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Title: On the Edge – *an exploration of the Visual Arts in remote rural contexts of Northern
Scotland*

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> **To intervene**
>
> - *to take a decisive or intrusive role in order to determine events*
>
> - *to come or be among or between*
>
> - *to occur between events or points in time*
>
> *New Collins Concise English Dictionary 1987*

On the Edge[1] as case study

This case study is a programme of five visual art projects in Northern Scotland with five regional
partners that have come about through a research framework[2]. It demonstrates aspects of the
dynamic of intervention largely focused by conversation between the participants in the process.
Intervention, as an artistic tactic (De Certeau, 1998) [3], raises a number of significant questions
that challenge a conventional understanding of how art is made and experienced, in particular the
status of the artist as sole author, the artwork as the sole vehicle for exploring creativity, and the
audience as passive witnesses of the creative act.

The theatre director, Richard Schechner, suggests that artistic traditions are relative to specific
cultural conditions and values.

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[1] The 'edge' is simultaneously a quality of remoteness as well as a metaphor for a creative challenge on a threshold between
known mores of artistic practice and new forms of practice, a liminal space in which to suspend belief, to question and raise new
critical frameworks.

[2] The On the Edge research is supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) 2001-4 www.ontheedgeresearch.org.

[3] De Certeau's thinking is central to the On the Edge research project through the doctoral research of Heather Delday currently
undertaking a studentship attached to the project. De Certeau distinguishes 'tactics' from 'strategies'. Tactics operate informally
within the everyday as a fundamental creative tool of survival in contrast to strategies – the actions of the 'proper' or the given
structures of power.

In the western post Renaissance traditions of art, the product is valued: works are hung, 'museumed', taped, filmed, 'videoed' – as if they could be rescued from time. But in other cultures, or at periods of Western culture, a better balance has been achieved between the 'being in' of art and its material products' (Turner, 1988:8).

Schechner is discussing the work of the anthropologist, Victor Turner, in particular Turner's reflections on the nature of performance in human societies. He notes that Turner valued the working, the doing, the experiential exhilaration of 'being in'. He looked for the 'minute particular' – the intrinsically unique flavour of this or that culture, sub culture or individual.

In On the Edge 'being in' is evident in the development of projects through involvement of the individuals that the work might affect and also in the open ended, exploratory nature of the journey. Conversation allows the sharing to happen. 'Valuing the particular' is a key quality of the project content that draws on the specific way of life and concerns of individuals and organizations where the projects are located.

The dynamic of intervention in On the Edge

Our context, remote rural parts of Northern Scotland, challenged us to think differently about what we were trying to do at a number of levels – in professional art practice, as dwellers in remote rural places (Miles 2000), within the education and training of the artist and as a research community. We understood enough to know that we were seeking a sharper critical awareness of how the arts work within culture. We started to build new projects within remote rural places by drawing together the specifically local with wider spheres of influence operating the different roles of the artist, the audience and the curator or producer of the project. This was a different way of working from earlier approaches that had reinforced the separation of these roles into professionalised hierarchies in which the artist determines an outcome that the audience receives or consumes.

Within the On the Edge research the network of organizations[4] co-operate to develop and evaluate the programme of five visual art projects as a shared experience. The spine of the research is a series of workshops that take place every spring and autumn. These workshops ensure that the strategic objectives of the research permeate the project activity. The research *intervenes* in professional practice through a series of carefully constructed questions. The critical perspective of the research tests and retests ideas and actions within the network of partners. This spine keeps the research activity relevant to itself. It also enables skills and tools to be exchanged and developed. A key role of this spine is create 'an interval of freedom' (De

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[4] including the Scottish Sculpture Workshop at Lumsden, The Museum of Scottish Lighthouses, Fraserburgh, Deveron Arts in Huntly, Duff House, the outstation to the National Galleries of Scotland, Banff in Aberdeenshire and Shetland College of Textiles and Deisgn in Lerwick.

Certeau,1984) that questions received models of excellence.[5] The workshops are facilitated by the cultural policy researcher, François Matarasso, who has acted as a critical advisor to the research and adds considerable experience of evaluation, in particular of social impact.

The partner challenge, the project idea and the artist

The research team, experienced artist researchers[6], invited each of the five partner organizations into conversation over time about how they would like to use the opportunity that the research presented. We intuitively started to build the projects within key challenges, not as a problem solving exercise, but as an opportunity to open up new ways in which the visual arts could become operative. These ways work across social relationships operating as a bridge *between* academe and non academic worlds, *between* the project partners and the communities in which they are located, *between* the professional art sector and other cultural organizations, *between* global networks and local communities, *between* professional expertise and the knowledge of vernacular that comes from dwelling in a particular place, knowing through dwelling.

Each partner identified their key challenges within their relationship with the community or sector that the organization served.

> The Museum of Scottish Lighthouses (MSL), Fraserburgh, is a heritage site that is located on Kinnaird Head, Fraserburgh where Stevenson built a lighthouse within an 11th century tower. Although known Europe wide for the technology of lighthouses, the museum has attracted little local attendance, particularly by young people.

> The Scottish Sculpture Workshop (SSW), Lumsden, was established in the 70s as a modernist sculpture 'factory'. It is currently undergoing transformation into an international residency centre for artists and others interested in the visual environment. Its relationship with the small community of the village in which the workshop is located had been remote but the new focus of the organization could potentially be significantly enriched by being informed about traditional knowledge and local expertise.

> The voluntary community arts organization, Deveron Arts, Huntly sought to develop a programme of challenging arts that would enable the town of Huntly to see itself with 'fresh eyes' with 'the town as a venue for the arts'. Deveron Arts wanted to investigate the potential of a 'Town Artist' who could mediate between the inhabitants and a programme of ambitious contemporary art projects.

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[5] In Workshop 3 and 5 a set of criteria were identified by the partners as relevant to their particular working situation. The results were different from received or externally imposed criteria by funders or major institutional perspectives such as the gallery, largely because they placed high value on the quality of process, the quality experience and contribution of audience as a participant in the process.

[6] Practice- led research is a space to be creative and reflective. The researcher both makes situations and makes sense of the experiences in rigorous ways by evolving practice and critical language together.

Duff House, the outstation of the National Galleries for Scotland, in Banff had been restored to its 18th century splendour as a William Adams house to accommodate significant collections from other historic houses in Scotland. The Chamberlain, Charles Burnett, felt that the value and experience of the restoration process was of interest to his 'client body' but had become invisible by presenting Duff House as a conventional country house visitor attraction. He therefore wanted to use the research opportunity to explore the organisation's role as a centre of expertise in built heritage by investigating an appropriate 21st century response to the loss of a significant 16th century painted ceiling in the region.

Shetland College Textile and Design Department, Lerwick was concerned about the relationship between design and creativity and the traditional crafts of lace making and knitting. Where these traditional forms of making are significant to the economy of Shetland, they are not currently attracting young people because of the lack of design and responsiveness to contemporary lifestyles. How could the traditions be revalued in a way that would be sustainable by Shetland craftspeople in the future?

At this first level of interaction between the research team and partner organizations, the research space was read to different degrees as an opportunity to change or influence a set of beliefs and values about how a cultural organization was working within its own geographical location and social networks. The move was away from the kinds of homogenization that come with centralized systems of control towards valuing the potential for a different character both to the way the organisation was perceived as well as the nature of its role, by being responsive to specific local circumstances and individuals. Challenging these beliefs or values would, it was hoped, enable the organization to become more effective and thereby more sustainable as its relationship to (local) people or 'community' became more meaningful, more vital. At the very least, something would be learned by sharing the journey.

The project idea

Each challenge formed the basis of a project idea. I will use two examples to make this explicit.

David Bett, Director of the Museum of Scottish Lighthouses, rethought the museum's role. It had been a repository for the material culture of lighthouse keeping, supported by the experiences of keepers who act as guides within the museum space. A new perspective revealed the lighthouse as an expression of the relationship between technology and communication and enabled us to view the museum as part of a continuity and to create a vital link with the lives of young people in Fraserburgh, whose daily experience are mediated by technologies of communication - text messaging for example. How might an artist work between the two sets of interests - that of the museum and that of the Fraserburgh youth, in a meaningful way?

Chris Fremantle, then Director of the Scottish Sculpture Workshop, focused on the significance of the organization being in that particular place of Lumsden and what that could mean in relation

to the future both of SSW as well as that of the village. Lumsden is an agricultural community and yet the last tenant farmer, Pat Dunn, to earn his living full time purely from farming retired in May 2003. How might the process of dwelling in Lumsden become visible and meaningful within both Lumsden's and SSW's evolution and change? Chris identified marginal rural land as a shared issue between the people of the village and the nomadic artists visiting the organization within residencies. The project could be a catalyst for a second phase of the development of the village. In the 19th century the village was planned with a view to maintaining an agricultural workforce for the Clova estate. The 21st century phase of development would be driven by culture. The role of the artist within the project would be to make visible processes of dwelling within the village as the life of individuals and organisations, such as Pat Dunn and SSW, changed over time and to identify key issues about public and private space.

Community as an act of forming relationships

Our experience of defining community within the projects has shifted from a simplistic notion of a group of people who happen to live in the same geographical location to a more concise notion of the process by which we, as humans, group and regroup in complex interactions of belief and values that are dependent on where we are, physically and culturally. Within On the Edge community defines an active process of forming relationships through dialogue in and around making art, thereby arriving at values, rather than assuming that these pre-exist.

The On the Edge research *intervenes* in the everyday of the remote rural places in which the projects are raised by opening up a temporary space for deep consideration for what might or could be by the partners and the communities. The artists *intervene* in the emergent projects by interpreting the briefs through their own personalities and artistic vision and (in most cases) opening up the brief further – more ambitiously, in unexpected ways and in relationship with other participants including local farmers, youth leaders, housewives, young people, school teachers, owners of historic properties, historians, academics, knitters, crafts officers, retired people.[7] The resulting programme manifests a range of approaches and related qualities – masculine, feminine, fraternal, youthful, responsive, felt, anarchic, permeating, diffused, convivial and, at times, unnerving, disruptive, provocative and sometimes destructive. Judgements about these qualities are to an extent a matter of perspective.

Convivial and diffused

The artist, Gavin Renwick, had worked with Chris Fremantle in an earlier project *Owergaeing* in 1998 that focused a sense of place with a group of younger artists, architects and designers by exploring Lumsden in depth through walking, drawing, photographing and interviewing local

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[7] The artists that have the responsibility to carry out specific projects come on board in different ways. Some of the projects such as *Inthrow* (SSW) were formed with a particular artist in mind. In others such as Edge FM the principal artist was identified well into the process of development.

'elders'. In many ways Gavin's approach in this earlier project had informed the On the Edge *Inthrow* project (2001 - present).

> 'The intention was to explore how SSW could facilitate an environmental reorientation of the community linking archaeological and cultural landscapes through engaging with the oral tradition of the people that have occupied the landscape'[8] (Renwick 2003 :13).

As both artist and researcher Gavin is engaged in the repositioning of knowledge and aesthetics directly in the context of human existence[9]. The project in Lumsden offered Gavin an opportunity to work in his own country, Scotland, with the key issue – the democratization of the land.

The first phase of the project involved a number of actions that were effectively entry points into a discussion about land and inhabitation with different groups affected by changes in ownership. Pat Dunn's retirement as a farmer marked 'the re-incorporation of his farm into the estate, the final clearance of the landscape with everyone finally consolidated into the village' (ibid). Gavin conducted taped interviews with the village 'elders' such as Pat Dunn, and recorded visits to a meeting of the Doric Society of traditional language, poetry and music. He identified Doric terms that were then threaded into the project as a way of developing its meaning – *inthrow* is the Doric for hearth, fireside and also *by means of, through the agency of*; the term *reekin' lums* or smoking chimneys is used to read the changing pattern of inhabitation within the landscape. The smoke signifies dwellings that originally were widely distributed across and within the estate and are now concentrated within the village. It also marks changes in forms of heating based on local resource consumption – wood, peat – to one (central heating) based on a commercial system consuming resources from Arabia, Latin America and Alaska in the form of oil. A key idea is the changing relationship between home and house, where home is an area of land or landscape instead of just a house and garden.

Gavin tracked events such as the *roup[10]* or farm sale of Pat Dunn's farm equipment. The young people of the village were engaged in photographing the inhabitants in exchange for help with constructing a *bogie cart[11]*. *Inthrow* leaflets were designed and distributed at the roup as a mechanism to communicate the intentions of the project and as a vehicle for obtaining a response. Gavin with Chris Fremantle initiated a music workshop with the DJ artist, Norman Shaw, involving a group of young people from the village who collected found 'sounds' from their daily

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[8] 'The word culture originates in our relationship with earth, for its is with the agri*culture* that the landscape of the Scottish Northeast was formed and delineated' (Renwick 2003 :13).

[9] For a number of years he has worked in Northern Canada among the Dogrib peoples as part of an interdisciplinary team that articulates the Dogrib notion of 'home' to the Canadian government with a view to sustaining the Dogrib way of life within the colonialism of Western European Canada

[10] *roup* in the Concise Scots Dictionary means 'plunder, deprive of everything'

[11] a three wheeled cart made by teenagers out of improvised materials

environment (from their own swearing to the sound of cock crow) used as raw material for sound pieces and a music event held within a ruined *clachan* or farmstead above the village.

These small scale entry points were developed by Gavin interacting in a convivial way with the village by living there, by encountering people in the pub and in their homes, entering into the space of their everyday through an interest in their way of life – traditions of farming, of peat cutting and of language. The quiet building of confidence has grown into a more ambitious and long - term proposal of establishing an 'archive' of traditional knowledge for the village. This could be supported by an apprenticeship of a young villager to co-ordinate the 'archive' and work with SSW to evolve it. A related proposal is to form a feasibility group to assess the relevance of of Land Reform legislation in Scotland to Lumsden.[12]
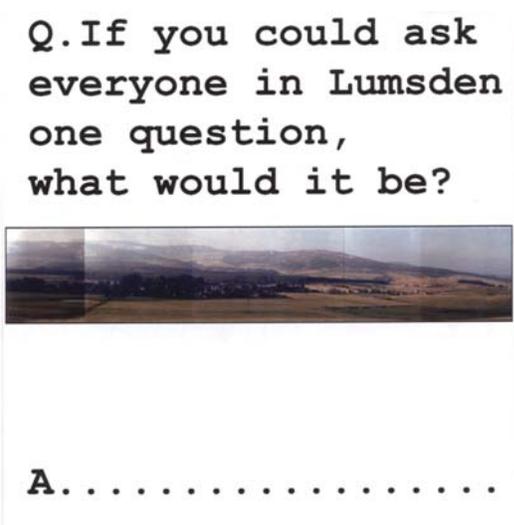

Fig.1 Evidence of the artist Gavin Renwick's methods used in Inthrow, *including Norman Shaw's music workshop, the Lumsden poster and Pat Dunn's peat cutting tools*

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[12] an ironic move given that the village was originally constructed by the adjacent Clova Estate to maintain a workforce in the area.

Conversation as a tool

Dialogue established through conversations has been a key method within the On the Edge process. The critic and theorist, Catharine Stimpson (Kramer,1994), defines conversation as a 'tool' of cultural democracy, 'a working technique for making relationships and agreements happen' (Kramer,1994:27). Stimpson asks us to imagine a circle of relationships of different kinds of conversations that range from 'consensus' at one point in the circle, in which individuals share the moral and intellectual basis for action, to 'conflict without rules' at its extreme opposite in which force dominates[13]. Conversation is a tool for making consensus and coalitions occur on the one hand and for setting the rules of contests or rule bound conflicts on the other. Stimpson is identifying conversation types within the context of multiculturalism. However, these qualities are also useful for understanding the kinds of relationships between participants in On the Edge. Quality of relationship and quality of intervention are closely allied. It is within dialogue through conversations that values that are often implicit at the beginning become clear and explicit.

The character of intervention in *Inthrow* is slow, immersive and convivial. Gavin Renwick describes this process as a 'process of raising consciousness'. The relationship between the research team with SSW as partner organization and Gavin Renwick has evolved through intense dialogue and the building of *consensus*, a series of exchanges operating within what is fundamentally a shared set of values. Differences of interpretation of the project have been shared and resolved within conversations that have enabled artist, partner organization and research team to adjust their perceptions of each other and nurture and enrich each stage as relationships grew within the project team and simultaneously with the village[14].

As the project has progressed, it has gathered its own autonomy and independence from the research process through the short, medium term and long term outcomes identified in the artist's interpretation of the brief.

Structured, cathartic, playful *and* disruptive and unnerving

A different set of qualities characterize the Langerin'[15] project on Shetland. Susan Benn, the artist involved, is the Director of Performing Arts Laboratories (PAL) that explores creative

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[13] Other stages include coerced conformity, conformity, coalitions, contests, rule bound conflicts and conflicts without rules as different ways of reaching agreement or begging to differ.

[14] For example, the music workshop with Norman Shaw came about as a result of rethinking the importance of young people and their experiences alongside that of the 'elders' of the village

[15] Langerin' is a Shetland term describing the getting together of women knitters in each others' homes to knit and share news and stories.

collaborations between, across and beyond disciplines. Susan was invited to design and direct a new collaborative 'Langerin' Lab' programme to bring traditional and contemporary hand and machine knitters of the Shetland Islands together with a group of artists, designers and academics, from a range of disciplines, to stimulate new work and new ways of working. The aim of the programme was to revalue the traditional forms of making within contemporary ways of living. Susan articulates her artistic approach as follows

> 'As the director of PAL I create, with lots of other people, an environment in which new thinking and ways of working happen through collective chemistry. It is what I call the 'pressure cooker' factor.

> Certainly in the beginning there is a lot of discomfort and dislocation that make people ask questions about their practice, about their place in the group, their core values as a person'. (On the Edge workshop 5, Lumsden, 9.10.03)

The eight day Lab was the result of several months of careful preparation working in partnership with the research team and partner organization, Shetland College. It took place in May 2003, incubating a range of ideas within a creative experience. Within the space a number of ideas were identified to be further developed, produced, exhibited, published and marketed by March 2004. The Langerin' Lab is currently being developed further in collaboration with Shetland College and with the practical encouragement of the Shetland Development Department and other local agencies, to provide an infrastructure which supports the ongoing work of the project.

The nature of the intervention in this project is unlike that of *Inthrow* in that it is highly structured and negotiated at every phase of its development. It encompasses different paces of working from fast moving catharsis to slow, thorough preparation and critical reflection. Like *Inthrow*, it is convivial, playful but through working together in groups rather than individual encounters.

The Lab methodology structures and formalizes a shared space of taking risks through individuals' creative production. By entering and participating in the space of the Lab, an individual participant has the opportunity to grow in the process though there is no guarantee that this will happen. There is acknowledgement of danger and discomfort. The cathartic and generative qualities of 'labness' resonate with Turner's discussions on the nature of performance in ritual, *open, unfinished, decentred, destablising and liminal (betwixt and between)*(Turner, 1988*)*. Its impact is reflected in the individual feedback from the lab from two of the participants

> 'I found I was looking at designing in new ways and producing work from a different perspective….This type of event is invaluable to designers in remote areas especially, as one tends to become disconnected from new thinking'.

> 'One does tend to get possessive about one's ideas but the Lab showed me that mutual respect and open discussion is very beneficial. It struck me that group working with the right atmosphere actually increases the creativity of individuals'.

The quality of relationship in the Langerin' project has ranged from *consensus* based on shared values and empathy between the research team and artist to a *coalition* between research team, artist and partner organization. The evaluation process has provided a space for revealing disagreements that at times have been painful to resolve. There are sharp differences of expectations between the partner organization, on the one hand and the research team and artist, on the other, expectations that have become clearer as the process has evolved. After a great deal of discussion we have arrived at the decision to acknowledge that different interests are operating within the shared space but that these differences are significant to understanding the dimensions of the issue at hand.[16] It is therefore important to continue to work together on the shared issue of revaluing traditional forms of making. Stimpson defines this process of continuing through an acknowledgement of difference as a *coalition*.

The experience of the Langerin' project would indicate that the process of developing the projects through exploration is by no means *consensual.* Valuable learning takes place at points of experiencing real tension between different individuals and their perceptions.[17] The journey, like good research, has exposed deeper levels of questioning, not least the 'food chain' and infrastructure of the industry that needs to be understood in a complex way. Research provides opportunities for this understanding to be developed as part of practice.

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[16] For example, Shetland College defines the lack of design in the knitting as a key problem though this has been implicit rather than explicit in the process of developing the Langerin' Lab. A narrow reading of the Lab as a mechanism for delivering this design element has led to real disappointment in the eyes of the partner organization in its outcomes, though this had never been an explicit objective of the project. Reading the Lab as a mechanism for encouraging a spirit of creativity and self reliance within traditional knitters has produced a far richer set of results and processes that are less formal or nameable but that have seeded new ideas and collaborations that would never have come about without the catharsis of shared creativity.

[17] Explored further in Douglas, A & H. Delday, 2003

Fig. 2 The Langerin' Lab *participants involved in experimental work and the evaluation blanket monitoring day to day experience of the lab.*

Paradoxical and opportunistic

Paradoxical aspects of intervention are clearly evident within the *Town Artist* project with Deveron Arts. The artist in this project, Lynn Millar, tested the notion of 'town artist' as a relatively long - term development i.e. beyond the norm of a three - month residency. Deveron Arts were seeking to find a different way of being an artist in relation to the community of a Town that was neither a community artist nor a conventional artist in residence. The assumption underpinning this search for a different model was the uncomfortable set of choices posed by existing models. On the one hand high involvement in the community was perceived as a loss of quality in artistic terms. On the other hand quality in artistic practice was perceived as a lower level of involvement and relevance to the community of the town. Lynn Millar's role was to support 'the implementation of dedicated short term artist in residence programmes of various artistic disciplines' developed by Deveron Arts. Lynn, as a local artist, is firmly located within the community of Huntly, and therefore effectively part of the way of life of the town. Her presence would, it was hoped, secure the acceptability of other work by incoming artists.

The aim of the 'ambitious programme of projects' was to enable Huntly 'to see *itself* with fresh eyes' through the intervention of *professional* art practices acting as an injection of a different kind of energy. Lynn's appointment within the research framework presented an opportunity whereby all the participants – research, partner and artist might learn from the process.

As the artist's role became increasingly pragmatic, in terms of supporting and realizing the initiatives taken by the partner organization, it became evident that we were some way away from identifying 'a third way'. The artist became frustrated by the lack of clarity about what the role involved. Deveron Arts became frustrated by the apparent lack of real development in the role that they had defined as 'ideas maker and shaper'. The *Town Artist* project drew to a close after twelve months.

Despite the best intentions and some exciting work, these interesting concepts in and around the transformative role of the arts have tended to remain 'strap lines' or 'labels' used to attract funding. These have been very effective in generating projects. An area of real success within this project has been the development of mechanisms to stimulate debate on subjects such as 'rural commerce' and 'notions of home and identity' identified by individuals undertaking residencies. These events have been co-ordinated by the town artist. This level of engagement of the local community with formal debate initiated in relation to artistic practice points to an area of potential development for Deveron Arts and the community of Huntly.

The quality of conversation within this project between the partner organisation and the research team has been marked by *coerced conformity*, where the respective roles of partner organization, research and artists were enforced more by the 'legal', social and cultural definitions imposed on

those roles than by trust, exploration and learning. Where for the most part the other four projects in the programme have developed conversation to 'help consensus and coalition to occur', within this project conversation helped to set up rules of engagement[18].

Youthful and Anarchic

Within *Edge FM* project (partner organization Museum of Scottish Lighthouses) the artist, Paul Carter, bridged two systems of belief – that of the museum and that of a group of young people from Fraserburgh by building a radio station. In the artist's own words

> '*Edge FM* was run by a group of local young people who collected and transmitted the voices of people from the area talking about issues of identity. Using the radio broadcast to be heard, and a museum exhibit to position themselves within the history of the town, the Edge FM project was the reclamation of the museum and of local history by the group' (Carter, 2003).

The qualities of intervention in the *Edge FM* project are dynamic and improvised. The opportunity for young people to 'intervene' in the space of the museum was shaped by the desire of its director to encourage their presence, and the skills of the artist in making something different happen through the vehicle of the radio broadcast and its development. The content - an exploration of identity, and its vehicle of dissemination, a radio station, interested the group of young skateboarders and bmx bikers enough to come together and to sustain their attendance over a series of weekend workshops. Paul's skills of creating a trust between himself and the participants enabled a unique kind of space in which the adult world listened instead of instructing, in which adults were challenged by and learned from what the young people chose to offer them, and with which the adult world of the museum felt some discomfort. The young people relished the opportunity to invade the museum's space with their skills, the way in which they expressed themselves, their values and aspirations for the town's future. This sense of 'invasion' was carried through symbolically into the airwaves through the broadcast.

> 'In the city
>
> the bladers hate the skaters
>
> the skaters hate the bmxers
>
> but in a place like this
>
> abdy gets on
>
> abdy stick t'gither

[18] Unlike the other projects, Deveron Arts interpreted the role of the research team as objective within the development process rather than participatory through a practice-led approach. For example the artist was appointed without consultation with the research team.

naebdy sees naebdy stuck'

(Fraserburgh 2 August 03)

The preparedness to accept people for who they are is expressed by one of the
participants in Edge FM, broadcast as part of the soundscape.

The relationships between research team, partner organization and artist in Edge FM has been
largely one of *consensus*, of agreeing on a course of action through fundamentally shared values.
The Director of the Museum, David Bett, sought the support of community group leaders in
Fraserburgh as a means of firmly locating the project within the experience of its young
inhabitants. The artist's response was surprising but focused the project's aim more sharply than
the team and partner could have envisaged. Paul stressed the importance of using 'low'
technologies of radio (rather than the original idea of using contemporary digital media) because
low technologies are more manageable and therefore empowering for the lay user, more could be
expressed and more quality time spent on developing the broadcast. The energy of the young
skaters and bikers proved quite challenging in the museum space, again stimulating new ideas
about how the museum collection might be mediated in new ways to develop new audiences.
Could skateboarding be choreographed into the task of guiding the public through the space? The
broadcast produced rich insights into how concerned the young people were to marry local and
global interests often expressed within their sporting interests. How might the museum lend itself
to addressing these concerns in a lively way?

*Fig. 3 Spaces inside the museum created by Edge FM. Outside the building scaffolding was used
to erect a radio mast for the one day licensed broadcast.*

Dramatic and complex, spontaneous and witty

In the Celestial ceiling project (partner organization Duff House) the owners of a private space,
Cullen House South Tower, raised the issue of the loss by fire of important Scottish heritage, the
16th century painted ceiling. Their initiative in bringing this issue to the *public* space of the
museum led to a complex interpretation of the research opportunity – to raise two commissions
with two different artists who would respond in distinctive ways to the loss. Robert Orchardson, a

young Scottish visual artist, is in the process of 'replacing' the original ceiling with a new 21st century painting. Through intervening in the original ceiling space he is appropriating the space in a new way and for his time. John McGeogh, a second artist, is developing a projected ceiling using new digital technology as a way of challenging the conventions of heritage interpretation by offering an artwork as a *new experience* of lost heritage, only possible through current technology. This artwork will tour to a number of historic properties.

The literal nature of the two commissions as interventions within architectural spaces belies another more symbolic level of intervention where loss is transformed into creative opportunity. The values of the patron, of wit and spontaneity, open up the space in which new artistic content can play. The two artists have offered responses to these values that are witty and dramatic, improvising on the original content– a new celestial ceiling referencing yellow bath bubbles and astronauts on the one hand, and a Troy enlivened by animated flames and the individual portraits of the *putti*[19], normally not visible to the 'naked eye', on the other.

The relationship between 'actors' in this project has been demanding, businesslike, convivial, and playful. It has been elegant and improvised. The research team have been highly active in the process of identifying artists, artistic approaches, and content by co-ordinating discussions across interest groups. By each participant being open to the question 'Who should the artist be?', we have engaged in a process of learning from different 'experts' who have contributed to defining an approach. The rich material that has resulted from this process is available to the artists working on their respective outcomes within the conceptual framework of 'patronage'.
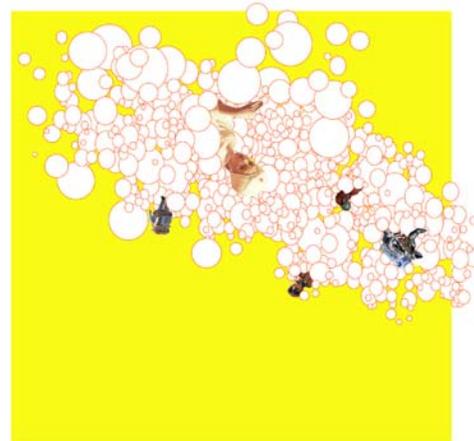

Fig. 4 A tiny detail from the tempera painted ceiling destroyed by a fire in 1986 and the proposal for a new painting on the ceiling by the artist, Robert Orchardson. A second commission, a digital ceiling projection by the artist, John McGeogh reinterprets the original ceiling and is planned to tour other heritage sites.

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[19] cherubs

Conclusion

Focusing the On the Edge programme of projects by different qualities of conversation, *consensus*, *coalition* or *coercion,* has helped to recognize the needs of each project and the multiple strategies that have been required within the development, implementation and evaluation phases. These qualities have only become clear through the process of engagement, of 'being in' the process. What has actually happened is a result of a whole series of contingent factors in which each participant is part of a conversation. In this sense, culture is a 'co-operative adventure' (Harrison, 1985).

A clearly significant consequence of approaching the development of the visual arts in this way is the balance between what is taught and what is learned. Within the *Langerin'* project the learning is through sharing skills and experiences in which each participant is simultaneously teacher and learner. In contrast, within, *the Town Artist* project with Deveron Arts project, the teaching follows a single trajectory. Both offer quite different types of exchanges.

What is the role of research expertise in this process?

The dynamic of intervention operative in the On the Edge projects is research led and simultaneously practice led. The practice is framed by questions to which nobody has the answers at the outset. Each participant in the process is at once the expert and also the non expert. Each contribution is significant to a deeper understanding of the changing phenomena that we are trying to understand.

The research is instrumental in making the practice happen. It constitutes a powerful tool of creativity in culture. It is disinterested in the sense that Terry Eagleton suggests i.e. neither self interested or self orientated but *trying to feel (a) way imaginatively into the experience of others* (Eagleton, 2003). We do not apply specific genres of practice but embrace a complexity of approaches from ceiling painting (*Celestial Ceiling*) to projects that have no single artistic output (*Inthrow*) or (*Edge FM*), working across known genres of art. We also do not apply specific methodologies of research but position ourselves in a 'generalist' 'non specialist' way in the same sense that artists are generalists using their skills of observation, empathy and communication to understand and re-present experience in ways that can be understood by non artists[20].

The research and related practice is **self critical** in the sense used by Jane Kramer, the American critic of public art i.e. *the **local** figuring out of what works and what does not work* (own emphasi*s*) (Kramer, 1994). The development of evaluation processes and tools that can be used as part of daily practice (and not just professional research) has been a key research outcome.

What values are created and expressed by these projects?

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[20] In contrast a scientist, such as a medical researcher, would engage specialist languages and methodologies of science to carry out research without feeling an requirement to communicate their findings in lay terms.

Within On the Edge it has been crucial to address the process of developing values from multiple perspectives – that of the partner organization, that of the artists carrying out the work and that of the participants within the project 'sites' as well as the researchers who are also artists. Values are not a single truth. They are the subject of discussion, part of the act of forming or creating a sense of self in relation to others, intrinsic and central to the creative process.

Multiple perspectives can be contradictory and tense as well as shared. They engage thoughts and feelings that to one individual may be the subject of passion and to another, indifference. The complexity of possibilities is what is important as well as the space to reveal and explore this complexity and to learn from it. This learning stance is a different perspective from that of professional performance evidenced in the following ways.

The principal artists in each project have been invited in to contribute their experience and thinking by interpreting the project briefs and in discussing and sharing realisation with the partners, research team and participants. They are not asked to 'produce', but to 'participate in the production'. The artistic 'output' is positioned differently in relation to the process of development. In both *Inthrow* and *Edge FM* for example, output is the least evident part of the process. The soundscape of *Edge FM* is a stage in a process of adjusting sensibilities and constructing new relationships between the young people and the museum. In contrast in gallery or permanent public art practices, output is normally the most evident part. The means of disseminating the work is also different. Within sectors of professional visual arts practice dissemination conventionally takes the form of a glossy catalogue or academic text. On the Edge needs in this case to communicate to a different kind of 'lay' audience including the range of participants in the projects, challenging us to evolve a different approach inspired by 'popular' or 'lay' culture – the information booklet or the comic.

Another manifestation of difference is the quality and intensity of relationships that are formed between people in remote rural areas in which mutual trust and interdependence is a question of survival. This is closely linked to sensitivity in relation to taking risks, the fear that failure is letting down the people that you know and depend upon. Project development is about judging risk in relation to personal relationships as opposed to an anonymous public.

This focus on relationship requires a different sensibility in relation to pace of development with different results. Where professional visual art practices in the gallery or in public art for example are regulated by the three week exhibition slot and new work or 'one off' project i.e. a 'professionalised' structure, projects in remote rural areas evolve slowly and painstakingly with people. (Each of the projects in On the Edge has taken a minimum of two and half years to build). This process of nurturing relationship and ownership often leads to the seeding of co-developments such as those of *Inthrow* that could never have been fully envisaged at the outset but that map and rehearse sustainable development of the activity.

Not every aspect of the programme is slow. There is also a need for catharsis, the injection of new energy that is short and sharp, evident for example in the *Langerin' Lab*. This catharsis needs to

be supported by a framework or network of individuals who take on the responsibility of seeing the work through where in other contexts this responsibility might well be carried out by a single monolithic institution – the gallery, urban museum, public art organisation.

Finally, the nature of professional performance invests creativity solely within the role of artist. The On the Edge projects draw on the creativity of each participant to make the project work. The principal artist in each project facilitates and intensifies this process releasing new ways of being within the everyday.

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