A woman with long, wavy blonde hair is shown from the chest up, speaking into a black microphone. She is wearing a light-colored, possibly white, top. The background is a soft, out-of-focus mix of warm colors like yellow and orange. The image has a painterly, textured appearance.

# THE ARTISTRY OF CONVERSATION

RHIANNON ELLEN JONES

This section of the cover features two images of the same woman with blonde hair. On the left, she is shown in profile, looking upwards and to the right, with her mouth open as if speaking. On the right, she is shown from a slightly different angle, also looking upwards and to the right. The background is the same warm, textured color palette as the top image.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of Nottingham Trent University  
for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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# ABSTRACT

This thesis proposes a new way of thinking about conversation as a methodology and argues that conversation itself can be considered as an art practice. The practice research has been developed through a body of five artworks produced between 2012-14, each of which directly engaged with communities and residents of the city of Nottingham, UK, and emerged in relation to the specificity of this location. The doctoral research has been presented within the international contexts of art and social science through several seminars and conferences, including the researcher's co-founding and co-curation of *InDialogue* (2012 – present), a biannual interdisciplinary symposium.

The research engages with existing work on conversation and the dialogic by Allan Kaprow, David Bohm, Mikhail Bakhtin, Grant H. Kester and Hubert Hermans, from which it develops a socio-artistic and philosophical framework to theoretically underpin a body of dialogic practice. For the purpose of this thesis, PhD stands for Practice in High Definition: the body of work produced has been tested and analysed to develop an original methodology, which has been termed APSSL, to describe its five key features: architectactics, performativity, storyteller, social activism and legacy.

The thesis sets out the framework for a performative and experiential approach, providing examples of the orchestration of space and the dialogic architectures of site and body. Conversation is considered as a methodological producer and as the instigator of practice. Aesthetic in approach, the methodology is recognised for its socializing power in terms of generating the opportunity for a public presentation of self and other, and for the mobility of voices in spaces. It establishes that there can be an artistry of conversation.

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# DEDICATION

Often you hear a PhD being likened to the experience of going on a journey into the unknown, and, I can honestly say that it has truly felt just like that. Writing this thesis has taken many beautiful twists and turns during the PhD process and it has been a voyage of discovery both personally and professionally. This is a page of dedications and thanks that need to be expressed before turning the page.

Professionally, this PhD would not have been as easy to achieve without the kindness and support of so many great organisations within the arts, here and overseas. I want to offer my heartfelt thanks for their partnerships. I must thank Nottingham Contemporary, Backlit Gallery, PRIMARY, Dance4, Nottingham City Council, Bromley House, Nottingham Community Police Force, Refugee Forum, Nottingham Playhouse, The Cutting Room, Creative Quarter, Synapse Arts, Loughborough University, Nottingham Trent University, Lord Mayor of Nottingham, local and regional councillors and arts officers, The Hive, UK UnLtd, and the University of Georgia, Athens, USA, Meadows Artist and Residents Society and New Art Exchange. They have helped inform my practice research no end. I also want to extend my thanks to Cumulus contemporary art working group, for the opportunity to present my research in Sweden, Milan and Portugal. The invaluable support for my practice over the last 6 years has helped me to find new ways to platform conversations within the public domain.

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This thesis is dedicated to my husband, Michael Pinchbeck, who inspires me every day through the simple act of being himself. We have shared this journey together and we will share many more as we journey through life. To match his beautiful dedication to me in his thesis, I can reply in mine, yes husband; you truly are 'my other half' too. I dedicate this thesis to our beautiful baby, Harper Wren who has already changed our world completely for the better and gave me the motivation to finally finish this thesis and came with me to the viva.

This thesis is dedicated to my mumma and daddy for their kindness, devotion, and endless support. They taught me the value and power of talking, the importance of knowing right from wrong and always showing kindness and humility. They are the most inspiring and incredible parents who I love endlessly. It is dedicated to my sister whom I admire and love so much, even if she is the little sister it is me who looks up to her. I thank my step children for telling me I'm the best step mum in the world. It is dedicated to all of you for making everything seem possible when I am struggling to write another word on another page. I love you all dearly and your unquestioning faith and support in me; always believing that I can do anything I put my mind to has helped me to get this job done!

May 2016.

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All links are live at youtube and can also be accessed via the website [www.theartistryofconversation.com](http://www.theartistryofconversation.com) by clicking on the relevant project page. Alternatively they can be viewed using the accompanying DVD box set provided.

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

[www.theartistryofconversation.com](http://www.theartistryofconversation.com) and [www.indialogue.uk.com](http://www.indialogue.uk.com)

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## PREFACE

In a coffee shop in Nottingham a waitress approaches holding in her hands the book *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. The bill I just requested is nestled between the worn pages. I thank the waitress. Smiles are exchanged. I open the book and see Alice.

The black and white etched lines on the page draw my focus to Alice's face. Our eyes lock. We are both sat at a table looking outward. I rapidly start absorbing the sketch of a living room that has been inked in pen. Alice is not alone. Foregrounded, are two women I begin to trace my finger across the page. The women have my attention now, and they are also the focus of attention for Alice. Alice is poised, like a ballerina with her head tilted ever so slightly so she can lean across the table to listen to the women talking. Both of her arms are bent, her hands upturned, and fingers almost touching. Alice's right hand is carefully positioned next to the hand of the woman who is talking; she is mirroring the woman's body language, absorbing her conversational iterations and nuances. Alice's eyes are wide open.

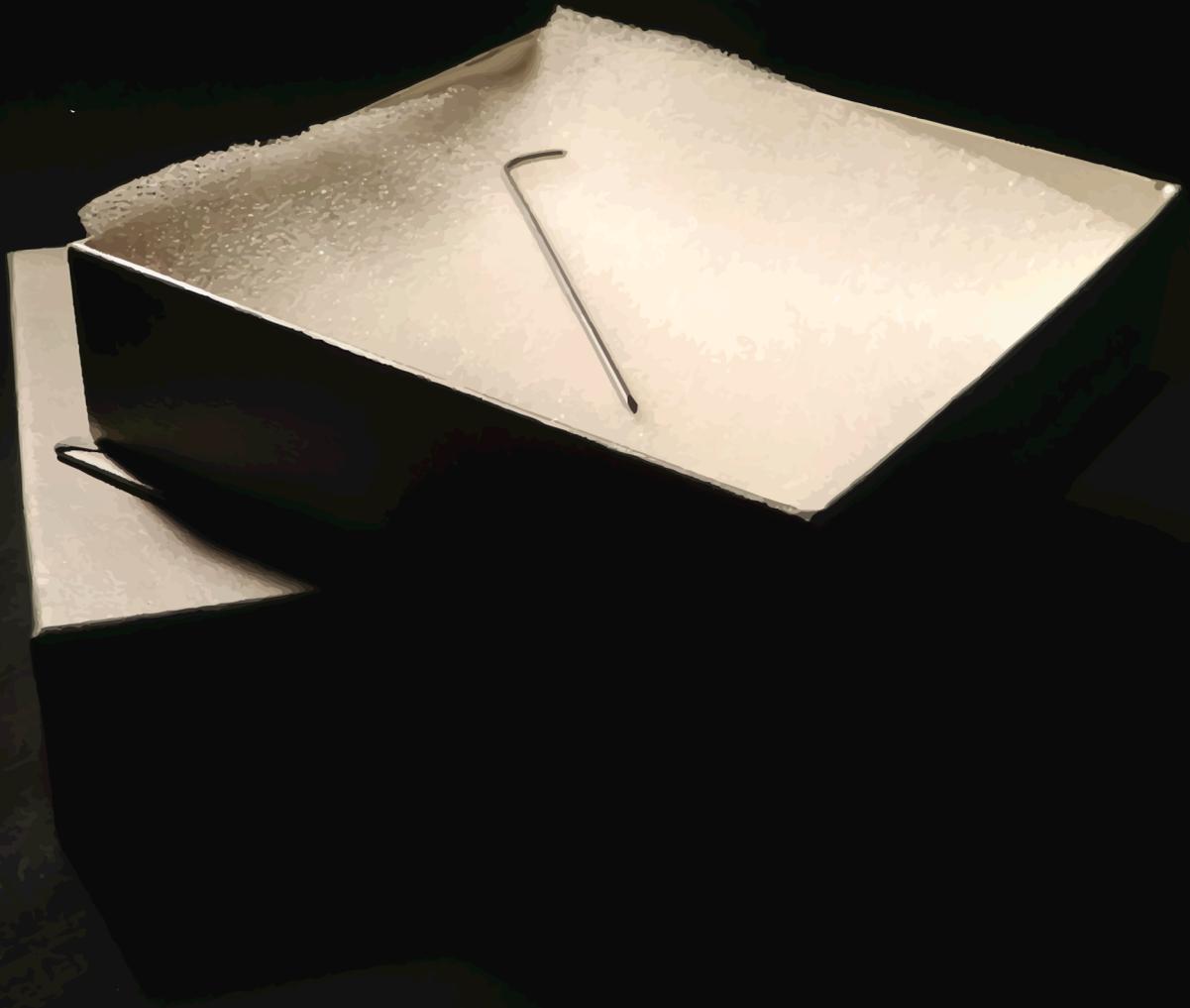
She watches. She listens. She waits as the women talk. My thumb traces down towards the bottom of the illustration, my eyes stop at the caption 'Alice, with both elbows on the table, listened with wide-awake eyes'. It feels as though the waitress has presented me with this book not by chance. I place a five-pound note on top of the found illustration and close the book and smile. I recognized myself in Alice. Alice, like me, has a curiosity into **the artistry of conversation**. A curiosity that has resulted with the production of a thesis bound in black ink, printed in Arial font size 11, which I, like Alice through the looking glass, have 'puzzled over this for some time; (until) at last a bright thought struck... 'Why, it's a looking-glass book, of course! And if I hold it up to a glass, the words will all go the right way...' <sup>1</sup> It is intended that this thesis can be held up to a sheet of glass, its words made visible and the right way round and contribute to the expanding discourse on dialogue.

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://literature.org/authors/carroll-lewis/through-the-lookingglass/Chapter-01.html>  
accessed 3rd august 2015

## CHAPTER ONE

### 1986: An Introduction



This doctoral research emerged from a place of vulnerability. In 1986, at the age of 5, I smashed my left elbow and arm in a P.E. class at school whilst playfully pretending to be a hedgehog. Over the subsequent years I saw how others reacted to my scar, and how so often it became a starting point for *conversations*: even strangers would be confident enough to ask about it rather than simply staring. Because of this, my arts practice became concerned with the use of the dialogic as a mode of enquiry. 24 years later, in 2010 I began to consider in depth how the dialogic aspect of my practice operated and what knowledge it would be able to produce. So, curiously, the wonky pink line on my left arm was the starting point for this PhD.

Within the scope of this enquiry I decided to focus on the defining of *conversation* as a practice. As an artist and within my professional employment experiences, I have grown increasingly aware of the power of *conversation*. I have used it as both a tool and a medium for creating new outcomes/issues within a social engagement setting.

My roles as a senior communications officer for the strategic health authority for the NHS in 2007 – 2009 delivering events for NHS60 and the regional healthcare awards working with NHS staff and users taught me how to facilitate complex and confidential discussions. By working with others I learned to design appropriate environments, such as the use of non-NHS sites in a non clinical environment which encouraged dialogue. As project coordinator for the regional language network (RLN East) in 2009 – 2011. I delivered body language and culture training for SME sectors of industry wanting to export UK goods overseas. I relied on my knowledge obtained as a trained performer to help me deliver these events and realised that both roles required the employment of the haptic, the personable and the creation of conducive environments for these tasks to be undertaken for my employers.

The blurring between my own professional employment and art making has narrowed over time into a single practice, and this body of research was therefore initiated in order to investigate the potential for *conversation* as an art form. I was choreographing *conversation*, orchestrating response & the dialogic to create spaces<sup>2</sup> for new ideas & observations to be made. Through being in *conversation* with others I discovered that I

---

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this enquiry space is defined as both a physical space, such as a building or room, but it also references the physicality of space between persons conversing. It is a term that's definition is located interwoven between conceptual and physical boundaries. Conversation spaces are therefore constructed through a combination of physical and architectural components.

was writing a composition, a score for the dialogic and I began to liken it to an art form. *Conversation* is unfixed, it incorporates a sense of discovery. It values the process behind the composition as well as the final composition for *conversation*. I moved away from describing *conversation* as an art as now I was focused on **The artistry of conversation**.

Art for me no longer implied something fixed, completed and fully formed with outcomes that could be determinable. The act of being in *conversation* needed to reflect a likeness to how I experienced conversing where conversation is unfixed and incorporates a sense of discovery. It values the process behind the *conversation* as well as the final composition for *conversation*. I moved away from describing *conversation* as an art as now I was focused on **the artistry of conversation**. This methodological shift refocused the PhD enquiry. It became the investigation into *conversation* as a methodological process and practice.

Historically, dialogic practice has been very much a part of artistic practice, and in particular, socially engaged art practices. An appropriate historical and contemporary trajectory of dialogical practice and theory has been researched; specifically in relation to socially engaged artistic practice. Art historian Clare Bishop coined the term 'social turn' in 2006 that advocated a resurgence of socially engaged art practice, particularly noted during the late 1990's in the UK. There was a notable shift during the 1990s toward more of a commentary on consumer culture in contemporary arts; this research practice picks up the threads up from that earlier trajectory. However, the increase in participatory art forms comes from a long trajectory of artistic practice that can in part be traced back to movements in art history such as Paris Dada, influenced by Andre Breton who moved audiences away from cabaret and towards public spheres for participatory practice, this is noted in the work *Excursions and Visits* during the 1920's (Bishop 2012, p27). For this enquiry, artists who have influenced my practice research have been identified such as the works of Allan Kaprow *18 Happenings in 6 Parts*<sup>3</sup> (1956), this groundbreaking happening that involved audience participation. During the 1970s, visual artists Joseph Beuys *Four Blackboards* (1972) and Judy Chicago *The Dinner Party* (1974-79), were continuing to develop methods to operate socially and engaged the dialogic. And, at around the same time in the 1970s, Social & Critical Histories of Art Professor Griselda Pollock, started leading 'new' courses in the subject.

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<sup>3</sup> *18 Happenings in 6 Parts* for more information see <http://www.medienkunstnetz.de/works/18-happenings-in-6-parts/>

More recently, the works of artists Adrian Piper, *The Probable Trust Registry* (2014), Jeremy Deller, *The Battle of Orgreave Archive* (2004), John Newling, *Preston Market Mystery Project* (2006), and Jota Mombaca's *Soterramento (Burial)* (2014) are all of important note for this PhD enquiry. They are all artists who have worked within a frame of reference for the dialogic operating through participatory and polemical media to produce a range of practices that reside either within the gallery or the public sphere. They have all utilized the dialogic as a tool for artistic practice, often working collaboratively and involving people as the medium for the art.

Of particular note has been the work of Mary Kelly, her large-scale narrative installation *Post-Partum Document* (1973–79) and *Women at Work*<sup>4</sup> (2016) providing seminal examples of how research methods were drawn from the social sciences and used as an artistic strategy. They forged a complementary relationship between science and art to deal with the personal and political, the public and the private. The fact that *Women at Work* has been collected by the Tate in 1973-5 and was recently curated by Valentina Ravaglia at Tate Modern in 2016 speaks of its currency. It highlights how historically artists have generated practice that is discursive in form and how artists can deal with socio-civic issues without being politically motivated. It shows how contemporaneous discursive practice is and that this is being recognised within the arts.

Artists are using dialogic techniques to engage participants with their work. This, in turn, is raising awareness for the production of dialogic encounters, inviting us to question how artists are producing methodological designs within artistic practice. In relation to my practice research, it is a process of designing for conversation methodologically as an art practice. Given the historical context for my practice research, it is pertinent that my work is looking at design for conversation at the same time that institutions like Tate Modern are revisiting works from the 1970s. Art from this period often focused on the marginalized and socio-political issues. *History is Now*<sup>5</sup> at the Hayward Gallery in 2015, invited artists to individually reflect on Britain over the past 70 years, since the end of the Second World War and leading up to the general election of 2015. *History is Now* (2015) and *Women at Work* (2016) both demonstrate a

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<sup>4</sup> Between 1973 and 1975 Margaret Harrison, Kay Hunt and Mary Kelly conducted a detailed study of women who worked in the Metal Box Company factory in Bermondsey, south London. For more information on *Women at Work* see <http://www.tate.org.uk/visit/tate-modern/display/performer-and-participant/women-and-work>.

<sup>5</sup> For more information about *History is now* see <https://www.southbankcentre.co.uk/venues/hayward-gallery/past-exhibitions/history-now>

resurgence of the need for a dialogue to take place to catalyse and give voice to marginalized communities. It highlights the need to create opportunities within the arts to make work that reflects on daily life, the socio-political climate.

The work of German artist Rosalie Schweiker, <sup>6</sup>who lives and works in the UK launched *Unite Against Dividers* campaign to create the opportunity to bring together politicians and artists through artistic practice. This was achieved through the provision of workshops, debates and conversations and the project aligns with my own practice research engaging a variety of socially engaged techniques to encourage others to participate in conversation. The desired outcome for *Unite Against Dividers* was that the public would then be able to influence and help generate fresh ideas surrounding the challenging and changing nature of the UK. Schweiker and I both seek ways to activate the arts community and marginalized groups through a multi approach to dialogue (examples of this are provided in chapter two).

The artist collective WochenKlauser (who are discussed in more detail in chapter two) are noteworthy in relation to this practice research. It was appropriate that I engaged in conversation with them directly as their work is about seeking new ways to engage the public in dialogue – their work has discovered how for them it is pertinent to provide spaces for people to speak and to create different types of environments and spaces that are appropriate for a given context. In this way, the use of carefully constructed environments and the provision of spaces became instrumental to my practice research. My awareness of social engaged practice on a international platform has helped me establish the distinctive features of my projects and resulting methodology; these are articulated in chapters two and three.

The formal enquiry that started in 2010 led to the production of a body of five works up to 2014, some 30 years after the accident that produced my scar. Cumulatively, they deal with how we talk, how we perform when we talk and how we have *conversations*. When looking back on the first research project, *The Art of Conversation* (2012), I had worked on a very small scale, with a community of five people who each had a scar story that they wanted to share alongside mine within an exhibition context. I produced a series of performances where I re-narrated each scar story to a live audience in a

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<sup>6</sup> Further information can be read about Rosalie Schweiker at <http://makeitclear.eu/posts/3-unite-against-dividers/>

gallery, with the five people in attendance. They witnessed me retelling our conversations, whilst the audience also encountered artifacts connecting to the various stories. Afterwards, everyone talked, the audience guessing whose story was whose. This project was a turning point: I realized it was not about generating small communities for those who have similar experiences, or indeed about re-narrating a story on behalf of others, it was about something else. From watching the post-show action, the intermingling of audience and community I noticed how something started to happen: people started to talk in a shared safe space, about themselves, for themselves.

The second project, *[Media]ted Riots* (2012) allowed me to work with new communities in Nottingham. I was commissioned by Synapse Arts to design and produce a project on the impact of the London Riots in 2012 and how they had affected people in Nottingham. I needed to forge networks appropriate to the project design, as well as developing trust and relationships with industry and community. I decided to work with, and bring together a local school, a library and an arts organisation that had not previously worked in partnership. I had a triadic approach which was to create a spatial construction for the dialogic that shifted in content dependent on the context of the site. This gave opportunities for different demographic groups to come together to share their views shifting *conversations* across sites and contexts. Another key aspect to this way of working, was my suggestion to also host a public debate, and invite individuals from across the city to share their views within a constructed and conducive space. Different people who engaged with the project were then able to speak within a public context as a way of talking back to the experts. The gallery provided a safe space for the cross fertilization of ideas and sharing of opinions.

The third project, *Freedom in Air* (2013) developed key methodological insights found in project two, such as use of space and triadic approach to curating *conversation* across different sites and demographics. I identified and named this spatial conversational shift as the *architactics of conversation*. It is also important to state here that some of the same community group members continued to participate within this project as strong links and relationships were being formed.

The fourth project, *Wonderland* (2013-2014) was in partnership with New Art Exchange, an arts institution in the city. It was 15 months in duration and funded by Nottingham City Council, Synapse Arts, The Hive and New Art Exchange. This project was extremely complex with over 1500 members of the public actively engaged. This

enabled me to test the methodology on a large scale, high profile project in the city of Nottingham.

The fifth project, *InDialogue* (2012 – present) was curated and designed to provide a platform for Dr Heather Connelly and myself. In 2011 we identified that there was a lack of opportunity to test out practice research with other researchers who wanted to work with dialogue. We conceived *InDialogue* to run alongside our doctoral research, but it became apparent that it should be a part of the PhD work. For me this was because *InDialogue* fostered my curatorial approach in encouraging the engagement and creation of supportive spaces for *conversation*, and the use of my approach to the *architactics* of space. It was a platform created to share my research within a specific community of artists and researchers working with the dialogic internationally and across disciplines. This project was founded in 2011 and is currently in its third iteration, with the next symposium scheduled for December 2016.

What has become very clear is that I position myself as an artist within the field, best described by Bruce Brown (2015) as *practice research*. This term acknowledges the process and approach towards the making of the five projects produced for this PhD study. The term *practice research* (2015) avoids the micro-politics of ways to try to describe practice, variously debated as practice: ‘through, from, based or led’. These definitions felt too closed and often separated practice from research through categorization of terminology, therefore they were not considered adequate to use with this study. See *Visualizing Research* (Gray 2011), *The Artist as Researcher* (Wesseling 2011), *Practice as Research* (Nelson 2013), *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Smith and Dean 2009) or *Art Practice as Research* (Sullivan 2010). Practice research, as a term used in relation to this PhD appropriately describes practice without separation from research; the two are symbiotic and synthesized, they operate harmoniously, side-by-side.

The five projects have all been carried out in Nottingham, UK between 2012 – 2014. I was invited as an artist to work with organisations in the city that understood how I could use art as a means to resolve tension and engage with a demographic that was not actively participating within the arts at that time. The five projects for this PhD emerged out of slightly different motivations: some were self-initiated and some came from my being approached by organisations. What is common to all the projects is that that **The Artistry of Conversation** has been a process of talking about talking by talking. It has

convinced me of the social and civic value of talk in an increasingly online and electronically inter-connected world. In this thesis, I will argue that art practice can provide a platform for *conversations* to take place, that *conversation* is engendered by the art-event and that finally, in this respect, *conversation* can itself be recognised as an artistic medium. When reference is made to **The Artistry of Conversation** as a methodology it is considered as dialogic specifically in relation to the founded and working approaches for my research practice

The research question was therefore determined as *how can **the artistry of conversation** be defined as an embodied material art form that is activated through the creation of a dialogical methodology generated through a socially engaged practice?*

### **The parameters**

The terms by which the work has been carried out calls for the production of *Practice in High Definition*, which is what I came to consider the acronym PhD as standing for. Practice was magnified to examine detail closely, *in high definition*, in order to identify methodological contributions. A key motivation for this thesis has been to increase awareness and understanding of *conversation* as an artistic medium within practice. My approach to making each of the works described for this research practice has entered into the spirit of things with the words of philosopher Henri Lefebvre in mind, who in *Critique of Everyday Life* (2002) shared '*his desire to constantly link the conceptual with the experiential; the autobiographical dimension of theoretical reflection; (and) a relationship to experience*' (Lefebvre 2002, px). Resulting in the ideal scenario whereby there is a continuous process of self-evaluation and self-creation that cultivates openness to new knowledge.

The PhD enquiry has found ways to avoid the growing normalization of methods for social engagement: such modes no longer provide adequate approaches for artists working in this context. Too often there are monetary, civic and societal agendas that outline a project's terms and conditions; frequently projects have pre-set measurables that will determine how successful a project has been, based on outcomes that can be easily quantified for having high impact with key target groups.

As a result, the thesis attends to strategies for navigating the terrain of the body in relation to conversing. The research develops a strategy – *architactics* – to consider the

architectural and physical tactics for *conversation*: here *conversation* is thought of in terms of its physical and material nature, bound up by the use of one's environment, emotional and social constructs. *Conversation* is likened here to a sort of invisible or temporal sculpture. Considered sculpturally it is a material that is worked by the artist to build up a shape or form that can be changeable and reworked to create a final end result - a conversation.

Lucas Ihlein's (2009) article *Public art as public conversation* emphasized the importance of dialogic practices and calls for '*...an art of public conversation (that) need not withdraw into the sanctity and disconnected architecture of an art gallery - conversations can be relayed, and replayed, into the very spaces from which they originate...*' (Ihlein 2009, p39). Whilst the article caricatures the nature of public work within a gallery it acknowledges shifts in locations for public art discourse beyond the architecture of a gallery. However it lacks consideration of how to extend discourse beyond play back, edit and presentation of discourse in the gallery. Jeremy Deller's *The Battle of Orgreave* (2001) reenactment performance was disseminated and turned into a installation *The Battle of Orgreave Archive* (2004). This use of the gallery demonstrated how an artistic project could both manifest inside and outside of a gallery as Deller used the installation space to disseminate and present documentation, objects and sound recordings echoing back to the performance and the actual battle of Orgreave that the artist was exploring (Bishop 2012, p35). So, in relation to Ihlein's statement above, this practice research uses specific *architactics* to mobilize voices inside and outside of a gallery.<sup>7</sup> Specific examples of how this was achieved are provided in chapter two.

Voices are exposed and engaged with in a live event through the *architactics* of space to extrapolate **the artistry of conversation**. This is activated in the architectural curation of the gallery space so that '*an art of public conversation need not withdraw into the sanctity and disconnected architecture of an art gallery*' (Ihlein 2009, p39). The production of *conversations* in spaces where they would not normally reside or be navigated is important to **the artistry of conversation**. *Architactics* is returned to in detail in the methodology outlined in chapter three.

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<sup>7</sup> In relation to this statement I am referring to my use of a particular gallery space as being integral to the terms I set as a practitioner in relation to dialogue. The venues I have used were specifically chosen for this practice research very carefully, to enable various publics to come together without preconceptions. Some venues were physically redesigned, such as the construction of internal walls to design a gallery space at Backlit Gallery for *The Art of Conversation*.

The practice research has addressed how the act of being in *conversation* could become a key to unlock how ‘... we seek the past, we find ourselves. And when we seek the present (an analysed and activated presence), we find access to the past’ (Noack: see Kelly 2012, p32). This thesis tells a story. I am choosing to use the word story, because it aligns with my encounter with Walter Benjamin’s *The Storyteller* (Arendt 1999). For Benjamin the storyteller had a sensory and experiential practice where ‘words, soul, eye and hand are brought into connection. Interacting with one another, they determine a practice’ (Arendt 1999, p107). It is relevant to this research because it acknowledges storytelling as a practice and importance of communicability of experience. As such, it is a story of five projects bound together through the act of *conversation* to prevent the role of the storyteller becoming ‘something remote from us and something that is getting even more distant’ (Ardent 1999, p83) from twenty-first century daily life.

A key motivation for the practice research was to design projects for specific times and places with particular individuals, through the staging of art-events to orchestrate the opportunity for *conversation* to seek out the inner storyteller in each of us. This thesis tells a story of five projects and the ‘greatest part of the story is what we choose to add to it. And that’s the story of lifelike art’. (Kaprow and Kelley 2003, p232). The greatest part of this practice research is by providing a body of work to exemplify how story telling can be considered to be lifelike art, as suggested through the words of Jeff Kelley in his writings on the practice of Allan Kaprow (2003). Lifelike art was a term used by Allan Kaprow to make work through mediating between art and every day life. This approach of looking for non-art models for communication has influenced this enquiry.

The practice research has to be understood in relation to the notion of experience, and in particular the question of experience within the context of being inside and outside of the gallery space to produce works of art. Kaprow (Kaprow and Kelley 2003) described the changing nature of art practice to include experiences as an approach that would in turn, provide artists with access to new forms of practice through pushing models of communication in order to generate experiential works.

As an approach to practice Kaprow’s thinking provides a platform for debate about the ‘...changing nature of experience with the rise and proliferation of mass “communication” technologies and as an artist who grounds his art in interpretive interplay of body and mind, of doing and reflecting what has happened’ (Kaprow and Kelley 2003, pxiv) this re-

contextualises these questions of limitation that an artist may be faced with when working and producing live works in an increasingly technological era. This research practice model engages with the notion of live-ness and the *performativity* of *conversation* through the act of interplay when we converse. **The artistry of conversation** involves the bodily turning to talk and as we do so, we talk to tell tales.

I suggest this allows for the practicalities of *dialogue* in daily life to be considered as a raw form for artworks that are created 'somewhere in and between attention to physical process and attention to interpretation' (Kaprow and Kelley 2003, p241). Kaprow's use of *dialogue* and mobilization of voice within the public domain provided a basis for an approach to engage communities and individuals

depending on how curious the person is, it could provoke the question what was that all about? You could suggest a cup of coffee together and talk about the meaning of life and that's one way to do lifelike art (Kaprow and Kelley 2003, p237).

Kaprow raised attention to the distinctions between art and life within practice through the provision of a provocation to question the meaning of life whilst having a cup of coffee. In Kaprow's work, these acts not only blurred the boundaries between art practice and daily life but inadvertently also placed emphasis on having a conversation within an artistic framework. It is the setting up, and use of the dialogic that is of particular interest for my practice research. It validates the use of daily life within artistic practice such as having a coffee. This became a specific technique employed in my own work, particularly in the first research project *The Art of Conversation* (see chapter two part one). I met individuals and had a drink in order to hear their stories. Like Kaprow my research has been focused on human experience and the meaning, or communicability of that experience through art. For Kaprow the line between art and life appears almost indistinct at times, is fluid and should be unrehearsed. These rules set out by Kaprow in his 1966 essay entitled *The Happenings are Dead: Long Live the Happenings!* (Kelley and Kaprow 2003, p59) are conditions that I employed in my practice research to assist the development of the methodology, APSSL.

A social context for art practice was considered in his writings in the 1960's that proposed that a social context is commonly understood in terms of an individual's social, personal and contributing environmental factors but in addition to this

psychological and sociological factors should be considered in relation to artistic practice and how it should change 'according to the shape, scale, and contents of its envelope' (Kelley and Kaprow 2003, p94). This practice research has drawn on the theoretical principles of Kaprow, considering itself an envelope that has to adapt and develop accordingly, project to project. In this sense Kaprow's thinking holds significant contemporary reference especially in direct relation to my dialogic practice.

The following working terms *artistry*, *performativity*, *dialogue* and *conversation* have been specifically defined in relation to this research practice. Each provide a theoretical framework to ground the practice and have supported the final set of critical terms I have identified for the methodology which will be expanded and focused on in chapter three.

*Artistry* is usually defined in relation to someone, having an artistic skill or ability. The OED suggests that someone who has such an ability or skill is an artist, writer, musician or actor, and the words skill and imagination are often cited in dictionary definitions. The term is therefore related to ability, to being a skilled professional. These synonyms conjure a limited interpretation for artistry. The Western definition seems to restrict, defining artistry in terms of roles and tasks in both domestic and specialized acts and so an Eastern definition taken from the Chinese offers a more appropriate alternative. In Chinese, by contrast, the term is defined as having an 'artistry for writing poems' roughly translated as artistic conception (*yìqì*), and this is considered as holding the highest 'artistic' interpretation of the society's morals and ethics. This definition resonated with this practice research. Society's morals and ethics were used as a starting point for orchestrating *conversations* as one of the key platforms for my practice. The word *yi* means to 'to escape', to 'flee'. It also aligns with my theorization that people could 'escape' daily life and engage with an art event and be in *conversation*, be outside of themselves through **the artistry of conversation** (Lei, C 2015).

As a result this definition conjures a range of ideas and a sense of value for the lived experience concomitant with the view that, '*...art's function is to provide meaning through experience, rather than meaning out of art*' (Kaprow and Kelley 2003, pxxii). This is fundamental to my approach, as through the artistry or crafting of a *conversation* (specifically within the context of this research practice) my practice is able to provide an experience – the experience of conversing. (Kaprow and Kelley 2003, pxxii). This trajectory returns me to the conceptualizing of *Art as Experience* (Dewey 1999) that

threads art as experience with its intrinsically active and socializing authority. Dewey called for interaction with the everyday, the gallery to interact with the street and everyday events to interact with art events. This was noted during the boom of socially engaged practices in the 1980s – artists desperately finding ways to establish connections between art and life. The experience of being in *conversation* is conceptualised in terms of its situational, operational and structural forms. Experience is subject to feedback and open to feedback. Implicit is faith in the communicative function of art. (Kaprow and Kelley 2003)

As the research developed and I explored how we negotiate *conversations* with others, I came to think of participation in *conversation* as a practice which we perform. *‘Through language, through a re-description of the phenomena we are confronted with and through the (re)telling of a story that the subject is performing, even constituting, him – or herself’* (Kelly 2011, p5). *Performativity* is therefore considered as that which is embodied in relation to taking part in a *conversation* within the context of the projects. Merleau-Ponty (Romdenh-Romluc 2000) claimed that the body came into being through a sense of *self* and *other*, *seeing* and *being seen*, through which it can then be considered that *conversation* is both material process and practice. The *performativity* of *conversation* is therefore essential in understanding the multifaceted and multisensory nature of the process.

*Performativity* is understood as an embedded physicality of the process of being in *conversation*. This reinforces the power of the physicality of *conversation* and the need to ‘turn to’ and to ‘engage’ and be ‘face to face’. Emmanuel Levinas stated that, *‘the face speaks to me and thereby invites me to a relation incommensurate with a power exercised, be it enjoyment or knowledge’* (Levinas 1991, p198). Amelia Jones worked with Austin’s ideas of the performative, as being that which is to *‘overcome the limitations of a sense reference model of language and to allow the recognition of speech as an act’* (Jones 1998, p84). Austin’s theorization of the performative has been appropriate for this enquiry because it aligns places priority on the body and physicalizes language. It is important to mention the work by groundbreaking theorist Judith Butler’s in relation to the performativity of the body, and the conceptualization that the body is a surface, a boundary through which gestures, movements and enactments are embodied. Amelia Jones draws on Butler’s references the dialogic as ‘speech acts’, again, reiterating language as an active and not a passive exchange. Butler also defines linguistic

performativity in relation to gender, and of interest for this enquiry is the conceptualization that language defines identity and that language is a signifying practice and that we are engendered performatively through our sense of being.

This research enquiry is focused on the actualisation and **the artistry of conversation** and how *performativity* has begun to transform the way we look at, and engage with, *conversation*

...the performance of the body as an artistic practice is a mode of textual inscription. The body (as the corporeal enactment of the subject) is known and experienced only through its representational performances – whether presented ‘live’ in photographs, videos, films, on the computer screen... meaning is a process of engagement and never dwells in any one place.’ (Jones and Stephenson 1999, p8).

It has been important to consider the distinctions between *dialogue* and *conversation* in relation to this practice research enquiry. As a verb, *dialogue* is considered as an active process that occurs between people in order to be In *Dialogue*. The root meaning of the word *dialogue* taken from Greek definition of *dialogos* means *dia* ‘through’ + *logos* ‘word’ or ‘reasoning’ (Bohm 2004, p6). This definition for *dialogue* is important for this practice research as emphasis is placed on movement or where *dialogue* occurs *through* action. Often *dialogue* is considered for its theological, social and relational constructs when a definition for *dialogue* is being referenced. Dialogue, or *Dialogos* has both literal and theatrical roots and this practice research offers a definition that attempts to bridge the gap between, as Martin Buber (2000) wrote ‘I and thou’, a bridge between the literal and the theatrical. For this enquiry *dialogue* is considered as pre-conversed, already said, caused through a given action and it can be rehearsed.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines *conversation* as a verb to engage in *conversation* evokes action, participation with someone, something, other. The root of the word in Latin is con- ‘with’ +and versare, the frequentative of vertere *to turn*. *Conversation* is defined by this practice research as improvised, embodied and defined by its informality. It is physical, connective and performative. At its root, *conversation* is active, implicitly it encourages movement, to turn and engage, with and in *conversation*.

It is important to return briefly to the definition for *dialogue* to emphasise the distinctions between *dialogue* and *conversation* for this practice research. *Dialogue* has implied rigid structures, often a defined set of principles in both thought and actions that take place between individuals. *Conversation* has implied informality, free flowing conversing and a relaxed approach and articulation within a dialogic practice.

*Conversation* analysis, Jefferson (1995), Sacks (1995), Schegloff (2007) is traditionally an approach for studying human interaction, in terms of talk and body deployment (actions). The focus of the analysis is commonly orientated towards individuals. This research has approached *conversation* as pluralistic. Individuals are bound up in the process of conversing with me, and are also the mutual producers of *conversation*. Focus is given to all aspects of '*participative thinking and acting (which is considered as) an engaged and embodied relationship*' (Gardiner 2000, p54) to incorporate physical, cognitive, spatial and narrative processes for *conversation*.

For Peter Senge, Physicist David Bohm understood the relationship that we have with *dialogue* as '*a process of direct, face-to-face encounters*' (Bohm 2004, pxx). Bohm, believed that *dialogue* sometimes enhances collective meaning, through the form of discussions or disagreements but it is not always a *dialogue*. Perhaps it is better to consider these as aspects of forming a *conversation* through which *dialogue* is activated. And that understanding arises through our participation rather than by abstraction. '*The thing that mostly gets in the way of dialogue, he says, is holding to assumptions and opinions, and defending them*' (Bohm 2004, pix). This practice research suggests that we are responsible to acknowledge and '*integrate dialogue practices into day-to-day operations*' within arts practice (Bohm 2004, pviii).

### **The Critical Context**

Grant Kester is Professor of Art History and the founding editor of FIELD: A Journal of Socially Engaged Art Criticism. Kester is one of the leading figures in the emerging critical dialogue around "relational" or "dialogical" art practices. At *InDialogue*<sup>8</sup> in 2014 and again in 2016 I had a performative online, live conversation in front of an audience of international artists and researchers. Kester has been a key starting point for my practice research given his academic research into conversation being recognised as a

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<sup>8</sup> *InDialogue* is one of the research practice projects for this enquiry and will be discussed in detail in chapter two. *InDialogue* is an international symposium for artists and researchers which was co founded by Rhiannon Jones and Dr Heather Connelly.

legitimate art form. He is an advocate for artistic practice that engages with the dialogic and so it was appropriate for us to be directly in conversation. Kester holds the belief that dialogic practice encourages self-evolutionising and generative qualities in others: when we acknowledge personal stories of self and for another, individual construction of the world around us can begin (Kester 2004). If an authoring of ourselves and our lived experiences takes place during *conversation*, it raises questions about the value of *conversation* and highlights the potential of talking as ‘*a process of transformation*’ (Kester 2014).<sup>9</sup> When knowledge is shared and generated, conversation has transformative potential to be a multisensory experience. Kester supports the idea that *conversation* is a process and that it is activated through practice, and he acknowledges that dialogic practice commonly produces finished objects, whereas *conversation* art provokes, and often becomes, a part of the work. Through the five projects, this research extends his conceptualization by evidencing how *conversation* can be the work in its entirety. It is acknowledged that this does not apply to all forms of conversation but in terms of the body of work produced for this enquiry, examples are offered (see chapter two) of the specific type of conversation that can be considered as the art work, dependent on the context, content and conditions orchestrated through arts practice.

I have reviewed Kester’s article *Conversation Pieces: The Role of Dialogue in Socially-Engaged Art* (2005) and created a series of positions for *conversation* relevant to this practice research, listed in bold:

1. Local consensual knowledge is only provisionally binding and that it is grounded precisely at the level of collective interaction.

**Local consensual knowledge is shared and is only provisionally binding and that it is grounded precisely at the level of collective interaction.**

2. In a dialogical aesthetic, subjectivity is formed through discourse and inter subjective exchange itself.

**In a dialogical aesthetic, subjectivity and knowledge is formed through discourse and inter subjective exchange itself.**

3. Discursive participants may have their opinions challenged, and even changed, but they enter into, and depart from, discourse as ontologically stable agents.

**Discursive Individuals have their opinions challenged, and even changed, but they enter into, and depart from, discourse and have formed opinions**

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<sup>9</sup> For further information and for the video recording of the keynote please visit <http://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/event/dialogue-2014>

**through their interaction with this body of practice from an ontological perspective.**

4. The artist often operates as an outsider, occupying a position of perceived cultural authority.

**The artist is not positioned as the outsider, to avoid where possible perceived cultural authority.**

Kester has extended the discourse for dialogical practice away from a linear ideology<sup>10</sup> to include in its definition forms for practice that challenge aesthetics and encourage participation. Through his critical framework, art practice has been granted permission to allow both artist and individual to engage in '*the possibility of new knowledge, unpredictable outcomes and relationships and generation of a new sense of self and the other*' (Kester 2004, p138). This research acknowledges that an investigation is needed into '*aesthetical dialogues*' (Kester 2004, p190) to challenge traditional definitions for the dialogic and through practice provide the opportunity to be '*outside of self*' (Kester 2004 p155). Kester suggests that dialogical art is an art form that provides an individual with the chance of '*being outside self*' (Kester 2004, p155) activated through the artist's provision of a context. It is identified that there are opportunities for an individual to be both '*outside and inside of self*' in arts practice as it can bring attention between physical process and interpretation.

Social scientist and psychologist Hubert Hermans authored Dialogical Self Theory. (Hermans 2010). He called for the readdressing of the dialogic, the construction of self, and inner *dialogue*. This provided a useful juxtaposition to apply to my practice research as Hermans proposed '*we have the developmental possibility for dialogue and to have and to create spaces for dialogue*' (Hermans 2012). I noted a commonality of the call for the use of the dialogic in both arts practice by Grant Kester and by Hubert Hermans from the social science disciplines. My practice bridges the gap between these disciplines by its provision of a platform that recognises and redefines the *performativity* and *artistry* of the dialogic.

*Dialogue* needs a positioning theory: in order to have more insight into *dialogue* you have to look at the space in-between (Hermans 2012). This in between-ness, is a

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<sup>10</sup> Linear ideology is defined as an organized step by step system or series of ideas that are developed for or by a given subject.

physical space that can be generated through practice and provide attention to what is said and unsaid, and the spatial elements of *dialogue*. The fundamental problem with *Dialogical Self Theory* is that the performative nature of *conversation* is not considered, my work is in part a reply and a provocation to this position. This practice research enquiry addresses this gap, where the spatial use of site and body are incorporated into the production of dialogic engagement.

As a framework for the mediation of human activity, it dialogically considers how self and other are mediated through language whereby the dynamisation of self is contextualised as a dialogic process. It is a process that takes place between individuals; it is a form of praxis defined for example by Seifrid as '*only on the lips of another can the word become comprehensible to the speaker and the process is even described as involving a complex interplay of subjectivity and objectivity*' (Seifrid 2005, p32). This thesis identifies language as an activity; it is a space in between individuals and communities or arts organisations, and myself. In contrast to is Herman's proposition that the space in-between is a relationship between language and one's intention.

Speaking is to weave oneself a dynamic meta position for the voice. Speaking about an experience publically provides individual with the opportunity to contribute towards the building of a socio-civic identity for themselves and informs the current or future identity of a given community. Hermans suggested that we can name this as the in-between, our in-between, because it is conditioned by the dialogicality of global acts. This means that they are interdependent, the implication that the actual formation of *dialogue* is transitional as it also involves possible future ones. This supports the conceptualization that *conversation*

...engages both our minds and bodies in actions that transforms art into experience and esthetics into meaning. Our experience as participants is one of meaningful transformation (Kelley 2003, pxviii).

In order to achieve this, *conversation* is able to mobilise the sharing of experience through the '*attention to physical process and attention to interpretation*' (Kelley 2003, p241) of *dialogue*.

It is not my intention to reduce voices to the singular but to mobilise voices and provide spaces for them to be audible. '*If one voice represents another it can not be in dialogue*

*any longer. A dialogue is when all voices can be heard'* (Hermans 2012). Nor can it be taken as a given that *'Dialogue is everywhere, we need to be aware of inhibitors or facilitators of dialogue'* (Hermans 2012). To do this the multiplicity of self – the relationship between emotion and reason, and the development of a dialogical relationship through the act of *conversation* - all need to be accounted for. The *architactics* of space, (one of the named components of the methodology designed for this PhD enquiry explained in chapter three) and the methods by which I have chosen to function need to be acknowledged in order for insight into *dialogue*.

This thinking helped me devise modes for communication in order to generate a body of work. Returning to the words of artist Allan Kaprow, (introduced earlier in this chapter) his concept of *lifelike art* also warned that

the models for the experimental arts of this generation have been less the preceding arts than modern society itself, particularly how and what we communicate, what happens to us in the process, and how this may connect us with natural processes beyond society (Kelley 2003 p xv).

The above quotation is significant because it offers a definition of the nature of art, I have noted that we live in a climate within the arts that increasingly strives to seek ways to encourage *dialogue* and enrich society. Kaprow's remarks from 1974 are still relevant. Re-evaluation of the need to talk in shared spaces, often provided by arts organisations, is pertinent, in these unprecedented times of digitisation. The generation of space for shared *dialogues*, for the communicability of experiences, which depends so much more on the performative presence and opportunity for people to converse, within an art context, than rely simply on the utterance of words.

Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin provided a literary and linguistic theorization for the dialogic. His writings have been central to an understanding of the term dialogic and its application in relation to this research practice. In *The Dialogic Imagination* (Bakhtin 1982) Bakhtin defined the terms *heteroglossia* and *chronotope* in order to assist the understanding of dialogue. Heteroglossia placed emphasis on content over text and the hybridist nature of language. Chronotype on the other hand provides a definition for language that incorporates the spatial, temporal and relational. This is significant as I consider not only language, but **the artistry of conversation** as incorporating aspects

of both heteroglossic and chronotypical activities. Bakhtin defined the dialogic through dialogue; he described utterances as being a direct relationship between people that are never abstract and always directed to someone about something

My understanding of aesthetics in relation to practice has been theoretically influenced by a Bakhtinian school of thought that proposed the *'first step of aesthetic activity is my projecting myself into him and experiencing his life from within him. I must experience – come to see and to know – what he experiences, I must put myself in his place and coincide with him, as it were'*. (Bakhtin 1990, p25) As a consequence of reading this, I ensured that all individuals who engaged with this practice research were encouraged to share their experiences. Interest was shown in their stories by making the time to have a conversation and, in turn, this increased the frequency of dialogic exchanges that I had with others. It is important to acknowledge that Bakhtin's writings were instrumental to the research enquiry in two very distinct ways. The first research project *The Art of Conversation* was particularly influenced by the notion of one's temporality and fleeting moments in history. Bakhtin proposed that *'any given act, always remains a pure demand of one's own temporality, historicity and finitude'* (Bakhtin 1990, p123). I investigated how metaphorically these concepts could be applied to the collection of scar stories. I asked how scars leave both a literal and metaphorical marking upon one's being.

The second notable Bakhtinian influence on my practice research comes from the thinking that *'places priority on the creative process itself and (on) the artist or author who creates'* (Smith, P and Wilde, C 2002, p293). By prioritizing the creative process it gives value to artistic work that is created within a dialogic frame of reference. According to Bakhtin, everything that the artist creates is answerable to life and lived experiences. He placed priority on an artist's creative potential to connect art and life through the use of the dialogic in a given time and space. As Bakhtin states *'The word lives, as it were, on the boundary between its own context and another, alien, context'* (Bakhtin 1990, p284). This enquiry accepts the idea that words are the boundaries between contexts, between self and other, and, as such, has made 'less alien' another's context through the practice this research has generated. To do this, I created opportunities for individuals from different socio-political contexts to come together to talk through a variety of orchestrated events and projects. For this enquiry, I have taken the view that *'I live in a world of others' words'* (Bakhtin 1984b, p143) and considered words, as Bakhtin did, to be active, living expressions. Words, or utterances, are

polyphonic, (a metaphorical term for the dialogic that Bakhtin borrowed from music theory) because we are always in dialogue with each other and the world around us.

Connected to this is the thinking that every act, whether it is an internal feeling or an external and visible gesture, is inextricably linked with the idea that one is constantly performing. This is apparent in the statement that describes how *'in every act, in every deed... (one) performs, both outer and inner...'* (Bakhtin 1990, p123). This thinking, when applied to my practice, suggests that how I conduct myself in conversation is essentially a performative act, whether they are internal acts of cognition or made manifest as visible gestures. This conceptualization of performativity is in part what this research enquiry is theoretically grounded in and it has contributed towards the methodological design of APSSL discussed in detail in chapter three.

To continue with this line of thought Bakhtin proposed that *'my own word is an act that I perform, and my performed act is alive only in the unitary and unique event of being. Hence, no act performed by me is capable of consummating my own life, for it connects my life with the open infinitude of the event of being'* (Bakhtin 1990, p143). Within my practice research enquiry I considered the possibility for conversation as limitless by embracing Bakhtin's notion of 'being' in terms of its idea of connectivity between people and life and its sense of performativity. I considered the dialogic as an invisible performed act. I did not allow my heightened awareness of the performed act to consume me or whoever I was in conversation. Bakhtin's notion of conversation as a performative act was summarized by Kester within artistic practice who *'argued that the work of art can be viewed as a kind of conversation; a locus of different meanings, interpretations and points of view'* (Kester 2005). This approach to *dialogue* brought into question the power of discourse by understanding multiple perspectives offering the creation of a linguistics methodology and artists have recognised the possibility of *conversation* as a space to power paradigms through *dialogue*. As mentioned earlier, Bakhtin proposed that *dialogue* was polyphonic. Dialogism requires individuals to constantly engage, respond and be informed by other things. In this way *dialogue* becomes social. For Bakhtin, to exist is to engage with *dialogue*. This undoubtedly places importance on being in the world and that our understanding of others is ultimately dialogic. This enquiry directly engaged with Bakhtin's notion that language is more than just a means to communicate with words, instead it is the unfolding and informing of ourselves through being in *dialogue* with others. Priority is placed on the social and of being in the world. Being is always relational for Bakhtin. My practice engages with the

Bakhtinian belief that dialogue is transformative and can change an individual's consciousness or perspective through being in the world and through social interaction.

To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask questions, to heed, to respond, to agree and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life; with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds. He invests his entire self in discourse and this discourse enters into the dialogic fabric of human life into the world symposium (Bakhtin 1984, p293).

I engaged with a Bakhtinian school of thought because I created opportunities through methodology for individuals to participate in a series of projects where dialogue was considered more than simply an exchange of words. Instead it was a physical, emotional, and all encompassing process for an individual to engage in. This research enquiry has entered into a polyphonic spirit, working with many voices, and seeking ways to bring these different voices together. By directly engaging with Bakhtin's notion of being, I explored notions of context, place and performativity, resulting in the orchestration and design of *architactics* (this is unpacked methodologically in chapter three).

As a consequence of Bakhtin's conceptualization of the dialogic there was a noted rise in popularity for his writings in the West, specifically since the 1960s. His proposition that language is key to the production of *dialogue*, that thinking is unfolding; and the utterance of words is defined as the way we use words, rather than the word itself. However, this school of thought does not consider the multisensory, performative or social forms of speech in relation to the dialogic, which are what this research enquiry has explored. It is important to state that Dewey and Bakhtin are not natural bedfellows but for the purposes of this thesis they are appropriate points of reference to the work.

Gillian Rose (2012) encourages finding ways to understand hidden textures of everyday life and considers a Bakhtinian value on the importance of the everyday through the collection of stories and artifacts. Life is a continual process that one negotiates in order to establish a coherent construction of meaning about oneself. This is embodied through one's ability to understand life, by developing a characterization for oneself. Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic is limited through the notion of a singular internal voice as it is through the *transgression*, or interaction with another, that understanding can be formed for a lived experience. The term *transgression* offers a useful definition for

artistic practice as it acknowledges being able to see beyond oneself and to be able to see and hear the other, whether individual or community or inner and outer body.

This is however reliant on the successful negation between self and other which is an important aspect of art's function. That is not to deny '*each of us as a singular narrative*' (Gardiner 2000, p54) but that a nod towards external interactions and perspectives enhances an individual's conceptualisation of self. In other words, the process of embodiment of one's identity is a product of an interactive process. Bakhtin proposed that interaction and negation of self and other aids the interpretation of specific elements of one's character that requires '*participative thinking and acting [and] an engaged and embodied relation[ship]*' (Gardiner 2000, p54) to be established.

For Thomas Seifrid, author of *The Word Made Self*, Wilhelm von Humboldt's influential philosophical writings on language during the 1860s, contributed towards the rethinking of '*speech as cognitive interchange, as a social basis for language*' (Seifrid 2005, p32). Humboldt proposed that language is *energeia*, a doing-ness. When active and engaged you produce *energeia* therefore, through doing, a definition for language can then be created. Language is therefore a mediated activity that produces an energetic definition for language and physicalizes language.

The work of artist Mary Kelly has influenced my practice because of the questions she has asked with regards to defining dialogue and the use of language in arts practice. Her conceptualization of voice as material establishing connections between narration, *performativity* and listening has been impressive. Of particular interest for this enquiry is her proposal that narratives can '*inhabit the space of installation with its specific experiential dimensions of simultaneity in time*' (Kelly 2012, p13). What is key here is that Kelly extended Bakhtin's position for *dialogue* beyond narrative and brought it into contemporary thinking within art practice. Kelly's work supports the idea of project-based art forms as they are '*not necessarily politically motivated, nor are they dialogic...they are circumscribed by a discursive site*'. (Kelly, 2012, p10) For Kelly these works have enabled people to engage with '*precarious forms of life we call the everyday*' (Kelly 2012, p13). As such, I have used a project-based approach to provide a framework for the practice research.

Kelly suggested that '*there is a latent investment in listening*' (Kelly 2012, p17) and that *conversation* is a way to activate this dormant activity and actualize listening through *conversation* and vice versa. It is a truly reflective percipience as Dont Rhine proposed in

*conversation* with Mary Kelly 'I speak, you listen, there is another complication. I speak. I hear myself speaking. You listen. I hear myself being listened to' (Kelly 2012, p17). This conjures a circular movement of conversing that implies a turning in and out of oneself. Of being engaged with and in, to turning and being turned towards through conversation.

There is not always a 'forthcoming need' from a society to engage and have a *conversation*. So, it is about seeking out and finding the potential within communities. It is not a cerebral activity; it is based on a social intelligence and development of skills to listen and to talk as an art form in its own right. It is about creating vehicles for influence and impact through building relationships over time, during *conversation*. Kelly (in *conversation* with artist Sharon Haynes) discussed how you seek out your audience, and who you are actually talking to when you are making work. Locating your audience, however large or small that group, it is fundamental that 'you really desire to speak' with them as this is this platform from which a *discursive site* can then occur (Kelly 2012, p14). Kelly's works during the period 1973 - 2010 consider *dialogue* in relation to narrative and *performativity* as a means for witnessing events. *Performativity* comes from the connectivity of *dialogue* through spatial moments of exchange between self and other. The voice is about texture, sharing of experience and suggests an embedded historical quality for voice that is about its locale. For Kelly it is also a question of what is produced during speech acts and bound with that is the enquiry into the process of listening as when 'I speak, you listen therefore we are' (Kelly 2012,p17). This implies that through the partaking in both speech and listening acts, a sense of *we* is generated.

Les Back (2007) offers a layered definition to listening as an active agent, and argues that listening, culturally has become more about speaking rather than listening. The lines are too blurred in contemporary practice and in reality. It is not enough to listen, and to assume that we know what that means in modern daily life. Everything is shifting and continues to shift: we are, like the art of listening, redefining the rules of how to listen and how to talk. They are in both definition and by their own activity becoming shape-shifters. Back raises fundamentally important ideas, that we are mostly ignoring, or, indeed, not wanting to listen to as he raises the questions of how interconnectivity and modern day life are making us less connected in the global world in which we live. I am connected, plugged in, tuned in, online, panicked if offline without connection, and yet I am also solo and I select what I listen to and what I speak of; we are living in a

'reduced world of reality and a heightened world of revelation and voyeurism' (Back 2007).

For Back, *conversation* is likened to that of an *unexpected visitor*. As a metaphor it describes an openness and willingness to explore the unknown and to welcome the unexpected. However temporal that moment of curiosity and intuition might be it has the potential to manifest into an inspired thought and provide a driver for *conversation*; such found knowledge can be described as '*shocks of recognition that mark key steps in the way practice led researchers find their way through, being in an on-going state of emergence*' (Smith 2009, p219) opportunities for recognition can be gained from encountering and entering into *conversation* through this method for practice.

Refreshingly, the act of listening was made more explicit in an exhibition entitled *Listening* at The Bluecoat in Liverpool curated by Sam Belinfante. The programme notes state that '*Listening is an exhibition that interrogates the idea of listening itself rather than merely its aural objects*' (Belinfante 2015). Belinfante subtly acknowledges the idea that listening is a thing in its own right, it is not only an act, or something we do, but that it is also the thing itself. *Conversation* in this thesis is also being positioned as the thing itself. It is the subject matter, not just a means through to an end, in order to enter into and out of dialogue in order to communicate. *Conversation* is an art form and a method that has been created in order to produce encounters to encourage others to explore the experiences of others.

In conclusion, I have shown in chapter one the terms by which this practice research has been carried out. It has also defined the context in which the project operates engaging with key thinkers from the field of social science such as Hubert Hermans, and from within the artistic discipline, Grant Kester, supported by the practices of Mary Kelly and Allan Kaprow. It has mapped out the territory for the five projects highlighting that the practice research considers *conversation* as experiential and performative. It has demonstrated the rationale for the practice research as an embodied approach from which it can argue a position for an artistry of *conversation*. Chapter two will describe the five project based works in chronological order to demonstrate that it has founded *conversations* within communities. **The artistry of conversation** is not just a cerebral activity; it is based on a social intelligence and the development of the skills of listening and talking as an art form in its own right. It has been an exercise in creating vehicles for influence and impact through building relationships over time, during *conversation*.



## CHAPTER TWO

2012 - 2014 Practice in High Definition



## **Introduction**

This chapter describes the five projects that make up the practice research for this doctoral work: *The Art of Conversation*, *[Media]ted Riots*, *Freedom in Air*, *Wonderland* and *InDialogue*. It unfolds as a chronological, conversational narrative, paying attention to the fine details of particular spaces, voices and encounters. In this, and the tone that I adopt in my telling, I draw conceptually on Dutch artists and non-academic free-style researchers Rob Hamelijncx and Nienke Terpsma known as *Fucking Good Art* (2014), who consider dialogue to incorporate ‘*the white noise*’ where everything shared during conversation has the potential to be significant. The projects were designed so that I remained alert to this potential, and could therefore explore the connections I might find in the smallest aspects of what was said and done. This work will then provide the material upon which I will reflect in chapter three, **The Artistry of Conversation: a methodology for my practice research.**

### **Note for the reader:**

Please now refer to the project descriptors in appendix before further reading of this chapter. As this chapter is both textual and visual in content you will be invited at key points throughout this chapter to refer to the DVDs listed below. All links are live at youtube and can also be accessed via the website [www.theartistryofconversation.com](http://www.theartistryofconversation.com) by clicking on the relevant project page. Alternatively they can be viewed using the accompanying DVD box set provided.

#### **DVD1**

DVD1 *The Art of Conversation* part 1

<https://youtu.be/j4H0k0cq9HM>

DVD1 *The Art of Conversation* part 2

<https://youtu.be/VGRulRsFHsE>

#### **DVD2**

DVD 2 *[Media]ted Riots*

[https://youtu.be/a-o\\_xdlgn-4](https://youtu.be/a-o_xdlgn-4)

#### **DVD3**

DVD 3 *Freedom in Air* part 1

<https://youtu.be/FfXy2yyTxjY>

DVD 3 *Freedom in Air* part 2

<https://youtu.be/Re19uNblCH4>

DVD 3 *Freedom in Air* part 3

<https://youtu.be/iHXOcy67MFQ>

#### **DVD4**

DVD 4 *Wonderland*

<https://youtu.be/SKFm9ArpC8U>

#### **DVD5**

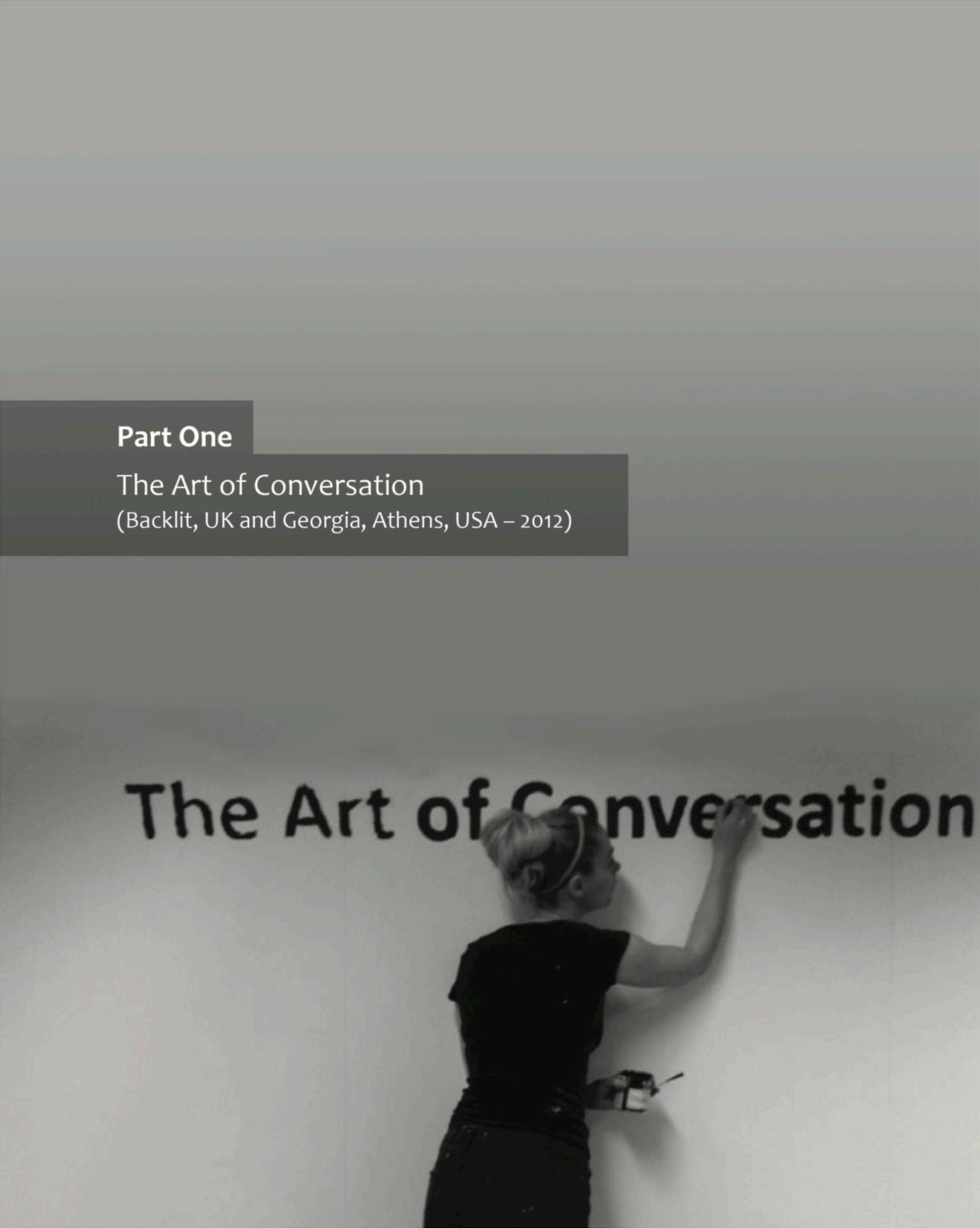
DVD 5 *InDialogue*

[https://youtu.be/xANmS8CX\\_RI](https://youtu.be/xANmS8CX_RI)

## Part One

### The Art of Conversation

(Backlit, UK and Georgia, Athens, USA – 2012)



The Art of Conversation

## Part 1:

### *The Art of Conversation* (Backlit, Uk and Georgia, Athens, USA – 2012)

The project *The Art of Conversation* took place at Bonington Gallery, Nottingham Trent University (UK), Backlit Gallery, Nottingham (UK) and Georgia University, Athens (USA). The project had a series of provocations to generate practice. Firstly, I was interested with dealing with how conversation analysis<sup>11</sup> could be applied to a performative practice and secondly, how that might require a heightened sense of awareness of voice, challenge the concept of ownership of dialogue and adapt dialogue live with an audience. The premise for the project was based on the concept that my scar provided a provocation for people to converse with me<sup>12</sup> as *'we are constantly telling stories to give meaning to our lives, so much so that they are almost necessary as the air we breathe'* (Leavy 2015, p39).

The project consisted of four stages:

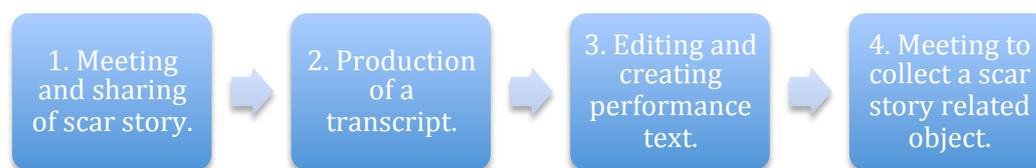


Fig. 1 Diagram showing the four stages of the project.

This premise fuelled my interest in making work that was an attempt to reject the notion of a homogenised society by generating opportunities for individuals to converse about their scar stories and to share my story in return as the material for an exhibition to engage *'that which is indelible'* as a starting point for practice. The marks of a scar provided embedded qualities both in bodily and textual form. Scars provided the lines on a page wanting a story to be written upon its surface. Stories were gathered from five individuals who agreed to participate and tell me their scar story: Georgina Lock, Paul Moran, Jo Higgins, Hilary Shedel and Wolfgang Buttress. I decided to include my own

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<sup>11</sup> For this thesis conversation analysis is aligned with 'organisation of everyday talk, of language as an actually used in social interaction...conversation analysis provides a component that has been critically missing from the realistic examination of such issues as how language relates to thinking, how 'structure' relates to 'practice' and institutions to experience, or how actors can be agents and objects in the social world (Moerman, M 1988).

<sup>12</sup> This was based on first hand experience that the sight of my elbow became an access point for interaction, an awkward glance, a wry smile, and an upturned corner of a mouth hesitant to say hi to break the tension of being caught in the act of looking.

story making a total of six narratives<sup>13</sup> so that I could position myself as both contributor and collector to share a similar role to deliberately facilitate and tease out their stories and to break any perceived hierarchy of ‘them and me’. It also was stressed that we had much in common with each other because we each had a scar and a story. This was reinforced by the conceptualisation that ‘*stories have the potential to make us feel connected, open our eyes to new perspectives, stimulate the development of empathy, self-awareness or social reflection*’ (Leavy 2015, p39). This was also echoed in the individuals’ motivations to volunteer and participate in this project because they were each conceptually intrigued with the theoretical principles behind my research and inquisitive as to how their stories contribute to an art project. The methodological insights into the role of the storyteller for this practice research are expanded upon in chapter three.

A Participants	B Date met	C Permission Granted	D Dialogical Intervention	E Location of Conversation	E Transcript Created
Georgina Lock	April 2011	YES	YES	Her work	YES
Paul Moran	January 2012	YES	YES	Cafe	YES
Jo Higgins	April 2012	YES	YES	Cafe	YES
Hilary Shedel	March 2012	YES	YES	Cafe	YES
Wolf Buttress	April 2012	YES	YES	His home	YES
Rhiannon Jones	June 2012	YES	YES	At the above locations.	YES

Fig. 2 Table to show list of participants and key stages in *The Art of Conversation* project.

To maintain control, the enquiry was structured so that each participant was communicated with over email or phone and it was explained that our conversation would be recorded, transcribed and gestures or anecdotes would be noted. Details of where each meeting would take place and were agreed and permissions granted. Each participant agreed that they would like to remain anonymous and trust that I would share with them everyone’s story. This positioned me as the authorial voice and confirmed that through me they were all connected, both to the project and by their active participation in conversation with me. This decision also ensured that I retained

<sup>13</sup> *The Art of Conversation* is part of a systematic consensual process that conforms to a structure developed. Five individual permission forms have been completed and ethical clearance has been granted by Nottingham Trent University (November 2011).

control over the amount of interaction, conversation and knowledge they had of one another. I encouraged each participant to select the location to meet to ensure that they were in an environment that was most conducive, by this I requested they thought of a location that was familiar and comfortable for them to sit and to talk. I ensured that I did not know any of them personally, and that both of our stories would be shared and the conversation would last as long as it was deemed appropriate by either party, who were able to end the meeting at any given time. Questions were not pre-prepared, as I decided to reject the use of a conversation analysis established in the 1960s by Harvey Sacks, Emanuel Schegloff and Gail Jefferson, who devised a research methodology intended to help with the study of conversation,<sup>14</sup> After receiving training in conversation analysis, which was applied to early transcripts produced during this research project, I felt that their approaches did not allow sufficiently for unexpected happenings, were too focused on linguistics, and did not allow for consideration of the performativity of conversation<sup>15</sup>. As a result I decided to find an original way through my own arts practice, incorporating its promises and challenges through an experiential and theoretical approach for practice research.

Discussions about the project within academia and the public domain created opportunities to meet potential participants. This is exemplified through the way I met Paul, after the following conversation with his father on the phone ringing to book tickets to the ice hockey in Nottingham. *'You need to talk to my son – he's got a great one, he is training to be a lawyer at the moment, and was pro ice hockey player but got injured too bad so had to retire – he's got a good story'* (Jones 2012). On meeting Paul over drinks in the café he had selected, before the first sip he had pulled down the neck of his jumper, showed me his scar and told me:

I love my scar, it's part of who I am, it's my crest. April 2nd 2009 I had surgery. 46 staples, 11cms in length. It goes from under my armpit all the way up to my neck. It's like a zip, a human skin zip. It's all the pain and injury I suffered over 2 and a half years all wrapped up in this one scar, it's the end of one chapter of my life, and at the

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<sup>14</sup> After presenting a paper at Discourse, Communication, Conversation Conference, Loughborough University in 2012 (Jones, 2012) and receiving training in Conversation analysis it was deemed inappropriate for this practice research enquiry as it was too focused on the narrative and not the physical or environmental conditions involved in dialogic artistic research.

<sup>15</sup> For more information please see article in Defining Contributions at [https://theartistryofconversation.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/rpc\\_defining-contributions\\_publication.pdf](https://theartistryofconversation.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/rpc_defining-contributions_publication.pdf)

same time, it's the start of a new journey in my life, which without my scar I wouldn't be going on... - it has become a part of me; a part of my story (Jones 2012 a).

He then asked me 'have you got any good stories?' and I noticed that our conversation went back and forth, up and down and in and out. I recognised that conversations had to take place in the appropriate environments, space became important, encouraging the right voices to speak through me and to each other. It was about providing an agency, which was the request for a scar story. Through that simple request it allowed them to be agents of their own story. Participants placed themselves in a vulnerable position by trusting that we had both exchanged a genuine scar story. Undoubtedly this raises questions of trust and authenticity and places importance on the participant being able to select the location so that they felt secure to have this type of conversation in a particular space. I wanted participants to feel that their experience was positive and that they had not been part of a 'social experiment', appeased by their choice of location, clear rules for engagement and the method for recording the conversation. Often the act of recording can hinder the natural flow of dialogue, often being aware of a recording taking place encourages an individual to self edit before speaking. To avoid this and to turn it into a useful device I wanted to produce the performance script from the transcript.

I decided to do the following:

1. They were asked to place the recording device between us so that both of our voices could be equally captured.
2. They were encouraged to press the record button so that they became an active part of setting up the recording rather than being a passive part of the process.

As a consequence of this, two things became apparent. The first was that it contributed to an increased sense of involvement for all participants, that they were more in control and secondly, it appeased feelings of threat and broke down a barrier between them and the recorder on the table through a tactile encounter with the device so that they had a sense of shared ownership of the recording process.

This initial phase in research heightened my awareness that by working within a dialogic context I had a duty of care for the participants and for the production of transcripts and the analysis of narrative text. I also re-considered text as a tactile exchange raising questions about the interconnectivity of interviewer with interviewee,

off page, off script. Chapter three continues with these emerging ideas of *tactility* and *interconnectivity* within the conceptualization of the performativity of conversation in relation to this practice research.

In the next phase of the project I decided to use the transcript of each conversation as the basis for the performance script, words were not changed but extracts were edited to form a 20-minute text. This raised questions of the dangers of editing, of repetition and the complexities of navigating biographic material. It became appropriate to engage with Clifford and Geertz in Stake (1998) and their use of 'thick descriptions' which helped me to retain a level of intrinsic narrative interpretation for each scar story. This became a framework to understand what it meant for this group of individuals to each have a scar. The below extract illustrates a moment of understanding that took place between 'Paul' and myself – highlighted in bold.

P: .....sometimes with memories...it's the little small things or the smell or a certain colour and that's what triggers it off rather than the big event.

R: *Yeah.*

P: *Yeah.*

R: *...and all these little objects, seemingly random little pieces...*

P: *Yeah, It's the little details isn't it?*

R: *Yeah*<sup>16</sup>.

As I read and re-read the transcripts I was aware that I was reimagining the meetings and in my mind's eye would see their gestures and my own. I would also hear how they were objectifying themselves, revealing their flesh to me during conversation to show me their scar, the marked out line where their story began. This influenced the editing process as lines that linked to gestures were incorporated into the performance text.

All participants attended the exhibition and performances in an act of silent support for me and for each other as they had to remain anonymous.<sup>17</sup> This heightened the atmosphere and added to the sense of intrigue as a premise for encouraging conversation as I witnessed when I found people asking *do you have a scar, is it your story that will be told tonight?* I observed that people welcome the opportunity to have a dedicated space and time to talk, to share, and to be in conversation. The participants felt that their story and the experience of taking part in the project had personal

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<sup>16</sup> Full performance text can be read in the appendix.

<sup>17</sup> <http://backlit.org.uk/project/the-art-of-conversation-by-rhiannon-slade/>

importance and all felt connected through the witnessing and participation in conversation, as 'Georgina' explained in an email to me

...watching and listening to myself through you, your voice and body last night was deeply moving for me, I had not realised how much I spoke, or, indeed that I did feel quite like that – reading the transcript you sent me was one experience but hearing it back, not in my own voice, hearing us talking has made me start to reflect more on how I think and feel about my scar and body... how it has shaped me, become part of my life story and body and... I will have to come back to you on that one next time we meet up! (Jones 2012).



*Fig. 3* Photograph showing audience at *The Art of Conversation*, Backlit Gallery, Nottingham.

As the first research project *The Art of Conversation* offered a philosophical interpretation to conversation analysis, where the dialogic for this practice is reframed not only spoken or written, but considered a relational and aesthetic process of exchange. Conversations about scars provided participants with the opportunity to reflect on their own story and participant Georgina recalled a moment when a nurse had attended to her in A&E and could remember feeling the nurses hand in hers as we were talking. A new navigation of herself through her scar took place and highlighted for me how conversation could be an embodied, confluence and dialogical process.

The focus of this project moved away from the collection of scar stories towards the construction of conversation and how my practice engages with the phenomenology of

this process through an engagement with people's experiences. As a consequence this practice research asks the question *how do we uncover how we author self and our lived experiences to interpret the world around us?* Through the act of participation in conversation with the artist, as Wolfgang stated during conversation

W: It's a bit like a drawing or a signature or something...

Because skin's like paper or a canvas isn't it... and it's there isn't it?

.... It's just kinda there...

R: *I always think it's like those trees when you see people have written*

*I woz here ....*

W: Yeah I was going to say exactly the same thing!<sup>18</sup>

What is evidenced here by Wolfgang is that experience can be defined by what is embedded in our flesh and given meaning through conversation and in this instance; with one's own scar. A scar is contextualized as a permanent mark, a signifier for something 'other' and in this case, that 'something other' is the conversation about the actuality of a scar. As Wolfgang and I discussed we liken scar stories to leaving a signature on a tree that traces a moment in time, left by an individual who carved into its form for others to see.

I became aware that objects were mentioned or hinted at when recalling their scar story. So I asked participants to provide an object for display in the exhibition that would represent their scar story as a totemic representation of both our conversation and as a personal artifact that was carefully selected. I created an archive of scar story objects bound together through their collective display linking to a specific moment in time. The objects provided were:

*A trainer, filled with sand, sock stuffed down inside and the laces still left undone from 2010.*

*A teach yourself origami book from 1971.*

*An Airfix model bomber aircraft from the 1970s.*

*Two surgical pins removed from a body in 1985.*

*A shoulder sling to play ice hockey from 2008.*

*A set of scissors used to remove clothes in 1992.*

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<sup>18</sup> Full performance texts can be read in the appendix.

These objects represented a specific moment in time, much like their scars tracing back marking moments of personal history. The use of objects was a thematic device, acting as a memento to a specific moment in time, linking together their scar and story.

I gave careful consideration to the intertextuality of language within my arts practice (as I referred to it in relation to this project as the aesthetics of a dialogical encounter). I was conscious that all the material for the exhibition had been produced outside of the gallery in the public domain and as artist Adam Chodzko states *'the notion of looking takes place partly in public space but also in interior space; the imagination of the inhabitants of that public space'* (Chodzko 2009). I therefore redesigned the structure of the gallery space turning it from an open singular space and constructed walls to create different spaces that would form a series of zones to conceptually work with the notion of entering and exiting spaces. (DVD1 *The Art of Conversation* 2016, 0.10) The zones were carved out for audience members to process a mixture of abstraction and concrete modes of dialogic interaction in the gallery by entering and exiting inner and outer spaces. The 'type' of audience was not defined as it was important to engage with a wide demographic (local artists, researchers and general public) with the common denominator being everyone's shared association to a scar story or their own experience of being scarred. It was an important opportunity to test out the use of zones to aid the sharing of memories through interaction and conversation in a gallery context.

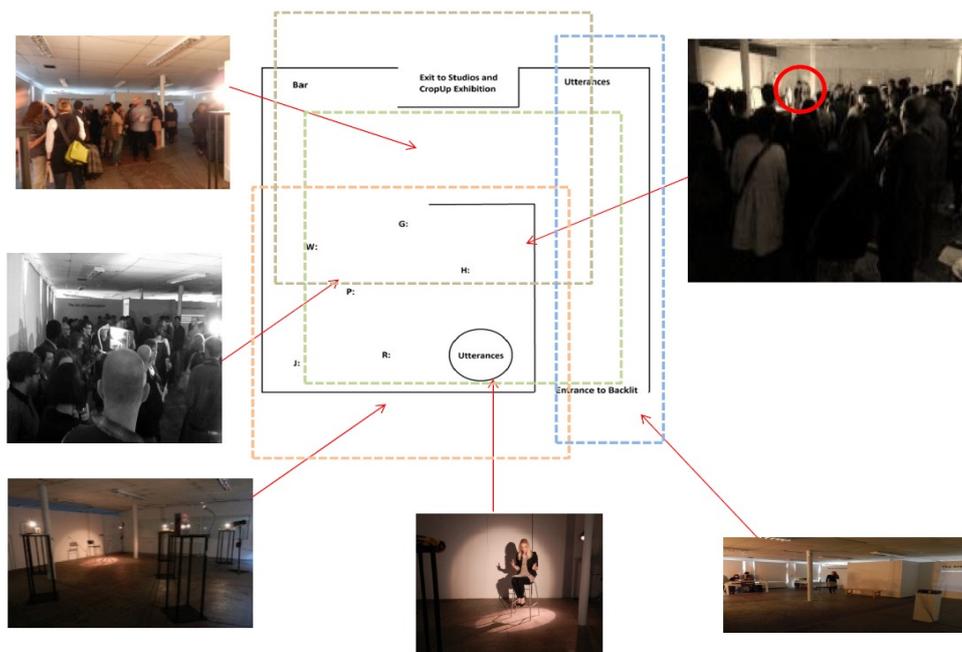


Fig. 4 Illustrated floor plan for Backlit Gallery, Nottingham.

Each zone was designed stylistically to 'spiral inwards' to facilitate a gradual engagement in dialogue with the artist and the work and to reflect architecturally my artistic approach to obtaining the conversations, that I had worked from the edges of discourse triggering conversation to spiral inwards towards the heart of the subject matter.

**Zone 1:** Entrance to gallery. A large empty space with only a map located on the wall, listing objects on display coded with each scar story participants first initial letter to maintain their anonymity. (R:W:J:H:G:P). In this zone I welcomed people into the gallery, and would walk them down a corridor like space to assist their adjustment from an external public space into the gallery space. The walls were designed to deliberately block off any access to seeing others to encourage individuals to have to focus on what they could hear. The corridor also guided individuals towards a large display of rolling text that contained extracts of the collected scar stories, this is where zone 2 overlaps with zone 1.

**Zone 2:** The title *The Art of Conversation* is painted in black on a large white wall at the bottom of a dusk lit corridor at the end of zone 1. There was a digital projection of dialogue / utterances that rotate. They are fragments of collected scar story conversations from each of the community members, providing traces of their stories and links to artifacts displayed in Zone 4. In this space I talked to people about the displayed narratives and use the fragments of text as a trigger and device to start conversations. Evidence that this was effective was gathered in further conversations with participants in the gallery space. One individual related to me:

The scars don't go away though do they; they are reminders of the event? 'I mean the scars just kinda me now, and actually I don't even think about it until someone like you Rhiannon says do you have a scar? And then I'm like 'Oh yeah, I've got one of them. I've got a story to tell. (Jones 2012 b)

This statement demonstrated a sharing of personal history triggered by a textual narrative reiteration on display. Sharing of personal scar stories spread in this zone as audience members found commonalities, however temporal. I witnessed individuals read and photograph the quotes projected whilst talking and responding to the

provocations that the words evoked. I started to define what the term community meant in relation to this dialogic practice research and it began to centre itself on the idea of a group of unfamiliar individuals who are temporally engaged through (a) found commonalities. This methodological insight is returned to, and defined in chapter three.

**Zone 3:** An area for social engagement and interaction with food and live music. In this area you could move in and out of zones 1, 2 and 4; it was also the adjoining space for conversations pre and post-performance. A seemingly uncurated space, due to the absence of content on display, it helped allude to the belief that ‘nothing much’ was happening in zone 3. However, this zone was where I focused on facilitating dialogue to gather fresh perspectives on scars and the shared scar stories. In appearance I moved between groups and individuals to mediate discussions about scars, extending discussions into the gallery space beyond the 5 participants. I became more confident in talking to strangers, asking them how they were and what they thought about the objects or stories they had listened to, often this led to a sharing of scar stories and personal anecdotes being expressed. A DJ was booked to help keep people up-beat and engaged, and shift the volume balance up and down repeatedly through out the evening to support the ebb and flow of conversation. Zone 3 was the largest floor space and was most inhabited.

**Zone 4:** A display of six objects, each placed on top of one of the six black plinths. Each plinth was constructed so that objects were positioned at eye level, to replicate the eye-to-eye contact that takes place between humans, and had a spot light on each object, following a standard display principle. This area was also where the scar story performances took place to conceptually connect object with story and enhance the performance aesthetic within a shared space. As a theatrical device at the start of each performance 5 of the 6 spotlights are turned off to indicate which object would be featured in the scar story. The map located in zone 1 (R:W:J:H:G:P) details each object: *A trainer, filled with sand, sock stuffed down inside and the laces still left undone from 2010. A teach yourself origami book from 1971. An Airfix model bomber aircraft from the 1970s. Two surgical pins removed from a body in 1985. A shoulder-sling to play ice hockey from 2008. A set of scissors used to remove clothes in 1992.* It was deliberately left unclear as to what the connection was between object and scar story to emphasize the mystery and to encourage discussions about the objects. It also reinforced that these objects, much like the participants, were anonymous, and through the performances the narrative encounters revealed each object’s relevance and significance. Likened to the

encountering of a scar when you first look, you do not know its history: slowly this is revealed for each object through each performance – the displayed trainer filled with sand had remained unworn and with a sock pushed down inside because it had been removed by air ambulance on a beach when the fall occurred; years later, the trainer is, kept in the porch at home never to be worn again or thrown away.

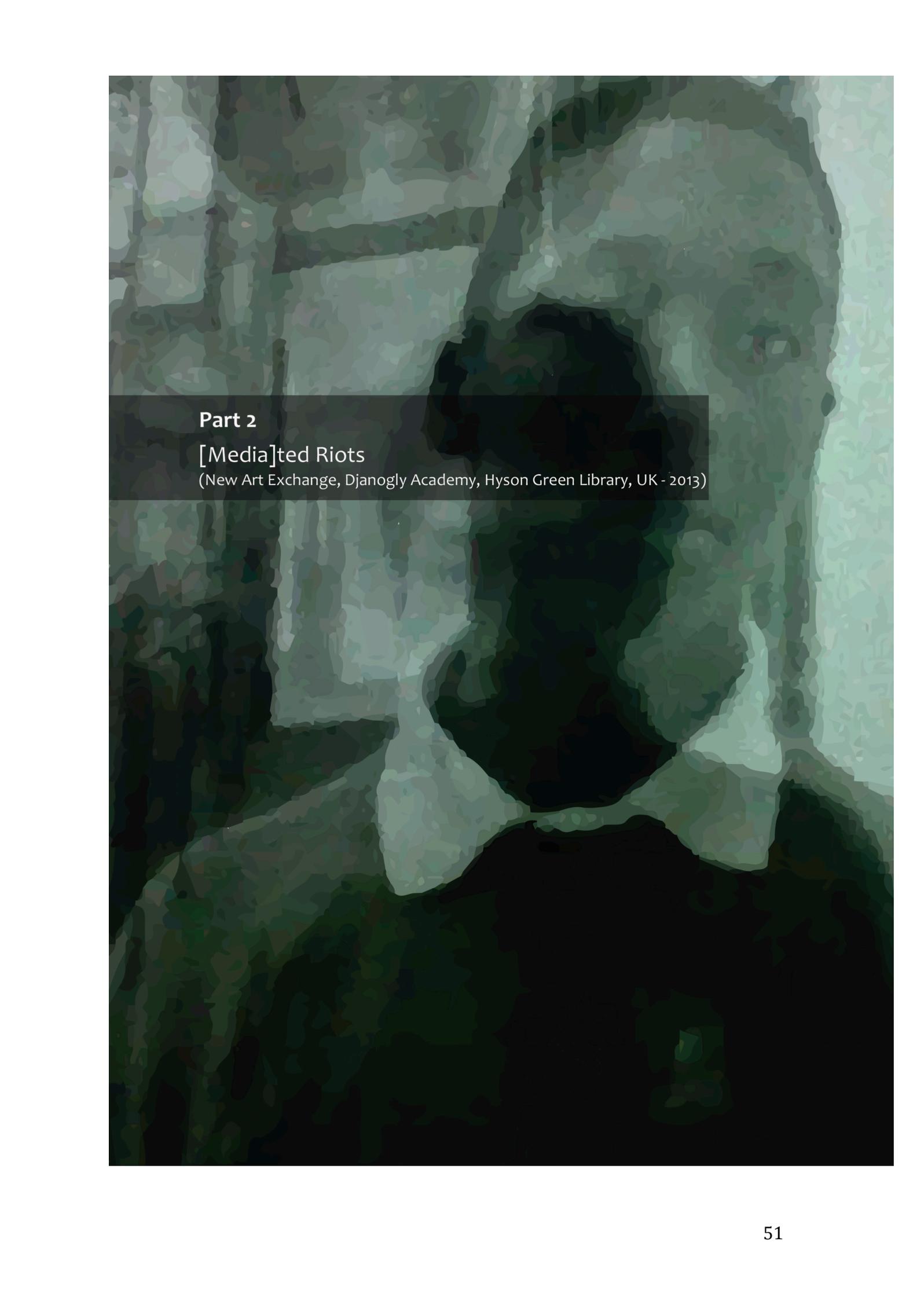


*Fig. 5* Photograph of Zone 4 Backlit Gallery, Nottingham.

During conversations with the participants and with those who attended the exhibition I studied what was said as well as non verbal communications such as the pauses, the intonations, a flicker of an expression across the face all became an important part of the process for collecting scar stories and more importantly in relation to this practice research it began to evidence how I was defining the process of being in conversation. My scar story was not required as a starting point for the generation of conversation but a trigger was within the context of the gallery and that trigger was me rather than my story.

During the performances I mimicked voice and key gestures that a participant had carried out when talking with me, to raise awareness of how we ‘perform’ ourselves during conversation (DVD1 *The Art of Conversation part 2* 2016). The performances were a significant part of the exhibition as they provided a platform for conversations to be ‘played back’ within the carefully constructed gallery environment; transforming the gallery into a dialogic space through its provision of a dedicated space for the unfolding of inner speech between self and others. The performances also provided the opportunity for people to reconvene in zone 3 to reflect on the connections between the displayed objects and scar stories.

*The Art of Conversation* focused my artistic motivations and raised awareness to the shift in focus for my practice research from collection of a story to the process of collecting in itself. The architectural designs for the exhibition coupled with the decisions that I also made about how to move people physically through the space, through facilitating, conversation became critical for this research enquiry. This is revisited in chapter three as a key influence for the methodology. As the architectural and performative aspects; often 'invisible' layers of complexities to the viewer were key to create an environment that encouraged the production of conversation through a highly complex installation and appropriated use of space.



**Part 2**

**[Media]ted Riots**

(New Art Exchange, Djanogly Academy, Hyson Green Library, UK - 2013)

## Part 2:

*[Media]ted Riots* (New Art Exchange, Djanogly Academy, Hyson Green Library, Uk - 2012)

I was commissioned by Synapse Arts<sup>19</sup> in 2012 to design a project that would research into the impact the London riots had on Nottingham in the summer of 2011. I was approached because of *The Art of Conversation*, where I created a community of participants from across a diverse demographic in Nottingham using a topical issue to generate practice. As a practitioner living and working in Nottingham I felt that my personal connection to the city and local knowledge would aid my undertaking of the commission. Entitled *[Media]ted Riots*, I set basic targets to avoid stereotyping reactions to the riots and determined that conversations would be open to anyone who wished to participate. I decided to act as a mediator between local residents and authorities to achieve these goals. The riots provided a topical platform for potentially inflammatory and antagonistic reactions, so I decided to reach out to pockets of neighborhoods that had been involved in the Nottingham response to riots that took place on the same night as those in London. Nottingham's Canning Circus Police Station was vandalized and firebombed and residents in Hyson Green reported cars damaged and street fires.

New Art Exchange <sup>20</sup> approached me to host the project as it is based in Hyson Green where most of the journalists covering the riots had focused their accounts. I was excited to work with the organisation for the first time because of their ethos to '*stimulate new perspectives about the value of diversity in art and society*' (New Art Exchange 2015) and their situation in an culturally diverse neighborhood; they are keen support artists who, like them, want to extend links and connections with their borough through arts practice.

Since New Art Exchange is situated on Gregory Boulevard, I began by walking up and down this road, where I also found a secondary school Djanogly City Academy and Hyson Green library (DVD3 *[Media]ted Riots* 2016, 0.11). These are distinct organisations all serving the same neighborhood. Each attracted different members of

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<sup>19</sup> Synapse Arts is conceived, managed and delivered by Saira Lloyd, an independent curator supporting emerging artists and developing audiences for contemporary art in the East Midlands. The organisation acts as an interface between artists, producers, curators and audiences.

<sup>20</sup> New Art Exchange is an arts organisation in the city of Nottingham <http://www.nae.org.uk>

its locale but I became aware that they had not been assembled before, so this is what I set out to do. I wanted to bring together the local groups to form a partnership between the venues for *[Media]ted Riots*, especially as they had never worked collectively.

I introduced myself to the NAE, Hyson Green Library and Djanogly City Academy. Being open with those I encountered about the aim of the project, I explained that I did not know who would want to talk to me about the riots, or, where I would find people who did; the project started from this moment of engagement. Networks emerged due to my willingness to meet people face to face and discuss on a local level issues and concerns that had affected them as individuals. I carefully introduced myself as 'Rhiannon' first name only and unassociated to an organization, so that I was taken at face value as a lone individual interested in their borough, and simply wanting to talk.

In order to gain trust from individuals I reinforced that what was being discussed in conversation with me was not going to inform or end up as part of a journalistic reportage<sup>21</sup> but that what was said would remain in their words and from their perspective. I used the knowledge that I obtained from the local area as a platform for the project sharing that I recognised that there was a lack of opportunities for individuals to speak and be heard in their borough, which, in turn became a deliverable for the project. This provision of an opportunity increased individuals desire to participate in a project that was aiming to extend the reach of their opinions and voices beyond a local, closed and fragmented area of the city.

My artistic process became reminiscent of the approach that artist Rebecca Solnit takes to practice; she stated that '*... for artists ...the idea or the form or the tale that has not yet arrived, is what must be found. It is the job of artists to open doors and invite in prophecies, the unknown, the unfamiliar ...*' (Solnit 2006, p5) I knocked on endless 'doors' (virtual and real), to locate those who wanted to work with me through a shared mutual interest in the topic. By conducting face-to-face encounters my presence locally was established as a familiar, and I became trusted, I found out who the key local residents were and encountered 'Mohamed the butcher' who was a well respected local man with links to

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<sup>21</sup> It has been necessary to define journalistic reportage in relation to this practice research. There have been important observations made both in relation to the text described and the operation of this project. Journalistic reportage is understood in terms of its dialectical slippage between fact and fiction, often with pre-determined agendas and outcomes that need to be fulfilled.

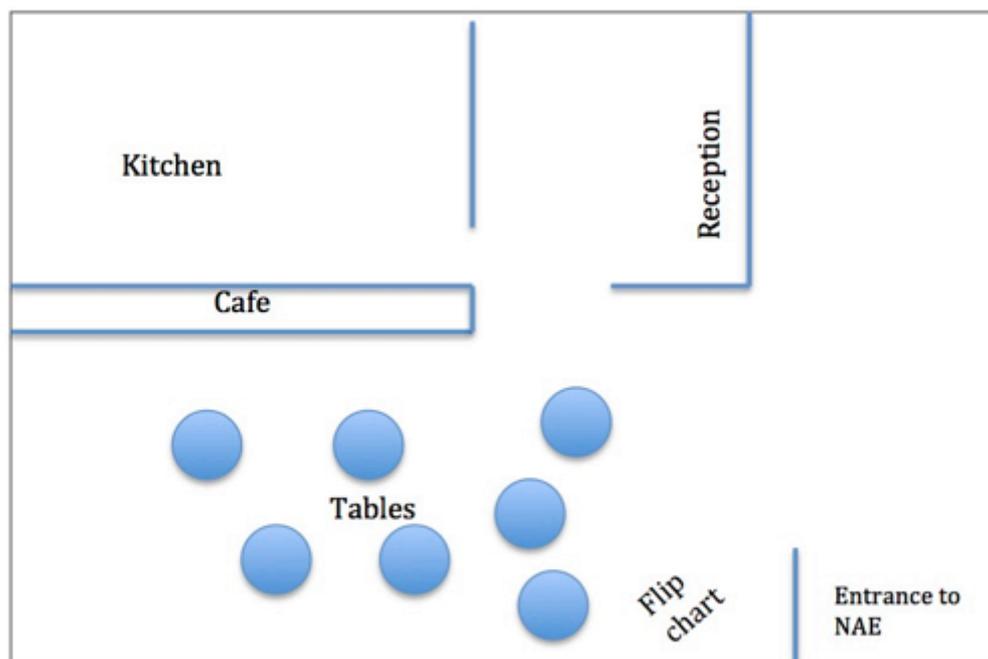
groups in the local community, and, with his 'nod of approval' people started to acknowledge me and talk. By ensuring that I listened, I was able to establish that a main benefit of the project would be that through their contribution they could speak and be heard. In addition to this, and given the topic for the project, I negotiated the terms and conditions for engagement as there were potential legal and criminal implications for an individual. Anyone who decided to talk with me was informed up front that anything shared with me, would remain private, unless they granted permission for it to be shared within the context and remit of the project design.

One part of the *[Media]ted Riots* project was an evening hosted by New Art Exchange for a live performance and panel event to discuss the riots (DVD2 *[Media]ted Riots* 2016). I approached key individuals that I felt would ensure that a broad demographic and range of voices would be heard from the panel they were told that there was no funding, no chair only me to facilitate conversation, that there was no preparation required or briefing and that they would be part of a conversation with everyone in the room and that questions would come from the floor and from young persons who had prepared questions for the panel during a workshop with myself. Selected panelists were Minnie Rinboluceri, aged 17, a volunteer at young peoples' service, 'Just Ask'; Shad Ali, a local activist and campaigner for Nottingham; Archie Maddocks, a London-based writer, actor and stand up comedian; Professor David Buckingham of Loughborough University, a specialist on childrens' and young peoples' interactions with electronic media, and on media literacy education; Skinder Hundal CEO of New Art Exchange; and Kevin Spriggs, youth facilitator at Catch22 a national charity that helps people in difficult situations to change their lives . The panel debate<sup>22</sup> was filmed and this was also declared so that everyone was aware in advance of the discussion.

I worked with the venue's technician and introduced him to everyone, and encouraged him to also feel that he could ask questions if he wished, which he did at one point during the evening from the technicians box.

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<sup>22</sup> For more information on the project and to view the recording of the panel debate please visit <http://theartistryofconversation.com/work/mediated-riots/>



**Zone 1**

*Fig. 6 Diagram to show the design for [Media]ted Riots.*

I created a structure for the event to break the space and the evening to create different zones and used the café area as a key part of the design so that I could greet everyone and provide a personal welcome to the event at New Art Exchange. During my welcome I stated

Everyone that is here in the room are the right people to be here because we all came here today to have a conversation with one another because we care. That is why we are the right people to have this conversation (Jones 2012 c).

This statement, using an adapted approach to the introductions made by facilitators using Open Space theory<sup>23</sup>, was used to appease any hostility and gain an opportunity to look at everyone to gauge a sense of how everyone was feeling so that I was aware of individuals who might be more sparky or problematic in the panel debate. I orchestrated it so that refreshments and music were provided whilst everyone had time to familiarize themselves with one another, or reconnect with friends and colleagues. I ensured that I learnt everyone's name and those who had already engaged with the

<sup>23</sup> For more information visit [http://www.openspaceworld.com/users\\_guide.htm](http://www.openspaceworld.com/users_guide.htm)

project were welcomed by me like old friends. People who came to attend the event were introduced to people who were part of the project so that they felt included in the wider conversations that were taking place and that would be picked up on during the debate. These tactics encouraged people to be engaged and link up with others from the same local borough.



*Fig. 7 Photograph of [Media]ted Riots event at New Art Exchange, Nottingham (Cerezo, B. 2012).*

I invited New Art Exchange's youth group to work with writer Archie Maddocks to perform a reading from his play *Mottled Lines*<sup>24</sup> that deals with difficult issues of hate, race and crime and the London Riots. This helped me to set the tone for the evening where all who were in attendance could encounter honest and hard-hitting problems, but through friendly and supportive conversation.

This was a highly structured and controlled event to avoid friction and test out my technique for encouraging the sharing of difference so that I was able to create a sense of camaraderie between groups of differing persuasions and opinions. The performance took place before the debate proceedings so that I deliberately positioned myself in the tiered seating with everyone in order to switch from 'hosting' the event to becoming a fellow audience member. This was a subtle but important tactic to indicate that I would also be watching, listening and learning from what was being said; reiterating the approach that I have had to conversation throughout the project.

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<sup>24</sup> For more information about *Mottled Lines* visit <http://www.theartsdesk.com/theatre/mottled-lines-orange-tree-theatre>

After the performed reading, conversations were louder, more energized and I observed that they had shifted from introductions and formalities to reflections on the reading and issues the text had raised. I guided everyone as a collective to the café area where flip charts had been positioned ready for comments and questions to be captured. I had scribes ready to capture information on the charts and very quickly the charts became full of red and black scribbled notes. In addition to this I requested that the café's background music was turned down so that it didn't compete with everyone's voices. When I felt that the conversations were 'simmering', (a phrase that I found helped me to communicate with NAE staff) I indicated that it was the right time to encourage everyone to go back upstairs for the debate to start. The start time for the debate was organic and driven by conversation flow not by time.



*Fig. 8* Photograph of *[Media]ted Riots* event at New Art Exchange, Nottingham (Cerezo, B 2012).

The room for the debate (see Zone 2 on the figure below) was the same space used for the performed reading, which increased a sense of familiarity. The room was set up traditionally for a paneled debate; tiered seating was set out to increase control over people's movement and participation during the debate. I decided to position myself in the centre to break up the panel whilst facilitating conversation between panel and the public. I positioned the flip charts slightly to the side but at the front so that everyone could see the gathered comments and questions. I wove these comments into the debate as some individuals felt more able to listen to the panelists because their voice had already been heard in the café, and they could see their words on the flip chart next to the panelist ready to be shared formally within the debate.

Djanogly City Academy year 9 students were invited to review media archives on the riots and their reflections were then 'graffitied' onto the panelists' table and benches. I invited the panelists to look at their tabletop so that the students words and images triggered conversation during the debate, making sure that these young people's perspectives were included in the debate. It was also an active reminder of the newly formed partnership between New Art Exchange, Djanogly City Academy and Hyson Green Library, which I had established so that the three organisations were having a shared conversation for the first time about local issues. Students were also invited to pose written questions for panelists so their voice would be heard: I deliberately asked them to seal their questions so they were unedited, as I wanted their raw and honest questions to be discussed by the panelists. Panelists were not provided with predetermined questions and the questions from the students were randomized to encourage and invite an open and reflective reaction to the questions and a commitment to addressing a question live.

A short film was produced about the riots with Djanogly City Academy: as well as providing students with an opportunity to gain new skills in production it encouraged participation and engagement, particularly from the male students in the class. Students opened up on camera because I gave them the control to talk, edit footage and be the camera operator<sup>25</sup>. The short film was produced so that during the event there was a moment for everyone at the debate to pause; I also intended that it could be used to as a means to return to a supportive and communal atmosphere when individuals appeared to be getting rather heated: screening the short was a device to remind everyone through the words of thirteen and fourteen year old students of the bigger picture – that we were all present to discuss hopes and aspirations for the future to avoid riots and disenfranchised communities within a locale.

Nottinghamshire Community Police heard of the event through the local borough and approached me about their attendance at the event; we discussed the ethics and politics of whether they would be in or out of uniform, it was mutually agreed they would attend in uniform and I ensured that they would be introduced and the motivations for why they were present would be shared so that any mystery or assumptions were cast aside at the start of the event so that, where possible, it didn't affect the honesty or openness

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<sup>25</sup> A similar technique was used as in *The Art of Conversation* project where the recording technology used was controlled by both of us working in partnership.

of the dialogue. Through this event I had successfully brought people together from the local community, reiterated by Nottingham Community Police who realised that they were in a room with new groups of individuals who were unfamiliar to them and with whom they wanted to establish good working connections to help understand and improve the local area.

To complete the project, the panelists' tables and a projection of the students' short film was installed at Nottingham Hyson Green Library. I wanted to provide an opportunity for local residents to meet with Nottingham City Councillor Toby Neal to talk about the riots and any other community issues that needed to be raised. The library was keen to work with me as they recognised that there was a lack of young persons using the library and *[Media]ted Riots* was engaging with that demographic because

I wasn't interrogating them, I wasn't talking a position of authority or casting judgment, I just wanted to create a project that would provide people with the chance to talk, in different spaces and environments where they felt comfortable to talk <sup>26</sup>(Nottingham Evening Post, 2012).

The local press described me as 'shedding light'; <sup>27</sup> implicit in this statement is a sense of stripping back or uncovering of information however what needed more clarity was that it was possible because of my approach to conversation as an affirmative approach to talking by positioning myself as a conduit for conversation where individuals are free to ask me as much as I ask of them. The purpose of a project is never hidden from them, they are free to contact me whenever they want, however they want, and whenever they wish to meet.

By focusing on the aesthetics of exchange and the quality of the experience for an individual who engaged with the project in order to facilitate a space for dialogue, the information gathered in conversation was perceived as methodical and indispensable for helping to advance a shared common understanding for something in this sense,

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<sup>26</sup> To read the full article please visit

<https://theartistryofconversation.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/untitled-2.pdf> and  
<https://theartistryofconversation.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/untitled-copy.pdf>

<sup>27</sup> Full article at <https://theartistryofconversation.files.wordpress.com/2015/12/untitled-copy-2.pdf>

conversations had led to the production of useful dialogues beyond the remits or agendas that I had set and identified for the project.

By not focusing on a literary analysis of words, but the worlds and provision of a space for people to be self-reflexive in a variety of spaces at Hyson Green Library, New Art Exchange and Djanogly City Academy, I had provided an appropriate context where the environment was appropriate for individuals in this particular borough to speak, to experience, to feel, to reflect, to engage to listen and to express themselves.

In a published article about my project entitled 'What we want' featured by Nottingham Evening Post, young persons were asked to state what their hopes and aspirations for Nottingham were. Desires for more money for schools, better parks and to be safe were amongst the comments that I had collected. I had successfully collected different public opinions because I was 'on the front line' as described by Gurmut Kaur, Community Cohesion Inspector for Nottinghamshire Police.

*[Media]ted Riots* focused my attention on the structural design for my arts practice. It raised my awareness to the wide demographic that this project engaged due to my generative and inclusive approach to conversation. It has strengthened my conceptual concerns with 'voice' and the possibilities for it as a device for practice. This project was a new iteration of a structural design that used a triadic approach (workshops, panel debate and installation of works) for practice, mobilizing people, considering the use of space and place through my role, in this instance, as a mediator. These insights are revisited in chapter three as key contributory components of the methodology design.

I tactically positioned myself between individuals and journalists so that I was the first 'port of call' to protect and maintain my position of trust and authority within this local borough. *[Media]ted Riots* featured on the BBC news, radio and through local press sharing the views of a community that was otherwise not heard. I acted as a mediator to ensure the journalists heard the voices of those who participated in *[Media]ted Riots* as a result, the journalists were not the researchers of their articles I was. My approach engaged a demographic with this project that consisted of individuals from the local community, local police, social workers, academics, artists, residents, students and writers.



**Part Three**

**Freedom in Air**

(New Art Exchange and Nottingham Playhouse, UK – 2013)

### **Part 3:**

#### *Freedom in Air* (New Art Exchange and Nottingham Playhouse, UK – 2013)

In 2013 The Cutting Room, an arts organisation based at Nottingham Playhouse, commissioned my proposal to run a citywide project alongside its production of *The Kite Runner*<sup>28</sup> adapted for the stage by Matthew Spangler<sup>29</sup> for Nottingham Playhouse (26 April - 18 May, 2013). Entitled *Freedom in Air* I was appointed to engage in conversation with the public on topical issues that the show would raise, whoever and however that public might materialize through the projects duration.

I set the parameters for the initiatives for this project<sup>30</sup> as I felt very strongly that this was an opportunity for Nottingham Playhouse to develop its audience within the city and build new relationships. *The Kite Runner* had the potential to engage the interest of local communities and residents that were not part of the established demographic of theatregoers. I proposed a triadic model similar to *[Media]ted Riots* that would take the form of a workshop, panel debate and installation of works. To build on the model for *[Media]ted Riots* and gain greater exposure and wider participation the workshops would be open to the public not located with a city academy. The panel debate event would take place at New Art Exchange on the other side of the city to widen the geographical remit and house the debate in a separate venue to the show. The installation would be installed at Nottingham Playhouse to disseminate and share with the theatre audience the gathered materials and body of work produced for this project.

Having spent time talking to members from vulnerable and disparate community groups across the city such as the Refugee Forum and the Afghani community, I invited them to Nottingham playhouse to attend a free workshop. The workshop was critical for engaging new individuals in the project and to help establish trust, but as some young persons felt uncomfortable to attend a workshop at Nottingham Playhouse, I decided to host some workshops at other locations in the city. The workshop was centered on the designing of kites to trigger conversations about issues of freedom, war and travel. One hundred young people and families from across the city took part in designing kites as

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.nottinghamplayhouse.co.uk/news/cast-for-the-kite-runner-announced/>

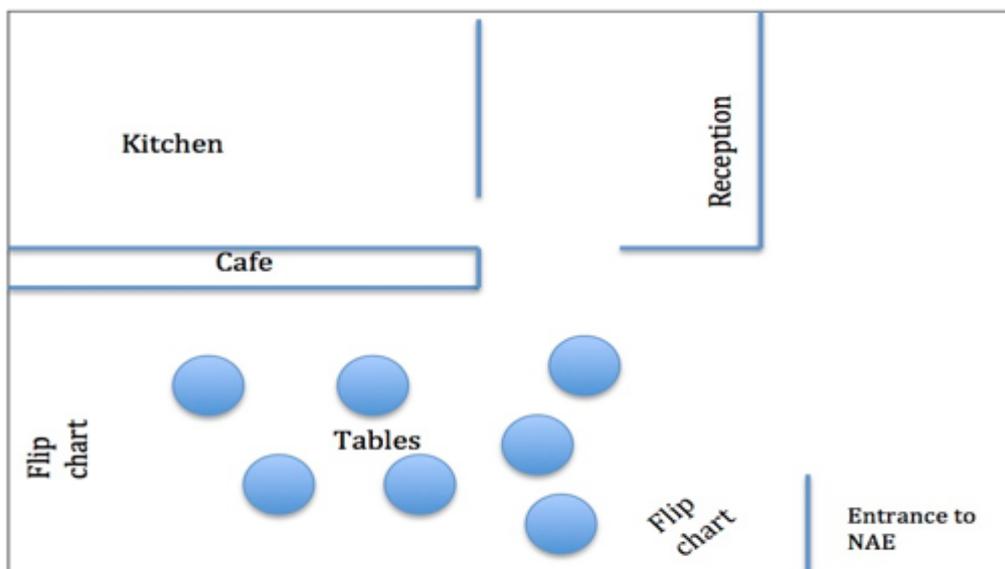
<sup>29</sup> <http://www.the-cutting-room.org/kiterunner/kitemakingworkshop.html> and [http://www.the-cutting-room.org/kiterunner/kiterunner\\_exhibition.html](http://www.the-cutting-room.org/kiterunner/kiterunner_exhibition.html) and <http://www.the-cutting-room.org/kiterunner/debate.html>

<sup>30</sup> Nottingham Playhouse informed me that they wanted to extend their regular theatre demographic wider for this production and that new audiences would engage and attend the performance through the artist led initiatives that I designed.

symbols of hope for the future for themselves, their city and for Afghanistan. The workshops were designed to provide information about Afghanistan and I invited a missionary, Valery Pope, who had spent time in Afghanistan to attend the workshops and share her home photos and stories of her time there, and to answer any questions to help reconfigure preconceptions about what life is like in Afghanistan and to challenge perceptions formed by TV and media coverage (DVD3 *Freedom in Air part 2* 2016, 1.07).

I made an agreement with Nottingham Playhouse that there should be guest tickets to the press night of *The Kite Runner* for the refugees who were involved in the project as a thank you. This also was a way of showing my trust in them and that it was not a working relationship that was one way. It was about also giving back experiences and valuing those who were involved in the process of the project. It was an opportunity for those working for the Refugee Forum and those using its services and support mechanisms to diffuse stereotypes and misconceptions about refugees and asylum.

I approached New Art Exchange as the hosting partner for the panel event for *Freedom in Air* and we agreed to open their new season with a specially developed session that considered the impact of modern day warfare on the people of Nottingham inspired by the production of *The Kite Runner*.



**Zone 1**

*Fig. 9* Diagram of floor plan for *Freedom In Air* panel event, New Art Exchange, Nottingham.

The structure for the event was a continuation from *[Media]ted Riots* to aid my artistic development. I welcomed everyone in the café area, made introductions and ensured that everyone felt at ease. A local group of men from the Afghan community arrived to listen to the debate attending straight from their local gym after the local butcher whom I had previously met had told them about it. I introduced them to the woman who had spent time in Afghanistan who was able to talk with them about ideas of 'home' and her time in both the UK and Afghanistan. I made sure again that I knew everyone's names, spent time making introductions between panelists and those attending as an audience member. This time, I also encouraged people who had raised a really interesting question or comment to share that publicly during the panel discussion, not just on the flip chart or with me. I was keen to find strategies to enable them to speak, especially when a key motivation for a lot of the community who were engaging with this project was their feeling of always having been silenced.

The design approach for the set up for the debate room was adapted from *[Media]ted Riots* but this time panelists were positioned as a collective, sat closely and at an angle so they were able to face the audience and see the screen where images and footage were to be shown during the event. I also wanted to be able to walk about the space so that I could be between audience and panel and move freely to the flip chart and help physically direct the conversation throughout the evening. Attention was placed on details such as the use of handwritten panelist cards and the workshop participants' created questions. The questions were sealed, randomized and unedited the tactics of sharing personal anecdotes as a way into keep conversation fluid and meaningful at a local level with those in the room. I asked the cast of *The Kite Runner* to talk to camera and prepared a series of questions to provoke debate that stemmed from their personal feelings about the story and the world in which they live – this way the voices of the cast, panelists, and participants were all shared.



Fig. 10 Photograph of *Freedom in Air* panel, New Art Exchange, Nottingham.

I invited panelists Nick Hayes (reader in History and Heritage at Nottingham Trent University), Saira Lloyd, (Director of Synapse Arts), Giles Croft (Director of the Kite Runner Production at Nottingham Playhouse), Skinder Hundal (Chief Executive New Art Exchange), Bashir Herawi (Nottingham Afghan Association) and Jane Henson (Campaigner and activist for asylum seekers in Nottingham). I selected these individuals as they had each spent time with me during the project talking and sharing their personal experiences and their research, they had also each become instrumental in bridging gaps to access other individuals associated to their research or organization; their combined discourse felt pertinent and I wanted to share their medley of voices within this public platform.



Fig. 11 Photograph of Rhiannon Jones with flipcharts hosting panel discussion, New Art Exchange, Nottingham.

The BBC <sup>31</sup> became very interested in the project and how it was encouraging members of the refugee community and Afghan community to come forward and participate in the arts and share their experiences of living and working in Nottingham. I made an agreement with the BBC that I was willing to talk on air about the project as long as it also provided a safe platform for others to be able speak for themselves on air about what life was really like for them: I was not willing to speak on their behalf. Part of the project became incorporated within the programme of activities entitled *Uncovering Afghanistan*, which was in association with the Refugee Forum.

I selected thirty kites to display in the main foyer of the Nottingham Playhouse to show from a Nottingham perspective how people understood culture, issues with identity and their hopes and aspirations. Positioned above theatre-goers heads in the main foyer,

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<sup>31</sup> To listen to the interview with the BBC <https://vimeo.com/68760575> and <http://theartistryofconversation.com/work/freedom-in-air/>

each kite tail displayed messages of hope and frustration, suspended poetically in the air, swaying gently by the movement of audiences entering and exiting the production of *The Kite Runner*. In addition to this, a series of display panels<sup>32</sup> detailed information about the participants and video footage about the project was projected on screens in Nottingham Playhouse.<sup>33</sup>

Individuals who engaged in the workshops and, or attended the debate event at New Art Exchange were willing to visit the installation at Nottingham Playhouse as they had become invested in the project. What was evident was that the demographic for this project consisted of local police, social workers, academics, refugee organisations, politicians, Afghanistan community group members, charity organisations, international community representatives, artists, residents, students and writers. Aided by my project design to shift the projects deliverables in location I was able to widen the potential for the engaging demographic the as a result an eclectic range of voice was captured.

The experience of making *Freedom in Air* enhanced my tactical skills for networking and forming new partnerships through the facilitation of conversation. I reconsidered the role of the 'workshop' as a means to provoke conversation and to mobilize individuals across a city through art practice. I shifted different demographics geographically forming spaces for the weaving of conversations between 'themselves' and 'others'. It delivered the opportunity to ruminate on modes for the orchestration of panel events, and the use of layout and mixed media as a basis for thinking about the tactics of this type of social engagement. This is considered as the social activism that **the artistry of conversation** has when engaged as a methodological approach for my research practice; its design and contextual frame of references are described in chapter three. Conversational devices such as those described above can trigger new discoveries in one's research. (DVD2 *Freedom in Air part 3* 2016). It provided time to research the performative tactics that I was employing, placing my own embedded gestures and actions under a magnifying glass through practical testing in order to extract my own performativity within the given context. What has been discerned during *Freedom in Air* is revisited in chapter three as a key piece of the methodology.

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<sup>32</sup> For more information and to access pdfs of the panels that were on display at Nottingham Playhouse please visit [www.theartistylink.com](http://www.theartistylink.com) to go here...

<sup>33</sup> The documentation film can be accessed at the following address <https://vimeo.com/68760575> and <http://theartistryofconversation.com/work/freedom-in-air/>



**Part Four**

**Wonderland**

(New Art Exchange, UK – 2013 – 2014)

#### Part 4:

*Wonderland* (New Art Exchange, Uk – 2013 – 2014)



Fig. 12 Branding design for Wonderland logo (copyright 2013 Percival, C).

In the summer of 2013 it became clear to me that individuals who had engaged with *[Media]ted Riots* and *Freedom in Air* still held a desire to participate in an artist led project that provided the opportunity to share opinions about matters of importance for the city of Nottingham and (which I held to be of greater significance) their desire to continue to be in conversation with one another and with me. As a result of continuing to engage in conversation with different groups of individuals who had participated in the previous projects this need became apparent and I felt a responsibility to conceive a new project to generate ‘a space’ for people to converse: so *Wonderland* was conceived. Its premise was instigated by my recognition that there was a need for a new citywide project to be created<sup>34</sup> to fill this presented aperture, its motives and founding were established from a ‘grassroots’ perspective, listening to needs and responding accordingly. It was not driven by an organisation or socio-civic funder based in the city that had preconceived ideologies of what ‘need’ there was for artist led projects at that time in the city of Nottingham.

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<sup>34</sup> *Wonderland* (2013-14) was delivered with freelance Nottingham based curator Saira Lloyd, under the umbrella term of Chromatic Cultures and supported by Nottingham City Council and New Art Exchange.

I constructed the title *Wonderland* so that the project would allude to the unraveling layers of significance that the project identified through conversation. Such as, the 'critical wonderment'<sup>35</sup> that individuals shared on a range of topical issues for the city of Nottingham. Interwoven with a conceptual interpretation for the notion of 'land' and embedded in this the idea of belonging and place. It also had the idea of discovery and journeying, concepts closely related to Lewis Carroll's book *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) when Alice journeyed into the unknown, meeting difference and unpredictable encounters – experiences to which I felt personally connected.

I designed a 15-month project (summer 2013 until the autumn of 2014) to support an appropriate amount of time for me to continue to establish good working relationships and forge new connections with individuals and organisations from different geographical and demographic areas of the city. To enable this *Wonderland* was constructed to support public and school workshops, pop up exhibitions and a series of paneled debate events at New Art Exchange. The outcome of these generative activities was that different topical themes and issues of a socio-civic nature were identified through conversations that I initiated by facilitating.

The project's ethos promised that *Wonderland* wouldn't shy away from discussing challenging social and political issues. It sought to diversify and expand its participants and their conversational reach through the creation of spaces that individuals could move in and out, and through the provision of different contexts to create accessible conversations for anyone who wanted to engage with the project. This formed the ideological foundation for *Wonderland*. As Sasha Costanza-Chock, communications scholar at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, suggests there needs to be

...Low barriers to participation, strong support for sharing, informal mentorship, members who feel that their contributions matter, and who care about others' participation. Participatory cultures reward participation. 'Not everyone must participate, but everyone must believe that if they participate it will be valued (Costanza-Chock 2012).

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<sup>35</sup> The term 'critical wonderment' is the cause or occasion of wonder for a given subject. The project *Wonderland* provided a space to critique a range of topical issues affecting the city of Nottingham.

Costanza-Chock's contextualizing of participation is pertinent as it links closely with the ideology of the value of participation which is an essential component of *Wonderland* and supports how projects like *Wonderland* needed to be 'open' to the public. I learnt this lesson in previous projects where, reinforcing the message of inclusivity of voice, I reiterated that they were the right people in the room for the conversation that would unfold because they were engaged and present..

To achieve this I approached New Art Exchange as 'a contemporary visual arts space in Nottingham that celebrates the region's cultural richness and diversity. It is the largest gallery in the UK dedicated to culturally diverse contemporary visual arts' (New Art Exchange 2014). New Art Exchange's commitment to celebrate the region's cultural diversity was aligned with my commitment to stimulating new perspectives on the value of diversity within art and society.

**Wonderland's design phases:**

Phase 1: Research and Development

Phase 2: Launch 2013

Phase 3: Implementation of workshops and events. Light Night Nottingham creative workshop for children at Crafty Sparrow, Friar Lane, and Nottingham. Children will be able to make lanterns of hope and peace, which were displayed across Nottingham.

Phase 4: Pop up exhibitions at New Art Exchange and Bromley House.

Artist residencies.

Phase 5: Final vocal event and evaluation 2014.

In the previous panel events for *[Media]ted Riots* and *Freedom in Air* I felt that the pitching the events as panels or debates was inappropriate as it set a confrontational, them and us dynamic; instead I felt it was more in line with the premise of *Wonderland* (2013-14) that they were to be branded as the opportunity to *BEvocal* which, appropriately became the name developed for the events. Each event was programmed over a 15-month period to offer a series of pauses for reflection and evaluation<sup>36</sup> on the project's development.

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<sup>36</sup> *BEvocals* for July 2013, December 2013, February 2014, April 2014 and August 2014

Events:

- 17th July 2014 *Wonderland*: what does the city need?
- 3rd December 2013 *Wonderland*: Technology and Older Persons
- 13th February 2014 *Wonderland*: Children's issues. These range from Health, Well Being, Education, Opportunities, Displacement and Identity.
- April 2014 *Wonderland*: Creating disruptive cultures to bring social change
- 10th August 2014 *Wonderland*: Closing event *Wonderland* reflections

Fittingly, the agenda and focus for each event discussion was not determined until nearer the time to leave this open to unforeseen encounters and conversations with individuals. The events provided the opportunity to promote other activities and brainstorm ideas with new people and organisations at a *Wonderland* event.

*Wonderland* dealt with key issues that communities across the city of Nottingham wanted to discuss openly and honestly bringing together different voices to provoke debate about issues ranging from war to politics, to art, culture and technology. The events focused on how these issues impacted on those who live in Nottingham, matters that I had previously discussed with individuals prior to the events were raised so that they could represent their communities, this approach was known as going from the grass roots up. As Skinder Hundal, Chief Executive of New Art Exchange stated

Having an honest discussion that challenges us to understand and rethink society in a safe place is an important moment... as an art space we would encourage creative interventions including debates from diverse communities in order to stimulate new art that transcends and produces knowledge and understanding to create a better place for future generations.... (Hundal 2013).

*Wonderland* was a networked project; by this I refer to how I was networked within the city through various channels. *Wonderland* became a conduit that provided collaborative spaces and a platform for the collective sharing of concepts and practice. I started to look at the performative aspects of talking, considering how I would provoke debate and how to unpick this within a politically and civically charged setting. *Wonderland* filled an absent space for play, discourse and communication through the art of conversation.

My personal motivation for the project came from being increasingly frustrated with today's global economy carving up predetermined civic and societal agendas set by agencies as the 'issues' to be discussed. In contrast *Wonderland*, provided individuals with the opportunity to set the agendas and tell me what should be discussed and disseminated within the context of art gallery and artist led project. Individual's confidence participating in *Wonderland* became totemic through its perceptive programming

...using art to explore debates around key issues affecting Nottingham was a great opportunity for the attendees to have a healthy debate. You had some key speakers that spoke with passion about making a difference where it gave me the opportunity to build on community links. Excellent. (Community Cohesion Inspector for Nottinghamshire Police Gurmit Kaur 2015).

Integrating individuals of 'difference' with 'shared opportunities', *Wonderland* was a conduit through which opportunities could be offered, networking people and offered a series of internships and artists commissions.

I was committed to stimulating new perspectives on the value of diversity within art and society as the value of socially engaged artist led projects within the arts is of increasingly high importance within today's global economy and *Wonderland* promised to enthuse the public and engage those who would not normally engage with the arts. Impact of socially engaged art has been studied with outcomes such as enhancing quality of life, health and creative outputs. Other benefits such as increasing the effectiveness of public services and policy has been attributed to art projects that encourage local communities to consider local issues<sup>37</sup>. This can be evidenced in the work of *WochenKlauser Renovation of a Refugee Hostel* (2015) working in consultation with local institutions, a school and the hostel owner to improve the living conditions for refugees at the hostel resulting in the renovation of the hostel.

To remain faithful to the rationale for founding *Wonderland* I invited participants from previous projects [*Media]ted Riots* and *Freedom in Air* to attend the workshops, events

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<sup>37</sup> For more examples of economic Impact from AHRC-funded projects visit: <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/documents/projects-programmes-and-initiatives/examples-of-economic-impact-from-ahrc-funded-projects/>

and pop up exhibitions. Through the series of projects *The Art of Conversation*, *[Media]ted Riots*, *Freedom in Air* and *Wonderland* I had established a trajectory for my research practice that individuals trusted and felt that there would be ‘meaningful’ outcome. Often a definition of a meaningful outcome is concomitant to three main factors: time, what an individual wants, and what can be measured. For this body of work, what is meaningful is identified as the production of a conversation in a given time and space where an individual chooses to enter in and out of a dialogic encounter. A key demonstrator of *Wonderland’s* success was that each finished when everyone had spoken and indicated to me that they now wanted to talk independently to each other remaining in the room to talk.

I measured success by the reoccurrence of individuals from local police forces, social workers, academics, refugee organisations, politicians, community group members, charity organisations, international community representatives, artists, residents, students and writers within the different elements of *Wonderland’s* programming. It offered individuals the opportunity to talk, and to turn and tell tales. The first event alone brought over 300 people to New Art Exchange in July 2013 with audiences reaching 690 for the events.



*Fig. 13* Photograph of *Wonderland* Event, Main Gallery New Art Exchange, Nottingham.

At each *Wonderland* event names were collected of the participating organisations and individuals and their contact details. Every person who attended was welcomed: this ritual became an in-house joke that the New Art Exchange entrance became like my front door, welcoming people in and out of the venue. It was imperative that everyone helping was primed and able to speak about what *Wonderland* stood for and could gather information from the people who attended. As a phenomenological approach it

allowed participants during *Wonderland* events to share information about themselves in relation to the geographic, socio and civic reach of the project across the city. This data helped me to extend the reach of the project and contact everyone to find out what involvement or ambitions they had for a *Wonderland* and offer invitations to participate in the events at NAE.<sup>38</sup>

The events fostered positive relationships between individuals and community groups because they articulated for themselves mutual issues and shared agendas which then promoted aspiration, creativity and a shared sense of community. The use of zoning areas for the events took place but was conceptually extended further beyond their practical use in *[Media]ted Riots* and *Freedom in Air*. *Wonderland* zones extended out into the main gallery to cope with capacity and provide space between different activities and individuals showing and sharing what they had done under the umbrella of *Wonderland*. I created a market place for everyone to share whatever they felt best reflected them. On talking with POW<sup>39</sup> a peer-founded charity supporting individuals involved in or affected by sex work, I decided to position them next to the local authorities whom they felt were not engaging with them, so that their issues and concerns for workers in the local neighborhood could be heard.



Fig. 14 Triptych of images from *Wonderland* events, New Art Exchange Nottingham.

In Zone 1 I functioned as I had in previous projects *[Media]ted Riots* and *Freedom in Air* giving personal welcomes and using flipcharts (DVD 4 *Wonderland* 2016, 1.05 and 2.28). I extended this by performing the traditional acts of hosting, such as handing out drinks and homemade cakes to facilitate conversations. Local artisans, musicians, magicians, belly dancers and performers were invited to showcase their practice as a *Wonderlander*. Music would be played, images of workshops and pop up exhibitions screened, and I

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<sup>38</sup> Please see the following link for an example of a wonderland invitation  
<http://theartistryofconversation.com/publications/>

<sup>39</sup> For more information please visit <http://pow-advice.org.uk>

would observe that conversation transferred to the voices of others and mine had become subdued. An example of the use of Zone 1, I invited a local folk band to play music selected by older persons from community groups for whom I had previously run workshops, to bring a synergy between these activities and some of the themes for discussion around opportunities, art and culture and creativity for older persons within the city of Nottingham. Invited panelists were asked to arrive early to be present in the café area (Zone 1) with me to greet everyone who was attending. This was to increase panellist's familiarity and to provide the time and the opportunity for them to mix with others and defusing their perceived authority before the formality of the discussions began.

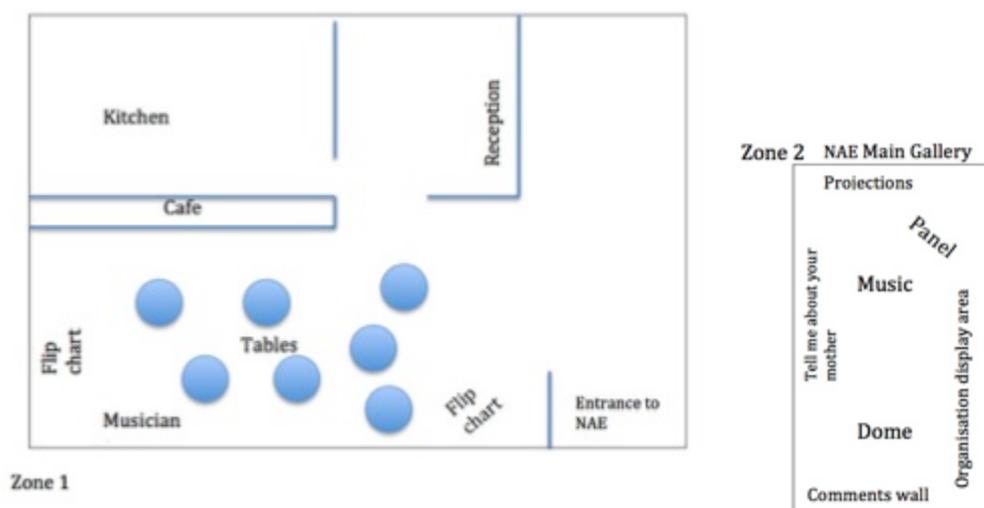


Fig. 15 Floor plan of *BEvocal* space for Zone 1 of *Wonderland*, New Art Exchange, Nottingham.

Hosting the *BEvocals* was highly rehearsed and involved an attuned series of performed technique that I had developed over a period of time looking for the dialogic nuances and reading body language. The set up of the room for the event became like invisible performance positioning chairs at 45-degree angles to encourage people's physicality to be open to their allocated table and to others in the room. I knew where each panelist would be positioned and ensured that I knew where everyone else positioned themselves so that I had a sense of the type of conversation that each table top would have and I also ensured that I was able to turn, and be turned to during the event to weave in everyone's voice to the conversation. I was aware when one point was being made or raised in one area of the room that person x had an experience or account that they would want to share and I would then encourage them to share that with the group, there was a balance between individuals offering to speak and me creating

opportunities and gaps for their voice to be brought into the discussion. This was only possible because of the time that I spent outside of the event talking, visiting and building relationships and gathering knowledge on everyone. The use of music and personal images on screen, provision of tablecloths and home baked foods to create a sense of the familiar in an unfamiliar space.

Panelists were split up and each sat at different tables so that their voices were stretching across the whole room, to encourage participation with others at each table. I moved through the space, weaving myself physically between panelists and participants capturing their voices. I transformed the room into a *Wonderland* space, where the sharing of knowledge, professionally and personally, could take place within a supportive and encouraging environment. I achieved this by being supportive of conversations through subtle performative gestures, curation of space and management of people. I developed the use of anecdotes within my facilitation of the events.

An example of this came from the Older Persons event where I asked a participant to get a dongle so that we could access the internet in their community hall: they had entered into a shop to purchase this item and had asked for a donkey and if it would fit in their bag or if they needed a car to come to collect it and them! These anecdotes, shared willingly with everyone, created a personal touch and provided a sense of insight into a relationship between individuals involved in the project with myself. I orchestrated it so that individual accounts were read out by figures of authority who attended the events such as local councillors, the Lord Mayor of Nottingham, or persons of civic responsibility for the city. This meant that they had to speak, with permission, the words of someone who was unable to attend to enable their voice to be offered to discussion.



*Fig. 16* Photograph *Wonderland* event, integration of panellists and public New Art Exchange, Nottingham.

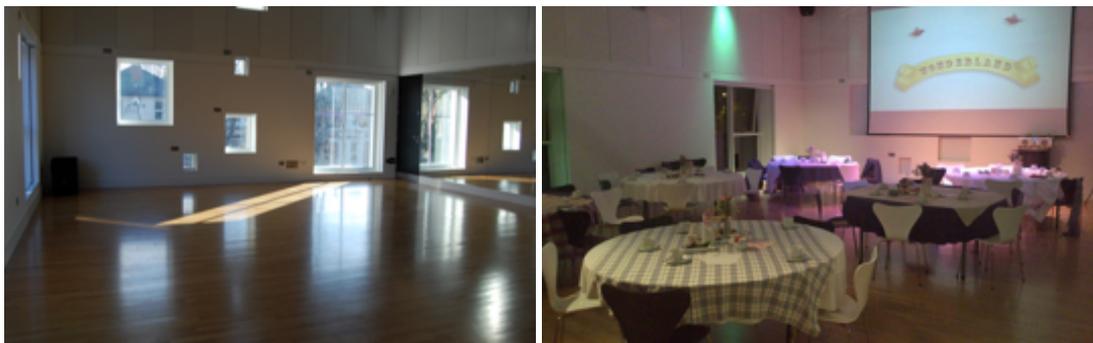
Lighting was a really important part of creating the right atmosphere for Zone 4. The right atmosphere was assisted through the used of theatrical lights, as Francis Reid stated

perhaps the most fascinating and rewarding use of light is the possibility of influencing the mental state of the audience... light can help to control whether the audience feel happy or sad, extrovert or withdrawn, aggressive or submissive (Reid 2002, p6).

I used a mix of profiles and fresnels for colour for each vocal event (DVD4 *Wonderland* 2016, 4.01). The colour scheme was altered to create alternative and appropriate atmospheres conducive to the dialogue and individuals that would be entering the space to talk.

One of the principal ways of controlling such atmosphere is by mixing warm and cool light...Light can only help to create atmosphere. Light never works by itself and is only of a package of integrated staging devices, which production teams use to control the emotional state of an audience (Reid 2002, p6).

Having previous industry experience working with lighting in theatres I was aware that warm, soft and calming colours: a palette of blues, greens, yellow and oranges was appropriate to be selected. I was aware that these tones have helped to set the scene for audience participation in shows such as *Missing Entertainment* (2003), and so this palette was used to help to create an atmosphere that was conducive for generating conversation.



*Fig. 17* Photograph of before and after set up of *BEvocal* space for *Wonderland*, New Art Exchange, Nottingham.

*Wonderland* was commissioned for *Light Night* (2014) to run a workshop for children to create a lantern in order to ascertain children's issues ranging from health, wellbeing,

education, opportunities, displacement and identity. It was whilst carrying out the workshops that children spoke about their own hopes and aspirations for the future. These ranged from personal goals such as wanting to get better at homework or football, to political, global, environmental and other social issues, by using musical choices to engage with children's attitudes to the arts & the world around them. Questions of identity as a global citizen were raised including why cultural identity is important to children and how do we make children citizens of the world, able to take an active part in global dialogue and economy? I carried out the workshop at a local hairdresser, the central location by Nottingham Castle meant that I was able to increase the footfall of people out for *Light Night* to get a wider range of views from over 250 people in 3 hours.

These questions were fed back to Nottingham City Council and the impact of *Wonderland* was measured by the direct contact and long-term results that were felt as well as the temporal act of being able to host and facilitate. Pat Thomas, chair of New Meadows Tenants and Residents Association stated that

Wonderland enriched the lives of the Meadows people involved in the sessions. A few of us - about 8 - attended all the sessions and enjoyed them. There was a sense of excitement and an increase in our self worth. Too often older people feel sidelined: this was never the case with Wonderland- we felt valued and listened to. Thank you for the opportunity to be part of Wonderland (Thomas 2015).

Everyone's voice matters and can be heard through participating in workshops and vocal events. *Wonderland* brought people together who cared about the impact of modern day life on the people from Nottingham. By providing a space for everyone to come together through art, to share his or her hopes and aspirations for the future.

A series of workshops took place with Long Meadow Day Centre, Cherry Tree Resource Centre, and New Meadows Tenants and Residents Association, who are older person's communities from across the city. I worked with them to reflect on topics of art, culture and new technologies that resulted in an exhibition at Bromley House Library. I initiated the pop up exhibition at Bromley House because many of the Meadows residents, painted and had not previously had an opportunity to exhibit their work. In this way I used the exhibition to provide access for this group to raise concerns they had shared

with me, and for these to be heard by local councillors and city council members who *Wonderland* had invited to attend the exhibition launch. Moving the demographic to an alternative space that is frequented by the invited parties meant that it physically mobilised the group and the conversation out of the area of the Meadows into the city where they could speak in person to the policy-holders also present in the same room.



*Fig. 18* Photograph of local councillor, Bromley House curator and Meadows Residents and Artists at the exhibition launch, Bromley House, Nottingham.

*Wonderland* had impact on the geographical landscape of the city seen in the Meadows, an area of the city that now has two permanent carved totem poles on Queens Walk, which were contributed to by *Wonderland*. These made clear how *Wonderland* itself became totemic of the community that it had created. Each day of my tram commute into the city, I pass these forms showing two hands touching and the symbolism of the relationships that were formed during *Wonderland* between these groups.



*Fig. 19* Photos *Wonderland* Story Poles, Queens Walk, Nottingham (Thomas, P 2015).  
Local businessman, Radio DJ and director of fastgraphics Tony Bates stated:

I was delighted to get involved in the Wonderland Project as Nottingham, like most cities, can be quite disconnected and this project has brought so many minority groups together. The highlight for me was meeting a wonderful gent in his 80s who was so proud to have recently held his first art exhibition, worth taking part in only for that (Bates 2014).

*Wonderland* embraced learning and participation, engaging people playfully through artist led activities to encourage engagement with the idea of people's own heritage, working with people aged 6 to 80 through activities that enhance life experiences. Nicola Rae from *Bromley House*<sup>40</sup> remarked that 'the library has enjoyed working with the Meadows Art Gallery in what was a new venture for both organisations, and I believe we have both benefitted from this collaboration' (2014). *Wonderland* connected communities and brought people together and in doing so excited, inspired and raised aspirations by acknowledging diversity and facilitating understanding through conversation.

Working within the communities that the project was serving, I was able to bridge the gap between social and civic organisations acting as a conduit between the two finding opportunities to bring people together so that they could talk as supported by Carol Luckwell said '*the Wonderland Project offers great opportunities for a diverse group of people, from Nottingham area, to meet and discuss issues of local interest*' (Jones 2014). *Wonderland* asked how do we talk about norms, civility across communities and in doing so, *Wonderland* took a necessary step in the right direction, but only a step towards diversity as we adopt a more dialogic culture. This is addressed in chapter three as part of the methodological design for **The Artistry of Conversation**. It became apparent that few organisations and individuals were working in the same way as *Wonderland* in the city of Nottingham for the East Midlands. At the launch event I placed POW next to Nottinghamshire Community Police to shift the location of where their conversations usually occur (within a meeting room) to a social context to agitate conversation within an artistic context. Acts like this meant that *Wonderland* was viewed as hard hitting, as we did not shy away from initiating and having the conversations that were needed to be had and at the same time created a supportive environment to assist in the production of conversation.

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<sup>40</sup> For more information about Bromley House visit <http://www.bromleyhouse.org>

Strategies to command different spaces physically through a combination of performative tactics along with my spatial design (verified and honed in its third iteration through my practice research), were generated. Resulting in the attention to the design of minute details, placing chairs at 45 degree angles, the control and use of voice, light, sound and body all contributed to the construction and definition of conversation. In turn these became a part of the method employed to deliver *Wonderland*; the integration of specific practical aesthetics is examined in chapter three as contributing aspects of the methodology.

Yochai Benkler regards the social as needing to be able to provide private and public spaces to bring about change and to seek ways in which we can reconsider the 'owning (of) our own culture' (Benkler 2007, p300). *Wonderland* (2013-14) provided a platform for conversation about cultures and valued the approach to telling stories and in chapter three it will methodologically demonstrate how the collective body of works *Wonderland*, *The Art of Conversation*, *[Media]ted Riots* and *Freedom in Air* have creatively brought people together through **the artistry of conversation** to produce a methodology for my arts practice. As the summative project, *Wonderland* demonstrated how it was possible to bring people together from across the city, from vulnerable and disparate community groups and organisations that inform and are part of the rich tapestry for the city of Nottingham. To bring about positive change, for both an individual and to the socio-civic landscape however temporal.



**Part Five**

**InDialogue**

(Nottingham Contemporary, Primary, Backlit, Dance4  
and Nottingham City Council, 2012 - present)

## Part 5:

*InDialogue* (Nottingham Contemporary, Primary, Backlit, Dance4 and Nottingham City Council 2012 - present)

InDialogue was set up to bring together emerging and established artists and academics from a number of disciplines, to interrogate how artists and researchers use dialogue in their practice, create an opportunity to network with like minded practitioners, to disseminate research, to promote art practice as a form and method of research; thereby contributing to current international debates. It is so important to provide shared platforms for artists and researchers to come together and be in dialogue with each other and maintain the artisan spirit of generosity, sharing and inspire conversations through creativity. (Founders, Heather Connelly and Rhiannon Jones 2016).



*Fig. 20 InDialogue, The Man Who Flew into Space from his Apartment* by Michael Pinchbeck, Nottingham Contemporary (Tagen, D).

In the context of this practice research enquiry *InDialogue* contributes to the critical discourse on the dialogic by providing an international platform for artists and researchers to extend and share knowledge from across a multitude of disciplines, through **the artistry of conversation**. It has provided a platform to discuss the methodology and test out aspects of the approaches I had pursued in previous projects.

*InDialogue* consists of two words, *In* and *Dialogue* deliberately merged together to remove any sense of separation for actually being 'in dialogue'. The name of the organisation iterates an in-ness and a face-to-face and the use of the personal. We make

it known to individuals that we expect everyone to engage and be an active participant, and to be 'in dialogue' with one another. It is stipulated that they provide a significant voice that will contribute to that conversation and that they are all context providers. Such techniques help to enable *InDialogue* to be a platform for destabilizing structures by causing disruptions to the normal & expected flow of events with performance interventions and topographically through the creation of 'spaces for dialogue'. Combined with the creative programming <sup>41</sup>of works it enhanced the dissemination of ideas and artworks.

*InDialogue* has established itself as an international platform for artists and researchers to question how they are engaging with dialogue through their own practice or research models. My research practice facilitated the design of a blueprint for the organisation *InDialogue* (through a curatorial approach employing *conversation* and the application of the *architactics* for space (this is unpacked methodologically in chapter three). My aim was to create an organisation that was 'a dialogue' between different disciplines working with the dialogic and to question the understandings of this in relation to the term *InDialogue*, considering differences, commonalities, and how diverse approaches to understanding and articulating the theme can lead to new ways of thinking and making. My methodological approach to conversation has supported *InDialogue* in its delivery of activities and set the agendas to be discussed. Providing structures to help facilitate and enable the flow of conversation between delegates, between performances and papers, between city and sites.

The only other dedicated platform for dialogic theory and research is a social science conference called "Dialogic Self" that takes place each year and in 2012 I attended its seventh iteration in Georgia, USA to research its structure and also present a paper on my doctoral research practice. From attending this, it was apparent that there was a need for an artistic and cultural platform for researchers that looked at dialogic practice not only from a social science perspective. It was also clear to me that there is a need for an interdisciplinary discourse on the dialogic that could bridge the gap between science and arts.

*InDialogue* is interdisciplinary because it invites social science and the arts together to present their varied approaches to the dialogic, which is pertinent to me that any

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<sup>41</sup> Examples of the creative programming and details of presenters/works shown at *InDialogue* 2012,14 and 16 can be accessed online at <https://indialogue2014.wordpress.com>.

activity I was conducting engages with the bridging between discourses, between artists and researchers, disciplines and shifting globalized contexts. In doing this it provides an important opportunity for artists and researchers from either discipline to present their work within the UK context and at an International symposium and discuss a global view of the dialogic.

A historical trajectory for *InDialogue* can be traced back to a conversation that took place between Heather Connelly and myself. We met on an AHRC funded *New Research Trajectories Walk* in the Peak District, hosted by artist Alison Lloyd in April 2011. We had both noticed that there was a lack of opportunities to openly discuss research within the UK within a supportive community of artists and researchers. We discussed how our individual interests in the dialogic could be used as a starting point to generate spaces to converse. We recognised that our own similarities and differences in how we use dialogue in our practices could create a platform to host these needed critical conversations. Heather's research into transcultural dialogues and mine looking into the design of a dialogic methodology through my practice created a contrasting synergy for research and our distinct knowledges became the bookends for the creation of the organisation. We both recognised that there was not a 'space' for artists and researchers to gather to be 'in conversation' with the objective of sharing dialogic models of best practice. *InDialogue* became a space that functioned as a collaborative test bed for both early career and well-established practitioners. This was noted by Grant Kester who agrees that

*InDialogue* is the only platform I know of that provides a space for substantive international exchange on issues associated with dialogue, across the boundaries of visual art, theater and performance studies. It provides a rare opportunity for researchers and artists in all of these disciplines to learn from each other and does a great deal to advance the critical conversation in this burgeoning field. As dialogue and participation become ever more central methods across the arts and humanities events like *InDialogue* will only become more important. (Kester 2015)

We identified that there was a need for the facilitation of the development of practice and research and by making 'vocal' the varied methodologies currently being engaged

with by others and by Heather and I we were able to create a platform to support this activity.

As a founder whose own practice explores aspects of the performativity of conversation through the production of a dialogically generative methodology. I was principally concerned with how I could make use of the dialogic to create spaces to share experiences that were dialogically aesthetic <sup>42</sup> in order to challenge conventional perceptions and systems of knowledge. Tactics were employed by me in order to achieve this, such as on arrival on the first day everyone was personally greeted by me and I was the first point of contact for all participants. I wanted *InDialogue* to be a provider, a platform to consider the distinctions between conversations and dialogue both in terminology and method by practice. *InDialogue* is an after-effect of reading *Conversation Pieces* (2009), pages that were fresh in my mind at the time of founding the organisation. *InDialogue* is characterised as a generative platform because conversations can be initiated between researchers and artists about practice in a safe and supportive environment. It also offers individuals the opportunity for the conversation to continue through the various iterations of events that *InDialogue* hosts as Grant Kester points out in *Conversation Pieces* keeping the conversation going is an essential component for research into the field of the dialogic within arts practice.

In order to achieve this, strategies were put into place that engaged my practice research methodology when devising *InDialogue*. The decision was made to ensure that *InDialogue* was distinct because it could be described as sitting within the traditional context of an academic symposium that provides a keynote, panel, papers and sometimes breakout sessions for discussions. However *InDialogue* also places consideration to the informal and experimental construction of the symposium which is reflecting through the selection and commissioning of works. *InDialogue* encourages experimental papers and states that it is a test-bed for ideas to create a less pressured environment that encourages the sharing and discussion of ideas rather than a 'show and tell' approach towards a symposium. *InDialogue* has widened its audience reach,

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<sup>42</sup> In relation to this practice research the aesthetic is defined in relation to the notion of experience particularly when considering ones own lived experience or (in relation to) the lived experience of (a) particular and unique other human being. '*Aesthetic contemplation and ethical action cannot abstract from the concrete uniqueness of the place in being that is occupied by the subjectum of ethical action as well as by the subjection of artistic contemplation*' (Bakhtin 1990, p24) This conceptualization of the aesthetic acknowledges the inextricable link between a lived experience and the sharing of an experience by another.

offering opportunities for presentation of works beyond academia both in terms of applicants and hosting venues and partners so that *InDialogue* engages with and is part of the public so that seminars or dialogues can be mediated by radio & visual technology particularly as these are growing as interactive media, public & authoritative interest is growing around the act of conversation.

*InDialogue* 'provides a rare opportunity for researchers and artists in all of these disciplines to learn from each other' (Kester 2015) which means that knowledges can be shared across social science and arts disciplines. This is also aided by the fact that *InDialogue* physically situates itself outside of the academy and into the context of the city and an arts venue such as Nottingham Contemporary so that the prevalence of the dialogue is questioned alongside the research being discussed by shifting its context it requires a refocusing of its position and claims within a 'real world' or 'arts market' setting. Taking the conversation outside of the 'four walls' of academia extends the academic enquiry into dialogical modes of expression for practice because individuals are challenged to assimilate their understanding of their discipline further through the act of sharing of knowledge within a different frame of contextual reference.

As an organisation it acknowledges both bodily and haptic knowledge. Imperative is the acknowledgment and respect for the ethics and aesthetics for a particular approach to regarding the dialogic within practice. The result is that conversations are opened up and different research processes are reconsidered in terms of the dialogic. This is achieved through the supportive and generous environment that is constructed so that the sharing of knowledge's can specifically take place within the safety of *InDialogue*. As such, *Fucking Good Art* presented at both *InDialogue* 2012 and returned in 2014 to continue their discussion within the *InDialogue* community. They consider dialogue to incorporate 'the white noise', by this, they refer to every bit of a conversation is containing the potential to be significant. In keeping with this, it is not a platform to provide outcomes or draw conclusions. It is a conversation where the process of being 'in dialogue' and the way in which that dialogue occurs has as much potential as the summary of what has been conversed. *Fucking Good Art* regard conversation as a continuous process with people who have participated in their projects right up to and even during the editorial process after a project has potentially finished. This ethos of conversation as a process of continuation is practically aligned with *InDialogue's* philosophy.

It is important to note that a highly critical level of conversation takes place during *InDialogue*, this in turn shapes and reshapes the introductions and any dialogue that we as curators<sup>43</sup> have with the delegates during the symposium. As a pedagogical approach it is responsive learning model through sharing of ideas at all times. As founders and curators we have established an ethos where we consider our roles as a gestural activity, and as a research activity. Often, we mentor artists and researchers to help them formulate what they wish to share at *InDialogue* if we feel strongly that there is a burgeoning question or approach that needs to be shared within a wider community such as *InDialogue*. We form relationships with every participant prior to the actual symposium, and I insisted that everyone in the room is known by name, an approach that I take in my own practice research which has been tried and tested as a method to relax and engage people quicker within a particular setting. During the symposium dialogue continues and introductions are made, these opportunities are constructed to facilitate this so that people are more comfortable to speak and participate within workshop and group settings. This technique of personalization is also the position that Austrian art organisation *WochenKlauser* employ in their practice and they described the importance of this process in order to build a sense of trust and community during their presentation at *InDialogue* in 2012 (WochenKlauser, 2012).<sup>44</sup>

*InDialogue* uses a range of cited known methods, such as that described by *Fucking Good Art* and *WochenKlauser* to promote conversation, however through my own practice research shifts in the conducting of an event have been molded and aided through my artistry for conversations. My use of *architactics* to keeping conversations going is one approach to the facilitation of *InDialogue*, this methodological approach is explained further in chapter three. My use of monitoring where conversations seem to be dissipating and my interjecting to keep a conversation flow occurring is another approach that I take, offering personal welcomes, monitoring gestures, mimicry of body language and use of techniques such as serving up the food at the symposium meal handing a plate to each and every person thanking them for attending and providing communal meals. Another approach to assist in the creation of a sociable atmosphere for *InDialogue* was the use of after dinner board games so that individuals on their own

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<sup>43</sup> It should be noted that we described our activity as that of curators rather than as facilitators to distinguish ourselves as a collective, that in the first instance align with a more traditional use of the term curation as we initially and predominantly select artists/researchers to present works. Drawing on the belief that curation is far from a static practice as described by Hans Ulrich Obrist (2015).

<sup>44</sup> To view the conversation between WochenKlauser and myself please see <https://indialogue2012.wordpress.com/live-broadcasting-of-in-dialogue-symposium/>

could participate in a collective activity, mutually provided with a common objective to play a game and to help create a feeling of inclusivity.

The programming considers the shape of conversations at *InDialogue*, thematically and through the use of other activities, like the board games after meals and interjection of one to one performances. All of these tactics collectively are used to encourage the continuation of conversation throughout the course of the event, and, where possible, to provide space for individuals who return the following year to continue to build on prior conversations.

*InDialogue* encourages many spoken languages & international travel within education and has created a pressure group that calls for an arts forum, such as *InDialogue* to exist as it recognizes the true meaning of internationalization & intra & inter-cultural dialogue. *InDialogue* participant and theatre practitioner Howard Lotker from the Czech Republic told me that '*the number of languages that you know, well, that's the number of different people that you are*' (Jones 2014). We encourage individuals to become 'other' than themselves, however briefly through the experience of participating in conversation; so that there is the potential to be open to change by a willingness to learn and engage which is reinforced through the ethos. We state at the welcome that it is about opening up not closing down conversations, conversations are had in many languages and '*creates moments for shifts in perceptions. By being open to unknown or the invisible InDialogue offers an individuals the opportunity to become and remember others. 'To perceive the invisible in you' and 'while I become me, I remember you'* (Irigaray 2000 p43).

*InDialogue* facilitates a willingness to want to change a viewpoint on dialogue, it creates memorable moments, through the experience of being *in dialogue* by entering into conversation. It has stretched research opportunities for artists and researchers alike, this is cited through a mass of online media coverage and blog posts and publications a result of providing opportunities for both academic and professional communities<sup>45</sup>. In turn, this has had impacted not only on my research enquiry but it has also created a space for debate on key gaps in research knowledge that were noted on this international platform. Which, *InDialogue* now has a responsibility to continue to provide a platform for the sharing of creativity within dialogic modes of discourse.

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<sup>45</sup> See Nottingham Contemporary media channel  
<http://www.nottinghamcontemporary.org/media/video?page=9>

To assist with this we bring an essential third voice into the planning process in the form of an invited guest curator who has a contrasting practice, different set of terminologies, approaches and methodologies with regards to the dialogic. This is to encourage conversation to extend and engage with wider discourses and often as a result of this, the conversations that take place during the curatorial process help with the thematic design of the symposium. By using our varied ideas on dialogue as a structure for the symposium it widens the trajectory and appeals to a greater cross section of artists and research community to engage.

*InDialogue* maintains an engagement with current and critical questions that need to be asked in this field such as in 2012 researcher Viviana Checchia questioned the role of dialogue within a curatorial/artistic process and ran a panel session looking at the dialectical tendency to hegemonies through art; with a focus on how this practice interferes with the dynamics of the production of artistic practice. In 2014 artist Becky Beinart, questioned the politics of participation working with Janna Graham, Gary Anderson and Lorena Rivero de Beer on questions of power, inclusion/ exclusion, and agendas behind socially engaged, public and participatory artwork – and examples of projects that activate these questions, and make space for different kinds of dialogue or resistance. Each curator’s interests shape the conversation within *InDialogue* that in turn triggers conversations for further discussion during the symposium with the wider attending participants and selected guests. Respectively, it means that an invaluable opportunity to directly engage and speak about our research through practice could be articulated. The structure of the symposium is therefore centered around the curator’s research interests this model for the symposium has come from our positions as artists and PhD researchers. As such, *InDialogue* is a provision of a space and time to focus on practice research and to help nurture the potential of our and others artistic works and research.

However, conversation takes priority within the construct of *InDialogue*, conversation in this context is central to how *InDialogue* builds its culture <sup>46</sup> out of the conversations that take place. Through the various *architactics* that are performed by me during the

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<sup>46</sup> Culture is thought of in terms of an individual’s personal, socio-civic and political background that they innately bring with them when they attend an *InDialogue* event. Through their presence and participation they in turn help to develop the ideas, customs, and social behavior of *InDialogue*. *InDialogue* becomes a culture that is therefore built out of the many individual cultures/cultural references that each individual brings with them to the event.

symposium, these methodological tactics are described in chapter three. This apposite quote regarding conversation as that which *'flows along, cutting its own channels, creating and obliterating cultures to suit itself'* (Ostrosky p55, 2005) is aligned with *InDialogue's* methodological structure as it cuts its channels through the physical design of the symposium alongside the practical interventions performed by me. These performed acts as a method for assisting conversation are unpacked in chapter three. This has led to the realisation that conversation has to be identifiable through its practices, beliefs, standards and concepts. Which can be understood from a position of commonality that is generated during conversation at *InDialogue*. From this position conversations are formed and knowledge's are shared.

*InDialogue* invites artists and researchers to interrogate their use dialogue in practice by encouraging experimentation through interaction in the form of presentations, discussions, artwork, performances and workshop participation. When Heather and I are making selections we attempt to bring together a balanced number of artists and researchers so that the feel and conversation are in relation to how they are all cultural producers and centre the conceptualising of their research through a focus on practice.

As a result speakers are encouraged to respond to the call to present practice or research through engaging and dynamic papers, performances, interventions and workshops. With a focus on dialogue in relation to:

- Knowledge and production
- Artistic and curatorial process
- Interactive and collaborative practice
- Translation and intercultural communication
- Methodologies.

*InDialogue* retains a somewhat formal symposium structure of 'application and selection' however, it is also more fluid and is open to different types of knowledge and experience. A mentoring process is offered whereby applicants can spend several months in conversation with Heather or I developing their proposals if they have an interesting stance on the dialogic which we believe would fit into the symposium. The

organisation provides residencies<sup>47</sup> that run prior to and during the *InDialogue* symposium, to support artistic research.



*Fig. 21* Photograph from performance at *InDialogue*, Nottingham Contemporary (Tagen, D).

The symposium is ultimately time-based and as a strategy we mix papers and performances to juxtapose and overlap. We encourage language and conversation to mingle and synthesis. We programed the events to provide space to talk as much as to listen as both of these are crucial for the dissemination of knowledges (DVD5 *InDialogue* 2016, 1hour 1min). We provide time for reflection, by constantly shifting the setting in each given context as a strategy for conversation. To cater not only for the taste buds but also for every type of working methodology that an artist or researcher might have.

*At InDialogue:*

1. Artists and researchers sign up to be a part of a process, encouraged to stay for the whole ‘conversation’ i.e. the whole event.
2. Bring people to a particular set of venues specifically to support the selected artists and researchers.
3. Distinctive cultural characteristics of artists and researchers selected examine examples of socioeconomic, political, and demographic factors that give shape to the conversations during the symposium.
4. We are aware that we both sit within the community it supports; Heather and I are both academics and practicing artist working within and through dialogic contexts. As

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<sup>47</sup> This model has been developed in partnership with Dance4 and in 2014 selected artists Karen Christopher and Rajni Shah to develop and present new material produced rather than the material being brought to the symposium.

such, it invents, supports and generates from the inside out not from the top down. It also has a dynamic programming approach, which matches and emphasises the cross, interdisciplinary nature of dialogue.

5. *InDialogue* is an independent organisation that sits on the fringes between institutions to encourage collaboration with partners in the city. *InDialogue* does not follow 'others' agendas and is not limited by or to other organisations party politics. As a result of this tactic we have been able to see that *InDialogue* has nearly a 50/50 split of artists and academics who all feel comfortable to attend because it isn't under the covert of a 'particular' organisation. The increase in individuals who attend *InDialogue* is indicative of the approach that we take as it the events continue to attract artists and researchers year on year.

6. *InDialogue* addresses notions of research and knowledge and challenges traditional modes of conference delivery through the consideration of *InDialogue* its self as practice-based research activity, that then within it, hosts practice and research activities. It considers complex challenges our understanding of dialogue as a process and as an outcome.

We encouraged *InDialogue* to be a chance to digest, disseminate and converse. To engage in and with dialogue, to have conversations to rewrite, edit, mute to watch, to listen to question to respond, to participate. To be in Dialogue. The ethos is one built on generosity, Heather I organize the events for free, what is fundraised is in kind and what is paid for covers cost for communal meals and drinks. I ensure that we are known to all delegates to provide everyone with a sense of value and respect by personal welcomes, introductions and space for a medley of tailored activities that will appeal to a different artists and researchers in attendance as we ensure that we know each individuals and their background before they attend at event.

In this respect *InDialogue* is generative and generous, we state in our welcome to deliberately plant the belief that 'the right people are here because they have chosen to enter the room and join the conversation' (Jones 2014) this is a development of the use of the welcome in *[Media]ted Riots* and *Wonderland* as a tactic to encourage individuals to feel engaged and valued and helps to promote that *InDialogue* is a vehicle and a generative site for the exchange of ideas through conversation.



Fig. 22 Rhiannon Jones in conversation with John Newling, Nottingham Contemporary, 2014.

In 2012, I designed the panel 'Performing Dialogue' and invited Martina Reuter and Manfred Rainer Austrian based artists from *Wochenklausur* to speak alongside Newton and Helen Harrison from *The Harrison Studio*, USA and *John Newling*, UK as collectively their practices shared a common concern for the public interest, which is activated through their use of the dialogic. I facilitated a conversation between artists, countries, time zones and sites to discuss the use of conversation to generate practice.

I spoke with the artists at length prior to the event so that we were familiar to each other and could employ my method of establishing rehearsed phrases, actions and establish points of associations between them and me so that I could use them in the panel to carefully steer the conversation. As a result of the pre-conversations they all kindly agreed to let the conversation unfold on the panel, there were no prepared questions and answers and it was encouraged that they would ask questions of each other as much as to receive questions from the floor and from me. This was to maintain a faithfulness to my approach for conversation allowing for the unfolding and liveness of a performed conversation to take place. I weaved thematic commonalities into starting points between the speakers, using techniques established during previous projects *[Media]ted Riots*, *Freedom in Air* and *Wonderland*. Common themes found within the diversity of their practice such as the use of conversation as an artwork and the design and use of working methodologies. Defining what conversation is for each artist, the role of conversation and a definition for it within relation to their practice. Discussion took place as to how conversation could become defined as dialogue, when the moment of change occurs and become something different, and to what extent.

John Newling described his dialogic practice in relation to that of a transaction, situations are formed between people and the works, through the use of dialogue to define the dialogue and how the between ness of people and work occurs – is the between ness the dialogue? The Harrisons had a clear agenda that is created by the artists in discourse with the larger community. Thus, the Harrisons see themselves simultaneously as guests and co-workers. They stay only as long as the invitation continues, or until they deem that they have done all that is possible for them to do. WochenKlausur's conversational technique is often referred to as a simple act of talking, but when asked about the notion of simplicity they replied that conversation is actually a very complex thing, and very sophisticated and has to be conducted in a certain way to achieve the outcomes desired – whether its allowing others voice to be heard or encouraging policy change, so a highly methodological approach is developed to support the defined project that is needed to be completed.

In 2014, entitled 'The Performative Conversation' John Newling was invited back to pick up the conversation from where it was left in 2012 to emphasis the idea that conversations continue which is an important aspect for *InDialogue*. This time the focus had shifted and was shaped again by my concerns with the aesthetics of experience <sup>48</sup>to challenge conventional perceptions and systems of knowledge and the distinctions between conversations and dialogue both in terminology and as a method by practice. What was significant during this conversation was that John Newling stated

...At a time when many ideologies have all but blown themselves out; when meaning seems to have become meaningless in a strangely nihilistic void; when, in our sophistication, we find as our ancestors did that we are fearful of the unpredictability of nature; when knowledge as causality seems to become increasingly predetermined; it seems important that we experience, see and partake in art projects of all kinds so as to better construct a lasting

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<sup>48</sup> It is reiterated that in relation to this practice research the aesthetic is defined in relation to the notion of experience. Particularly when considering ones own lived experience or (in relation to) the lived experience of (a) particular and unique other human being. Aesthetic contemplation and ethical action cannot abstract from the concrete uniqueness of the place in being that is occupied by the *subjectum* of ethical action as well as by the *subjectum* of artistic contemplation (Holquist 1990, p24). This conceptualization of the aesthetic acknowledges the inextricable link between a lived experience and for another. Linked to this the thinking that what we experience is embodied all forms of inner life and that of the given world surround us.

conversation that, partially, constructs antidotes to our troubled selves.(Newling 2014)

What was significant about this statement are that key questions are being asked of the purpose of conversation within arts practice as a construct of antidotes and, at the same time questions the role of the artist role as a constructor of conversations that can last. What differences are there between dialogue and artwork, or is dialogue artwork itself? How is work being made now adding to art history – in relation to advocating the individual and what it is to be human what do we do to get by to feel better?

What is reiterated throughout *InDialogue* in its form and content is the use of my approach to conversation as a considered and embodied practice. The definition for the performativity of conversation originates from the connectivity between self and other, dialogue is a performative, infinite and evolutionary. These aspects are iterated through the following:

1. *InDialogue* carries on conversations from previous InDialogue events – new panels and workshops are developed around emerging themes and ideas to build on previous events.
2. During *InDialogue* there is as much time scheduled for conversation, as there is to listen to artists/researchers presenting works/papers. It is polyvocal, not just one voice or trajectory but many to encourage cross-disciplinary conversations on research and artistic practice.
4. *InDialogue* provides a space for the cross pollination of ideas. It somehow inhabits an energy that is urgent and present. Everyone who attends does so to share and to learn within a temporal community of (as I named them) *In-Dialogue-ers*.

*InDialogue* sits between scholarly disciplines and cultures and the geography of a city to connect to universities, art venues and independent organisations to reflect the type of individuals who attend the symposium who are from both the academic community as well as artists living and working in the city. It uses the geography of the city to help to promote the cross-pollination of ideas between different spaces, institutions, contexts and cultures, to interrogate dialogic practices through dialogue because

Like people, ideas have social lives. They're one way when they're by themselves, and another when their peers surround them. Crammed together, they grow more uncertain, more interesting, more

surprising; they come out of themselves and grow more appealing, and funnier. You wouldn't want all of intellectual life to be that social-  
-we couldn't make progress that way. But there's a special atmosphere that develops whenever truly different ideas congregate, and, on the whole, it's too rare. (Rothman, Joshua).<sup>49</sup>.



Fig. 23 InDialogue venues 2014, Nottingham Contemporary, Backlit, Primary, 2015.

Different sites are used drawing upon my research interests in the performativity of conversation, to shift the physicality of conversation and how where we have a conversation shifts the conceptualization of what is discussed. By using sites such as Nottingham Contemporary, Primary Studios and Backlit, individuals attending the symposium who are often new visitors to the UK and to the city, enjoy the opportunity to explore and time to reflect on the city and its culture whilst moving between venues. The journeys between venues provided spaces to walk and talk, something Heather and I valued greatly as InDialogue emerged on our walk together in 2011. We use artist's responses to the call for participation as a method to determine the venues, similar techniques are employed by artists to help them construct their practice such as Tim Knowles<sup>50</sup>(2015) who uses wind to determine routes that he takes. We use applications and the conversations that we have with individuals to determine the venues and therefore the walks that we then take through the city as we navigate between locations. Reinforcing my advocacy of extraction, shifting contexts and genres to maintain a physicality for conversation.

*InDialogue* approaches each of the venues because of their appropriateness to support artist and researchers, not that the presentations or performances are 'shoe horned' into a conference room or the only available space. We value the potential configurations of dialogue through creative engagements by engaging with the spatial design of a city, as

<sup>49</sup> <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/tag/cross-pollination> accessed online 17th November 2015

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.timknowles.co.uk/Work/Windwalks/tabid/496/Default.aspx> accessed 2<sup>nd</sup> December 2015

Recently a multitude of artists' endeavors to creatively engage with various configurations of the 'public space' have been considerably more aligned with the temporal than the spatial. That is to say, the virtualization and near atomization of a more traditional vision of public space – as exemplified by an architecturally designed and structured common, park, square – has allowed for an increasingly elusive, radically dispersed number of intervals, moments and events. (Patrick 2011, p65).

The temporary set up of artists work in different venues across the city facilitates the mobilization of voice, and how different voices are heard in spaces based on how comfortable you are, this also allowed for the possibility for everyone to feel that there was a space for them to relax and to contribute if they wish to the wider sessions and conversations. The increased acknowledgement of designing moments, intervals and events that engage with different sites has assisted all of the projects produced for this practice research. For *InDialogue*, it has helped in fulfilling its agenda to support my own research interests in the performativity of conversation, the physicality of conversation and how where we have a conversation shifts the conceptualization of what is discussed.



*Fig. 24* Diagram to illustrate the spread of delegates for *InDialogue*.

The figure above reiterates the geographical reach of *InDialogue* with over 25 nationalities attending previous iterations to date. The demographic is made up of artists, curators, doctoral researchers and senior academics who valued the time to present their own research and test out new practice in a safe and supportive environment with like minded people. All who want to contribute to new knowledge on the approach and methodologies for finding new ways for artistic research to be

disseminated and shared within a increasingly globalized and mobile world which the research and academic communities are responding to and from within. By bringing elements of different models together to create a rich, busy and intensive programme we continue to work with a rich mix of practitioners, exploring arts practice as research. It brings together emerging and established artists and academics from a number of disciplines, to interrogate how artists and researchers use dialogue in their practice, create an opportunity to network with like-minded practitioners. It is so important to provide shared platforms for artists and researchers to come together and be in dialogue with each other and maintain the spirit of generosity, sharing and inspiring conversations through creativity; and at the same time to disseminate research and promote art practice as a method of research in order to contribute to current international debates.

In summary, *InDialogue* supports individual's practice but also contributes towards new ways of working and thinking about dialogue for postgraduate researchers, for publication and public engagement models and reconsiders how academia engages within and outside of its institutionalized 'four walls'. By offering an alternative set of spaces, a network of international colleagues academics and artists to reside outside of the studio and institution to share and test out works. It cuts across disciplines, cultures and geographic localities in order to be in dialogue with the engaging in dialogic practices and research to contribute to the discourse on a global perspective. Borne out of and from within a locale whilst producing and effecting a global position for dialogical practice and research.

Since establishing the organization it is now commonly known as a platform for debate and for the generation and exchange of ideas. Alongside this it also challenges approaches to hosting international symposiums and examples best practices being produced from across the globe from different areas of discourse *InDialogue* has a well established working methodology whose ethos is designed to specifically contribute and promote a dialogue between *InDialogue* and national and international institutions.

## CHAPTER THREE

### The Artistry of Conversation: a methodology for my practice research



This thesis sets out the critical context for conversation and defined the key terms for my practice research in chapter one. In chapter two I described the practice research through five projects: *The Art of Conversation*, *[Media]ted Riots*, *Freedom in Air*, *Wonderland* and *InDialogue*. In this chapter I will identify the organic and embodied methodology I have designed through practice and how the key terms (APSSL) have been identified and applied to my practice research. This chapter describes the contributions that are the direct consequence of the practice research, and addresses how these outcomes have resulted in the design of a new methodology. I will outline the methodological contribution via five aspects: *Architactics*, *Performativity*, *Social Activism*, *Storytelling* and *Legacy* (APSSL)<sup>51</sup>. The application of each of the component parts of the acronym varies in measure and sequence within each project. The design has no fixed order so that it is infinitely transferable across the variety of projects conducted under the title **The Artistry of Conversation**. APSSL is always bracketed by conversation at the beginning and the end and it is constituted with five critical components mentioned above.

The practice research methodology has been generated as a result of the experiences encountered on this PhD journey through my arts practice. An aim of the PhD (*Practice in High Definition*) was that the research trajectory evolved organically, spatially and chronologically across the city of Nottingham<sup>52</sup> so that I worked within a specific local and geographical context to gain in depth experience, and develop relationships within the different local communities where I lived. Objectively, the experiential nature of conversation consistently remained at the heart of this practice research. The agency at work in my practice harbours a collaborative ethos that places priority on experience and the exchange of that experience; it rejects pre-defined methodologies in favor of my method (APSSL), which was constructed as a direct result of the practice research. Gray contended that '*practice-led doctoral research, (shows a) desire – for seeing things differently, for bringing about change, for creative transformation and invention - is characteristically rooted in practice*'<sup>53</sup>. (Gray 2007, n.p) These characteristics are

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<sup>51</sup> Ethical consideration was made at all stages of the practice research enquiry in conjunction with the creative and intellectual methods employed to conduct the research.

<sup>52</sup> Nottingham not only happens to be where I live it is also where I have chosen to undertake my practice so that it is situated in one of the earliest Industrial cities, it has a wide demographic across the city providing a large resource for raw material and as a place it has a very active and positive support for arts practice and a large artistic population for the constitution of a city. Nottingham is a unique place to work and live as an artist.

<sup>53</sup> To read the full paper visit <http://carolegray.net/Papers%20PDFs/Fromthegroundup.pdf>  
Grey, C., 2007. From the ground up: encountering theory in the process of practice-led doctoral research. [Keynote paper], AHRC Postgraduate Conference. De Montfort University

reflected within the design of the methodology, which at its core values experience and experiential methods to bring about change through practice.

The methodology ultimately has a pedagogical aspect to the works as social constructs and issues are discussed and debated. It politically places a wedge between social systems that are not easily defined and brings together a diversity of groups and individuals in an environment where we are less likely to get together. This is also where the polemic comes into play in connection with any political motivations<sup>54</sup>. This is clearly defined as socially engaged art under the *New Model Visual Arts Organisations and Social Engagement* report<sup>55</sup> where socially engaged practices are delivered '*through collaboration, participation, dialogue, provocation and immersive experiences. The organisations focus on process and seek to embed themselves within the communities among whom they work*' (Froggett et al. 2011). At its core it's intention has not been to educate or politically motivate, but rather it has been about conducting an enquiry as a process for developing ideas and sharing dialogues to create spaces between people to have a conversation, whether that is physical or spatial by design. I have been developing an embodied methodology that looks at the articulation of the space, and how we narrate things in it and through it. At its core, is the attention to a complex process (APSSL) comprising of environmental factors, my personality and how that feeds my performativity, my intuitive immersive-ness and former professional life and training as a practitioner.

Chapter three, **The Artistry of Conversation: a methodology for my practice research**, draws on a body of literature from the arts to social sciences in order to test and validate the methodology and the concepts I have used throughout my work. For the purpose of my PhD I have placed my practice 'under the magnifying glass' to view it under high definition, hence my use of the playful acronym *Practice in High Definition* (PhD). Like Alice in Wonderland I was placing my practice 'under the magnifying glass' which also functioned at times like a '*reducing lens...different from everyday life...*' (Brook 1999, p110) to distil fine details that would make evident aspects of the methodology. Through the orchestration of the body of work I created the opportunity for a '*happening effect - the moment when the illogical breaks through our everyday understanding to make us open our eyes more widely*' (Brook 1999, p101). I sought to

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<sup>54</sup> It would be easy to assume that this practice is polemical but that has not been the main motivation. Inevitably any practice that engages with a city and its inhabitants it could be perceived as being politically driven or motivated arts practice.

<sup>55</sup> See (online <http://www.uclan.ac.uk/schools/social-work-care-community/index.php>)

change perspectives and to prompt new views of situations, which are key motivations for the arts and social sciences. The body of work scrutinized in this PhD thesis creates a channel for people to engage and construct meaning through conversation.

Within all of the projects, individuals were provided with the chance to experience a *significant moment* through their participation. Les Back (2007) likened such inspired moments in conversation to that of an *unexpected visitor*. As a metaphor it describes an openness and willingness to explore the unknown and to welcome the unexpected. However temporal that moment of curiosity and intuition might be, it has the potential to manifest into an inspired thought and to drive the discourse forward. Smith describes such knowledge generation as '*shocks of recognition that mark key steps in the way practice led researchers find their way through, being in an on-going state of emergence*' (Smith, 2009, p219) and in this enquiry knowledge is gained from encountering moments of inspiration during conversation. Therefore there is a parallel between the practice, conversation, and the research thesis. APSSL was generated by my viewing of conversation as an art and a means for production of both material content for display in an exhibition and also how I was starting to understand the role of conversation as a means for production of material. I had not yet recognised conversation as an art in its own right until I started to explore systems for mediating between self and others as a legitimate artistic process. This began to include bodily and tacit techniques.

Patricia Leavy (2015) outlines the work of Ronald Pelias who wrote that his methodological approach is one that '*speaks the heart's discourse because the heart is never far from what matters. Without the heart pumping its words, we are nothing but an outdated dictionary untouched*' (Leavy 2015, p3) We are reminded through these words of how methodological approaches can '*collect in the body: (as) an ache, a fist a soup*' (Leavy 2015, p3) What is significant here is the contemporary acknowledgement of how conducting research does not require the artist to separate themselves from the practice or the research. Leavy acknowledges the clear bridging between the artist and researcher, self and other, intuition and logic, communication and silence to challenge traditional research practices. It became important for me not to divide my 'artist self' from my 'researcher self' as in the case of this PhD I am positioned as both artist and participant a technique used throughout the body of work produced.

The practice itself is the key method of enquiry. The knowledge gained for this practice research has come out of the practice and is demonstrated in the practice, by the doing.

This view is supported by Robert Nelson, Director of Research, Royal Central School of Speech and Drama, University of London, UK who describes doctoral research by practice as a '*multi-mode research inquiry*' that involves more labour, and a wide range of skills that engage with the nuances and subtleties of the research process (Nelson 2013, p10).

This methodology and in relation to **the artistry of conversation** within a research context demands my ability to be self-reflexive and to successfully negotiate the materialization of meaningful conversations. My earlier training as a senior communications officer for the NHS was put into good use in this respect so I had a grounding to allow for further personal development in the creation of meaningful conversation. As a guide, Sullivan (in Smith 2009) suggested that legitimate research outputs can be identified as a concept, theme, idea, or image. This demonstrates changes in the understanding of what constitutes research data: a measurable outcome can be conceptual and material.

This practice research acknowledges the discourse and narrative research areas, however my practice directly engages with the aesthetic interpretation of the spoken and written word through performance and exhibition. In depth analysis of narrative, such as that emerging from the complexity of conversation, is '*interpretative...selective and discerning but also requires imagination and creativity*' (Back, 2007, p21) highlighting an awareness of the subjective and interpretive nature of the dialogical. As a method it is reliant on the researcher-self to articulate what is appropriate within the discursive event. Recent analysis of on-line conversation helps us understand the broad range of factors involved in face-to-face conversational encounters. Dubberly and Pangaro, co authors of *What is conversation, can we design for effective conversation* state '*we talk all the time, but we're usually not aware of when conversation works, and how to improve it...what models of conversation are useful for interaction design*' (Dubberly and Pangaro 2009, p1) and begs the question; why don't we think about conversation when we design for interaction? John Freeman described practice-based research as challenging the conventional methods currently employed to disseminate in order to obtain new knowledge particularly within an academic framework for assessment of creativity (Freeman, 2011). Freeman highlights that creative approaches to research methodologies can be acknowledged within an academic research context, and that consideration of the composition of an artist's practice can challenge conventional methods.

This methodological design (APSSL) focuses on the form and function of conversation as practice, through a rigorous and reflexive approach for the dialogic that draws on Bakhtin's articulation of the *'importance of struggling with another's discourse, its influence in the history of an individual's coming to ideological consciousness is enormous...creativity has to be understood in a dynamic relationship where self and other work and world are intimately connected'* (Haynes, 1995, p.21). According to Dubberly and Pangaro current research around online communications and social media is not adequately profiling the importance of the emerging theme of self and other, haptic and tacit, performative and experimental by research currently being undertaken around on-line communications and social media (2009).

It is important to acknowledge that I decided against using Conversation Analysis as a methodological approach, even though

Conversation analysis studies the organisation of everyday talk of language as actually used in social interaction...conversation analysis provides a component that has been critically missing from the realistic examination of such issues as how language relates to thinking, how 'structure' relates to 'practice' and institutions to experience, or how actors can be both agents and objects in the social world. (Moerman 1988)

Its primary focus is on language and I felt that it does not incorporate enough of the haptic or performative aspects I consider as essential in conversation. The use of the term 'data collection', felt contrived and manufactured and relies on recording and transcription<sup>56</sup> from which I consciously moved away as a methodological approach. In 2012 I described my use of conversation analysis<sup>57</sup> emphasizing the role of transcription and a linguistic interpretation for conversation. My position on the use of conversation analysis in work has shifted considerably whereby I now approach analysis of conversation as a cross-pollination of key thematic devices that involve conceptualizing conversation as the way in which we use words, not the study of the word itself; this is embedded

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<sup>56</sup> Gail Jefferson, Harvey Sacks and Emanuel Schegloff's design for Conversation Analysis is made reference to here. For more information visit [www.sscnet.ucla.edu/aoc/faculty/scheglogg](http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/aoc/faculty/scheglogg) or [www.liso.ucsb.edu/jeffersonpublications](http://www.liso.ucsb.edu/jeffersonpublications)

<sup>57</sup> See [https://theartistryofconversation.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/rpc\\_defining-\\_contributions\\_publication.pdf](https://theartistryofconversation.files.wordpress.com/2015/10/rpc_defining-_contributions_publication.pdf)

within the theorization of *Architactics*, *Performativity*, *Social Activism*, *Storytelling* and *Legacy* (APSSL) that are for this enquiry considered as a crucial methodological design.

APSSL has been composed for this research practice as illustrated below (see figure 34). Its configuration has been carefully designed through its practical application to each of the five projects.

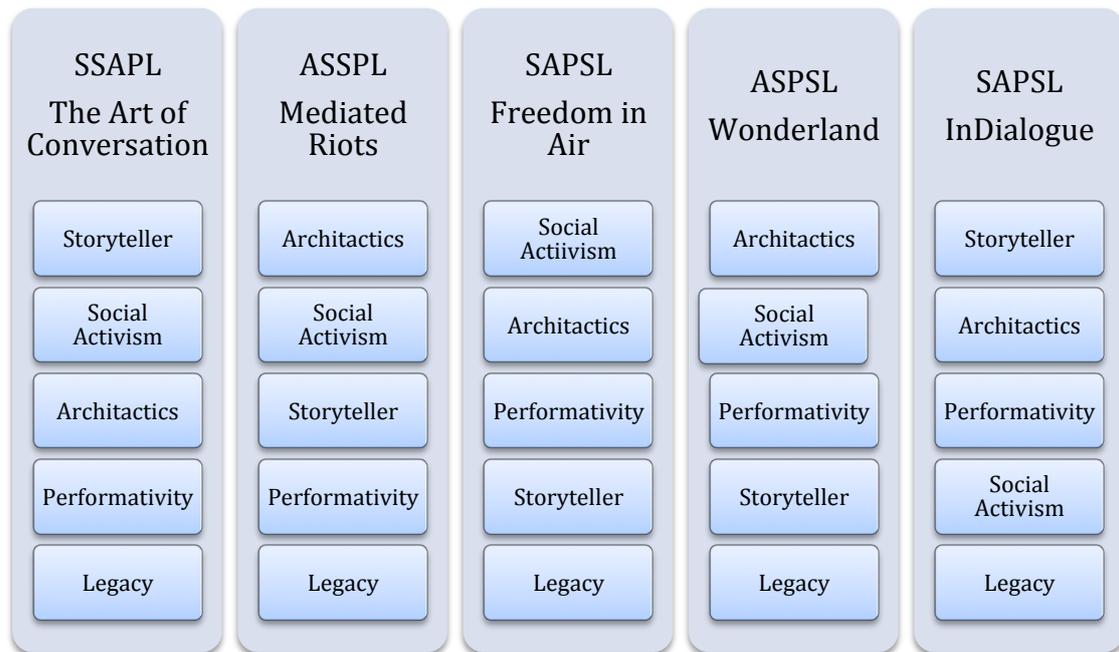


Fig. 25 APSSL. My practice research methodology illustrated, *The Artistry of Conversation*, 2016.

APSSL is made up of the components *Architactics*, *Performativity*, *Social Activism*, *Storytelling* and *Legacy*; collectively they produce a sculptural design methodology for social interaction. APSSL is a way of considering conversation explicitly within arts practice. The terms that compose the acronym APSSL have been employed in all of my practice, creating a variety of sequences for each project, which has developed a configuration specifically appropriate for this body of work. It is deliberately designed so that each component is flexible to support the practice appropriately. It is important to note that the components overlap slightly with each other, one informs the other and they are structurally interwoven. APSSL has been constructed so that the methodology can be a movable, shifting entity that can reconfigure in design in order to support the practice.

I will now describe how each component for APSSL has been defined, and as a result, how APSSL functions in a highly transferable way across projects because it generates what I am naming, an *invisible sculpture*<sup>58</sup>. This has been defined as a result of observing how each project has sculpted and makes manifest an object; the conversation, which has been formed and is the material or in this case, a sculptural outcome. As a term the *invisible sculpture* draws upon the phenomena of tacit knowledge, often difficult to transfer to another person by means of writing it down or verbalizing. The limits of the term is part of an ongoing enquiry beyond this practice research enquiry and it will continue to be evaluated in the generation of future works. However, it was important for the practice research that this term is used as it refers to the nature of artistic practice and its origins in sculpture and it is a term, which is rooted in art practice. Any use of the artistic methodology in another discipline would lend itself to increasing the awareness of artistic terminology within another discipline and would, rather importantly; help to reinforce that artistic terminology can be cross-disciplinary.

### **A is for... Architactics**

When you are in conversation you are engaged in the moment. APSSL does not use pre-prepared questions, and panelists who were invited to speak at events were asked not to prepare in advance, so that everyone in attendance was engaged in conversation and engaged in the '*immediate effective stream of experience*' (Hermans 2012) APSSL is a methodology that is used to create opportunities for participants to live in the moment.

Conversation is a progression of exchanges amongst participants. Each participant is a 'learning system' that is a system that changes internally as a consequence of experience. This highly complex type of interaction is also quite powerful, for conversation is the means by which existing knowledge is conveyed and new knowledge is generated (Dubberly and Pangaro 2009, p1).

Therefore, through the application of *architactics*, which requires an individual to be present in a conversational space, it allows for the development of a moral and social way of thinking and an ontological perspective on who you are. There is growing

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<sup>58</sup> As described in chapter one, *Conversation* is likened to an invisible sculpture. Considered sculpturally it is a material that is worked by the artist to build up a shape or form that can be changeable and reworked to create a final end result - a conversation.

contemporary analysis showing increased concern around the lack of opportunity and space for conversation design. Art critic Boris Groys highlights the increasing domination of big collectives and the limitations their own actions brings for an individual. He states,

our world is dominated by big collectives: states, political parties, corporations, scientific communities, and so forth. Inside these collectives the individuals cannot experience the possibilities and limitations of their own actions – these actions become absorbed by the activities of the collective. (Groys 2016, p1)

What was significant about the projects was that I created an environment where it was essential that people could be individuals and speak from their own sovereignty. They were encouraged to speak from their own perspective, which was particularly important and evident when individuals gathered together with others from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Most interaction with social media, and within the culture of consumption, engenders the tendency for people to create versions of themselves. My aim was to create a space in which individuals were encouraged to develop an awareness of their own sense of self through the artistry conversation.

Gehl (2011) and Whyte (1980) both highlight a lack of thinking incorporated in the design of public spaces that facilitate areas for social interaction and public debates. My approach for practice to use the city as a platform for conversation has meant that I have been able to both find and create spaces for conversations. I have mobilized people to sites outside of their usual geographical and demographic foundations by working with the landscape of the city and those residing within it, not against it. It is timely that this research has developed examples how to do this through the projects and this relevance is supported by the paper on *'The Speakers' Corner Experience – Public Space & Public Sphere in the 21st Century'* (Austin, Parsons, Pestana, Resvanis, Shechter & Zucchi 2009) which reaffirms the need for public spaces that can address and engage with the people. This thinking aligns with this research practice, which considers space in terms of the production of social environments. An important tactic to achieve the mobility of individuals between public and private spaces is to make both types of spaces feel as though they are an overarching and undivided space, which for this research I have contextualized in terms of the city.

APSSL provides a clear example of a model for working out in the city. In support of this, art critic and historian Martin Patrick described artists as creating a 'choreographic turn' towards the staging and orchestrating of their creative actions by 'working creatively to engage with various configurations of the 'public space'. (Patrick 2011, p65).

Academic Tricia Austin researched into creating and reclaiming spaces for citizenship asking can public spaces be a site for debate and discussion and how can design interventions foster the use of public space as an arena for public debate? (Austin, T., et al., 2009). I have considered Austin's questioning of public spaces as a site for debate and discussion in relation to my approach to conversation and argue that conversation design provides the bridge to aid the creation of a public space and through the use of APSSL a site for debate and discussion can be generated. In this sense, where previously discursive practice has been assumed to not hold any intrinsic value because of a lack of articulation of who is speaking to whom (Frieling 2009, p47). **The artistry of conversation** positions itself as a methodology that not only identifies who is speaking to whom but that it actively engages with the process of seeking out and bridging the gaps between individuals so that conversations are signposted so the 'who and to whom' is clarified and discursive acts can display intrinsic value.

*Architactics* helps particularly with creating a safe space for people to be able to talk, and through the use of my performativity to encourage storytelling facilities opportunities for individuals to be themselves, to listen and to speak with others who are different. Individuals contributed and created the agendas for conversation, which encouraged social and cultural interaction between people who would not normally mix. I provide a matrix for an event, which has no specified outcome. It is the lived experience of the individuals that creates and generates the final form or purpose of the event. In this sense, *'conversation is a progression of exchanges among participants. Each participant is a learning system, that is, a system that changes internally as a consequence of experience'* (Dubberly and Pangaro 2009). The experience for individuals is guided by the combination and application of APSSL which in turn enables individuals to make exchanges and activate their internal learning systems. *'This highly complex type of interaction is also quite powerful, for conversation is the means by which existing knowledge is conveyed and new knowledge is generated'* (Dubberly and Pangaro 2009).

However, it could be argued that conversation is not an everyday act any more resulting

in Dubberly and Pangaro, (2009) calling for conscious design for effective conversation for the improvement of services and software for online interactions and for the development of organizational dynamics. In chapter one I referred to the potential of the performativity of conversation and the *architactics* of a space. APSSL is important because it is also a tool to assist the generation of conversation in daily life, to be offline to turn and be turned towards – to talk. APSSL contributes to this discourse as it proposes essential components for conversation design through the methodology. Which appropriately takes me to P for performativity.

### **P is for... Performativity**

Performativity is a term which is hard to define, but, for this enquiry it is understood as being closely related to postmodernism. Academic Richard Schechner defines performativity as the '*performative principle*' (2013, p129), which is both a noun and an adjective that provides an unorthodox or nontraditional understanding for the term 'a performance'. Instead, performativity is associated with an understanding and incorporation of the '*social, political, economic, personal and artistic realities*' (Schechner 2013, p123). Conversations that involve these aspects of self and other are innately performative and as J.L.Austin theorized '*performative utterances [...] are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances*' (Austin 1962, p22). The everyday occurrence, local concern or personal issue is embedded and embraced within this contextualization of the defining of the performativity of conversation. This theorization has also been central to the design of the five projects for this research practice and has been utilized by engaging topically in conversation with individuals.

The performative model for my practice was developed and used in a range of applications. I altered states of seating and environment for individuals, as for instance in the shift from the use of theatrical seating style for panel events, where traditionally the format is 'end on', and where as facilitator, my body would be positioned at the front of a seated audience, moving to the left, right or remaining centre stage. This approach used in earlier projects shifted to fully utilize the performative potential for conversation when I altered this set up and created an immersive approach through which I was sitting, squatting, standing, and choreographing conversation through the positioning of individuals at each table, integrating my body amongst other bodies. By incorporating round table tops everyone was positioned breaking down the barrier between panelist and participant. Secondly, it created allowed me to '*perform speech acts*' (Searle 1969) through my different roles and states to support dialogue aided by a

perceived shift in my status through changing my height, tone of voice, gesture. These subtle shifts in my performative state helped design conversation and returns to Allan Kaprow's thinking that *'the line between art and life is fluid, even indistinct'* (Schechner 2013, p166) and it is through the invisible sculpting of the environment and my performed acts that individuals were able to engage, converse and participate in the practice. As such, it is considered that when we converse it is innately performative when coupled with my use of the performative tactics developed within APSSL to increase the level of performativity, so that the outcome is that conversation is a highly performative practice.

The use of performative aesthetics, or as theatre director Peter Brook named them 'practical aesthetics' were a device to assist with both the *architactics* and performativity for conversation. *'The height of the chair, the texture of the costume the brightness of the light, the quality of the emotion matter all the time'* (Brook 1999, p110) and for this practice research have been found as appropriate and valuable devices to utilize to produce the right set of conditions for conversation.

During a workshop with Hubert Hermans in 2012 in Georgia, USA he described how his methodology by design is used as it is a dynamic theory and method that brings the social into question. Proposing that at times when an individual takes distance from immediate streams of experience it is still dialogical, when individuals were present at events whether they were actively engaged in an experience or the recollection of it, they were still engaging in a dialogic context. Hermans advocates the development of an individual's future image of self, better known as promoter positions, defined as 'I as...'. My practice research offered individuals the opportunity to develop their promoter positions because they were encouraged to talk, reflect and be open through my performative approach to the construction of conversation. Hermans stated that opportunities for individuals to talk and reflect aid the recognition of promoter positions, and at the same time the aestheticisation of dialogue can be generated. The composition method, which Hermans uses, takes elements from Japanese gardens and uses material elements such as stones to help individuals become conscious of their positions, a black sharp stone might represent anger and pain. APSSL is a material design for conversation that constructs spatial, bodily and narrative elements where individuals have been provoked to converse and become aware of their positions through **the artistry of conversation**.

At its most fundamental, **the artistry of conversation** is performative because it is an embodied approach for practice, which comes into being at the actual moment of encounter and experience. **The artistry of conversation** is produced when I have worked live and directly with others to produce a specific set of codified environments through the application of APSSL. This is done so that the potential for the transference and production of transformative experiences can take place for both singular individuals and communities through participation in conversation. In this sense, it can be reiterated that conversation is an *invisible sculpture*; the material outcome, not a producer of something else, such as a painting or an object, and it is for this reason that conversation can be reconsidered as an arts practice.

### **S is for... Social activism**

Social activism and conversation as a method for my practice research meets at the point where consensus and conflict fuse through the agency of the artist. Agency is a critical component of the methodology and the way that this is generated through shared bodily and haptic knowledges. It requires a highly attuned and habitual approach that is developed over time and is embodied through a series of technical gestures, sculpting of spaces and conversations through navigation of self around others. Conversation in this respect is likened to a sculpture due to its complexity of layering in voice, tone, gesture, form and shape. Like a sculpture, conversation is cast, carved and formed; talking leaves an imprint like the potters hand on its clay. Conversation's materiality extends beyond the thing itself, it is not bound by the production of an end product, whether a beautiful clay pot or alteration of a civic agenda. It retains its sculptural identity because it is about how a conversation contains the energy and memory trace of the process and the experiential nature of conversation.

I have observed that conversation is often given a currency that is defined by how topical it is, what issues it might raise or resolve and its usefulness in a given context to produce, question or provoke an outcome. This practice research argues that the currency of conversation is constant, not time bound or agenda driven but it advocates the individual. Within the context of this practice research the projects have evidenced how conversation is sculptural in form and has opened up arguments for the use of APSSL by considering conversation as that which can transform and be transformative. As Turner (1982) claimed dialogue can also be a 'formative and transformative experience' and I believe this can be achieved by acknowledging the between-ness that individuals are bound up with relationally, between one's inner and outer self, self and

other, but extends this to incorporate APSSL, *architactics*, performativity or embodied and spatial/ time-bound characteristics etc. All contribute to that which I have named **the artistry of conversation**.

The body of work for this research practice provided the opportunity for individuals to hear other voices speak and theirs, to turn and be turned towards. Individuals became a temporal community of conversers. By creating a unified concept for social design through APSSL I was able to trigger conversations and generate a dialogical space that could become a site for conversation. The dialogic is therefore considered as a way to think, reflect and speak by creating research strategies to talk. Research is often about the problematizing of things along with the quest for knowledge production. This practice research enquiry has created a space for my practice and as a result it has thrown up different research strands and un-anticipated knowledges have been generated outlined in chapter four. In relation to the writing of this thesis I have treated this thesis as a space situated in-between the practice research and myself.

The articulation of the activism of a language for **the artistry of conversation** has been developed through the role of individuals and artist functioning collectively as storytellers throughout the body of work. As a result, an articulation of the dialogic is generated through the act of conversations that occur between artist and an individual whereby *'the body is not [perceived as] something self-sufficient: it needs the other, needs his recognition and form-giving activity'* (Gardiner 2000, p55) The shape and form of the narrative is considered for its incorporating physical, cognitive, and narrative to define the aesthetic values. Rose (2012) encourages the development of finding ways to understand of the hidden textures of everyday life and places a Bakhtinian value on the importance of the everyday through the collection of stories and artifacts. It is through a continual process of collection that one negotiates the social in order to establish a coherent construction of meaning about one's self. In turn, questions can be asked about how life is embodied through one's ability to understand life through our development of a characterisation for oneself.

This characterisation, Bakhtin pointed out, is often limited through the singular internal voice of self, it is through the *transgression*, or interaction with another, that an understanding of a lived experience occurs when successful negotiation between self and other occurs. That is not to deny *'each of us as a singular narrative'* (Gardiner, 2000, p54) but that a nod towards external interactions and perspectives enhance an individual's

conceptualisation of self. The process of embodiment of one's identity is a product of an interactive process. What is pertinent for this methodology was the recognition that I was an *'advocate for criticism to be a supportive act where artist and critic are not fixed identities but both acknowledge as vulnerable, embedded positions. Critical debate need not be written, it can happen in many contexts'* (Carmichael & Crouch 2014, p5) This was recognised as a direct outcome of the application of APSSL, where people were willing to share their experiences and opinions both personally and politically in relation to the themes of the projects. This level of interaction and negation of self and other aids the interpretation of a specific node one's characterisation that requires *'participative thinking and acting [and] an engaged and embodied relation[ship]'* (Gardiner 2000, p54) to be established. An individual's participation is integral to the production of conversation and in this way, **the artistry of conversation** can be understood as an extension of authorial power. This is because the methodology is embodied through my physicality, vocality and performativity but also through individuals' words and the actions of others and our found approach to conversation.

### **S is for... Storytelling**

Returning to the metaphor of a bridge, if a story was a bridge then each *'word is a bridge thrown between myself and another [and]...it is also a territory shared by both addresser and addressee, the speaker and his interlocutor'* (Dentith 1996, p130) In this sense, the act of storytelling allows individuals to connect and variations in roles between speaker and interlocutor for example are structurally equally in order to support conversation.

To support conversation Speaker's Corner Trust<sup>59</sup> in Nottingham arranged a series of local debates about topical issues effecting people of Nottingham such as 'listening to mothers' and 'getting the best out of our neighborhoods' to promote active citizenship and public debate. Entitled *The day for debate* it was a political motivated and charity driven activity. In contrast to the motivations for this practice which are founded in response to individuals' needs that have been identified and integrated into an arts context. Projects are not solely typecast into categories such as 'mother', 'artist' or 'neighborhood'; these categories are merely triggers for discussion and individuals are integrated and invited to attend all events. My work is clearly framed as an arts practice, centered around the use and production of conversation as its context, I am not a political or charity driven entity. Stories are not gathered for the production of information for a specific end result, such as a government funded initiative, they are

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<sup>59</sup> See <http://www.speakerscornertrust.org/speakers-corner-projects/uk-projects/nottingham/>

gather because of the value of talking and of providing individuals with an experiential output to engage with in their daily life.

This approach is aligned with the practice of artist Mary Kelly, introduced in chapter one, who considered the voice as material and conceptualizes this form of materiality as one, which inhabits space and is experiential. The transgredient nature of voice in this sense can shift in form from internal to external and from solo to plural or even multi-vocal. What is interesting is that within APSSL the role of the storyteller is also one that shifts in form from internal to external, from singular to plural, and, when combined with Kelly's approach to using dialogue to create large-scale narrative installations, (see *Women at Work*<sup>60</sup>, 2016) this helps to synthesize the proposition that conversation is the material outcome, an *invisible sculpture*.

The act of storytelling is as author Walter Benjamin described '*...the art of repeating stories as an art is lost when the stories are no longer retained*' (Arendt 1999, p91). **The Artistry of Conversation** proposes that stories need to be, and are retained through their physical embodiment and through the production of conversation as an arts practice. This was initially discovered in the scar story project whereby a scar was a clear signifier for a story, which was accessed through the facilitation of conversation conducted by myself as artist. The method therefore facilitates opportunities for exchange of story and sharing of knowledge between 'artist' and 'individual' and is a strategy for art production that *successfully 'enacts community through a process of physical and dialogical interaction'* (Pollard 2005). Storytelling

is itself an artisan form of communication...It does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel (Arendt 1999, p91).

This quotation resonates closely with this practice research because it supports the position that storytelling is not a process of a reportage when conversing with others. I had, as Benjamin proposed, an approach to practice whereby a story could be 'sunk' into the life of the storyteller, whether the storyteller was myself or another individual. The idea of sinking was defined as embedded for this practice research. In this respect it was

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<sup>60</sup> For more information please visit <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/harrison-hunt-kelly-women-and-work-a-document-on-the-division-of-labour-in-industry-1973-t07797>

important that this role could be switched so that it was possible for each and every shared story to be extrapolated at the events produced.

Within the design of APSSL and specifically the role of the *Storyteller* the use of pauses were used to encourage conversation. Writer Maurice Blanchot who in describing conversation proposed that

the power of speaking interrupts itself, and this interruption plays a role that appears to be minor – precisely the role of a subordinated alteration. This role, nonetheless, is so enigmatic that it can be interpreted as bearing the very enigma of language: pause between sentences, pause from one interlocutor to another, and pause of attention, the hearing that doubles the force of locution (1993).

This conceptualization of fluidity for conversation across time and space is crucial for this methodology as APSSL functions optimally when it's most fluid shifting between components rapidly to support conversation design.

In the storyteller phase I gathered information from individuals by a series of assurances that I was not, for example a journalist, and nor was I interested in the use of a journalist reportage. As a result of this declaration stories were shared and I left them unedited and encouraged their own retelling of accounts. I was the carrier of each story that was shared with me but I encouraged that it was shared amongst the other individuals through my facilitation of APSSL. What APSSL demonstrates here is that it is a process that artfully weaves together narrative with my own performed physicality in order to encourage people to speak and share their own stories for themselves. I achieved this because I recognised that

the role of the hand in production has become more modest, and the place it filled in storytelling lies waste. (After all, storytelling in its sensory aspect, is by no means a job for the voice alone. Rather, in genuine storytelling the hand plays a part which supports what is expressed in a hundred ways with its gestures trained by work) (Arendt 1999, p107).

I trained my hands to perform gestures to encourage conversation from others, to indicate and encourage speech and to control and command dialogue in room. This

rewired me to develop a heightened awareness of otherness. Kip Jones, a researcher in social performative social science and arts based research states that

...attempts at verbal descriptions as a device that storytellers used to express the physical, the sensual, and the atmospheric...are largely impenetrable by other research methods. Yet it is within and across these dimensions that the soul of our participants' experiences may emerge...long-standing objectives guiding qualitative research – getting at real, textured, complex, sensory, contextual meanings (Leavy 2014, p50).

The role of the storyteller links closely with P for Performativity, because of the emphasis on the sensual and physical layering of gestures that I applied to conversation. This is cited especially with regards to the role of my hands, they became welcome-ers, facilitators, controllers, pacifiers, comforters and silencers like the hands of a conductor gliding through the air marking out the ebbs and flows for conversation. Like the handprints of the potter embedded in their clay, my hands became embedded with the conversations that I was moulding, which returns me to a Bakhtinian school of thought where *'even the inner utterance is social; it is orientated toward a possible audience, toward a possible answer, and it is only in the process of such an orientation that it is able to take shape and form'* (Dentith 1996, p153). The shape and form for of an utterance is part of the role of the storyteller, to mould, to extrapolate and to mediate between an abstract system of possibilities and social possibilities.

### **L is for... Legacy**

The legacy of APSSL has been developed through its authenticity, its essence; conversation, which is then transferable. The transferability of APSSL, its essence is the reconfiguration from project to project which is part of its strength and legacy when it begins and ends with a conversation. APSSL has proven that its design, when applied to a new project has produced a legacy. This is evidenced by a variety of outcomes, such as finding that individuals had the impetus to carry on conversing with each other, and through their desire to continue to converse they wanted to engage in different projects as the platform for their conversations to continue. This in turn also helped to mould a new iteration of APSSL as is illustrated in fig 25 on page 106 of this chapter. The return

of individuals, spin off activities such as totem poles being erected in the city of Nottingham, exhibitions of work at venues in the city and the forming of new partnerships; have all been clear indicators of its potential for developing a legacy.

This methodology when appropriately used through the careful application and configuration of APSSL, can enhance the belief in the principle of participation in conversation as an arts practice. What this methodology has recognised is that it provides detailed analysis of what *'constitutes a mode of speaking in public, of being heard by a public, of having a public manifestation'* as Irit Rogoff raised in her article *Looking Away: participation in visual culture* (2005), rarely is there a questioning of what constitutes listening, hearing or seeing especially when considering the intentions of conversing within a public setting.

In conversation with Grant Kester I asked him the following:

RJ: Going back to the other and how we understand the other, certainly what I feel in regards to my own research and through reading yours is the notion of extending a discourse for a dialogical practice that is moving away from a linear ideology towards a definition where we encourage pluralism, participation, aesthetic experiences where I guess, dare I use the word, transform human consciousness through dialogue. My question to you is about 'the other', how we separate ourselves from 'the other' and ultimately that space between self and other is unpredictable it requires relationships it requires the generation of a new sense of self and ultimately its about a generation of new knowledge. So how does that then fit in with the word collaboration with the word agency?

GK: That's a really good question and let me contextualize it by saying that one of the things that I think is distinct about the contemporary at this moment and one of the things that attracts me to the work of someone like Mikhail Bakhtian or George Herbert Mead is that so much of our continued ideas of what is art continue to be rooted in this notion that the most basic form of a self is a pre-social self ... in the broad sweep of critical theories read in the art content there is still a strong investment in the nomadic pre-notional self is the site which real work needs to be done... once we've learnt to accept to the fact that we are defined by an ontological gap (Jones and Kester 2014).

The conversation between Kester and I in 2014 reiterated the currency of dialogic practice and its role in helping to understand one's ontology, and our understanding and interpretation of the world in which we inhabit. How one separates and defines our selves from 'the other' are all crucial aspects and benefits of engaging with a dialogic arts practice. APSSL is able to and has facilitated an awareness of different positions bodily, spatially and dialogically including many cultural variants. The space between I and Thou, inner and outer compositions, self and other are all means through which if conversation can tap into within an arts context through examples of projects such as those produced for this practice research enquiry then the possibilities for knowledge about the world, one another and conversation are never ended.

The approach towards the design of the methodology has been focused on the creation of an environment which is people-centered, William Whyte, founder of the *Street Life Project* described how designing starts with observing people (Austin 2009) and through observing people during the process of making the body of work I was able to observe what individuals' needs were and address them appropriately, by developing methods to make people feel more relaxed and comfortable in a given space, talking them through the logistics for the event and showing individuals different spaces before they entered it as part of a collective. Part of my design methodology for conversation has been an inclusive and open approach that incorporates and offers the opportunity to participate, to be in conversation. In this sense, the concerns that Back raised and were referenced in chapter one are addressed because my approach promotes interconnectivity in an attempt to avoid being less connected in modern daily life.

In support of the timeliness of this enquiry with regards to the use of or creation of a public space for conversing, Italian curator Claudio Zecchi has been focusing on the relationship between art and the public space, and the legacy of these relationships<sup>61</sup>. In terms of this practice research it is the legacy of the conversation and the impetus that people have to continue the conversation. It has energized institutions that have hosted the projects and we have seen the return of individuals to attend and participate in different projects carried out during this PhD enquiry. It has generated, encouraged and nurtured conversation between different individuals through the shared processes involved in APSSL and my research practice.

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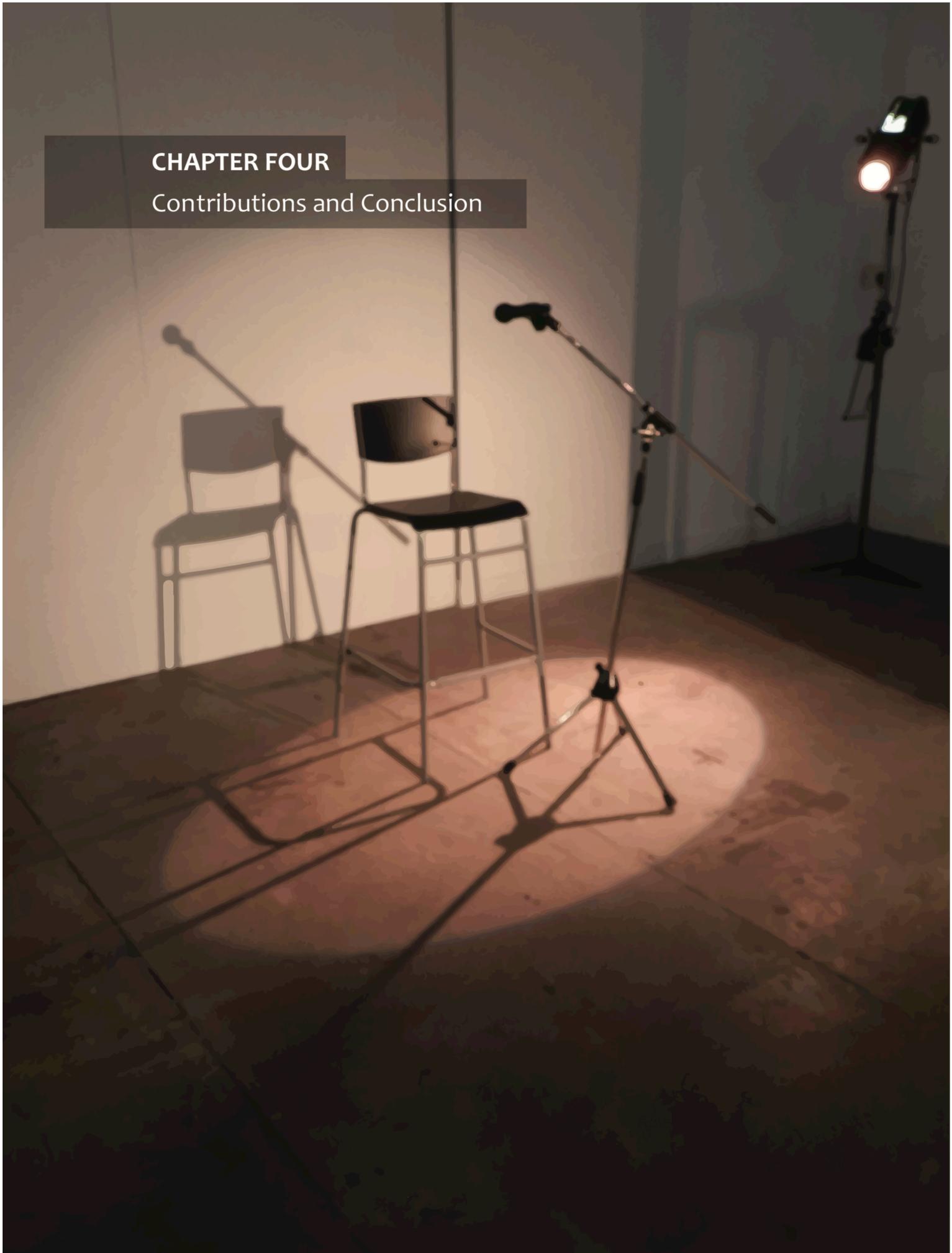
<sup>61</sup> Accessed online see <http://www.bjcem.org/projects/current-projects/practices/> 23 march 2016

Now dear, patient reader, you might ask: “Where does this leave us? What have we learned about the art of conversation, which is already dead, or is by most accounts dying? Are we meant to put ourselves in the shoes of Beuys’ hare? Is this some elaborate funeral?” I might respond, provisionally, or as a preface to the next chapter, that: “The thought of conversation needs to become stranger still if we want conversation to forge something altogether new. In de- naturalizing it – and veering towards the neutral – we might get out of the circle we’re in, take God and animal, and forge some kind of Sphinx to listen to, posing questions that interrupt what we have thus far called conversation (Monika Szewczyk 2009).

Monika Szewczyk pointed out in 2009 that there is an art to conversation. She also indicates that we need to interrupt or challenge what conversation is, in order to investigate what conversation might be, or what it could become. This practice research has engaged with this spirit and has set out in this chapter the evidence for **the artistry of conversation** as a methodology for my practice research. This has been illustrated through the detailed description of each of the five projects in chapter two that conversation is neither dead nor dying. This theorization is supported by the contextual references and terms outlined in chapter one and by Szewczyk’s proposition that conversation needs to be thought of as stranger still so that its nuances, spatial and physical design is incorporated into the understanding of and for **the artistry of conversation**. Chapter four provides a summary of the findings produced through the body of work and lists the contributions that have been identified as a direct outcome and synthesis of the practice and the methodology for this practice research enquiry. This thesis and the practice research both draw temporal conclusions, as Grant Kester suggests the conversation continues and it must do in order to continue to pose questions that can as Szewczyk suggests interrupt what we ‘thus far called conversation’ and instead as arts practitioners make new positions for conversation such as the claim that it is an invisible sculpture that can continue to be moulded by the potter’s hands.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### Contributions and Conclusion



# CONTRIBUTIONS

The authority for this research has been established through its engagement with existing work on conversation and the dialogic from which it has developed a socio-artistic and philosophical framework to theoretically underpin a body of dialogical practice. The contributions to new knowledge of the practice research described in this thesis are the following:

## **1. A new way of thinking about conversation as a methodology for my practice.**

The production of the five works, *The Art of Conversation* (2012), *[Media]ted Riots* (2012), *Freedom in Air* (2013), *Wonderland* (2013-14) and *InDialogue* (2012-present) has created a different way of thinking about conversation as an artistic medium and as a result my research practice has designed a methodological approach that has examined the use of conversation as an art *Practice in High Definition* (see p2, p16, p100 and p101). Conversation is now central to my artistic practice as a consequence of this body of work.

## **2. The Artistry of Conversation is proposed as a methodology that comprises of key elements that are applied to my practice.**

**The Artistry of Conversation** as a dialogic practice begins and ends in conversation. To extrapolate this I have produced a series of definable terms that are known by the acronym APSSL which has been established through the body of work. It embodies the *architactics, performativity, social activism, storytelling* and *legacy* that cumulatively when applied to my dialogic practice generates **The Artistry of Conversation**.

## **3. A methodology that can be reconfigured.**

APSSL can be reconfigured for each project but its components are present in varying degrees in all of the works. These terms have produced a vocabulary through my explorative works and have been appropriately applied to my practice. The result contributes to a redefining of the use of conversation in arts practice. The vocabulary used to describe my research practice is a way forward in thinking about **The Artistry of Conversation** as an *invisible sculpture* (see p106, p111, p114 and p119) whilst it allows for the critical contextual framework supporting this proposition to be addressed. The method was developed around a multifaceted sensory and theoretical practice.

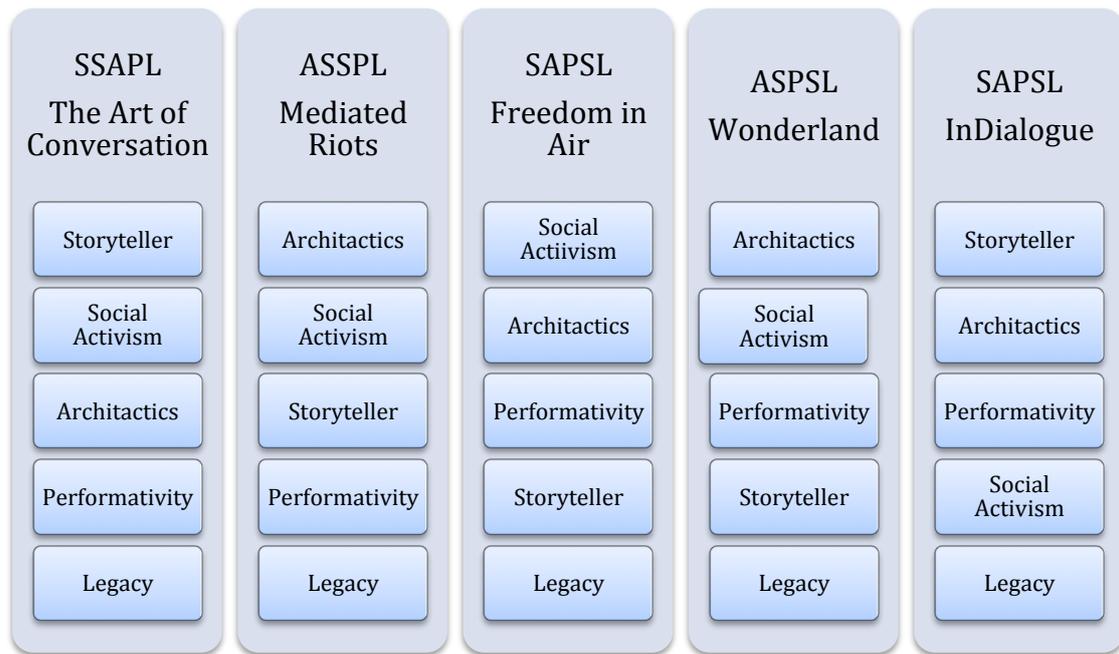


Fig. 26 APSSL. My practice research methodology illustrated, *The Artistry of Conversation*, 2016.

As an arts practitioner I have been able to stage a series of dialogic works that have defined the use of a distinct methodology that has not been centered on reaching specific outcomes and instead focused on the creation of a dialogical environment through the application of APSSL. APSSL recognises that there might be several outcomes identified for a project, however *The Artistry of Conversation* necessitates an open-ended structure and APSSL was designed for use within that context. In each of the five works the methodology has been successful because each project has completed the process of APSSL bringing a project to a close at the point where it can be left with the impetus to continue the conversations forming new iterations in different spaces.

#### **4. The dialogic works presented in this thesis has generated a public profile for *The Artistry of Conversation*.**

The application of **The Artistry of Conversation** has extended the reach of my practice research across disciplines in both the arts and social sciences. Evidence for this is provided in the establishment of the organisation *InDialogue* an international biannual symposium for artists and researchers established in 2012. *InDialogue* is now in its third iteration for 2016 working in partnership with Nottingham Contemporary, New Art Exchange, Nottingham City Council and Dance4. It is an adapted method that looks at social science and arts practices but relies on my skills in these areas in order to successfully deliver **The Artistry of Conversation**.

## CONCLUSION

**The Artistry of Conversation** started with my scar story in 1986. As the PhD enquiry now ends in 2016, I exit with a different kind of scar and one that tells a different story that has been formulated as a process of intellectual scarification. Whilst reflecting on this long journey that started from a place of vulnerability it is appropriate that it still teeters upon that same threshold. As like my journey, conversation is fragile and temporal. It is often messy, but illustrates the phenomenon of the debate for conversation as it permeates contemporary arts practice. Just like my enquiry, conversation often pursues new understanding and knowledge. The conversations that I had surrounding the PhD and the opportunities to converse about this enquiry have contributed to the research.

There are both limitations and benefits of working with conversation in an arts practice context. However, I have shown that **The Artistry of Conversation** is a legitimate practice. I have placed this practice research in a trajectory that recognises the value of dialogue in 21<sup>st</sup> Century arts practice. The research has resulted in the creation of *InDialogue* producing, to date, three international symposia attracting internationally recognised academics and artists. The research practice has engaged directly over 5000 individuals. In addition to this, it is concurrent with research emerging from the USA, Australia and the UK about the role and function of artistic practice in relation to the use of the dialogic in participatory art forms. This is evidenced by the new journal publication, *FIELD*, produced by Grant Kester, key themes discussed at the National Coalition of Dialogue and Deliberation and concurrent issues and discussions held at *InDialogue* 2016<sup>62</sup> all of which clearly highlight the currency of this field of discourse. *InDialogue's* continuing growth demonstrates an important contribution to knowledge in terms of dialogic practice research. The fact that we are now putting together a book that charts the last six years of *InDialogue* clearly demonstrates the currency of its debate. I have chaired two performative online, live, keynote talks with Grant Kester at *InDialogue* symposia in front of an audience of international artists and scholars and am well connected to an international network of specialist researchers in this nascent field.

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<sup>62</sup> Further details of papers and archive footage from *InDialogue* 2016 can be viewed online. Including the closing remarks on current themes and contemporary issues within dialogic practices as cited at *InDialogue* 2016 facilitated by Professor S Swindles, Dr Heather Connelly and myself. Please see <https://indialogue2014.wordpress.com/indialogue-2016/>

*InDialogue* is a well-established, cross disciplinary platform that welcomes all art forms as it recognises the 'real world' contextualisation of working professionally as a maker and within an academic research context.

There are tensions when using conversation that remain unresolved and interwoven. They are tensions that cause frictions, sparks of ideas often offering moments of insight into the use and definition of conversation and dialogue within the context of this arts practice. These tensions are not considered as negative or divisive; they provide positive attributes for conversation, because a moment of tension is often linked with the production of knowledge. The tensions, from the Latin meaning *tendere*, to stretch, can be interpreted in terms of this enquiry as the stretching of thought. The widening of doubt offers more opportunities for conversation that are open-ended. This has been the approach that I have taken for conversation, which has given me confidence to talk. Tensions are reconsidered in this context, not as a limitation, but rather providing a purpose for the stretching and ongoing development of a dialogical discourse.

For this research practice the process of design for conversation has been an organic mechanism. In terms of this body of work, conversation is dependent on both the orchestration of the context and the provision of a set of constructed conditions known methodologically for this practice by the acronym APSSL. The invisibility of the methodology to participants has been debated widely, but it is now seen as a key strength. Its subtle nature and highly constructed design led to the success of the working methodology, APSSL, and as a result it was used and engaged with by a large number of public and professional institutions over the period of study for this PhD.

To summarize, this doctoral research was presented within the international contexts of art and social science through several seminars and conferences, including the co-founding and co-curation of *InDialogue*. My practice research engages both the academic community and public art venues and communities. **The Artistry of Conversation**, and APSSL, the methodology for communication in the arts, was extensively documented and was specifically tailored for Nottingham to best engage with its diverse, cultural arts scene. Evidence of my research is both within the academic community and highly profiled within the regional art industry and can be seen in the archives of Nottingham Contemporary's media channel. *InDialogue* is an international symposium for artists and researchers, which I co-founded to provide a platform for artists and researchers to test out new works and share models of best practice in a safe and supportive environment.

To date, *InDialogue* has conducted three major international symposia with over 600 delegates in attendance representing universities and arts organisations both in the UK and overseas with a 50/50 split between academia and international artists and independent organisations. I have established partnerships with organisations such as Dance4, New Art Exchange and Nottingham City Council through my organisations. *InDialogue* has been previously supported by Loughborough University (2012-14) and Birmingham City University (2016). Evidence of research and academic activity is also cited in this thesis **The Artistry of Conversation** (2016) and in the form of papers delivered both in the UK and overseas at International conferences e.g. Cumulus. These networks and spaces for sharing of research are pertinent to the current socio-civic and political contexts in which we live.

Conversation needs to remain open-ended and, as Grant Kester proposed in *Conversation Pieces*, the conversation must continue, and this thesis requests the same of its readers. Conversation is an ongoing process of negotiation of self and other through practice and research. The conversation needs to carry on so that there is a continuation of questioning the application and role of conversation. If it was wrapped up neatly with a bow in a box then the conversation would, in effect, be ended and the future function and possibilities for conversation would be closed. One of the main purposes of *InDialogue* is to support this idea that a platform needs to exist for artists and researchers alike to keep asking questions of the dialogic and to be 'in dialogue'. The 2016 iteration of *InDialogue* expanded again on the list of participating venues, artists, and academics. *Indialogue* continues to geographically 'stretch' the conversation wider across the city and host papers and performances at sites that will support the work.

As such, this practice research enquiry has not only proposed a position for **The Artistry of Conversation** through a body of work engaging not only my reflective percipience but that of others as well throughout this process. In order to seek out the possibilities for conversation design from many angles just like a looking glass. To return to the preface where Alice asked if the words will all go the right way, I believe that this thesis has argued the case for an artistry for conversation within the context of a dialogic arts practice. I have established a position for this thesis that has been constructed through, and from, conversation, resulting in the production of the methodology, APSSL. As Alice asked '*...what is the use of a book...without pictures or conversation?*' (Carroll, L 1865). Like Alice, I asked the same question, but not of the use of a book, but of what use this thesis would have been without conversation.

It would not exist! It is because of the conversations that I have had during this period of time that it was possible to establish a position for this enquiry as a critical and reflective document surrounding conversation as an artistic practice. For example, New Art Exchange, who hosted *[Media]ted Riots* in 2012 recently invited me to write a contextual essay for an exhibition exploring the history of Riots in Nottingham<sup>63</sup>. At the time of writing this, I am in discussions with social scientists who are going to use my methodology for their research and I am in discussions with a publisher with a view to creating an anthology around dialogical practices as a result of the InDialogue symposia.

This thesis has contended that choreographed conversation is an art practice. Therefore, in this respect, conversation itself can be recognised as an artistic medium. Clarifying the purpose and motivation for a conversation was key, and by stating that the conversation is the aim and outcome has enabled me to have confidence in my art practice and benefited diverse organisations and communities over the period of research and development. What can now be acknowledged is that there is a multi-faceted and multi-sensory nature of the process of conversing. Like Walter Benjamin's metaphorical potter's handprints leaving marks in the clay vessel, the haptic nature of **The Artistry of Conversation** also now leaves its trace, so the conversations and my arts practice can continue. It has been a process of talking about talking by talking. That process has manifested itself in my practice research and 50,000 words of this thesis.

The conversation continues...

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<sup>63</sup> For further information and to read the Riot publication please visit <https://theartistryofconversation.com/publications/>



APPENDIX

# PROJECT DESCRIPTORS

The thesis will make continued reference to the following projects.

## *The Art of Conversation 2012*

Solo exhibition hosted at Backlit, Nottingham, 2012 and Georgia, Athens USA, 2012. A community project that engaged with 6 personal scar story narratives to dialogically establishes connections between the moment of a scar's creation, (actuality) and the recollection (expression) of its story. The project explored how experience is defined by what is embedded in our flesh and given meaning through a lived act; the act of participation in conversation with artist, self and scar.

## *[Media]ted Riots 2012*

Devised project commissioned by Synapse Arts at New Art Exchange, Nottingham. The project responded to both the Nottingham and London riots of 2011. A workshop was conducted with year 9 students from Djanogly City Academy to review the media archives and stories surrounding the riots. Students made films and the panel table and benches captured the hopes for Nottingham and the children's personal aspirations. A live panel event was curated with leading experts from a diverse range of backgrounds invited and a live public debate took place. The panelists' table and chairs were exhibited at Hyson Green Library from the 29th September and a ceremony took place with local councillor and invited parents, students and the audience who participated in the workshops and debate event at New Art Exchange so that the conversations could continue on the subject of the Nottingham Riots. This project took place during 2012.

## *Freedom in Air 2013*

Over the period of a few months in 2013, The Cutting Room commissioned local artist Rhiannon Jones to design and facilitate a series of community-led workshops, lead a paneled debate at the New Art Exchange and present an exhibition at the Nottingham Playhouse. The Cutting Room invited around 100 young people to participate in free kite making workshops to design their very own symbol of hope for the future. As part of Nottingham Playhouse's production *The Kite Runner* (26 April - 18 May) The exhibition of kites were presented in and around the main foyer of the Nottingham Playhouse.

### *Wonderland 2013-2014*

Designed in 2013 by creative director Rhiannon Jones, this was an 15-month project hosted in partnership with New Art Exchange. Supported by Nottingham City Council, it was a city-wide project conceived as a research project it explored and revealed the hopes and aspirations of the people of Nottingham. By using art as a universal language, Rhiannon Jones delivered a series of creative workshops for adult learners, older persons, young persons, and children and curated exhibitions across the city at various locations. Wonderland has facilitated 8 public debates hosted by New Art Exchange to bring together the diversity of voices and issues felt by many different communities. During the projects run of 15-months, Wonderland has talked with over 2000 members of the public and has received international respect as a research model.

### *InDialogue 2012 –present.*

[www.indialogue.uk.com](http://www.indialogue.uk.com)

Is a biannual International Symposium that interrogates how artists and researchers use dialogue in practice. *InDialogue* provides a series of interdisciplinary events including presentations, discussions, communal meals, open mic sessions, live music and performance/live art showcases taking place across the city of Nottingham. Our aim is to create a dialogue between the different applications and understandings of the term In Dialogue, considering differences, commonalities, and how diverse approaches to understanding and articulating the theme can lead to new ways of thinking and making. *InDialogue* 2014 took place across three sites in Nottingham UK from Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> October – Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2014. *InDialogue* 2014 was hosted by Nottingham Contemporary, Backlit and Primary and co-curated by Rebecca Beinart, Heather Connelly and Rhiannon Jones. In Dialogue invites creative responses to the following themes and contexts and comprised of performance, papers, presentations, workshops and provocations for the 2014 International Symposium. Dialogue as knowledge and production, dialogue as artistic and curatorial process, dialogue as an embodied methodology and translation as dialogue and intercultural communication.

Project	Audience Number	Date	Venues
The Art of Conversation	560  200	June-July 2012  October 2012	Backlit, Nottingham  Georgia, Athens, USA
[Media]ted Riots	210 direct audiences 40 Children 70 Vocal event BBC Radio Nottingham Post Over 2000 people engaged.	September 2012	Hyson Green Djanogly City Academy and New Art Exchange
Freedom in Air	Direct participants 88 Vocal Event 63 Exhibition PV 96+ Visiting Theatre 500 to 1000 a night over 2 months. BBC radio broadcasts outreach numbers.	December 2012 – may 2013	Nottingham Playhouse and New Art Exchange. Commissioned by The Cutting Room.
Wonderland  Light Night 2014  Bromley House,	Workshops 500+ Vocal events x5 @ 70 capacity Exhibition - summer 2014 – 1500+ Lantern making in hairdressers and collecting children's hopes and wishes 250 people 300 people	Summer 2013 – summer 2014  February 2014  April – May 2014	New Art Exchange and various venues and community outreach centres across city of Nottingham.
InDialogue	356 researcher network established 50 applications for 2014 80 participants 2012 136 direct attendees per day. 50 online views	October 2012 - present	Partners 2012 – present have included: Nottingham Contemporary Primary Backlit St Christopher's Community Hall Dance4 New Art Exchange Nottingham City Council

# PERFORMANCE TRANSCRIPTS<sup>64</sup>

## I – 3

### **The Art of Conversation**

22<sup>nd</sup> June 2012 Backlit Gallery, Nottingham

Script 1

H: Again, it was that fear of not knowing what it was, of being an adult and having to be on a waiting list and again not being able to work and being in so much pain. It was growing I was starting to look pregnant and ermm. And they said that when they did open me up, well depending on what they would find inside they would potentially take everything away and I said well no. I said I will sign a consent form, but whatever happens you've got to wake me up and tell me what's going to happen but she said, well you know they might not be able to do that you know it might not be safe you know. So I did then find out that then that although it was squashed they didn't remove it. But, although they didn't remove it I did then find out that it was extremely unlikely that I was able to get pregnant, and that I had a very high chance of having an ectopic pregnancy and that I had 2 fallopian tubes on that side, and all this other information that at the time and all the pain and time, and I'm like ok so I don't have cancer but I'm being told I can't have kids. And it wasn't like that was a burning desire but like everybody else I wanted that choice. And we've all grown up thinking we have that choice but actually that's not it at all. It took me such a long time to be able to get back up on my feet again, and because of the way they had to cut me across like that – and cut through the muscles so even when I could legally drive again I couldn't because I couldn't move. I didn't have muscles it took a long, long, time. And then I was back on my feet – and got attacked.

R: [Gasp] where!

H: In London. It was umm, It was lunchtime, outside Kings Cross in summer. Everybody was about, and yes, Kings Cross wasn't a great area then but the police said it was such an unusual crime. Because it was half past one, I was standing at the cash point machine smartly dressed and umm. Getting 30 pounds out [swallow] and as I got 30 pounds out a guy came and grabbed my hand and started biting it and he was a drug addict. And him and his mate were shouting things like 'oh you haven't paid me back' and all these things trying to make me look bad and probably it wasn't long, until a group of about 50 people

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<sup>64</sup> These conversations have been transcribed from recorded interviews and remain faithful to the colloquial form of expression of live dialogue. The transcripts seek to capture the atmosphere of the conversation as much as the content and as such contain informal spelling and punctuation.

were watching... [look at audience and pause]. I couldn't get away because my hand was in his mouth and with his bite – he just wouldn't let go.

R: Were you saying anything?

H: oh I was screaming and shouting – I was screaming, absolutely screaming and you know looking in to the faces of the crowd and not one person said a thing. [look and pause]. Not one person said a thing. Not one person said 'oh leave her alone, nothing. [Pause]. And then he let go. He took my money and he went and I was so angry at them that I screamed at them all and I ran into Barclays bank that was next door and I said call an ambulance. Call the police or something. And they said we've already called them. So the police came and an ambulance came and...

R: Had he given you bite marks?

H: Yerp

R: God almighty!

H: Yer – he'd pieced the skin.

H: Oh yer, he had drawn blood he was biting so hard yer, so, so, so anyway, yer, so the police came to see me at the hospital and I had jabs for all sorts of stuff and they wrapped me up and then I went home and I just sat there and I felt so powerless and I had to do something, so I started to draw. I started to draw the bike and the guy and the colour of his shirt anything that I could remember that I could do. And then the phone rang. It was good to say 'well we've got a witness and we think we've got him!' And I didn't know it but someone watching in the crowd had actually then followed this guy to Argiale Square round the corner to where they were kinda like hanging out and had watched them and when they settled he had gone back round and called the police. So I did have a friend in that crowd. I didn't know it. But I did. So anyways the police came round and picked him up, he was selling crack and they wanted to see me so they came up to my house and they took all the drawings away and the process started there and the reason I've brought all this up is because I can remember that feeling of just thinking my life was getting back together I can walk upright and I'm in no pain and I was there doing things and you know it was [click fingers] just like that it went. I had to go to court because he had pleaded not guilty and I had to go to court and do all that and eventually he was, he was found and he got 13 months for robbery which is theft with violence.

R: Right

H: And so my life has always felt like it has all these dramas in it, because since I was a kid that is how my life has sort of gone. And you know I've just spent so much time in hospital. It's about I'm the patient and finding and keeping that voice. The scars. To me

it's as if they are my pain. And then as a child, do you remember the origami programmes that used to be on as a child?

R: Oh, no – no I don't

H: Oh, well there used to be these programmes on TV – look at this, 30p! [holding book]  
[Laugh]

R: Yer, I've got some like that!

H: It even smells old! And I've got books 1, 2 and 3 but this is such an important book because in a way, for me it goes back to that feeling of isolation that I had as a child. Or felt as though I did as I was doing a lot of things on my own and being very resourceful and teaching myself things which is something I've always done. And that was I've got a book and I've taught myself how to do origami. And that kinda res, resolution or determination to – comes from – I've thought a lot about it over the years and it comes from not being able to communicate and being in pain and going through all those operations and surgeries and not knowing what was what and having to cope and having to get on with it and still to this day I find it incredibly hard to ask for help. And I think that's very much linked to that – [look at object] that's linked to that.

R: Yer. So did you make everything in that book then? [ask audience]

H: Most things yer, and in the other 2 books as well, yer. There's a flapping bird that I've made all over the world. It's a wonderful way to communicate with people – you hold one end of the tail and the wings do this.

R: How old were you when you got this book?

H: 8, 9, 10 something like that.

R: Who bought it for you?

H: I did, I'm sure I bought it from smiths with a voucher from a birthday gift or something like that. I knew that's what I wanted. I used to make anything and everything.

R: You said you were ill from when you were little?

H: Yer, well, I was born with a kidney defect. I knew growing up that I was, that I'd had these 3 kidney operations and that I had these 3 scars. I knew what they were from you know I still had a lot of kidney infections and problems and was in and out of hospital.

R: Where are they?

[Signals where they are on the body].

H: And my mum said to me I know you had something else done as well, but I don't know what. And I was like well why didn't my parents bloody well ask and find out then! But you know they were barely allowed to visit. And in those days of course you didn't ask. And I can remember being shouted at my first memories first memories are of being

shouted at by this matron because I wet the bed, and being in this crib/cot thing with bars and you know I spent probably up to my 20s thinking well what else have I had done then! This is mine, and it goes right the way down to the pubic bone. And when you are in the changing room for example in your bra and knickers and people are like ooh what happened there then and its like bugger off – you know. I don't mind talking about it but it's none of your business really. And I've never known my abdomen, my body without scars. Never. So I don't know what that's like. I mean I don't mind talking about it I'm quite honest and open about it but only if I've chosen to tell people about it.

R: Did it stop you wearing certain clothes then?

H: It hasn't really, not once I got to my late 20s and there was only one place I would do it and that was in clubs you know where I was a good dancer and it was darker ---- but I am so aware of them.

R: Do you think they are a part of you?

H: Umm I guess in a way they are because I don't know what me without them is. I don't know what me without scars looks like. [END].

## **The Art of Conversation**

Backlit Gallery, Nottingham

29<sup>th</sup> June 2012

Script 2

J: And I think for me, for me, it's also about ...its just about I think every time I talk about it, I realise something different about it. You see I don't think. I don't think I've accepted mine cause its only been two years, two years sounds a long time but to me its not because I can. I can remember it so vividly, how it happened and everything about it. It's just like it happened last month.

R: So it happened in august?

J: Yer, I was on holiday in Cornwall, in urm, near padstow, don't know it you know Cornwall,

R: I have been to Cornwall but I'm terrible with names and places

J: Yer, well its north Cornwall and we had been going there for nine years same place just gorgeous, and the place we stay in is a beach, around the corner is a beach, its actually called Boobies Bay much to the hilarity of my kids, but it's a gorgeous beach. Its not like really sandy, its rocky, and there's lots of rock pools

R: I used to love that as a kid, going rock pooling!

J: The first part of the beach is covered in rocks. And then and in 2010 I think we'd, we'd had a holiday, yer we'd gone for 2 weeks, and it was the start of the second week and it was about 7 o'clock at night and my sister in law and brother urrm come with us and my mum and dad but they'd stay, we stay in mobile homes and they were staying in the one next door to us and urrr, I, I've got three kids who are, well then they were two seven and nine I think, that's about right! And err, I said to my husband Lee - cause I'm a keen photographer as well, let's just nip out because the sun was just going down and it looked so nice, and I said let's just nip out without the kids and take some photographs from Boobies Bay and I said to my sister in law can you look after the kids we won't be long, just for an hour to take some photographs we won't be long we're just going to nip out and she said, yer fine, so we walked down to the beach and we were just crossing the rocks and Lee was sort of towards the left side, no, the right side, and I was coming down here... and I wasn't even climbing, I wasn't doing anything it was just stepping from one rock to the other wasn't jumping it was just stepping from one rock to the next I was just stepping and, and, you know how your ankle can sometimes go like that, well it did that, but it just didn't stop.

R: Yer, ooohhhhhhwwhhh

J: And I'd got trainers on and I sort of... it just kept going... and then I remember falling and I sat in a rock pool and I just howled. I've never, never known pain like it.

R: Can, can you recall the pain now?

J: Yer, and there was a crack as well and I thought cause id got my camera in this hand, and I thought that was that my, my camera on the rock, cracking as it fell, but it wasn't It was my ankle that cracked... cause my camera was fine cause I sort of protected it as I fell on my arm and put my hand like that with my camera, like that, ... it was just the crack and but the pain was horrific I've had three children and I'd go through labour again rather than have that pain. [Pause]. Awful. Makes me feel sick... [pause]. Then my husband came rushing over.

R: I was gonna say...

J: And he was like ...

R: Did he hear the crack ...

J: No he was a bit further away...

R: ...Right, But he'd seen you'd fallen....

J: Yer, so he came rushing over and there was hardly anybody about, about... it was 7 o'clock at night and he said we got to get.... Cause the tide was coming in and we were the furthest out on these rocks, and he said we've got to get back to the top of the cliff and I said there's no way I can get over the rocks to the top of the cliffs, and I remember shouting it's hurting, it's hurting at the top of my voice. I think Lee was sort of urm embarrassed, I said what are you embarrassed about there's no one about, he says just come on you've got to get up, I said I can't get up but I did it but I hopped with his help, I've I but I've no idea how I did it!

R: Adrenaline. Shock and adrenaline probably!

J: Awful. Erm So I got to the top and I managed to sit down and then, there was this man walking this dog, and he came over and said do you want any help and it turned out later he was the owner of the caravan park that we were staying at and I'd got my phone on me but there was hardly any battery left on it and no there was no signal at all so we couldn't contact anybody and we'd got the cameras with us, and so this man, the manager said he go back, so we told, told him what caravans we were in and he said he'd take the cameras back and tell my mum and dad what had happened and meanwhile, my husband had gone over the cliff and he bumped into this couple, who were really old, really old couple and he said 'could he borrow your phone, have you got any signal?' And they had, so he phoned 999 and erm, they put him through to the coast guards they said they'd send somebody down and errr then the coast guards would send for an ambulance so I waited and sat on this rock, and I was so cold.

R: Cause you'd been in the rock pool as well hadn't you!

J: Yer...

R: It must have felt like days.

J: Yer. It did, I think I was there for about 40 mins. It was awful and man, The manager came back then and he stayed with me for a bit, I said what do you think I've done and I sort of pulled my sock down a bit and there was a lump forming... And he said ohh... I think he was trying to keep me calm he said... I think you've just sprained it...and I said do you think I've broken it and he said oh no I think you'll be alright...And then errr, my husband came back then, and I think I heard him say oh my god there's about nine men all coming running, there must have been about nine men. And I thought oh my god! And then they gave me some gas and air and I remember there was this really nice one who sat behind me and said oh lean back... Yer, and then I can remember them arguing over the phone with the ambulance people because they hadn't got these coast guards hadn't got a stretcher only got a chair thing and they were having an argument with the ambulance man, and the ambulance people were saying, saying don't put her on a chair wait till we get there with a stretcher and they were saying no we need to put her on a chair thing to get her of the cliff and they were saying no don't to put her on a stretcher don't put her on a chair wait until we get there and put her on the stretcher. So that was quite funny but by then I was out of it on gas and air...so everything seem to be just going on around me then and then this nice man said just lean back... I never even saw his face, [pause]. I just knew he was there, he was like just lean back on me and he was so nice, [pause] And I never even... I didn't know his face... but I knew his voice, it was so nice [pause]. He was saying just lean back on me you won't squash me or anything I remember thinking how nice.

J: The bloke at the front, giving me gas and air he was, I remember his face, he was a typical, you know a typical life, not life guard, coast guard with the beard and a ruddy face and was just like that, he was nice as well I remember he said oh can you hear music yet, because I'd had taken that much gas and air said, can you hear music yet! [laughter to silence] and then this... [looking at foot]. I remember going in the ambulance and the and I just kept begging for more gas and air and got through one canister on the beach and so they started another canister in the ambulance, and then, my brother, I could hear my brother shouting and I've never really got on that well with my brother, because he was horrible to me when I was little, he's only 2 yrs older but he was a really mean brother to me at times and he had quite a difficult life and been in trouble and all sorts of things, but that moment when he shouted through the window he said 'don't worry everything's going to be alright and we love you to bits'... and that...

well, he's never ever said anything to me like that to me before and I can really remember that feeling that people are looking out for me and they care.

R: Isn't that lovely, I mean I know it's come out of something terrible, but you've got that beautiful moment.

J: Yer... But it was almost like he has always been afraid to show that I'm his sister and that moment he knew that when I was in the ambulance that something serious had happened and he just must have felt he was able to say that even though I was totally out of it on gas and air!

R: But you remember it...

J: ...It was so emotional... and I couldn't say anything back. Then we started to set off. If it had been earlier in the evening it would have been by air ambulance. But I've got a fear of flying Lee - he was disappointed he missed out on a helicopter ride!

R: But you got to hospital in the end?

J: Yer, and they drew the curtains round me and I had to wait quite a while then, and then, opposite was a bloke or a young lad who'd been brought in and he'd had his ear bitten off in a fight and I was listening to all this goings on about his ear hanging off and that was quite weird. And then this nurse came and she said we're gonna have to put a plaster on, a temporary plaster on now before you have an x-ray and ohoooo that was painful and I think I had some more gas and air then and she had to stretch my ankle out to put a temporary plaster on it. Ummmm, and then I went for an x-ray and I hadn't got any stuff so my husband had to bring the gas and air, wheel the gas and air in with me and I had an x-ray which was agony again putting in different positions again and then I asked her 'is it serious, do you think I've broke it?' and she said 'well it wouldn't look like that if you hadn't broken it!' And then an hour later a doctor came through and had a conversation and he said right this is the deal you've broken and he said 'right this is the deal, you've broken it in 3 places, your gonna need an operation to pin it'. And when he said that, I don't know why, but you know when there's a really serious break and you have that, like, a cage round you, your leg... and there's like pins going into, I thought he meant that...

R: ...Right

J: ...My god that must be really serous if I've got to have one of those. So he said you can either have it done in Derby or you can have it done here, and its your decision. So I thought I will stay in Cornwall and have it done because you must have a lots of people falling on rocks!

R: Yer!

J: So I went up to a ward and it was about 5'Oclock in the morning and Lee was with me all the time, and then I remember a nurse coming over and saying its about 6am in the morning and he's going to have to go now it's not visiting times on the ward now. And told Lee to go and I was in a strange place and I was in agony and I just balled and balled and a woman opposite me was really nice and said ring the nurse and tell her you are upset, and I said... ummm. I think I said something like 'I didn't want to bother them' and she told me where to press the button to call someone and she said, 'oh no, you must, you should tell them to phone for someone'. And then that was it really. 20 mins. I did it on the Monday and I was told they wouldn't operate until my swelling had gone down and I didn't have my operation until the Friday, and I didn't have anything to eat all day and I didn't go down until about 5pm on the day and I was starving. Had a horrible nurse who was evil to everybody couldn't see my children, they weren't allowed to visit as it was too traumatic for children, my son was only 3 no 2 he was 2 and I was really missing them, but I had my phone with me and I was texting them all the time and it was just such an awful traumatic time. But I got to know the women on the ward...

R: Did you stay in touch with any of them?

J: She was ever so nice and I often think about how they got on ...And I really wish I had and have it done as I thought you must have a lot of people fall over. I often think about how they got on. Yer, they kept me going, cause one of them was really funny. I did it on the Monday and they operated on the Friday

R: And then you went home?

J: Yer, Lee put all the seats down and I had my leg up on 3 pillows. And drove 6 hrs home on the Tuesday. Yer and My little 2 yr old was like 'oh, hi mum' and I was like 'oh thanks Jake' and he was more interested in what my leg looked like! It was still really, really, painful and I was told I'd got this nerve condition and could end up in a wheel chair if I did have it and end up in a chair and its really, really, rare, and its called RSD. But its only really now that it's sunk in about 3 weeks later it wasn't RSD it was a really bad fracture that would just take a long time to get over I think I'd blocked it its only really now that I think about it and that was awful.

R: I'm not surprised because it's your way of coping with what's happening

J: This pain specialist looked at me, 'good news or bad news? Bad news is it is a very severe fracture...' When he said that I could have kissed him... it was like he's given me my life back! He had a tweed shirt, and bowtie [pause]. I'm always conscious of it. If the kids come in and jump on the bed, I'm always like 'be careful! Mind my leg'. And they are always 'oh sorry is that your bad leg?' I spose for me I have I've still got a bad leg it will always be a bad leg.

R: Well a lot of people say to me its just a part of you and a map of your life. Your scar is part of you

R: Do you feel that though?

J: No, not yet – maybe as the scar fades as the trauma fades...?

R: Yer, or whether we just look at it differently?

J: Well I feel like I'm mard.

R: Oh.

J: It's a flaw now.

R: Right

J: Maybe ill change, I really hate it, but I don't mind showing people. which is odd.

R: Yer cause you've shown me.

J: Yer.

R: But maybe that's, maybe you are starting to like...

J: ...Yer

R: It becomes, I don't know, it's part of my identity now

J: Maybe because its only been 2 yrs?

R: And its that constant, constant reminder and taking ownership of it.

J: This is me. [nod]

R: Maybe I don't know. Part of how we deal with it,I mean I show mine and I always feel funny like it's a big reveal like oohh what...

J ...Dadar darr

[Laughter]

R: And its always what are they going to think about it

J: I always think its bigger in your own mind than what other people thing.

R: Yer like your scar doesn't look bit to me

J: It's not at all really to me its not at all in my head its angry and red and so obvious. But like everybody says it's so neat. But not to me its not

R: Yer

J: Not to me its not. So yer, that's my story. I was thinking if I'd broken my ankle and I hadn't had an operation.... I wonder if the reason I want to show people is to prove that actually I have gone through a really awful trauma and if you haven't got the scar they might not believe you, how bad it is

R: Oh yer, it's your evidence.

J: Yer, here's my scar and I went through such trauma and here's proof.

R: Ummm

J: That's interesting, I've never really thought of it before.

R: It's also taking control back of it, this is it, here it is, this is the evidence of it full stop...  
draw a line under it

J: Now give me some sympathy! [Laughter] Yer, and that's why I might appear a bit nutty. Draw a line under it. Page closed. [END].

## **The Art of Conversation**

Backlit Gallery, Nottingham

4<sup>th</sup> July 2012

Script 3

W: It's not massive. It's faded now, but it was when I was, I would say 8. I was stopping over at Auntie Margaret's, well she wasn't really an auntie but she was like a close friend of the family, and err I actually found out later she used to go out with my dad before my mum and dad were married!

R: Oh really!

W: My mum was fine about it, she knew about, and we used to go and spend loads of time at their house in a place called Shiftal I think it was then, and then, outside their house they had a road it was fairly busy but we always used to play football and stuff out in the street. And we were playing err hide and seek and there was me, and Nissal who was about 4yrs old who was the son of auntie Margaret and his sister might have been playing as well, and we used one of the lampposts as a tiggie post, and so, I was hiding behind this bush and Nissal I think he was it and he was walking down the street and I looked over and saw the tiggie post, so I ran over to the tiggie post and then err can't, cant, can't really [pause] remember whether I looked up the road or not, but anyway, the next thing I knew I'd been hit in the... in the head... took a blow cause a ford Capri had run into me and err... I was lying in a crumpled heap. Didn't manage to get to the tiggie post. I remember coming around and there was loads of people around. And err an ambulance came and my head was really sore and they took me to hospital and I had concussion, and so because I had concussion they couldn't give me any, they couldn't knock me out... So they sort of stitched me up I think I had like 20 odd stiches in my head and my mum wasn't there I had my Auntie Margaret so I found out after she had phoned me mum and was 'ohhh, wolf's had an accident you know, don't worry he's alright'. So I have this big scar, and I remember the next day err I remember it was a Ford Carpri.

R: Do you remember what colour it was? Did you just see a flash of colour?

W: I think, I'm pretty sure, it was it was red, but, err, I'm a bit confused because because my Auntie's husband Farouk he ended up buying a gold Ford Capri! So, so in the memory, the two things are confused and so when he first bought it, on the first day when he bought it, I used to get really bad car sickness and I kinda puked up in the back of his Ford Capri!

R: I'm not surprised!

[Laughter!]

W: So ever, so it's weird, but ever since I've never liked Ford Capris! I really like Ford Mustangs which Ford Capris are based on but I've never liked Ford Capris, but the next day, no, I was then in hospital for a couple of days and then they sent me home, and then it sort of came out that the police were thinking about pressing charges, they found the guy

R: Oh so he just disappeared then? [Shock]

W: Yer, he disappeared...

R: Oh right...

W: ...And they found him I think through his number plate and he came round to my house to see if I was ok and because I was off school I used to make all these air fix models and used to make all these planes and tanks, all sort of stuff... and errr he came round and you could tell he was all nervous and stuff ...

R: Had he been sent round by the police because they'd tracked him down or did he come round...?

W: I'm not sure, I'm not sure. I think when he came on his own or, but I know that the police were asking how fast was he going, cause I know he must have been going pretty fast cause I looked one way and he wasn't there and then run across the road and he hit me and then other people were saying he was going pretty fast, so when he came up to the house worried I think he was worried that we were going to press charges. That's what he was talking about, and saw me making all these air fix models, and he was kinda, because I was going to be off school for a month or so cause of the cause of the injury... 'So I'll get you, what haven't you got? What air fix model haven't you got?'

R: Ummmm

W: And I'd always converted this stupid Live bomber, but one of the big ones like this, I'd always really wanted one of those and he was 'ohhh like right I'll get your one of those you'll be really bored over the next few weeks and stuff'. To me it was like fantastic I'm going to get an air fix model and it was like some kinda implicit agreement, even though it was never said, but you get the air fix model and I'll say ok I won't press charges and to be honest I was a kid and I was more interested in the air fix model!

R: Yer... yer... yer!

W: So anyway he left, charges weren't ever kinda pressed against him and every day or the next few weeks I used to wait for this stupid bomber to turn up and he never turned up with it. And so that, that was the biggest sort of thing it wasn't the... The kinda, it wasn't the kinda pain, it was the raising of hope that I was gonna get this present and I never got it.

R: And you never got it?

W: Never got it.

[Pause, look forward]

R: When he came round...

W: Yer... yer...

R: How did your mum and dad...were they like... I'm trying to imagine like how they were with him coming round knowing that he's the guy that's run their son down? Like, that must have been pretty, like, do you remember the atmosphere I can't imagine that I would have been like 'oh hello come in, sit down...'

W: ...Yer...

[Nod]

W: ...He was very apologetic and obviously very glad that I was alive and when I went down apparently there was blood everywhere, apparently I was wearing a light blue t-shirt with Micky Mouse or something on it was just completely red and so when so when my mum got to hospital it was thrown away. There was blood everywhere, at first It looked a lot worse than it was and because it was a head injury and because I was out, they were really worried and cause he was going fast he would have been done for dangerous driving at one point everyone was a lot more worried but in the end it it was sort of stitches and concussion. So it wasn't as bad, so yes. Yer, so when he came round he was nervous and kinda apologetic and kinda got his sense of relief that I was alright but I can't remember my mum and dad's reaction was at the time and I felt a bit awkward and embarrassed and kinda angry that he was the guy that had knocked me over and that's maybe why I set about displacing the, and showed my air fix models and after, I was a kid, I was fine....

R: So they were out did you have all your air fix models out is that why you got talking about them?

W: Yer they were out I was making one

R: ...At the time when he came round?

W: They were out, I was making one it was a small one and I was making one, we lived on a semi big estate in Birmingham and breakfast bar in the kitchen that we used to eat at and I was just making it on there and I remember everyone was standing around and I was making one on there and I remember being quite conscious and I didn't want the fuss I spose....but is that sense of being awkward and uncomfortable that it's more than that than the physical pain cause you're in this other world - cause you don't really know about responsibility, or those sort of things it's the inconvenience, it's in pain, you're in bed off school for a month or so... I can't remember this fella, he was young

apparently young-ish but when you're 7 someone whose 18 is ancient and someone whose 30 is like...

R: Yer

W: I remember he was older cause he drove the car, but at the time the Capris were boy racer cars and so, so they'd only just come out and it was a supped up one and sort of stuff, and I think, and this is me interpreting afterwards with hindsight and that he probably was coming round down the side street too fast but stuff happens...

R: When you look at it now, I mean, do you notice it?

W: No, not any more

R: No

W: I did err when I had hair I started receding when I was about late teens early 20s so and then for quite a while you couldn't it was hidden in the hair and the hair line was just above it so as it was receding that was kinda weird, because the scar was sort of revealing itself which was a bit odd.

[Laughter]

R: Yer

W: But now it's really faded, and again because I was so young at the time it seemed really massive proportionally on my head but because like your arm as you grow it stays the same so now its fairly small on my head but I remember as a kid there was always people saying oh what did you do to your head all the time.

R: But...it's always been a talking point?

W: Yer yer yer

R: Did you find that as it's become more visible people have started talking about it?

W: Yer I did, but less so because it's faded and maybe your face, eyes get older battered and people don't tend to notice it and maybe people assume as you get older you get more battered and bruised.

W: But when you're younger and your skins a lot more taught and cleaner and anything that cuts into that perfection jumps out a lot more so yes, so people used to say a lot more, quite quickly then but...

R: ...And did you tell people?

W: Yer. But, errr, I think sometimes you have that thing where you tell the story of the memory and then you don't know how and this is like the colour, I'm pretty sure it was red, but because of, like I said Farouk's car was gold - my memory is gold now, and I don't think he was kinda gold. And sometimes when you say the same story quite a few times it kinda changes and sometimes what you remember is the last time you've told it

its like Chinese whispers and sometimes you sort of think what happened to what you recounted...

R: Yerrr like cause that's a bit like for me you wonder how much its mum and dad round the dinner table years later saying their anecdotes and you go oh okk...

R: And you paint the picture....

W Paint a picture yerr ...and...

W: ...And yer and that becomes some kind of reality in your head and so to say, explicitly to say it happened like this then this and this, and because at the time because you are young and you don't articulate as well anyway and because so many other things are happening then and you're like a sponge everything's a bit mad at that age. Errrr and I remember my mum felt really bad cause it happened and, and I was stopping at my aunty Margaret's house, she felt terrible!

R: So did you ever want to buy that air fix model?

W: Errr, yer, but I never did in the end, cause...

R: Did it taint it?

W: Kinda because there were two different ones and I made loads of the smaller ones which were about this sort of size there was one bigger one this air fix and I think it was the 112 or one 120 but it was the bigger version of it so I made a couple of the smaller ones

R: Right

W: But yer it was always in my head well that he should have bought it me really but he never bought it me so I

R: So you didn't want it [shake head]

W: Yer so I just thought yer, so I it was a bit weird. And yer, every time I went in into a toy shop, and saw it I always thought in the back of my head , no I I won't get that one because he'll turn up with it and, and, there was always something else to buy... so yer maybe it was because it was tainted a bit for me.

R: So do the air fix models make you think more about the accident then the scar?

W: Err, only, only this particular aeroplane

R: That aeroplane [look at plinth with air fix on it]

W: That particular model, zooka air bomber.

W: I mean this [touch head] it's like a surface wound, and again, like, for me now, cause I'm kinda older, and you get slightly less vain than you used to be when you're a teenager or early twenties where looks are probably more important and going out slightly more conscious of how it looked....It is, it is, isn't it... kinda weird the little sort of traces they leave?

R: Yer, like the car and the air fix model...?

W: Yer, yer and it's the little details isn't it!

R: Yer

W: And that's sometimes with memories that's what it is it's the little small things or the smell or certain colour and that's what triggers it off rather than the big event

R: Yer.

W: Yer.

R: And it's like all these little random, random little pieces...

W: ...Yer, yer and the colour - it was red, because there was so much blood everywhere, and my t-shirt...

[Pause]

W: ...Had to throw it away.

R: Yer yer - so if someone says to you what happened there - you're not at all, you don't mind saying oh this is what happened to me then.

W: No, I've probably got it down to less than a sentence you know, I ran into a...

R: You've got it down to a story, script.

W: This is what happened...

R: Do you always get the same reaction to it? Do you feel you're a bit of a story teller?

W: Errr, I spose it's in context, if you're sitting I don't know, in a restaurant or having people round for dinner then it becomes more of a story but otherwise if I'm working in a factory or something and people say then a quick little to answer the question rather than tell the story and be very factual to be polite and rather than rather than give it any emotion.

R: Do you think it's become part of your dna or character at all, if I said to you I could wave a magic wand and remove your scar would you let me do that?

W: Naaaa, no.

R: You'd keep it?

W: Yer, because it's part of me it's like a trace of me. If it was really disfiguring then possibly but because but it's because its subtle and if it was right across my nose or eyes or something like that then possibly but no this is and it is part of its part of your body of who you are. And again it's one of those things like you have photographs on the wall, like of your kids or whatever and they are there all the time and you can have a look at them but it's only sometimes when you are actually properly looking it triggers off a memory because you have to consciously look and stare at it and otherwise it's just a shape or image and you take it for granted. It's a bit like those, cause it's a bit like a

drawing or a signature or something because skins like paper or a canvas it's it and its there isn't it....and it's just kinda there...

R: I always think it's like those trees when you see people have written. I woz here that people...

W: Yer I was going to say exactly the same thing!

R: Yer?

W: And it's almost the, the older it kinda has, the meaning becomes more poetic because you don't know what's happened to that person ...

R: And it holds you to a time ...

W: Yer, yer, very much so...

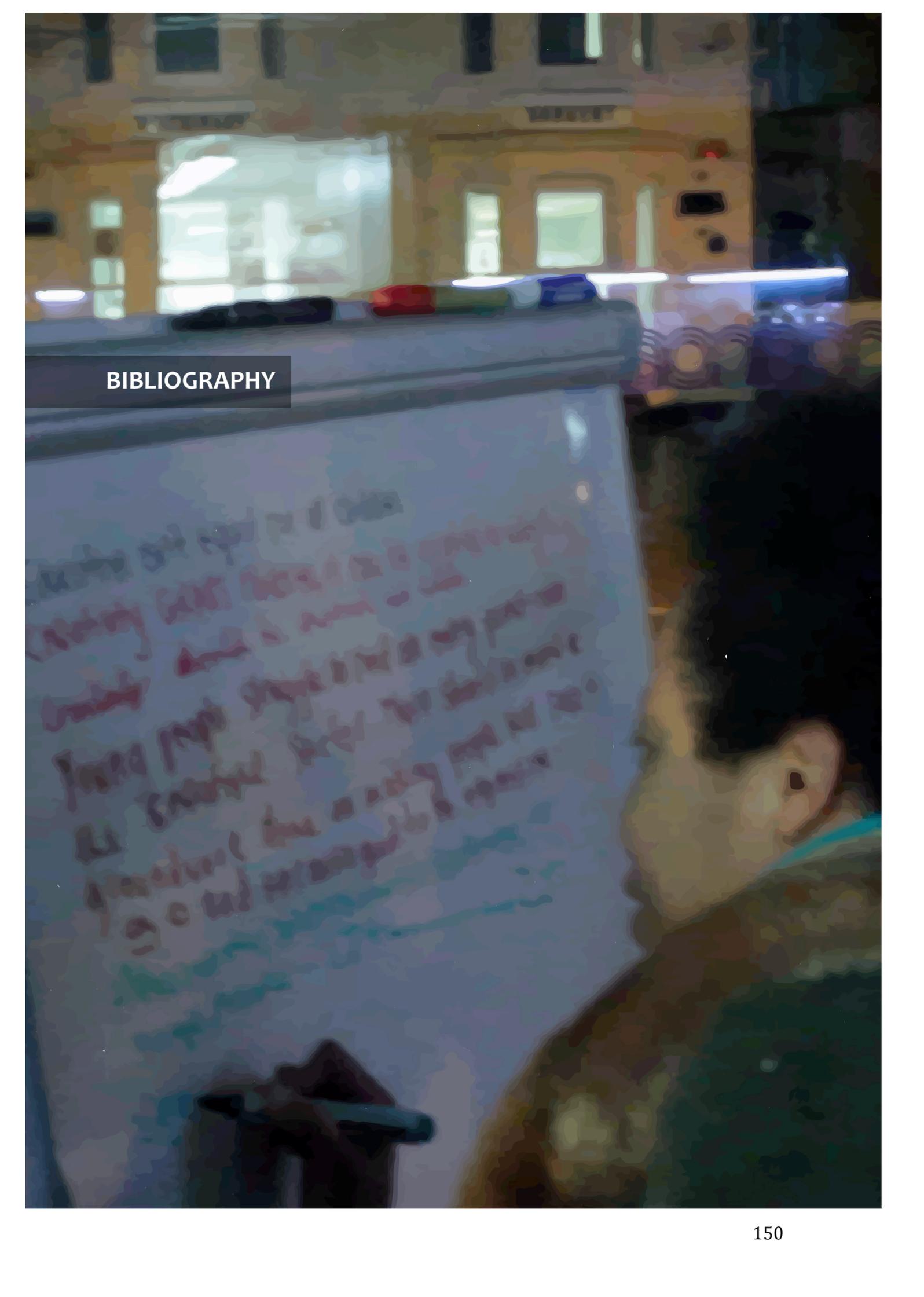
R: Because I think the older you are you forget different phases of your life like a scar from a specific time...

W: ...It takes you back... to a time because I really remember being little and playing...it takes you back to playing and having fun you know, so yer...

R: Do you think it is a part of you?

W: I guess in a way, because I don't know what I without the scar would be.

[END]



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## DVDS

### DVD1

DVD1 *The Art of Conversation* part 1

<https://youtu.be/j4H0k0cq9HM>

DVD1 *The Art of Conversation* part 2

<https://youtu.be/VGRulRsFHsE>

### DVD2

DVD 2 *[Media]ted Riots*

[https://youtu.be/a-o\\_xdIgn-4](https://youtu.be/a-o_xdIgn-4)

### DVD3

DVD 3 *Freedom in Air* part 1

<https://youtu.be/FfXy2yyTxjY>

DVD 3 *Freedom in Air* part 2

<https://youtu.be/Re19uNbIcH4>

DVD 3 *Freedom in Air* part 3

<https://youtu.be/iHXOcy67MFQ>

### DVD4

DVD 4 *Wonderland*

<https://youtu.be/SKFm9ArpC8U>

### DVD5

DVD 5 *InDialogue*

[https://youtu.be/xANmS8CX\\_RI](https://youtu.be/xANmS8CX_RI)

All links are live at youtube and can also be accessed via the website [www.theartistryofconversation.com](http://www.theartistryofconversation.com) by clicking on the relevant project page. Alternatively they can be viewed using the accompanying DVD box set provided.