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IMAGINARIES OF THE FUTURE 01: BODIES AND MEDIA

Re-Imagining Artistic Subjectivities within Community Projects

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In this article an artist and an academic consider how the idea of subjectivities manifests itself in community projects. Taking an example of an 'artist-in-residence' on a co-produced research project, the authors experientially consider how their work has been articulated and presented. We draw on a dialogue, jointly written on a research blog, to discuss this. We consider collective forms of theory building and whether it is possible to re-imagine theory within a future-oriented process. The approach is necessarily fragmented and, as within any co-produced enquiry, poly-vocal. We aim to open a window on an iterative thinking process moving between and across domains. We do not desire consensus or agreement; nothing is settled or sedimented within this text.

Introduction

How have artists working in community contexts helped to imagine better collective futures? This question guides a conversation we present here between a visual artist and an academic. In these roles we consider, in particular, the role of the artist in community projects and wrestle with the idea of subjectivity. The concept of subjectivity is informed by considerations of the posthuman and the collapse of the idea of the 'knowing subject' (Braidotti, 2013; Gilbert, 2014). The relationship between artists and communities has implications for teaching and learning possibilities within schools, communities and other sites of public pedagogy (Hickey-Moody, 2013). We consider that the relationship between practice and theory is still unclear when working from an arts perspective in community contexts (see Kester, 2004, 2011; Bishop, 2012). Our work takes its impetus from the field of 'practice as research' as well as materially situated theory, using these to make sense of what we do (Barrett and Bolt, 2007; Carter, 2004).

We draw on theoretical perspectives from posthumanism and the new materialism and consider their value within the lived experience of doing artistically informed work in community contexts. We find Braidotti's (2013) definition of the posthuman helpful as being a vision of creating a better world outside the confines of the self. This led us to the work of Félix Guattari. Through Guattari we introduce the idea of multiple ecologies of space and time. We view this writing and our wider work as a heuristic journey that we locate within theory from posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013) and subjectivity (Gilbert, 2014), and guided by ideas within the *The Three Ecologies* by Guattari (2000).

We present our practice as shared and entwined in a way that can make disciplinary boundaries invisible. We have worked in schools, with youth groups, and in collaboration with artists and community organisations, as well as with universities. In our work, we have considered the ways in which co-production across universities and communities can bring to the surface different kinds of knowledge production practices, with a particular focus on socially engaged arts practice as a mode of enquiry. By socially engaged arts practice we mean work that is grounded in communities and rests on the idea of social transformation and making the world a better place (Kester, 2004; Hamdi, 2004).

Our projects included a five-year programme called the 'Imagine' project, funded by the ESRC,[1] which involved a number of universities and communities coming together to think about the nature of civic engagement and how to imagine better communities and make them happen, drawing on co-production as a methodology. Our part of the project particularly focused on culture and included projects on Muslim women's poetry and writing, on visual art as a form of engagement, and on poetic and cultural forms of inquiry within particular communities. We worked with larger-scale museums and galleries to explore the nature of art and utopian thinking, together with discussions and interviews with visual artists to illuminate this work.[2] We located one of our projects within Park Hill flats, a modernist housing estate in Sheffield (**Figure 1**), and were able to work within and across a number of different communities to re-imagine better futures through art and writing.

One of our inspirations for the work we did on the 'Imagine' project was the Artist Placement Group (APG). This has been described by Bishop (2012) in her history of participatory arts as an experiment in context that questioned the concept of art as

Figure 1: Park Hill flats in Sheffield. Photograph by Steve Pool.

social model, but also presented a vision of the artist working outside the gallery as a forward-thinking, innovative but complex model of relational arts practice. We took the idea of the 'incidental person' as a starting point for considering the role of artists in community/university projects. Here, we discuss this in a conversation from our blog, which constituted a research diary of our work and experience on the 'Imagine' project. The blog was carried out over five years and was used as a place to put thinking and reflections on the relationship between theory and practice. Within the 'Imagine' project Steve Pool was appointed artist-in-residence and supported the production of a major exhibition, as well as developing an archive of work that responded to the project as a whole. We explore his practice in relation to the wider 'Imagine' project, and locate this within a number of traditions. This includes various traditions from the work of war artists, to the idea of the 'incidental person' developed by the APG.

From the blog:

Kate: *What is the Artist Placement Group?*

Steve: *It is difficult to talk about the APG without a bit of history. Established in 1969 by artists Barbara Steveni and John Latham, the APG placed artists into civil society. This was neither new or innovatory; what was different, however was the lack of any idea of the purpose or potential results of these placements. One of the origins of what was to become the robust and establishment "artist-in-residence" started off much more haphazard, spawning a generation of artists who referred to themselves as the "incidental person".*

On the 'Imagine' project, we began to think about how the artist's subjectivity was manifested. One of the challenges of the idea of the 'incidental person' was the way in which it materialised a de-centred subjectivity. Running through our work here is a concern to lose a certain authorship, the artist's 'ego', and instead focus on what is useful, or what might be collectively authored. Here, drawing on our blog, we discuss the ways in which the artist worked on the project:

Kate: *What did it feel like to be you?*

Steve: *I suppose for most of the Imagine project I have been thinking, "Be careful what you wish for". Kate did sit with me and ask what it was I wanted to do.*

… When I actually got started the reality of trying to remove the artistic gaze, the objectification and commenting from afar—what I initially had called de-materialization—felt in some ways a denial of self. Like Einstein working out that if one thing was constant something else would have to be relative, my identity and my hopes and aspirations flowed away. I started doing the things I have always done, which involve trying to be liked and useful and pragmatic. I suppose here we could call this the schizophrenia of the phantasm.

Below we situate our work by explaining who we are and what we do and then describe our theoretical positions. Our work is concerned with how artists navigate the complex spaces of work in communities with universities, with a focus on hopeful practice.

Who we are

Kate Pahl was the Principal Investigator on the 'Imagine' project. Her work has been concerned with finding common collective ways of knowing that centre on language, and literacy in community contexts. Drawing on Raymond Williams' idea of a common project to restore present hope, as outlined in 'The Long Revolution' (1961), she developed, through a cultural materialist project, a dispersed group collective space for research to happen in a number of AHRC-funded Connected Communities projects.[3]

Steve Pool worked as artist-in-residence across the 'Imagine' project for five years. The role was initially imagined as an intervention that would draw on the history of the Artist Placement Group (described above). He was particularly drawn to the notion of the 'incidental person', a professional and validated individual with no specific appointed role related to a specific outcome or agenda. As the 'Imagine' project evolved, aspects of the role became deeply embedded within the everyday of research. The artist (Steve Pool) began to be given practical jobs, documenting through photography and film, helping with displays and organizing events. The

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[3] See www.connected-communities.org for more information on the AHRC Connected Communities programme.

process of becoming visible and invisible, material and abstract seemed closely linked to ideas of an incidental subjective, an artist without portfolio.

Working within this space led to the realization that our aspiration to generate co-produced living knowledge relied on an un-located incidental and fluid subjective. In turn, this explained the significance of partially materalised ideas, the unfinished, the messy, the importance of shared ownership and collective failures. We learned to listen on the edges of things, and to allow our constructed identities and expected roles to become incidental. We are not resistant to look to theory within our work; rather we learn to listen to theory from the edges of projects and locate it within the field. The messy and complex world of co-produced research has been described by Facer and Pahl (2017) as being uncertain, contested and multi-disciplinary. Our work here is to represent that world, but to acknowledge the need to write about it as living knowledge that is in process (Facer and Enright, 2016).

By way of illustration, here is Steve writing on our shared blog:

Not reducing things to a list of ingredients is essential. A breakdown of the sensitivities we have in common can present problems as we rub closer and closer up against each other. Artists' role in research, then, involves the interplay between a number of individual facets that resonate in a complex field of actions and reactions. Firstly, artists can be critical and question givens, they can break down existing structures and come between people by presenting singular or binary world views. I often say we do not sign the Hippocratic Oath, we can do harm. Secondly, they can introduce robust forms such as painting that can allow for people to be heard over other more accepted forms such as "consultation meetings". These forms are only robust if they are constructed with integrity within a framework that allows them to be aware of themselves and the edges of their forms.

Reflecting on this, we can see how this complexity introduces a language of dissonance and disagreement within projects (Mouffe, 2007). Finding the language to describe this has been difficult. One way to do this is to articulate the 'not-ness' of

things, but another way is to locate the practice within a context. Here we discuss the relationship between artists and community by thinking about what we do.

What we do

We adopted an approach to 'doing' that is pragmatic and draws on the idea of 'Small Change' (Hamdi, 2004). We acknowledge that 'Stuff comes from Stuff' (from Steve Pool and Kate Genever's shared blog, www.poly-technic.co.uk). This means locating work within practice and space rather than solely within theoretical perspectives. This article is a conversation between two working people, a jobbing artist and an academic, working in community contexts, looking to theory to better understand what they do. We recognise that our perspectives in this project are located in our own experience and location, yet question how effective posthuman theory can be in moving us beyond this located approach to a more dispersed epistemological frame. Here, we draw on our shared experience of working on a community research project that focused on imagining better futures. Through revisiting five years of collaborative research we look for a correlation between communities' abilities to imagine possibilities and their capacity to act to create change. We discuss the problem of individual and collective subjectivity in relation to what we describe as an arts and humanities approach to doing research with people.

We consider the ways in which theory helps practice on the ground. We recognise that within the intricacies of the projects, our own feelings, affective responses and identities were challenged and brought into the field of research. Our subjectivities were enmeshed in the fine-grained detail of the projects. Our embodied epistemological unconscious selves were deeply committed to be fully present and fully engaged within the research: we had no intention of withdrawing from the field; the production of an individual subjective positioning was clearly manifest. We looked to theory and ontologies which appeared useful in order to understand ourselves better.

Steve describes this relation to theory on our blog as 'worldizing'. In a film the relationship between a soundtrack and the action is complex set of relationships; similarly, the idea of playing theory into the world through the projects and listening back, so neither sound becomes a dominant single line the brain follows, made theory both practical and accessible.

Here Steve explains this idea on our shared blog:

The great sound engineer Walter Murch coined the term "Worldizing" while working with George Lucas on the Film American Graffiti *in 1973. He was struggling to balance the sounds of Wolfman Jack's radio show, playing on young people's car radios across the city, with the film's dialogue. Eventually he took the soundtrack out into the street, played it through a speaker then re-recorded the sound from down the street whilst randomly moving the microphone. This process blurred the edges of the sound and allowed it to slip into the background; it mimicked the way we hear things in the world.*

Our theorising then, is blurred around the edges; it is at times brought into crisp focus then slips away into the background. It is part of the world, but not entirely of it, entwined with practice and the everyday. Below we explicate our work in more detail, beginning with the relationship between the artist and the community.

Community, collective action, subjectivity

We organise our notion of 'community' as being partly located within sites but also as the materialisation of a common endeavour (for example, within the 'Imagine' project). The 'Imagine' project was a cross-community/university project that worked on civic engagement but also made space for re-imagining collective futures. Our focus was premised on an idea of utopia as method, as a site for collective social re-imagining (Levitas, 2013). We formed a collective, common set of projects in which the past and the future could be re-imagined, ranging from a revisiting of the community development projects of the 1970s (Banks et al., 2017) to a re-imagining of the resilience framework through a 'Communities of Practice' approach (see Hart et al., 2013). Our work was co-productive and cross-disciplinary, and included a focus on collective historical work (Pente et al., 2015). We developed an interest in poetry as method and collaboration across communities, used to re-imagine contested communities (Rasool, 2017). By re-imagining what artists do in community contexts through a utopian perspective, we were able to explore the relationship between a

community's ability to imagine possibilities and its capacity to act to create change. We were interested in how people might imagine or co-create collective futures.

The idea of 'community' has been defined in sociological endeavours as involving a sense of belonging, located in some cases through an attachment to place (Savage, 2008), but communities can also be connected to practice and shared interests (Wenger, 1998). Raymond Williams in *Keywords* (1983: 76) sees the concept of community as relationally constructed as well as historically located, as being 'the materialisation of various forms of common organisation'. The history of collective action has been explored by Gilbert (2014) as growing from Williams' (1989/1958) cultural materialism, as expressed in the term 'structure of feeling'. This vision is broadly a holistic and interdependent vision of collectivity. We drew on this idea in order to explore ways of collectively imagining better communities through arts practice. We offer this in a spirit of hope. As Maxine Greene says (1988: 9), '[w]hen people cannot name alternatives, imagine a better state of things, share with others a project of change, they are likely to remain anchored or submerged'. To avoid the floodplain described by Greene we need to look outwards and think about what 'could be' to create a utopian vision of a better world, a mode of utopia as method (Levitas, 2013). We also need to lose ourselves in the process, to become not 'us' but a collective 'we' that can stand for something different, beyond ourselves, an imagined better future that can perhaps only just be glimpsed through collective action and a focus on social good (Gilbert, 2014).

Subjectivity as a term is located and defined within a number of disciplines, including sociological, philosophical and psychological endeavours. Defining this term is complex, but our purpose here is to explore the limits of the word 'subjectivity', and to consider whether it is possible to go beyond Western liberal concepts of the subjective self. In doing this, we are helped by Gilbert (2014: 33) who articulates concepts of the subjective as originally located within 'what is private to the individual subject', but this conceptual framework need not be restricted to interior thoughts and subjective experiences, but also wider social relations, and then to a much more diffuse and less coherent subjectivity, a 'failed wholeness'

resting on the Lacanian concept of 'difference' (Gilbert, 2014: 123). We attempt to explore what it means to occupy a looser, less bounded concept of the subjective, which disperses subjectivities across sites and spaces, tied to Guattari's (2000) idea of the 'three ecologies' and the notion of dispersed subjectivities across different states inherent in his vision.

The role of the artist in community projects

When we worked together, we engaged in moments of disagreement, or dissensus, as part of our practice (Rancière, 2010). This could be seen within the form of our research blog, which we quote from in this article. Our shared work has engaged with debates about where we are in our practice, and also where the artist's subjectivities lie. When working with communities the location of the artist's ego has to be overlaid by the urgencies of the situated practice the artist finds herself within. Our argument develops from the observation that when working effectively within communities, artists can move between material and mental subjectivities. If incidental, they may be indivisible from the collective ecologies of their production.

We suggest that artists and academics working in communities can enable the dispersal of subjective authority, constructing new relationships and new ways of understanding as a collective. This approach draws from posthuman approaches to research and art making (Taylor and Hughes, 2016). The posthuman turn represents a fundamental ontological shift that de-centres the human subjective through a focus on the material and non-human world. Subjectivity is then cast into a problematic space. The concept of subjectivity has been associated with the 'Humanistic Self', 'who thinks, therefore it is' (Braidotti, 2013: 15). This Self also implies an Other that is outcast and inferior. Braidotti's (2013: 38) argument that the structural Others of modernity have de-centred the primacy of the human, which then leads to 'other visions of the self', for us speaks to a crisis of subjectivity. Communities present challenges of difference, divergence, a lack of agreement or consensus (Mouffe, 2007). Our work has engaged with moments of disagreement, of agonism, when the outsider perspective might need to be articulated.

Our discussions on the blog about 'Imagine' included a discussion of what the role of hope was in the project, with a specific interest in utopian theory as a

method, a way of working, drawing on Levitas' (2013) concept of utopia as method. Our work was located within co-production as a way of working. This involved drawing on co-production as a methodology. This harnessed approaches that drew on community development as an approach to bringing communities together. On 'Imagine' our approaches included communities of practice (Hart et al., 2013), and dialogic co-inquiry spaces (Banks et al., 2014). Kate worked with Campbell and Lassiter's idea of collaborative ethnography (Campbell and Lassiter, 2010, 2015), and, together with approaches from arts practice that were relational, situated and collaborative, the projects emerged in conversation, drawing on long-standing collaborations in community contexts.

Our blog was a response to the idea of the conversation, in which key ideas could be developed and tried out, as well as a shared research practice which was reciprocal and situated. Reflecting on the process of doing the 'Imagine' project, what we were struggling with was the pragmatics of the project, which then got entangled with wider questions of what artists are supposed to do when they work with universities and communities. We have written on this previously (Pahl et al., 2017), but our writing never fully recognise the role of the artist, or the genealogy of his or her practice. Our thinking is grounded in a practice that is surrounded by theory but might not be directly theoretical. The concept of 'worldizing' sums up this approach. The blog acted as a space to place both theory and practice, and itself was a kind of practice. This process was necessarily conducted in between Kate running the 'Imagine' project as a PI, and Steve curating exhibitions and taking photographs and helping sort things out. Therefore, the fragmented nature of some of the thinking is intentional; this was the reality of working on a large-scale research project, where the ideas were dispersed within the practice.

Working with the 'three ecologies'

Our suggestion here is that artists take up multiple and dissolved subjectivities within community projects. We situate this within our collaborative practice but we also locate what we do in a theoretical tradition that includes posthuman theory and ideas which expand the concept of the subjective (Braidotti, 2013; Gilbert, 2014). We explore, in this way, the complex and exploded notion of selfhood. We see our

work as material and embodied and reaching to momentarily hold ungraspable ideas, 'beyond the confines of bound identities' (Braidotti, 2013: 107). We engage with the posthuman as a field that offers different epistemological relationships with the world (Taylor and Hughes, 2016). We challenge ourselves to present a perspective that does not put the human self at the centre.

To engage with this idea, we took an ecological perspective informed by the work of Félix Guattari. By thinking with Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* (2000) we explore, here, the spatial and relational aspects of artistic practice as it moves between individual and collective action. Our thinking was informed by Guattari's idea of 'dispersed subjectivity'. Below we explain how we have used the work of Guattari to think through hope, the limits of the utopian imagination, and what this means in the context of the posthuman and utopia. Reading this has to be done in the spirit of an 'as if' world, where our ideas are being worked out and worked through. In reality, many of these ideas existed on the edges of an instrumentalised practice that tried to keep projects to deadlines, produce exhibitions, books and articles, and satisfy the requirements of our funders.

We can find a vision for a dispersed subjectivity in Guattari's work. In the last part of his short essay *The Three Ecologies*, Guattari (2000: 68) reflects on the moment when subjectivities are dispersed and re-combined:

> …it will be a multifaceted movement, deploying agencies [instances] and dispositives that will simultaneously analyse and produce subjectivity. A collective and individual subjectivity that completely exceeds the limits of individualization, stagnation, identificatory closure, and will instead open itself up on all sides to the socius, but also to the machinic Phylum, to techno-scientific Universes of reference, to aesthetic worlds, as well as to a new "pre-personal" understanding of time, of the body, of sexuality. A subjectivity of resingularization that can meet head-on the encounter with the finitude of desire, pain and death.

Guattari's argument is that ways of knowing and grasping things cannot be dependent on one vision, but instead must rely on multiple visions that depend on

multiple and dissolved subjectivities. His final statement is a plea for different ways of being and knowing:

> We need new social and aesthetic practices, new practices of the Self in relation to the other, to the foreign, the strange—a whole programme that seems far removed from current concerns. (Guattari, 2000: 68)

We tried to apply this vision to our work. Within the 'Imagine' project, Steve was appointed as an 'artist-in-residence', a role that was never specifically defined yet placed him at the centre of the programme, and which he described as a 'significant other'. This meant his practice was dispersed across the project, at one point taking photographs for a conference record, at another point setting up an exhibition, but also writing the shared blog, exploring key ideas and concerns.

We were particularly interested in Guattari's ideas about multiplied difference and creative autonomy. His final comments in the book address the need for a gradual re-forging and renewal of humanity's confidence in itself in order to achieve the 'reconquest' of various domains. Throughout the text, he makes references to art and urban planning, indicating that relational—albeit tangled—pathways across the three ecologies are possible; for Guattari this is transversality, which presents as a potential for interdisciplinarity, and a critical trajectory for new forms of practice. In our work, we have found this process of re-forging and renewal helpful in articulating a more hopeful future. This was particularly important in the 'Imagine' project, which took as its theme the idea of imagining better communities and making them happen. In this article, we have drawn on our blog posts as a source of thinking. We consider this an example, perhaps, of a moment of 'dispersed subjectivity' that itself could be reflected upon as a place of located practice. Our thinking is fragmented, written on the run, but drawing on hopeful ways of working as a locus for thinking:

As Steve describes in a blog post:

It's impossible to sum up the three ecologies: that is the point. Guattari tells us to remove our scientists' white coats that we wear on the outside, and also the ones we wear on the inside. He is not anti-science; in fact, he has hopes

and suggests that science may be our greatest ally in re-making a more viable
world. However, he articulates a move away from the "I" to the "we": "We think
therefore we are".

The Three Ecologies recognises the crisis that we face as a species and tries to grapple
with this, through the prism of a mental ecology, a social ecology and an environmental
ecology, all connected and all somehow important to a vision of the future.

As we developed our argument on the blog, we used examples from our former
projects to illustrate our ideas. One of our projects, which was on wisdom and
fishing,[4] was concerned with the potential for the ideas of Ernst Bloch to be applied
to the practice of coarse fishing in a youth work context. In this project we asked a
philosopher, Johan Siebers, to work with us, together with ourselves (Kate and Steve)
and a poet and linguist. Steve developed an art practice that was located in a dummy
called Carlos, who was a sound recorder, and then was used to hide or to amplify
the process of recording sound, when making a film about fishing with the young
people. In this work, the artist's practice is dispersed into an object, and not located
in the person or the practice. Our clearest encounter with the de-centred subjective
was through Carlos, our binaural recording device (**Figure 2**). As both object used
to represent art and a simple recording device, he seemed to offer a space for the
unknown, an unquestioning presence, a non-human subjectivity. Onto this object
each of us invested our own interpretation. He was of use in that he recorded sound,
but also he was present within the projects without being human.

Steve describes Carlos' function in a blog post:

I keep thinking of Carlos. A binaural sound recorder made from a 1970s
manikin's head and two latex ears which were used to practice acupuncture
on, Carlos began to represent ART in our projects. I was struggling to find the
place of art, or I suppose what would be called my practice within the projects.
My role, and therefore my identity within the work, was constructed around
use value, but Carlos, although useful, provided a subject—a space that was

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[4] 'Communication Wisdom: Fishing and Youth Work'. PI Johan Siebers, AHRC grant number:
AH/K0006479/1.

removed from the ego and the self. Carlos was actually a knee-jerk reaction to trying to be an artist on projects where I wasn't really performing the role of what I imagined an artist would do.

In our thinking, we tried to signal how the concept of the dispersed subjective worked for us in the everyday. Our discussions began to centre on the experiences we had of not being human, or being located, experientially, through objects. Affect and feeling began to be important in our discussions of subjectivity. Steve reflected on what his role was in relation to a kind of 'use-value' in the following blog post:

The residency on the "Imagine" project was like this from the start, the role was implicitly linked to the use value. I was only really visible when I was doing something visible for the collective—perhaps this is the second ecology of the subjective?

The concept of multiple individuated ecologies is not useful here. Throughout *The Three Ecologies*, Guattari argues that there is no simple division or reduction. The proposition of the 'three ecologies' (social, environmental, mental) are all tightly

Figure 2: Carlos. Photograph by Steve Pool.

bound as a singularity. Guattari's fascination with the non-human and expanded subjective gave us an opportunity to think differently. We thought about the ways in which the artist's individual subjectivity was in flux, changing shape and becoming; we asked ourselves how this surfaced within the 'Imagine' project:

As Steve outlines in a blog post:

This is the question we need to address, yet the answer to this is in no way straightforward, without the object, artefact or subjective of the individual, without the individual and collective history or narratives of art then the possibility of pinning down the agencies at work—the assemblage (from the French agencement*)—is impossible, and perhaps this is the point: the thing we have to tried to achieve is to create a dispersed subjective.*

We didn't agree on the posthuman other than that it is a slippery idea. We came close only when we both caught an image of some things out of the corner of our eye. We were not able to fully grasp what we were writing about or why the posthuman mattered. Perhaps our vision was sufficiently utopian; yet the utopian element became ungraspable. We struggled to imagine the future within the present using a model that felt ungraspable. Guattari's 'three ecologies' helped to unsettle our idea of personhood but did not enable us to settle on a new way of understanding.

Our revisiting of this experience, informed by a posthuman perspective, could highlight and account for such phenomena more broadly and recognise the agentive power of such figures in projects that appear to be led by humans. Perhaps what is left is the idea of a collaboration between two different people who work together over time, and then emergent collaborations that can capture the move from the 'I' to the 'we'. We write as 'we' here. Our work has rested on the idea of common cultures, and cultures of belonging.

Our collective thinking

Our thinking here has moved from Raymond Williams' (1961) focus on collective, common cultures, to the critiques of Gilbert (2014) and Braidotti (2013) of the Western liberal subjective. We have done this via our reading of Guattari's *The Three Ecologies*.

However, the difficulty for us is that practice continues to be the lynchpin of our work. We continue to work in communities where common cultures can manifest themselves in a miners' banner or a demonstration, that do not see posthuman thinking as productive in a world where food banks and children's poverty continue to be part of everyday life. It is hard to locate theory within these spaces. Our work is located in adventure playgrounds, schools and community centres, and our funding is concerned with social cohesion in a post-'Brexit' world. We need theory that matches these concerns.

Considering our refusal to embrace the posthuman as a way of seeing the world differently, we have re-discovered humanism. The thinking challenge of trying to imagine the world without humans opens new avenues of thought, but for us at this point in time it is not hopeful. We took the idea of the posthuman and used it to reconsider selfhood in relation to our projects.

Our concern in this article, however, is to consider whether a posthuman approach to subjectivity in a working collaboration can be a useful way forward for collective projects that are concerned with change. Gilbert (2014: 181) looks at the possibilities for artistic forms to create a decentralised, affective, collective politics. Our work has moved in and between the idea of the 'ego' and the dispersed subjective and its relation to practice. One thing this opens out is the possibility of a positive potential for research if we blur the individual and the collective; along with a focus on the 'inter-action' between very different actions and subjective positioning, this re-situates us within the thing that is happening (Barad, 2007).

Conclusion

Our work has hovered around whether the subjective was graspable in our projects. We used examples from our practice to illustrate this. In conclusion, we return to our blog:

> Steve: *This is what we tried to do with the posthuman, by bringing it to our projects and playing it through them, from the past and into the present, we tried to "worldize" an idea. To let the soundtrack of our thoughts slip from the background and into foreground seamlessly. As with any new process we learnt a lot from it and came up with many new ideas, yet it doesn't feel like*

we got that far, we couldn't push the idea deep enough behind the world for it to vanish into the background to reappear when it was needed, maintaining a flow, feeling and direction. The attempt felt worthwhile at the time—we need to really consider where it worked and what we can take forward, re-work, craft and use.

Kate: *My response to this is to say, what is theory doing that is useful? When you bring theory into the world, sometimes you can disempower people and make them feel like they have nothing useful to say. Our work is grounded in sites and tries to do something useful. I would like to make our work useful because people all own it, not just a few people. The university often thinks it owns the process of creating knowledge. However, when you take those building blocks into community settings they can make no sense. I like theory that works for people. However, I also think that in a hopeful way this work is important: it recognises something that might not have been visible before, and in that way, it is useful. Different ontologies are what communities can contribute. In order to think across disciplines and hear different voices we need to dissolve into the field and create a new social imaginary.*

Steve: *Maybe I need to listen more carefully to the sounds in the world, and "hear" the theory to become helpful in the broader picture of collective understanding. Our work can change the world if we allow it to. New ways of seeing and understanding can inspire new ways of doing: we know that moving into the chaos of theory can create new thoughts. I am trying now, let's not give up.*

How much did our theory infuse our interactive practice within communities? We have used the expression 'worldizing' to describe the ways in which theory comes into the foreground and then drops away.[5] By seeing theory as part of the world it

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[5]   Steve Pool defines 'worldizing' as follows: 'Worldizing is a way for something to be there but not draw all the attention, and the point with sound is that it is the quality of the sound not the volume; it is not like worlding, which is just putting it in the world, it is a recognition of the way we as humans interact with it. In a film it is in the background but when people talk it drops away, so in some of the projects, like the adventure playground, it's in the background but in others it becomes a thread that becomes part of the greater sense-making' (text message sent by Steve Pool on 15 March 2018).

becomes differently situated. This is what we have found useful in Guattari's 'Three Ecologies', in that theory becomes useful in thinking about activism and collective action. In this article we have worked with the ways in which artistic practice can itself become dissolved into the collective. We have drawn on theoretical ideas from posthuman thinkers such as Braidotti (2013) to locate this thinking. We also recognise the importance of small-scale moments of change that can transform communities in quiet ways (Hamdi, 2004). Our work has many human factors. In writing this article, though, we have tried to keep the human at bay in order to think about what would happen if we did consider the less-than-human aspects of our practice. We have seen this in small instances: in a conversation between ourselves, in a dummy used to record sound, in a dispersed use value and informed by the idea of the 'incidental person' from the Artist Placement Group. We are interested in the potential of these ideas to inform future work in communities, whereby a vision from Guattari's *The Three Ecologies* of a world that is more collective and sustainable, is possible.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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