like their appearance)

Therefore I will take a poster.

This is a useful guide to participatory action but it cannot be assumed that all participatory actions occur like this. What about a participant who takes a poster absentmindedly or without any reasoning? It is suggested that Aristotle offers a basic though imprecise template for explaining participatory action from a rational perspective. When the modern perspective on the causal explanation of action is considered it is acknowledged that the explanations of human action given by natural science are extremely fruitful and valuable in

terms of empirical research into human motility. However these explanations will not be employed in an explanation of participatory action because a detailed causal explanation of participatory action is not necessary. I would say that it is more appropriate to draw attention to observable participatory actions. When 'Untitled', 1993 is considered from Wittgenstein's perspective an account of participatory action is provided that does not need to be 'full-fledged'. Wittgenstein accounts for participatory actions that are not thought about, decided on and then carried out. From his standpoint taking a poster could be like walking. It is observable behaviour that does not necessarily need a finely graded psychological explanation that includes an account of the human will. In this sense the will becomes embodied in the action of taking and rolling up a poster.

### **4.3 Intention**

Some rough guidelines have been established to explain how participatory action can be distinguished from other actions and to explain what the causes of participatory action may be. Another way of considering participatory action is to take into account that it can be an action where you have an intention in mind. When I participated in 'Untitled', 1993, I didn't take a poster by accident, by chance or without knowing that I was taking part. I was aware of my actions and purposefully took part. I would suggest that intention explains a central category of action and for this reason should be considered in an account of participatory action.

#### **4.3.1 Intentional action**

When looking at intentional action an action is being taken into account that is connected to a state of mind that steers current action or is primed to look forward. According to Mele it can be described as "executive attitudes towards plans" (Mele, A.R. 1997: 19). Intentions can guide simple planned actions or can co-ordinate groups of planned actions. They are described as being linked to a practical state of mind and they are also described as having a "settledness" (Mele, A.R. 1997: 19). When you intend to do something you are inwardly confirming your course of action in a way that is absent when you entertain a wish or contemplate the possibility of carrying out a future action. Another issue associated with explanations of intentional action is the connection between intending to act and giving reasons for acting. Usually it can be said

that an action is intentional when an act was intended. I shout intentionally when I intend to shout. I didn't shout involuntarily in pain for example. It can also be said that in acting intentionally you act for a reason: I shout intentionally because the music is so loud. On this basis Mele suggests that "acting for a reason is often *identified* with acting intentionally" (Mele, A.R. 1997: 19). When presented with the Gonzalez-Torres work 'Untitled', 1993 (Fig. 5) you may take a poster because it appeals to you. You intentionally take a poster and this coincides with your attraction or your reason for taking it.

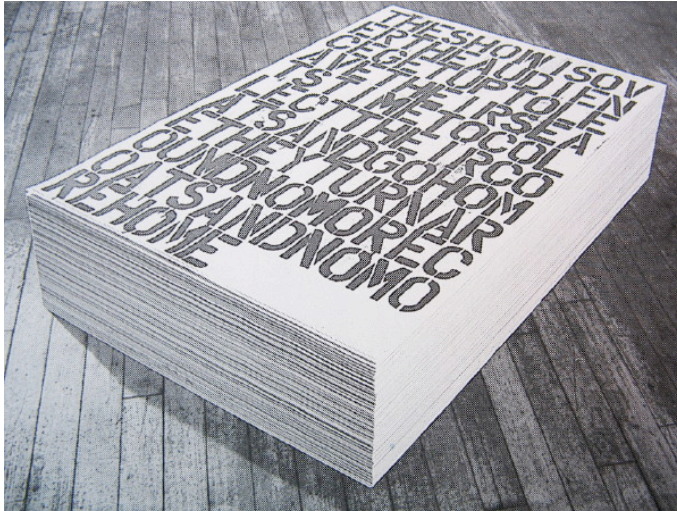


Fig. 5

#### 4.3.2 The psychology and physiology of intention

In her enquiry into the concept of intention Anscombe states that there are a number of senses of intention. She describes a situation where someone might ask you, 'What was your intention in doing that?' In offering an answer to this kind of question you are making a statement about intentional actions as an explanation of past events. You might explain your current actions as corresponding to a presently held intention that fills out the meaning of your actions. This is an "intention *with which*" you act (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 25). You may also hold something in your mind as intention for the future. This intention may or may not be realised and so is an "expression of intention" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 1).

Anscombe suggests that a natural understanding of these kinds of statements is misleading. Intention is not simply viewed as an inner state of mind like an emotion or a psychological desire. The key to this misunderstanding is in the fact that you engage in 'expressions of intention'. You say what you are doing



or going to do. This points to the suggestion that intention is to an extent a public thing like language and in this sense it is “conventional” (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 5). In her criticism of a physiological explanation of action she considers the merits of imagining intention as something that occurs in *addition* to an action. From this perspective an intentional action is depicted in such a way that intention becomes separate from the movement. This view separates an action into a series: something that starts at a source of inner intention, a muscle stimulus, a bodily movement, a known action, an object acted on and the external effect of the action on the object. If this perspective is adopted then there seems to be no justification why you should stop at muscle movement as *the* origin of an action. What about electrical impulses or chemical changes that precede the muscle movement? Additionally she asks how the separate ‘forces’ of action and intention relate to one another. Anscombe concludes that if this kind of logic is pursued you end up in “inextricable confusions” (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 29). Intention is not something “*in the action, or in the man [...]*” (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 29 *Italics mine*). For Anscombe describing an action as intentional is more like a process of designation. It is “to assign it to the class of intentional actions” (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 28). Intention occurs as part of communication and as such is conventional in the way that communication is.

In setting aside psychological and physiological explanations of intentional action Anscombe identifies its conventional nature. Could it be said that participatory action is like intentional action and has a conventional nature? When you describe your intentions as conventional it is like describing intention in terms of a contract. You are naming your actions. In this sense intention is not something like an emotion that appears ‘naturally’ but something you rationally articulate like language. Intention is conventional in the same way that language is conventional because others ask you about your intentions and you tell others about your intentions. If this sense of intentional action is applied to a participatory action then it can be said that it underlines the rule-based features of participatory action. From this perspective the participatory action of taking a poster from ‘Untitled’, 1993 becomes linked to language. The intentional act of taking a poster is placed in the context of communication. You may say that you are going to take a poster, are currently taking a poster or that you have taken a poster. This could take the form of an obvious statement like ‘I plan to take a poster’. It could also take the form of something more inward like “addressing a command to oneself” (Davidson, D. 1978: 91) although it should also be acknowledged that you don’t always



articulate your intentions in such clear terms. In this sense intending is more like forming a pact with the self. This casts doubt on the view that the intentional act of taking a poster primarily takes place in the context of bodily movement. Anscombe cautions against viewing intention as a natural phenomenon that is somehow 'in' an action. As though it is the first psychological event in a series of subsequent physical events. If this warning is observed for a participatory artwork then further reasons are given to avoid describing participatory action in simple physical or psychological terms. An intention to take a poster is not 'in' the taking of a poster. The taking of the poster falls into the category of being intentional.

#### **4.3.3 Single action under many descriptions**

There were no unintended consequences from my participation in 'Untitled', 1993, however when I was briefly uncertain about the legitimacy of my actions I imagined how others might see me. I thought: If this is not a participatory artwork then my actions could inadvertently be seen as theft or vandalism.

An important feature of an intentional action is that you must be aware of what you are doing. Anscombe uses the example of a man sawing a plank of wood that is an historical artefact. He may not have noticed that its underside displays ancient carvings. Therefore this action can be described as a man intentionally sawing a plank of wood. It can also be described as a man unintentionally destroying a historical artefact. Additionally the sawing may be causing a lot of noise, which he doesn't notice or he may be creating a pile of sawdust on the floor, which he doesn't notice. This example is used to highlight that a single action may have various aspects. One may know one of the aspects and in knowing this, one is acting intentionally, but there may be numerous other aspects, none of which can be said to be intentional even though they outline the same act. Therefore to act intentionally is "to give a description of what he is doing *under which* he knows it" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 12). All these descriptions of sawing apply to ordinarily observable aspects of the obvious action, but the sawing can also be described as the firing of multiple nerve ends and the flexing of muscles in the man's arm. In these kinds of description a very specialised way of looking at action is focused on and ordinarily these descriptions would not be linked to the man's act of sawing the wood. In this sense it can be said that these kinds of action description are also

unintentional because the man may acknowledge that nerves and muscles are involved but he would not usually say that he intends to stimulate his muscles with his nerves. In this context this is not a description of an intentional action. It is not a description *under which* he knows his action of sawing.

Anscombe accounts for an intentional action as being an action under a description. Considered in this light can participatory action only be known under a description? I would suggest that there are situations where participants engage with a work without fully knowing all that they are doing. Your participation may take place under one description that you are aware of, but the artist may capture your participation under another description that you are not aware of. It is also suggested that there are situations where artists present a participatory artwork and unintended effects take place while people participate. Your description may not be the one anticipated by the artist. This highlights the discrepancies that occur in the participatory artwork like 'Untitled', 1993. A participant may think that by taking a poster they are receiving a free gift. A child may think that it is being mischievous and its mother may think that too. In my experience of the work I was not certain how to describe my actions. I was concerned that I may cause some trouble but was also willing to take that risk. On the other hand the gallery staff were indifferent because they were operating under a description that permitted the act of taking a poster. The artist, gallery staff and the participant can put the intention under different descriptions. Therefore participatory action can be known under numerous descriptions.

#### **4.3.4 Public and private intention**

In an encounter with art you would usually not consider your intentions unless you were talking about a work. Your contemplation of an artwork is typically a personal matter. You would only worry about your intentions if something you said about the work had an unintentional effect. Based on what you say someone might think that you are being critical when in fact you admire the work. When you take part in a work like 'Untitled', 1993 you are in a similar position. You no longer privately reflect on the work; your participation is 'in the open' but what do your actions indicate about your intentions?

To get near to describing someone's intentions you have to refer to what they are up to and this description has to "coincide with what he could say he was

doing” (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 8). So you have to describe what an action looks like from the outside and this description has to match what the person knows within himself or herself. Immediately you see that there is a tension between what is observable and what is private. Anscombe acknowledges this by describing various circumstances where it could be said that you must rely on the other’s report to settle what they are doing. If a person’s intentions are clear you don’t ask, if they are unclear you usually ask. In these cases intention seems to surface first of all in the mind and action comes afterwards. Anscombe wants to resist this temptation and instead places the emphasis on the action: “what physically takes place, i.e. what a man actually does” (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 9).

Anscombe looks at intentional action from an external perspective. She describes how intention provides a more complete picture of action. For example if you were standing up to leave a room and someone asked: ‘What are you doing?’ it would be facetious to say ‘Standing up’. It would be more appropriate to say ‘I have to leave’. Anscombe describes a sense where you say an intention “*with which*” something is done (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 34). What is important during such situations is the appropriateness of the answer. As is stated in the example of standing-up-to-leave if your answer is overly obvious then it is provocative. If your answer clearly corresponds with a potential future state of affairs then your intention is evident, however if your answer leapfrogs over a logical chain of events it appears absurd.<sup>3</sup> Anscombe refers to such situations to indicate that an intentional action is not always something that *only* an agent can describe adequately. She demonstrates that an intentional action must sometimes be described with an external perspective in mind. “A man’s intention in acting is not so private and interior a thing that he has absolute authority in saying *what* it is – as he has absolute authority in saying *what* he dreamt” (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 36).

Anscombe also contemplates an internal perspective on intentional action. To summarise a classic example, Anscombe describes a situation where a man is pumping water from a reservoir into a cistern that is the main water supply to a house. In the house are a group of evil party chiefs. While he is doing this someone appears to tell him that some poison has been put in the reservoir and that he is in the process of poisoning the evil party chiefs. On this occasion, in asking the man doing the pumping: ‘What are you doing?’ Anscombe states “*In the end only you can know if that is your intention or not*” (Anscombe,

G.E.M. 1957: 48). If he was doing what he normally did prior to being told about the poison only the man can know the truth of his intentions. He may say 'I don't care', 'I was just doing what I normally do', 'I am glad to have helped' or he may just grunt and not give anything away, scheming that none of his actions prove with certainty that he collaborated or not. It appears that there is no definitive test for intention. It seems to boil down to a convincing match between exterior appearance and a trust in what an agent can only know privately. In the series 'Objects for human use' (Fig. 6) Marina Abramovic chose to use 'spiritual' materials in order to encourage participatory actions from her audience. In this work participants could press their bodies against blocks of crystal. It could be said that your actions in this work demonstrate the public and private nature of your intention. You could participate in the work and externally it may appear that you are having a special kind of experience. You could also declare that the work had a psychological affect but there is no certainty about the match between these two views of your participation.



Fig. 6

In her account of what is observable and what is private in an intentional act Anscombe stresses the external action rather than the internal mind. Could this characterisation coincide with a way of understanding the participatory action? An explicit and observable physical act is invited as part of the interpretation of participatory art. However this work also exhibits the problem that Anscombe points out, namely that there may not be an agreement between what you do and what someone else says you are doing. For example you could participate

in 'Untitled', 1993 with the intention of stealing a poster, but anyone around you who knew about the conventions of the work would accept your action. So in a sense your participatory action presents the ambiguity between your private intention and public appearance. It could be argued that the action that is invited in a participatory artwork isn't a straightforward external sign of an inner intention. The doing of the act places the participant on the threshold between a personal goal and a shared goal.

For Anscombe intention is publicly observable. It can also be asked to what extent participatory action should also be publicly declared. It seems to be true that in participating with an artwork you cannot have absolute authority in saying what you are doing. You haven't decided to act privately. You are following the conventions of the participatory artwork. The primary convention of this kind of artwork is that the artist gives you authority to act on the work. If an onlooker who was not aware of the conventions of a participatory artwork challenged you to explain what you were doing you would have to provide an appropriate answer. You may be with a friend who is unaware of the conventions of 'Untitled', 1993 who is aghast that you should take and begin to roll up a poster. You would have to adopt an external perspective to describe your actions. It could be said that a participatory artwork supports the view that a part of intention when challenged must be publicly declared. A participatory artwork diffuses the authority of the artist who produces the work by allowing participation but this does not mean that participants then adopt absolute authority about their own intentions. In this sense if someone attempted to set fire to Torres' pile of posters and claimed that this was a legitimate participation and not an act of vandalism, it could be said that this is not a participatory act but is instead an attempt to enforce a personal authoritative action on the participatory artwork. Just as the artist sacrifices his authority in a participatory artwork the authority of the participant is also diffused because participatory action can be *described by others* or may need to be *explained to others*. A student raises this point during the 'Renascent Scission' pilot study when he discusses the potential for "sabotage" and "destruction" in participatory art (Appendix II: Audio V).

When participation is considered along with Anscombe's argument in favour of the privacy of intention it may be that here the private interpretative element that accompanies any participatory action is being considered. It can be accepted that an individual's participation may be public but it must also be

accepted that in discussing art there may be a contemplative aspect that perhaps can only be embodied in privacy. In Anscombe's example of the man pumping the poisoned water she talks about the ambiguity of his role. He may be indifferent to the poisoning, a collaborator in the poisoning or feigning neutrality about the poisoning. In a participatory artwork it could be said that a similar degree of ambiguity is present. An artist will often withhold a full declaration of their intention in a work, not because they are trying to deceive anyone but because they are aware of their influential position in interpreting their work. He or she doesn't want to overemphasise a preferred meaning. It follows that in a participatory artwork participants would be encouraged by the artist to follow a similar approach. One needn't fully declare in what sense one's participations are to be taken. When one of the posters in 'Untitled', 1993 is taken there is no clear way of establishing if participants think of themselves as taking what they are entitled to, as stealing from Torres or conspiring with him. Participatory action is ambiguous because it has an aspect that is known only to the participant.

#### **4.3.5 Causes, reasons and appropriate reasons**

When I took a poster from 'Untitled', 1993 I worked out that this was an appropriate thing to do based on a vague memory I had of a description of the work, on my observation that there were multiple posters and also based on a measure of self-assurance. I was motivated by a number of factors and was not simply prompted to take part. I was not told to take a poster by an attendant and I did not read any instructions.

A feature that distinguishes intentional action is your response to the question 'Why?' if it is asked of your actions. For Anscombe a reply to this question can provide a reason for acting and in providing a reason you provide an intention. However the reply does not always lead to reason. Anscombe recognises that there are differing senses of reply to the question why; some providing reasons, some providing causes. While acknowledging that the two senses are not sharply defined, she points to instances when there is an extreme separation to clarify the difference. A 'cause' is a simple response to an event like being surprised by a car alarm as you walk down the street. This may give you a fright and you may collide with another pedestrian. The car alarm is not a reason for your action; it is a cause of your action. A 'reason' is a response "surrounded with thoughts and questions" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 23). To

have a reason your reply to the question ‘why?’ has a “place among reasons” (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 24). For example if the question is: ‘Why did you take a poster?’ the answer that is presented as part of a group of reasons may be: ‘Because it was free.’ Or, ‘I liked the image’.

In her explanation of causes and reasons Anscombe reveals an important distinction to be made in an explanation of the participatory artwork. In what sense can it be said that a participant is caused to participate in a work and in what sense could it be said that a participant has a reason to participate in it? In Anscombe’s terms if your action is caused then it is a simple event. If you have a reason to act then there is a complex of thoughts and ideas. It could be said that an attempt to cause a participatory action may be too close to a command or instruction. On the other hand if reasons are provided for a participatory action then this may add to the work’s subtlety. It could also be suggested that the simplicity of being caused to act is necessary in order to provide a suitable degree of accessibility for the greatest amount of participants or it could be claimed that if too many reasons are sought for why you should participate then this inhibits the spontaneity of the participation. This perspective explains why it is so difficult to satisfactorily create a participatory artwork. An artist has to conciliate between an audience’s ability to participate and its tolerance for demands that may be made on it. This issue is raised during the ‘Renascent Scission’ pilot study when the importance of the “everyday” nature of a participatory action is discussed (Appendix II: Audio III). I would say that Torres’ work succeeds because he chose the simple action of taking a poster that requires no skill, instruction or explanation. Christian Marclay involved an equally simple action when he produced ‘Footsteps’ (Fig. 7). In this work hundreds of vinyl recordings of tap dancing were placed on the floor of the gallery and visitors, simply by walking around the space, contributed to the work. Marclay then repackaged the scratched recordings and sold them as individual works.



Fig. 7

The correct senses of the responses that give reasons for intentional action can now be summarised. Appropriate responses may be a description of past history, an interpretation that provides the “intention *with which*” (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 25) and a declaration about the future. I could say that I took poster because it was free; I am taking a poster now because I want to participate in a work by Torres and Wool or I plan to take poster because it will look good on my wall. You may know what you are doing and describe it as intentional but you have to be aware that you, the artist, attendants and other participants can all have different views of your actions. The artist may see you as an accomplice but you may feel like a consumer. Your intentional action is also ‘in the open’ and in this situation you give up the final authority you have to describe your actions. You cannot say that vandalising ‘Untitled’, 1993 is a valid participation because you are not the only person who has a say. Consideration has also been given to how answers that provide *causes* are sometimes not considered to be sufficient to suggest an action is intentional. If a loudspeaker or bright lights somehow triggered your participation then it may not be intentional. However you could take a poster without being fully aware of your actions. Your action may descend without warning.

This is the commonly reported reply to the question ‘Why?’ that occurs outside of the summary. This is the kind of reply where neither a cause nor reason is clearly revealed. Anscombe lists answers like: ‘It was an impulse’. These kinds of answers allow you to speculate about involuntary behaviour and are sometimes adequate replies. Anscombe states that such replies could be



explained as “the answer is that there is no answer” (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 26). She also describes odd replies like, ‘I found myself doing it’. Again in such cases this can be fine but it can often just seem garbled. Anscombe accounts for these replies by describing a situation where there may be a permitted scope of replies. When you ask what your reasons were by asking ‘Why?’ you may limit the scope of the answers. ‘I felt like it’ may not be permitted. In this situation the scope of the answers you allow restricts the scope of potential answers to the question ‘Why?’ Anscombe suggests that in order to explain an action as intentional you must have a fix on the scope of replies that are permitted. She describes replies to the question ‘Why?’ as being “more extensive in range” (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 28) therefore answers like ‘I found myself doing it’ generally fall outside of intentional action. Anscombe reflects on the consequences of allowing ‘I just did it’ into range. If such answers are legitimate then she can’t find a clear way of distinguishing an intentional action from any other kind of action. All actions, voluntary or involuntary can potentially be relegated to this undifferentiated retort.

How does Anscombe’s concern with prohibiting the acceptance of the ‘non-answer’ help in a description of the participatory artwork? She describes the need to regulate the scope of replies to the question ‘Why?’ when asked of an action. It could be said that this kind of control is acceptable in everyday situations. You want a comprehensible reason when someone explains his or her action. However it could be said that in the context of art and the context of participatory artworks it has to be admitted that you would frequently get the ‘non-answer’ from a participant. It could be suggested that there has to be an extension to the scope of satisfactory responses when you are dealing with art. The ‘non-answer’ moves from the marginal position it occupies in daily life to become a more central reason. ‘I felt like doing it’ becomes legitimate in this context. I would say that an intuitive impetus to participate in ‘Untitled’, 1993 doesn’t necessarily need to be plainly articulated. I would suggest that many participants probably participated in ‘Untitled’, 1993 without fully knowing why but where simply curious.

#### **4.4 Action Theory**

If it is accepted that your participation can often be explained as something you ‘feel like’ then it has to be acknowledged that an analytical philosophy of action can only offer a partial explanation of participatory action. However Donald

Davidson claims that if rationality is given a chance it can help to convincingly describe instantaneous actions and more deliberate actions, (Davidson, D. 1978: 85). He accepts that every time you act you don't necessarily go through a demanding process of deliberation. He acknowledges that your acts often escape you 'straightaway', nonetheless he assumes that there is some kind of sequence that can explain these kinds of actions. Davidson's point is that a *rationalization* is valuable because, if it is called upon, it can be applied to any type of action.

#### 4.4.1 Actions, Reasons and Causes

When I took part in 'Untitled', 1993, there was an element of spontaneity to my actions however I would not say that I simply took part because 'I felt like it'. I did have a straightforward desire to simply participate but there was also an incentive to participate in order to take possession of a poster. I would say that a diverse set of motives was at the starting point of my participatory action.

In Donald Davidson's analytical treatment of action he describes the link between a reason and an action. This is described as a *rationalization* which is composed of a "pro-attitude" (desire or duty etc.) and a "believing" (knowing or perceiving etc.), (Davidson, D. 1963: 3). For example you may act because you want to. In acting you may believe, judge or sense that what you are doing is what you want. For Davidson this forms the "*primary reason*" for action (Davidson, D. 1963: 4). He also emphasises that an action is a physical event that is given a fuller description when you give your reasons for acting. You may describe an action as 'I moved the books' or 'I *wanted* to move the books'. For Davidson the specific event of the movement of the books must happen for the first description to have any certainty. The event is fastened to the first description in a way that wanting is not. The second description gives additional information, a reason for the moving of the books. The wanting that occurred in the action could have been other attitudes like 'I *had* to ...' or 'I *remembered* to ...'. In this example it could be said that Davidson is underlining that the natural or causal relation in the event of action has a place alongside any rational explanation of an action. <sup>4</sup>

When Davidson links causality to actions and reasons he points out that the 'pro-attitudes' and beliefs that make up the reasons for an action do not cause action in any coarse way. They are not best described as simple events. Instead

he describes attitudes and beliefs as “states, dispositions or conditions” (Davidson, D. 1963: 12) and he describes the way you become aware of your states. “States or dispositions are not events, but the onslaught of a state or disposition is” (Davidson, D. 1963: 12). The mental event that causes an action is not always a singular instant “like a stab” (Davidson, D. 1963: 12). It is the change in conditions that you undergo. It is the coming into awareness. This *can* happen in an instant. Like the way you can suddenly realise you’re late by looking at your watch. It can also happen in other ways and there are numerous metaphors that accompany such transitional states. “A wish *floods* into your mind” (Davidson, D. & Hornsby, J. 1997). An emotion can *reveal* itself, a thought can *dawn* on you or an idea can *spring* to mind. In this image of people taking posters from the Gonzalez-Torres work ‘Untitled, (Republican Years)’ (Fig. 8) it is clear that participation in this work is not as instant as glancing at your watch. It is an involved action that may involve a variety of immediate and more deliberate actions. One of the participants appears to be building a paper boat with his poster.



Fig. 8

Before I took a poster from the pile that made up ‘Untitled’, 1993 there was a gradual realisation that this kind of action was permitted and after I carried out my action any doubts I had swiftly dissipated upon realising that I had done nothing wrong. The action itself surfaced from this complex or reasons like a sudden event. This seems to support the view that causality should be ruled out of explanations of action. It suggests that actions emerge from more complex patterns of reasoning. Davidson accepts that the mental event such as the spike

of awareness you get when you look at your watch should not be upheld as the universal explanation of the way that action is caused. However this does not rule out causal explanations of action, he argues that a gradual coming to awareness of a mental state that is also associated with action can equally be explained causally.

Nonetheless Davidson stresses the difficulty in associating natural causal laws to your reasons for action. Causal laws can be confidently used to explain a solitary event so in this case the “singular causal connection” is acceptable (Davidson, D. 1963: 16). However when it comes to reasons for action you have to deal with more of a narrative. Someone may respond to a situation in one way and another respond to the same situation in a different way, depending on their beliefs, attitudes, character, history etc. In Martí Quixé’s participatory design work ‘Do scratch’ you are supplied with a light-box that has been painted black (Fig. 9). You are invited to scratch into the surface to ‘complete’ the object. In one sense you can predict that the nature of the work will probably cause its owner to act on the work in some way. They will probably scratch something onto it but in another sense you cannot easily predict what, why and how they may scratch onto it. These decisions involve a complex group of reasons.

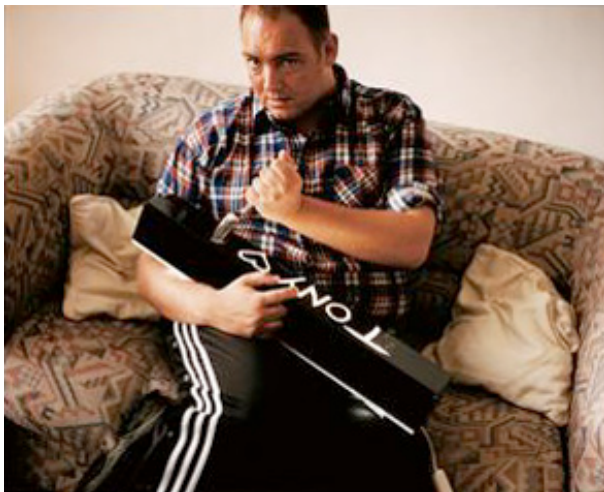


Fig. 9

So there does seem to be a mismatch between causal explanation and reason explanation. Overly rational explanations of action only deal with singular events of decision, as though there is no milieu of competing reasons out of which decisions are reached. In hindsight reasons for action become streamlined. The confusing influences that make up the process seem to fall

away to reveal a core of rationality. "What emerges [...] as *the* reason frequently was, to the agent at the time of action, one consideration among many, *a* reason" (Davidson, D. 1963: 16). Davidson holds that casual explanation has a place in his descriptions but also acknowledges that there are difficulties in the relationship between causal and rational explanations.

Davidson splits his description of the primary reasons for an action into a 'pro-attitude' and a 'believing'. If the participatory artwork is considered from this perspective then it could be asked what kind of primary reasons best describe participatory action in such works. While engaged in participation do participants *want* to take part, *feel obliged* to take part, *remember* to take part, have an *expectation* that they will take part or that they *must* take part? Do participants *know*, *believe*, *judge* or *perceive* that what they are doing is what they want or feel obliged to do? If 'Untitled', 1993 is considered from this perspective then it could be suggested that the 'pro-attitude' I experienced when I took a poster was primarily that I wanted to take a poster. There was an element of expectation in my action because I was unsure of its legitimacy but I did not feel obliged to act, that I was remembering to act or that I must act. If my action is considered from the perspective of belief then my action was not something that I knew about or perceived as something to do. I judged that I could take a poster if I wanted one.

Davidson suggests that in hindsight explanations of action are often oversimplified in order to bring them closer to a simple causal explanation. Could it be said that this account can also describe the way participatory action is oversimplified to a simple causal explanation. Following Davidson it is not so easy to view participatory actions as being simply caused. From this perspective if the range of causal conditions that generate action is recognised then it could be said that this enriches an explanation of participatory action. Participatory action can be explained as being caused by a broad spectrum of mental states ranging from sudden events of attentiveness to states that unfold little by little over an extended period.

In Anscombe's explanation of causes and reasons it was claimed that the simplicity of being caused to act by a single reason may be necessary in order to provide a suitable degree of accessibility for the greatest amount of participants although this could reduce the work to a series of instructions. It was also argued that if too many reasons are sought for why you should participate then

this perhaps inhibits the spontaneity of the participation although a number of reasons to participate may add sensitivity to the work. It could also be claimed that the more a participatory work dictates only one possible reason for action the less participatory it may be. It could even be that a potential participant would tend to look more sceptically at the participatory claims of such an artwork.

It could be said that a stronger sense of participation surfaces when there is one reason for participatory action considered among many reasons because this more accurately resembles the variable ways that you ordinarily make decisions. It may lead to a participatory action that feels less contrived. I would say that this again highlights the fine balance required in order to successfully encourage participation. Torres presents a situation with a set of reasons for participation that allows for a free response in the midst of the 'narrative' of the situation. It is a manageable situation but not so regulated that you may feel coerced into action. You may take a poster on the basis of a group of reasons not because you are compelled by a single cause.

#### **4.4.3 Free action**

'Untitled', 1993 like all participatory artworks is exposed to an unstable situation. There may be participants who want to test the limits of what is an acceptable participation. Someone could attempt to take away more than one or two posters. In theory you could return to the gallery every day and take away as many posters as you could carry away knowing that the stack would always be renewed. In a sense this is part of the question that 'Untitled', 1993 asks. There are unspoken constraints in place in works like 'Untitled', 1993 but to what extent are they publicly negotiable and to what extent do such works offer genuinely free participation.

Davidson is interested in a causal analysis of the freedom to act. He investigates the extent to which your behaviour is caused by your surroundings or the extent to which your actions influence your surroundings.<sup>5</sup> He disregards explanations of human action where belief and desire are portrayed as being absolutely governed by "events outside the agent" (Davidson, D. 1973: 63). Instead he favours accounts that identify free action as a "*causal power* of the actor" (Davidson, D. 1973: 63). Davidson suggests that there is neither an active

nor passive sense in which you can describe your free actions. You may think that you instigate your own desires but there could be evidence to show that someone or something else has caused these desires. Equally events happen to you and determine your actions but often it is valid to represent free action as an inner transformation that leads you to cause changes in the world.

Davidson remains doubtful about the possibility of achieving a clear causal law that could say what should be in place in order for an action to be described as intentional or free. He points to the idea that for something to be described as intentional there must be some kind of conformity between the practical reasoning behind it and the action. Davidson is responding here to cases of 'causal deviance' that create problems for causal explanations. An action is usually said to be deliberate because you formed a plan in your mind before carrying it out, but there are occasions when an unexpected sequence of events still provides you with the planned result. Following Mele (Mele, A.R. 1997: 7) 'I may try to shoot you and miss, but the shot stampedes a herd of cattle and they trample you to death'. This kind of 'causal deviance' raises problems concerning *intentional* action and leads to a consideration of whether your death can be described as an intentional action. In terms of causality Davidson says the link between the reason and the act "[...] must follow the right sort of route" (Davidson, D. 1973: 78). This kind of example shows the multiplicity of potential causes that may link a reason with an action. The effect may be what is wanted but this is achievable in more than one way. Thomas Hirschhorn's work 'Altar to Raymond Carver' demonstrates the kinds of deviance that can appear in participatory art (Fig. 10). Hirschhorn has produced numerous public altar-pieces and likens them to the shrines that often spontaneously appear at the sites of fatal car accidents or crime scenes. In this work he installed photographs, mementoes and texts associated with Raymond Carver in a site in Glasgow's Gorbals area. Typically Hirschhorn finds that his work is respected and sometimes people may add their own token of respect. On this occasion he found that residents began to steal elements of the work and was obliged to adapt to this situation.

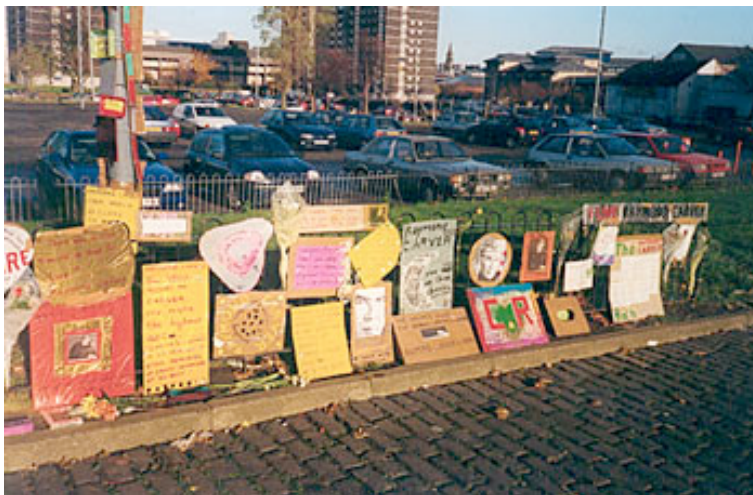


Fig. 10

In using the phrase 'causal power of the actor' Davidson emphasises the freedom of individuals in choosing their own actions rather than more deterministic accounts of freedom. This contributes to an explanation of participatory action because in being invited to participate in an artwork, to an extent, you relinquish your own freewill. You are free to choose to participate, but to an extent the range of the participation is limited and only has legitimacy under the auspices of the artwork. From this perspective it could be said that the controlled participation that is invited by 'Untitled', 1993 reveals the contingency of freewill. It could be said that 'Untitled', 1993 does not present unconditional freedom but demonstrates a viable freedom within prevailing conditions. 'Untitled', 1993 demonstrates that a participant is both *compelled to act* and *free to act* in conditions that are not within their control; an individual acts on the ratio between the phrases: 'events happen to you' and 'you cause changes'. For example you may attempt to write or draw on a poster by Torres and return this to the pile of posters. Similar incidents have been reported to happen in other examples of Torres' work and members of the gallery staff have not permitted these actions. From this perspective Torres permits a degree of freedom but also insists on a level of control.

When Davidson describes the 'right route' in explaining an intentional action he draws attention to how a desirable outcome is achievable in more than one way. If this condition is applied in an explanation of participatory action then a counter argument is presented that suggests that participatory action should be as free as possible. If it is accepted that artists are often unwilling to control the range of interpretations that their work may produce, then it could be said that they may be equally unwilling to strictly control any approaches to



participation in with their work. In this sense it could be said that an artist would have to accept that participation might not follow the 'right route'. It is easy to imagine participation occurring in divergent ways, so in making a participatory artwork no artist can absolutely prescribe how participation comes about. In this way it could be said that a participatory artwork should have an inbuilt flexibility and openness in order to accomodate a broad range of potential approaches to participation. From this perspective 'Untitled', 1993 avoids being overtly prescriptive. Gonzalez-Torres does not instruct or announce warnings to participants. The work presents a tolerably free exchange for participants to the extent that he is confident that audience response will follow the general 'right route' to participation.

#### **4.5 Conclusions**

The aim of this chapter has been to understand participatory action from an analytical perspective. When participatory action is understood from this point of view it is recognised that a categorisation and explanation of action is required and it is assumed that a participatory action involves reason and intention. The main question of this chapter was: Can participatory action be rationally explained? I suggest that participatory action can be rationally explained. However it should be recognised that rationality should not be applied to rigidly explain participatory action as a deliberate process or physical event. Rather it should be employed to ensure that participatory action is explained in terms of the reasonableness of communication.

When an analytical perspective is taken on participatory action then an appropriate measure of thoroughness has to be considered. How rational can accounts of participatory art be? I suggest that participatory action can be generally categorised as a central case of agency. Participatory action is something you do because your senses draw you towards it or because you have thought about it. It can also be adequately summed up by a 'coarse-grained' description. Therefore a finely detailed psychological or physical representation of participatory action is not required. However it is suggested that a measure of precision is used to differentiate between actions. In this way the temporal and spatial particularity of each person's participation is preserved.

An analytical explanation takes into account how language is used to describe action and criticises explanations of action that overlook the role of language. A

naturalistic or volitional description where the series - neural activity or act of will/muscle movement/action is used to explain action is considered to be inappropriate. Consequently it is unsuitable to think that some kind of primitive occurrence sparks off a sequence that leads to the final physical event each time participatory action takes place. Rather participatory action arises in artworks that are described and discussed. Participants, onlookers and artists offer questions and descriptions about their participatory actions. In the context of communication participatory action operates on a threshold where the private authority of the artist and participant is surrendered. You privately know in what sense you participate but you must also openly explain yourself if asked. It is suggested that participatory action may also occur in different ways. Participation may be 'triggered' in a direct way but this can feel too much like coercion. Instead I would say that participation is most successful when you feel like you are freely taking part or when you feel like you don't have to explain why you took part.

It is additionally suggested that analytical explanations of action theory offer the possibility of a participatory action theory. In line with Davidson's action theory I would say that the explanation of participatory action as being caused by a 'pro-attitude' and a 'believing' is appropriate. In correspondence with this action theory I would say that participatory action may arise from complex combinations of possible motives and can be caused by a sudden awareness or the gradual realisation of the possibility of action. Finally I would say that a participant's right to test the limits of a participatory artwork should always be taken into account. In an artwork you may not have unhindered freedom to participate in any way you feel but it should present a satisfactorily open situation that accommodates rather than regulates participatory action.

## 5.0 Phenomenological Explanations of Participatory Action

### 5.1 Introduction



Fig. 1a & Fig. 1b

#### *Context*

When I experienced 'Tropicália' and 'Six Sensorial Masks' (Fig. 1a & Fig. 1b) I wholeheartedly embraced the opportunity to participate. I took my footwear off and walked around the environment of 'Tropicália'. I walked through sand, beds of bark and straw and strayed into a pool of water. I negotiated hanging tarpaulins and badly lit 'mazes' while a cockatoo occasionally cried out overhead. Other participants were also present and for the most part we kept our distance although as I left one of the 'mazes' I unintentionally gave someone a bit of fright in the dark. Throughout the experience I was often hesitant but I also got completely caught up the world of 'Tropicália'. When I came across 'Six Sensorial Masks' I immediately started rummaging through the works and tried on three masks in quick succession alongside another participant who was also trying out the masks. I tried on a mask that had mirrors over the eyeholes and spent some time staring at the weirdly intimate reflection of my own eyes and tried to look around the gallery. I tried on a mask that had maraca-like pods paced over the ears and shook my head back and forth and I also tried on a mask that had herbs and spices sewn into a pocket in its nose cone and I spent a short time breathing in the aroma.

#### *Problem*

When I participated in these works I was aware that there was a definite intention to bring the participant closer to an experience of the work. You had to take your footwear off and walk into a space and you had to wear the work. There was a sense that Oiticica and Clark were endeavouring to place the participant 'in' the work. Through participatory action you were placed at the

centre of an *experience* of the work. However it is suggested that during this experience you did not examine your own participatory actions in a dispassionate way. You were not making the kind of external observations of your participatory actions that an onlooker would be making. Instead you had a sense of being active and this sense of activity was a personal way of being conscious of your own actions. Following from this it can be said that not all of the participatory actions in these artworks were done so consciously or can be clearly explained in terms of rationality. In 'Tropicália' it could be said that I acted because I felt like it, acted without thought or in response to enthusiastic emotions. Additionally it is suggested that participatory actions in these artworks highlight the role of bodily sensation in the experience of action. It is proposed that an explanation of the experience of human action will help artists and participants to appreciate that participatory action can be treated as a phenomenon rather than a rationalisation.

### *Resolution*

It is therefore proposed that the experience of participatory action can be explained from a phenomenological perspective. From this viewpoint it is recognised that participatory action has a personal and intuitive dimension, participatory action is not always produced by reasoning individuals but frequently has an affective aspect and participatory action can also be viewed as a transitive event that is closely connected to the human body. From this viewpoint it is suggested that key aspects of participatory action as a phenomenon will be demonstrated.

### *Summary*

In this chapter a phenomenological viewpoint will be introduced with a look at the role of intentionality in accounts of action. Jean-Paul Sartre's views on the role of human action will be explored and the phenomenology of action will be developed with an explanation of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's reflections on the intentionality of bodily movement. The remainder of the chapter will then focus on aspects of Paul Ricoeur's early phenomenological descriptions of the human will and action. He considers many aspects of the human will, however this chapter will concentrate on the aspects that are closest to an explanation of action. These accounts will provide a phenomenological perspective on action and throughout the chapter these findings will be compared to aspects of 'Tropicália' by Hélio Oiticica and 'Six Sensorial Masks' by Lygia Clark. These comparisons will provide a phenomenological explanation of how action is

embodied in the participatory artwork. In these comparisons the discourse on action will once more be used as a means to reach a fuller understanding of participatory art rather than a means to discuss the philosophy of action on its own terms. Therefore these comparisons will place accounts of action at the service of explanations of 'Tropicália' and 'Six Sensorial Masks'. This will help to answer the main question of this chapter: What does participatory action feel like?

## 5.2 Intentionality

In my encounter with 'Tropicália' and 'Six Sensorial Masks' I was able to think about what they may be about but at the same time was able to actively engage with them. I explored 'Tropicália' in the same way I would when exploring the interior of a building and I approached 'Six Sensorial Masks' as though they were items of clothing. In each case I was able to inwardly feel or think about the works as I would if I was surveying art that involved no direct participation but there was not such a neat separation between my contemplative state and my active state. It is suggested that the phenomenological term 'intentionality' will help to explain this state of affairs.

### 5.2.1 Basic conditions

From the outset the way that the terms *intention* or *intentionality* are used in phenomenology should be distinguished from the everyday usage of intending. Intending in everyday usage means: 'To have a plan or expectation'. *Intention* or *intentionality* does not mean this in phenomenology. It is used like a technical term in phenomenology to describe a property of your mental states. It could be said that when you are in a mental state that has intentional properties then it means that you are in a mental state that is directed at something. It is the directedness of your mind. For example you can have a *perception of* a bowl. You may also have a *memory of* that bowl. In this example your mental states have different intentional properties when you perceive and remember the bowl. Similarly if you admire or dislike someone then it could be said that your admiration or dislike is directed to a person. Your admiration and dislike have intentionality.<sup>1</sup>

There are many other mental states that are directed outwards: You can be amused by an event, be proud about an achievement, feel affection for a person

etc. These kinds of examples tend to suggest that intentionality draws you towards the external world and away from the notion that thoughts and feelings are so inward looking. In this way it could be said that phenomenology, owing to its concern with intentionality, aims to question descriptions of human affairs that are based on crude divisions between the private, inner world of the mind and the public, outer world of 'reality'. By addressing the way the mind is oriented towards the world phenomenology emphasises an underlying acceptance that the world is shared in common with others. <sup>2</sup> It could be said that minimalism tends to focus on how an experience of art can also have these shared characteristics (Fig. 2). Sol Lewitt uses numerical systems and geometry to demonstrate that sculpture is not necessarily about the expression of the inner experience of the artist. He uses number to demonstrate that art can also have its basis in methods that question the private and inner reality of art.

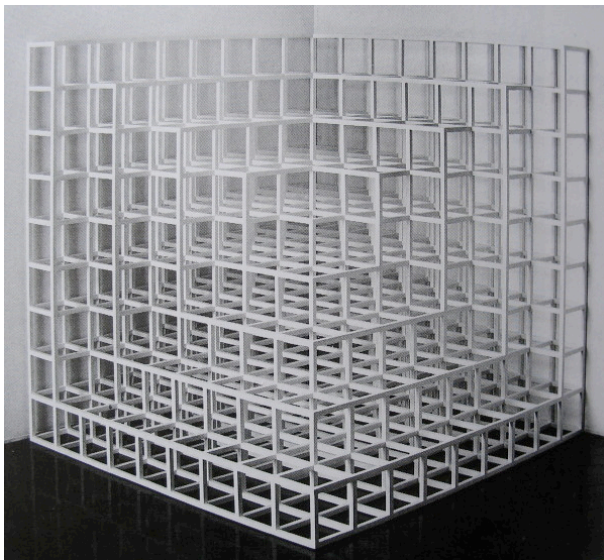


Fig. 2

### 5.2.2 Consciousness

If intentionality is not included in a model of consciousness it can be argued that there is a tendency to sink back into a crude understanding of the mind as being some kind of inner existence as opposed to outer existence. There is an inclination to think that the mind is “an enclosed sphere with its circle of ideas, the term “consciousness” is usually considered to be univocal.” (Sokolowski, R. 2000: 12). Consciousness is imagined as being wakeful but unvarying until an experience comes along to give it some character or direction. De Boer comes to

similar conclusions. The mind becomes like a uniform medium. A state without changes where experience can be located. These experiences are then said to be *in* consciousness. Consciousness becomes an “[...] undifferentiated concept. It is a passive receptacle, a box: the contents ‘are simply there’” (De Boer, T. 1978: 160). Intentionality provides a sophisticated model of consciousness and sensitivity to the diversity of human experience. When intentionality is taken into account consciousness is no longer seen as an unvarying phenomenon. In phenomenological terms, consciousness is constituted by intentionality from the beginning and because intentionality is “highly differentiated” consciousness is therefore not considered to be so invariable (Sokolowski, R. 2000: 12). De Boer suggests that if a phenomenological outlook is adopted then this offers a description of consciousness that “[...] consists of a finely branched out system of intentional functions” (De Boer, T. 1978: 160).

Edmund Husserl describes intentionality as the *intentional act* and suggests that what is significant in intentional acts is that they “[...] constitute a unity of consciousness” (Husserl, E. 1970: 540).<sup>3</sup> Husserl teases consciousness apart and recognises that it is not just one thing. It does not exist prior to and independently of intentionality. Consciousness is not an already composed, uniform presence that hovers silently behind intentionality. Intentionality is what consciousness is comprised of. Intentionality such as the perception of an object or the memory of a past event merge in particular ways to form consciousness: “These contents have, as contents generally have, their own law-bound ways of coming together, of losing themselves in more comprehensive unities [...] consciousness is already constituted, without need of an additional, peculiar ego-principle”. (Husserl, E. 1970: 541). Intentional acts join together and disconnect in countless ways, revealing the numerous, suitable modes of consciousness for each experience. “[...] whether perceivingly, imaginatively, retrospectively, expectantly, conceptually or predicatively” (Husserl, E. 1970: 550). In this way Husserl can describe consciousness as a “contemporary ‘bundle’ of experiences” (Husserl, E. 1970: 561).

Another feature of intentionality is that when evidence of its presence is found then it can be said that it is a sign that some kind of mental state is at work and that the laws of the natural sciences are not completely applicable in this instance. “It is the intentionality of mental phenomena that distinguishes them from physical phenomena” (Crane, T. 1998: 819). If the example of the bowl that was perceived and remembered is reconsidered, it can be said that the bowl

exists in the natural world but perceptions and memories of it have an intentional property that is unlike the bowl. From a phenomenological viewpoint the intentional properties of perceptions and memories occur differently to the way natural objects occur. The intentionality of perceptions and memories is a “mark of the mental” (Crane, T. 1998: 819). This kind of distinction is what marks phenomenology off from other more empirical approaches to consciousness that tend not to recognise the centrality of intentionality and attempt to explain consciousness in terms of raw sensation or “immanent data” (De Boer, T. 1978: 159). Consciousness simply faces the data of sensation while the property of intentionality recedes.

Intentionality has been described as the directedness of mental states. It has additionally been suggested that this directedness encourages an outward looking awareness that is responsive to the world rather than sealed against the world. Intentionality also demonstrates that consciousness appears in diverse ways and cannot be described as a steady state and that consciousness is associated with mental states rather than explained in physiological terms. Intentionality plays a role in an explanation of participatory action because it stresses the ties between an internal and an external reality. The way that intentionality highlights the directedness of mental states could be said to be similar to the way that the externally oriented features of action are emphasised in the participatory artwork. The participatory artwork encourages a publicly observable action that is an outwardly directed attitude to the artwork.

I would say that ‘Tropicaliá’ is experienced in this way. You walk through its compartments and practically negotiate a set of circumstances. There may be moments of reflection within the installation but these stand in relation to the required participatory actions. You participate in activities that appeal to the practical and inquisitive side of your character as well as the impartial and thoughtful side. This kind of practical exploration does not lead to distance between participants but an acknowledgement that they share the same space. In Clark’s work the emphasis is on the senses. The wearing of a mask directs your attention towards a singular optical, aural or olfactory sense. Considered from a phenomenological perspective these works do not accentuate how sensation is a physical fact that gives direction to a passive consciousness. Through an active engagement rather than a contemplative distance these works demonstrate how you are actively engaged while sensing. You do not



observe yourself sensing. You inhabit an active kind of awareness that has many distinctions within it.

If intentionality is used to explain participatory action then participation can be associated with the *connections* between your thoughts or emotions and your actions 'out there'. Participation *links* outwardly directed attitudes with mental states during a participatory action. This can offset any tendency there may be to explain action in crude physiological terms and consciousness in crude psychological terms.

### 5.3 Sartre

Oiticica and Clark's works physically drew you in. To fully experience the works you had to walk around the environment of 'Tropicália' and actually wear one of the 'Six Sensorial Masks'. It could be suggested that by being surrounded or contained within these works that you became part of them to an extent. By being so physically involved it could therefore be asked if you are getting emotionally and intellectually involved to the same extent. It is suggested that Jean-Paul Sartre's view on human action will help to explain participation in these works. He describes how actions create links with an individual and his or her surroundings.

When it comes to explaining human action phenomenologists and existentialists like Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Ricoeur have all challenged the dualist view of mind and body.<sup>4</sup> Their main argument is that the separation between mind and body does not in fact exist and that there is no need to examine the difficulties in unifying the mind and body because they were never apart to begin with "[...] only what is first separate can be united [...]" (Danto, A.C. 1984: 100). They argue that the tendency to assume that there is a split between mind and body is a consequence of an excessively objective approach. In the search for certainty about the world Cartesianism immoderately rejects most of human experience. In place of a dualism they propose that primarily there is an undivided way of being in the world that can be summed up as "I *am* my body" (Danto, A.C. 1984: 99).

Arthur C. Danto explores the consequences of accepting the traditional dualism in explanations of human action. He considers a simple action where you may move a stone with a stick that you hold. The relationships between the stone the

stick and the hand can be clearly observed. This can be explained in objective and physical terms but how is the relationship between what lies 'behind' the hand explained? Between the hand and the self? Again physical terms like muscles, nerves or even neural connections can be used, but in doing this there is the risk at some point of coming up against the idea of an act of will. There is an attempt to explain that there is a mind behind all the apparatus of the body. This results in the claim that there is a dualism between the complex mechanism of the body and the guiding mind. For Sartre this conception of the body in action is not helpful. The body should not be conceived as something that is used in the same way that the stick is used to move the stone. It can be argued that there are occasions when the body is used in this way. There are points in life where the body is objectified. In hospital you may look at your body as a damaged system. As an athlete you may treat your body a system of muscles but these are not representative accounts of the body. You do not usually treat your hands or even your muscles, nerves and neurons in this way, "[the body] is not used because it is the very fact of using." (Danto, A.C. 1984: 99). An unnecessary division between the body and the mind should not be introduced in an explanation of action. For Sartre the active state presents an underlying single state of being in the world. It could be said that minimalism reinforces this understanding of human action. The viewer does not contemplate a work like Robert Morris' 'Untitled' in detached visual terms (Fig. 3). The work reminds the viewer that they are an active person who is bodily present in space. The viewer is encouraged to negotiate the situation that the work sets up in the gallery space and the actual object of the work itself in dynamic way.

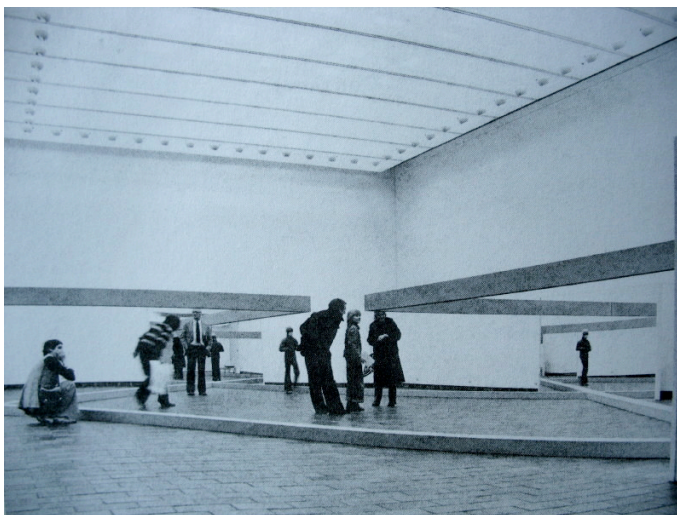


Fig. 3

From Sartre's point of view when you say, 'I *am* my body' you are not saying that you only have a physical being and you are not oversimplifying the mind/body problem. Sartre is suggesting that the sense of being a body is the way you should start to address the problem. You start with an unbroken sense of being one thing. Actions are not ordinarily observed as physical movement nor are actions usually analysed with reference to some psychological impetus. In this sense you may say that you do not *have* a body. You do not *possess* a body and a body does not *accompany* you in life. You have always been your body. The body is not a mere physical and spatially extended thing to be viewed from the privileged realm of the mind: "one does not know it, one *lives* it" (Danto, A.C. 1984: 100). It could be suggested that when he acknowledges the possible alternatives in an explanation of human action Sartre is not advising that you disregard all objectivity. He is not denying the value of natural science in explaining physiology and psychology. He is recommending an approach to human action that recognises that there are numerous ways of interpreting action but is pointing out that specialist approaches to the problem should not necessarily be given preference. He is suggesting that when human action as it is generally *lived* is talked about, it is worth bearing in mind that there is a basic sense of the body in movement and that this basic sense is in a very direct way a single experience that allows an engagement with the world, "We do not survey the world, but rather are engaged." (Danto, A.C. 1984: 101).

Sartre suggests that the experience of action should be used to reconnect consciousness with the world. In this way he argues that the body is unsuitably objectified when the traditional separation between mind and body is supported. Instead he underlines that mind and body are one thing and that existence has its basis in an indivisible state of being. Consequently he claims that when you generally act in the world this is an experience that you 'live' and not an objective event that you gain knowledge of.

How do Sartre's ideas on human action assist in an explanation of participatory action? It could be said that just as action is employed by Sartre to reconnect a detached consciousness to its surroundings, so participatory action overcomes the traditional separation between viewer and artwork. The underlying philosophy of the participatory artwork then becomes a challenge to the traditional dualism of mind and body. The disembodied mind is re-connected to the body. The participatory artwork re-engages consciousness with the world through its invitation to participate in action. I would suggest that the way that

participatory art overcomes the viewer / artwork separation echoes how participatory art cuts across and goes beyond the discipline of aesthetics (§ 1.3). Participatory action places your experience alongside other kinds of experience in the world and brings to light the idea that aesthetic experience and ordinary experience are connected. Participatory action tests the modernist notion that aesthetic experience takes place in 'immediate' time and instead offers grounds for conceiving of aesthetic experience within 'durational' time.

This explanation is also supported by Carolyn Korsmeyer's re-evaluation of the hierarchy of the senses in aesthetic experience (§ 2.2). She questions the way that the 'higher' senses are traditionally favoured over the bodily senses because they are associated with supposedly inferior concerns. This causes her to doubt the associations that are conventionally linked to the senses. She rethinks the body's role by reconsidering why the ability of the 'higher' senses to function at a distance is associated with the objectivity of thought and queries the superiority of the detachment and independence that this distance brings.

The participatory actions that comprise artworks like 'Tropicaliá' or 'Six Sensorial Masks' introduce some equivalence between the intellectual senses of contemplation and the bodily senses of action. In this sense mind and body are assumed to be less separable. As a result the traditional explanation does not apply to a participation in an artwork because for the duration of the participatory action it is assumed that there is indivisibility between participant and artwork. Sartre's existentialism where mind and body are undivided from the beginning begins to seem more appropriate in this case. Through action the mind is reconnected with its bodily situation and through action the disembodied participant is reconnected to the context of the artwork.

How does Sartre's resistance to an objective view of human action play a part in an explanation of the participatory artwork? When Sartre resists objectivity he is resisting the idea that the body should be *known* in the way that things can be known about a complex mechanism. When you are saying action is *known* you objectify it and understand the body as an instrument of a detached consciousness. As an alternative he claims that the body should be *lived*. It is through the body that a feel for the experience life is achieved. When you say it is *lived* you are acknowledging that general human action is a constant presence in life and your experience of this action gives you a certainty about how it feels

to act in the world. Clark's masks reinforce this notion of the single state of being in the world. By inviting the participant to wear the work Clark weakens the impression that your participatory actions can be explained in objective physical terms. When you wear glasses they tend to blend in with your 'lived' experience of vision. To be most effective you ordinarily do not use your glasses in a self-conscious way. Clark's masks merge with the participatory action in a similar way so that the participant's state of being active is closer to a 'lived' experience of action rather than a self-conscious knowledge of being active. There is less of a separation between a self who surveys the participatory action and the self who engages in the participatory action.

## 5.4 Merleau-Ponty

### 5.4.1 Body Image

When Sartre talks about a 'single state of being' where the experience of the body is 'lived' he is referring to an everyday experience of the body. He is describing a way of looking at ordinary action in the world that does not divide it into a psychological motivation and a physical phenomenon. From this perspective human action connects internal and external reality. I have suggested that when I participated in 'Tropicália' and 'Six Sensorial Masks' I had a similar everyday experience that felt like ordinary action in the world. I was connected to the art object through participatory action. Merleau-Ponty captures the feel of this ordinary action in the world in his phenomenology of bodily movement.

Merleau-Ponty proposes that the body is experienced as a "*body image*" (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962: 98). For Merleau-Ponty body image should be described in terms of its *form* and in terms of its orientation towards *tasks*. When body image is described as a form he is suggesting that the space of the body is experienced in a different manner to the way that the space of the world is experienced. Objects in the world are next to one another but you do not experience parts of your body in this way. You experience the body as a total arrangement that does not usually differentiate between its parts or between its experiences: "the space of my hand is not a mosaic of spatial values." (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962: 98). According to Merleau-Ponty with this wholeness of body image comes an increased awareness of how the body integrates with its endeavours. Just as the space of the body is considered differently to its surrounding space you also have a different way to direct your bodily space.

You operate with a personal set of coordinates. When you are engaged in a purpose you do not think about the abstract location of the body, you experience “a *spatiality of situation*.” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962: 100). The body image is experienced as a singular volume, not as just another impersonal region in space. In this sense Merleau-Ponty is able to say that the body image is experienced in a special way as “the laying down of the first coordinates.” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962: 100).

By explaining action with reference ‘Body Image’, Merleau-Ponty proposes that the body is experienced as a totality of experience that occupies space in a personal way. It is not a “compendium of our bodily experience” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962: 98) that takes up an abstract position in space. This theory of the body image has a role in an explanation of participatory action because it offers a description of what it feels like to act in the world. Merleau-Ponty captures a sense of the body in action that is more than a physical or quantitative explanation and also does not detach the acts of the body from a pure kind of consciousness. He acknowledges that the body image is responsive and open to its environment as a set of circumstances rather than as a set of spatial co-ordinates. I would say that this conception of the body is consistent with how it felt to participate in the work of Oiticica and Clark. As a participant in these works I did not view my actions in simple physical way nor did I spend all of my time in a detached state where I contemplated my actions. As the image of the original installation of ‘Tropicália’ in the Whitechapel art gallery demonstrates (Fig. 4) the way that you could take part in the work had a measure of everydayness to it. When I took my footwear off and wandered around ‘Tropicália’ these participatory actions had the same qualities as ordinary actions that occur in practical and everyday experience. My participatory action had a sense of wholeness that is similar to the wholeness I usually experience in my actions. In this sense if the notion of the body image accurately captures the feel of the actions in ordinary situations then it can also be accepted as a satisfactory description of the participatory actions that were invited in these artworks.



Fig. 4

It has been suggested that when an artwork like 'Tropicália' generates participation that feels like ordinary action in the world then this is one of the work's virtues. Participatory action is enhanced when it feels like an everyday action. It could be said that in the discussion based on Donald Davidson's explanation of causes and reasons that similar virtues of everydayness in participatory action also come to light (§ 4.4.1). Davidson proposes that explanations of action are often oversimplified in hindsight. A single reason is frequently isolated as being the cause of most actions. Instead he suggests that it is more correct to explain that a reason that causes an action usually emerges from a group of potential reasons. In the discussion it is proposed that a more convincing sense of the cause of participatory action can be captured if one reason is considered among a group of reasons because this more accurately resembles the variable ways that decisions are typically made. I would say that just as participatory action that has the ordinary feel of the body image is less contrived so a participatory action that is not compelled by a single cause is less contrived.

#### 5.4.2 Concrete and Abstract Movement

My participatory actions in 'Tropicália' and 'Six Sensorial Masks' may have had an ordinary and unaffected 'feel' but they took place in the context of art. From one standpoint it could be said that this does not make any difference. My participatory action is the same as my ordinary actions 'in the street'. From another standpoint it could be argued that my actions no longer had a straightforward purpose because they were part of art. I was not acting for an ordinary reason and this introduced a degree of self-consciousness into my actions.

In his work Merleau-Ponty considers the responses of a patient who can act more or less normally but who is unable to carry out simple body movement to order. He differentiates two types of movement and describes these as “*concrete movement*” and “*abstract movement*” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962: 104, 107). He proposes that a simple example of concrete movement may be reaching to hold your nose and an example of abstract movement is simply pointing to your nose. Merleau-Ponty notes that the patient was able to hold his nose but unable to point to his nose. This leads him to ask what the difference is between holding your nose and pointing to it. They seem so similar. For Merleau-Ponty when you engage in a concrete movement like holding you are surrounded by the everyday purposes of life. You are familiar with the feel and scope your actions. You are immediately attuned to the purpose of your movements and you do not scrutinise your actions. When you engage in an abstract movement like pointing you inhabit a more detached situation. You occupy objective space and view your actions like an observer. Abstract movements are the kinds of things that you may be asked to do in an experiment or as part of a drama. They involve an element of artificiality or imagination.

Based on the evidence demonstrated by a patient Merleau-Ponty outlines the notions of concrete and abstract movement. I would say that this notion of concrete and abstract movement is relevant in an explanation of the actions that occur as part of a participatory artwork. It could be said that my participatory actions in the work of Oiticica and Clark are best described as concrete rather than abstract movement. These actions took place in practical situations that had tangible tasks. The engagement with ‘Tropicaliá’ and the trying on of masks in Clark’s work took place in a ‘real life’ set of circumstances. These participatory actions retained the feel of ordinary real life situations so in this sense they were concrete. They were not like an experiment because participants were not instructed to carry out a neutral set of exercises or tested on their ability to participate. Nonetheless I would say that these actions also had an abstract dimension because they all took place in the arena of an art gallery and it could be argued that this is similar, (although much less controlled) to the way that an abstract movement may take place in the arena of a clinic. I would suggest that my actions were endowed with some minor abstract qualities in the context of these participatory artworks. Examples of participatory actions that are more fully abstract can be seen in the ‘Adaptives’ produced by Franz West in the seventies and eighties (Fig. 5). West made a series of abstract objects that were made primarily with the human body in



mind. He exhibited these objects and encouraged viewers to try them out, often taking photographs of the outcomes. In each case participants pose and add drama to the situation giving the works a theatrical edge.



Fig. 5

#### 5.4.3 Flexibility

Participatory action in ‘Tropicália’ and ‘Six Sensorial Masks’ could be described as both concrete and abstract. As I explored these works my temperament varied between these two poles. My actions felt quite ordinary and were focused on the practicalities of the situation or were tinged with a measure of self-consciousness. It could therefore be asked if participatory action always has this plurality.

Merleau-Ponty found that his patient was able to engage in concrete movements that involved real situations and actual purposes but if the patient’s concentration was broken he observed that the original smoothness of the movement was lost. In an attempt to regain the movement the patient began an extremely awkward sequence of gestures that looked as though he was going through a series of measuring actions to help him to re-engage with the concrete action. Based on this evidence Merleau-Ponty suggests that when the patient is withdrawn from the usual unbroken tasks of life he ran into difficulties. When the patient was asked to complete an abstract movement in the form of an experiment a similar kind of behaviour occurred. When the patient was asked to move an arm and asked to pinpoint its position after the movement he again went through an awkward sequence of actions “a laborious

decoding of stimuli and deduction of objects.” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962: 109). From this study Merleau-Ponty proposes that because it is usually easy to complete both concrete and abstract movements then it can be said that you usually have the flexibility to cope with these two different situations. You can act in a world of particular tasks where your movements have a practical purpose but you can also deal with more artificial situations where you are asked to concentrate on isolated movements that are divorced from practical purposes. The patient does not have this flexibility. The patient is unable to easily incorporate the artificiality of the abstract movement required by the experiment. He describes this as a “confinement within the actual [...]” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962: 109). The patient can comfortably act in the context of actual tasks but can only translate actions that are disconnected from the usual course of practicalities such as the abstract movements required in an experiment by treating the situation in terms of impersonal coordinates. This is why the movement emerges so awkwardly because his position is only known through an abnormal system of calculation.

Merleau-Ponty highlights the significance of this flexibility in dealing with different kinds of movement and the problems that emerge when the conception of movement becomes inflexible. He describes how you can be fully absorbed in a concrete action or objective about an abstract action. The states of absorption in action and of objectivity towards action demonstrate how important it is to recognise that there are different ways to direct the self towards action. He argues that these different ways of approaching action have intentional properties. The difficulties of his patient show that without a full sense of intentionality, without the flexibility to move from concrete to abstract movement you are not free to move the body. You do not have the flexibility that allows you to pay close attention or to pay no heed to your movements. Like the patient without intentionality the body is treated in simple physical terms. It approaches “the condition of a thing” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962: 121). Erwin Wurm tests this notion of the human body as a thing with his series ‘One minute sculptures’ (Fig. 6). He exhibits some instructions and invites participants to photograph their actions with the stipulation that they hold the pose for a minute. It could be said that these works involve an extreme version of Merleau-Ponty’s abstract action. The participant’s body is removed from the actual purposes of life and simply becomes another prop to support an absurd abstract situation.



Fig. 6

With normal motility you are flexible enough to move between concrete and abstract movement. Merleau-Ponty puts forward the idea that the directedness of intentionality is like the degree of flexibility that you have when you deal with concrete and abstract situations. Intentionality can explain how you adapt when you act in the world and different demands are made on you. Intentionality helps to explain the diversity of experiences that your actions are likely to focus on.

At this point it should also be emphasised that Merleau-Ponty affirms the significance of intentionality in an experimental situation. He compares clear examples of concrete and abstract movement to prove his argument. It is not my aim to experimentally verify that intentionality occurs in participatory action. As has been discussed earlier it could be said that participatory actions have concrete qualities but may also have abstract qualities therefore participatory action is not such a clear example of concrete or abstract movement. As a result it is not so easy to demonstrate how intentionality can inform an explanation of participatory action. Nevertheless when Merleau-Ponty states that there are “several ways for a body to be a body, several ways for consciousness to be consciousness.” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962: 124). I would suggest that this helps to describe the feel of participatory action in artwork like ‘Tropicália’. In this work I was active in a number of ways. Following Merleau-

Ponty it is suggested that the sense you have of the body in movement gives you a sense of the diverse group of intentional properties that may be linked to action. Intentionality integrates experiences in the form of an outwardly directed state of mind and is responsible for “centring a plurality of experiences round one intelligible core” (Merleau-Ponty, M. 1962: 121). I would say that in ‘Tropicália’ my actions were ‘concrete’ with a mild abstract quality. They felt like ordinary experience but were part of an artwork. While I took part in the installation I experienced pleasure, amusement, doubt, puzzlement, expectation and hesitancy. I would say that these dispositions and the dispositions of others as they participated in ‘Tropicália’ are accounted for by intentionality.

## **5.5 Ricoeur**

The everyday feel of participatory action has been compared to Merleau-Ponty’s description of body image. Your actions come together in a total arrangement of bodily space. The feel of participatory action has also been compared to Merleau-Ponty’s description of intentionality. He describes how you need a certain amount of flexibility to move from concrete to abstract movement and suggests that this flexibility is an indication of presence of intentionality. Merleau-Ponty’s treatment of action has provided a way of looking at participatory action as a bodily phenomenon. It is suggested that the treatment of action and the will offered by Paul Ricoeur can add to this explanation of the feel of participatory action.

### **5.5.1 Reciprocity**

When I tried on one of Clark’s ‘Six Sensorial Masks’ I was aware that my attention was focused on a specific sensation. Each mask gave you an opportunity to isolate yourself from the gallery and privately reflect on the aural, visual or olfactory. The mask also made me feel anonymous. I felt like I had been coaxed into assisting in a strange kind of art experiment and had become a member of a group of test subjects who had all undergone a similar set of experiences.

Paul Ricoeur explains the human will in terms of freedom and nature.<sup>5</sup> This could be described as an explanation of the way that you do not choose your bodily and physical nature but your freedom to choose is dependent on this

nature. For Ricoeur this link between freedom and nature forms the primary relation at the heart of the human will. The relation between the voluntary and the involuntary is *reciprocal*. As a result it is incoherent to study the voluntary will in isolation from involuntary nature. The will can only be captured in the light of its involuntary conditions. For example according to Ricoeur explanations of voluntary things like a decision must always be tempered by the conditioning influence of what is frequently outside of your control such as your character, habits and emotions. “The involuntary is *for* the will, and the will is *by reason* of the involuntary” (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 86).

Ricoeur describes how the will moves from *decision* through *action* to *consent* while always considering reciprocity as the underlying theme. In these descriptions Ricoeur identifies the points where the voluntary becomes restricted by the involuntary and where the reciprocity between the voluntary and the involuntary is fully realised. For example he looks at the way that your character may inhibit your voluntary action or the way that your voluntary action may be explained by an objective scientific account of your behaviour. In such cases he wants to find the border regions between phenomenology and natural science. “Objective studies are used as counterfoci which limit phenomenology” (Ihde, D. 1971: 29). For Ricoeur it is important to stress instances where you have *objective descriptions* of involuntary states and where you may have *experiences* of those involuntary states. There is a sense in which you can understand an objective description of an involuntary action such as breathing but there is also a sense in which you can only *live* through such an experience. Through always acknowledging the reciprocity between the voluntary and the involuntary Ricoeur aims to highlight the fulcrum on which existential life tilts into objectified nature.

His method of identifying these points of reciprocity refers to the two different schemes used when the body is described. An objective and subjective scheme is used to describe the body in terms of the “*object body*” and the “*personal body*” (Ihde, D. 1971: 32). You consider yourself as an object body when you refer to empirical psychological studies. You become an accumulation of objective facts. You also simultaneously refer to yourself as a personal body when you refer to the intentional properties of mental states. You become a private subject. For Ricoeur these two readings of the will are radically different but there are overlaps where you can see one influence the other. Ihde refers to this as the “ambivalence border” (Ihde, D. 1971: 33).<sup>6</sup>

Ricoeur's work looks directly at action and the human will. When the actions that take place during a participatory artwork are being considered Ricoeur's perspective is particularly relevant because he stresses the significance of the reciprocity between the constraints of the human nature and the free human will. Ricoeur explains that an explanation of the freedom of action rests on the fulcrum between the involuntary forces of bodily objectivity and voluntary experience of choice. How does this assist in an explanation of participatory action? I would say that there are parallels between the way that Ricoeur emphasises the reciprocity of the will that can be realised in objective or subjective terms and the way that participatory action be explained objectively or subjectively. Ricoeur presents a model that allows participatory action to be viewed as operating on the boundary between public action and private experience. He provides a vocabulary for discussing participatory action as an overlap between action that is known in its objective sense and as it is lived in human experience.

From this perspective 'Six Sensorial Masks' highlights this 'ambivalence border' between the object body and the personal body (Fig. 7). The masks have an empirical and experimental dimension to them. When you participate you isolate your senses. You put a mask on and you focus on the reflection of your own eyes or concentrate on the smell of herbs. These participatory actions can be viewed as evidence of your objective behaviour. Participants who tried on Clark's masks were all responding to the stimulus of the work and these responses could all be independently compared. Everyone had an actual physical reaction. Yet from a phenomenological viewpoint participants also had a personal experience of their participatory action. They had an experience that tied them to their own distinct series of participatory actions that are not so easy to put side by side with another's 'lived' experience. In this sense participation emerges from the overlap between the objective and personal body.



Fig. 7

### 5.5.2 Motivation

The main incentive for taking part in ‘Tropicália’ was that it was part of my research. I had specifically travelled to the Barbican to see this kind of participatory art. However there were other people exploring the work while I was there. I assume that they were driven to participate for other reasons. They didn’t have to take part and in many ways it was easier not to; so did they participate simply because they were inquisitive and were in the mood to join in?

Ricoeur carries out his discussion on motivation by describing it as series of levels starting with a very basic sense of decision-making found in primary needs and ending up in rational deliberation. When a decision is made Ricoeur suggests that you are forming a *project* in the world and when you do this you tend to find that you have motivations or reasons for your projects. However he claims that the involuntariness of the body lies at the basis of the voluntariness of your reasons in decision-making. The origin of how the self is oriented towards its projects and carries out its projects is found in your bodily situation. It can be argued that there are many other factors that have an influence on decision-making. You inhabit a social and political world and usually think about your projects in a rational way. Why should the body be such a significant aspect of decision-making? Ricoeur wants to identify a primitive sort of decision that can act as a model for general decision-making. He has an interest in identifying the overlap between the voluntary and the involuntary so when he proposes that the body has a role in decision-making he is locating a point of tension between a free decision and something that may limit this freedom. He locates this point at the lowest threshold of what could be called a decision. He sees this point of tension arising in the experience of basic *needs*.

He proposes that the experience of hunger for example, gives an indication of the borderline between a freely taken decision and a bodily requirement. This *ambivalence border* is a veiled region in experience where you are unable to track any conscious decision-making because it is where the body takes over. You *need* to eat and drink to survive. You *need* to breathe and the heart *needs* to beat.

When Ricoeur refers to *need* to highlight the body's central position in an explanation of decision he claims: "To experience is always more than to understand" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 86). For Ricoeur the experience of *life* comes to you as fundamentally as the objectivity of *thought*. He also characterises *need* as at once a lack and an impetus. Basic needs are experienced as both an inner drive and an outward movement. He embodies them as an "[...] uneasy, alert absence, an active, directed lack" which can "carry me beyond myself" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 90). In this sense hunger drives me toward food and tiredness leads me towards sleep. Ricoeur shows the lower range of experiences that are associated with decision and demonstrates at what point it is appropriate to consider these in the physiological terms of the *object body* and at what points experience becomes accessible to phenomenology and is explicable in terms of the *personal body*.

Having established need as an indication of rudimentary corporeal experience Ricoeur considers higher corporeal motivations such as ease and difficulty and suggests that the reciprocal relationship between ease and difficulty has a significant bearing on your sense of well being. For Ricoeur this willingness to face difficulty or the "taste for overcoming obstacles" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 119), surfaces once stability is achieved with your surroundings. When security to well being is established, the imagination turns to the rewards of further striving, you present to yourself "[...] the pleasure of struggle, [...] the value of energy" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 119).

Ricoeur then associates these corporeal motivations with the broader field of rational deliberation. Ricoeur refers to the deliberate will of intellect and a spontaneous will of feelings. Intellectually the will is seen as being subject to an idealised system of reason. Actions are rationalised without regard for how they relate to the material world. In terms of your feelings you have a will beset with all the contradictions of material existence like emotion and desire. For Ricoeur you cannot treat these two systems independently, you have to assume



they are connected in some way. You have to assume “a phenomenology which goes beyond the *opposition* of reason and sensibility.” (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 131).

Ricoeur describes need as both a lack and an impetus. He also considers difficulty alongside ease and assumes that the intellect and feelings have a primary connection. He stresses that there is interdependence between each of these poles of motivation. Ricoeur’s discussion of *motivation* contributes to an explanation of participatory action because he highlights the two-fold nature that lies at the basis of motivation. I suggest that Ricoeur’s depiction of motivation can explain how you are motivated to take part in a participatory artwork. At the basis of participatory action there is a dual aspect that is always aiming beyond its limits. Lack carries you towards something external, the rewards of difficulty disturb your sense of ease and feelings can influence your rational deliberations. Each of these cases demonstrates how motivations engage with their opposite. Using this as an explanation of participatory action shows it as a realisation of “other-directedness” (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 90).

Ricoeur’s descriptions of need do not have a direct bearing on ‘Tropicaliá’. I did not have any need to take part in the work. However it is suggested that the model for decision-making that he creates from his description of need is useful in an explanation of this artwork’s participatory actions. In ‘Tropicália’ you are motivated to go beyond yourself and actively participate on the basis that you are willing to introduce the difficulty of participation into the easy situation of detachment (Fig. 8). You could easily look on as others navigated around the various inhospitable and slum-like environments of ‘Tropicália’. Ricoeur’s model suggests that the motivation to move from ease to difficulty stems from an appetite to ‘go beyond yourself’. I would say that this is one way of explaining why participants would have an impetus to engage with such a situation.



Fig. 8

### 5.5.3 Choice

My participation in ‘Tropicália’ and ‘Six Sensorial Masks’ was pre-meditated. I had thought it over and expected to come across these works. However these kinds of plans seemed remote when I was actually in the gallery and moving from being a spectator to being a participant. I was focused on the overt consequences of my actual participatory actions rather than my plans.

According to Ricoeur to choose is to sum up all previous hesitations and to end the argument. “[...] it completes it and at the same time breaks it off.” (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 164). A choice brings everything together and starts something new simultaneously. He describes this state of affairs as offering the main paradox in the description of choice. How do you escape endlessly considering your options if you don’t interrupt the considering? When you interrupt your considerations you decide, but in deciding, everything you went through previously becomes concealed in a sudden outcome that is unlike the process. For example in choosing a television channel, you go through the options, evaluate them and then decide. But the instant of decision seems to swallow up the period of selecting options.

Ricoeur tackles this paradox of choice by viewing the situation in terms of “deliberation” (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 168) and “irruption” (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 171). A ‘deliberation’ aimed at a choice is understood to be a slow process. For Ricoeur a choice under consideration becomes the trying out of hesitations where you seek to refine a mess of in-decision “Thus choice is a resolution of deliberation.” (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 169). Understood in terms of ‘irruption’ all your trials join together. They become a singular “leap” (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 171). There is no

slow acquisition of certainty. Precision is arrived at through a sharp declaration and the moment is described as a dare or risk.

He concludes that in order to do justice to the full scope of the journey towards a choice 'deliberation' and 'irruption' should be reconciled. The hesitation and the 'leap' of choice become resolved in the physical act. In Ricoeur's words "The act reconciles practically the theoretical discord of the two readings" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 181). I would say that this description of choice captures how it may feel to encounter a work like Ernesto Neto's work 'Mime Glip' (Fig. 9a, 9b & 9c). This is a stuffed object with openings on all sides. I recognise the initial cautiousness that would be feature in an encounter with such an object but I also recognise the sense of risk that would overcome this sense of cautiousness.

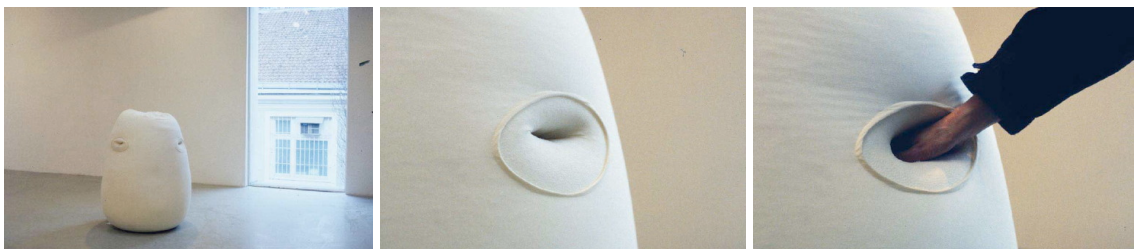


Fig. 9a, 9b & 9c

Ricoeur suggests that choice is very considered and also quite abrupt and that both of these aspects are brought together when they result in an action. In his description of choice he suggests that action can take on the responsibility of resolving the 'paradox of choice'. How does Ricoeur's description of *choice* play a role in an explanation of participatory action? It is suggested that there is a link between the emphasis that Ricoeur gives to the conciliatory power of action in his description of choice and the emphasis that action is given in the participatory artwork. In a description of how you choose to participate in the work of Clark and Oiticica you would tend to describe your choices as impulsive when your participatory actions are literally like a 'leap' and you would tend to describe your choices as calculated when your participatory actions are more like a considered set of activities. In trying on one of Clark's masks I arrived at this decision in a moment, without any specific deliberation during the action although I was aware that this artwork was being exhibited and had deliberated to an extent about whether to participate in the hours prior to arriving at the gallery. 'Tropicaliá' involved a series of actions with a lot of immediate decisions and tentative trials. It involved a degree of spontaneous daring and some clear deliberation from its participants. Ricoeur's explanation

of choice allows for the recognition that in the participatory artwork all action is a practical manifestation that is *simultaneously* a sudden decision to participate and a gradual process of reaching that decision. In this sense participatory action is a practical embodiment of these different routes to decisiveness.

#### 5.5.4 Spontaneity

When I came across 'Six Sensorial Masks' I had already planned to take part and was prepared. My participation was not impulsive. However it must be assumed that many others may have been taken by surprise by Clark's works and took part in the spur of the moment. In this sense they did not choose or were not clearly motivated to take part.

In his description of spontaneity Ricoeur states that it is more apt to say that it arises from "preformed skills (know-how)" rather than reflexes. (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 231). Preformed skills demonstrate a familiarity with your bodily movements. In carrying out a 'preformed skill' there is more of a negotiation between the world and the self. It is skill that "regulates" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 242) between something outside itself and an emerging recognition of a potential impetus to move. It is initiated from a sense of making-even a situation that is fluctuating. Reflexes are not relevant because they appear suddenly with a natural force. They cannot be decided on. A reflex is a response to something outside that produces an action like a blink in the form of a "signal" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 242). There is no persuasive element, no reflecting will. Reflex is a sharp occurrence with no development. For Ricoeur a conception of rudimentary skill that uses 'reflex' as a base only offers the "addition of rigid partial movements" as an account of the elements of action, (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 244). In its place he proposes a primitive situation for action embodied in a "[...] dynamic tension capable of variable resolution" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 244).

Another approach to the roots of spontaneity is to consider the influence of the emotions on actions. Ricoeur claims that rather than viewing emotion as a driving force for your actions they should be seen as a process through which an action is achieved. It is suggested that prior to the experience of emotion you inhabit a steady state of "self-possession" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 252) and it is through an emotional experience that you are prompted to act. In this situation the will seeks to reinstate a sense of balance. Ricoeur views emotion as a "fertile disordering" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 253). Upon the introduction of an emotional

state the uniformity of experience becomes excited, drawn together and fixes on a goal. Extreme involuntary emotions can have a visceral impact. You can end up 'beside yourself' or in a feint. In this instance you summon up stability with an equally physical, corrective response. In this sense emotion works as an "[...] amplifying in the body" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 256)

Habit is also considered to be associated with spontaneity. For Ricoeur habit does not arrive in one go but develops in time through experiment and adoption. The gaining of a habit grants a dormant sense of ability. Ricoeur describes how one becomes "[...] in some sense charged" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 288). Furthermore habits present a situation where you can engage in actions "inattentively" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 291). They can give you an easy option. This reveals their negative aspect, which is their capacity to turn you from a life of development and new starts towards a life of reliance on what is already known. For Ricoeur it is always possible that "man is buried under habits" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 299).

Ricoeur looks at know-how, emotion and habit and in each case highlights the need to maintain some kind of equilibrium when you undergo a spontaneous action. These kinds of action are all in a 'dynamic tension'. In the case of know-how there is a tension between the physical world and the self, in the case of emotion there is a tension between a steady emotional state and a 'disordered' state and in the case of habit there is a tension between the 'charged' abilities habits offer and the complacency that they can also induce. Ricoeur's explanation of *spontaneity* plays a part in an explanation of participatory action because it could be said that there is a parallel between Ricoeur's explanation of spontaneous action and the spontaneity that may generate a participatory action. His emphasis on the need to maintain a balance even in the midst of a spontaneous action suggests that there is a kind of elasticity to spontaneous action. On an occasion when you spontaneously participate in Clark's artwork: with reference to the subject of reflex you may be so familiar with the idea of rummaging through items of clothing that you 'automatically' participate in 'Six Sensorial Masks' by searching through the collections of masks and trying them on; with reference to the subject of emotion you may be so amused by the absurdity of Clark's masks that this may prompt you to take part; with reference to the subject of habit you may *not* participate because you are so accustomed to the idea of not participating in such situations. If Ricoeur's explanation of spontaneity is adopted then the spontaneity of your decision to

take part in 'Six Sensorial Masks' is not like a 'signal' of reflex or 'driven' by emotion and habit. From this viewpoint the impulsiveness of a participatory action has its basis in a dynamic tension between stability and instability. Your spontaneity springs from the 'give' between the extremities of your physical, emotional or habitual states.

### 5.5.5 Effort

In my encounters with Oiticica and Clark's works I would say that there were only some minor difficulties to overcome. You only had to take off your footwear and enter an installation or wear a strange looking mask but in doing this you risked being embarrassed, uncomfortable or looking stupid. This did not present me with a physical challenge but you still had to have an active outlook and be willing to try these works out.

Ricoeur conceives of action as something in which the body becomes an organ of the will. However like an internal organ it isn't considered when you ordinarily act. It disappears. He describes an ideal action as something that passes across "*the docility of a yielding body*" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 309). It could be said that the optimum conditions for such depictions of action would be in athletic or dance performance. However such absolutes of freedom in the direct response of a docile body are a momentary flaring up of just one side of the real situation. The situation must also include resistance. The most basic form of resistance in action is an awareness of muscular heaviness otherwise known as 'effort'.

In explaining how effort relates to the actual act of movement Ricoeur points to the inadequacy of descriptions of action and effort that deal with the situation as a group of component parts. He is critical of models which lead to illustrations "[...] of effort" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 318) or models that illustrate how efforts "*precede movement*" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 319). In these cases a theory of effort is sought in terms of how effort is sensed. For Ricoeur sensation cannot fully account for an effort. Sensations can only provide a partial view because they don't coalesce to explain the unity of an effort. Sensations may indicate your movements but they don't illuminate the effort. "[...] the register of sensation is a register of fact." It is a "sensual multiplicity strewn about the muscles" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 319). Sensation offers numerous pieces of data but it does not offer the effort. Ricoeur posits instead that effort inhabits a totally

different level of experience: “a radically non-representative, radically practical dimension” (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 319). He suggests that the “properly *active* moment” (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 319) must be kept to the forefront of conceptions of effort otherwise its practicality and transitive identity is degraded to a succession of theoretical components. An event is spoken about as though it were an object. According to Ricoeur you settle for a “*spectator* representation of effort” (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 320).

How does a discussion of *effort* enhance an explanation of a participatory action? Ricoeur states that the body tends to be overlooked in action and you tend to concentrate on the activity at hand. However, he also argues that an ideal bodily transparency is rare and that the body is commonly encountered in the efforts you make towards action. For Ricoeur this effort should not be understood as a sensation because this only offers the objective data of effort. Effort cannot be objectified and you cannot ‘spectate’ on your efforts. The works by Oiticica and Clark do not pay particular attention to the significance of physical effort. They do not call for an optimum kind of athletic or choreographed action or have any aspects that obviously resemble exercise or dance. In this sense effort appears in these works in the way that it ordinarily appears in your everyday actions and is barely remarked on. Nevertheless Ricoeur’s explanation of effort plays a part in explaining the overlooked presence of effort in a participatory action when it is recognised that according to Ricoeur personal effort is an indication that a *person* is involved in the action. Effort guarantees the inimitability of each participatory action carried out by the individual. Effort particularises each action. No matter how minimal, its presence is an assurance of the existence of an experiencing subject: “The effort of attention that none can take in my place gives to knowledge the personal mark of ‘I [...]’” (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 337). If Clark’s work is considered from this point of view then everyone who participates tries on a mask. However their individual participatory actions are distinguished by being connected to their own specific set of particular ‘active moments’. In ‘Tropicaliá’ all participants negotiate the installation’s numerous environments yet participation is individuated by the particular effort linked to each individual’s participatory action of navigating the space (Fig. 10a & Fig. 10b).

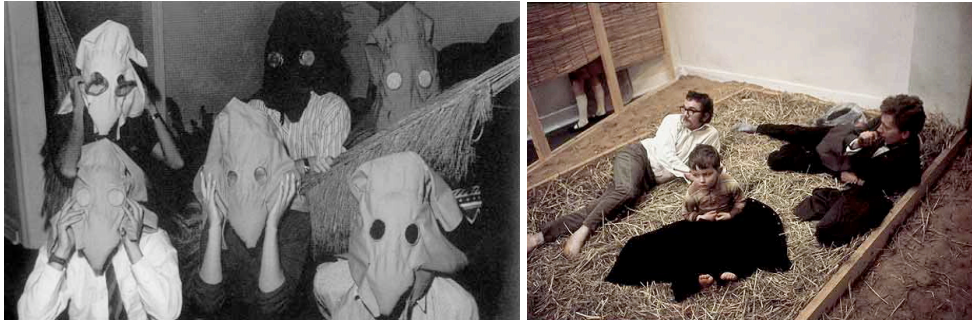


Fig. 10a & Fig. 10b

It has been suggested that when an artwork like 'Tropicália' is explained in terms of effort then the specificity of each person's participation is highlighted. Jennifer Hornsby's explanation of action and doing also draws attention to the way that participatory actions can be individuated (§ 4.2.3). From Ricoeur's perspective personal effort guarantees the distinctiveness of each participatory action. Participants may all do the same thing in a participatory artwork but their individual effort particularises each action. On the basis of Hornsby's explanation all participants could be described as doing the same thing. However the *action* of each participant is particular to the moment of its occurrence and its concrete position in space. It is suggested that these two ways of individuating participatory action identify the nature of each personal contribution to participatory art. Each participant has a subjective experience of participation that can be accounted for objectively as an event in time and space.

## 5.6 Conclusions

The previous chapter has shown that participatory action can be rationally explained. Participatory action can involve reasons, intentions and can take place in the context of communication but it was also recognised that there are aspects of participatory action that are not so easy to rationalise. These are the aspects of participatory action where your feel for action takes precedence over your reasons for action. Participatory action is not always such a deliberate process; it can come about with no clear goal in mind, straightaway without any thought, because you 'feel like it' or simply for the sake of the action itself. In this chapter the objective has been to look at how general human dispositions and the body may influence participatory action in order to capture the 'feel' of participatory action. Participatory action has been explored



in terms of the phenomena of the mind and body in action, ordinary bodily movement and voluntary and involuntary action.

In this phenomenological explanation the distinction that is made between the inward looking mind and the physical body alters. In place of this distinction is a series of connections between outwardly directed states of mind and the body. The separation between participant and artwork is similarly reconsidered. For a participant the body is no longer described as a mechanism that is detached from the will and the world is not observed in a detached manner. The body participating in an artwork forms a unified state of being. Through this respect for the association of participant and artwork I would argue that participatory action traverses the discipline of aesthetics, placing ordinary experience on level pegging with aesthetic experience in art.

When the feel of ordinary bodily movement is explored in terms of participatory action I would say that it is convincingly captured by the notion of 'body-image'. Participatory action is acknowledged to have a similar wholeness to ordinary bodily movement and is considered to be receptive to the everyday purposes of life even though it occurs in the relatively atypical setting of a participatory artwork. I propose that the more participatory action has this everyday feel then the more at ease participants will feel in their actions. They will be able to suspend the usual impassiveness encouraged by the gallery and their participatory action will feel less contrived.

When the relationship between voluntary and involuntary action is compared to participatory action this provides an opportunity to consider the boundary between the lived experience of the body in voluntary action and objective accounts of the body in involuntary action. In this explanation the boundary is not strictly defined but is thought to be reciprocal. From this perspective participatory action arises from the convergence of the 'personal body' of experience and the 'object body' of knowledge. The motivation to participate surfaces from the 'two-fold' nature of an inner need that always carries you towards something external. A decision to participate may be measured or impulsive but the actual act of participation reconciles these divergent attitudes. The spontaneity of participatory action emerges from the energy of the movement from calm to disturbed physical, emotional and habitual states and finally I would say that the slightest personal effort is enough to individuate your participatory action.

## 6.0 Social Explanations of Participatory Action

### 6.1 Introduction

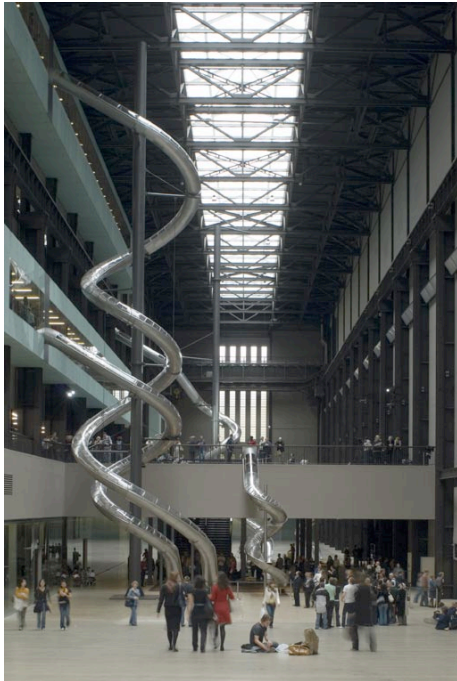


Fig. 1

#### *Context*

When I experienced 'Test Site' (Fig. 1) it was a busy Thursday afternoon at the Tate Turbine Hall. There were lengthy queues for all the exhibitions including 'Test Site'. As I waited with two friends in the queue I watched blurred forms slide down its chutes and observed the clusters of onlookers surveying participants as they shot from the outlets. The chutes looked enormous and my friends and I were keen to take part. We picked up our free tickets and were informed that there would be a delay because they were spreading out participants at half hourly intervals. We split up and I made my way to the 4<sup>th</sup> floor and visited another gallery for an hour. At the designated time I joined a queue that led to the entrance of the 4<sup>th</sup> floor chute. As I waited I noticed that there were large bins filled with knee and elbow pads, helmets and white cotton bags. I put on a helmet and picked up a bag in time to be briefly instructed by an attendant about how to sit at the mouth of the chute. As I adopted the position for sliding there was a momentary wait while he looked at a surveillance monitor trained on the outlet of the chute to check that the previous participant had arrived safely. I made a rapid descent down the chute and struggled to my feet on the crash mat as an attendant asked me if I was okay.

### *Problem*

When I participated in 'Test Site' the scale of the group participation and the extraordinary architectural scale of the project initially struck me. Alongside these observations I was also aware of the social nature of the event and was surprised that participation seemed to involve a set of quite everyday tasks but that these tasks amounted to such a remarkable experience. It could be said that the central participatory action of 'Test Site' is the physical experience of descending down a chute at high-speed. There is no doubt that this is the main reason why most people participate but it is also suggested that there are other significant aspects to 'Test Site' that draw attention to the social aspects of participatory action. Some very ordinary actions have to be completed to prepare you for the high speed-descent. Numerous conventions have to be observed, a lot of the participatory action involves public negotiation and much of the participatory action takes place in a functional or utilitarian context. It is proposed that an explanation of the social aspects of action will help artists and participants to appreciate that participatory action appears in a public context that involves social conventions.

### *Resolution*

It is therefore proposed that participatory action can be explained from a social perspective. From this point of view it is recognised that participatory action should not be isolated from the particular circumstances in which it takes place. A social perspective does not neutralise the context of action in order to rationalise it or describe the experience of action. This approach does not represent participatory action as though it appears on its own but connects participatory action to previous and successive actions. From this viewpoint it is suggested that key social aspects of participatory action may be demonstrated.

### *Summary*

This chapter will survey human action from a broad social perspective. Aristotle's explanation of practical wisdom will initially be considered because this provides an introduction into how human action can be placed within a more general context. Aristotle places action alongside theory, skills and ethics. Human action will then be considered from a sociological perspective. From this viewpoint the assumptions that are made about rational human action, action as an expression and collective action will be explored. A Marxist standpoint will then be taken on human action and it will be considered in association with work and production. These accounts will provide a social

perspective on participatory action and throughout the chapter they will be compared to aspects of 'Test Site' by Carsten Höller. These comparisons will provide a social explanation of how action is embodied in the participatory artwork. It should be indicated again that in these comparisons the discourse on action is used as a means to reach a fuller understanding of participatory art rather than a means to discuss the philosophy of action by itself. Therefore these comparisons will place accounts of action at the service of explanations of 'Test Site'. This will contribute to the main question of this chapter: What social values influence participatory action?

## **6.2 Practical Wisdom**

When Aristotle considers practical wisdom he is talking about a very general sense of knowing what should be done so that a person may live a fulfilled life. To clarify this very broad definition he compares practical wisdom to other groups of problems that have a connection with practical wisdom. He compares practical wisdom with craft skills and moral action.

### **6.2.1 Craft skills**

While 'Test Site' can be described as participatory art the participatory actions that it invited did not contribute to the literal 'making' of the work. Participation involved using the work in the way you would use a feature of a building like an escalator or a lift. Does your use of this work highlight that participation is simply done and nothing is made?

When he compares practical wisdom to craft skills Aristotle acknowledges that there are differences and similarities. There are differences between practical wisdom and craft skills because the former is concerned with a very general sense of knowing what to do, while the latter concentrates on very specific situations such as being skilled at woodwork or gardening. There are similarities between the two because having a skill allows you to produce a good end result and it could be said that if you have practical wisdom then this allows you to attain the end result of a 'good life'.

Aristotle underlines the differences between practical wisdom and craft skills when he identifies what actions are closest to practical wisdom and what actions are more like craft skills. In his ethics he makes the classic distinction

between *praxis* (action and doing) and *poeisis* (production and making).<sup>1</sup> He suggests that the thoughts that go into craft skills are controlled by more decisive thoughts that are oriented toward a fulfilled life: “[...] that which is made is not an end in the unqualified sense (but only an end in a particular relation, and the end of a particular operation) – only that which is done is that; for good action is an end, and desire aims at this.” (Aristotle. 1980: 139). It appears that there is a straightforward distinction between skilful actions that are applied in a concrete way and can be assessed on a practical level and ethical actions that appear to refer to higher values. Honest and kind actions contribute to a more worthwhile life because they embody a good life. However J.L. Ackrill points out that this difference is not so clear. “[...] one cannot divide performances up into those that are actions and those that are productions: one and the same performance can be both. Indeed it might be claimed that *all* actions are in a broad sense ‘productions’; in acting we intervene in the world to produce some change – actions are directed to outcomes” (Ackrill, J.L. 1981: 143). For example in clearing the snow off a neighbour’s path you are being considerate so this action involves a practical production but also contributes towards a fairer social order. You may be honest in a courtroom but your honesty also contributes towards a just verdict. This action is ethical but it also produces a tangible result.

Ackrill’s commentary on *praxis* and *poeisis* contributes to an explanation of the participatory artwork because he emphasises that it is best to explain action in terms of a making *and* a doing. According to Ackrill it is difficult to think of human action solely in terms of something that is abstractly done. Instead action should be seen as having both a tangible result and as being a transitory event that constitutes an ethical life. At first glance it appears as though a participatory artwork is not a product but only involves doing. As a participant it seems as though you are not involved in making anything. You are not explicitly producing an artwork in the way that you may conventionally produce artworks. You are not working on an object or manipulating materials. It could be said that Höller’s ‘Test Site’ stresses ephemeral and participatory actions that refer to a wider social life not the particularity of the artwork as a product. However the participatory actions of ‘Test Site’ such as waiting, preparing, actually sliding and the aftermath of the event can be considered from another point of view. They do not seem to be related to any kind of making, however it could be said that you are helping to produce the artwork in the same way that you are helping to produce justice if you act as a witness

in a courtroom. You are not producing an artefact but your actions as a participant play a role in the creation of participation.

In 'Test Site' the act of sliding may have been the focus for participation and in this respect the work resembled a skateboard park. However you could not say that some participants were employing any special skills while they took part. It encouraged a more general impetus to participate in the social context that surrounded the work.

Aristotle suggests that there are similarities between practical wisdom and craft skills because just as you would say that in order to have a rewarding life you would have to possess some practical wisdom you would also say that in order to make a good table you must have some carpentry skills. You would have to have some prior knowledge about what makes a good life or a table and then employ this in your actions. Nevertheless there are differences between practical wisdom and craft skill because there are no hard and fast set of standards that can be uniformly employed in life that guarantee that it will be rewarding. Practical wisdom can help to decide on an appropriate action in the contingency of the here and now but it can only come up with a very general and rough outline. Practical wisdom is unlike craft skill because it has to be more flexible in order to respond to the individual situations in life. "There is no blueprint for living well and in that sense no clear cut definition of what living well consists of." (Hughes, G.J. 2001: 92).

Hughes also suggests that you have to distinguish practical wisdom from craft skills because practical wisdom retains an overarching moral dimension. When using practical wisdom you are concerned that what you are doing is commendable from the perspective of a rewarding life. Practical wisdom has more potent lessons attached to it and you take a longer view. When you are employing craft skills you are concerned with actions that lead to good products or results. At this level you pursue optimum efficiency. "In the case of a good life, one has to think specifically of the quality of what one is doing, and only secondarily, on occasions, of the causal effectiveness of what one is doing." (Hughes, G.J. 2001: 93).

Hughes' remarks on the differences between practical wisdom and craft skills play a part in an explanation of participatory art because although it has been suggested that 'Test Site' *produces* participation, it is not suggested that

participation should be solely evaluated in terms of craft skills. You could comment on the efficiency of the total participatory procedure of 'Test Site' and say that it was well built or well run. The chutes traced smooth curves from the upper floors of the Tate and were attractively designed in polished metal and clear plastic. The process of participation also ran smoothly with attendants ready to help at important points. However the actions of participants did not require any overt skills so it could not be said that one participatory action was more accomplished than the other. Waiting, preparing and sliding down a chute are the kind of actions that resemble the everyday actions that practical wisdom is frequently applied to. These were not skilful actions that required practice but very general actions. 'Test Site' invited actions that are part of everyday life rather than actions that require expertise (Fig. 2). In this sense they are actions that could be placed in the context of a general comprehension of life linked to practical wisdom rather than actions that can be placed in the context of craft skill that particularly focus on efficiency and dexterity.



Fig. 2

### 6.2.2 Moral action

It has been suggested that when 'Test Site' is explained with reference to practical wisdom that you do not simply 'do' participation you also 'make' participation but it has also been suggested that participation is not 'made' with any special skills. Practical wisdom ensures that participation is seen as an everyday sort of action. However given that they contribute to a participatory artwork can participatory actions be exclusively described as everyday?

For Hughes practical wisdom starts with a rough understanding of how you should act based on a limited experience of life but this understanding is continually enhanced by the demands that are placed on you by individual situations. As your practical experience of particular examples increases so too does your universal understanding of what should be done. You gather together individual situations where you can estimate that you acted in a commendable way. "We come to understand the end – what a fulfilled life involves – better precisely by deliberating about what to do, situation by situation." (Hughes, G.J. 2001: 105). In this way it can be said that a fulfilled life coincides with and is constituted by your every day actions. You gradually assemble an image of what you are generally aiming at in life through practical wisdom.

Ackrill offers a similar explanation of practical wisdom where moral action contributes to an atmosphere of philosophical awareness. According to Ackrill practical wisdom offers a moral guide when everyday actions are carried out. In these instances you are usually not in a position to speculate philosophically or have profound insights, you rely on practical wisdom to help you to decide whether an action is good or bad. In this way by relying on practical wisdom you try to ensure that a general kind of honesty surfaces in your everyday actions. In line with Ackrill this is how the right kind of environment is generated where it is likely that enlightened attitudes can prevail and if these kinds of attitudes prevail then it boosts the chances of the occurrence of philosophical speculation. Practical wisdom is distinctive because it does not provide an unyielding template for 'the good life' but indicates the general outlines of a fulfilled life. In this sense practical wisdom works from the ground up by providing a fertile ground for the growth of deeper insights into how life should be lived. Following Ackrill, "The theory that the *ultimate* objective of morality is the promotion of *theoria* is quite compatible with saying that its more *immediate* objective is that balanced satisfaction; the society that achieves the latter will be the society in which *theoria* has the best chance to flourish." (Ackrill, J.L. 1981: 141).

Hughes and Ackrill underline how practical wisdom is accumulative. You achieve a more universal knowledge of what to do in life through the gathering together of individually instructive experiences. Deeper insights into how life can be lived are accomplished through the build up of moral actions that are informed by practical wisdom. These descriptions of the nature of practical



wisdom contribute towards an explanation of the participatory artwork because they provide a wider context for the everyday nature of the participatory action. The participatory actions of waiting, preparing, actually sliding and the aftermath of 'Test Site' have more of a resonance because they can now be seen as contributing to a wider set of circumstances. It is no longer just another unremarkable action such as the walking or sitting down that you may do in a gallery. If a participatory action is informed by practical wisdom then by taking part you are involved in an ethical question. Is this a good thing to do? What good does this action do? If Aristotle's notion of practical wisdom is adopted in these circumstances then the participatory action is not only a response to the individual situation with all of its immediate problems but it is also seen to be playing a role in the constitution of a wider social life that involves the build up of a more philosophical attitude.

### **6.3 Sociology**

When participatory action is explained from the viewpoint of practical wisdom then it is placed in a broad social context. Participatory action becomes an everyday action that has ethical outcomes and is not just a special skill that you can complete successfully. When participatory action is understood from the perspective of sociology then this broad social context is considered more thoroughly. From a sociological position everyday actions become influenced by social conventions and norms. Human actions become less rationally explicable and are viewed with more pragmatism while a social view on personal expression and collective action becomes relevant.

#### **6.3.1 Analytical philosophy**

At a key moment during my participation in 'Test Site' I lay on my back on a sheet and allowed the force of gravity to pull me down the chute (Fig. 3). I submitted to some very simple physical forces. However this key moment was co-ordinated by an attendant who was observing a monitor that showed when it was safe for me to go. I had to wait to get to this moment and was only in this position because I had complied with the rule to wear protective clothing. Therefore in one sense the central act of participation in 'Test Site' is a simple physical fact but in another sense the act coincides with other social factors.



Fig. 3

R.J. Bernstein sheds some light on this state of affairs when he suggests that human action must be understood not just in the precise context of physics but also in a broad social context. The aim of an analytical approach to action is to demonstrate that a human action can be described as movements of the body and the same human action can also be described as the behaviour of an individual. The objective is then to show that descriptions of action as movement and descriptions of action as behaviour are distinct from one another. To illustrate exactly what this means an example can be considered where bodily movement and behaviour are combined. A man may be at an auction and during the bidding he raises his hand to bid for a piece of furniture. Analytical philosophers of action concede that in such situations the raising of the hand can be described in terms of physiology and that this can provide the causes of the action, however they also claim that this kind of explanation can never adequately explain the raising of the man's hand in the wider context of the auction. A physiologist would describe the raising of the hand in purely material terms as being *caused* by events like the firing of nerve endings in the brain. The analytical philosopher of action on the other hand explains the situation using an entirely different vocabulary. He or she may explain the raising of the hand in terms of the man's *reason* for acting, his *purpose* in acting or in terms of the *rules* that regulate bidding.

This example shows the clear division between ways of describing an action and also shows the implications of an analytical philosophy of action: Human behaviour cannot be reduced to the laws of physical science and as a result the laws of physical science do not have a privileged role in descriptions of human activity. Consequently explanations of action that use notions like purpose or

intention cannot be converted into a more elementary sequence of underlying physical or biological processes. According to Bernstein the analytical philosopher of action claims that “there is something non-reducible and distinctive about the nature of human action and agency such that it requires a conceptual framework which is radically different from, but no less legitimate than, those employed in the physical sciences.” (Bernstein, R.J. 1971: 237).

Bernstein explains the further implications of his claim. A physiologist claims to explain purpose, intention and reason as being *caused* by physical laws. This means that you do not need to rely on any other kinds of explanation for human action. All activities can fundamentally be reduced to physical laws. Bernstein suggests, “Such a view is a necessary [...] condition to support the thesis of the mechanistic materialist that man is nothing but a complex physical mechanism.” (Bernstein, R.J. 1971: 237). If on the other hand analytical philosophy can prove that there is something in human action that cannot be reduced to physical laws, if analytical philosophy can prove that purpose, intention and reason are categorically distinct from physical laws then this proves that human beings are more than very complex mechanisms. It can show that when human behaviour is being discussed a special class of concepts has to be used that highlight the human aspects of an activity rather than just its physical aspects.

To support this argument Bernstein explores A.R. Louch’s proposal that you use *moral* explanations when you explain human action and when you use moral explanations, you cannot use scientific explanations because these two systems of explanation are irreconcilable. Louch claims that you never turn your explanations of action into a neutral set of motions or reflexes. Human actions are not like events that occur in the natural world and cannot be boiled down to stimuli and responses that can be dispassionately analysed. Louch disagrees that the approach should “[...] begin with *colourless movement* and mere receptor impulses as such, and from these build up step by step both adaptive and maladaptive behaviour.” (Bernstein, R.J. 1971: 263, italics mine). He is suggesting that in explanations of action you don’t first of all register a neutral motion and then assess it in the light of reason as an action. An explanation of what you do cannot be understood like a bare fact under laboratory conditions because your actions are always encountered within a set of circumstances and these circumstances tend to be extremely variable. As a

consequence you ensure that your explanations reflect this extreme variability, so they tend to be flexible and are often improvised.<sup>2</sup>

Bernstein explains that an analytical theory of human action sets out to prove that human action cannot be described exclusively in physical terms. Instead a description must also include references to the experiences of reason, purpose, intention and social convention that play a part in all human action. From an analytical perspective these experiences are definitely distinct from the physical aspects of human action. This sociological evaluation of the aims of the analytical theory helps in an explanation of the participatory artwork because this allows participatory action to be associated with a state of mind or shared conventions rather than simple physical movement. If it is accepted that a participatory action has these features then this provides support for a description of Höller's 'Test Site' where participatory action materialises against the complex background of reasons, purposes, intentions and social conventions as well as in terms of a simple physical movement. In this sense the participatory action that is invited by 'Test Site' is not just about waiting, preparing and sliding. In the context of a gallery participants may be taking part because they want to fulfil the conventions of the artwork, because they want to accomplish a personal goal by participating or because they see participation as a donation towards a communal principal. In each case behaviour can be linked to numerous reasons and social conventions that would not be satisfactorily explained if you were to rely entirely on a simple physical explanation.

### **6.3.2 Rational action**

When I encountered 'Test Site' there was no doubt that it was participatory art. There was an overriding recognition by the audience in the Turbine Hall that anyone could take part. In a way the remarkable feature of 'Test Site' was not simply that you could participate but how easily this possibility caused the usual norms of gallery behaviour to evaporate.

Hans Joas' reflections on excessively rational explanations of action help to explain if this move from detached viewing to participatory action only has novelty value because it is a change in the audience's usual routine or is a serious proposal to transform the conventions of the art institution. Joas is critical of the focus of analytical philosophy because it is mainly concerned with

the actions of an individual who operates in an abstract realm outside of social relationships and is critical of economic theories where action is treated as the outcome of a rational choices made in the market place. He also questions certain kinds of psychology where action is understood as behaviour that is a response to external stimuli. He suggests that one way of gaining a valid perspective on all of these theories is to explore how human action has been explained in sociology and proposes that the best way to understand action in the context of sociology is to stress the *creative* features of human action.

The gist of his proposal is that the theories of action described above tend to be extremely selective about what kinds of action should included and excluded from an account of human action. Actions that are not the result of individual deliberation, rational or behavioural become marginalised. As a result a large swathe of human action is relegated to a “residual category” (Joas, H. 1996: 4). As an example Joas highlights the contradictions that emerge when a rational theory of action is used in sociology. He points out that when sociologists adopt an economic model of human action it becomes difficult for them to adequately explain human actions that occur outside of the economic model. For Joas there are aspects of institutions like work, leisure or the family that fall outside of economics and it is these aspects of social life that a sociologist is often most eager to address. Joas proposes that a theory of action is needed that defines itself on the basis of its connection to these social practices rather than a theory of action that treats human actions that fall outside of its frame of reference as abnormal. He claims: “[...] sociological action theory is permeated with the theory of rational action precisely because it sees types of action only as gradations of deviation from rationality” (Joas, H. 1996: 35). Joas refers in full to Max Weber’s typology of social action:

“Social action, like all action, may be oriented in four ways. It may be:

- (1) *instrumentally rational (zweckrational)*, that is, determined by expectations as to the behaviour of objects in the environment and of other human beings; these expectations are used as ‘conditions’ or ‘means’ for the attainment of the actor’s own rationally pursued and calculated ends;
- (2) *value-rational (wertrational)*, that is, determined by a conscious belief in the value for its own sake of some ethical, aesthetic, religious or other forms of behaviour, independently of its prospects of success;
- (3) *affectual* (especially emotional), that is, determined by the actor’s specific affects and feeling states;

(4) *traditional*, that is, determined by ingrained habituation.” (Joas, H. 1996: 39).

He notes the sophistication of the categories of social action but also underlines that there is a continuing need to refer to rational action as the privileged model of action. For Joas what is taken for granted has to be exposed when a preference is shown for rational as opposed to non-rational theories of action.

A participatory action can be considered from an analytical, economic or psychological standpoint. It can be seen as the result of the rational deliberation of an individual and a behavioural response to stimuli. Each of these approaches may reveal some aspects of a participatory action but if Joas’ sociological perspective is adopted then it becomes clear that these points of view on human action can often fail to encompass other more ‘creative’ expressions of human action. Joas’ approach has value in an explanation of participatory action because he would not consign participatory action to a ‘residual category’ but see it as a ‘creative’ action.



Fig. 4

The dominant rational model of action in art galleries is that the visitor should not touch any objects. You usually observe exhibits as shown in this image of the Turbine Hall during a show of portrait sculpture (Fig. 4). It could be said that this model is described in Weber’s terms as social action that is *value-rational*. Your action in a gallery is based on a belief in aesthetic value for its own sake and the behaviour that usually promotes an evaluation of aesthetic value is detachment. In this sense from Weber’s sociological perspective the participatory actions that occur in ‘Test Site’ do not provide norms for action in a gallery and may be categorised as abnormal, marginal or non-rational. A

student points out the tensions that exist between normal and 'abnormal' gallery behaviour during the 'Renascent Scission' pilot study when she mentions two newsworthy instances of inappropriate behaviour during the 'Sensation' exhibition (Appendix II: Audio IX). However if Joas' position is accepted then a participatory action in an artwork is not trivialised as non-rational. By understanding action in terms of creativity rather than rationality its relevance becomes restored because 'Test Site' creates a new set of norms during the period of its exhibition and these new norms give participatory action a primary role. If this creative perspective is endorsed then I suggest that the value of participatory action may be fairly appraised.

### **6.3.3 The assumptions of rational action**

I arrived at 'Test Site' with the intention of taking part and I took it for granted that there would be no difficulties. It turned out that I had to wait an hour because it was so busy but luckily I could manage this. In retrospect I realise that there could have been many more practical difficulties. I could have been on a tight schedule and unable to wait or I could have been with an older or younger group of people and would then have witnessed their frustration at the health and age restrictions.

This situation is addressed by Joas when he lists three assumptions of theories based on rational action: "They presuppose firstly that the actor is capable of purposive action, secondly that he has control over his own body and thirdly that he is autonomous vis-à-vis his fellow human beings and environment." (Joas, H. 1996: 147). The problem with all of these requirements is that they are rarely found in actual human action. Human actions are not always concentrated on clearly defined purposes and are frequently distracted by other objectives. Individuals do not always have the same ability to act. There are many forms of physical ability and you also regularly act on behalf of others or for reasons that are dependent on your environment.

Joas also suggests that a rational approach to action ignores the way that your cultural background may influence your understanding of the role of the body. For Joas a rational theory of action assumes that human action should be considered in terms of an "*activistic relationship to the world*" (Joas, H. 1996: 165). Rationalism makes a cultural assumption that you face the world forcefully with a willingness to change the environment and does not acknowledge that

there are other cultural outlooks that favour circumspection or an acceptance of the prevailing state of affairs. Following Joas the extent to which the customs and traditions of the surrounding community shape interpretations of the role of passivity and activity in human action must be taken into account.

Joas additionally stresses how a rational approach to action assumes that individuals are equally able to control the body in an efficient way. He states that this assumption ignores the way that the body as an organic entity may not necessarily comply with a rationally considered objective; the body does not always act in accordance with an individual's intentions. From the rational perspective the body in action is understood in much the same way that a mechanism is understood. The body plays an instrumental role in your actions. Joas claims that this application of control over the body is not the only way to understand human action and suggests that the alleviation and absence of control have as an important role to play in a general explanation of human action. Events that happen to you like falling asleep, sneezing, sighing, laughing or remaining inactive are not central to accounts of human action but these capture a sense of how marginal action can offset reductive rationalism. Rational action theories tend to overlook the instability that is always ready to breach intentional action. It should be recalled that at certain times Aristotle recommends that it may be more appropriate to embrace a broad range rather than a narrow range of actions (§ 4.2.2). In this sense you should be prepared to expand your spectrum of relevant human actions.

Joas highlights how a rational approach to action tends to overlook some of the concrete conditions in which human actions take place and shows how a rational approach cannot accommodate the range of potential influences on human action. Human action does not always have a clear purpose, does not always start from a uniformly able situation and is not constantly carried out in absolute isolation from other agents. Attitudes to activity and inactivity are culturally shaped and additionally there is a volatile edge to human action owing to the organic nature of the body. From this perspective it could be said that it is more appropriate to build the heterogeneity of these kinds of conditions into an account of participatory action rather than attempt to regulate participatory action in a prescriptive and rational way. In this sense these diverse influences form a pragmatic underpinning for the notion of participatory action. An explanation of participatory action then concentrates on the practical viability rather than the rationalisation of participation. Rather than regarding the erratic features of human action as a problem in an account



of participatory action they should instead be recognised as the basis for a more inclusive explanation of participation. The potential precariousness of the situation underscores the difficulty of producing a successful participatory artwork like 'Test Site'. An individual's decision to not participate can be partially accounted for if these variable concrete situations are acknowledged. The decision to slide down one of Höller's chutes is subject to numerous contingencies involving your physical ability, responsibility to others, your cultural attitude to participation and the extent to which your intention to slide down a chute may be influenced by other more intermediary aspects of action like tiredness, illness, embarrassment or apathy. In Erwin Wurm's 'Do It' series he exhibits an instruction and supplies clothing and a means to document your participation. In this work (Fig. 5) you are invited to stretch a sweater over your body, strike a particular pose and have your photograph taken. I would say that this work makes some assumptions about the abilities of participants. It requires a lot of enthusiasm from participants because you have to put a bit of effort into your actions and you also have to be quite physically fit to achieve the bodily contortions that are required. This comparison makes it clear that there are degrees of participation and that often works can alienate as well as enthuse an audience. Following Joas I suggest that if a participatory artwork is unable to accommodate a degree of audience diversity then it is based in an unfeasible notion of human action.

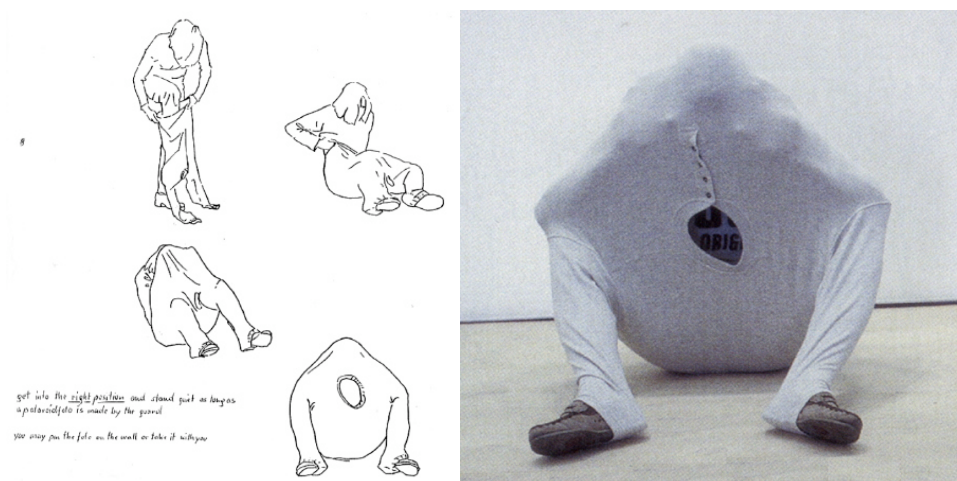


Fig. 5

### 6.3.4 Expression

Having decided to take part in 'Test Site' I began to appreciate that participation was not such a straightforward act. You could not spontaneously

participate in 'Test Site' in the way that you could spontaneously dive into a swimming pool. You had to pass through a number of checks that ensured that the event ran smoothly. You were 'processed' to an extent.

The procedures that channel the spontaneity of participatory action in 'Test Site' can be paralleled with the way that Joas captures human action as an expression. For Joas the most uncomplicated explanation of an expression is that it is a bodily demonstration of an inner feeling: a facial expression or a gesture. However Joas casts doubt on the idea that an expression is the straightforward movement of something inner to the outside.

He supports his claim by considering a phenomenon you frequently undergo when you express yourself. You are often taken aback by what you express or have a need to alter what you express in order to get closer to what it is you are trying to communicate. When this happens it is often the first opportunity you may have to reflect on what you are trying to communicate. Joas suggests that this shows expression to be not such a simple procedure. You often are not able to gain access to the content of private feeling until you see or hear evidence of it in a more public domain. Joas highlights how this demonstrates the shared nature of expression. Expression emerges from a spontaneous interval that generates the unforeseen newness of the expression but also emerges from a shared system of communication that exists prior to the expression. He supports this model because it shows "[...] the mediated nature of the act expression, but also the novelty of each new found expression" (Joas, H. 1996: 79). For Joas expression is founded on an exchange between an inner feeling and the outer act of expression. A thought or feeling is augmented in the act of expression.

John Langshaw Austin covers similar ground in his study of the speech act. Austin looks at the way certain utterances you make are like an action or like doing something. He identifies a few classic examples: "'I *do*' (in marriage), 'I *name* this ship', 'I *bequeth* my watch to my brother', 'I *bet* you a fiver'" (Austin, J.L. 1962: 5 *Italics mine*). These remarks stand out because when you say them you aren't describing or giving an account of anything. You are acting by using words. Austin maintains that in each of these kinds of expressions you do not represent what you are doing, have done or are going to do, you *do it* in saying the words. When you say 'I bet you a fiver...' you are not stating anything

about betting, chance or the odds. You engage in the act of betting. Austin names this kind of expression a “performative utterance” (Austin, J.L. 1962: 6) <sup>3</sup>.

Austin suggests that a general condition of the performative utterance is that it should be uttered in the appropriate circumstances. All the circumstances in the above examples are extremely controlled and would probably only ever occur on the particular occasion of marriage, ship launching, will reading or betting. Another important circumstance is that the utterance usually accompanies something else such as another statement, a physical act or a mental act. Austin concentrates on questioning the mental act that is supposed to accompany an utterance. He states that there may be a sense in which a performative utterance is simply a description. This is when the utterance is seen as external evidence of an “inward performance” (Austin, J.L. 1962: 9). Here the declaration ‘I bet ...’ is gauged on whether it truly reflects an inner declaration of a bet. However Austin argues that the act of *doing something* should be stressed in these utterances. Through this emphasis he questions the status of the inner declaration and instead highlights the value of the performative utterance. He questions the simple view that characterises an utterance as a mere “outward and audible sign” of something inner (Austin, J.L. 1962: 13). By placing the weight of his discussion on the performative he criticises explanations of speech that depict it as a report of a state of mind.

Joas compares human action to expression and argues against the straightforward view that expression is an external sign of an inner state of mind. He claims that expression should be explained as a form of mediation between a private and a public state. Austin looks at special kinds of speech acts to show that communication shouldn’t be simply described as an outward sign of an inward state of mind. Like Joas he underlines the palpable and performative aspects of a speech-act and argues that these features demonstrate the mediated nature of communication. Therefore just as an expression is not simply a process of impartially broadcasting an antecedent feeling and just as a performative utterance is not simply an ‘audible sign of an inner declaration’, human action in general is not simply a demonstration of an intention that is fully formed prior to an action. There is a sense that your actions can surprise you in a similar manner to the way your speech can surprise you and there is also a sense that your actions can only be reflected upon and refined once they become observable. Human action understood in terms of expression or the performative utterance can therefore be described as an event that is created ‘in

the open' as much as it can be described as an event that shows your inner purposes. For Joas "[...] it is only in our utterances and actions that we recognise our own potentiality." (Joas, H. 1996: 81). 'Test Site' places an emphasis on publicly observable and participatory actions and it can be said that this helps to underscore the mediated and shared aspects of communication. Prior to and after sliding your participatory actions are regulated by the systems of 'Test Site' just as an expression is mediated by the conventions of communication. During the actual sliding you may undergo a private experience of exhilaration or panic for a few seconds but bystanders and attendants also witness you as you emerge from the chute (Fig. 6). In 'Test Site' there is a procedural and performative aspect when you take part in preparing to slide and the aftermath of the sliding that places you at a confluence of personal intention and public engagement.



Fig. 6

### 6.3.5 Collective action

'Test Site' motivated large groups of people to participate without any problem. It had a similar ability to draw a crowd as a popular ride at a fairground. In one sense you could say that it used a populist form of entertainment to generate an interest in participation. On the other hand you could say that people were brought together by their unaffected enthusiasm.

The possibility that a group has to be prompted or may naturally participate in an artwork is explored when Joas looks at an influential rational approach to collective action put forward by Mancur Olson, (Olson, M. 1965). Olson wants to know what rational reasons there are for acting collectively and suggests that

there is a contradiction between rational action and collective action. He states that collective action seems to occur when individuals are undergoing the same circumstances and they want to change these circumstances. The way to achieve this change in circumstances is to form a group. At first glance it appears rational, if the aims of a group coincide with the aims of all its participating members then it is to everyone's benefit to participate in the group. Olson thinks this rationale is taken for granted by social theorists. As an alternative he suggests that it is more rational *not* to participate in a group. If you can avoid participation but simultaneously benefit from what is achieved by the group then this makes more sense. It is more rational to receive the rewards of the efforts of others without making any effort yourself. If it is accepted that you cannot presuppose the readiness of individuals with shared goals to participate, then this exposes the difficulties associated with assembling groups of individuals. The significant question then becomes: How can participants be mustered to take part in collective actions? Olson identifies a number of issues associated with ways to gather together a collective group. These are:

- Coercion: Participants are forced to contribute and penalised if they do not contribute.
- Group size: The smaller the group the more noticeable is your failure to participate and the larger the group the easier it is to blend in.
- Incentives: In order to generate a collective interest an appeal is made to the advantages that may be of personal benefit to a participant.
- Observation: An ethical dimension is introduced into participation. If you participate and this participation is observable, is this participation a result of a genuine desire or need to present a good impression?

In Olson's account of rational approaches to collective action it appears that it is more rational not to participate. On this basis a rational account of collective action is reduced a series of techniques designed to overcome this way of thinking. Appeals are made to authority, personal interest and public reputation in order to compel individuals to unite in action. If the participatory artwork is considered from this perspective it could be said that at first glance it appears that Olson provides a useful set of principles that could be gainfully employed in any participatory artwork. His methods seem to offer a way to overcome participant apathy. When 'Test Site' is considered from this

viewpoint I would suggest that *coercion* was not a factor for participants. No one was forced to take part. *Group size* was influential in reducing any pressure to participate because being in the Tate Modern Turbine Hall any participation or non-participation that took place merged with a considerable and steady audience presence. I would suggest that the most persuasive aspect of 'Test Site' is the *incentive* of an exciting physical experience offered to the individual participant. In Gonzales-Torres stacks pieces the incentive of a free artwork operates in a similar manner (Fig. 7a & Fig. 7b). It is additionally suggested that *observation* played only a small part in 'Test Site' because there was such a sizeable audience taking part and witnessing the spectacle that an individual attempt to create a good impression by participating would have made no impact.



Fig. 7a & Fig. 7b

However it should also be recognised that these techniques are founded on the claim that an individual will always rationalise their attitude to collective action. Olson's account does not consider the spontaneity that may play a role in collective action. He assumes that individuals are led to non-participation by shrewd calculation but does not consider that affective states such as enthusiasm and empathy may play an equally motivational role. These are often the reasons why people participate in charity work or demonstrations. It should also be pointed out that the techniques put forward by Olson bear a striking resemblance to the kinds of strategies used in marketing. It is suggested that Olson's rational approach to collective action resembles a persuasive method of manipulation rather than a method to encourage participation. Accordingly although initially he appears to offer some useful tools to increase the rate of participation these kinds of methods may have the opposite affect. Potential participants may be suspicious or openly hostile towards these forms of persuasion.

These issues have similarities to the discussion on participatory action that is based on Donald Davidson's explanation of free action (§ 4.3.3). From this perspective participatory art permits a degree of freedom but also insists on a level of control. There may be flexibility in how you choose to participate but you are also required to follow the 'right route'. From Olson's perspective collective action can take place as a result of a spontaneous feeling and so is freely chosen but it is also suggested that participation may need to be manipulated to an extent. It may only arise when participation has been encouraged and this requires a set of techniques designed to overcome a participant's lack of interest. I would say that there is a resemblance between Davidson's *rationalisation of free action* and Olson's *rationalisation of collective action*.

## **6.4 Materialism**

This sociological view has emphasized the problems that arise when an overtly rational sociological approach is taken on human action. From another perspective the materialism of Marx, Lukács and Habermas highlights how a measure of objectivity can help to explain the role that human action plays in 'social being'. Marx considers human action as praxis, Lukács understands human action as labour and Habermas considers human action in terms of communicative action. However their objectivity does not narrowly focus on the cold efficiency of praxis, labour or communicative action but concentrates on ensuring that these descriptions of action continue to be known in human terms. Consequently their objective treatments of human action respectively present praxis as a realisation of human potential, labour as realisation of human purpose and communicative action as an increase in the openness of communication.

### **6.4.1 Marx**

It could be said that 'Test Site' can be appreciated as an extensive sculptural project. Sections of it are five storeys high and it involves impressive engineering ingenuity. As an object on its own it has aesthetic value and Höller accepts this view, "[...] it would be a mistake to think that you have to use the slide to make sense of it." (Honoré, V. 2006). Nonetheless it could be said that human activity and sociability are integral to an appreciation of the work and to



see the object and not the crowds is to overlook one of the work's essential properties.

This connection between the man-made world and human activity is explored when R.J. Bernstein argues that Marx's materialism does not depend on "classical mechanistic materialist doctrine" (Bernstein, R.J. 1971: 42). Marx may concede that reality has fundamental material properties but he suggests that these basic properties do not exist as passive objects in a passive state. For Marx there is not such a clear division between objective nature and the human subject who perceives nature. For Marx materialism has its basis not in a sterile objectivity but in an active human engagement with this objectivity. Materialism has to account for the way that human subjects actively experience the material world. Bernstein quotes Marx describing his brand of materialism. It is a state of affairs that is structured around "sensuous human activity, practice [Praxis]" (Bernstein, R.J. 1971: 42). <sup>4</sup>

Bernstein describes an important outcome of Marx's approach to materialism. If it is accepted that natural objectivity and human activity coincide in a fundamental way and if a crucial term for Marx like labour is considered, then it may be suggested that any products that result from a human engagement with nature in the form of labour are not so straightforwardly separate from human affairs either. The artefacts that emerge from labour are not sterile objects. "The product produced is not something "merely" external to and indifferent to the nature of the producer." (Bernstein, R.J. 1971: 44). Products that are an outcome of human activity are a manifestation of praxis. What you do and make is an embodiment of human activity and this embodiment is a register of the reality of human life. Your products are not detached commodities separate from your activity; they reflect back to you what it is to be human. Through their labour men and women produce "crystallized forms of their activity" (Bernstein, R.J. 1971: 59).

Bernstein describes Marx's materialism in active rather than passive terms. At its basis there are active individuals engaged in praxis. According to Marx, when labour is understood as praxis it displays the social origins of human activity and demonstrates the human potential of labour. It can therefore be said that the participatory artwork draws attention to participatory activity as well as the tangible and objective product of the activity. A work like 'Test Site' destabilises the settled status of art as a commodity or object and in doing so it



reconciles the artwork with its social and human origins. By allowing participants the opportunity to actively inhabit the work Höller challenges the status of his work as a product. He does this principally by not charging participants but he also does this by openly declaring that a significant part of the artwork can only surface when participatory actions are present alongside the artwork as an object. It can be said that he places praxis at the basis of his notion of what constitutes this artwork in the same way that Marx places praxis at the basis of his materialist philosophy. In this sense 'Test Site' serves as a restorative example of how human activity can be recombined with its products. It shows how other forms of praxis can integrate human activity more fully into man's products.

#### **6.4.2 Lukács**

It could be said that participatory action demonstrates the interdependence between human activity and the artwork. You do not see the whole work if you view 'Test Site' without taking into account the participatory actions that it encourages, however it could equally be said that you miss the whole work if you only concentrate on the participatory actions.

Bernstein has demonstrated how, according to Marx human activity intersects at a fundamental level with objectivity and how this can provide a way of re-introducing human activity to the products of its labour. George Lukács captures the relationship between human activity and natural objectivity in a similar way. Initially he explores the possibility that human activity is absolutely distinct from natural objectivity because human activity has a purpose while nature does not have any purpose. Labour is considered to have clear aims like providing shelter or food, while nature is considered to lack these kinds of aims and only passively bears the imprint of human labour.<sup>5</sup> Lukács suggests that labour marks out the boundary where purpose may be said to exist. "Man not only effects a change of form in the materials of nature; he also realises his own purpose in these materials." (Lukács, G. 1980: 3).

However Lukács questions if this new form of objectivity is absolutely independent of the natural world. He suggests that although purpose is generated, nature itself is not intrinsically altered. Human labour may appear to place nature in an auxiliary position; the properties of the material world are exploited in order to create use-value. The material world can be re-arranged,

recombined and coupled in numerous ways to serve a purpose however the rules of nature remain. Nature may be indifferent to the efforts of human labour but it has a formidable authority in determining the outcome of human activity and continues to be the overwhelming background for the creation of use-value. Quoting Hegel he describes the relationship between nature and labour: “‘nature’s own activity, the elasticity of a watch spring, water, wind etc. are employed to do things that they would not have done if left to themselves, so that their blind action is made purposive, the opposite of itself.’ Man ‘allows nature to act on itself, simply looks on and controls it with a light touch’” (Lukács, G. 1980: 12). For Lukács human purposes simultaneously control and submit to nature. Purpose and nature are not easily differentiated and therefore he suggests that the apparent purposefulness of human activity and the seemingly passive state of nature are interdependent. Labour could be more accurately described as mediating between the intention of human purpose and the passivity and pervasiveness of natural objectivity.

Lukács suggests that human action in the form of labour creates a new kind of objectivity. Labour produces purposes in the form of intentions in a natural environment that is devoid of these kinds of purposes. Nonetheless he argues that man’s ability to create purposefulness with his labour could not come about without the underlying principles of natural objectivity. Accordingly Lukács proposes that labour and natural objectivity are mutually supportive; the productive processes of human activity should be considered in the light of their material circumstances. Through labour individuals are commonly engaged in the material properties and objects of the world. If it accepted that there are resemblances between labour and human action and that parallels can be drawn between labour and participatory action it can be suggested that a participatory action must also be explained with reference to the materially embodied artwork that the action is inevitably connected to. In this way participatory action cannot be exclusively explained in terms of the ‘event’ of activity. To fully explain a participatory artwork the participatory action must be considered alongside the participatory object. In ‘Test Site’ the participatory actions are the waiting, the preparation, the sliding and its aftermath but there is also a participatory object that makes these actions possible. A series of images without any human figures are used on the Tate Modern web site to show in detail the construction and design of ‘Test Site’ (Fig. 8). The structures of the chutes form the stable material basis that embodies the artwork. This includes the material properties of the metals and plastics used in its

construction, the spatial properties of the Turbine Hall where it was sited and the natural forces of gravity and acceleration that play a part in causing each participant to slide down. Consequently there is interdependence between purposive participatory action and the objective material forces that are harnessed in the production of 'Test Site' as a participatory object.



Fig. 8

The issue of the relationship between the activity and products of labour has similarities to Ackrill's explanation of action as doing and making (§ 6.2.1). Following Ackrill it is initially recognised that participatory action does not seem to be involved in the discernible fabrication of any kind of product. However if it is accepted that action should be seen as being both a transitory event and as having a tangible result then it is suggested that in doing a participatory action you are also contributing to the production of the notion of participation. Likewise according to Lukács if it is accepted that labour is an activity with a purpose that arises from the manipulation of underlying material forces then participatory action becomes an activity that takes place together with the objective properties of the artwork. I would therefore say that participatory action is an event that is oriented towards the creation of participation and is an event that is dependent on the participatory art object.

### 6.4.3 Habermas

Although Marx and Lukács' ideas usefully demonstrate the relationship between human action, the products of this action and the objective world that human action takes place within it should also be recognised that they are primarily explaining human action with reference to the making of artefacts. They see human activity in terms of productive *work*. When I was participating in 'Test Site' I was not working in any obvious way although I was paying closer attention to 'Test Site' than most others because I was there as part of my research. It is suggested that the type of participatory action encouraged by 'Test Site' involves other factors and is not satisfactorily described as work.

This problematic relationship between work and participatory action is evident when Joas looks at Marx's notion of praxis. He notes how the term is primarily associated with a form of "object-related activity" (Joas, H. 1996: 91). Through praxis new artefacts are generated and ideally this kind of activity is linked to a fuller realisation of human potential. Joas wants to avoid restricting his explanation of creative human action to an association with production. He does this by detailing a number of Jurgen Habermas' doubts about the use of praxis as the model for human action. One of Habermas' main reservations is that when an explanation of human action is exclusively based on the way that artefacts are produced then the importance of production becomes exaggerated. Notions associated with production such as efficiency and utility become overbearing and explanations of many aspects of social life are generalised. Production models tend to create uniformity in the understanding of human action and notions like utility begin to be inappropriately applied to creative activity.

Habermas proposes that actions are directed towards different aspects of the world. In his typology of action Habermas distinguishes four ways that you act in the world. These are "*Teleological action [...] Normatively regulated action [...] Dramaturgical action [and] Communicative action [...]*" (Outhwaite, W. 1994: 71). In the first of these you treat the world as a series of things or objects that you may use efficiently. You accept that other people may also take this objective outlook and that they may also have a similar desire to use their surroundings efficiently. In the second of these you accept that you are part of a social group and consent to the standards and conduct of this group. In the third category actions become a way of conveying or suppressing personal desires in a way

that is similar to a performance. These objective, social and the personal groupings are all “success-oriented” (Baynes, K. 1998: 195).

In contrast to these limited perspectives Habermas places more emphasis on communicative action. When communicative action is employed he claims that your orientation towards the need to influence others recedes. During communicative action the primary aim is to achieve a shared viewpoint, “[...] in the case of communicative action any further ends the agent may have are subordinated to the goal of achieving a mutually shared definition of the agent’s lifeworldly situation through a cooperative process of interpretation.” (Baynes, K. 1998: 195). In this sense a production model of action cannot be used to explain communicative activities like teaching, social work or artistic creation. These activities require collaboration and shared values and are not strictly about success or failure. <sup>6</sup>.

For Marx, Praxis embodies the creative potential of human action however Joas has reservations that praxis is too closely tied to a production model based around the fabrication of objects. To compensate for this he looks to Habermas’ ‘success-oriented action’ and ‘communicative action’ to provide a broader description of action.

Is it appropriate to take into account these kinds of considerations when participatory action is being examined? It could be said that if praxis is used in its restricted sense to describe participatory action then it fails to adequately explain this type of action. If praxis is associated with processes of fabrication then the participatory actions that are invited in ‘Test Site’ cannot be described because these kinds of action do not in any *obvious* way produce anything i.e. no object is fabricated. As a result I would say that the doubts that Joas has about the relevance of the production model in an explanation of human action are legitimate.

Is it therefore appropriate to adopt Habermas’ typology of action in a consideration of participatory action? His approach does seem to resonate with the participatory artwork. He differentiates between actions that are motivated by a desire to alter the surrounding world and influence others and actions that are oriented towards an exchange of ideas and a shared interest in communication. Outhwaite describes Habermas’ position as follows: “Unlike the ‘cognitive-instrumental’ notion of rationality in teleological action, where ideas of the manipulation of, or adaptation to, an environment are central, a

model of rationality grounded in communication implies an option in favour of 'a wider concept of rationality' oriented to 'argumentative speech'" (Outhwaite, W. 1994: 70). Habermas not only distinguishes between actions that are directed at objects and actions that are directed towards other people, within actions that are directed towards other people he differentiates between actions that are simply geared towards more efficient relations with others and actions that help to establish more freedom in communication and play a role in the widening of discussion and debate. This notion of communicative action has been described as an "ideal speech situation" (Davey, N. 1998: 77).

If 'Test Site' is considered from the perspective of Habermas's typology of action then it could be said that there are aspects of the participatory actions that comprise the artwork such as the waiting, the preparation, the actual sliding and its aftermath that can be described as *teleological action*. Participants could evaluate these actions in terms of their efficiency or use. How long do you have to wait? Does it seem safe? Are the chutes pleasant to use? In this sense 'Test Site' is being evaluated as an effective system and Höller encourages this kind of evaluation. "From an architectural and practical perspective the slides are one of the building's means of transporting people [...]" (Honoré, V. 2006). There is also an aspect of these actions that can be described as *normatively regulated* because you participate on the basis of the consent provided by social groups such as the artist, the gallery authorities and the other participants. It could also be said that there is an aspect of *dramaturgical action* in 'Test Site' because by participating you are 'performing' your desire to take part. Nevertheless these are all 'success oriented' perspectives on participatory action.

I would suggest that the participatory actions demonstrated in 'Test Site' are most effectively described with reference to communicative action. Such actions are dependent on the object of the artwork but they are not directed toward the production of objects or the modification of the environment. It is suggested that by inviting a participatory action Höller is placing action in the context of discussion and communication (Fig. 9a, 9b & 9c). He is encouraging participatory actions that can be explained in terms of 'argumentative speech' or 'ideal speech situations'. From the standpoint of communicative action participation is not an attempt to influence others or a response to the attempts of others to influence you. As communicative action the participation of each individual contributes to a more informed experience of 'Test Site'. Practical,

social, aesthetic and collective experiences become open for discussion through participatory action.



Fig. 9a, 9b & 9c

This comparison of participatory action with communicative action resembles the way that Elizabeth Anscombe describes intentional action as having the conventional properties of language (§ 4.3.2). Following Anscombe intention is not like a psychological emotion that appears ‘naturally’ or an inner force that triggers the physical aspects of action but something you rationally articulate like language. Intention is conventional in the same way that language is conventional because you tell others about your intentions and others ask you about your intentions. In this sense if participatory action is considered to be intentional action then participatory action can be described in terms of language. Participatory action follows rules and conventions and takes place in the context of communication and should not be considered in simple psychological and physical terms. Likewise according to Habermas the objective of communicative action is to augment the free exchange of ideas within the broad context of language and is not limited to explaining social organisation and material production. It can therefore be said that participatory action can be explained as a practice that takes place in the context of discussion and dialogue.

## 6.5 Conclusions

The previous two chapters have shown how participatory action can be rationalised from an analytical perspective and how the bodily situation of the participant can be accounted for from a phenomenological perspective. Nevertheless it is suggested that a rational explanation tends to isolate participatory action from its surroundings and phenomenology tends to narrowly focus on the particular situation of each individual’s actions. From the present viewpoint participatory action is thought about in the context of

general social life. Its potential role in the social environment is considered. The main question of this chapter was therefore: What social values influence participatory action? When participatory action is contextualised within the diversity of the wider social world it becomes explicable in terms of social conventions. I would say that participatory action provides grounds to test some of the suppositions of these social conventions.

When participatory action is associated with practical wisdom it can be described both as an event where participation is done and as an event that makes participation occur. However when participation is produced it does not involve special skills but takes place as an everyday action. Nevertheless while participatory action may be closer to everyday action rather than skilled action it does not only deal with immediate day-to-day affairs. I suggest that it can contribute to a climate of ethical enrichment.

Participatory action may only involve a simple physical movement but when it is described in simple physical terms I suggest that this only partially explains what takes place. Given that it enriches ethical life I would say that participatory action is more fully explained in the context of social conventions. When participatory art is exhibited it is acknowledged that participatory action is often marginalised by the conventions of detachment that are prevalent in art institutions. I therefore suggest that the value of the ideas implied by participatory action can be properly judged if the notion of participation is established as a central rather a peripheral set of norms for your behaviour in the gallery. In this way participatory action is not treated as an eccentric digression from narrowly defined norms but as a critical presence within an art institution that is receptive enough to accommodate new norms.

Besides a need to accommodate the norms of participatory action there is also a need to recognise the practical feasibility of participatory action. Participation can be idealised and assumptions are made about what properties should be included and what should be excluded from participatory action. I would say that the properties to be integrated into participatory action should be as heterogeneous as possible. Participatory action should not be rationalised to the extent that the diversity and ability of participants becomes restricted. When participatory action is considered as a participatory expression then it is recognised that it comes to light in a shared context. Participatory action mediates personal and public expression. I also suggest that the rational



assumptions made about collective action are not entirely suitable for participatory action. The rational strategies used to encourage collective action may be helpful as rough guidelines but could be described as manipulative. They tend to disregard the possibility that collective action may be based on unprompted feelings rather than a premeditated rationale.

Participatory action is explored in terms of productive work and it is recognised that explanations of production as praxis and labour show how the social life of human activity can be integrated with its objects and how human activity arises from an objective natural world. Nonetheless it is recognised that these schemes of production offer a restricted explanation of participatory action. I suggest that the notion of communicative action supports the view that participatory action can be explained in a broader social context. Rather than being linked solely to productive work, participatory action can also be explained as contributing to the emancipatory potential of human communication.

## 7.0 Overall Conclusions

### Findings on aesthetic experience and action

The main objective of this study was to realise new knowledge about participatory art by employing philosophical arguments about aesthetic experience and human action. Comparisons were made between representative participatory artworks and analytical, phenomenological and institutional/ sociological perspectives on aesthetic experience and action. It is stressed that the outcomes of these comparisons should be judged on how they contribute to a fuller understanding of participatory art and their success in explaining the qualities of a participant's experience in participatory art, not solely on their success in explaining the philosophy associated with aesthetic experience and action. I would say that these comparisons have demonstrated that participatory action changes the conditions in which aesthetic experience arises.

At the start of this study it was proposed that aesthetic experience is just one experience among the many experiences that are available in participatory art. A description of aesthetic experience does not lead to an exhaustive description of the experience of art. It was recognised that cognition, interpretation and background knowledge come to the fore with the introduction of participatory action while the perceptual experience associated with modernist aesthetics becomes less influential. It was shown that the disinterested perceptual experience favoured by modernist aesthetics stands in extreme opposition to the social order and instrumental reality. As a result participatory art is not satisfactorily explained with reference to modernist aesthetics because it actively involves elements of the social order and instrumental reality. It was also proposed that participatory art leads to actions that do not resemble 'artistic labour' but are 'ordinary' actions and that these 'ordinary' actions are 'transdisciplinary'.

When the findings of the chapters on aesthetic experience are taken as a whole it is suggested that a central theme demonstrating the role of participatory action in changing the conditions for aesthetic experience emerges. From an analytical, phenomenological and institutional perspective it is argued that participatory action goes beyond the stability of modernist aesthetics to

embrace other orders of engagement. The 'ordinariness' and 'transdisciplinarity' of participatory action opens up *a medial space of observable behaviour* in the encounter with participatory art. Participatory action introduces a measure of interconnectedness in the encounter with participatory art where the participant is able to recognise that inner experiences, aesthetic experiences and cognitive experiences coincide with outer experiences, ordinary experiences and bodily experiences. Participatory action intervenes to show how your encounter with participatory art can be cognitive rather than perceptual, interpretative rather than experiential, durational rather than immediate and diachronic rather than synchronic.

From an analytical perspective the medial space introduced by participatory action integrates aesthetic experience with practical and social experience. Aesthetic experience becomes receptive rather than isolated from other experiences. From a phenomenological perspective the medial space introduced by participatory action restores some bodily directness to aesthetic experience. Participatory action mediates an everydayness that extends beyond the discipline of aesthetics. This brings to light the circumstances shared by ordinary experience and aesthetic experience. From an institutional viewpoint the medial space introduced by participatory action puts the purity of the artistic competence that is customarily linked to aesthetic experience to the test. Participatory action brings everyday social and practical conventions to the surface.

When the findings of the chapters on human action are taken as a whole it is suggested that a central role for participatory action becomes clear. When the philosophy of action is used to explain participatory art then the division between psychological meaning and physical behaviour is not so clear-cut. From a rational, phenomenological and social perspective it is argued that it is inappropriate to reduce participatory action to plain physical movement. From a rational perspective naturalistic or physiological explanations of action inappropriately reduce participatory action to a sequence of physical events. Instead the equally significant context of reason and the conventions of language should be included in the account. The phenomenological perspective on participatory action has similar concerns. From this perspective an entirely objective account of human action is considered to be a misrepresentation of the full scope of action. Intentional states and bodily experience should be included in this account. Likewise from a social perspective naturalistic accounts of

participatory action overlook the diverse social conventions, customs and policies that are inexorably bound up with participatory action.

### **Findings on action that support findings on aesthetic experience**

When the study is taken as a whole then a number of the findings on the role of aesthetic experience are supported by some of the findings on action.

In the analytical account of aesthetic experience a broad range of corporeal, ethical, intellectual and emotional attitudes is considered to be appropriate in an explanation of participatory art rather than a particular aesthetic attitude (§ 1.4.2). I would say that participatory art encourages an experience of art that has a degree of continuity with ordinary experience because ordinary experience involves a similarly broad range of attitudes. This is supported by the sociological account of participatory action (§ 6.2.1). In this account action is closer to practical wisdom and the broad context of everyday action rather than the specific competence required by craft skills.

Participatory action displays how the directness of 'the body' cuts across the discipline of aesthetics. This is shown in the phenomenological account of aesthetic experience where the bodily senses used by participatory action must be factored in alongside the 'higher' visual and aural senses (§ 2.2). This claim is supported by the phenomenological account of participatory action where the association between the participant and the artwork is described as a 'unified state of being' (§ 5.3). Through participatory action the disembodied participant is reconnected to his or her bodily situation and the situation of the artwork.

When the change to aesthetic experience is understood as a change to the rules of the art institution then I propose that the socially mediated effects of participatory art come to the fore. Just as an experience of participatory art becomes less exclusive and more able to include the heterogeneity of ordinary experience the rules of participatory art rely less on the specific rules of the art institution and begin to incorporate the extemporaneous qualities of the rules used in ordinary social life. These socially mediated effects question the role of agents in the artistic field, the role expression and the privacy of intention.

In the institutional account of aesthetic experience participatory action creates some ambiguity about the distinction between artist and audience and this provides grounds for questions about how these roles are distinguished in the art institution. The doubt cast on the distinct role of artist and participant highlights how these roles can be publicly negotiated. You no longer privately experience the 'world' of the artist as a distant viewer but publicly participate in a 'world' that you share with the artist and other participants (§ 3.4.2).

The social milieu of participatory action is demonstrated when the sociological account of action as an expression is taken into account. From this point of view participatory action is not simply an event that shows your inner purposes or a demonstration of an intention that is fully formed prior to an action. Participatory actions are 'in the open' and this highlights the publicly mediated aspects of participation (§ 6.3.4).

The social context of participatory action is also shown when the analytical account of intention is taken into account (§ 4.3.2, 4.3.4). To an extent both artist and participant forgo their personal intentions in participatory art because your participatory actions are on view and your intentions can be a subject of discussion or you can be asked to explain your intentions to others.

### **Summation**

At the start of this study it could be said that human actions could be adequately described as simple movements of the body. On the basis of the main findings of this study I propose that physiological explanations of participatory action can be improved by attending to the influence of reason and language, an awareness of intentionality and receptiveness to social convention. I also proposed that participatory action transforms the conditions of aesthetic experience in participatory art. On the basis of the main findings of this study I suggest that participatory action opens up *a medial space of observable behaviour*. This medial space makes the experience of art more inclusive by allowing other kinds of more commonplace experiences to play a role. Parity is created between aesthetic experience and corporeal, ethical, intellectual and emotional experiences. The practicality of participatory action situates everyday experience at the heart of participatory art. The directness of participatory action couples ordinary experience with aesthetic experience by going beyond the discipline of aesthetics and embracing other orders of engagement. Finally

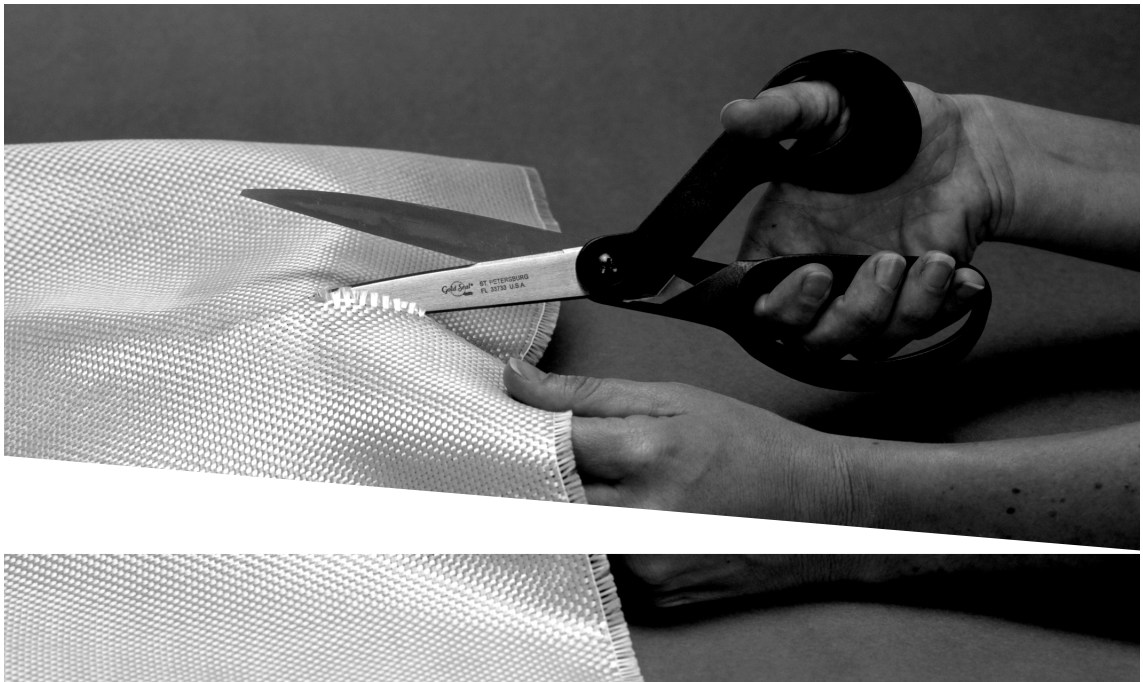
participatory action makes the experience of art discernable. In this respect it acts like a catalyst allowing participants to play out the rules of the art institution in public and critically compare them to the rules of other social institutions.

## Appendices

### Appendix I

#### ***Renascent Scission:***

Participatory art research by Chris Wallace.



Wed. 18<sup>th</sup> April 2007 From 10am.      ***Sculpture Dept. Project Room.***

This is a flyer for 'Renascent Scission'. This was a participatory art research pilot study that lasted for a day. It took place at Gray's School of Art in the Sculpture Department Project Room. The phrase 'Renascent Scission' derives from Paul Ricoeur: "I am one only in a constantly repeated conquest of the renascent scission" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 297). The phrase means 'reborn cut' and is used as a metaphor by Ricoeur to describe freewill. During this work a large sheet of yellow cotton was laid on a table. A sewing machine was set up on the corner of the table, a pair of scissors hung from a nail on a wall and various pins, needles and thread were available. When potential participants entered the space I was present and I would describe to them some provisional requirements for participation. Initially I suggested that as a participant you were invited to cut the fabric in two and you were then free to sew it back together again yourself or you could ask me to sew it back together again. Initially participants simply joined the pieces together but as the day progressed new approaches appeared.

The entire day was documented using a static DV camera on five hours of tape. The 'cuts' of each participant were edited together into a chronological visual track and a few 'laying out' sequences were retained to give some continuity. The most relevant sequences of discussion were then edited together on a separate audio track and the two tracks were brought together to create a short movie of around fifteen minutes. There is a transcript of the movie in Appendix II and a DVD of the movie in a pocket at the back of this thesis.

The main intention of this practical work was to generate informal discussion around issues associated with participatory art and to show how art students relate to these issues. Consequently the document of 'Renascent Scission'

should be seen as offering additional support to proposals made about participatory art in the main body of this study.

## Appendix II

### Transcript of 'Renascent Scission'

Chris Wallace is in italics.

#### Audio I

Are different skills required from an artist?

*Could be ... that's a good point.*

Communicative skills for a start.

*It's taking away the idea of creativity being some kind of inner psychological state, and more like ... a more open thing where you discuss what's going to happen, or there's a possibility of discussing it or changing what's going to happen, I mean that erm ...*

So therefore the aesthetics would change would they?

How you would judge a piece of work can't be by the traditional methods then.

*That's true.*

*The aesthetic changes and you relate aesthetics to other kinds of experience as well. So you talk about social experience or practical experience ...*

Oh Right ...

*As well as aesthetic experience alongside ...*

*The way you assess a painting ...*

That's what I mean ...

*You don't assess it in terms of social experience because the tendency is to exclude social experience when you're in a gallery. You want to experience the thing on its own, on your own and you imagine it to be in a kind of pure way without having any influences about ... influences by ... what you might know about the artist or what movement he may appear from. You try to experience it in a direct, pure way ... and that would be traditionally how you define aesthetic experience or the aesthetic.*

But the artist would still be at the core of all that but here you might not be. It could be the viewer or the participant who becomes the centre of the piece rather than the artist so you're moving away from all that as well aren't you?

*These things begin to become separated. So the artist and the participant/viewer become separated but at the same time they begin to overlap ...*

Well yeah ...

The viewer / participant you are inviting in to interfere if you like with your work ... It's not really normal in a gallery is it?

*It's not interfere ...*

Well no it's not interfere ...

*Because the basis of the work isn't about me its about at least two people so in that sense it teases apart the idea of the artist or the author and the viewer but brings them together as well.*

It's a different relationship then.

*And that ties into the idea of the 'Renascent Scission'. It takes it apart, it cuts the thing in two but brings it together again and it's ongoing. So it's an ongoing 'Renascent Scission'.*

#### Audio II

No ,no ,no ,no ,no, no, no ,no!

I think this is interesting. Standing here thinking is he going to finish that?

Should I finish it for him? I find myself conversing about slowing down things.

I was thinking 'Is he doing this deliberately?' and it's really weird when you're standing with nothing to do and the anticipation of waiting to do something.

*Well that's interesting.*



I thought it was really interesting when you were cutting the cloth (gestures to other participant) and every two seconds looking up to see what you are saying and she's finished cutting and its ... stands back and 'What do I do next?' It's not really a free thing, she's still waiting for you. You are still in charge. Even though you are trying to back off from it. And then saying you don't have to finish it, you don't have to do this sewing, I'll do it for you. I think your quite quick to offer to join in but are you ... when you say do a cut and do a sew are you ideally looking for the person to complete both parts or are you looking for them to do one part and for you to do the other?

*I think that's an option I hadn't thought of. There's the possibility of someone cutting and completing the cut themselves. Bringing it back together again, or there's the possibility of me doing the cut and joining the cutting or there is the default which is the participant doing the cut and me doing the combination. So there is those three options I suppose.*

### **Audio III**

The activity itself has to be really non-threatening.

*That's the most important thing. It can't be something that involves a special degree of skill.*

Yes.

*I mean this involves a certain amount of skill.*

It puts me off.

*Well it is easy.*

*Well skill is maybe the wrong word it has to have some accessibility.*

Oh yes and hominess I think, something everyday, something associated straightaway, that they've seen, done ... almost kitsch the activity, do you think?

Kitsch works as well because kitsch is something people identify with straightaway don't they?

*I think something recognisable and familiar is a good starting point.*

### **Audio IV**

That's it, there is truth and very ... and real, reality about this kind of work. Its kind of like reality because its real, it's real people, it's in the now, it's here, it's not ... you know ... it's actually happening. Which I like ... and recording ... us ... isn't it?

Yes.

I like that very much.

### **Audio V**

One of the papers that interviewed me said what part of the work is to see how people deal with it because the nature of most people who come across strange things is to destroy them.

Yes.

Or to alter them.

Yes.

Well there is the destruction part where you can kick a sculpture apart or you can add to it ... the constructive part ... but its still sabotage, but in a constructive way.

So your fixing ...

But that's what you are inviting people to do ... kick your thing or change it.

*Yes. In a way you'd say that the work is at fault if it can't withstand that kind of ... in a way you'd say it has to be able to withstand these kind of potential areas like sabotage.*

It's context ... where it is actually sitting ... if it's in a white space then you do need to ask permission but if it's in a forest or floating around the street or something like that it becomes public domain.

*Clearly if it was in a forest and I wasn't there it would be insane ... to have a table and a sewing machine ... the work wouldn't happen ... it would be too disparate, it would be stolen, it would be destroyed ...*

## **Audio VI**

It is interesting finding out about your audience whether you get some overtly outrageous person coming in and showing off who wants to break those rules but its saying more about them than it does about the art.

*The likelihood is that your more likely to ... if your going to talk about where you do it ... and this is what we were talking about earlier ... we don't represent the public because we are all involved in art to greater or lesser degree we are all studying art or are artists.*

Mary had done a performance last Thursday and it's amazing how incredulous how most of the people were that you encountered.

Well I did it at the art school because there was an audience here and if I had left it any later ... and I didn't want to do it at Sainsburys as somebody suggested because I hadn't done it at all before so I wanted to start somewhere were I was safe.

## **Audio VII**

I think if someone's filming you that gives you credence, if you're there without a camera-man you could fall into the edge of madness and people start to shun you.

We noticed that with your thing didn't we? As soon as the people saw the camera they sort of then looked for the performance and that meant that people understood what was going on but the figure walking by itself was 'witched'.

I think it distances you though doesn't it if there is a camera there with a piece like that where somebody is dressed up or whatever because that could interact then with it sometimes the camera stops people interacting the same because that is kind of why the performance is ...

## **Audio VIII**

It is interesting how each slice becomes entangled with the next slice and someone's work becomes part of someone else's work. Would there be any way apart from videoing it or documenting it ... a participant saying this was my bit.

You could draw round each time on the table.

Because obviously I could say ...

This worked nicely.

It just got sliced each time no one would actually know which bit they did or does that ... that doesn't matter to you does it?

*Not so much no.*

*It's collective behaviour which matters ... the basis of this is a collective act rather than saying below the collective act there is an individual act ... I think its best to start with the collective act. Although ... the likes of yourself you are quite skilled, you are a craftsperson (to participant) ...*

Well I showed off too.

In comparison to most people.

*To allow your craft to blend into some of the inadequacies of some of my sewing ... here you can see it. That's another issue so as an artist or as a craftsperson you might think well, I'm not so comfortable with the juxtaposition of my skills with someone with lesser skills ...*

## **Audio IX**

A point about the interaction thing ... the little rules that get set up ... I was thinking about the 'Sensation' exhibition. Two incidents: Damien Hirst had the

sheep in formaldehyde and somebody put black ink into it and renamed it, actually changed the title to 'Black Sheep' which at the time I thought was quiet funny. It was called vandalism but in a way there was a nice bit of interaction there ... it wasn't in the right place. And the other one was the Myra Hindley portrait which again had ink thrown at it. The exhibition was called 'Sensation', it was a very provocative exhibition and somebody was moved to such provocation ... I have them in the back of my mind ... the times when artists were very upset about interaction and now we are starting to invite people, we are trying to engage the audience more and get them to join in with us, but there have been times when the audience has had its hand smacked very hard.

#### **Audio X**

If people don't know the rules then they might fall foul without meaning to. The classic case is children ... children might use a work as an obstacle course ...

#### **Audio XI**

*I'm not sure how much time you should spend looking at it because it's like just a part of this really ...*

Its important the laying out afterwards.

*It seems to be now.*

Because each person is looking ... like the next person that comes to the work they are coming to it fresh so they are going to have to see it ... its new to them, the next person. You know its new every time.

*So I have got a responsibility to ... I've got to create some continuity between ... if someone comes after you I've got to create some continuity or ...*

Or do you?

Do they come to it as fresh as the plain one in the morning?

*It is like when I mentioned earlier, It's like joining in a conversation that has already begun. If you arrive in café or a pub after your friends are already there it takes a while to understand what they are discussing ... or what the joke is, or whatever and this is a bit like that too I think. That's what a dialogue is already ongoing and you arrive at it and you think well 'what's this?' So I think my responsibility is to try and explain. The only thing that I can do is ... unless you want something different to happen ... I'm just trying to lay it out the way you ... how you joined it on, so I think it was like this wasn't it?*

**End**

### Appendix III

During this study I delivered papers at three conferences:

*Action and The Open Work* delivered at 'Beauty's appeal in the Transformation of Standards for Valuation'. The 10th annual conference of the International Society of Phenomenology, Fine Arts and Aesthetics at Harvard Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, USA. May 27th and 28th. 2005.

*Action, Sensation and Intentionality in Physically Interactive Artworks* delivered at 'Moving Forward'. The 3rd College of Arts and Social Sciences Postgraduate Conference at The University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen. June 28th and 29th. 2006.

*Action, Sensation and Intentionality in Physically Interactive Artworks* delivered at 'Art and the Senses'. The 7th Student Summer Symposium at Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, Norwich. July 20th and 21st. 2006.

*Action and The Open Work* was published in: A.T. TYMIENIECKA. Chief ed. 2008. *Analecta Husserliana. The Yearbook of Phenomenological Research. Volume XCVII*. Dordrecht: Springer. pp 239 - 262. A copy can be found in a pocket at the back of this thesis along with a copy of the paper delivered in Aberdeen and Norwich.

## Notes

### Methods

<sup>1</sup> Paul Ricoeur supports this method of validating an interpretation of an artwork. He proposes that the way that artworks can be interpreted is similar to the way that texts are interpreted. He suggests that when reading a text you engage in a reciprocal procedure of *understanding* and *explanation*. (Ricoeur, P. 1998: 213) In the first procedure you may intuitively *understand* what a text is about but you have to substantiate your personal perspective in order to communicate it to others. In the second procedure you may *explain* a text as a system of rules and signs but in order to understand it you need to have a sense of what it may mean. When you interpret an artwork there is an exchange between intuitive understanding and objective explanation.

### Chapter 1.0

<sup>1</sup> Collinson summarises the numerous supporters of the aesthetic attitude theory. Aristotle claimed that you adopt an attitude of *stasis*. In an aesthetic experience you have no direct appetite or desire for the object of experience. Arthur Schopenhauer advocated a kind of *will-lessness*. In ordinary experience you have motives and purposes. In aesthetic experience you see behind this to a more fundamental reality. Emmanuel Kant suggested that you inhabit a state of *disinterestedness*. In aesthetic experience you detach yourself from any bias or inclination that an object may offer you. You try to consider it on its own merits. Edward Bullough pointed to a theory of *distance*. In aesthetic experience you separate yourself from a practical concern with the object of experience. You insert a distance between yourself and actuality to create a new inner perspective.

<sup>2</sup> A phenomenological account would question attempts to isolate the aesthetic properties of an object from the aesthetic experience of that object. For the phenomenologist an aesthetic property is not an objective property of experience in the way that height is an objective property of a tree. You do not observe the aesthetic properties of artworks in the way that you may evaluate the height of a tree. There is no clear way to test the reliability of the experience. A phenomenological account emphasises the privacy of the experience. There is an aspect of aesthetic experience that “unlike seeing or knowing of a genuinely epistemic kind, is entirely accessible introspectively” (Iseminger, G. 2003: 103). On the other hand the epistemic perspective favours a more public and evidence-based conception of aesthetic experience. From this perspective it is the objective properties of an artwork that cause verifiable perceptions. These then lead to aesthetic experiences. The important epistemic point is that the aesthetic experience is differentiated from other experiences through its reference to an external object.

<sup>3</sup> In the realist account the aesthetic facts of a thing are captured by perception. This perception provides the experience with “*aesthetic representational content*” (Zangwill, N. 2003: 64). Therefore a realist accepts that there are actual aesthetic properties in the world. These are perceived and in doing this they are represented by you. This representation then provides you with content. It is this content that embodies aesthetic experience. In the non-realist account of aesthetic experience the suggestion is that aesthetic experience emerges from the adoption of a viewpoint. Such accounts tend not to accept that aesthetic properties really exist in the world. The question that is frequently asked is: If

such properties do objectively exist then why is it so difficult to clearly judge what is aesthetic? Consequently for the non-realist there is a sense that your viewpoint has to be regulated because if there are no objective aesthetic facts then you have to be certain that you are adopting the 'correct' attitude in order to sort out what is and what is not aesthetic.

<sup>4</sup> To clarify this it could be asked what 'interested awareness' might be. This would be a situation where a viewer *does* consider the relationship an artwork has to external associations. You may be looking at a painting of a landscape where you grew up. This may cause you to think about memories associated with the image. Another viewer who has no biographical connection with the landscape would tend not to have these sorts of memories and would instead treat the painting on its own merits. In the first case the viewer is 'interested' in the second the viewer is 'disinterested'.

<sup>5</sup> Beardsley parallels art with the situation found in law. You are presumed innocent until proven guilty; the burden of proof lies with the prosecution. Within the context of a trial the convention of presumed innocence cannot be questioned. Beardsley then uses this line of reasoning to establish firmer grounds for the argument about the supposed intrinsic value of aesthetic experience. For Beardsley the intrinsic value of aesthetic experience cannot simply be justified 'for its own sake'. It is more like the presumption of innocence. Its intrinsic value is accepted until evidence can be provided of a conflict with other values. Art needs no justification as long as there are no reasons against it existing. Until some other proof crops up that time would be better spent in some other way then art has value for its own sake.

## Chapter 2.0

<sup>1</sup> Hermeneutics is a discipline that emerged from the study of religious and legal texts and conventionally offers guidance in the accurate reading of texts.

<sup>2</sup> On these grounds Nietzsche claims that science cannot offer any remedy to the metaphysical situation. If the underlying reality is in 'becoming' and history is ultimately cyclic then all scientific advances are an illusion. Scientific progress may offer some optimism because it rises to the challenge of the ultimate impermanence of reality but it is not a method of escape and it cannot 'correct' this underlying reality. For this reason the early Nietzsche rejects science in favour of art because if science is believed in then you close your eyes to the reality of the inexorable collapse of the order that has been imposed. You are "entirely unprepared" (Young, J. 1992: 41). According to Nietzsche art is more truthful because the artist accepts the underlying impermanence of reality from the outset. The artist does not hope to amend reality but begins with the recognition of inevitability of this state of affairs. The challenge that the artist must rise to therefore differs from the scientist. While the scientist optimistically hopes that scientific advances can remedy man's metaphysical situation, the artist has to summon a belief in creative action knowing the distressing truth of things.

<sup>3</sup> Two key terms in Nietzsche's philosophy of art are the terms 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysian'. Generally it could be said that these terms are used to describe different kinds of mental state. When considered in relation to art then they describe the mental state that an artist may experience while making an artwork or the mental state that a viewer may experience while considering an artwork. Nietzsche draws on the Greek myth of Apollo and uses some of the myth's principal characteristics to describe an 'Apollonian' mental state of

orderliness. Apollo is principally seen as the 'sun god': "In his wisdom is seen the searching light from which nothing is hidden" (Jobes, G. 1961: 110). In ordinary experience Apollo is associated with a moderate temperament. This temperament is connected to numerous other characteristics such as a desire to clearly distinguish things, to recognise limits, to seek civil values and to be reasonable. In the experience of art Apollo is associated with the kind of transformation that may occur when sunlight is at its extreme. For example sunsets or evening sunlight can enhance the appearance of things in such a way that appearances have the quality of a dream. Apollonian art is an elevation or improvement on the appearance of the ordinary world and experience of such art leads to states of "entrancement" (Schacht, R. 1995: 495). Nietzsche refers to the Greek myth of Dionysus and again uses some of the myth's aspects to describe a 'Dionysian' mental state that in many respects is the opposite of the 'Apollonian' state. Dionysus is associated with the changes inherent in natural phenomena: "he embodies the life of nature as it comes and goes with the seasons" (Jobes, G. 1961: 447). Dionysus is also associated with extraordinary kinds of experience linked to intense excitement or intoxication. Historically Dionysus and the states he is associated with are related to rituals to celebrate the renewal of springtime. "The ritual consisted of dances and songs designed to magically stimulate the growth of plant life" (Jobes, G. 1961: 449). Young points out that in such states participants pierce the habitual illusion of ordinary experience to reveal themselves to be part of a, in Nietzsche's words "primordial unity" (Young, J. 1992: 34). In the experience of Dionysian art it is claimed that a loss of the sense of self is experienced. Individuality is absorbed into a more fundamentally fused reality.

<sup>4</sup> Gadamer aims to associate art with a more objective kind of knowledge by questioning the explicit subjectivity of traditional aesthetic theories connected to Kant's 'Critique of aesthetic judgment'. He wants to show that there is a way of looking at knowledge that the 'human sciences' can claim as their own without having to stand in the shadows of the natural sciences. By questioning the subjective nature of aesthetic theory and by trying to reconnect art to a more objective form of knowledge Gadamer is favouring hermeneutics over aesthetics. Gadamer himself asserts: "Aesthetics has to be absorbed into hermeneutics" (Gadamer, H.G. 1975: 157). Gadamer describes how Kant developed an aesthetic theory that secured a certain amount of independence for aesthetics. This helped to legitimise the study of art but with this independence came a dislocation between art and knowledge. For Gadamer, Kant's descriptions of the judgements made about art involve a "radical subjectivization" (Gadamer, H.G. 1975: 36). Judgements about art came to be associated with an introspective 'play of the imagination and understanding'. Aesthetics was linked to subjective knowledge that could not be demonstrated. From this time onwards knowledge linked to aesthetic judgement became increasingly marginalised as the more verifiable knowledge of the natural sciences began to dominate. Gadamer explains that the diminishing influence of aesthetic judgement caused by this marginalisation resulted in the 'human sciences' being obliged to always define themselves in relation to the natural sciences. The verification of the natural sciences became the most legitimate source of knowledge and the 'subjective' knowledge of aesthetics ceased to have a wide currency.

### Chapter 3.0

<sup>1</sup> Peter Burger describes Dada, Constructivism and Surrealism as the 'historical avant-garde'; he contrasts these historical movements with art that came later and is influenced by this period describing it as the 'neo-avant-garde'. Burger is

extremely pessimistic about the potential criticality any neo-avant-garde art may have. For him all post-war art is a degraded repetition of the more genuine innovations of the historical avant-garde. Horowitz characterises the neo-avant-garde: “the more stylish the subversion, the more obvious its claim to enter the institution and, thus, the more effective it is in *legitimizing* the institution” (Horowitz, G. 2003: 756). Burger dismisses this art because the original critical value that it may have had has come to be expected by its audience. In this way neo-avant-garde art aestheticises the avant-garde. He highlights how the institution of art confiscates the dissenting impetus of avant-garde art and uses it to immunize itself against the risk of criticism. For Burger the neo-avant-garde is now the dominant force and represents the status quo in contemporary art.

Hal Foster challenges Burger’s description of contemporary critical art as an inauthentic ‘neo-avant-garde’. Foster suggests that Burger idealises earlier art movements giving them a “pristine authenticity” (Foster, H. 1996: 11) pointing out that Burger adopts a straightforward causal conception of history. The earlier art movements caused the original disruption and all later critical art derives from this starting point but only as an effect. It simply follows afterwards. In place of this description Foster suggests “*a temporal exchange between historical and neo-avant-gardes, a complex relation of anticipation and reconstruction*” (Foster, H. 1996: 11). Foster does not understand the situation as containing an authentic before and a repetitious after; he sees a dialogue between the two historical points.

When he suggests that there is a connection rather than a split between these two historical situations Foster is suggesting that though a lot of contemporary art terminates the avant-garde project there are some manifestations that are a more advanced development of the project. In its entirety contemporary art is not all just a chic subversion that reinforces the institutional conditions under which it is produced. This more advanced development of the project is characterised by the way in which it broadens the possibilities for critique. Foster proposes that the historical avant-garde while exposing the conventions of the artwork did not effectively tackle the problem of the art institution. He suggests that the problem of the art institution is not adequately addressed until the advent of the neo-avant-garde art. Foster therefore distinguishes between neo-avant-garde art that addresses its institutional status and neo-avant-garde art that does not and proposes that the former category of artwork is more advanced and worthy of being compared to the original avant-garde. He summarises his response to Burger’s pessimism about the post-war neo-avant-garde: “(1) The institution of art is grasped as such not with the historical avant-garde but with the neo-avant-garde. (2) The neo-avant-garde at its best addresses this institution with a creative analysis at once specific and deconstructive (not a nihilistic attack at once abstract and anarchistic, as often with the historical avant-garde); and (3) rather than cancel the historical avant-garde, the neo-avant-garde enacts its project for the first time – a first time that again is theoretically endless.” (Foster, H. 1996: 20).

<sup>2</sup> Peter Burger describes the development of aestheticism in the mid nineteenth century as a point where advanced art no longer attempted to make direct connections with the wider values of ordinary life. Aestheticism protested against the oppressiveness of these wider values by absolutely denying them. In this sense the aesthetic movement indirectly commented on the values of ordinary life by being passive and spurning these values and pointing to art as the solution.



<sup>3</sup> For Burger art appears to be separate from the rest of life as a result of the influence of numerous social forces throughout the nineteenth century. Among other things art's maintenance of the craft mode of production; the transformation of the artwork into a rare commodity and a new kind of bourgeois individualism gains legitimacy. Such factors have a determining role in allowing art to be independent from the utility, efficiency and competitiveness of day-to-day life.

<sup>4</sup> In his discussion of the artistic field, Bourdieu takes Duchamp's galvanised iron bottle dryer readymade "Bottle Dryer" (1914) as an example. He asks: What makes this an artwork? It is an ordinary thing but it has somehow acquired a supernatural status. He suggests that Duchamp's signature on the bottle dryer gives it a special status. But what makes this signature so endowed with transformative power? He claims that all the power of the autograph rests on its direct connection to Duchamp the *master* artist. It could then be asked what qualities mark out Duchamp as a master when all he has done is sign an ordinary object? One explanation may be that his status as a master rests on the notoriety of previous artistic risks he took. Again similar questions could be raised ad infinitum about these exploits.

<sup>5</sup> According to Bourriaud the historical avant-garde presented far-reaching new programmes for living, and imagined future modernist utopias. He claims that current practitioners have ambitions that are informed by these aspirations, but now that these experiments have passed into history, they can be seen in relation to the dominant cultural forces that have emerged since. He insists that the efforts of the historical avant-garde should not be disregarded but hints that their out-and-out idealism should be tempered. Instead of being placated with imaginary utopias the relational artwork should be directed to "*learning to inhabit the world in a better way*" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 13). In this way more flexible and contingent models should be used as strategies for artistic practice. He suggests "cultural do-it-yourself and recycling" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 14).

<sup>6</sup> An 'interstice' is usually understood to be a space that occurs between things, like gaps in paving stones. Bourriaud, however, refers to a definition of 'interstice' used by Marx. Under Marx's terminology an interstice has similar characteristics - it is 'in-between' things - but it is 'in-between' the main modes and forces of production. It is a special area where the rules of capital are substituted by other rules like barter, charity, self-sufficiency or even despotic rule. Bourriaud proposes that the space of the relational artwork has similarities to these kinds of communities.

<sup>7</sup> As a consequence of the influence of media such as photography, television and computing and as a result of experiments in recent art practice Bourriaud suggests that artists and audiences have a different understanding of form. The informed individual is now more readily able to associate groups of widely divergent phenomena from many different fields. In this sense he proposes that form should not be considered as a stable relationship between perceptible elements of a medium such as colour, line etc. Instead it should be considered as a volatile coming together of "an artistic proposition with other formations, artistic or otherwise" (Bourriaud, N. 2002: 21).

<sup>8</sup> The potential meaning, purpose, quality, institutional context and the methods used to invite participatory action should take into account the work as a whole. It could be said that this argument is at odds with how participatory action is analytically and phenomenologically explored in this project (§ 4.0, 5.0). During these discussions action is isolated from its broad context and

explained rationally and with reference to bodily experience. The way that a rational or bodily experienced action integrates with a wider social framework is set aside in order to reach some analytical or phenomenological outcomes. It is therefore acknowledged that in light of the argument against a neutral view of participation that the outcomes of these discussions should bear in mind that participatory action takes place in a participatory artwork as a whole. While participatory action is a primary focus of this project it is also recognised that the content of an artwork plays a determining role in its overall interpretation.

## Chapter 4.0

<sup>1</sup> This means that they can be more or less explained from the viewpoint of the natural sciences in terms of the biology or chemistry of the brain. This neural activity is then able to cause an appropriate nerve firing that causes an appropriate muscle movement that causes an appropriate action. In these kinds of causal explanations of action it is suggested that the discussion is once more breaking away from how action is ordinarily considered. Actions are usually thought of as involving some kind of observable bodily movement but the causal explanation seems to be diverting attention to other kinds of issues. A 'chain' of spatially extended movement inside the body is now being considered. Where is the event of action located now? At muscle movement or the firing of nerve ends? In a description of an arm movement George Wilson summarises the situation, "Some philosophers have favoured the overt arm movement the agent performs, some favour the extended causal process he initiates and some prefer the relevant event of trying that precedes and 'generates' the rest." (Wilson, G. 2002: 5). The bodily movement, the intermediate causal chain of nerve firings and the early brain activity of 'trying' in the action of moving an arm can be causally explained as physical events. However when the natural sciences are entirely relied on to explain actions it can be argued that the natural scientist is turning his or her back on the person who may be experiencing all this brain activity, firing of nerves and bodily movement. There is a sense in which an analysis of the physical events that constitute an action is being focused on too closely at the expense of the human subject who may be directly experiencing these actions. How does the inner self who is generating the reason for the action fit into this explanation?

<sup>2</sup> He compares this detached sense of action with an imaginary situation. He conceives of a drawing machine that you control by a series of levers. You may sit behind the machine and pull its levers and these cause a pencil to move across the paper. He asks whether this is perhaps an appropriate metaphor for describing your actions. Do you sit behind your actions in this way and decide which levers to pull in order to bring about the desired effect? Wittgenstein argues that the drawing machine metaphor is false and suggests that the conception of a will that operates separately from an action is also false. If it is accepted that actions do function like the drawing machine then it has to be accepted that behind the drawing machine choices have to be made, "there is such a thing as deciding which one we were going to pull before pulling it" (Wittgenstein, L. 1958: 153).

<sup>3</sup> If it starts raining and you start to go upstairs. Someone may ask 'Why are you going upstairs?' You may reply, 'It's raining'. You may be the only one who knows about the open skylight upstairs that will let in the rain. There are unexplained gaps in this reply because the other doesn't know about the open skylight.

<sup>4</sup> Davidson defends the usefulness of including causal relations in explanations of action. He focuses on the use of the word 'because' when it is used to explain a reason for an action. It is the bond between reason and action. In a similar way to Anscombe he describes the way you use reason to explain your actions as something more diffuse than the way you use causality to explain events. Reason offers a "pattern of justification" (Davidson, D. 1963: 9) whereas causality gives a harsh 'cause and effect'. In giving the reasons for actions you re-describe events and include other factors like beliefs, history, social situations etc. However Davidson is not so willing to surrender the clarity of cause and effect to a vague configuration with an uncertain outline. A main argument against the causal explanation claims that if causality is used to explain action then attention has to be paid to the rule of cause and effect and this means that there should be a clear cut distinction between cause and effect. "Causation: The relationship between two events or states of affairs such as the first brings about the second" (Flew, A. 1984: 58). This means that if a reason is described as the cause of an action then the reason must be separate from the action. It can be argued that a re-description of an action is not a separation of reason from action. In explanations of action a link is usually made between reasons for doing an action and the action itself so the distinction is not so evident. In this way it can be argued that a reason is not a cause. Nevertheless if it is accepted that in a re-description of action, a reason becomes mixed up with the action in some uncertain manner and in unscrambling this relation a pattern is produced that is different from cause and effect then Davidson declares "that pattern must be identified" (Davidson, D. 1963: 10). If a reason does not cause an action he wants to know in what other manner are reason and action related. Davidson questions the use of terms like 'pattern' and suggests that cause and effect remains the most convincing explanation there is so far of the connection between reason and action.

<sup>5</sup> Davidson is responding here to the argument described by Mele, (Mele, A.R. 1997: 14). Mele claims that a causal explanation of action contradicts a widely held view of freewill. If you describe your actions as being caused by reasons then there is sense in which it appears that as a free individual you seem to be determined by reasons. There seems to be some state of affairs that is simply part of you or some state of affairs outside of you that causes you to act. So it seems that you are not an individual engaged in fully realised free action.

## Chapter 5.0

<sup>1</sup> John Searle stresses that not all mental states exhibit intentionality. He points out that states of anxiety, depression or elation can be experienced without these being directed at anything in particular. These states can be experienced in a general and undirected way. Additionally when you say that you experience anxiety it is different from when you say you have a memory of a person. In the first instance the experience and the anxiety are indistinguishable, in the second instance the memory and the person are different. On this basis he suggests that although it appears that intentionality and consciousness are the same thing they are not. If you are generally anxious without being able to put your finger on what it is that your anxiety is directed towards you do not have intentionality but you are conscious. Therefore you can be conscious without having intentionality, "the class of conscious states and the class of intentional mental states overlap but they are not identical [...]" (Searle, J. 1983: 3)

<sup>2</sup> If it is accepted that mental states have intentional properties when they are directed towards the world then it is also important to point out that from a

phenomenological viewpoint, phenomena in the world can also lead you to have intentionality. An important aspect of phenomenology is the way that it helps in the recognition of how different phenomena in the world exist in different ways. In the example a bowl was perceived and remembered but in the other example a person was also admired and disliked. Bowls and people exist in different ways and these different ways of existing lead to different ways of orienting the self in relation to them. Perceptions and memories of a bowl are different to perceptions and memories of a person, just as admiration and dislike of a bowl is different to admiration and dislike for a person: "Things do not just exist; they also manifest themselves as what they are. Animals have a way of appearing that is different from that of plants, because animals are different from plants in their being." (Sokolowski, R. 2000: 14)

<sup>3</sup>. Husserl uses perception as a model on which to base an understanding of intentionality. He uses an example like the utterance of a word. This may first be experienced as a physical phenomenon. Sound without meaning. Equivalent to the way that voices in a crowd are experienced as an undifferentiated hubbub without focus. But as soon as you experience this sound as meaning, as soon as a word emerges from this background, an alteration in consciousness occurs. The sound is no longer merely a physical object but is "modified" (De Boer, T. 1978: 131). For Husserl this adjustment to consciousness, as you move from experiencing an abstract sound to experiencing a meaningful word, provides the basics for understanding intentionality. This adjustment in perception is identified as an intentional act. The actual event in space and time and the meaning occur together, there is no physical change in the sound but the perception adopts a new complexion. The word that emerges from the hubbub becomes attached to meaning via "[...] a new, sense giving act" (De Boer, T. 1978: 131). Husserl pushes his enquiry further by demanding to know "What in general is the surplus element distinguishing the understanding of a symbolically functioning expression from the uncomprehending verbal sound?" (Husserl, E. 1970: 567). He is trying to determine how the differences may be shown between hearing noise and hearing meaning from the same source and is also seeking to establish what is exemplary about the hearing of meaning. This 'surplus' is further evidence of the intentional act that provides something more than 'data'. It is that "[...] which is found in experience itself, in its descriptive content as opposed to the raw existence of sense: it is the act-character which, as it were, ensouls sense [...]" (Husserl, E. 1970: 567)

<sup>4</sup>. In summary Cartesian doubt states that much of what you perceive can be doubted. Everyone may be being misled in some way or another. Therefore you should doubt what is perceived as existing in order to get to something that you can be certain about. The world is perceived through the bodily faculties so this means that the world and the body must be doubted. However when the point is reached where everything that exists is doubted then the only thing that remains is the ability to doubt. In this sense Cartesianism suggests that although the existence of an exterior world that the body is part of can be denied the existence of a thinking self cannot be denied. If the existence of the body can be denied and at the same time the existence of a thinking self who doubts cannot be denied then there must be two kinds of thing: A mind and a body. This doctrine leads to two main problems: How can knowledge of anything be achieved if everything must be doubted and how do mind and body affect one another. One seems to be present in space and the other appears not be in space.

<sup>5</sup>. His translator describes the general gist of this title as "nature makes freedom actual, freedom makes nature meaningful" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: xv).

<sup>6</sup> This ambivalence emerges from the way that the body as an object is often called up to serve as a means of psychological explanation. Lived experiences become reduced to hard data "[...] by contamination from the object body which alone has the privilege of being exposed among objects" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 9). This can frequently seem inappropriate if the self is associated with intentionality. For Ricoeur it is important to emphasise the exchanges between the detached facts of an objectified world and life that "overflows" (Ricoeur, P. 1966: 17) these objective descriptions.

## Chapter 6.0

<sup>1</sup> R.J. Bernstein's initial description of *praxis* is based on the way that Aristotle categorises the term. Aristotle makes a general distinction between *theoria* and *praxis* that could very roughly be translated in today's terms as theory and practice. The former term could be described as knowledge 'for its own sake', a kind of contemplative approach to knowledge. The latter term could be described as knowledge as it is lived in the ethical affairs of the individual. Bernstein describes *praxis* as "free activity (and the disciplines concerned with this activity) in the 'polis'" (Bernstein, R.J. 1971: x). Bernstein emphasises that care should be taken not to make a sharp distinction between these two terms. *Theoria* should not be seen as an expression of remote and passive thought and *praxis* should not be seen as an expression of a kind of 'nuts and bolts' practicality. These are not isolated states of mind. They should be viewed as two aspects of the same thing. They are two ways of explaining how you live and use knowledge. Both expressions should be considered together while recognising that there is a "high" and "low" way of looking at *praxis*, (Bernstein, R.J. 1971: x). Bernstein differentiates between the 'high' of Aristotle's ethically minded approach to a 'good' life and the 'low' of the contemporary understanding of the term that is related to practical mindedness.

<sup>2</sup> Bernstein cautions that when analytical approaches to action theory are considered there should be an awareness of two considerations that have the potential to radically alter any position that may be taken. Changes in *scientific knowledge* and changes in the *social order* can both change your understanding of human action. You have to be receptive to new developments in *scientific knowledge* because these may change your understanding of the psychology and physiology of human action. Experimental science may well present a credible case that demonstrates how human action can be reduced to a complex physical mechanism. You have to be sensitive to changes in the *social order* because if it is accepted that human action can be explained by reasons then the context in which these reasons take shape should be considered. It could be said that these reasons take shape in a neutral arena that has a timeless logic to it or it could be said that they take shape in a social order that is made of institutions and practices. If this is accepted then it must be accepted that these institutions and practices are subject to change and that these changes will affect the reasons used to explain human action.

<sup>3</sup> Later on Austin refines his thoughts on the nature of the speech-act. He identifies three areas that draw attention to the main features of the speech act. He calls these the "Locution, Illocution and Perlocution" (Austin J.L. 1962: 102). Locution is what we actually say, the actual words and their basic meaning. These words take place at the same time as the illocution. This is what we do "in saying something" (Austin J.L. 1962: 99). It is how our words are to be taken. Is what you say a question, a warning, a joke? Finally we have the perlocution. This is what the words are intended to bring about in the recipient: "[...] certain consequential effects upon the feelings, thoughts or actions of the

audience [...]”(Austin J.L. 1962: 101). A locution might be: ‘I’ll meet you at lunch’. The illocution of this may be: an assurance. The perlocution of this might be: That settles what I am doing later.

<sup>4</sup> A materialist philosophy classically describes the world in terms of scientific laws. Accordingly human society rests on the natural laws of physics, chemistry and biology. Bernstein argues that this form of materialism can no longer be strictly applied to Marx’s philosophy if praxis plays a key role in his thought. He proposes that Marx’s materialism can be captured in a clearer light through an explanation of praxis.

<sup>5</sup> Lukács describes the creation of utility from natural materials as a primitive form of labour that emerged when early man made the transition from a natural relationship to his surroundings to the social organisation of his surroundings. Labour established a metabolism between natural existence and social organisation and consequently it is linked to the essence of social being. He suggests that the metabolism established by labour generates a qualitatively different form of objectivity from that of natural objectivity. Natural materials are worked on and put to use, but the results of labour do not form a continuation with the previous objectivity of nature. For Lukács human activity in the form of labour has its basis in reasoned intentions while natural objectivity lacks these reasons. This differentiates human activity not only from less active organic life like plants but also from the biological impulse that compels animals to their instinctive behaviour.

<sup>6</sup> While broadly accepting Habermas’s typology Joas continues to insist that Habermas should not absolutely rule out the production model of action. He proposes that the role of the production model of human action should not be understood negatively. Its role is not to conceal the differences between different types of human action but to explain what is shared among the diverse of kinds of human action, “the production model of action should be regarded not as an alternative to communicative action, but rather as a - problematical attempt - to grasp in metaphorical terms the central determining property underlying all action, namely its creativity.” (Joas, H. 1996: 105).

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