Reflection

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Contents

Introduction

The aim of this body of work was to both realise physical developments of theoretical outcomes and to summarise and present the learning which had taken place since the beginning of the MA programme.

Reflection on previous practical work had identified a range of opportunities which might facilitate further development including:

- Re-introducing drawing onto the surface of laser etched objects

- Exploration of simultaneous filming from two angles

- The possibility of including basic interactive elements within the work

- Utilisation of The Link Gallery Space for a period between 14th – 19th April

- Opportunities for engaging/presenting work to the public in the form of a workshop at a local festival and participation in a Manchester club night.

As previous survey-based research had highlighted issues of public ownership and interaction with space and place as pertinent areas of study, it was decided to focus in on these for an installation in The Link Gallery which would provide opportunities for exploring much of the above. The images and themes used aimed to reference the contrast between institutional texts found in the environment which globally and indiscriminately direct and control and the organic subversion of the street artist who finds individuality and independence through local visual intervention. These concepts are discussed in more depth in the Exhibition Information/Comment Booklet (Section 2 of Appendix 3) which was made available during the show. This opportunity would also be the largest public exhibition of the work since the last 2D installation in Helsinki six months prior and the first opportunity to fully engage with space and multiple projections.

In addition, I approached this project with an understanding that through it I could build a higher quality of portfolio content while developing professional practice, transferrable skills and employability.

Facilitation of the Exhibition

Submitting, Promoting and Planning

The first step in organising the show was to make the submission/proposal to the gallery (Appendix 1). This document outlined previous work undertaken and provided links to example work online whilst also explaining the development which could take place if the show were to go ahead. It also included a plan of the gallery which provided possible display solutions and alternative ways to use the space. Upon agreeing dates, promotional material was organised (Appendix 2). At this stage the title of *Marking the Territory* was selected as this phrase could be used to describe the focus of much of the content and it seemed an appropriate title to summarise the purpose of the work during stage one of the MA programme.

Approaching sponsors was a priority before finalising and printing promotional material. One source of support came from an arts supplier who had agreed a discount for a previous event and agreed to continue subsidising any materials purchased for the show. A local bar also agreed to offer refreshments for the closing event. Though the financial value of these sponsorships was not excessive, the association with locally recognised businesses lent credibility and professional status to the event during promotion.

A range of web, postal and location based approaches to promoting the event were taken, though it is apparent that these did not contribute to the number of visitors and those who did attend were largely invited by email or word of mouth, being already known to me. None of the press releases issued were printed (with the exception of staff and student newsletters) and though an agency made contact offering free promotion after seeing the show posted online, no evidence that the event was ever listed was forthcoming. It is apparent that the only individuals who attended and were not known to me personally were either passersby who were using The Link as a crossing or people who attended with friends. Though there has recently been some interest from strangers through both the website and Facebook groups, these individuals are not based locally and so this did not contribute to the number of physical visitors. In order to improve future visitor numbers a greater focus on encouraging people to bring guests may at least broaden the audience of small scale shows and working with a larger or more established gallery or other artists and events would also expand the possible catchment while working with a marketing agency may become more affordable if working with others or sources of funding.

Installing in the Gallery

Though an initial plan of the gallery space was submitted with the proposal, many necessary changes were only identified after work had begun in the space. With projection a predominant feature, ambient light levels were consistently at the forefront of planning concerns and it had been possible to negotiate with the gallery technician to have the windows of the main sections of the space boarded over. This, however, increased the wall space exponentially and it became clear as soon as the planned projectors were installed that there had been a significant underestimation of the capabilities of the projection beams and subsequently the full environmental experience as planned would not be achieved. Fortunately it was possible to borrow four more data projectors which ran off DVD players and extended the areas covered by light and image. Though this resulted in a stronger outcome, it required continued building work past the advertised opening date. Given the more flexible expectations of a student show and the likelihood that there would not be many visitors at that time, a full response to the space was prioritised and the show opened as a more 'work in progress' installation than initially planned. Though in many respects this decision necessitated failure to meet the deadline, it made it possible to fully utilise the space and subsequently realise a more successful outcome for documentation purposes, also in time for the closing event when most visitors

were expected. This decision also required last minute editing to prepare images and film for the additional projectors.

In order to increase the three dimensional impact of the exhibition and better involve 'dead space' a new series of prints was also generated that used vector drawings of hazard and directional signage originally made for the purpose of editing in to the projected films. As the inclusion of these in the film was fairly subtle, they could be reused without undue repetition. The prints were situated in areas of the gallery without much projection but positioned to reflect the way such signs are functionally placed and did not seek to reference traditional display modes. This was in direct contrast to the display in the foyer which presented an alternative range of prints in a more traditional configuration and loosely aimed to continue questioning spatial directions (See Below).

Final additions to the planned work included the construction of a desk to be used at the closing event by the musician and the utilisation of black and white images printed onto sticker paper. These were applied to both the plinths used to house the projectors and to areas of the etched objects which had not been marked with drawing and served the dual purpose of quickly enhancing the drawing as well as including the functional plinths more, highlighting the formal similarities between these and the etched objects. Using the sticker paper lent important practical application benefits but also continued to reference urban interventions within the context of the show theme.

Summary

Though it was necessary to make adjustments to the plan once work had begun in the space, the experience of these will lead to more realistic judgements when planning future events. Better technical understanding relating to the capabilities of a range of projectors may also be required and if working in a more professional context it would be important to fully research this beforehand. It is unlikely that it would be possible to borrow additional equipment at the last minute when operating outside of an educational institution, at least without a significant impact on the budget, and full technical requirements like these would need to be factored in during the application and costing stages.

Through the experience of promoting the event it has become clear that the strategies employed were not successful in attracting visitors. Careful and discriminating consideration of audience and subsequent use of more appropriate promotional websites, publications and locations as well as considering alternative approaches to advertising are all areas for development in future ventures.
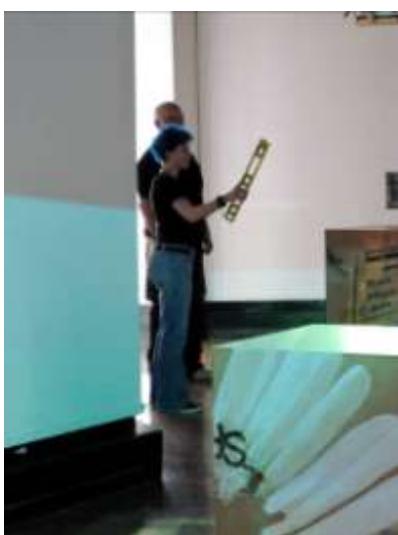
Reflection on Exhibited Outcomes

3D Drawing Installation

- **Objects and Drawing**

Following the manufacture of a small scale test object and subsequent experimentation with projected film and slides, the development of a series of larger scale pieces to project on to was determined to be an appropriate focus for the installation. As a consequence, the design and production of these objects was a priority for much of the planning stage and it was decided fairly early into the process to produce three of these in response to the segmented nature of the gallery space. Some technical issues with the laser etching process arose during production but having been previously delayed with similar problems, planning allowed for these to a certain extent. An additional skills development need arose during the preparation of the digital files relating to the calculation of area and it was necessary to research and use simultaneous equations to facilitate this. Other issues included a discrepancy in the etching of specific images which were planned to line up along corresponding edges (see Fig. 6) and as the engineer was unable to resolve these problems, it was eventually necessary to accept inaccuracies in the outcome in order to install the objects on time.

The process of drawing onto an object made in this way had been trialled live at *Norvun Sunday* at The Roadhouse in Manchester a fortnight before *Marking the Territory* opened and many of the reflections following that event (Appendix 4) were reinforced during the extended drawing process of the exhibition. These include the confirmed success of multiple projections, the continued contrast between still and moving images and the relationship between the surface of the MDF (including additional texture as provided by the laser etching) and a variety of wet and dry media (see Fig. 4 and 5). Despite these similarities, there were many differences between the events, the most notable of which was the relationship between the work, process and audience. Where in the case of *Norvun Sunday* there was an existing audience who were attending to see a range of artists (predominantly musicians) and intending to spend time in the space, The Link Gallery is primarily used as a walk way and though this is beneficial to the work in achieving an higher exposure, it does not encourage people to remain in the space as they are primarily in transit. Though in this specific instance, this pedestrian nature of the passersby lent an additional weight to some of the intrinsic transience of the installation, it changed the importance of the drawing process considerably. This was not helped by the overrunning of the installation of extra projectors which affected my own focus as well as cluttering the gallery with ladders, etc and the impression during much of the live drawing installation was that the show had not been finished yet, drawing included. This may also be in part due to the conventions of gallery display in that the focus is usually on final outcomes and it is likely that it was not clear to many that the work in progress was a feature.

An additional unforeseen factor was that the inclusion of additional projection on the walls, though necessary to fill the space and achieve a successful environmental impact, drew focus away from the objects and they eventually played a lesser role than anticipated. That this was the case is not necessarily a negative factor and it could be argued that they played an essential spatial role in creating an environment and linking the space between walls rather than being reduced to 'objects on display'. One unavoidable physical characteristic which contributed to this was the scale of the objects in the space, however as they had been designed to make maximum use of the full size of the laser cutting bed it would not have been possible to manufacture larger pieces without a far more complex approach to construction.

The main success of the objects centred around moments of interaction which were created as people passed through the space, interrupting the beam of projection more directly than they might have done had it been purely wall based and occasionally pausing to work out what was transient projection and what was permanently marked. This combined with the *This Belongs To* project (discussed on page 8) and the shift in focus away from the artist and performative aspects of the drawing process, underlined the importance of developing opportunities for public interaction in future work.

Fig. 1

Fig. 2

Fig. 3

Fig. 4

Fig. 5

Fig. 6

- **Film, Source Images, Projection and Sound.**

The projected films were generated by editing hand drawn vectors at adjusted transparencies (Fig. 7 and 8) with source digital video (Fig. 10 and 11 – film stills). This aimed to not only assist the drawing process by preselecting and emphasising shapes but also to contrast the static elements from which a place is constructed such as buildings, streets and bridges against the visual impact of the moving, transient elements. The source film employed two cameras to record simultaneous scenes which were shot side by side from the 13th floor, looking out over Salford and Central Manchester. This was a departure from the test films which were set at street view at right angles or back to back for the reason that in order for the 3D recreation of a street to be fully realised, a very specific setup was needed which, it was felt, conflicted with the existing specifics of the gallery space. There was also a deliberate step back from street level in order to reflect the Concept City (as suggested by De Certeau) and avoid focussing too closely on a particular area or accidentally move toward the generation of an architectural model. In addition to three pairs of 25-minute films taken from static, elevated viewpoints and edited to emphasise simultaneous events, a sequence taken on foot while using a network of underpasses was introduced (Fig. 9 – film still). This film was shaky, a contrast to the stable shots achieved with the tripod and far from encompassing a wide view of the city it deliberately focused in on textural, close up detail. Each style of film brought different qualities to the space; the stable, vector enhanced film being used to generate environmental stasis, with the exception of the moving cars which were projected on to the floor giving the viewer an impression of elevation and the pedestrian film which lent additional dynamism to the static gallery space while inferring the viewer's inhabitation of the Concept Street. Additional still images edited into the film pairs included public interventions such as graffiti (Figs. 14 and 17) and institutional directions such as road signs or those that include reference to place (Fig. 15 and 16). Many of the directional signs were highlighted with the use of an opaque vector in the same way as the moving images (Fig. 13) and these were then layered with the film. Inclusion of natural images achieved a visual contrast against the focus of

the built environment but also loosely referenced comments recorded in research relating to participation in communal gardening projects as being an alternative environmental intervention that enhanced feelings of ownership. The concepts behind the use of many of these images are discussed further in the information booklet (Appendix 3). Additional still imagery was introduced to the space through the use of slide projection and in an attempt to explore the analogue nature of these the images used were digital montages which could not have been generated using traditional means (Fig. 18).

Despite the work that went into producing the films, the reality of the installation was that there was little interaction between moving image and drawing process as planned. Much of the drawing was in fact conducted from still images, largely due to the physicality of the gallery and the need to position projectors in specific places. Though the changed relationship between moving image and drawing did not completely exclude the effective contrast between static and transient, it was less explicitly discussed than planned and the loss of this dialogue was noticeable. This may also have been a result of the decision not to pursue street level footage and a consequence of the inclusion of aerial angles was less movement within the frame. Though movement was successfully introduced to the space generally through the walking footage, it reduced opportunities for interaction of drawing with film. In Addition, the effective 'breaking' of the projected image over the three dimensional surfaces resulted the intended visual impact of the film being less tangible. Many visitors stopped to watch the films displayed on the laptop screens (Fig. 12) as well as taking in the environmental projections.

Fig. 7

Fig. 8
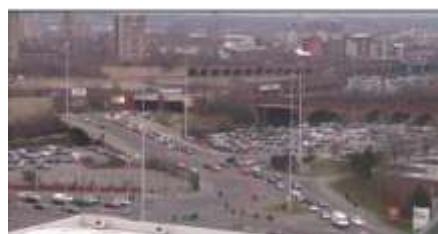

Fig. 9

Fig. 10

Fig. 11

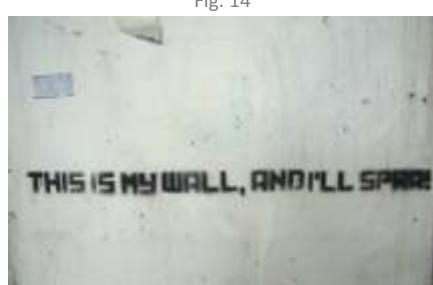Fig. 12

Fig. 13

Fig. 14

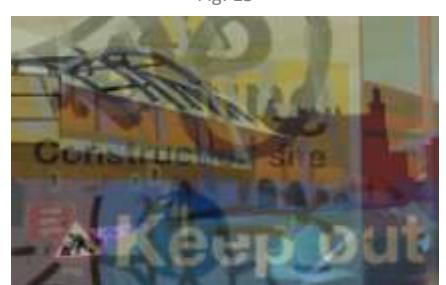Fig. 15

Fig. 16

Fig. 17

Fig. 18

Ambient light levels were the main consideration relating to use of projection and despite the windows of the central gallery spaces being boarded over, there was a lot of natural light from the end windows, which it was not possible to cover. However, the inclusion of additional projectors helped counter this and it did not interfere with the installation too heavily. The deliberate overlapping and merging of the projected images (Fig. 19) as well as the decision to project on to floors and angles between walls (Figs. 20 and 21) successfully emphasised the three dimensional aspects of the installation and contributed to environmental discussions by fully surrounding the viewer. Use of audio supported this, with real world street samples playing at one end of the gallery and specifically composed music edited to reflect changes in the video playing at the other end. Positioned in this way, the audio balance shifted as the viewer moved from one end of the gallery to another, lending an additional spatial experience to the installation. Real world samples were selected to support the visual themes and this is discussed in more detail in the exhibition information booklet (Appendix 3)

Fig. 19

Fig. 20

Fig. 21

Despite changes and developments to the planned outcome, many of which were responses to the dynamics of the space, the three dimensional development of the installation work can be considered broadly successful in comparison to the last major public exhibition of the work in Helsinki in October 2009. Additional public interactive elements are however beginning to move the work forward and the shift on focus is definitely away from artist as performer and facilitator of process and more onto on to audience and members of the public as one half of an interactive encounter with object as a spatial reflection of urban environments.

This Belongs To

This Belongs To was devised as an initial experiment in public environmental intervention and also included the additional feature of potential interaction with the concept and physicality of the installation. Simply realised as a laser cut card referencing name labels (Fig. 22), the object allows participants to devise an identifying name or mark which is then rudimentarily projected using natural (or artificial) light onto surfaces in the environment (Figs. 23 and 24). Where used in the exhibition space, this has successfully encouraged viewers to spatially interact with the environment by positioning themselves and the cards at a point which would allow a focused shadow. This then lead to further interaction and play where attempts were made to interact with specific images (Fig. 25), other participants in the space (Fig. 26) or to find alternative ways of intervening with the projection (Fig. 27). There has been a high level of enthusiasm for the project and all the first batch of cards made had been taken by the end of the exhibition, however there has been very little in the way of uploaded or returned images to date and it is recognised that there is a gulf between initial response and the act of making and uploading the intervention. Plans for continuing this project involve developed use of internet applications such as Facebook and Twitter to build up awareness and participants. Research in related areas has identified that similar participation projects (such as http://thereisbeautyinthecity.blogspot.com/) are slow to build up content and although *There is Beauty in the City* has been running with funding since 2008, a recent report from the administrators suggests that there have been only around 40 participants. Though the role this project has played in recent work is not currently significant, the successes so far support the intention to move the work much more tangibly toward participation and interaction.

Other investigations into audience participation during the development of this work have included the facilitation of a crafts workshop at a local environmental awareness event. Though this was not without success it has highlighted that method and technique should be carefully considered when attempting to facilitate participation. Further reflection and images of this event are attached (Appendix 5).

Fig. 22

Fig. 23

Fig. 24

Fig. 25

Fig. 26

Fig. 27

Record of Additional Displays

- **Saint Peters Square**

This was a private commission accepted in May 2009 and did not at first appear to be related to current practice. The decision to include it in *Marking the Territory* was made as parallels gradually began to emerge. These include use of projection to transfer digital image to analogue process and the investigation of place as subject matter. During planning it was decided to project the original digital sketch back onto the completed acrylic painting and the image used was in fact a version of the final vector graphics, modified for the Freestyle Graphics competition category at Breakpoint 2010 in Germany. The entry placed 6th. Unfortunately, due to high ambient and natural light levels in the Interactive Arts Foyer the projected element was not as strong as hoped. However, this subtlety did create some interesting moments when passersby stopped to look closely at the detail in the painting and only then discovered the projection as their shadow fell on the surface. Some interaction then occurred as viewers deliberately obscured areas of the projection in order to decipher the projected and painted images.

Fig. 28

Fig. 29

Fig. 30

- **City Poems Series 2**

This series of images was generated as an element of visual inquiry during the development stages and uses photographs of initial trials of projection onto laser etched surfaces digitally merged with photographs of territorial marks in the urban environment. This served an aesthetic contribution to the space and along with *Saint Peters Square*, formed attempt to define the boundaries of the exhibition and draw passersby in to the space via the interactive Arts Foyer (Fig.28). They may also be argued to form a 'way in' for individuals who are not used to engaging with installations but can 'understand' the format of an image as an artistic comment. There is no plan to develop or continue this work.
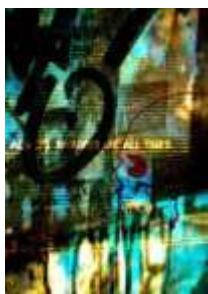

Fig. 31

Fig. 32

Fig. 33

Fig. 34

Fig. 35

Fig. 36

Development, Conclusion and Summary

Development

- **Feedback and Overview**

Positive feedback from visitors to the exhibition both via written and verbal comments demonstrates that the issues surrounding ownership and place were successfully communicated (Appendix 3) and one FE student who visited commented that "it made me think about what is around me" suggesting that direct environmental and spatial awareness were also challenged. Despite this, it has already been noted that much of exhibition served as a *summary* of work which clearly indicates a need for closure on this chapter and there is already a tangible gap between the evolution of ideas and the physicalisation realised here. The recognised potential for a more developed public engagement which may be achieved through the proposed investigation into methods of interaction underlines the need for considered research into ways of achieving this and also calls for advancement of functionality or purpose in order to encourage that engagement. In parallel to the practical processes, it is desirable for conceptual and practice based development to manifest, which may be facilitated through a more structured approach to both the generation and management of ideas.

- **Process Development**

One model for the creative process as promoted by the private digital training company *Hyper Island*, promotes an indiscriminate ideas generation period in which it is recommended to divorce any analytical thinking from the creative phase and aim to record as many ideas as possible without regard for practical boundaries. These ideas are refined later to fit practical constraints; however the theory is that the outcome will be a more creative response to the brief than where constraints are applied from the start. This technique also promotes the importance of serendipity in the creative process and encourages the acceptance of potential failure, recommending a move from the 'comfort' to the 'stretch' zone. The projected impact of this model on the creative process is one of refined ideas and increased rigour and discrimination in developing an appropriate solution. Though a formulaic approach to any creative situation should be approached with caution, the deliberate application of a 'thinking process', especially one which embraces risk taking, may in many cases stimulate cognitive function and result in stronger output.

- **Areas of Research**

As the relationship between identity (implied as a condition of ownership) and interaction within an urban context has clearly become a central concern of this work, initial research for the next phases will focus on both the physical and the virtual.

- o Physical investigations will focus on the creation of interactive objects and may employ technology such as motion, light and touch sensors etc. Possible utilisation of electronics such as *Arduino* will be researched.

- o Virtual research will include engagement with and reflection on web 2.0 based interaction via methods such as rss feeds, social networks, and microblogs (sites such as twitter, facebook, foursquare etc), especially where the use of mobile technology (handheld devices, netbooks, tablets) encourages a departure from domestic or work settings and facilitates a direct interaction with environment (especially foursquare)

- **Reflection**

The use of reflective writing to structure and support the physical process has been a feature of current practice which has developed a specific format both in terms of structure and visual device as well as content and aim. Following assessment of this relationship in previous outcomes, a further review has underpinned much of this document and has been compared with assessment of evaluative work at Levels 2 and 3 in my teaching practice. It

has been identified through this reflection that much detail is voiced unnecessarily and that many of the reflective documents throughout stage one verge on the descriptive and obvious while more discrimination could better facilitate productive analysis. This is likely to be symptomatic of the nature of the courses I deliver and a move away from this 'box ticking', formulaic approach including an almost fetishistic need to 'produce evidence' is likely to not only free up creative development and experimentation but also allow a more productive use of time. Recognition that many of the issues discussed are inherent in the work and a more careful consideration of relevance in any written work should facilitate an academic 'trimming' similar to the practice based editing I executed at the start of the programme of study.

Conclusion and Summary

Marking the Territory was a successful installation which effectively developed recent multimedia installation work into three dimensions and served to physically summarise the distance travelled over the course of Stage One of the MA Programme as well as providing opportunities for professional development. A flexible response to the space enabled the facilitation of a more effective product and verbal, written and observed feedback indicated that the issues of relationships with space and public ownership/place making were successfully communicated as well as stimulating thought in the audience. Basic interactive elements demonstrate strong potential for development and have generated enthusiasm from viewers. Possibilities for developing these further will be generated by research into areas of online interactivity and networking as well as the building and design of interactive objects through electronic hardware. These will driven by a parallel goal to develop a functional utility for the work, either via a specific purpose or a more indirect application. Creative practice has also been reviewed through the course of this body of work and changes to ideas generation and management as well as a more streamlined, focused approach to written reflection will be actioned.

Work Cited

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