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Constellations of Identity: Place-ma(r)king beyond heritage

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Abstract

This paper will critically consider the different ways in which history and belonging have been treated in artworks situated in the Citadel development in Ayr on the West coast of Scotland. It will focus upon one artwork, *Constellation* by Stephen Hurrell, as an alternative to the more conventional landscapes of heritage which are adjacent, to examine the relationship between personal history and place history and argue the primacy of participatory process in the creation of place and any artwork therein. Through his artwork, Hurrell has attempted to adopt a material process through which place can be created performatively but, in part due to its non-representational form, proves problematic, aesthetically and longitudinally, in wholly engaging the community. The paper will suggest that through variants of 'new genre public art' such as this, personal and place histories can be actively re-created through the redevelopment of contemporary urban landscapes but also highlight the complexities and indeterminacies involved in the relationship between artwork, people and place.

Con-stel-la-tion ...*n.* **1. Astronomy** **a.** Any of the 88, scientifically arbitrary, groupings of stars as seen from Earth, considered to resemble and named after various mythological characters, inanimate objects, and animals. **b.** An area of the celestial space occupied by such a group. **2. Astrology.** The position of the stars at the time of one's birth, regarding as determining one's character or fate. **3.** A brilliant gathering or assemblage. **4.** A set or configuration of usually related objects, properties or individuals. [Middle English *constellacioun*, from Old French *constellation*, from Late Latin *constellātiō* (stem *constellātiōn-*), group of stars: Latin *com-*, together + *stellātus*, starred, from *stella*, star] ¹

Introduction

Traditional urban public art tends to serve a commemorative function: war memorials and statues of the distinguished but deceased are an accepted part of the urban vocabulary. Shoppers frequently hurry by monumental effigies oblivious to their significance and tourists take snapshots with statuesque companions that many will later struggle to name. Although the history may be distant, even neglected, such works are indicative of place, resonant with history and key to city image. As cities, especially those that have suffered the social and economic impacts of industrial

decline, have sought to rebuild their economies upon a cultural basis and to revamp their image, so public art has increasingly been used in the re-fashioning of the urban landscape. To ensure competitiveness with other cities, it is essential that a distinctive identity be forged. Drawing on a place's past history and expressing it through public art is a vehicle through which this can be achieved. As well as contributing to (re)aestheticisation, public art is accredited with being able to create a sense of place, identity and community (Hall & Robertson: 2001; Selwood 1995). Flagship works of art such as Antony Gormley's *Angel of the North* are intended to re-image and promote a particular place in order to encourage external interest from businesses and tourists and internal local investment, job creation and regeneration.

In addition, however, public art is also seen to perform a social function as part of wider efforts to enhance a sense of identity and pride for residents (Evans and Foord 2003: 177). As Philo and Kearns have noted:

... there is also a more social logic at work in that the self-promotion of places may be operating as a subtle form of socialisation designed to convince local people, many of whom will be disadvantaged and potentially disaffected, that they are important cogs in a successful community and that all sorts of 'good things' are really being done on their behalf. (Philo & Kearns 1993: 3)

It is perhaps partly because of this that public art is now a common feature in neighbourhoods, particularly socially deprived areas undergoing regeneration. Castells has noted that, in an era of change, 'the search for identity, collective or individual, ascribed or constructed, becomes a fundamental source of social meaning' (1996: 3). In the context of regeneration, this is keenly felt. Echoing the emphasis on the past and place with which traditional forms of public art are associated, the contemporary public art recurring in neighbourhood regeneration schemes and new housing developments is similarly themed. Here, the need to highlight local distinctiveness and generate a sense of community is sharply focused, and yet this is not separate from the wider process of 'selling places' in the sense of private developments as well as the area at large. While critics have been quick to take such developments to task for the commodification of particular elements of the past, there are alternative ways in which histories can be woven through new residential developments.

The way in which issues of history and belonging have been incorporated in the Citadel housing development in Ayr on the west coast of Scotland is the focus of this

paper. The masterplan for the area, which encompasses both social and private housing as well as retail and leisure complexes, stipulated that each part of the development include public art. Some of this has taken the form of transparent markers of maritime 'heritage' (buoys and anchors) but other interventions are less obviously representational. This art will be considered within contemporary debates on heritage and its contribution, or otherwise, to identity. The paper will concentrate on the artist Stephen Hurrell's *Constellation*, an art work which has sought to create connections between people moving into the new housing development. Just as stargazers have traced connections between stars, inscribing patterns in space, so Hurrell sought to tease out links between new residents, formative associations from their past that had, perhaps, determined their present and to inscribe this into their new living space. Drawing from two residents' surveys, a longitudinal consideration will be made of the contribution of an artwork to identity and community within a residential community. Through this it will be argued that Hurrell's work attempts to put in place processes through which personal and place histories are integrated within contemporary urban landscapes.

Heritage, History and Identity

In *The Lure of the Local* Lippard writes:

Past places and events can be used to support what is happening in the present, or they can be separated from the present in a hyped-up, idealized no-place or pseudo-utopia. We need more fluid ways of perceiving the layers that are everywhere, and new ways of calling attention to the passages between old and new, of weaving the old place into the new place. (1997: 85)

As the past has been revisited, reconstructed and repackaged for the present, so an increasing rift has emerged in critical reviews between heritage and history. Whereas history's relationship with the past is seen as predominantly intellectual, heritage 'does not engage directly with the study of the past. Instead, it is concerned with the ways in which very selective material artefacts, mythologies, memories and traditions become resources for the present' (Graham 2002: 1004). As Graham elaborates, heritage is the discriminating use of the past through the lens and for the needs of the present, be they social or economic. Furthermore, it constructs particular images of time and space:

[heritage] can exclude difference by masking plural, complex and diverse histories beneath one-dimensional narratives; they can elide the broader spatial connections of places via those fixed heritage representations, rooted in bounded sites (Atkinson 2005: 146).

The placement of singular representations of the past in concrete and bronze in the rebuilt landscape renders such narratives fixed and incontrovertible (Johnson 1994, 1995).

This use, indeed manipulation, of the past for the present is neither always a consensual affair nor a seamless amalgamation of the social and economic. Turnbridge and Ashworth (1996) argue that conflict is inherent to the concept of heritage, not just a consequence of its realisation. There is a tension between heritage as an economic commodity, integral to a burgeoning tourist industry, and the personal, perhaps sacred, nature of the sites and histories selected for promotion or commodification. Moreover, as the appropriation of the past is discerning, certain pasts are inevitably excluded and a meaning may be created to which not all can relate. As Jacobs has argued: 'It is not simply that heritage places symbolize certain values and beliefs, but that the very transition of these places into heritage is a process whereby identity is defined, debated and contested' (1996: 35).

Accordingly, there has been much criticism of urban regeneration projects that have attempted to commemorate or recreate a sense of history in the landscape. They are presented as inauthentic commodifications offering 'kitsch' visions of what should be a rich and complex history (Samuel 1994; Atkinson forthcoming). Famously Hewison (1987: 10) has argued that the growth of heritage has led 'not only to a distortion of the past, but to a stifling of the culture of the present.' Similarly, rather than creating a distinctive identity, Sack (1992) argues that heritage landscapes cultivated for tourists, and thereby consumption, actively change rather than consolidate 'place'; they 'consume their own context' due to the standardising effect of tourism (1992: 158-159). Such heritage landscapes tend to be legible and transparent, offering images of history embedded in the visual form of the landscape, 'a shallow screen that intervenes between our present lives, and our history' (Hewison 1987: 135), hence raising critique that heritage offers lowest-common-denominator accounts. Heritage landscapes seek to present and unite people in a single narrative of history (this is what was here, this is how things were); mapping an imagined, symbolic historical narrative onto an 'imagined community' (Anderson 1991). The role of the inhabitant or visitor is frequently as a passive viewer of the transformed

landscape, since the apparently im-mediate legibility of the landscape requires no interpretation on the part of the visitor. Accordingly, Boyer (1998) has indicated that historicist reconstructions of urban environments and public art geared towards a specific heritage have undermined a sense of collective memory and identity. While there is a danger of the 'social condescension' of 'heritage-baiting' (Samuel 1994: 269) assuming that, left to their own devices, people will be drawn to the basest and most vulgar expressions of culture, it is more useful to think in terms of history as a process, becoming, and thus always open to change and intervention.

It is too simplistic, however, to establish a definitive binary dialectic between heritage artworks, on one hand, and alternative notions of public art on the other. In many cases what once might have been created as a commemorative or celebratory work of public art has, through time, tourism and marketing, become read, by some, as part of a wider heritage narrative now integral to the economic fortunes of place. The art itself does not fall into a specific category by virtue of its materiality, instead, the intentions of commissioners and process through which the work was created and, more importantly, received have determining implications for how it becomes appreciated as part of the cultural landscape. As de Certeau (1984: 35) has famously argued, through the enactment of their everyday lives, people are active (and often unpredictable) participants in creating cultural meaning, and this is equally applicable to notions of heritage as it is to other public artworks. Whilst the intentions in producing heritage artworks and other forms of public art like *Constellation* may operate on different cultural trajectories, when the artwork is on the ground and the intentions and process underlying the creation of the work are not visually apparent, there is no guarantee that the viewer will be able to distinguish or read markers of 'heritage' or 'art' in the landscape.

If, as poststructural theorists argue, identity is based in narrative (Butler 1989; Bennington 1990), then telling stories about the past is important in the construction of a community's and an individual's sense of self and this is something to which the visual can meaningfully contribute. In his discussion of national identity and commemoration, Osbourne (2001) conceptualises a 'geography of identity' based on the premise that people's identification with distinctive places is crucial for the development of an awareness, an 'a-where-ness', of, in this instance, national identity. The various components of the urban environment are imbued with meaning which in turn inform a sense of identity in dialogue with the habitual practices of everyday life (Lynch 1972; McDowell 1997; Casey 1993). Rose (1997: 89) has argued that a feeling of belonging is essential to the relationship between identity and place:

'It's a place in which you feel comfortable, or at home, because part of how you define yourself is symbolized by certain qualities of that place'. Given the complexity and selectiveness of the past's interpretation into forms of heritage, that a particular community or individual will be able to relate to a given landscape is by no means definite. If it is accepted that heritage is an integral part of 'place marketing in placeless times' (Robins 1991: 38), then this points to a need for, as Lippard has suggested, a more subtle form of place-ma(r)king and, therein, identity formation. Just as the current fervour for place-marketing has coincided with a turn toward the 'urban village' (Alduous 1992), so it can be argued that, against the formation of over-arching heritage landscapes, locally focussed cultural landscapes are emerging, central to which is the practice of involving communities and their personal histories in the process of creating innovative forms of public art.

Like Lippard, Hewison (1987: 144) argues for an alternative use of the past. He advocates 'a collaborative process shared by an open community which accepts both conflict and change'. Such a view resonates powerfully with 'new genre public art', a term coined by Lacy in *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art* (1995). She explains: 'Unlike much of what has heretofore been called public art, new genre public art – visual art that uses both traditional and non-traditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diversified audience about issues directly relevant to their lives – is based on *engagement*' (19, emphasis added). For this type of work, it is the process through which the art is produced – and especially the ways in which this process draws in local people – that is privileged over the final product. Rather than the imposition of a homogenising heritage narrative, such works might involve local people who aim to recover the histories and experiences of diverse, neglected groups (see Hayden 1995). In so doing, the process could necessitate developing or building upon an intimate knowledge of a place, and therefore the resultant landscape intervention might not be so obviously legible to the tourist or passer-by, or it might involve participation of local people in the creation and retelling of local narratives. Such work requires an embodied curiosity into multiple histories and biographies unlike the more passive form of spectatorship expected in legible heritage landscapes. It is at this local level where the focus tends to be on a specific, residential community, that 'heritage' is being challenged. This is reflected in artists' practice where there is increasing emphasis on process-led, participatory artworks that involve the local community in creating a work that not only lends itself to Lippard's call for an innovative way of weaving the old place into the new, but also creates constellations in the entwining of personal biography and geography with place history.

Waterfront landscapes in Ayr

In 1994 plans were made to redevelop The Citadel, a former industrial and port area in Ayr on the west coast of Scotland, into a new neighbourhood. The Citadel was so called because it was once the site of a Cromwellian Citadel, the partial ruins of which can still be seen on site, and the area has also been the location of a castle, barracks and has an important industrial heritage. The Masterplan by the then Kyle and Carrick Council and Enterprise Ayrshire, advised by London architects PatelTaylor, set out a range of properties including owner-occupier and social housing, retail and leisure facilities. Within this development Carrick Housing Association (CHA), now Ayrshire Housing, aided by a Communities Scotland grant, built a complex of 78 flats and houses for rent. By having a Masterplan those involved aimed to create a high quality development throughout, in both the private and social housing. Effectively there were two means by which public art would be provided: the council would include an element of 'public art' in landscaped areas and, as stipulated in the Design Guidelines issued in August 1994, the developers were obliged to finance an element of public art for their developments (CHA 2001). In this respect, the artworks in the spaces near the private housing developments and on the waterfront have focused on the nautical legacy of the area and unequivocally refer to the area's history as an industrial port (figure 1). Boats, anchors and buoys recur in the public spaces, creating a heritage landscape wherein the transparent icons of history are used to create a seemingly distinct identity for the place; that the nautical regalia could represent any maritime area is a moot point.

Between the overtly nautical and neglected historical landscapes stands the Citadel social housing development. Although CHA were not bound by the proviso that public art be included in developments, they were committed to responding to the spirit of the Masterplan and keen to 'do something *with* our tenants who were moving into not only a new house but also a new neighbourhood' (Jim Whiston 18/07/05, emphasis added). In so doing they had three main objectives: that the art installation would be of lasting worth; to engender a sense of community in the new neighbourhood and create a 'sense of place and inclusion for the new residents, and for the wider community'; and, finally, to empower the community through participation in the development and realisation of the project (CHA 2001; CHA with Hurrell 2002: 3). In this, the notion of engagement was central. CHA wanted to move away from what might be termed standard procedure where tenants judge a competition and then an object is installed, as that was considered 'static and quite patronising.' Instead, 'what we were keen to do was have an artist with an open

sheet of paper, so to speak, you know, who would actually engage with our tenants' (Jim Whiston 18/07/05). After consulting with Paul Cosgrove, Head of Sculpture at Glasgow School of Art, the Housing Association employed Stephen Hurrel, a former graduate of the Art School.

Hurrel has an established reputation for working with communities and creating site-specific works of art within an urban or residential environment. He has recently been commissioned to create an artwork for the Gorbals area of Glasgow which, over the past ten years, has been undergoing wholesale redevelopment, integral to which is an innovative percent-for-art public art programme. This commission builds on previous work which has used new media, including sound and lightworks, to explore urban public space. For example, *Either/Or* (1990) was an integrated art event, undertaken in collaboration with Matthew Dalziel and Oladele Bamgbboye, that placed walkmans, billboards, moving imagery in various public spaces throughout the city, from shopping centres to galleries, transforming the immediate surrounding space. As revealed in *Zones, An Audiology of the River Clyde* (1999), which transformed the river, once the heart of the city and its industries, into a metaphorical space for a series of sound and visual narratives, he has a strong interest in constructing meaning from journeying and exploring interactions with the public realm, both of which were to prove influential in *Constellation*. The neighbourhood in which *Constellation* was to be placed was especially complex as, despite the changing use of the site, it did not have an inhabited history as such and the incoming residents had not yet formed a community. In response to this, Hurrel sought to take the history of the site and find ways in which to entwine this with the personal histories of the residents moving into the Citadel, to create an embodied connection and belonging.

During the first phase of the work, Hurrel, assisted by three students from Glasgow School of Art, researched the history of the area and engaged in dialogue with the incoming residents. As a port, the Citadel had witnessed many comings and goings and so it was appropriate that a focal point for discussion was travel. Hurrel asked residents where they had lived in the world during their lives and amongst them found former inhabitants of Australia, South Africa, Cyprus, Canada, America and Singapore. Journeying is itself a place-specific act, even in remembered rather than physical form. As Casey has argued:

Hearing of journeys, we come to know places with as much right and as much insight as we know the time in which they have transpired. Narration hereby

lives up to its own origin in *gnarus*, knowing. In learning of narrated times and places – times-of-places and places-in-times – we acquire a distinct form of local knowledge (Casey 1993: 277).

It was this 'local knowledge' (Geertz 1983) that Hurrel was seeking. He also asked them 'What personal object or image have you always taken with you when you move house?' Integral to this is the idea of home – whereas a house could be anywhere, a home is a more personal, psychological, inward space. Within this space material artefacts do play an important role, as elaborated by Casey when discussing the relationship between 'hearth and home':

Any number of things can provide sufficient focus to serve as a hearth: a group of memorabilia, a coffee table, a television set, a stereo set, a Japanese tokonoma, a Greek iconostasis, etc. The focal thing must be material, presumably in order to act as an adequate support for all the paraphernalia of the home and thus to bear the weight of what I have called 'localized caring' (Casey 1996: 299).

Where you have been and what you have taken with you when you travel has an important bearing on your identity and feeling of belonging. In an unfamiliar environment, the familiar has added significance. As Divya Tolia-Kelly has argued such affective material artefacts are 'souvenirs from the traversed landscapes of the journey' and precipitates for important social and cultural memories (2004; 314). These artefacts are specifically in the home which acts as site where 'a history linked with past landscapes is refracted through the material artefacts' (2004; 315) and contribute to an embedded, everydayness of self and social identity. Accordingly, material cultures are integral to 'new sites of identity-territory relations' (2004:315). In reference to *Constellation* such objects locate individuals in specific geographies but through the communality of travel, draw them together into a common dialogue. In what could be seen as a parody of buying and sending postcards, particularly from a seaside resort, Hurrel then photographed the residents' objects, made postcards and distributed them to residents (figure 2). Rather than purchased souvenirs of 'wish you were here', however, these were profoundly personal remembrances of pasts and symbolic of personal identity. The subjects ranged from shamrocks to toolkits, paintings to pets, tattoos, tapes and photographs. In this way personal histories and personal-place histories became 'things' to be exchanged between new neighbours, and the materiality of their bio(geo)graphies (Lorimer 2003) began to be woven into the new community providing a dialogue of experience which, as a point of

conversation, aimed to create and enhance a connection between members of the community. The very act of allowing the object to be photographed and thereafter imprinted on a postcard and distributed to fellow residents signalled a willingness to enter into dialogue, into 'identity-territory negotiations', and to share personal, meaningful object. In a sense, this was somewhat analogous to a constellation in that the associations were arbitrary and it was left to the residents to trace any linkages they could see between their own life-path and those of fellow residents.

It is here that the difference between Hurrel's public art practice and Lacy's 'new genre' public art becomes clear. For Hurrel, inclusion is not simply a case of involving the 'resident' community in the act of producing an artwork, rather his is a more complex notion of engagement, reflecting more Nicholas Bourriaud's notion of 'relational aesthetics'. Bourriaud advocates a *relational* art which takes as its domain the realm of human interactions and social context rather than individualised representation (2002: 14). Although Bourriaud's relational art happens primarily in the gallery space and thereby with very particular communities, it is this relational, context-specific way of working that echoes with Hurrel's work in a public space itself defined by human interactions and social context as much as physical setting. Critiquing Bourriaud's text, Claire Bishop has noted that his idea of community is of a coherent, connected group of people, which has parallels with Lacy (2004). Bishop points out that the qualities of relationships produced by the artworks are not examined by Bourriaud and that all artworks engaging in relational practice are presumed to be beneficial (2004; 65). Miwon Kwon has similarly critiqued oversimplistic and predefined notions of community within 'new genre' public art practice, which tend to cast communities as victimized, marginalised or under-privileged and thereby 'discounts the ways in which artists can help engender different types of community.' (2004; 146-147). The art tends to deal with the social issues with which the group is most readily associated and therefore casts the community and the artwork in a particular narrative.

Hurrel's practice sits interestingly within these notions of community and art created with/for communities. For, at all times, various institutional forces are at play – if not the gallery, then the commissioning agent. As the work was not created for a private developer, Hurrel was free from the commercialisation with which such art is sometimes beleaguered. The brief was, however, to create a work which would engage with the tenants and provide a common point of discussion. Unlike typical 'new genre' works, however, Hurrel was not dealing with a particular, existing community or specific social issues. There was no utopian aim to create an ideal

community through the process of the artwork, but instead to find a common point through which a dialogue could emerge. It was to provide a starting point through which communities could emerge rather than representing a community that was already in existence. It therefore does not address issues of difference which, it has been argued, make the 'ideal' of a community inconceivable (Young 1990). Hurrel also believes that forms of public art should make a positive intervention into a space:

... there are plenty of other opportunities to be critical and to ask questions and to, you know, be challenging. I mean artists can do that in galleries, they can do that in temporary projects ... I think if you're going to do something permanent, in somebody else's space, that they interact with then, you know, you can be challenging in format, in the form it takes, but I don't think there's any point in making some kind of critical statement. (Hurrel 9/10/04)

Kwon has spoken of the 'essentializing process' in community art, 'the isolation of a single point of commonality to define a community' (2004: 151). The linking node of 'travel' in Hurrel's work is tainted with this implication, but in reality it is more nuanced, interweaving people and place without prescribing a definition or cultivating an 'ideal', rather opening a space for dialogue albeit, hopefully, a positive one. The artwork itself was intended to become part of the community. As such it appeals to Kester's idea of a 'dialogical artwork' – 'a locus of discursive exchange and interaction' (2004:12), although the majority of works discussed by Kester are temporary rather than permanent. Therefore, although there was a sense that connections would begin to be forged through the exchange of tales of the material artefacts on the postcards, rather than a sense of community emerging mainly from the process of delivering the work as in most new genre public art, Hurrel's work demonstrates the 'emergent capacities' of art (Thrift and Dewsbury 2000); being 'productive' through people's interactions with the work.

Continuing the idea of travelling, the main public artwork, *Constellation*, comprised a series of painted poles arranged around the public spaces between buildings in a pattern reminiscent of the star constellations once used by navigators on maritime routes (figure 3). The colours of the poles recall those of the funnels of passing boats and embedded within the hollows of some of the poles are small model landscapes, reminders of faraway places to whence ships, or the residents themselves, may have travelled. Hurrel's previous work has dealt with colour memory and how certain hues and colour combinations in themselves without associations to particular objects can evoke the sense of a particular period in time and, similarly, rather than replicate the

funnels, it was the colours in their physical context that had the potential to evoke a certain sense of place. It was an oblique reference to place history but moved beyond heritage in its incorporation of personal histories, which were further alluded to by the landscape miniatures which, in scale and form, paralleled the material objects the residents shared via the postcards. The landscapes are viewed through a small peephole in the pole, echoing the experience of peering into a periscope and discovering a new place or into a telescope to gaze at the stars. Implicit in the work is a sense of dreaming, of physical and mental journeys, of a constellation of fate serendipitously leading people from various parts of the globe to the Citadel.

The landscape has to be illuminated by shining a torch into an adjacent small opening in the pole. In the entrance hall of each housing block is a small box-cabinet containing a torch, batteries, a solar charger and a logbook (figure 4). Along with the postcards, each resident was given a key to access the box. In order fully to comprehend the installation, residents have to act out a process of 'logging-out' the torch and peering into the poles, an activity that is not open to non-residents unless invited by a key-holder. In so doing, Hurrel hoped that this was 'a way of giving them some kind of ownership' (Hurrel 29/03/05). Imitating the sensory environment of a port with its sights, sounds and smells, other poles are fitted with wind chimes which people have to press their ears to in order to hear the sounds which again allude to other, exotic places. Linking this permanent installation to the first phase of the artwork, and emphasising their shared knowledge of 'the secret of the poles' (Hurrel; 9/10/04), each resident was given a small model pole that they could place in their home, share with relatives or take with them were they to leave.

The close, personal way in which people had to relate to *Constellation* was an integral part of the work itself. As Hurrel explained:

As the artwork was to become part of a small living community I also wanted people to relate to it in a more intimate way. As an extension to the themes of 'the sea', travel and navigation I created five miniature landscapes that represent 'other places'. These are intended as points of contemplation. They could be places that people have seen or visited before or places that ships from the Clyde have travelled to. Perhaps they are examples of archetypal picturesque landscapes; the kind you take photographs of on your travels or that you see on postcards. Maybe they are a hybrid of all of these things. (CHA and Hurrel 2002: 12)

It was important to Ayrshire Housing and Hurrel that this activity was located in the semi-public spaces between the residences to generate discussion between the residents. *Constellation*, it was hoped, would 'give a talking point to residents moving in.' This was particularly important as 48 of the flats were earmarked for elderly residents who may spend the majority of their time indoors and need the company of their neighbours. As Jim Whiston, Director of Ayrshire Housing (formerly CHA), elaborated, it is 'quite a windy area so in the winter they will be making use of the closes [common hallways] and chatting to their close neighbours' (Jim Whiston, 18/7/05). Indeed, there is clear evidence that *Constellation* has been a talking point, between both residents and residents and passers-by. Given the intimacy of the work, the internal landscapes, much like the past histories of the residents that were integral to place and identity although not immediately apparent, would have to be explained to those not living in the development. This could be seen as exclusionary to those not immediately resident, and yet it gave impetus to dialogue between residents and others; and in so doing simultaneously gave residents an intimate cultural landscape and a vehicle through which dialogue could develop with the surrounding community. In this way *Constellation* was in stark contrast to the apparently unmediated legibility of the neighbouring nautical heritage-landscape. Whilst those passing by might glean a sense that the colours echoed ships funnels and masts, there was an aspect of the work that remained solely for the residents and that was evocative of their own pasts as well as that of the place. This is a created intimacy – through the circulation of postcards and the new residents' choosing to view the miniature landscapes and hear the poles' interiors, an intimacy of shared secret knowledge is forged between strangers.

Considering *Constellation*

In considering *Constellation* as a work of public art, a sense of engagement is crucial, and in order to explore it fully a detailed questionnaire was circulated to residents in the social housing. This approach was specifically chosen so as to provide a comparison with an interview questionnaire delivered shortly after the installation of *Constellation* by students from Glasgow School of Art in collaboration with Stephen Hurrel and thereby give a longitudinal view of how the community's relationship with the artwork had developed. In conducting this questionnaire students visited residents and conducted brief semi-structured interviews centred around five key questions on their attitude to the artwork and place. For the 2005 survey, under the advice of the Housing Association, our gatekeepers to the community, a postal questionnaire was deemed most appropriate method given that the majority of the residents were elderly. The second questionnaire (hereafter the questionnaires will be distinguished

by the year of their delivery, 2003 and 2005) built on the questions asked previously and also extended the scope so as to gain a sense of the engagement of the residents with the work over an extended period of time. Since the completion of the scheme in 2002 only 11 households have changed hands, allowing for a reasonable degree of comparability in the respondents. The questionnaires were left with residents for a week, allowing time for considered responses, most of which were lengthy, and they were then collected in person, allowing further opportunity for informal conversations with residents about the works. Responses were received from over a quarter of residents, a relatively high return for a postal questionnaire, and, as might be expected, were perhaps of the more extreme reactions since those with more ambivalent feelings might have chosen not to return the questionnaire. The research has also involved interviewing Jim Whiston, the director of Ayrshire Housing Association, who was responsible for delivering the housing and commissioning *Constellation*, and, on a number of occasions, discussing the realisation and nature of the work with the artist. Finally, we spent time in the Citadel observing people's use of the public space around their homes.

For those living in the development, there was clear evidence that, whilst both the more clearly heritage works and *Constellation* were read as works of public art, there was a difference in legibility which had an impact on reception. As one resident relayed: 'Folk say ... That place wi' all the poles ... I don't think it's nautical enough ... in another scheme there is a big buoy in the middle ... white ... that's what I mean would say nautical (respondent 26, 2003).² Although fully comprehending the work seemed problematic and, aesthetically, its minimalistic appearance was, as the artist thought it might be, challenging, the majority of respondents in both 2003 and 2005 questionnaires did recognise the nautical, funnel-like colouring of the poles. This may have been aided by most having moved from within Ayr or its environs to the Citadel and being aware of the site's former use as a port. Perhaps not surprisingly, in the period between the installation and recent questionnaire, attitudes toward the work seem to have polarised. Interestingly, although two-thirds of those questioned expressed a disliking of the work, saying that their opinion had not changed since installation, the number who felt that it fitted in well with the environment had risen from 47% to 57%. Some tenants indicated that this was because, over time, they have got used to the artwork and for others it was due to an active engagement with the poles.

For a number of residents, *Constellation* has been a positive addition to the area. Many remarked upon the colour that the poles had brought to the area, while others saw them as providing a stimulus for conversation, as respondents explained:

Brings colour to the area and also I can pass on information to my friends who visit, a bit of history (respondent 8, 2005)

It gives not only yourself but people from the town a chance to ask questions and a source of discussion (respondent 1, 2005)

Strangers to the area stop and look at them (respondent 13, 2005)

Whereas only a fifth of those questioned in 2003 had looked into the poles, by 2005 that had risen to nearly half. In addition, more people noted seeing other residents viewing the enclosed landscapes and showing them to friends and family. One resident explained that the poles 'gave me an opportunity to meet neighbours' (respondent 1, 2005).

However, despite the lengths to which the artist and Art School students had gone to consult with the tenants, the holding of a preview event on October 17th 2002 and the installation in July 2003, the overwhelming majority did not consider themselves to be involved in the artwork. This probably has something to do with differences as to what it means to be 'involved.' Hurrel did not set out to work as a community artist but on a 'public art project with community engagement' (Jim Whiston, 18/07/05). There is a subtle but important difference between the two terms. As Grant Kester explains: 'Community art is typically centred around an exchange between an "artist" (who is understood to be "Empowered" creatively, intellectually, symbolically, expressively, financially, institutionally, or otherwise), and a given subject who is defined a priori as "in need of" empowerment, access to creative/expressive skills etc.' (1995: 7). Although it involves an engagement between artist and community and the emphasis is on process, it often involves the artist deferring to the community, acting as guide, mentor rather than instigator and the creative agent. Regarding his position, Hurrel sees himself not as a 'creative genius' but more of a 'creative facilitator but with retaining the artist's position and vision.' (Hurrel 9/12/04) He explains: 'There's a danger that the artist gets lost in an attempt to satisfy everybody – a sort of 'art by committee' or 'democratic art' is not necessarily good art' (Hurrel 9/12/04). For the few that did consider themselves involved, their engagement did increase their knowledge about the area and feelings for the area in a positive way.

One resident felt that involvement 'increased my interest in the harbour which was always there since I was a boy' (respondent 1, 2005). This indicates that this way of working with the community can yield positive outcomes, even make people reconsider a familiar landscape.

Evaluating *Constellation* on the basis of representation of history and community however, might be to miss the point of artistic interventions in the landscape. While perhaps the legible features of buoys and anchors do draw upon discourses of history to represent this as a landscape of maritime heritage, the not-straightforwardly-representational practice of *Constellation* could be seen as working through 'effectivity and apprehension' (Rycroft 2005: 351), so we need to ask 'not the *what* but the *how*' (Thrift in Rycroft 2005: 351). This involves a turn away from causal explanation and the idealisation of meaning typical of much social science understanding of art and everyday life, and instead a turn to look at what *Constellation* has enabled.

Constellation has had impacts upon the community in the Citadel. Some residents, while responding negatively about *Constellation* as art, nevertheless articulated positive feelings about the poles and what they represented. One respondent explained her negative response as resulting from the fact that she 'did not think the cost was justified,' but continued by admitting *Constellation* added 'something' to the area (respondent 3, 2005). This response was common and illustrates the ambivalent and often contradictory feelings, emotions and evaluations that people held regarding *Constellation*. Answering a question about whether she liked 'the artwork', another resident replied: 'Waste of money. If it's art then if I put ma washing between the two poles colour-co-ordinated like, would that be art? I said to my friend, it's not needed, they are just like lamp posts but are useless' (respondent 41, 2003). However, when asked how she was adapting to them, her reply suggested, through habituation, a certain level of engagement with the work on both a visual and conceptual level: 'I just accepted them now they are part of the landscape. I've got more accustomed ... there is only one out of the lot that I like, that is the navy with the top wine ... I really like that. It's the colours of a boat I used to see' (respondent 41, 2003). Moreover, this tenant had gone to view the landscape in the pole with her own torch before the torches had been installed into the close and had put the miniature pole from her set on display in her flat. Contrary to her words, her actions suggest a more involved association with *Constellation*.

Furthermore, for many other residents, there is similar evidence that *Constellation* has been 'successful' in terms of marking the place, if not in an obvious sense. Although there was significant criticism of the work, even critical respondents admitted to using and having got used to the poles. Even by the time of the first questionnaire, tenants had become accustomed to the work and it had become part of their landscape:

At first I thought ... hideous ... but I've got used to them now. They have grown on me. (respondent 28, 2003).

Yes it's growing on me. First impressions were not good ... now I take it for granted. I've accepted it. (respondent 30, 2003)

It was clear from the responses to both surveys that *Constellation* – and its vernacular, 'the Poles' used by nearly two thirds of those involved in the 2005 survey – had given the area a distinct identity throughout the community. For some this had practical functions, one resident explaining:

Just on Sunday there the taxi driver says 'Hen tell me this, what ur they poles fur?' and I had tae tell him all about them. Folk says the place wi' the poles instead of "The Citadel" cos that could mean the sports centre or something. (respondent 11, 2003).

For others it was a more emblematic and personal identity; the poles marked a geographical area and highlighted their community. One way in which this was apparent was through conversations between residents and also with passers-by. As intended, the poles had become a talking point and had sparked conversation. Their installation had evidently generated some discussions between neighbours about the poles, and by 2005 most residents had a clear idea of their neighbours' opinions of the work, albeit largely negative. Although opinions were clearly more polarised by 2005, it must be recognised that within this there was a level of indifference, of welcoming, accepting or tolerating the work as part of the environment, whether liked or not.

These general responses have undoubtedly been affected by the perception that the money could have been better spent on additional facilities or amenities for the residents. The respondents' suggestions for alternative use of the funding ranged from solar panelling on roofs to bird tables, 'whirly-gigs' and clotheslines to Christmas hampers for tenants. Both the Housing Association and Hurrel have acknowledged

that more should have been done to explain to residents that the funding for the project was for art alone (Jim Whiston 18/07/05; Stephen Hurrell 09/12/04; CHA with SH 2002). The 2003 survey found that when people were told the money had come from a source that only funded artworks, some became less critical. The rhetoric surrounding public art advocates that it is beneficial for communities (Hall and Robertson 2001; see also Sharp, Pollock and Paddison 2005) and, as such, it is readily coupled with imaginative landscape architecture in the re-aestheticisation of neighbourhoods undergoing regeneration. Yet, there is implicit a question as to whether or not these residents are right, that the money would have been better spent on other facilities or benefits that they would, perhaps, more directly gain from than on the artworks.

People, places, process

Constellation has quickly worked its way into the everyday landscape of the residents of the Citadel and their imagined geography of home. Their engagement with the artwork is complex and multi-layered. Even those who were critical of the aesthetics of the piece are clearly attached to the poles as distinct features in the otherwise unremarkable landscape of the housing development. That the poles were an obvious choice through which to define the place, given the bland nature of the housing development, is a significant point and yet with the town's only leisure centre metres away and the heritage artworks more legible and immediately visible to passers-by, the fact that the residents chose to locate themselves by means of citing the poles as markers is important. For some, they are simultaneously a waste of money and an addition to the environment, adding an element of distinction that would be missed if the poles were removed. Despite not feeling involved with the work, the majority have engaged with it on some level – the intimate, personal experiences of looking and listening, and making the choice to share this with others. The artwork is at once a topic for conversation and a contentious concern.

In the process of creating the work, when the community were actively consulted, asked to contribute to the postcards, given the miniature poles and invited to the unveiling – in other words, when things were actively happening and there was still a sense of expectation as to what would result – the project was very much alive. When the poles were in place, however, the nature of community engagement fundamentally changed. As aesthetic objects they were, for some, difficult to interpret and, having seen the landscapes a few times, the active engagement waned. In this there was also the issue of mobility for some residents who were housebound and therefore unable to make the physical journey to the poles. The

conversation, the dialogue, with the artist and artwork does not seem to have been meaningfully sustained. As with many public art projects, the aim of community involvement is managed only in the short term, without sufficient vision for how the process will continue beyond the funded period. For new residents, there is no guarantee that they will be given a pack and, having not been involved in the process, may feel somewhat disassociated from the work. Given its minimalist form and abstracted nature, there is a possibility that for those who are not aware of the process it may seem like art parachuted into a public space rather than an attempt to use a process-based practice to create a work that is intrinsically of place. There are real issues, therefore, as to the sustainability of the narrative and objectives underlying this project and its embeddedness in the community. Having said that, alternatively, new residents may bring new meaning to the work, a different sort of engagement and, as the community develops, different narratives may emerge which weave the poles into the social landscape. Having to justify the work's existence and accepting that, amongst much of the community there is an overarching sense of indifference to the work, raises questions about the intrinsic merit of the use of public art in regeneration and whether it does, indeed, yield the benefits with which it has been credited. Nevertheless, as things placed on the landscape to facilitate community connection (even if these connections are discussions about the waste of money), the Poles have perhaps now done their job. Certainly Hurrel himself would prefer to see them removed from the Citadel if the community expressed this desire (Hurrel 29/3/05).

Conclusions

In a period of change, when dislocation or redevelopment changes the known and familiar landscapes of home, the search for social meaning is paramount. However, as Lippard and Hewison have indicated, finding such meaning in heritage-scapes is difficult. In this context new genre public art offers a challenging, but by no means perfect, way of marking a new landscape with meaning. The Citadel was a profoundly marked site whether by walls of castles, citadels or barracks or by the markings and masts of boats, and yet an engagement with the forming community led to a less visual, more conceptual and personalised consideration of place, past and identity. Hurrel's work attempted to appeal to personal memory, to past histories and sought to be evocative, allowing the emergence of affect, rather than being symbolically didactic. In not imposing a particular, historic narrative, it was open to the 'dialectic of remembering and forgetting' and able to exist in a state of continual evolution (Nora 1998: 8). Resonating with Massey's (1991) writings on a 'global sense

of place', he sees place as something more than bounded singularity and instead understands the multiple connections through which it is always constituted.

This appeal to memory, however, may have had a role to play in the difficulties in the relationship between the community and the artwork. In the travelled experience of the group, Hurrell appeals to a collective, social sense of memory, and yet whether this was something the group actively shared is another matter. The very formative nature of the community, the vague lines of communication and general insecurity of moving into unfamiliar surroundings, made finding common ground, a collective experience on which to draw, more problematic. Furthermore it could be that while residents could share the tellings of their various personal histories, they could not share in the experiences of these histories on the ground. Nevertheless, in contrast to the surrounding heritage-scape, the resultant artwork created a unique identity for place by drawing on the memories and histories of its community - it may not have been easily legible, but then places and people rarely are.

What *Constellation* indicates is that the adoption of a public art practice that engages with the community offers the potential for the creation of different kinds of visual and conceptual cultural landscapes. If the process can be enacted so as to create a dialogue and communicate with the community, then the resultant artwork promises to become a part of their landscape with which they can identify (even if in a grudging, uncertain way) and which identifies them. In seeking to draw upon personal histories and integrate them with place, the neighbourhoods and their communities become heterogeneous in contrast to the homogenising effect of much heritage. Multiple memories can be brought together not in a static, unmemorable memorial to the past but in a distinctive artwork which is at once relevant and responding to a social dynamic. What is problematic, however, is that whilst the community can be drawn into the process of creating the artwork and at that moment it seems lived, once process has manifested itself into an aesthetic object, it is up to the community as to whether any process continues. Whereas the active inclusion of the community was temporal and thereafter any engagement had to be self-motivated, the aesthetics outlive the process and therefore the process has to be nurtured and developed to ensure the creation of dynamic places rather than static spaces. The focus of Lacy, Kester and others' visions of new genre public art on the process behind the production of ephemeral works is demonstrated as problematic in practice involving longer-term interventions in the landscape. The prioritising of process seems to overlook what will happen when process comes to an end and only the built object is left.

In the case of the Citadel the general indifference of the community indicates that, beyond acting as markers and being indicative of place, the full concept underlying *Constellation* may be lost as the community evolves and is no longer engaged in the same way with the artwork and thus a new relationship beings to emerge.

Postscript

If identity is based around narration, then the act of asking questions about *Constellation* and people's relationship to it is exactly this kind of process. Through researching this paper, we are now part of the writing of the story. Asking people to articulate a relationship which for most is hidden through habituation perhaps further affirms identity through the act of responding to the questions,³ in the same was as questions from outsiders about the poles present residents with a choice of whether to include or exclude others. As one respondent put it concerning the questionnaire, it 'serves to remind me of the "artwork". Day after day I walk past some poles hardly noticing them or thinking about them' (respondent 6, 2005). It may have forced some to decide something about which they felt more ambivalent. Furthermore, as promised on the questionnaire - and unwittingly mirroring Hurrel's process of creating postcards - we have returned a card of questionnaire summaries to all residents. While this is unlikely to change individuals' views of *Constellation*, it presents them with an image of what others think about it which might not conform to held ideas about community views. Again, this might stimulate discussion in the closes, and renew the (re)telling of stories about the Citadel.



Figure 1: Buoy sculpture and Ocean Stores (photo: authors)



Figure 2: Images of things residents always take with them when they move (CHA and Hurrell 2002)



Figure 3: A pole from *Constellation*, viewing hole is near the bottom (photo: authors)



Figure 4: Torch box, residents' pack and landscapes from the *Constellation* work (CHA and Hurrell 2002)

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¹ *Reader's Digest Great Illustrated Dictionary*, The Readers Digest Association; London. UK. 1984

² Longer quotes from the 2003 survey were transcribed from tape by the researcher and have been written in vernacular whereas respondents of the 2005 survey wrote their own responses.

³ Although as Butler (1990) has reminded us, this process can work both ways, both reinforcing but also undermining identities. For those who really disliked *Constellation*, this provided the opportunity to reiterate why they felt this way.