



**Experiencing Contemporary Arts Organisations in Rural Places
Arts Practices and Disruption in North East England and Scotland**

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Abstract

The research explores contemporary visual arts organisations and their arts practices. Taking recent frameworks of cultural value as a point of departure, it focuses on how these practices are experienced. It asks how might these practices impact rural people and places, and disrupt rural identities? The research employed exploratory case studies of three contemporary visual arts organisations and their arts practices in rural locations in England and Scotland. It focussed on ‘moments’ of disruption in each location through specific arts projects, and how these were experienced by different actors. Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews, along with analysis of texts and items of visual material such as video and photographs. This was complemented by participant observation of the arts organisations ‘at work’ in each location.

The research found that contemporary arts organisations are positioned within a creative practice of ‘the post-studio, site responsive artist and roving global curator’. As neo-endogenous cultural actors, they are networked extra locally, yet remain responsive to rural place and context in distinctive ways. The research suggests a continuing struggle over the ways in which cultural identities of place in the rural are disrupted and maintained. It further reveals the processes of change and resistance implicit in the creation of cultural place identities, and in the maintenance of actors’ sense of place. It suggests an ongoing tension between constructions of the rural as traditional and modern, with contemporary arts practices seen by some as urban signifiers of modernity, and ‘out of place’ in the countryside. For others, they were ‘in place’, markers of cultural diversity that reinforced their identities as culturally literate actors, and enhanced their sense of place. The findings suggest an interpretation of the rural as a site of dynamic cultural change alongside more traditional cultural practices and perspectives.

Key words: cultural value, arts practices, rural place identities, rural sense of place, disruption

Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to Professor Philip Lowe

I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to Professor Phillip Lowe. His 'open door' policy and respect for widely different knowledge's as the fundamental ethos of the Centre for Rural Economy has allowed people, like me, to make the transition from policy and practice into academia. His insatiable curiosity about the rural social world and his infectious intellectualism has inspired many of us, and continue so to do. I could not have attempted a PhD nor been in a position to do one without his unstinting support and generosity.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 Setting the Scene

Over the last 30 years much attention has been focussed on culture as a critical ingredient of cities as engines of economic growth and regeneration (Hall, 1998; 2000). As many commentators have noted the result is a bias towards the urban in cultural policy making (e.g Cunningham, 2002; C Gibson and Kong, 2005; RCF, 2010, 2012, 2018; D Bell and Oakley, 2015). Conversely, the rural appears to have been overlooked as a 'residuary of non-creative places', offering little potential for cultural enrichment and regeneration (Rantisi, 2006; Edensor *et al.*, 2009; D Bell and Jayne, 2010). This would seem to run counter to Duxbury's impassioned plea to consider arts and culture as 'a foundation upon which the future of (these) rural/small communities rests' (2011, p.111). Within this 'problematic' space, the aim of this thesis is to bring a cultural value perspective to rural studies through a deep examination of three contemporary arts organisations in the UK and their arts practices in non-urban locations.

1.2 Aims and Objectives

The overall objective of the research was to investigate the disruptive potential of contemporary arts organisations in rural places in England and Scotland through their arts practices, using cultural value as a broad conceptual framework. Cultural value can be understood as articulating the value to people of engaging in arts and cultural practices, often but not exclusively, associated with state funded cultural provision (AHRC, 2014). The research responds both to the critique of cultural policy as outlined above, and addresses a gap in the literature. As Argent (2018, p.2) notes 'the role of artistic and cultural expression in the affirmation and continued reproduction of the social life of rural communities has been a relatively under-explored topic in rural geography'.

My involvement in national parks as cultural landscapes sparked an interest in rural cultures and creativity. For many years, I was a rural development practitioner in a regional economic development agency. The RDA where I worked invested in local development programmes for cultural tourism and local foods, and commissioned

studies on the rural creative economy. I shared with others the excitement over the creative potential of the region brought home by the bid by Newcastle and Gateshead to become Capital of Culture 2008. Although it failed, in the North East culture continued as an integral part of regenerating the region (Bailey *et al.*, 2007). Around the time the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) was launching its cultural value initiative, I was working on a project looking at the sustainability of small contemporary visual arts organisations in rural locations in North East England¹. I discovered that they were not one off vehicles for artistic practices and ambitions; I found more of them and was curious about the effects they might have. Questions followed. Might rural arts organisations act as catalysts of change in rural places? Might we think of artists as agents of disruption, actors impacting on the local dynamics of rural places and identities, and the innovative potential of rural communities? Disruption thus provided a novel lens through which to investigate cultural value. In the context of contemporary arts practices, disruption signals processes of change and a shift away from expected functioning's (Collins English Dictionary). Participating in art can 'enlarge our capacity to imagine the world and our relations anew' (Bishop, 2012, p.284; Crawshaw and Gkartzios, 2016). At the community level, local cultural practices are entangled in identities of place helping to build resilience and 'promote rural localities and regions to non-local people' (Argent, p.2). Yet those identities are not static and can be disrupted by dominant cultural interests (Woods, 2011; Mahon and Hyrylainen, 2017).

The argument that empirical accounts have been neglected in favour of more theoretically informed accounts of cultural value (Kaszynska, 2015; O'Brien, 2015) supports the focus in the research on actors' lived experience of contemporary arts practices. Hence, the research aimed to address the following research questions:

- What is the cultural value of contemporary visual arts organisations in rural places?
- How are contemporary arts practices experienced in rural places?
- How do they have a disruptive effect?
- How is disruption experienced, by whom and in what ways?

1. Northumbrian Exchanges was a year-long project undertaken by Newcastle University that took place from 2012-2014. It investigated knowledge exchange and the sustainability of rural arts organisations and was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

1.3 Methodological Approach

The research used qualitative, interpretive approaches to capture actors' differential experience of arts practices and followed an inductive research design, with no prior theory to 'test'. Disruption as a 'sensitising concept' (Charmaz, 2014, p.30) ran as a thread through the research design and subsequent analysis. Methodically, I followed Charmaz's social constructivist variant of grounded theory (*ibid*, p.12) and analysed my findings from within the data to produce a higher level account. I selected a case study approach because this allows real world phenomena such as arts practices to be studied in their specific contexts (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2009). Through a process of web identification and personal contacts, three contemporary arts organisations in rural areas in England and Scotland were contacted and agreed to be participants in the research. Each of them was located in a rural area that was classed as remote according to the English and Scottish urban-rural classifications. These are Atlas Arts in Portree, Isle of Skye, Deveron Arts in Huntly, Aberdeenshire and Visual Arts in Rural Communities in Tarsset, Northumberland, in the north east of England. Each organisation commissioned artists to produce work in situ and I focussed on actors' experience of three potential 'moments' of disruption through projects that had taken place within the previous ten years. Actors included a variety of local residents, board members of the arts organisations, artists and curators. The artworks were *Are You Localised* (Tatham and O'Sullivan, 2014) *Music for Street Fights* (Garry Williams, 2008,) and an unnamed sculpture referred to as the sculpture in the landscape (Khosro Adibi, 2015). I spent a total of five months in the field in 2015. Data were collected through in depth interviews with a total of 35 actors, supplemented by participant observation of the arts organisations in the 'everyday' (Highmore, 2001) and secondary analysis of selected texts such as video, media coverage and other materials produced by the arts organisations.

1.4 Theoretical Background

Argent's review of trends in rural geography identifies a progressive interest in 'artistic and creative expression' (p.2) as a critique of the bias towards the urban in cultural policy. This bias could be regarded as having two broad elements that coalesce around an urban imperative that casts the rural as lacking. The first is the urban as location for cultural infrastructure, from the iconic museums and art galleries of global cities (Hall, 2000), to the civic spaces of public art and cultural quarters that

stimulate the regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods (Vickery, 2007; Evans, 2009). The second, is the tangible and intangible infrastructure of economic growth and wealth creation such as creative clusters and the human capital that is attracted to them (A Scott, 2000; Florida, 2002). In terms of the first, policy suggests the rural lacks sufficient consumers, both in terms of numbers and cultural diversity (ACE, 2014), while its social problems are hidden, dispersed and marginal (Shucksmith and Philip, 2003). In the second, critical mass, agglomeration economies and cultural diversity act to marginalise the rural economically. These could be summed up as problems of scale and visibility (Woods, 2015) against which the rural with its narrower, and more limited, account of cultural value appears to fall short. There is a subtlety here, not simply of the rural as a material location that is 'lacking', but a suspicion that culturally, the rural is less interesting and dynamic (C Gibson, 2010). Recent work on cultural value (AHRC, 2014) appears to support this notion of rural deficit, albeit with a cursory nod to the rural in gathering its evidence. However, it remains of the view that broadly speaking, there is nothing distinctive about art in the rural as a result of rurality, simply variations to national trends of cultural consumption and access. Nor is there anything *sui generis* about the rural as a cultural location where engagement in the arts is experienced (p.83).

AHRC's work pivots around the experience of arts and culture as a conceptual starting point and argues for the value of empirical accounts as an important element in understanding cultural value. In so doing it aimed to provide a unifying framework that sidesteps the dichotomies of intrinsic versus instrumental value of the arts that have been the stuff of recent debates in cultural policy, (eg Garnham, 2005; Holden, 2006; Oakley, 2009; O'Brien, 2014). These debates centre on arguments about the value of 'art for arts' sake' versus the arts for other policy agendas such as health, social inclusion and economic growth. As a discursive concept cultural value is inherently political (Ruccio *et al.*, 1998) and the act of valuing – itself problematic (Ladkin *et al.*, 2016) inevitably brings the concept into the political arena (O'Brien, 2015). The 'project' of cultural value is thus increasingly viewed as a consequence of the requirement for cultural investment to prove its value via measurable impacts (Bakhshi, 2012), as part of an increasing shift in policy making from state to market (D Bell and Oakley, 2015). The weakness of the concept of cultural value lies in its conceptual impreciseness across disciplines and policy domains while its malleability suits a variety of purposes and is open to interpretation (C Gray, 2010).

Yet, judgements about the value of cultural activity to society have a long cultural history (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008) that precedes current policy concerns. Some of this history is bound up in how the rural is known and understood, its place in a long cultural imaginary perhaps best expressed by Raymond Williams as 'structure of feeling' (1973, p.46) or what we would now recognise as 'sense of place' (Agnew, 1987; Cresswell, 2004). Even today, this distinguishes the rural from the urban, albeit reflected in the nuances of 'changing and different countrysides' (Cloke, 2003, p.13). A cultural perspective on the rural has material, affective and discursive weight (Halfacree, 1993; 2006b). Rural as material space is experienced culturally: the word rural has emotional and symbolic meaning, is represented by particular images in policy and in politics, and is characterised by practices we call rural such as hill farming that are as much cultural as they are practical (RCF, 2010; Mansfield, 2012). All of these make up distinctive rural identities and imbue rural locations with a sense of place (Woods *et al.*, 2012). These identities are not homogenous, and may be contested (Woods, 2003; 2010a; Frisvoll, 2012; Schaefer *et al.*, 2017) but they are distinctive from those of cities (Cloke, 2003). Williams (1973) summed this up eloquently:

'The relation of country and city is not only an objective problem and history, but has been and still is for many millions of people a direct and intense preoccupation and experience.' (p.3)

With parallels to Williams' observation on the rural as 'an intense preoccupation and experience'(p.3), John Dewey writing 40 years earlier argued that art cannot be isolated as an homogenised, aesthetic project, separated from the actors who experience it in their everyday lives:

'In order to understand the esthetic in its ultimate and approved forms, one must begin with it in the raw; in the events and scenes that hold the attentive eye and ear of man, arousing his interest and affording him enjoyment as he looks and listens.' (*Italics in the original*) (Dewey, 1934, p.3)

Bringing these two perspectives together argues for studying rural arts organisations in situ through actors' experience of arts practices where rural (however defined) has cultural relevance. In a way this returns to the themes of the cultural turn in rural studies that focussed on the differential experience of what rural lives and identities were like and gave a voice to cultural experience (Cloke, 1997; Cloke, 2006).

The collection, *Country Visions*, a rich assemblage of insights and perspectives from different standpoints, illuminated some of this experience and the representations and constructions that surround it: the countryside as the normative ideal of the rural idyll (Bunce, 2003), as dwelling in the landscape (Wylie, 2003), on being a rural child (Horton, 2003), as exclusion and as struggle between competing ruralities (Abram, 2003). In recent years there has been a maturing of focus by rural scholars on the contribution of creative expression to rural places (Argent, 2018). The first 'wave' drew attention to rurally adaptive models of creative development favoured in urban policy, while the second built on earlier work on the endogenous potential of culture led models of (neo-endogenous) development for rural areas (Ray, 2000; Ray, 2006b). More recently arts practices have emerged in the literature within framings of cultural value, as components of wellbeing (K Scott *et al.*, 2018) and community identities (Waitt and Gibson, 2013) for example. There is a parallel focus on artists as creative workers in the rural (Luckman, 2012; Mahon *et al.*, 2018). The 'artistic dividend' is not confined to cities as Florida's creative class thesis suggests (and that he himself has now acknowledged, see Florida, 2018). Artists may bring different and distinctive qualities to rural areas, helping to broaden attitudes, build human and social capital and contribute to rural resilience (Roberts and Townsend, 2016). Artists are often highly mobile working in different urban locations before settling in rural areas for a variety of reasons including life stage (Bunting and Mitchell, 2001; Mitchell *et al.*, 2004; Gkartzios and Scott, 2015; K Scott *et al.*, 2018). Yet they face creative and personal challenges and may trade off quality of life against loss of professional opportunities (Baines and Wheelock, 2003; Luckman, 2012; Mahon *et al.*, 2018). There is, however, a gap in the literature in relation to understanding the value of 'cultural ventures that work to reinvigorate the rural' (Shirley, 2015, p.157). This research helps to fill this gap through a close examination of three of these ventures through their practices of contemporary visual arts. In the wake of the initiative on cultural value by the Arts and Humanities Research Council there is to be a five year programme of investment into the evidence base and methods of evaluating cultural value across sectors and disciplines (AHRC, 2018). A contribution to the rural debate is thus a timely one.

1.5 Structure of Thesis

The thesis is organised as follows. Chapter 2 is the first of two literature chapters. It introduces the concept of cultural value and examines the bias in cultural policy towards cities as a point of departure for a critique that draws attention to the neglect of the rural. The responses in rural studies literature are then reviewed before taking a step back to consider how the rural is known culturally as critical context for the research. Chapter 3, the second literature chapter looks at arts practices and the broad canon of contemporary art, while again acknowledging that contemporary arts are most usually associated with cities. This overlooks the fact that artists have always been drawn to 'arcadia' for creative inspiration (Luckman, 2012). More recently, however, arts organisations that challenge notions of rurality as an idyllic and nostalgic past have become established in rural places and the literature concludes with a brief insight into one of these, Grizedale Arts (Griffin and Sutherland, 2009). Chapter 4 sets out the methodology and rationale for the research design and describes the fieldwork. It also covers research ethics including identification of participants. In line with a focus on experience and the nature of the research questions, research design was inductive and used qualitative methods of data analysis within an interpretive framework. Grounded theory was the chosen approach to analysis and a methodological influence overall. Chapter 4 offers a critique of using grounded theory in addition to describing its key features and ontological and epistemological underpinnings. The use of case studies was important to researching the real world context of the arts organisations and their arts practices (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2009). This links to the three empirical chapters, 5, 6, and 7. Each chapter begins with a common introduction that summarises the structure of each and reminds the reader of the aims of the research. The chapters give a short profile of the places where the arts organisations are located, followed by a history of each organisation. The 'stories' of each project are then summarised before the empirical material is presented and findings discussed. Chapter 5 focusses on *Are You Locationalised* by artists Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan that was part of 'Generation', Creative Scotland's celebration of contemporary visual arts in 2014. Involving temporary works of public art in two locations, the project disrupted notions of place identity and in so doing got people talking about the art which in the eyes of some, was felt to be out of place. However, talking about art also helped those who were unfamiliar with it to gain cultural capital and enhanced their

sense of place. In chapter 6, the theme of art being 'in or out of place' (T Cresswell, 1996) was exemplified by the project *Music for Street Fights*, a temporary installation by artist Garry Williams that aimed to disrupt late night drunkenness on the streets of Huntly, a problem more usually associated with cities (Jayne *et al.*, 2008; Wooff, 2015). Fears about how the project might tarnish the image of the town aroused opposition to the project before it went ahead, largely without incident. Furthermore, it revealed that in putting Huntly on the map, contemporary art was valued as an 'antidote to the parochial' in a conservative market town. Finally, and as a point of difference, Chapter 7 discusses Khosro Adibi's sculpture in the landscape, and the unintentional disruption that occurred through cultural misunderstanding that failed to recognise the specificity of local place attachment. In so doing different cultural constructions and misunderstandings of place became apparent, with contemporary arts signalling perhaps urban cultural values that were felt to be out of place in a rural location, while for others contemporary art was a reminder of a welcome presence of artists in the countryside.

The penultimate chapter, Chapter 8 discusses these findings to consider the different ways in which place and personal identities are enmeshed (Twigger-Ross and Uzzel, 1996) and how arts practices helped to reveal competing and co-existing rural identities (Frisvoll, 2012). It also highlights the role and significance of key cultural actors embedded in rural places as neo-endogenous actors connected in webs of local and extra local relations (Lowe *et al.*, 1995), offering both insider and outsider perspectives. At the end of the chapter, the concept of the creative countryside is offered as a provisional framework to understanding rural change, and is illustrated with reference to the findings of the thesis. Chapter 9 concludes that there is a complex and shifting contribution to cultural value by contemporary arts organisations that changes over time and that this may contribute positively to developing rural capacities. It argues for the value of a cultural analysis of the rural through creative expression and relates it to processes of cultural evolution that might signal wider socio-cultural change in the countryside (A Miles and Ebury, 2017; Woods, 2018). In summary this chapter has set out the aims and objectives of the research, summarised the key literatures, outlined the methodology chosen, introduced the research participants and summarised the key findings. Chapter 2 now discusses the literature under the broad framework of cultural value.

Chapter 2 Exploring Cultural Value in Rural Places

2.1 Introduction

This chapter expands on the themes introduced in the Introduction. First, it introduces the concepts of culture and cultural value. Cultural value as a concept is both a product of contemporary cultural policy and the focus of recent academic interest (Crossick and Kaszynka, 2014) although questions about the value of the arts to society have a long history (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008). The chapter then considers the recent politicisation of cultural value and its discursive focus on the value of culture for economic growth and wealth creation that has favoured cities as the focus of cultural policy, and the consequent neglect of the rural (C Gibson and Kong, 2005). Responses in the rural studies literature that indicate a progressive interest in 'artistic and creative expression' (Argent, 2018, p.2) are then reviewed. These studies draw attention to rurally adaptive models of creative development and highlight the endogenous potential of culture led models of (neo-endogenous) development for rural areas (eg Ray, 2000). More recently, there has been a maturing of focus in the literature around the 'resilience of creative expression in rural places and its ongoing centrality to what might comprise the good life' (Argent, 2018, p.2). The chapter then takes a step back to consider how the rural is known and understood as critical context for the research.

2.2 Cultural Value

The concept of cultural value is the starting point for this thesis as outlined in the Introduction. Ideas of 'value' bring questions: what value do we mean, how might that valuing be done, and by whom? (O'Brien, 2015). These are political questions in as much as they are academic (C Gray, 2010). Cultural policy has tended to elide the concept with valuing the arts for what they can do for society and how public policy ought to intervene (D Bell and Oakley, 2015). Yet, the discourse of cultural value is broader than policy, and concern over the value of culture and cultural practices to society has a long history (Belfiore and Bennett, 2008; O'Connor, 2010). Culture can be as broad as a way of life – sometimes referred to as the anthropological perspective - or as narrow as a set of specific cultural practices– the culturalist perspective - and everything in between (Crossick and Kaszynka, 2014; Williams,

2015). In a phrase that has been much quoted, Raymond Williams referred to culture as 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language, making a distinction between culture as a way of life on the one hand, and 'the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity' on the other (Williams, 2015, p.87). In acknowledging that culture is an 'essentially contested concept', Gray (2010) offers an overview whereby (after Williams) culture extends from a way of living, to the 'societal and political dimensions of social life, (p. 220) along with a more prosaic understanding of culture as a set of (often elite) cultural practices. Throsby (2001) distils culture into two broad categories: culture' is both the shared values, attitudes, beliefs and practices that give groups their cultural identity', and activities that encompass the 'intellectual, moral and artistic aspects of human life' (p. 4). Moreover, those activities are concerned with creativity, and the generation and communication of meaning (*ibid*).

Throsby (2001) acknowledges that 'valuations of art and culture cannot detach themselves from the social context and relations in which they take place' (p.15). In other words, ideas of cultural value are always a product of the times in which they are situated. For example, Belfiore and Bennett (2008) argue that attempts at valuing culture in terms of its importance for individuals and wider society can be traced back to the times of Plato and Aristotle in Ancient Greece. Their taxonomy of cultural value from an historical perspective indicates that the arts have variously been viewed as: cathartic - emotionally and intellectually cleansing, a moral corrective, and a provider of wellbeing through direct experience and aesthetic pleasure, and may even be corrupting. Throsby (2001) offers six elements of cultural value at the level of the individual. These include the aesthetic and the spiritual, the social - connecting to others or offering 'a sense of identity and place' (p.29) - and symbolic (in terms of conveying meaning), along with authenticity value denoting artistic originality and integrity. Another way of understanding cultural value is the distinction between culture's hedonic or eudonic effects, the former concerned with fleeting pleasure and enjoyment, the latter with longer lasting meaning and purpose (Ryan and Deci, 2001).

2.2.1 Politicising cultural value

As a discursive concept cultural value is inherently political (Ruccio et al., 1998) and the act of valuing – itself problematic (Ladkin *et al.*, 2016) inevitably brings the

concept into the political arena (O'Brien and Lockley, 2015). The introduction of the target driven principles of new public management by New Labour in the early 2000s resulted in the need to demonstrate measurable outcomes as a return on investment of public funds (Belfiore, 2012; Hewison, 2012). It ushered in a polarised debate between an instrumentalist view of the arts and culture in terms of their contribution to other agendas, such as innovation (Oakley, 2009), urban regeneration and social inclusion (Vickery, 2007) versus their intrinsic value: the aesthetic, emotional and even spiritual impacts of the arts (Throsby, 2001; Hewison, 2012). Economists such as Bakhshi (2012) argued that the value of the arts had to be measured and thus demonstrated to policy makers beyond the narrow realm of 'arts for art's sake'; others claimed that the unique, intangible values of the arts made it impossible to measure their impacts (Matarasso, 2012). Cherbo asserts that 'It is precisely the intrinsic nature of art that makes it so valuable instrumentally' (2010, p.170). This acknowledges that 'art does something' for individuals and society. That it ought to do so to justify public funding, and to prove its effects has been critiqued by policy makers and academics. Compliance with an audit culture and the production of indicators of value risks hollowing out the concept while the instrumentalisation of 'arts painful truths' argues against value in the arts altogether (Ladkin *et al.*, 2016). Holden (2006) (with think tank Demos) offered a three pronged theory of cultural value that encompassed both the intrinsic and instrumental value of the arts, along with the institutional, acknowledging the complex interplay between the three elements. Holden's institutional value is helpful because it recognises that arts organisations have agency in contributing value and facilitating access to the arts. Also running as a thread through debates over cultural value are arguments around so called 'high and low art' or elite forms of cultural production versus popular culture, and the rationale for state support (D Bell and Oakley, 2015). Studies have confirmed that a small proportion of relatively well-off, well-educated cultural consumers benefit disproportionately from arts funding because public support tends to favour participation in a narrow range of elite cultural pursuits (Chan and Goldthorpe, 2007). This has revived arguments about everyday culture and the normative assumptions over what forms of culture are 'good' for people, and thus what the state should support (Taylor, 2016).

A specific element of the intrinsic versus the instrumentalisation of art debate is the conflation of arts and creativity with economic growth and wealth creation (Garnham,

2005; Oakley, 2009; D Bell and Oakley, 2015). This was spurred by the formalisation of the creative industries under New Labour in the UK (O'Connor, 2010; Hesmondhalgh, 2013). In 1998, disparate business sectors such as advertising, architecture, publishing and digital media, and the performing and visual arts, were brought together under a common value framework by the newly created Department of Culture Media and Sport that reflected their growing importance for the economy and contribution to national wealth. It also demonstrated the value of the cultural sectors in economic terms, particularly to the Treasury (D Bell and Oakley, 2015). This had implications for the arts: artists as creative workers were seen as valuable economic agents as part of the wider discourse of the value of creativity to wealth creation (Oakley, 2009). Furthermore, arts institutions used instrumental arguments alongside their more traditional advocacy of artistic quality to further justify state funding (eg ACE, 2014). In so doing they undermined their case for the value of the arts (Garnham, 2005; Belfiore, 2012).

2.2.2 Cultural value and spatial unevenness

It has been argued that for the last 30 years, cultural policy has demonstrated an urban bias (D Bell and Oakley, 2015; A Miles and Gibson, 2017). This bias could be regarded as having two broad elements that coalesce around an urban imperative that casts the rural as lacking. The first is the urban as location for cultural infrastructure, from the iconic museums and art galleries of global cities (Hall, 2000; Kong, 2012), to the civic spaces of public art and cultural quarters that stimulate the regeneration of deprived neighbourhoods (L Gibson and Stevenson, 2004; Mommas, 2004; Vickery, 2007). The second, is the tangible and intangible infrastructure of economic growth and wealth creation such as creative clusters and the human capital that is attracted to them (A Scott, 2000; Florida, 2002; Evans, 2009). In terms of the first, policy suggests the rural lacks sufficient consumers, both in terms of numbers and cultural diversity (ACE, 2014), while its social problems are hidden, dispersed and marginal (Shucksmith and Philip, 2003). In the second, critical mass, agglomeration economies and cultural diversity act to marginalise the rural economically. These could be summed up as problems of scale and visibility (Woods, 2015) against which the rural with narrower, and more limited, account of cultural value appears to fall short.

Perhaps the most visible aspect of culture-led development policy that has drawn criticism for its spatial unevenness is the turn toward the ideas of the creative class. Originated by economic geographer Richard Florida, the thesis of the 'creative class' postulates that cities and regions need to attract highly educated, creative workers to drive prosperity (Florida, 2002). Cities also needed to nurture their creative capital so that the footloose creative class would choose to locate there, enticed by amenities such as a rich cultural milieu of artists' neighbourhoods and hipster bars, and underpinned by cultural diversity and tolerance. The discourse of the creative class and the creative city (Landry, 2000) has been influential with governments across the developed world as they seek to replicate identikit versions of urban bohemia, with its creative 'buzz' (Landry and Bianchini, 1995; Florida, 2002). It has been much criticised, for its elitism and one-size fits all approach (e.g. Peck, 2005), and for reducing the contribution of artists to being no more than the 'shock troops of gentrification' to quote artist Grayson Perry (2014, p.96); (Cameron and Coaffee, 2005). Markusen challenges the stereotypes of bohemian artists clustered in cool neighbourhoods in a few major cities, as 'overstated.' (2013, p. 492). Conflating artists with the rest of the creative class, such as lawyers, bankers or video-games designers obscures their distinctiveness as socially and politically motivated individuals (Markusen, 2006). And while artists need to make enough live on, and frequently live on low incomes (Baines and Wheelock, 2003; Luckman, 2012; Mahon *et al* 2018), they are not necessarily driven by economic motivations. Nor is the 'artistic dividend' that artists can bring to local areas confined to cities (Markusen, 2006 p. 482). Using analysis from the U.S. Census and the American Community Survey, Markusen has shown that 'artists do succeed in living and working outside of cultural industry-rich city centers' (*ibid*). Surveys of artists in Ontario, Canada have shown similar trends, linking artists' decisions to move to rural areas to life course events such as raising a family or retirement (Bunting and Mitchell, 2001; Mitchell *et al.*, 2004). In the UK, artistic production is relatively widely spread across cities of different sizes and regions (Mateos-Garcia and Bakhshi, 2016). However, other studies have shown that 'creative originals' are important for remoter rural areas and may represent a disproportionate share of 'the creative class' (Naylor, 2007).

In summary there have been two currents running through cultural policy in recent decades. These can be summarised as a critique of its instrumentalisation for largely economic purposes and relatedly, a critique of its spatial unevenness. In the Culture

White Paper of 2016, the UK government stresses the value of arts and culture to society and the economy while stating the government's continued appreciation of the intrinsic value of the arts. Policy should support a wide range of cultural production in places across the country declaring that 'what is local and unique has a special value and should be supported and encouraged' (p.13). There is a clear message that cultural policy should be increasingly devolved to localities through sub national governance arrangements including to national parks and areas of outstanding natural beauty, while supporting a better regional spread of funding for the arts. Yet it clearly advocates flagship cultural initiatives as continued opportunities for cities, and to link investment in cultural infrastructure to economic policy across city regions such as the Northern Powerhouse that it claims will deliver wider benefits to rural areas. This demonstrates a mainstreaming approach to cultural policy as far as rural areas are concerned, while others are less convinced that rural areas are being treated equitably.

2.2.3 Rural advocacy and cultural policy

Advocates for a counterbalance in policy – and funding – that acknowledges the perceived neglect of rural areas have continued to make their case (D Bell and Jayne, 2010). These have capitalised on a wider critique of the inequitable distribution of public support for cultural activities that was disproportionately focussed on London (Stark *et al.*, 2013). The Culture Select Committee report on Arts Council England, the body responsible for the subsidised arts, not only pointed out regional inequalities but suggested an imbalance between urban and rural provision (DCMS, 2014; 2016). For some time the Rural Cultural Forum – a coalition of rural cultural interests - has advocated for rurally distinctive cultural policy and funding across the creative spectrum from public art to digital creatives, contemporary crafts and even land based practices (RCF, 2010; 2012). Responding to the focus on cities as the locus of creative economies, the RCF called for a rural cultural strategy to quantify the rural contribution to the national creative economy and address research gaps. Arts Council England responded with a rural position statement in 2015. While it 'recognised the strength of the arts and culture in England's rural areas and communities', and acknowledged 'the richness and diversity of rural England' it did not consider the arguments sufficiently compelling to produce a bespoke strategy for rural culture (ACE, 2015). Instead it favours a mainstreaming approach to arts policy via rural proofing, delivering arts programmes

via partnership arrangements and a continued commitment to rural touring. In Scotland cultural policy has been devolved since Scottish independence in 1999, with arts support being delivered by Creative Scotland, a new body that replaced the Scottish Arts Council in 2010 (Stevenson, 2014). Here, similar concerns emerged over the instrumentalisation of cultural policy towards economic objectives in spite of the rhetoric of the Scottish government about the fundamental value of arts and culture to Scotland - a commitment made perhaps more strongly there than in England (Bonnar, 2014). In terms of rural areas, Creative Scotland has a policy of mainstreaming cultural support and in its review of the visual arts sector (2016) drew attention to the value of the arts to rural place shaping through socially engaged practices. However, the key issues in cultural policy in Scotland have tended to give weight to the importance of Scottish identities through revived support for Gaelic language and traditional arts rather than rurality *per se*, amidst the hope that devolution would deliver a step change in cultural policy in Scotland (Bonnar, 2014).

2.2.4 Cultural value: moving on

The AHRC initiative on cultural value in 2014 (AHRC, 2014) was an important attempt to move forward the various debates outlined above (O'Brien and Lockley, 2015). It aimed to insert some objectivity and academic rigour into the value of 'people's engaging with and participating in arts and culture' and to distance itself from the policy discourse about public support. Informed by newly commissioned academic research including 19 critical reviews, it argued that the 'centrality of experience offers one means to by-pass the definitional contest, and draw together some of the diverse strands' (p. 21). It defined cultural value as:

The value of art and culture...associated with people's engaging with and participating in art and culture. These latter are defined through examples, that is to say...they include: theatre and dance; film; visual arts; photography; literature; storytelling; music; monuments and murals, as well as museums, archives, tangible and intangible heritage, and more.' (AHRC p.13)

Conceptually, experience of arts engagement offers a pivot point around which other components of cultural value would coalesce, although by way of qualification it argues that 'we do not wish to imply that each of the components has a symmetrical relationship to the cultural experience itself (*ibid*). Economic impact for example being less directly connected to experience than say aspects of personal wellbeing

derived from cultural engagement. Figure 2.1 illustrates the components of cultural value in relationship to experience as a conceptual diagram.

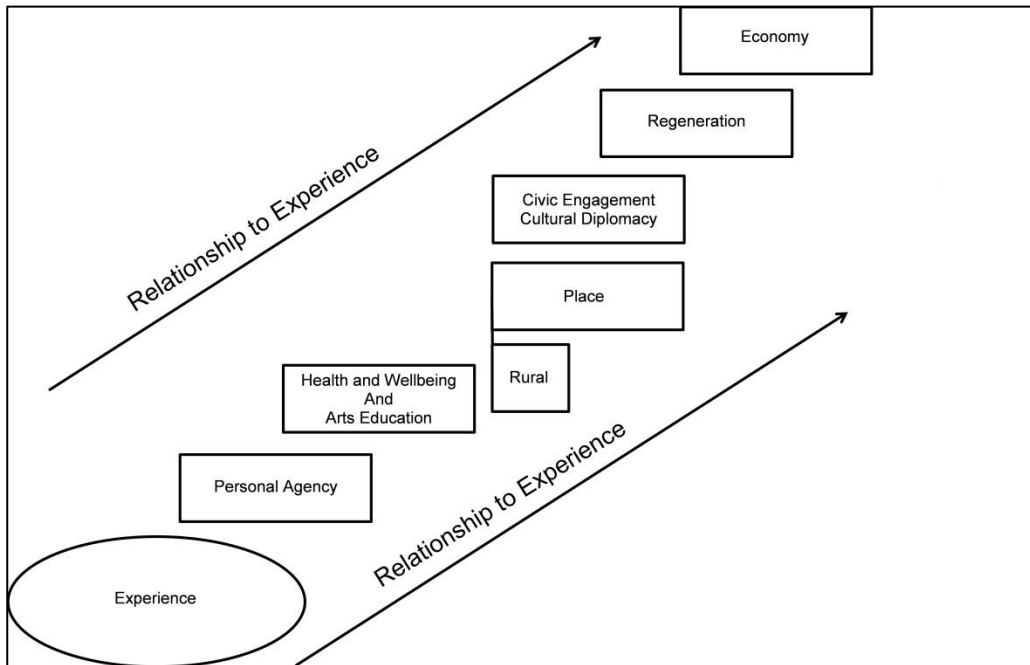


Figure 1 The components of cultural value in relation to experience.
Adapted from AHRC (2014)

In spite of its attempts to move cultural value beyond the discourse of contemporary cultural policy to a more academically informed analysis, a shortcoming of the AHRC cultural value report is its limited focus on cultural value in rural places, thereby failing to address the neglect of the rural as outlined above. This spatial blindness regards the rural as a sub-set of urban cultural value and neglects the vernacular and specific distinctiveness of rural creative expression (Edensor *et al.*, 2009; A Miles and Ebury, 2017; Argent, 2018). While there is much evidence in the report associating the value of arts and culture to urban regeneration and place making, through programmes of public art (e.g. Sharp and Pollock, 2005) it appears to consider the rural briefly, and largely through an urban centric cultural lens, arguing against notions of rural distinctiveness. In so doing it falls in what Woods (2015) refers to as ‘the conceptual trap’ of translating urban models of creativity to a rural setting. It regards the arts in rural areas as following a distinctly urban trajectory, with creatives from cities frequently migrating to rural areas to establish creative businesses. Moreover,

audiences in rural areas are similar to those in cities; while cultural provision by local authorities often reflects the fact that major cultural infrastructure that exists in cities will be accessed by rural consumers. In other words, there is an interdependency between urban and rural areas, rather than anything distinctive about rural provision or embedded cultural value through local creative expression (Argent, 2018). The report cites examples of the value of touring productions that visited rural venues and the ways in which these offered very different arts experiences to urban arts professionals through intimate performance spaces and the dynamics of close knit communities (Matarasso, 2004; see also Gkartzios and Scott, 2015). Yet this is still couched in terms of a relationship with urban creativity that ‘connected communities with the mainstream of current cultural life’ (p. 84) suggesting the compass of mainstream culture exists elsewhere, leaving the rural as a cultural residuary of ‘non-creative places’ (Rantisi, 2006, p. 1794). This theme will be picked up further in Section 2.3. The next section briefly considers the central focus on experience in the AHRC work on cultural value and as a method for investigating empirical accounts of it (Kaszynska, 2015) (see Methodology Chapter 4). In order to do a brief overview of phenomenology is presented below.

2.2.5 Cultural value and experience

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to knowing and understanding the social world, and a discipline or methodology (Dowling, 2007). It is concerned with first person experience as it presents itself to consciousness, and is based on the broad philosophical idea that reality is based on ‘pure’ experience (J Smith *et al.*, 2009). Husserl is recognised as the ‘founding father’ of phenomenology establishing its core principle of understanding experience as always being ‘experience of something’ or intentionality, and ‘in its own terms’ (Moran and Mooney, 2002). This means stepping outside everyday experience or ‘natural attitude’ to get at the ‘essence’ of that experience, with its core structures and features, as a foundation of reality (J Smith *et al.*, 2009). Heidegger, who was a pupil of Husserl’s developed a branch of hermeneutic phenomenology that insisted on human beings’ experience of the world as being indivisible from the meaning of that experience. It also acknowledges that experience is located in human intersubjectivity: literally the ‘shared, overlapping and relational nature of our engagement in the world’ (*ibid* p.17). The idea of intersubjectivity was also developed by Shutz in his phenomenology of the social world, or sociological phenomenology (Shutz, 1962; Kaszynska, 2015). In arguing for

a return to a phenomenological understanding of cultural value, 'shaped by first-order experiential data' Kaszynska argues for 'putting first person experience back into theories of cultural value' in order to provide 'a better account of the actual experiences on the basis of which judgements of cultural worth are made' (*ibid*, p.263). Drawing on work by Hall (1983) she suggests that experience has been ignored in favour of structural accounts of the way culture works in society, because cultural theorists have been suspicious of phenomenological approaches on the basis of a 'naïve humanism' that ignores the fact that 'men are born into determinate conditions' (*ibid* p.258). Furthermore, in terms of cultural policy, accounts of empirical experience have been casualties of the emphasis on measurement and provable impact in policy within an instrumentalist discourse of cultural value.

In summary, cultural value remains a contested concept that struggles to escape its political context. The initiative by the AHRC has brought fresh perspectives to long standing arguments, including reasserting the value of first person experience of arts and culture within a discourse of cultural value that has been focussed on the dichotomies of instrumental versus intrinsic value. Yet it has shortcomings; by its own admission it has largely ignored the rural other than in relationship to urban cultural provision and access. As a point of departure and an indication of the diversity of rural creativity, the next section reviews the literature on rural cultural value as indicative of sustained and maturing interest in 'rural creative expression' (Argent, 2018).

2.3 Cultural Value, Creative Practices and the Rural

Increased academic interest in rural creativity has been prompted by Florida's creative class ideas and an attendant interest in creative cities (Argent, 2018). Led by Australian cultural and rural geographers (see eg C Gibson, 2010) this sparked a 'first wave' of rural studies (Argent, 2018 p.2) where the focus was principally to highlight rurally distinctive responses to creativity led development models in urban locales. For example, the identification of a creative class in peripheral areas of the United States has been linked to the availability of outdoor amenities that persuade creatives to trade off city buzz for rural quality of life (McGranahan and Wojan, 2007; McGranahan *et al.*, 2011). Similarly, Verdich's study of what attracted the 'creative class' to Launceston Tasmania (2010) found similarities in that it was the attractions of 'outdoor amenities, proximity to the natural environment and a strong sense of

community' associated with small and rural town living that were favoured over more cosmopolitan factors. Ethnographic studies of a creative cluster in Cornwall meanwhile identify its role within a complex and dispersed 'ecology' of the creative industries, and its connections within and beyond the locality. Acting as a creative incubator, the cluster is presented as a rural response to an urban model of development (Harvey *et al.*, 2012). Bell and Jayne (2010) identify diverse sectors of the creative industries and their contribution to rural economies in their study for Shropshire County Council. They argue that 'while the creative industries are now being seen as important rural resources and key to reimagining rural economic and cultural life' (p.218) more research is needed to understand their distinctive opportunities and limitations. In Scotland at least, it is suggested that the digital promise of a creative transformation of the rural has not been realised (*Anderson et al.*, 2016).

Argent's 'second wave' identifies an interest in the role of culture in as part of an endogenous development paradigm for regenerating rural regions, based upon community-led, bottom up development, the nurturing of social capital and the valorising of local cultural assets, for example traditional foods, crafts and visual arts, nature and landscapes. The latter became defined by Ray as the 'Culture Economy' (Ray, 1998; Ray, 2000), depicting the ability of a local territory to capitalise on its cultural 'system' and network of actors to spur development in order to promote it to outsiders. This would encourage entrepreneurialism, attract development resources, develop social capital and enhance community capacity to act: ideas that have informed initiatives such as the EU Leader programme within Pillar 2 of the CAP (Shucksmith, 2000; 2012). However, not all localities are endowed with the right 'assemblage' of factors, and these can hide inequalities and the effects of unequal power relations (Shucksmith, 2000). Problems of introspection and close knit social ties can act as barriers to opportunity (Atterton, 2007) while internal capacities within rural areas may exclude some from endogenous development processes and decisions, while privileging those with high levels of social capital (*ibid*) . Argent (2018) highlights the difficulties of reconciling community development interests with (external) top down place marketing strategies that support development interests while claiming to benefit local economies. Bell and Jayne (2010, p.212) caution that valorising local culture can lead to cultural conservatism (Ray, 2006a) or 'cultural cringe' that homogenises rural cultures around notions of the rural idyll for the benefit

of dominant development interests. Bunting and Mitchell (2001, p.282) describe the situation of artists' 'economic exigency' in marginalized rural places, i.e. art being produced out of economic need, whereby the professional status of the artist becomes of secondary relevance to selling art or to including the arts in local economic development strategies.

2.3.1 Expanding the horizon of rural cultural value

There is now a maturing of the focus on cultural value that goes beyond earlier ideas of the rural cultural economy with its narrow focus on place branding and marketing, to more nuanced analyses of the contribution of arts and culture, including rural creatives, to rural places and communities while at the same time shifting the focus of attention away from urban models of regeneration (Bell and Jayne, 2010; Woods, 2015; Argent, 2018). This has brought a diverse range of studies to rural scholarship on the non-market aspects of rural creative expression as a maturing of rural scholarship within a cultural value perspective broadly speaking (e.g. Anwar McHenry, 2011; Luckman, 2012; Roberts and Townsend, 2015; Crawshaw and Gkartzios 2016; Scott *et al* 2018). Roberts and Townsend employed a resilience lens to examine the contribution of rural creatives in remote areas of Scotland, including digital creatives, artists and musicians, to the capacity of rural communities to withstand shocks, adapt to change and take advantage of opportunity (p.201). This 'adaptive capacity' has several key components including high levels of social capital, community leaders who can mobilise activity, plug in to extra local networks and attract resources, plus a positive community attitude (S Neumeier, 2017). The study found that creatives often brought new skills, ideas and energy, contributed to community initiatives and acted as community leaders. They also helped diversify the economic and demographic makeup of the places where they lived and worked, thought to be important to the resilience of rural communities (Ray, 2006a). Similarly, Balfour *et al* (2016) argue that arts based development has the potential to ignite 'a creative fire' in rural localities with the right conditions: this includes arts based venues, networked capacity of the local community, infrastructure such as creative business incubators, together with the availability of quality local amenities that attract rural entrepreneurs, and a supportive policy environment. They identify positive community attitudes to risk taking, tolerance and inclusion as important intangible factors. An interesting observation that is touched upon in the academic literature is the collective pride of the community or 'sense of place' and its

relationship to rural cultural production. McHenry (2011) found in her case studies of small rural settlements that the arts strengthened a sense of place and community identity. This sense of place resides both within rural creatives, who 'value the communities they live in' (see Luckman, 2012) and is expressed through cultural events and activities that can 'contribute to a community's identity and enhance inhabitant's place value' (Roberts and Townsend, 2016, p.214). This quote from an arts practitioner who set up an arts festival exemplifies how resilience and place may be connected:

'And so the festival is involved in stimulating the economy and providing opportunities for that economy on a voluntary basis as well as trying to provide some glue to the community'.(p.14)

However, the same person also observed that 'one of the things I was criticised for at Easter was that I was turning the island into a venue', suggesting that 'sense of place' may encompass hidden power relations and struggles over place identities (*ibid*) (Mahon and Hyrylainen, 2017).

2.3.2 Arts practices in the rural

As argued in the Introduction, the experience of arts practices, or 'what art does in practice' is underexplored in rural scholarship (Crawshaw and Gkartzios, 2016). However, there is an emerging body of research beginning to address this shortfall that moves art from being 'a central element of endogenous development' (Argent, 2018, p.3) to more nuanced understandings of the agency of 'rural creative expression' in rural places and its effects (Crawshaw and Gkartzios, 2016, forthcoming; Scott *et al*, 2018; Mahon and Hyrylainen, 2017). These studies are paying greater attention to the cultural value of engagement in arts practices as understood by AHRC. While drawing upon first person experience, these studies are still framed in terms of their contribution to rural development, albeit a more holistic understanding of the tangible and intangible elements that enables rural places and communities to flourish. Work on subjective wellbeing highlights how cultural engagement can enhance individual identities as part of human flourishing. For example a study of The Spiral Gallery in Bega - a small rural town in Australia - looked at how the experience of involvement in a co-operative art gallery run by women helped them reaffirm their creative and personal identities (Waitt and Gibson, 2013). These identities ran counter to the prevailing narratives of the economic

mainstream that were largely patriarchal – Bega’s principal industry is cheese production from local dairy farms. Furthermore, the Spiral Gallery helped to create a distinctive arts culture in the town, one that was personal and embedded and reflected the women’s creative choices; they had a diverse range of artistic practices, including textile production, ceramics and papermaking. This was in contrast to the regional art gallery that was felt to be catering for established metropolitan artistic tastes.

Arts practices can be vehicles for communities to engage in processes of change. Crawshaw and Gkartzios (2016) use an ethnographic study of community engagement with ‘relational’ artistic practices on Holy Island, North East England to show how experience of engaging in those practices enabled community members to engage in discussions about environmental change and articulate choices about the future of the island. Their analysis of the project through a community development framework argues that the arts ‘reads the community’ and as such can be a valuable diagnostic tool for rural community development. Scott et al.’s paper (2018) uses a social justice framework of wellbeing developed by Nussbaum in relation to people’s experience of engaging in ‘the everyday practices of small cultural (arts) organisations’ in two Northumberland villages (p. 176) as a way of conceptualising cultural value within rural development through the lens of wellbeing. Within Nussbaum’s framework the experience and meaning people derive from arts engagement was linked to the development of capabilities. Using data from Northumbrian Exchanges² they constructed a conceptual mapping that aims to ‘provide a clearer normative basis for understanding the intrinsic value of culture in rural development’. The authors argue that the long term embeddedness of the arts organisations in their rural locales provided ‘fertile ground for considerations of rural cultural value’ beyond short term evaluation of arts impacts, as the organisations interrogated ‘the changing nature and complexities of the rural’ (p.177). The paper argues (in the rural context) that art develops confidence and conviviality, ‘allows people to critically examine complexities and conflicts of (rural) place and community’ and can broaden peoples’ view of the world through encountering different cultures and lifestyles, including the ‘otherness’ of the artists with their different identities, values and social networks (p.178). The authors recognise, however, that access to

² Northumbrian Exchanges investigated the sustainability of rural arts organisations and was research funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council between 2011 and 2013.

culture remains mediated through social relations that are frequently unequal, reminding us of the importance of social context when thinking about the value of culture. The paper introduces the idea of 'everyday practices' such as the socially engaged arts practices of the organisations in the case studies to inform its social justice perspective. However, the specificities of those practices are not described, although one might imagine, and the authors argue, that some visual art, and artists 'puts residents outside their comfort zone' (p.179) a disruption to established ways of thinking that arguably can catalyse new perspectives and capacities (Crossick and Kaszynka, 2014; Grisoni and Page, 2014). Although the authors anchor their arguments conceptually within the rural development context, they acknowledge limitations of Nussbaum's framework in that it 'does not really speak to notions of 'place, belonging and identity' within understandings of cultural value, being focussed on individualised capabilities. Finally, Gkartzios and Crawshaw (2018) describe how an artist-led 'walk shop' as an example of the practice of 'walking as method' or a *peripatos* helped mediate between housing/planning experts and local community in a contested post-industrial site intended for housing near the market town of Berwick upon Tweed.

The previous section has foregrounded the growing interest in arts and cultural practices as a maturing of the interest in non-market creative expression within rural scholarship. Chapter 3 will return to arts practices in more depth as a contextualisation for the contemporary arts practices that are the focus of this thesis, and their relationship to rural places.

2.4 Rural in Context or what is 'Rural'?

The next section now considers the rural as a location in which art is experienced whereby arts practices are contextualised within the social interactions of everyday life, with its material, social and symbolic practices (O Jones, 1995; Leipins, 2000; Throsby, 2001; A Gray, 2002; Halfacree, 2006b; A Miles and Gibson, 2017). The rural is not simply a spatial container in which art happens, but is an integral component of the creation of cultural value, a cultural idea that conditions lived experience and action. Furthermore, I would argue it is necessary to situate contemporary visual arts practices within notions of rural space because the rural is a powerful cultural idea (in a British context) that has material and discursive weight (Cloke, 2003; Halfacree, 1993; 2006b, Heley and Jones, 2012).

2.4.1 Understanding the rural

It is fair to say that the question of what is rural has exercised rural scholars for more than 40 years with no clear consensus (Hoggart, 1990). There is a continuum of approaches: from a positivist perspective that understands the rural as bounded territory in relation to the urban, defined through a set of measurable variables such as population density and proximity to urban centres (Cloke, 1977; Cloke and Edwards, 1986) to a post structuralist understanding of rural space as a set of flows and networks, comprising human and non-human elements (Murdoch, 2000; 2003; 2006; Heley and Jones, 2012). In this relational view the rural is dynamic and fluid, comprising constellations of social relations and assemblages connected into global networks, (Massey, 1994; Woods, 2007; L Jones *et al.*, 2018), yet retaining heterogeneous and distinctive identities that solidify in rural places, influenced by discursive practices and actors' social constructions (Woods, 2007).

2.4.2 Social constructionism and the Cultural Turn

Social constructionist perspectives on rurality led to 'a turn to the cultural' in rural studies in the 1980s and 90s (Cloke, 1997). This renewed interest invited 'study of how practice, behaviour, decision-making and performance are contextualized and influenced by the social and cultural meanings attached to rural places' (Cloke, 2006, p.21). Similarly, Leipin's framework for reading rural communities conceptualised the interaction between place, meaning, community and the performance of everyday cultural practices as essential to understanding multiple constructions of the rural and community (Leipins, 2000). Thus actors construct multiple ruralities, or meanings of the rural, frequently divorced from actual rural places and ways of life. Often these are idealistic versions of rurality in post-industrial societies linked to a lost idyll (Bunce, 1994; Bunce, 2003; Short, 2006). The idea of the rural idyll as a normative ideal and persistent cultural trope has been reproduced through multiple representations or discourses of the rural including through arts and culture. Not only has it influenced how the rural is perceived and imagined, but how actors' behave in pursuing an idealised idea of rural living (Halfacree, 1995; Woods, 2011). This is considered further below in Section 2.5.

More recently how performance as a cultural practice helps make and remake rural identities is a more contemporary variant on the cultural turn within a social

constructivist orientation (Edensor, 2006). Criticism of the focus on culture within rural studies included its neglect of wider social and political issues and the material reality of the rural for those excluded from rural services, governance and networks (Philo, 1992; 1997; Shucksmith, 2000; Commins, 2004; Shortall, 2004). Cloke's imbrication was for researchers to both 'look in from the outside' and from the 'inside out', balancing analysis of structural influences with understanding cultural experience in situ (*ibid*).

2.4.3 Networked rurality

Research by Marsden *et al* (1993) and Murdoch *et al* (2003) took a network perspective that analysed how locally situated social constructions of rurality interacted with wider structural forces. They argued that responses to rural restructuring were resulting from wider processes of globalization that had led to the 'decline of agricultural productivism and its corporatist structures' (1993, p.185). However, these responses were mediated locally through a 'complex assemblage of economic, social and political elements (1993, p.185). Using land as an analytical prism they identified the 'variegated spatial impact of social and economic restructuring and its coincidence with different local systems of regulation and social relationships bound up with the land development process' (Marsden *et al*, 1993, p.184). Their analysis under the Countryside Change programme produced a four way typology (of the British countryside): namely the preserved, contested, paternalistic and clientalist (Marsden *et al.*, 1993; Murdoch *et al.*, 2003). Focussing on land brought into view political representations, class politics and social change. However, the cultural constructions of the rural at work here are only hinted at in the authors' early work and relegated to a sub section of economy and society in their final report. For example in the preserved countryside, it can be argued that middle class people moved to the countryside from the city because it was socially constructed as a 'better' or idealised way of life (Halfacree, 2006a), one which they sought to defend against development through the planning system. Similarly, in the paternalistic countryside, it can be argued that the cultural values of the owners of landed estates embodied specific social constructions of long term stewardship that are expressed through land tenure and management. A critique of *the Differentiated Countryside* (Murdoch *et al.*, 2003) is that it failed to recognise the differentiated cultures of rural areas including actors' cultural identities and constructions of rural space within wider rural responses to global change (Cloke, 1993; Woods, 2007;

2018). Secondly, that in focussing on land use, it over-emphasised agriculture as a major factor influencing rural development and change. I return to this theme in Chapter 8 in presenting the findings of the empirical material.

2.5 From Rural Space to Rural Sense of Place

The previous sections have foregrounded different approaches and understandings of rural space, that on the one hand is territorially and materially located, while being constructed discursively and understood as networks of global flows. Yet relational theories and spatial definitions, while remaining useful conceptualisations do not reveal within their 'black boxes' the power relations implicit in the construction of rural identities.(Frisvoll, 2012), nor the process of identity construction (Twigger-Ross and Uzzel, 1996). To do so requires moving from abstract concepts of rural space, to consider the agency of rural place (Agnew, 2011). As Cresswell puts it: 'places are 'spaces that people have made meaningful' (*ibid* p.7). Agnew (1987; 2011) offers the concept of a 'sense of place' as actors' subjective and emotional attachments to place. This is in contrast to more functional understandings of place as location – where a place is located, ie on a map with co-ordinates and typologies, as exemplified by formal definitions of rurality (eg.OECD, 2006; ONS, 2011) and place as locale – 'the material setting for social relations' (Agnew quoted in Cresswell, 2004 p.7), Thus the rural has certain material characteristics e.g. farmland, woods and trees, open spaces, vernacular architecture that is 'traditional'; absence of dense development. Location and discursive representations of rural space are experienced by actors in their everyday lives as place (Halfacree, 2006b). Sense of place implies that places are experienced and lived in, as 'profound centres of human existence' (Relph, 1976. p.43, quoted in Cresswell, 2004 p.23).

Sense of place is thus particular and personal, as opposed to space, which is objective and universal (Agnew, 2011). Actors may experience a strong attachment to specific places comprising many elements (Graham *et al.*, 2009). In a rural context for example through attachment to the land and its practices as embodiments of rural identities and continuity (Mansfield, 2012; Woods *et al.*, 2012). Similarly, sense of place may be embodied in specific heritage features even at a micro scale, such as historic buildings in a market town, (Jiven and Larkham, 2003; Convery *et al.*, 2012) or even expressed as an intangible 'structure of feeling' (Williams, 1973, p.46) through notions of community, tradition and belonging (Savage *et al.*, 2005). We tend

to think of sense of place as a positive force against a changing world, yet sense of place may be considered reactionary, insular and inward looking, used defensively to preserve national identities or prevent wider change (Massey, 1991; E M Harris, 2010; Agnew, 2011). Thus it may also conceal acts of power in the construction of rural place identities (Frisvoli, 2012; Schaefer *et al*, 2017). A further critique of the notion of a sense of place is the perspective of place as placeless. The collapsing of distance, mobilities, and technologies such as the internet have produced increasing homogenisation between places, arguably erasing of notions of place altogether (Relph, 1976), a culturally disorienting phenomenon articulated by Harvey (1989) as space time compression.

In the next section I discuss the rural idyll, a longstanding cultural idea within notions of the rural that, it is argued, is central to actors' constructions of rurality, along with its antithesis, the rural as backward or peripheral, and finally an emerging discourse of rural cosmopolitanism.

2.6 The Rural Idyll

Perspectives on the urban and rural have developed and shifted over recent time (Urry, 1995). Firstly, from ideas of the 'character' of the city: encounters with strangers, space for personal freedom and heterogeneity contrasting with the rural of homogeneity, close knit 'folk societies', and stability, to more nuanced understandings of both. Literary theorist Raymond Williams in his classic text *The Country and The City* (Williams, 1973) captured the essence of the 'otherness' of the urban and rural in the English cultural experience in a much quoted passage:

'On the country has gathered the idea of a natural way of life: of peace, innocence, and simple virtue. On the city has gathered the idea of an achieved centre: of learning, communication, light' (ibid, 1973, p.1)

This 'otherness' is perhaps the essence of the rural idyll: indeed it is suggested that the rural idyll was invented in the city as a reaction by an emerging middle classes to the perceived evils of industrialisation in the 18th and 19th centuries, although the idea of a rural arcadia goes back much further to at least Roman times (Short, 2006). Nevertheless, it is perhaps the most abiding image of the countryside and one that has proved remarkably durable as a cultural marker of 'Englishness' with a powerful reach in landscape, art, literature and music, and contemporary culture (Bunce,

1994; 2003). The rural idyll constructs an idealised, nostalgic view of the countryside as a place of refuge and tranquillity, of community, a lost Eden and way of life. This has been expressed since the early 19th century as an aversion to modernity and industrialisation, an affinity with nature and wild landscapes (Short, 2006 , pp 138-141) with connotations of *gemeinschaft*: the close knit communities of an earlier era (*ibid*, p.141). However, there are variants that have developed over time and according to different geographies and national identities (Woods, 2011). In spite of the modernisation of the countryside, advances in telecommunications and mobile lifestyles, the rural idyll remain remarkably persistent (*ibid*). It could even be argued that it is because of such changes that the rural maintains its abiding popularity, the dependability of 'community' and purity of 'nature' providing fixed points of reference in an uncertain world, reinforced and reproduced as part of popular culture (Murdoch, 2003; Phillips, 2008; Woods, 2011). Hence, the countryside is constructed in our imaginations as an object of desire, the rural becomes aspirational, an image to be consumed (Woods, 2011). One has only to look at the popularity. of television programmes such as *Country File* or *Grand Designs* to see how the countryside remains a potent cultural emblem. This is notwithstanding the realities of 'rural dystopias': for the poor, ethnically different and the economically struggling, (D Bell, 2006; Sibley, 2006).

2.6.1 Rural idyll, power and peripheralisation

Hence, contemporary rural living may be far from idyllic, as satirised in the recent television 'mockumentary' *In the Country*. This 'anti-idyll' can also be seen as a discourse that constructs others those who do not 'belong' in the countryside (T Cresswell, 1996). Bell (2006) argues that 'the production of the rural idyll (as something that urban folk desire) depends on 'othering' forms of rural life that are out of place in such idyllisations, including, ironically, some city-dwellers (p.151). Shirley's analysis of the early work by photographer Ingrid Pollard highlights the hidden racism of the countryside as an example of an idealised rurality that is largely white and middle class, a 'passive apartheid' that constructs (in this case) a black artist as other (p.77). This is in contrast to the 'Romantic stereotype of the isolated and out of touch rural artist' (Luckman, 2012 , p.122) who argues for a more pragmatic idealism motivating rural artists' practices and location decisions.

This othering also constructs exclusions and peripheries that are both geographically specific and culturally constructed. In Denmark, for example, the 'Rotten Banana' denotes a curved area of the country that is geographically peripheralised as rural, and denotes 'an increasingly widespread belief that all rural areas are backward' (Winther and Svendsen, 2012 , p.466). Similarly economic peripheralisation of Cornwall (a largely rural county) within the South West region of England, constructs the (peripheral) rural as being in need of development from the centre, the agency of actors becoming marginalised socially and culturally as well as economically (Willett and Lang, 2017). In these accounts and in the 'othering' potential of the rural idyll, we are reminded of the exercising of discursive power in constructions of the rural (Shucksmith, 2018), and the potential for dominant identities of rurality to prevail (Woods, 2010a; Mahon and Hyyrylainen, 2017; Schaefer *et al.*, 2017).

2.6.2 Rural cosmopolitanism

In contrast to the associations of the rural as idyllic, parochial and exclusionary, where only certain people fit in, is emerging interest in a culturally open and more tolerant rurality encompassed in the concept of 'ordinary cosmopolitanism' (Johansen, 2008; Woods, 2018). This goes against the grain of common cultural perceptions of rurality enshrined in the rural idyll. As Woods puts it:

'The very coupling of the terms grates with engrained cultural sensibilities that have conventionally associated cosmopolitan traits of global engagement, cultural hybridity and openness to difference with the city, whilst portraying rural communities as insular, parochial, monocultural, and in short, non-cosmopolitan.' (p.2)

Increasing migration flows, and mobilities into and from rural areas, together with an understanding of the rural as networked and global space (Woods, 2007) allows for the possibility of an 'ordinary cosmopolitanism' of the everyday. This suggests changing attitudes and practices of living that become cosmopolitan over time, such that communities may become more open and welcoming to cultural diversity (Skrbis and Woodward, 2007). It also raises interesting questions: is the rural idyll a continuing component of rural cultures or is it becoming redundant as demographics, mobilities and cultural change play out through the practices and experiences of everyday living (Edensor, 2006)? It also suggests greater cultural diversity within and between rural communities and places, of heterogeneous place identities and place

specificities that argue for a more nuanced understanding of contemporary ruralities (Abram, 2003).

To sum up, this chapter has argued that cultural policy fails to account for rural spatial distinctiveness and has an urban bias. This bias could be regarded as having two broad elements that coalesce around an urban imperative that casts the rural as lacking. The first is the urban as location for cultural infrastructure; the second is the tangible and intangible infrastructure of economic growth and wealth creation. In response there has been a maturing of focus within rural scholarship on rural creative expression beyond considerations of the cultural economy and markets to more nuanced understandings of arts practices within a framework of cultural value. However the experience of arts practices in rural places remain under explored within rural studies, and is neglected within cultural policy studies because the rural appears to be little different to the urban in terms of cultural engagement, and cultural practices (AHRC, 2014). In spite of its limitations, this chapter argued for cultural value as a concept and as a useful heuristic for understanding the effects of arts practices in rural places through actors first hand experiences. It also argued for understanding the rural through a cultural lens, acknowledging that a cultural perspective on the rural has material, affective and discursive weight (Halfacree, 1993; Cloke, 2003; 2006b). The following chapter now considers contemporary arts practices in more detail as context for the three empirical chapters that follow where cultural value is explored through actors' first-hand experience of those arts practices.

Chapter 3 Exploring Contemporary Arts Practices

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of contemporary arts practices from the perspective of art theory as context for the three case studies in Chapters 5 to 7. It is not an exhaustive review, rather a pragmatic summary that draws together the main elements. First the chapter considers the question of what is contemporary art before moving to consider the 'turn to the social' that has been a hallmark of contemporary arts practices for the last 30 years or so. This is relevant to arts practices in rural areas as the empirical chapters will demonstrate. The chapter also takes a brief look at the difference between contemporary and community arts and at artist residencies as a model of working. The issue of the disruptive potential of arts practices is then considered; this was a sensitising concept that informed my research design and praxis (Charmaz, 2014 , p.30). Finally, the chapter locates arts practices in rural places as a link to the empirical chapters.

3.2 What is Contemporary Art?

A host of terms exist that describe contemporary art. These include 'recent, post-modern and modern' (J Harris, 2011 , p.8); connote a multiplicity of artistic mediums such as 'photography, digital media, film, installation and mixed media'; encompass the different ways in which artists engage with the public, and also include wider elements of the creative milieu of a place such as architecture and design (*ibid*). It also covers the elements of mass culture enabled through digital technology that have produced the 'DIY cultures' of platforms such as *You Tube* (T Smith, 2009). However, it is argued that a defining feature of contemporary art is the 'global context and conditions that have come to shape how artists now conceive, realise, manifest and attempt to sell and in other ways propagate their work' (J Harris, 2011 , p.8). Contemporary art can thus be conceived of as a complex global system that 'erodes pre-existing though still active localised systems' (*ibid*). This system is comprised not only of artists and their work, but the global art market, the institutions and intermediaries through which judgements are made about the value of art, the discourse about art that is produced and reproduced, and the 'public' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999). Smith (2009, p.33) defines contemporary art as on the one

hand being pre-occupied with global capital, the production of the artistic spectacle and celebrity artists, while on the other art that is enacted through a more localised arts practice that is 'concerned less with high art style or confrontational politics and more with tentative explorations of temporality, place, affiliation and affect'. Gone are the utopian dreams of contemporary art changing the world for the better, of art as a grand aesthetic or political project in favour of an art that is social, participatory and collaborative. It is also art that through its collaborative mode of production and dialogic relationship with its 'public' has changed the way in which the space of art is conceptualised or used (Papastergiadis, 2011). This includes the traditional museum or art gallery (Whitehead, 2012), as well as the vernacular spaces of everyday living, such as in a rural context, the town squares, village halls, farm buildings and fields of non-urban spaces (Edensor *et al.*, 2009; Shirley, 2015). The following section considers socially engaged or relational arts practices, and the spaces of art, as important fundamentals of how contemporary arts practices in rural places are characterised and experienced.

3.3 Relational Arts Practices in Place

Dialogic or 'relational' arts practices exemplify the changed relationship between the artist and audience from 'viewer' to participant. Conceptualised by Bourriaud (1998) as 'relational aesthetics' this is art:

'Taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interaction and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space' (p. 14) ... Where intersubjectivity does not only represent the social setting for the reception of art...but also becomes the quintessence of artistic practice.' (p. 22)

Bourriaud developed his thesis of relational art within the spaces of the formal art gallery or museum, arguing for the possibility of a more meaningful relationship between artist, audience and spaces of display (Bourriaud, 1998 ; Papastergiadis, 2011; Whitehead, 2012). Instead of the passive audience or viewer, relational art involves people as participants in the creative process. Hence, art becomes less about creation and consumption of aesthetic objects and more about a series of relational encounters between artist and audience, or 'moments of sociability' (Bourriaud, 1998). The art exhibition in the art gallery or museum for example becomes a 'place where momentary groupings may occur ... a specific arena of

exchange' (*ibid*, p.17-18). Bourriaud attributes the rise of relational art to the 'birth of a world-wide urban culture, and from the extension of this city model to more or less all cultural production'. In so many words this is a global urbanism that has resulted in an 'upsurge of social exchanges' and greater individual mobility, and subsequent 'freeing up of isolated places, going with the opening up of attitudes' (p. 14).

Contemporary art moves from being a space to be walked through, to a time to be lived through 'like an opening to unlimited discussion' (p. 15). Bourriaud's somewhat rhetorical claims that relational art is a 'radical upheaval of the aesthetic, cultural and political goals introduced by modern art' (p.14) were critiqued by Bishop. In a well-publicised essay Bishop takes Bourriaud to task for perpetuating the gallery as a space of exploitation, in which relational arts practices offer 'little to an audience enrolled in passive acts of spectatorship' (Bishop, 2012, p.2). This not the same as 'the creative rewards of participation as a politicised working practice' that, according to Bishop, characterises much relational art (*ibid*). Socially engaged practice thus extends beyond Bourriaud's ideas of relational art, and the 'social turn' has been a defining feature of contemporary arts since the early 1990s (Bishop, 2012, p.2). The term socially engaged encompasses a range of practices, artistic genres and ways in which citizens participate in art. Cautioning against the idealism of participation as social therapy or political emancipation within much cultural policy, Bishop concludes that the complex relationship between artist and participant is 'a continual play of mutual tension, recognition and dependency' (p.279) rather than an assumed relationship of equal proportions that delivers citizen control. Furthermore, powerful political ideals of disruption and change to the social order through arts participation are realised less often in reality than in the discourse that surrounds them.

Nevertheless socially engaged arts practices remains a defining characteristic of contemporary arts, albeit a more situated, and pragmatic endeavour than the utopian aims and confrontational politics of the recent past (Papastergiadis, 2011). As Bishop (2012) puts it (relational) 'art has to hand over to other institutions if social change is to be achieved' (p. 283).

A second defining feature of contemporary arts is its incorporation into the public sphere and the informal spaces of everyday life and community (Lacy, 1995; Kwon, 2004). Thus sites of creativity may be physical locations, such as a street corner, but also intangible, 'virtual', ones: 'a social cause, disenfranchised community, or political debate' (Kwon, 2004, p.3). A key aspect is:

'Use of everyday spaces, divested of civic pomp and power relations implicit in the gallery, to place as settings for interactive, relational arts practices: shops, plazas, car parks, market squares, hillsides, cafes, shop windows, woods, temporariness as much as permanence, performance as much as object, multiple authors in addition to the artist and curator' (Lacy, 1995, p.19).

Dubbed New Genre Public Art (NGPA), and incorporating the relational ethos outlined above, this is 'visual art that uses both traditional and non-traditional media to communicate and interact with a broad and diverse audience about issues directly relevant to their lives.' (*ibid*). Influenced by Marxism and feminism from 1960s onwards, NGPA claimed to be outside the mainstream of public art or the art market and was differentiated from public art *per se* both in its form and intentions. The latter encompassed sculpture and installations in public places that were characterised by spectatorship and display, corporate sponsorship and image creation, gestures of municipal pride in spaces that were clearly public, and visible (Lacy, p.21-25). There was minimal interaction with the public beyond consultation with civic groups. Visual artists collaborated with architects to produce work for public spaces, but 'without engaging audiences in a way markedly different from in a museum' (Lacy, p.23). New Genre Public Art focussed on social issues rather than the physical fabric of the cityscape and involved collaboration with marginalised social groups (*ibid*). NGPA was also experimental artistically departing from the traditional boundaries of media, to include installations, performances, conceptual art and mixed media.

Similarly, Kwon (2004) distinguishes three phases of public art over a 35-year history of public art in the United States: art in public places, art as public spaces and art in the public interest (p.60). The first involved grandiose municipal gestures of art for public display and civic pride, the second, was public art that sought greater functional integration within the fabric of the urban landscape for example through artists' collaboration with architects and urban planners, to art that foregrounded social issues and engaged communities. Tornaghi (2008) distinguishes between art in public spaces and art in the public sphere, the latter being public art that also raises social or political issues. New Genre Public Art, or relational art, would be at one end of a spectrum, actively engaging publics in processes of art making for wider social goals, and public art for display, civic pride and urban revitalisation might be at the other (Sharp and Pollock, 2005). As noted in Chapter 1, public art has been a notable feature of culture-led urban regeneration in cities throughout the world (S Miles and Paddison, 2005). There is much rhetoric around the extent to which public

art has been able to transform the fortunes of communities (Lees and Melhuish, 2012), or is simply a 'fig leaf' for gentrification and cultural commodification (Cameron and Coaffee, 2005). However, Bailey *et al* (2007) suggest the arts led regeneration of Newcastle Gateshead enabled communities to retain a sense of identity and belonging, the outcomes that New Genre Public Art perhaps envisaged.

In summary, participatory or socially engaged arts practice has now become part of the artistic mainstream) within a 'turn to the social' within contemporary art (Kwon, 2004; Papastergiadis, 2011; Bishop, 2012). It is, however, not without critique. Participation can be a palliative for the failures of the state to deal with social issues, being instrumentalised within cultural policy as part of a 'mission to enable all members of society to be self-administering, fully functioning consumers who do not rely on the welfare state (Bishop, p.14). Its claims to political and social emancipation can be exaggerated, while its idealism can:

'exacerbate uneven power relations, remarginalize ...already disenfranchised groups , depoliticize and remythify the artistic process, and finally further the separation of art and life' (Kwon, 2004, p.6)

However, Papastergiadis (2011) argues that:

'The discourse on the political significance of art is still trapped in a debate over whether or not it can make a distinctive difference in the overall social context...Is art only of value when it transforms or reflects the social? (p.285)

A middle way within contemporary arts practice has thus emerged whereby artists 'have sought to take an active role in social change, not by means of radical intervention nor critical reflection, but through new forms of public knowledge' (*ibid*). This conceptualises such processes of exchange as a form of mediation that enables a creative and democratic dialogue between 'local experience and global processes' (*ibid*) through place. Artists are neither (external) saviours of society nor taking from the local context solely to produce work for the global art market, but active agents inside 'the processes of social production' as people 'construct their own narratives' (p.286). The role of the artist then is to facilitate new ways of thinking and being. Within the contemporary arts system curators are also collaborators and facilitators of dialogue via an 'integrative critical language through which values, ethics, and social responsibility can be discussed in terms of art' Kwon (p. 43). Hence curators have adopted artists' relational practices and strategies, responding to social issues and

co-creating responses with audiences and the artists. Yet this may mask issues of uneven power relations through the invoking of a coherent community or communities of 'mythic unity' (*ibid*, p.7). There are also issues of how the 'community', however defined, relate to the decisions that are made about public art that purports to involve them. Kwon (p.117) asks: 'who decides what social issue will be addressed or represented by/through them, the artist? The community group? The curator'?

3.3.1 Community arts

Rather than 'common beings', we should think in terms of communities of interest or 'beings in common' 'as a more accurate conceptualisation of those who engage in the arts (Kwon, p.7). This suggests different communities of interest may have different experiences of, and perspectives towards, contemporary arts practices in rural locations. It also suggests that other kinds of arts practices may engage different communities of interest and helps to differentiate community arts from contemporary arts. Briefly, the next section considers what is meant by 'community arts' and how this category of (situated) arts practice might be distinguishable in intent and organisation from contemporary arts practices although in the nexus of participation and place there will be overlaps. The following summary of the purpose of community arts from 1984 could have been written to describe the relational arts practices that have been outlined in the sections above with little to distinguish between the radical ambitions of socially engaged contemporary arts practices such as New Genre Public Art, and community activism (Bishop, 2012). Hence community art is:

'The use of art to effect social change and affect social policies, and encompasses the expression of political action, effecting environmental change and developing the understanding and use of established systems of communication and change. It also uses art forms to enjoy and develop people's particular cultural heritages. Community arts activists operate in areas of deprivation, using the term "deprivation" to include financial, cultural, environmental or educational deprivation.' (Kelly, 1984, p.7)

In Britain the first community arts groups were formed in the 1960s (Bishop, 2012). Yet in origin they came from different ends of an arts practice spectrum while sharing similar radical ambitions. At one end, epitomised by the arts organisation, The Artists

Performance Group, artists were positioned at the 'nerve centre of decision making bodies' such as corporations and government bodies to 'impact on their thinking' rather than being concerned with grass roots activism and the political empowerment of marginalised groups in society (*ibid*, p.178). In the latter, artists worked with communities to produce art of the street: the murals, street theatre, festivals and videos of peoples' ordinary experience (*ibid*). Many of the community arts organisations founded in the 1970s and 80s have ceased to exist owing to difficulties with funding and governance (Kelly, 1984). Bishop (p.190) offers an interesting perspective on the difference between community arts and contemporary arts: the former has 'largely fallen out of historical memory', a criticism echoed by Kelly in that the community art movement never paid sufficient attention to it (Kelly, 1984, p.8), succumbing to a conflict between being countercultural and asking for state support (p.188). Meanwhile, the latter has successfully negotiated the creative spaces of socially engaged practices on the aesthetic terms that the art establishment understands, and supports. Yet there are still tensions between the two and an ongoing desire for practitioners within both 'traditions' to delineate their arts practices and intentions (*ibid*).

3.3.2 Artist residencies

Another feature of contemporary arts practices that facilitates engagement and situates artists and their work in specific (urban and rural) places is the concept of the artist residency. It is comprised of two broad ideas. Firstly that artists work in locations outside their normal practice geographically, and second that artists engage with a broad constituency of interest 'in place' (Stephens, 2003). This contributes to their professional development, and artists are usually, but not always paid for the time they spend in residence (although self-funded residencies have become increasingly commonplace³). The origins of the 'modern residency' (*ibid*, p.44) go back to the work of the Artists Placement Group in the 1960s, as a 'radical attempt to directly introduce visual artists as paid employees in the workplaces of factories, institutions and governing bodies' (*ibid*). Since then the model has spread to many countries⁴, and has many different orientations where the artist acts variously as

³ For example, Allenheads Contemporary Arts <https://www.acart.org.uk/residencies>

⁴For example, Kravin Rural Arts in the Czech Republic, <http://kra.land/>; Rural Residency for Contemporary Art, Italy, http://www.resartis.org/en/residencies/list_of_residencies/?id_content=7702

educator, facilitator and researcher (*ibid*). Residencies are a now a feature of many institutional and community settings in both urban and rural locations, offering a conceptual and practical bridge between global relevance and local specificity (Woods, 2010b). For example, the artist in residence programme at the Centre for Rural Economy in Newcastle University that is delivered in partnership with Berwick Visual Arts, invites artists to respond to salient rural issues through becoming resident for six months in Berwick upon Tweed in north Northumberland, North East England⁵. The artists come from a wide range of countries and creative backgrounds, and incorporate widely differing arts practices, variously engaging communities through their arts practices. The residency places the artist in the community as ‘researcher’ and practitioner (Crawshaw and Gkartzios, 2018). For example, artist Gemma Burditt (2016-17) explored issues relevant to contemporary dairy farming, ranging from disease and nutrients in the soil to current European policies and subsidies. Through conducting interviews with dairy farmers, she produced an animated ‘story’ of a dairy farm in a four-metre-long video installation that engaged a rural audience unfamiliar with contemporary arts practices.

3.4 Coda on Social Innovation and the Arts

The original idea for this research was to focus on the contribution of contemporary arts organisations to social innovation as an element of cultural value. This was inspired by my interest in the dynamic behaviour of ‘entrepreneurs in the ‘non-economic, non-urban, areas of society’ (Swedberg, 2008 p.33) and an interest in the claims of art to bring about change through processes of disruption (Hjorth, 2009; Bishop, 2012). Social innovation appeared to offer promise: as a process of social learning for realising innovation (Bock, 2012), an outcome manifest in changes in ‘social relations, peoples’ behaviour and norms and values’ (*ibid* p.58) or even the re-shaping of places (Andre *et al.*, 2009). In short how might arts organisations and their arts practices stimulate social transformations in rural communities or as Neumeier (2011) puts it, effect:

‘Changes of attitudes, behaviour or perceptions of a group of people joined in a network of aligned interests that in relation to the group’s horizon of

⁵ (<https://www.ncl.ac.uk/nes/research/projects/creartist-in-residence.html>)

experiences lead to new and improved ways of collaborative action within the group and beyond.’ (p.55)

After looking at the literatures on innovation and notwithstanding Schumpeter’s tempting invocation around artists as understudied element of innovation theory (Bryant and Throsby, 2006), I found my aims were difficult to frame as a hypothesis, producing a complex chain of (untested) causality with too many links. Increasingly, it rendered the rural as a container, rather than as an active agent of social interaction through situated creativity (Luckman, 2012). Furthermore, notions of community transformation were difficult to evidence without recourse to a positivist approach via measurement and indicators (Antadze and Westley, 2012). Owing to my interest in actors’ experience of contemporary arts organisations and practices, and an interpretive, qualitative approach to explore its nuances, I realised it would not be possible to reconcile the two. Hence I decided that I would focus on cultural value through the lens of actors’ actual experiences, with disruption as a thread or ‘sensitising concept’ (Charmaz, 2014 , p.30) (see Methodology Chapter 4). This influenced the research design and generated the research questions set out in the Introduction, and it resulted in the findings that are presented in chapters 5, 6, and 7. I return to social innovation and social entrepreneurship briefly in the Conclusions chapter of the thesis as a direction for future study. The next section discusses ideas of disruption in relation to contemporary arts practices.

3.5 Contemporary Art, Disruption and Cultural Value

In this section, I explore the ideas of disruption that informed the framing of the research as a ‘sensitising concept’ outlined above (*ibid*). This links to the coda on social innovation above and to the empirical chapters. I would suggest there is a thread that runs through the various discourses of cultural value that posits disruption as a potential outcome and process of encounters with arts and culture. For example, ‘public art provides opportunities for artists to reflect the world and how we see it as well as to provide moments of provocation and disruption’ (Creative Scotland, 2016, p.56) or in the AHRC report ‘cultural engagement provides the space in which disruption to established ways of thinking might safely take place’ (AHRC, 2014 , p.45). Disruption then suggests interruption and change, something that is ‘prevented from continuing or operating in a normal way’ (Collins English Dictionary). As Grisoni and Page (2014) put it in relation to the potential of arts-based enquiry:

'There are many possibilities in relation to how we think of disruption with all its destructive and generative potential for organising and sense making. Disruption can be thought of as an act of delaying, dislocating or interrupting continuity, creating a lacuna – a disrupted and liminal space where shifts in thinking, sense making and practice can occur, pauses held and surprising inserts made' (p.1).

Cultural value as a result of disruption may be seen as beneficial or positive, such as in individual accounts of wellbeing in relation to identities (e.g. Page *et al.*, 2014; K Scott *et al.*, 2018) but it may also be uncomfortable or difficult and counter to normative expectations of what culture is meant to do (AHRC, 2014). As mentioned in the previous chapter on the origins of cultural value, Belfiore and Bennett (2008) note the idea of cathartic disruption to the senses or emotions through art from corruption to moral corrective. The term 'creative disruption' has been applied to art that is politically disruptive: art as activism or counter culture whereby 'powerful ways of acting spring from powerful ways of seeing' (Lacy, 2010), or by inserting 'the practice of art into the social realm, bringing political issues to the very feet of (their) audiences' (MassMOMA, 2004). According to Bourriaud (1998)

'the subversive and critical function of contemporary art is now achieved in the invention of individual and collective vanishing lines, in those temporary and nomadic constructions whereby the artist models and disseminates disconcerting situations' (p.30-31).

Bishop (2012) conceptualises a 'double ontology' for contemporary arts in that subversive art performances and art enactments are events that communicate 'the paradoxes that are repressed in everyday discourse, and (to) elicit perverse, disturbing and pleasurable experiences that enlarge our capacity to imagine the world and our relations anew' (p.284). Hence the notion of the arts as building capacity for change would appear to run deep through the discourse of contemporary arts practices. An example of disruption through arts engagement in a business and managerial context is offered by Mellor (2015) through research that 'investigates artist projects that parody corporations with the aim of "identity correction", mimicking emerging business models with the intention of disrupting them' (Grisoni and Page, 2015, p. 110). Mellor argues that by processes of 'professional parody' arts practices:

'Actively interchange, deconstruct and recontextualise signs and symbols from business (for example the language and practices of managerial culture) by mimicking them, in order to challenge and create new connection.' (p. 94)

These could be seen as 'creative disruptions' whereby existing businesses practices and 'normal operation' are potentially interrupted. Mellor further tested her ideas with her own artistic intervention 'Mellor Management in Pontypool (2012-13). Pontypool is a former mining town in South Wales and as part of a wider artist residency Mellor's brief was to elicit views of residents about the town's failing town centre and explore possible community responses. Borrowing from corporate culture, Mellor set up a 'consultant's' office, to engage local people in dialogue and design potential solutions, including a temporary entrepreneurial space in an empty market stall. Mellor claims that her interventions as an artist were able to 'disrupt existing power dynamics (between the council and local community), facilitate innovative responses and offer a DIY, community-driven, problem solving methodology' (p. 12).

3.5.1 Disruption and cultural experience: an urban discourse?

Miles and Ebury (2017) argue that 'the grand narratives of modernity' are played out on an 'urban stage' (p.59) and I would argue that in the academic literature there is a spatiality accorded to affective and disruptive cultural encounters. According to sociologist Richard Sennet (1996), disruption is a necessary condition for change, for 'breaking apart' the 'state of absolute bondage to the status quo' (p. 134). Sennet argues that we become stuck in fixed, or 'purified' identities as a bulwark against uncertainty and the unpredictability of human existence, creating myths for ourselves of fixed and unchanging identities, where we 'know who we are', and of community solidarity. (Such qualities might be attributed to notions of the rural idyll). Only by engaging in the 'otherness' of the world - ceasing to hide from the unknown - and allowing the interpenetration of perspectives and experiences that are different from ours, are we able to gain the emotional resources needed to fully participate in society. Sennet's remedy for what he sees as 'a state of absolute bondage to the 'status quo' is a dose of anarchic urbanism:

'Only a complex environment can give the possible complexities of men's lives full play. Such a society can only arise in the diverse disorganisation of a dense city. (p.135)

Similarly, Landry reminds us that 'we need to perceive the city as a more comprehensively emotional sensory experience, so understanding its effect on individuals' (Landry, 2006, p. 2-3) while Thrift foregrounds the environment of the city as powerful affective territory (Thrift, 2004). Bourriaud goes further in declaring that:

'The city has ushered in and spread the tangible, hands-on experience enabling a particular 'state of encounter' as part of globalised culture and the ubiquitous cultural freedom and attitudes that attend the global city.' (p.14)

In essence these writers are implying that change and disruption are part of the character of the city while by implication, the rural offers settledness, lack of change and cultural homogeneity (Williams, 1973; Woods, 2018).

3.6 Arts Practices in the Rural

This section draws the threads together before moving to the Methodology chapter 4. It ends with repeating the research questions that were presented in the Introduction. It begins by looking backwards in time to the phenomenon of rural arts colonies at the end of 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries. It then introduces an example of a contemporary arts organisation in a rural location, Grizedale Arts as context for the empirical chapters. Artists seeking inspiration from the countryside is not a new phenomenon, whether it be Ruskin and Morris in the Lake District in the 19th Century, or Damien Hirst in the 21st. (Luckman, 2012). Tate St Ives owes its origins to the artists of the 'Newlyn School' who flocked to the Cornish countryside from the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries to capture the light, build upon an (often inadequate) art school training, and take advantage of inexpensive studio space away from the metropolis (Cross, 1994). Facilitated by improving transport links rural art colonies emerged in response to the 'geographies of nostalgia' associated with industrialisation and urban living (Gee, 2004, p.428). Artists came to rural places progressively over a number of years, arguably starting a process of rural gentrification as cultural tourists (Lubbren, quoted in Gee, 2004. p.428) (Hines, 2010). At their peak there were an estimated 80 colonies throughout Europe containing some 3,000 artists (Gee, 2004). Sometimes, the artists settled permanently, early examples of counter-urbanisation perhaps (Mitchell, 2004), while others passed through. Their 'insider outsider' perspective enabled them to respond creatively to the place and people while remaining connected to their art worlds and markets in the city (*ibid*, p.429). Usually their contribution is understood from the

perspective of art history, and there are few accounts of the first-hand experience of those people whose lives became caught up one way or another with the artistic influx, as landlords, artists' models or curious onlookers, although Lubben (quoted in Gee, 2004) records that innkeepers played a key role as cultural intermediaries between the artists as visitors, and the locals as the visited (p.429).

An increasingly mobile 'creative class' continues to locate in rural areas for artistic inspiration, although their ideas connote a more pragmatic idealism than allegiance to romantic visions of a lost Eden (Luckman, 2012). Most visual arts organisations are located in urban areas, arising out of a nexus of the location of art schools, the availability of professional networks and critical mass of artists and consumers (Communian and Faggian, 2014; D Bell and Oakley, 2015). However, not all are. For example, Grizedale Arts in the Lake District began as a theatre in the forest and as location for pioneers of the contemporary land art movement, such as Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy. A change of director, and direction, in 1999 brought contemporary visual artists to work in a more antagonistic way in the rural locality (Griffin and Sutherland, 2009). Through contemporary art they sought to disrupt or challenge idyllic notions of rurality and reassert the complexity of the rural as a modern and often contested cultural space with hidden problems and social issues (*ibid*) (Philo, 1997; D Bell, 2006; Little, 2015). The practices and ethos of the resident artists, especially at the beginning of the 'New Grizedale' sometimes resulted in 'a confetti of abusive letters from four corners of little Britain' in relation to 'work that was smart-arse, glib and no more relevant than what had gone before' (Griffin and Sutherland, 2009, p.22). Ten years later, there were encouraging signs that 'a working understanding is developing between the arts organisation and the community' (*ibid*, 2009, p.8). This is not an isolated example of a contemporary arts organisation located in a rural place, as the empirical chapters demonstrate. Furthermore, it is a reminder that artists and their practices can be controversial.

To conclude, this chapter has looked at contemporary visual arts as framing and context for the empirical chapters of the thesis. It has noted the positioning of contemporary arts as a global creative 'system' with local specificity, and discussed two elements in particular of the paradigm: the 'turn to the social' and the diversity of creative spaces for arts practices outside the gallery and museum. It has also considered the difference between community arts and contemporary arts, although there are clear overlaps, and noted artists residencies as a commonplace mode of

working for arts organisations. Lastly, most contemporary visual arts organisations are located in urban areas: However, not all are. In policy terms support for them is mainstreamed in England and Scotland (see chapter 2), although Creative Scotland notes ‘the challenges for the sector, including higher costs of transport, fewer spaces for making and showing work, and smaller, more dispersed populations’ (*ibid*, p.20). There is also little written about them in the academic literature, as noted by Shirley (2015) who observes that ‘cultural ventures that work to re-invigorate the rural, not simply as the subject of artworks but also as a site of artistic production are a significant area for future study’. This research helps to fill this gap through a close examination of three of these ventures through their practices of contemporary visual arts in rural locales.

I entered the field with the following research questions:

- What is the cultural value of contemporary visual arts organisations in rural places?
- How are contemporary arts practices experienced in rural places?
- How do contemporary arts practices have a disruptive effect?
- How is disruption experienced, by whom and in what ways?

In the next chapter, I set out in detail what I did to help answer them, and the rationale for the approach I took.

Chapter 4 Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This chapter begins by explaining the rationale for the research design I chose in relation to the research questions set out at the end of the last chapter. The practical aspects of undertaking the research were shaped fundamentally by my decision to adopt grounded theory as its methodological foundation. Throughout the sections that follow, I discuss and critique the grounded theory framework to explain the pragmatic choices that I adopted in carrying out the research. These include questions of underlying ontology and epistemology, such as the approach to theory building, and experience of the method in use, such as the role of the literature review; data collection, coding and analysis.

4.1.1 Choosing constructivist grounded theory

Consistent with the focus on experience outlined in the Introduction and in Chapter 2, and the resultant research questions, I chose a qualitative, interpretive approach to capture actors' differential experience of arts practices and followed an inductive research design, with no prior theory to 'test'. This led to my choosing grounded theory as a methodological approach. Grounded theory is not the only methodology that follows an inductive logic; many qualitative research designs do this (J Cresswell, 2009; Bryman, 2012). However, the defining feature of grounded theory is its explicit aim of developing theory that is 'grounded' in data, via processes of inductive abstraction, offering explanation rather than description, as might be the case with an ethnography. What counts as theory depends in part on the variation of grounded theory being adopted and will be considered further below.

Developed by sociologists Glaser and Strauss in the 1960s, grounded theory emerged as a rigorous framework for analysing qualitative data, that offered an alternative to the domination at the time of quantitative approaches and helped to answer a growing critique of qualitative methods (McCann and Clark., 2003; Charmaz, 2014). Over the years the method has evolved to embrace different philosophical and practical orientations along a positivist-constructivist continuum: from the positivist worldview of Glaser and Strauss that assumed an objective reality that could be discovered to the social constructivism of Strauss and Corbin, and later

Charmaz (all students of Glaser and Strauss) that understood the social world as being constructed by social actors (Lock and Strong, 2010; Rieger, 2018). These differences are more than semantic; they influence issues of research design and practice and are important considerations for the coherence of the research overall, including consistency with the researcher's own worldviews and epistemological choices (Rieger, 2018). Methodically, I followed Charmaz's social constructivist variant of grounded theory (Charmaz, 2014 p.12) and analysed my findings from within the data to produce a higher level account. Charmaz's approach fitted my research topic and research questions, which were:

- What is the cultural value of contemporary visual arts organisations in rural places?
- How are contemporary arts practices experienced in rural places?
- How do they have a disruptive effect?
- How is disruption experienced, by whom and in what ways?

The focus on actors' lived experience implied a methodology that was sensitive to 'first person' perspectives: how they described their experiences, the meanings they ascribed to those experiences and how these might be interpreted and understood. Furthermore, art and arts practices are concerned with meaning making, and arts organisations as facilitators of those practices play an active role in constructing the social and cultural worlds people experience. Constructivist grounded theory thus provided a good fit for the aims and objectives of the research.

All the variants of grounded theory share the same basic set of processes; in particular, the on-going iteration between analysis and data collection via processes of constant comparison, and the development of concepts to form categories via increasing levels of abstraction, to arrive eventually at a core concept or category from which to produce theory (see figure 2). Charmaz (2014, p.15) sets out five analytical steps as a minimum requirement of the method:

- Conduct data collection and analysis simultaneously in an iterative process
- Analyse actions and processes rather than themes and structures
- Use comparative methods
- Draw on data to develop new conceptual categories

- Develop inductive abstract analytic categories through systematic data analysis

4.1.2. What is theory in grounded theory?

According to Corbin and Strauss (2015), 'what makes theory different from descriptive qualitative research is the overarching structure that explains why things happen' (p. 12). Theory can be specific to a group or place (known as substantive theory) be applicable in other less specific settings (middle range) or have broader and deeper applicability across a range of social issues (formal theory) (p. 63). Charmaz regards theory as the 'practical activities of engaging the world and of constructing abstract understandings about and within it' (p.233). The approach to theory is thus pragmatic and practical, given its grounding in action, and less in the nature of 'grand theory' applied top down to explain large scale social phenomena. Charmaz distinguishes between positivist, and more interpretivist views of theory. The former aims to explain and predict, establish causation and emphasise universal truths, consistent with a more positivist worldview. Conversely, 'interpretive theories aim to understand meanings and actions and how people construct them' (p.230). I return to explanation and theory in the Conclusions Chapter 9 but point out at this stage that in exploratory study within an interpretive framework my research is more aligned with the latter than former position. However, there are also problems with this approach.

A critique of grounded theory is that with its focus on internal theorisation from within the data it fails to account for context, and wider structural conditions (Burawoy *et al.*, 2000). In the context of the research then, how could data driven theorisation account for the mechanisms and structural conditions that impact on the production of cultural value in a rural context (Sayer, 2000)?

Kaszynska sums up this dilemma. Drawing on the ideas of cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1987), she argues we need to:

'Think of culture as simultaneously tied up with subjective experiences, but also emerging from intersubjective interactions, which are in turn subject to social forces.' (*ibid* p.259)

'Description of subjective experiences alone, no matter how nuanced, is not sufficient to explain the mechanism of cultural value production and transmission' (Kaszynska, 201, p.262)

Charmaz' position on this question is pragmatic (2014, p.243):

'A contextualised grounded theory can begin with being attuned to sensitising concepts that address larger units of analysis such as global reach, power, and other sites of difference. This approach can end with inductive analysis that theorise connections between local worlds and larger social structures' (ibid p.243)

However, the 'fitness' of grounded theory to connect to wider social conditions remained a concern and I address the topic further later in this chapter, while the use of 'sensitising concepts' as an externally influenced orientation for a grounded theory study is covered in Section 4.2.

The next section introduces the second element of the research design, the use and selection of case studies. It is then followed by the practical elements of the research, starting with data collection, before moving to analysis and issues of research quality. As above, I frame the narrative in part within a wider critique of grounded theory methodology.

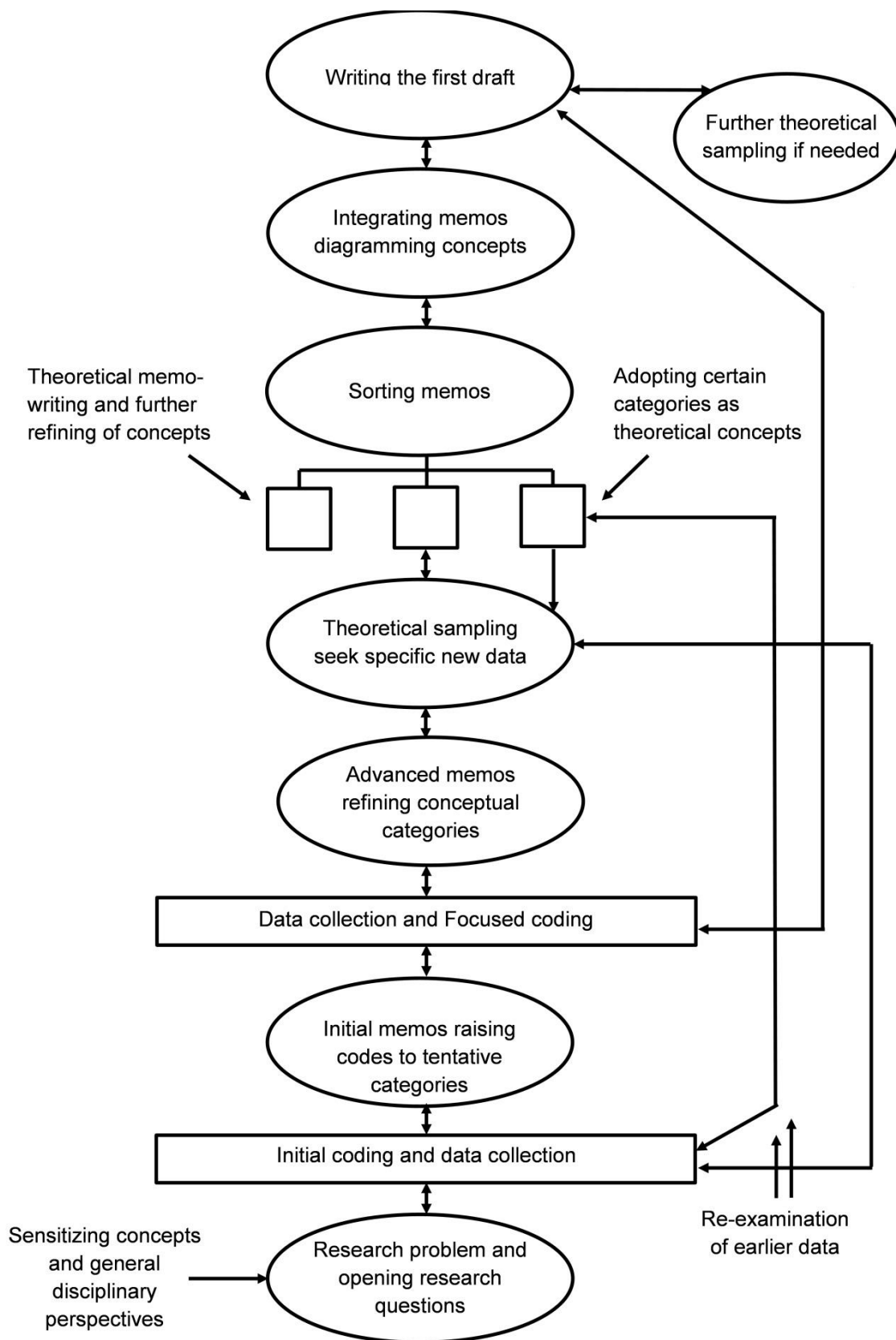


Figure 2 The stages of a grounded theory study
 (Reproduced from Charmaz 2006, p.11)

4.1.3 Case Studies and Case Study Design

I selected a case study approach because this allows real world phenomena such as arts practices to be studied in their specific contexts (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Yin, 2009). In relation to my study this allowed actors' experience to be contextualised in relation to the arts organisations and the rural 'places' where the arts practices were experienced (see below), thus overcoming some of the difficulties of context alluded to above. There are many different kinds of case study, depending on the purpose and epistemological orientation of the research (Bryman, 2012; Yin, 2014). One of the critiques of Yin's approach to case study is that its positivist leanings favour investigations framed by deductive reasoning and prior hypothesis, and thus exclude other research designs (Allan, 2003). This might seem contradictory to the approach of constructivist grounded theory, with its interpretivist epistemology to understanding actors' constructed worlds. However, other authors point out that there is no inherent contradiction in a qualitative, interpretive case study (eg. Stake, 1995). Hence I was comfortable with a case study approach and felt it was essential in order to study the 'real world' phenomenon of contemporary arts practices in rural locations.

Case studies can be single or multiple, with the latter offering potential for some kind of comparison across cases. Again there is no 'right' decision and it depends on the objectives of the research. Arguments made in favour of single cases include testing a significant theory or taking advantage of an opportunity to study some phenomenon that was previously unavailable to researchers (*ibid* p.51-53). I did not feel that one case was sufficiently unusual to justify exclusive attention, nor was I testing a specific theory or hypothesis. Nor did I choose to study one organisation over a prolonged period of time (longitudinal rationale) as in a conventional ethnography. Ethnography would have yielded rich data, and there are several good studies of cultural practices that have added to knowledge about cultural value in rural locations (eg. Crawshaw and Gkartzios, 2016; A Miles and Ebury, 2017). However, I wanted to allow for some empirical comparison across locations as part of the exploration of the cultural value of contemporary arts organisations and there were practical difficulties involved in carrying out ethnographic studies in more than one location. Choosing organisations in two countries in the United Kingdom also meant I could compare policy contexts. This argued in favour of more than one case study.

4.1.4 Case study selection

I selected originally four organisations to study. Table 1 set out the criteria for selection of the individual cases. Figure 3 shows their locations in England and Scotland. The criteria were derived in part from the literature and research questions but also informed by my previous experience and background in rural development and policy (see Introduction). As far as possible I wanted to find visual arts organisations that shared several characteristics. It was important for the organisations to be embedded in rural settings that were sufficiently distinctive from cities. Notwithstanding the leaning towards social constructionism in my methodology and its epistemological implications for understanding ‘the rural’, I needed a practical way of selecting arts organisations in particular kinds of rural places. This meant choosing locations that were classified as remote in the urban-rural definitions of England and Scotland⁶. I wanted the organisations to be embedded in those rural locations rather than having a temporary presence (such as touring theatre companies or orchestras). This included offering artists residencies as part of their arts practices. As mentioned in the literature review, through these residencies, arts practitioners spend varying lengths of time ‘in place’, responding to themes or commissions. Often they become temporary residents in those places. Hence they and their arts practices were likely to be visible to a greater or lesser extent and their practices experienced by rural communities beyond conventional gallery settings (Lacy, 1995). I was interested in contemporary art as a specific paradigm of arts practices rather than community arts, although the distinctions can be blurred (Bishop, 2012). Finally, I wanted to be able to observe current arts practices in addition to researching those that had taken place, and it was important that the organisations had live programmes of activity and were not facing closure (although this could not be guaranteed).

Having established these criteria, I identified several arts organisations to approach largely through web searching. The choice was also pragmatic in that there are not that many contemporary arts organisations in the UK based in rural areas. Two organisations were known to me, the other two (in Scotland) were not. One of the

⁶ Population less than 10,000. Isolated village or hamlet. More than half an hour from a major city by car (DEFRA urban-rural classification). Population below 3,000. More than an hour from a major city by car. (Scottish government urban-rural classification).

Scottish organisations came to my attention because of contacts made at an event attended by an artist from North East England, and she passed on the details. I contacted the Scottish organisations initially via e-mail, inviting them to be involved in the research. I followed this up with detailed telephone and Skype conversations. One of the organisations in North East England, Visual Arts in Rural Communities, was known to me from a previous project, but I made a fresh approach to the trustees to become involved in a new piece of research⁷. I selected four case studies in total. Owing to practical obstacles however, principally time constraints beyond my control⁸, one of two case studies in Northumberland (Allenheads Contemporary Arts) was abandoned after an initial pilot phase.

Criteria	Rationale	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3
England and Scotland	Enables research across different policy contexts	England Visual Arts in Rural Communities	Scotland Atlas Arts	Scotland Deveron Arts
Contemporary arts organisation delivering programmes of contemporary visual arts	Focus on contemporary visual arts as specific paradigm of arts practices Including artists' residencies if possible as part of socially engaged arts practices	Yes	Yes	Yes
In rural locations away from major cities, typically villages or small towns	Rural distinctiveness	Yes	Yes	Yes:
Embedded in rural locations, not temporary although programmes of art likely to be sequential	Arts organisations embedded in rural locations Ideally varying amounts of time offering comparative context. Engaged in current programmes of activity	Yes	Yes	Yes

Table 1 Criteria for case study selection, multiple case design

⁷ Northumbrian Exchanges was an AHRC funded project carried out between 2012 and 2014. It investigated the potential for knowledge exchange between small rural cultural organisations and Newcastle University. I was one of three Research Associates on the project, focussing on the sustainability of rural arts organisations that included VARC.

⁸ Observation of arts projects and programmes that were in existence or newly launched was a feature of the approach I wanted to take in all cases. However, one of the case studies in Northumberland did not secure a programme of residency based arts activity until well into year 3 of my PhD. This left insufficient time for fieldwork and analysis, and in consultation with my supervisors I decided to work with three arts organisations instead of four.

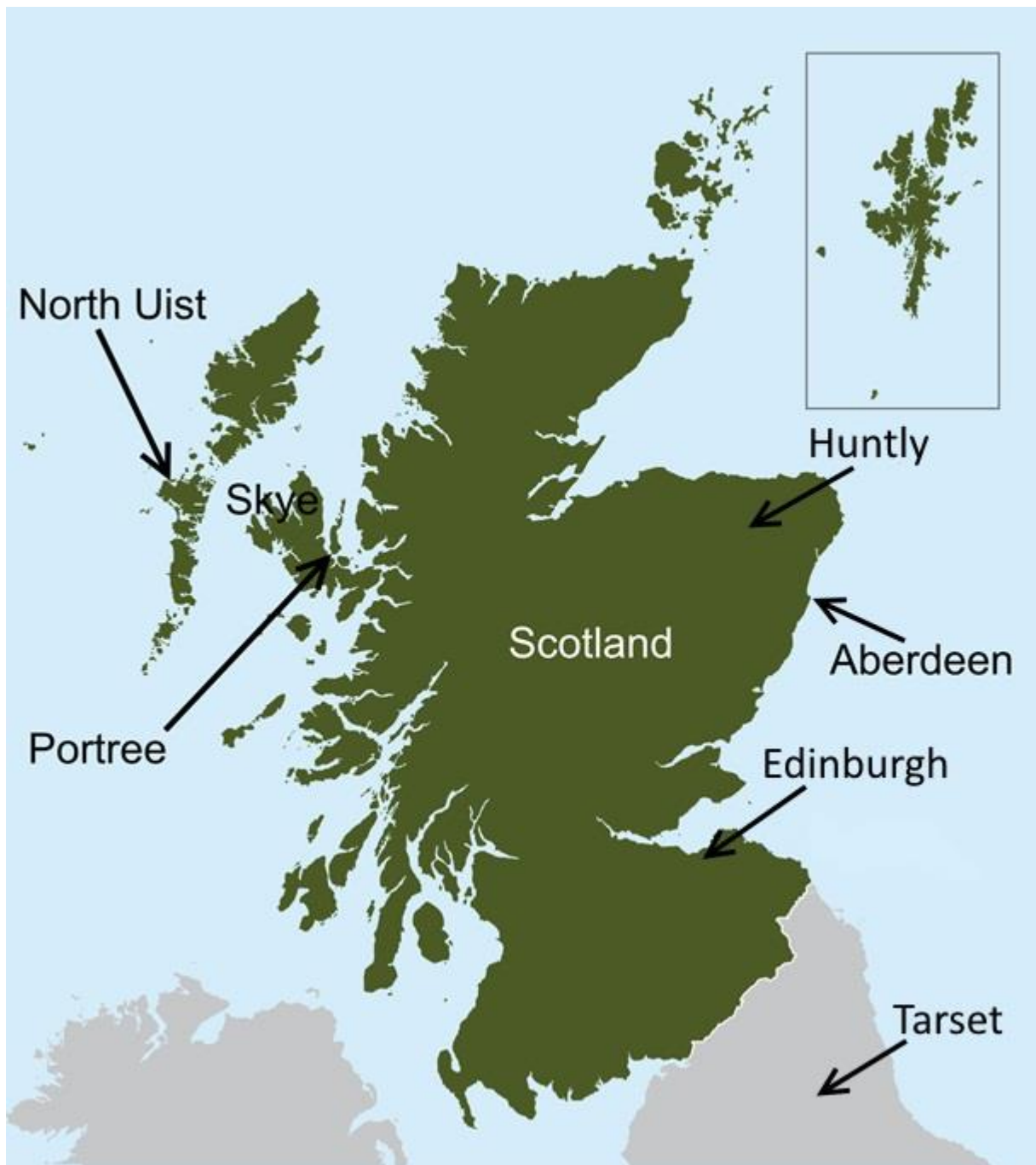


Figure 3 Map of case study locations
(Adapted from Maproom.net)

A further consideration was whether to focus on the arts organisations as a single entity, or ‘unit of analysis’, or to structure the case design to allow for study of ‘sub units’ (Yin, p. 53-56). For example, in studying a business organisation, a particular department or function might be a unit of analysis (p.55). Yin’s terminology here is somewhat technical in line with case studies in a business environment. In creative organisations I would argue it might be difficult to separate out ‘arts practices’ from the wider organisation. What and whom were involved in these ‘arts practices’?

Certainly artists and arts curators were. However, given the focus on arts practices as a way of understanding the arts organisations, I incorporated arts practices into the case design as a specific element (see Figure 4). They were central to the way in which I wanted to proceed with the research, and linked also to incorporating disruption as a sensitising concept (see 4.2 below).

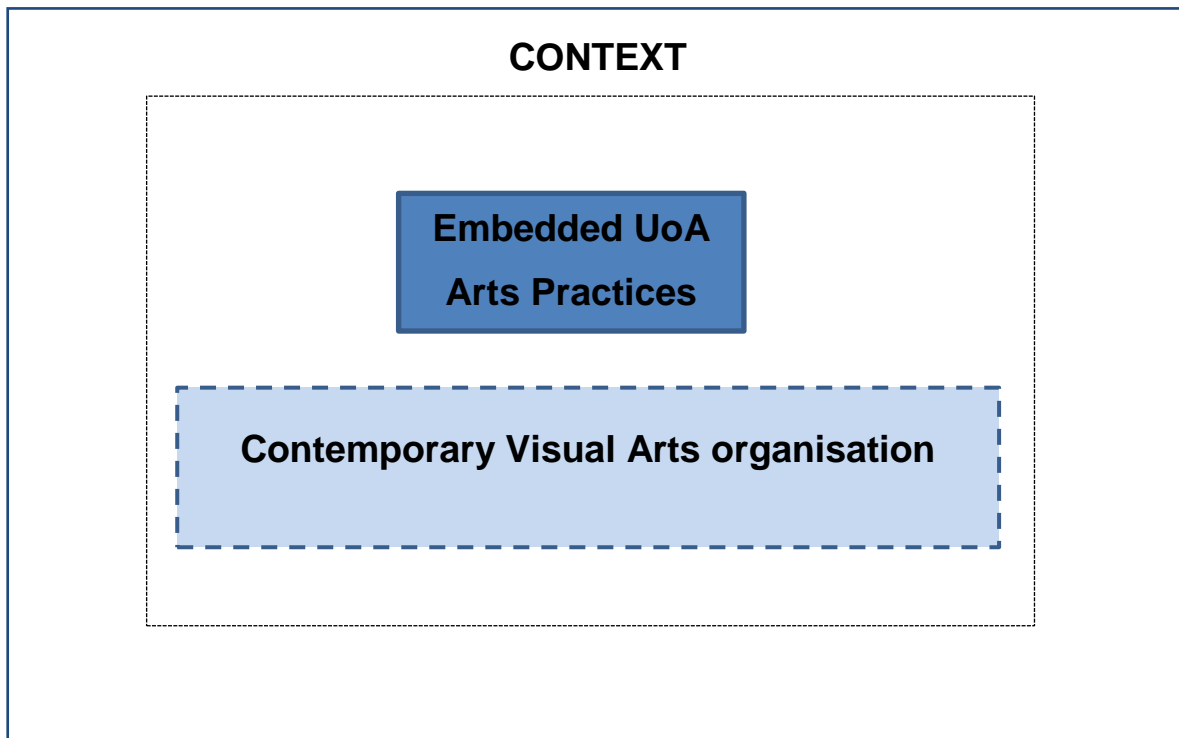


Figure 4 Case studies, embedded design
(Adapted from Yin 2014)

Yin describes the process of ‘working your data from the ground up’, as one of several strategies that can be employed to analysis data in case studies, but gives little detail (p.136). Given that grounded theory is regarded as an approach to analysis of data in addition to a methodological framework, and fits with the case study design, selection of data, data collection and analysis are covered in the following section rather than as a separate component of case study analysis *per se*.

4.2 In the Field

4.2.1 The role of the researcher: Preconceptions or blank slate?

Unlike the more positivist approaches to grounded theory, constructivist grounded theory with its interpretive, subjective epistemology accepts the reality of researcher’s

preconceptions (Charmaz, 2014) Thus in constructivist grounded theory the role of the literature is to help develop 'theoretical sensitivity' from extant theory, and frame research questions before research begins. This is contrast with Glaser and Strauss's approach that insists on theory emerging solely from the data with the researcher as a 'blank slate' ready for immersion in the research setting (Rieger, 2018). Thus the literature review should be 'delayed to prevent the researcher from developing preconceived ideas' (*ibid*:4). By contrast, Charmaz accepts that a researcher cannot escape his or her own subjectivity as an inherent part of the research process, and must therefore cultivate reflexivity – a kind of open-mindedness that does not bracket off pre-conceptions but 'wrestles' with them up front (p.155).

Hence, the literature review came before my entry into the field, and complemented my personal and practical praxis to set out the broad territory I wanted to explore. Without prior orientation, my investigations of cultural value of contemporary arts organisations would have been too broad and unfocussed However, Charmaz does not condone a laissez faire approach to the issue of preconceptions and thus I needed to handle the concept of 'disruption' without foreclosing later analytical options, recognising that there is a fine balance between the two. I drew on Charmaz's way of thinking about this that was derived originally from Blumer's notion of a 'sensitising concept' to guide what I did in the field and while undertaking analysis (Blumer, 1969, in Charmaz 2014, p.30-31). A sensitising concept stimulates thinking about a topic and enables a researcher to raise questions and pursue lines of inquiry, 'guiding inquiry rather than commanding it' (*ibid*). Sensitising concepts are thus dispensable if in analysis they prove to be irrelevant or unhelpful. This is a practical and helpful tool and one that is particular to Charmaz approach to grounded theory. This led to the identification of arts projects that had in some way been controversial and could offer the potential for studying disruption (although the two are not synonymous).

Case study	Disruptive 'moment'
Atlas Arts	Are You Locationalised
Deveron Arts	Music for Street Fights
Visual Arts in Rural Communities	Sculpture in the landscape (untitled)

Table 2 Arts projects selected as potentially disruptive 'moments'

This was not to imply that controversial projects always led to disruption, but to provide a starting point for research in the field: controversy as an indicator of disruption, not a pre-condition for it. In one case study, a project was identified in advance through discussion with the director of the arts organisation; in the other two cases the projects emerged during fieldwork. I ensured that I placed the projects within a wider set of activities undertaken by the arts organisations, some of which I was able to observe (see below). I was aware that potentially disruptive projects had been identified, labelled and constructed retrospectively, including by my asking questions about them, and their co-construction as such by the directors. Other concepts also needed to emerge from the data I collected that could offer a different view of 'what is happening here'. Nevertheless 'disruption' proved to be a helpful sensitising concept and led to further analytic insights.

4.2.2 Collecting quality data

In common with other methodologies, researchers undertaking grounded theory need to collect sufficient data, that is both extensive and of sufficient quality. Multiple data sources are encouraged in order to collect what is known as 'rich data' and many types of data are available. These include documents, videos, memoirs, historical documents and media archives in addition to data from observation and interviews (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p.37).

Case study 'unit of analysis'	Data collection methods, sources and rationale			
	Interviews and focus groups	Participant Observation	Organisational documentation e.g. annual reports, publications, project reports, media coverage, photographs, video, social media	Secondary data e.g., Census data, other surveys Contextual reports from non-organisational sources
Arts organisation	Yes Capturing range of perspectives History; Changing perspectives and actions over time Triangulation of data	Yes Organisation in action Triangulation of data	Yes Organisation in action Theory development History; Changing perspectives and actions over time Triangulation of data	Yes Theory development
Arts practices	Yes Capturing range of perspectives, experience and actions, Changing perspectives and experience over time Triangulation of data	Yes Arts practices in action Organisation in action Triangulation of data	Yes Organisation in action Theory development History; Changing perspectives and actions over time Triangulation of data	Yes Theory development
Context	Yes Understanding specific conditions of time and place	Yes Understanding specific conditions of time and place	Yes Understanding specific conditions of time and place Theory development	Yes Specific conditions of time and place Theory development

Table 3 Strategy for data collection, types of data and rationale

There are widespread and ongoing debates in social research about how the quality of qualitative research can be ensured and much has been written about a) what is meant by quality in this context and b) how quality can be assessed or at least safeguarded (Spencer *et al.*, 2003). Generally, quality refers to issues of validity, i.e. how we know something is 'true', replicability – the extent to which findings are generalizable beyond the immediate research project, and rigour – how well the research has been carried out in relation to maximising accuracy and reliability of the

findings. However, these concerns are derived from a positivist research paradigm that aims for universal truths, replicability of findings and widespread application of theory. Quality has a different meaning in a qualitative research context, and depends in part on the epistemological and ontological basis of the study. Hence what 'test' for validity might there be for a study that accepts peoples' constructions of reality as stated truths? To what extent can a theory derived from a particular research setting travel to other topics and disciplines? How do we know that what participants tell us in interviews is 'true' or an 'accurate' representation of reality? In an interpretive research project such as this, how well do we understand the meaning of the actors whose experiences we explore? How can findings from a limited number of cases be generalised? Flyvbjerg's defence of case studies offers two useful thoughts here. The first is that it is possible to generalise from a single case chosen strategically, and second that the ability to generalise is overvalued in the social sciences; contribution to knowledge is also important

'A purely descriptive, phenomenological case study without any attempt to generalize can certainly be of value in this process.... (the development of knowledge)... and has often helped cut a path toward scientific innovation'
(Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.10)

Perhaps the most important 'test' is the rigour with which research is undertaken and theoretical concepts developed. I would argue that having enough interview material to develop theory would be one element or benchmark of quality; another would be use of multiple sources of data and not reliance on one source only. Yet another would be a rigorous process for developing levels of conceptual abstraction that could be evidenced in some way. A practical benchmark could be the use of peer review, such as that offered by research supervisors, and ultimately an examiner. Charmaz recommends a checklist of questions to assess quality such as 'Have I gained detailed descriptions of a range of participants' views and actions?' 'Have I gained multiple views of the participants' range of actions?' 'Do the data reveal what lies beneath the surface?' 'Have I gathered enough data that enable me to develop analytic categories?' These are questions of reflexive judgement in relation to what is enough or sufficient to claim an explanation or theory.

A further question is 'Are the data sufficient to reveal changes over time?' This relates in questions of actors' experience over time and how this is dealt with in a

research study. In terms of experience 'we are trying to do research which is experience close':

'Pure experience is never accessible; we witness it after the event..... The meaning which is bestowed by the participant on experience, as it becomes an experience, can be said represent the experience itself' (p.33).

Relatedly, if we accept that actors interpret their experiences in terms of what these mean to them, it follows that an experience may have several components: memories, emotions and recollections of events can be argued to be part of an overall 'experience'. These elements can be separated over time as part of a 'hierarchy of experience' as argued by Dilthey (1976, in J.Smith *et al* 2009):

'Whatever presents itself in the flow of time because it has a unitary meaning is the smallest unit which can be called an experience. Any more comprehensive unit which is made up of parts of a life, linked by a common meaning, is also called an experience, even when the parts are separated by interrupting events.' (Smith *et al*, p.2)

Hence, this way of framing experience fitted with a constructivist approach to grounded theory and helped to meet one of Charmaz' criteria namely allowing for changed perspectives over time.

4.2.3 Practicalities and challenges of grounded theory in the field

In all I spent five months undertaking fieldwork, between June and October 2015. This involved becoming immersed in each of the arts organisations as a participant observer, and selecting and gathering documentary in addition to undertaking interviews.

4.2.4 Conducting interviews

Sampling was purposive in as much as I wanted to capture a spread of experience and actions and it gave me a rough framework of whom to interview. For each case study I aimed to interview the directors, members of the board, artists, plus a range of actors in the local community such as councillors, business owners and community leaders. Having identified projects that were potentially disruptive I also wanted to ensure that the latter group included people with direct experience of the project in addition to the arts professionals who were involved at the time. There was a

continual snowballing process throughout the research as new interviewees emerged, in addition to the pre-planned approach to recruitment within a purposive sampling process. The lists of interviewees I started with were not the same I ended with, although some actors were common to both. I made contact with key staff at each organisation prior to starting fieldwork, including the arts directors, and they suggested people to contact in advance to arrange interviews within the broad categories in which I was interested. They acted as gatekeepers to key people. I accessed other interviewees via a snowballing process once I was staying in the locality, and in response, where possible, to emerging themes and issues.

In grounded theory researchers are encouraged to undertake unstructured or intensive interviews to provide the 'richest source of data for theory building' (Corbin and Strauss, 2015, p.38). This means that interviews are not generally structured in accordance with a pre-prepared interview guide with fixed questions to be answered. According to Corbin and Strauss, this is more likely to give rise to rich data essential foundation for theory development. However, this does produce practical difficulties. Given my interest in potentially disruptive events and in capturing actors' experience of specific arts practices, the interviews needed some predetermined structure. Hence I prepared a sheet of key questions, while stopping short of a full interview guide. An example of those questions is provided at appendix A. I used the information sheet I had prepared for ethical clearance by the University to explain to interviewees what the research was about (see appendix B for section on ethics). Within my basic list of questions, I tried to allow sufficient flexibility for the interviewees to introduce topics or new directions. All interviews were recorded, with prior agreement of research participants. I transcribed most of the interviews in full, and with the agreement of my supervisors, also used the services of a freelance secretary to transcribe 10 of these. In total 35 in-depth interviews were conducted, lasting one hour or more, including three small group interviews.

Remaining flexible was essential while in the field. For example, with the Atlas Arts case study I interviewed a local expert in Gaelic culture in order to understand where contemporary arts fitted with other kinds of cultural production on Skye. He suggested another actor who provided valuable background to the local community that unexpectedly provided rich insights into specific arts practices that had been controversial.

Carefully planned interview schedules did not always go according to plan. I had intended to try and organise some focus groups in each location, but owing to lack of time and the snowball approach to identifying key informants, and the fact that some interviewees were on holiday and unavailable meant I abandoned them in favour of small group interviews that were easier to organise. For example, in Huntly I wanted to organise a focus group of Deveron Arts board members. I had contacted several of them by e-mail before arriving in the field, and some of them had provisionally accepted, but ended up being away during the time I was in Huntly. Instead I organised a group interview with three of them, fitting in with their work and family commitments. In the VARC case study I was not aware that a project was potentially disruptive until I was contacted by the project director. I subsequently gathered accounts of several actors' experience of the particular arts practice, some of whom were not available until months after the arts project had finished. Flexibility also meant I had to remain alert to different perspectives and to try and fill 'gaps' while I was in the field. Hence I needed to conduct a few additional interviews some weeks after analysis had begun. These were largely undertaken via telephone, although in the case of several artists took place via Skype. Interviews took place either in peoples' homes or in the offices of the arts organisations.

4.2.5 Participant observation

While grounded theorists regard interviews as the primary source of data, there is also recognition that additional data sources help with issues of research quality (especially in the more positivist orientations of grounded theory) and to explicate theory (McCann and Clark., 2003). Hence participant observation was also an important source of data in the research. Observation is the principal 'central cognitive device' of ethnography and source of data (Gobo and Molle, 2017, p.6). There are two main approaches; 'observing at a distance' in order to remain outside the sphere of action studied and maximise objectivity, and participant observation. Sometimes described an 'insider-outsider' perspective (*ibid*, p.9), participant observation attempts researcher objectivity balanced with experiential immersion in the social setting being studied, in a belief that the latter is essential to understanding actors' social worlds. This would appear to be a contradiction in terms although there are philosophical reasons why the two cannot exist at the same time (*ibid*). Suffice to say that 'going native' is a risk of participant observation and constant reflection and questioning are needed in order to remain objective, but involved.

I combined observation of the arts organisations in their day to day settings with observation of events, moving between situations of being a participant and an observer. In Scotland I became a temporary resident in the locations where the art organisations were located; I was able to access the organisation in North East England from my home in Hexham and fieldwork took place on a daily basis rather than becoming resident in Tarsset. Observation was a mixture of being immersed in the day to day activities of the organisations, either where they were based or at locations where events were taking place, such as project launches. Hence, while I was with Atlas Arts, I escorted guests to Raasay for the launch of *Seven Raasay Habitats*, chatting to artists on the crossing from the mainland. In Huntly I took part in the Friday lunches with the staff and was a participant at their 21st birthday celebrations in 2016. I observed the interns as they went about their work on a 'typical' day during my stay with the organisation, and joined in one of the art walks they were leading. With VARC I helped make clay ovens with refugees, and observed artists launches at High Green and attended the exhibition *VARC in the City* in November 2015. Where relevant to the analysis, I have included field notes from some of these observations, but I am aware that there is much rich material I have not included (although I would like to return to in future research and academic papers following this thesis).

4.2.6 Secondary Data: Documents as Analysis

A further source of data that is consistent with Charmaz` approach to grounded theory were documentary evidence or texts. These were used in two ways. In the sections where I pieced together the background to the arts organisations and the arts projects, documents were used as sources of information, and cited as a reference, and also supported actors` versions of events. However, as the analysis progressed there were key documents that became part of the unfolding narrative because they added to it analytically. This fitted with the interpretive orientation of the research within a constructivist framework. Hence certain key documents appear in the empirical chapters. A social constructivist orientation regards documents as active agents in the making and representation of the social world, and not simply neutral conveyors of 'facts'. As Prior (2003) puts it we have to consider documents not as 'stable, static and pre-determined artefacts' but as fields, frames and networks of action' (2003, p.2). Documents need to be studied in their context (Charmaz, 2014). Understanding documents in their social setting means focussing on 'how

they are manufactured and how they function rather than simply on what they contain' (Prior, 2003, p.4) and that this shifts and changes over time. Thinking of documents in terms of their active agency opens up a broad definition of what counts as a document. Prior defines this as something that is intended to be read, but is also multi-modal, containing pictures and diagrams as well as words. Even painting and sculpture can function as documents in certain circumstances.

I considered visual material and the role it could play in research design, but it was not until I had begun the process of data analysis that I realised that documents were a valuable source of data and should be part of the analytical process. I observed the arts organisations in the day to day activities and trawled through their archives. I noticed the language they used and considered how certain documents were used in the projects under examination. As analysis proceeded, they became more relevant and I included them as an additional data source that complemented what was said in interviews. I am aware that I exercised a degree of editorial choice in so doing. It could be said that the function of these documents was pre-determined and I am to a certain extent manipulating the data. However, I used my analysis of them carefully to add analytic insight. In the Deveron Arts case study, I concentrated on the fliers produced by the artist in the lead in to *Music for Street Fights*; in the Atlas Arts case study I analysed the text of the manual that was produced for the guides who interpreted *Are You Locationalised* to visitors; and in the VARC case study, I analysed materials produced for the exhibition '*VARC in the City*'. These are not exhaustive and there are other texts I could have chosen, but these made particularly useful points of analysis.

4.3 Moving to Analysis

4.3.1 Coding

As mentioned previously, one of the challenges of grounded theory interviews is the sheer volume of material to transcribe and analyse. Coupled with a distinctive approach to coding this became a challenging process, while also offering certain advantages over other approaches to qualitative analysis (Allan, 2003).

I began the process of analysis following the coding 'cannon' for grounded theory, consistent with Charmaz methods. Codes are short phrases or collections of words that stand in for concepts. In turn concepts become categories, and eventually theory. In grounded theory, coding splits the data, rather than collecting data together into sub themes and themes. This cuts at one of the methodological foundations of grounded theory with its focus on actions and processes:

'General qualitative coding identifies topics about which the researcher can write: line by line grounded theory coding goes deeper into the studied phenomenon and attempts to explicate it (Charmaz, 2014, p.124).

The early stages of coding, described as 'open coding', aim to capture detail and nuance and rely largely on description. Description then becomes the building blocks for more abstract concepts to emerge. I used two basic types of coding: In Vivo and Process (Saldana, 2013 , p.40). The former - literally actors' verbatim text - uses short quotes from the data that appear significant or denote an emerging concept. This has the benefit of allowing participants' voice to come through. In my analysis of Deveron Arts for example, I found that a key quote 'putting Huntly on the map' captured an important concept for further exploration and conceptual development. Process codes are based on gerunds – 'ing' words that help to capture action and interaction in the research. Again, this coding convention suited the data and its dynamic nature. For example, in the Atlas Arts case study 'getting everybody talking about art' was a process code that conceptually opened up several lines of enquiry in relation to actors' agency and power to act, whereas a thematic code 'talk about art' would produce a code with less analytic insight. There are many other kinds of coding that can be used at the beginning stages of grounded theory analysis (see Saldana, 2009 for an excellent summary). However, I found it helpful to stick to the two kinds of basic codes outlined above in line with Charmaz' advice to avoid over-complication, and to remain 'close to the data' (*ibid*).

At the start of analysis, the coding process produced substantial numbers of codes that gradually helped me to develop the focussed codes and emerging category that I discuss in the Conclusions chapter. Initially I stuck to line by line coding, but found that the data it generated was difficult to analyse. It was sometimes a case of not being able to ‘see the wood for the trees’ (Allan, 2003). Pragmatically I moved to incident by incident coding, but checked several times as I went through transcripts revising initial codes and producing new ones that I had missed, that I thought important. Figure 5 is a summary of the codes and categories that I developed for each case study. A more detailed example is included at appendix C.

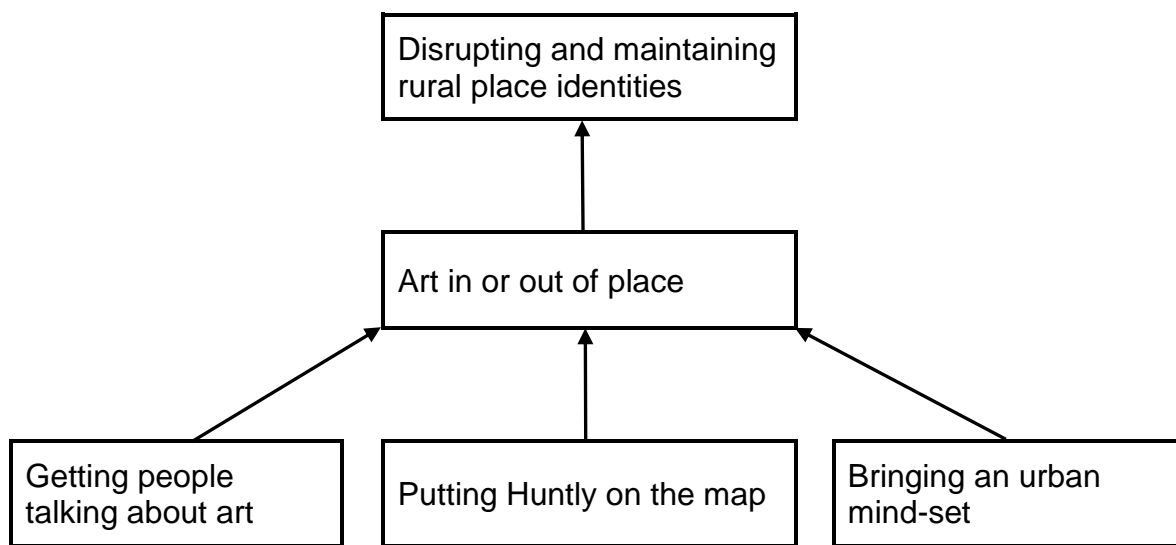


Figure 5 Summary of codes and categories

An important feature of analysis is writing analytic memos as coding proceeds. I found this a useful way of capturing emerging ideas and concepts, of noting questions that arose from which I could ‘test’ my emerging assumptions and ideas. Conceptual diagrams enabled me to explore emerging relationships between codes and categories, and to compare across cases. I found using NVIVO, a computer programme for assisting with analysis of qualitative data, invaluable. Many researchers say they prefer to use manual methods which enable them to ‘get to know their data’, particularly in the early stages (Saldana, 2013). They question the trade-off that computer programmes entail between deep knowledge of the data and the volume of material. However, I found that writing analytic memos in word, and then importing them into NVIVO was a helpful approach before starting detailed coding. Overall, NVIVO helped me to get to grips with large volumes of material and I

incorporated it into my research practice from the outset. Appendix D provides examples of analytic memos.

A key characteristic of grounded theory is the iterative sequencing of data gathering and analysis whereby the researcher collects data within a gradual process of theory building through inductive abstraction, until no more categories emerge and theoretical saturation is reached. Hence analysis can begin with the first interview for example (Allan, 2003). There are two main challenges I encountered with this approach. Firstly, I found it difficult to detect emerging patterns without a certain amount of data having been gathered. Along with the profusion of codes referred to above, seeing the conceptual wood within the forest of codes being generated made analysis frustrating and slow (*ibid*). Second, spending concentrated period of time in one location, as was the case for the two Scottish case studies, made this process difficult. In practice often it was not possible to analyse one interview before conducting another: for example, some interviews took place on the same day, sometimes one straight after another. Others interviews arose late in the process of immersion in the locality because of a chance encounter or introduction, meaning analysis was delayed.

4.3.2 Coding for theory?

Along with the practical limitations of iterative theory building outlined above, I became less clear about the feasibility of generating substantive theory based on a final core category, solely grounded in the data. As analysis proceeded and I wrote up my findings, sticking closely to the method meant I felt hesitant in producing concepts that came from outside the data, such as drawing on the literature on sense of place or conceptualising contemporary arts practices as a relational practice in a rural cultural setting. The exploratory nature of the research also lent itself to a discussion of more than one category (although Charmaz' pragmatic approach to grounded theory accepts that this may be appropriate in achieving theoretical sensitivity). This was particularly so owing to my relative inexperience with the approach. As a sensitising concept disruption was also external to the data in informing my research questions and introduced a theoretical flavour from the outset, along with the positioning of the literature. In rural studies external concepts and theoretical frameworks are often in the explanatory mix (depending on research design) and I offer the tentative conclusion that grounded theory may come up

against disciplinary traditions in that it cannot adequately answer the kinds of questions rural scholars may wish to pose. However, this is an argument that remains to be developed in papers subsequent to this thesis.

In summary I took the grounded theory approach as far as I could. I concluded the research with a discussion that draws on theory from outside the cases rather than being solely data driven (see Chapter 8 Discussion of Findings).

4.4 Research Ethics

The research project conformed to Newcastle University's code of ethics and received full ethical clearance from the ethics committee on 14th May 2015, before I commenced fieldwork. Bryman (2012, p.135), quoting Diener and Crandall (1978), offers four ethical principles of social research: harm to participants, lack of informed consent, invasion of privacy and deception. Harm to the researcher is also an element of ethical practice. Ethics apply even in apparently straightforward research settings that do not involve vulnerable groups.

The research did not pose any significant ethical concerns. I was not planning to interview children, or vulnerable adults. However, in Portree I did interview a small group of carers who worked with vulnerable adults and spoke about those experiences. While informally observing people coming and going to the Apothecary's Tower, I had a brief unplanned conversation with a group of girls, who were 'hanging out' there after school. I did not include this conversation in the empirical material for ethical reasons, nor did I record the conversation as part of my field observations. In Huntly, I had an e-mail and text exchange with an actor who had been involved in *Music for Street Fights*. The nature of his response to my request would have added a valuable perspective to the empirical material, but I was unable to use it. First, because he did not give his consent, and second, he would have been identifiable even though he would have been anonymised. Using the material would have been dubious ethical practice. These examples demonstrate the value of having clear guidance to inform decisions about what to do, particularly in unplanned circumstances. When interviewing the carers, I gave them information about the research and its objectives and they signed the consent form I had prepared. I did this for all the interviews I carried out. When interviews were undertaken by telephone, I e-mailed the form beforehand to the participants, who

completed it and returned it before the interview took place. A copy of the information and consent form are provided at appendix B.

The usual practice in the social sciences is for research participants to be anonymised in published material. However, in this study, artists and directors have been identified. This is consistent with practice in the arts and humanities and it would be unusual not to have identified these actors, as the arts practices and artists that were featured in each of the case studies was in the public domain (see Crawshaw and Gkartzios, 2016). In addition, the directors gave permission for their names to be identified and that of the organisations that I studied. However, in presenting the evidence from interviews in the empirical chapters, I took the decision to anonymise all the actors whose voices I quoted irrespective of whether or not they had given permission to be identified. I believe that to identify some actors in the narrative, and to anonymise others would have been inconsistent and could have unintentionally privileged some voices over others. It is my intention to revisit the issue of identification before publishing any academic papers subsequent to this thesis.

4.5 Summary

Following an inductive research design, using grounded theory methods of data collection and analysis, and case studies as real world examples, the research investigated how arts organisations in rural locations create cultural value. Methodologically, it was informed by notions of disruption as a sensitising concept and by my interest in lived experience of participants of specific arts practices. This was a research project, without prior theory, with analysis grounded in the data. A total of 35 semi-structured interviews were undertaken along with participant observation and documentary analysis. Analysis followed the coding cannon recommended by grounded theory. The method offers both strengths and weaknesses to qualitative inquiry, which have been detailed in the sections above. In the Conclusions, Chapter 9, I offer a final reflection on the efficacy of the approach. The empirical chapters that follow set out the detailed findings from the data, starting a process of analysis that is completed in Chapter 8, Discussion of Findings. The empirical chapters are organised on a case by case basis, starting with the two Scottish cases followed by the English one.

Chapter 5 Atlas Arts: Talking about Art

5.1 Introduction and Structure of the Chapter

The literature and methodology chapters set out my argument for researching contemporary arts organisations in rural locations through their arts practices and the rationale for each case study. The three empirical chapters follow the same structure. Each one begins with an introduction to the case study, proceeds to a profile of the places where the arts organisations are located, and then introduces the arts organisations including a brief history and summary of their arts practices. The focus of each case study is a specific arts project as a potential 'moment of disruption'. The empirical chapters begin with this one, on Atlas Arts, and follow with the chapters on Deveron Arts and Visual Arts in Rural Communities. This chapter concentrates on the disruptive 'moments' of the art project *Are You Locationalised* by artists Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan that took place in 2014. The first section begins with a short profile of Portree and Skye to provide context for the case study. Atlas Arts is then introduced, including a brief history of the organisation. The second section is an account of *Are You Locationalised*, drawing on data from a number of sources. The primary sources are interviews with nine actors, including one group interview. These include local residents, guides who interpreted *Are You Locationalised* to visitors, the director and board members in addition to the artists. These are supplemented by observational field notes and secondary analysis of documents, including media reports and material from Atlas Arts archive. The section begins with a short summary of the project, and is then described in greater depth. In the third section, I present an analysis of the disruptive moments of the project. The final section discusses the findings with signposting to Chapter 8, Discussion of Findings, that draws its analysis from across all three case studies.

5.2 Setting the Context: A Short Profile of Skye

Skye is one of the best known of the Scottish islands, in the group known as the Inner Hebrides. Positioned off the west coast of Scotland and in the Highland Region, it is famous for its landscapes, traditional buildings and settlements and is a popular destination for tourists from all over the world. The spectacular Cuillin Mountains in

the middle of the island are particularly well known. Portree is the island capital, but there are no big towns and many scattered villages and individual dwellings, arising from the traditional land uses of hill farming and crofting. The latter has declined in recent years, with crofts being converted into holiday homes or renovated in an on-going processes of rural gentrification that is perceived to have an effect on local house prices (local residents, personal communication); (Stockdale, 2010). Counter-urbanisation from other parts of Scotland is an on-going trend with significant in-migration from England (HIE, 2014a). The population of Skye is growing at more than the average for Scotland, and it has a higher proportion of retirees in line with an ageing population and the popularity of the island as a retirement destination (Stockdale and Macleod, 2013; HIE, 2014a). Portree, the island capital is the largest settlement at just under 2,500 people and here population is growing faster than the rest of the island (11 per cent between 2001 and 2011) and it has proportionally more young people (HIE, 2014b).

Skye is rich in cultural resources, underpinned by a strong Gaelic culture, principally focussed on language, song, drama, poetry and music (Feisean nan Gaidheal, personal communication). The Gaelic language has experienced a revival over the last 10 – 15 years, following a period of falling into disuse from the 1960s. This has been underpinned by policy commitment from the Scottish Government (Bonnar, 2014). Gaelic is a feature of mainstream education in schools with many offering it as a first language before English, including the High School in Portree (walks guide, personal communication). There is also a Gaelic college in Sleat in the south of the island. Skye is a tourism ‘hot spot’. Domestic and overseas visitors come for its distinctive landscapes, natural environment and culture, including traditional arts and music and crafts, malt whisky (the Talisker Distillery is on Skye), the ‘romance’ of the Scottish Highlands and Islands, and to trace family lineage. This swells the temporary population in the summer months in particular and part of the island are experiencing ‘tourism overload’; according to Visit Scotland visitor numbers in Portree grew five per cent per annum between 2015 and 2016 (Guardian, 2017⁹). Over the years artists have moved to Skye attracted by its cultural richness and diversity, including its seascapes and spectacular mountains, and more prosaically the availability of derelict or vacant properties (local artist, personal communication).

⁹ ‘Skye islanders call for help with overcrowding after tourism surge’, Guardian, 9th August, 2017

There is an active artists' association and many artists and makers make a living from their work, relying on tourism for a large proportion of their market (*ibid*). For all that Skye appears to be outward looking culturally in terms of in-migration and visitors, it is still classed as 'remote' in spite of being connected to the mainland by the Skye Bridge that opened more than 20 years ago. Inverness, the nearest city is more than two hours away by road, and with no airport, 'it can feel more remote here than in the Outer Isles (Hebrides)' (board member, personal communication).

5.2.1 Introduction to Atlas Arts

The formalisation of a contemporary arts organisation on Skye did not begin with Atlas Arts. Rather, Atlas 'rose from the ashes' of a forerunner organisation, with the Gaelic name of An Tureann, that closed in 2009 owing to financial and managerial difficulties (Atlas Arts' director, personal communication). An Tureann, in Portree, had been based at a permanent gallery, and it had a paid director. Its approach was to feature local artists in its gallery space and shop in addition to hosting travelling exhibitions of contemporary visual art. At the demise of An Tureann, the then arts agency, Hi-Arts (now defunct) commissioned work by consultants to look at how to take forward its legacy (Atlas Arts, 2014). Creative Scotland had wanted a continued visual arts presence in Skye and had ring-fenced funding for a successor. The reports provided a business case for two options: a time-limited arts project, or a new organisation. The decision was taken to go down the latter route and Atlas Arts was created, first as an arts project, then as an organisation in its own right. Emma Nicolson was appointed director in 2010 and as an experienced curator directed Atlas's programme until moving on to a new post at the end of 2018. With family connections on Skye she returned there to work for Atlas Arts after three years at an international contemporary arts institute in Sydney, Australia (personal communication). Initially the director and a skeleton staff worked part time from home, but then moved to a permanent office in Portree.

Atlas is a regularly funded organisation, supported by Creative Scotland. Describing itself as 'an organisation without walls' it responds to its remote rural setting with a 'global-local sensitivity to place and people' (*ibid*, p.3). Curated programmes of contemporary visual art are its mainstay, although a strand of more economically focussed activity is supporting arts based businesses to develop their commercial potential, and to develop artistic talent. Its activities include one off commissioned

artworks including large-scale projects, and collaborative initiatives such as its guest curatorship with the arts centre, Taigh Chearsabhagh on North Uist (Atlas Arts, 2014), and a project with Staffin Community Development Trust on commissioning public art to commemorate the history of crofting in the area. Like other contemporary arts organisations featured in this research, there is an emphasis on socially engaged arts practices and working with communities, 'playing a role in the development of Gaelic, while being internationally relevant' (*ibid* p.4). As examples, artists have variously engaged with the themes of wool, spinning and knitting on the island (*Spincycle-Skye*), mapped the island (*Mapping Portree and Skye*) responded to issues of local food and food sustainability (*Climavore – on Tidal Zones*), and the histories and memories of place (*Travelling the Archive*). Residencies enable artists responding to commissions to work in locations on Skye, depending on the project, and these often involve outreach and education activities. Atlas has no permanent gallery opting instead to site works in the public realm. These are often temporary performances as well as more permanent artworks. Its small, rented, office is based in a traditional building in Portree, overlooking the village harbour.

5.3 The Story of *Are You Locationalised*

In 2014, Atlas Arts commissioned artists Joanne Tatham and Tom O'Sullivan to produce an artwork on Skye. The commission was funded by Creative Scotland as part of GENERATION, described by Creative Scotland as 'a landmark series of exhibitions tracing the remarkable development of contemporary art in Scotland over the last 25 years' (Creative Scotland, 2017). It brought together an extensive programme of works by 100 artists to over 60 galleries, exhibition spaces and venues the length and breadth of Scotland between March and November 2014. It also received funding from Outset Scotland, a charity that supports international contemporary arts projects through private donations. The idea was to create an artwork to coincide with the Highland Games in Portree on the Isle of Skye. The commission that became *Are You Locationalised* eventually spanned the two Hebridian islands of Skye, and North Uist, in the Outer Hebrides. Creative Scotland describes Tatham and O'Sullivan's arts practice as 'disrupting the conventions of contemporary arts practices' by:

'Breaking them or sometimes sticking with them to the point of absurdity. They often make and remake their artworks in new forms and places so they act as sets or props, which can be arranged and rearranged to draw attention to what art does and how it works' (Creative Scotland, 2016).

The artwork consisted of a number of different but linked, elements. These included a temporary structure around the Apothecary's Tower in Portree, a 'talking wall' at the Taigh Chearsabagh Museum & Arts Centre on North Uist, a photographic exhibition at Taigh Chearsabagh and four pieces of text, made available as interpretive posters. The Atlas Arts office in Portree was also part of the artwork with an information desk positioned within it by the artists (Atlas Arts, 2015).

5.3.1 Arts practices in context

Tatham and O'Sullivan have worked together in creative arts practice since 1995, having met originally while studying at The Glasgow School of Art (artists, personal communication). Their work encompasses a range of different media, including sculpture, performance, drawings and photographs, texts, objects, events. Frequently their practice employs use of distinctive monochrome motifs. Re-using ideas from previous projects is a feature of their practice, which sets out to 'juxtapose realities, to take things out of order, to rearrange them in surprising ways' (artists, personal communication). Their work appears in public spaces, but also in private locations and galleries. While the artists intend for their work to be viewed beyond the gallery, they are uncomfortable with the notion that they do 'public art', preferring to see themselves as shifting between multiple settings, taking from those settings to rearrange and create new material in response to location and place. Their aim was to challenge perceptions or conventional understandings of place identities (*ibid*).

The antecedents of *Are You Locationalised* can be traced to the Cultural Olympiad of 2012. The Olympiad aimed to create new cultural opportunities to inspire and engage communities across the UK that would last after the London Olympiad had finished. Scotland's creative response aimed 'to present a programme of ambitious cultural activity ranging from spectacle and ceremony to more intimate experiences (Creative Scotland, 2013). Imaginative responses from artists were to be at the centre of the cultural programming (*ibid*). In 2009 Tatham and O'Sullivan conceived a proposal that, over a 12 month period, would 'employ four distinctive sculptural motifs to create an artwork that occurred across Scotland' (Tatham *et al.*, 2013). The rather

grandiose idea was for 'absurd but familiar forms' to engage audiences at a series of prominent public festivals, with the sculptures travelling between venues. The events would be carefully chosen selecting host communities that wanted to actively engage with the project (*ibid*). Their proposal was unsuccessful. However, via a contact on the board of the Centre for Contemporary Art in Glasgow, it caught the attention of the, newly installed director of Atlas Arts. This resulted in her approaching the artists to produce a work on Skye that would engage with the annual Highland Games that takes place each year during the first week of August in Portree. The games take place in an 'amphitheatre' – a natural hollow – on a hill overlooking the sea just outside Portree, known locally as 'The Lump' (personal communication).

Initially, the artists refused the commission, giving as their reason their reluctance to recycle a proposal that had been rejected (artist 1 personal communication). They were then invited to Skye by the director for further discussion, making a three-day visit in 2013 while the Highland Games in Portree were in progress. Tatham and O'Sullivan were nervous of adding an artwork to the siting of the Games. The director describes this as a difficulty with its compactness and crowded feel, the fact that an artwork there might seem 'tokenistic' (personal communication). However, the artists discovered The Apothecary's Tower and felt its neglected state and location gave it more creative potential (*ibid*). Dating from the 1830s, The Portree tower has been described as a beacon, apothecary's tower and memorial (Atlas Arts, 2015). Apothecaries' towers were used to indicate to passing vessels that medical supplies and assistance were available in the vicinity. Severely damaged in gales in October 1978, the tower was reduced to its foundations and subsequently rebuilt (*ibid*).

The Tower became the focal point of the artists' work in Portree. Nevertheless, the idea persisted of having a composite artwork that 'travelled' and thus would be seen in more than one location on the island. At that time the director was in the early stages of a guest curatorship at the Taigh Chearsabagh Museum and Art Centre on North Uist. Initially the artists were going to exhibit some of their photographs there as part of *Are You Locationalised*. Through further discussion with the director, they became interested in the 'Road End Sculptures' (also known as the Uist Sculpture Trail) where public art had been commissioned for the road ends around the island. Following a visit to North Uist, fresh photographs of the sculptures were taken by Tatham and O'Sullivan. These then became part of their exhibition at Taigh Chearsabagh within the *Are You Locationalised* project. These photographs were

juxtaposed with their own previously commissioned works from Loughborough University Campus. During the lifespan of the project, the photographs were displayed throughout Taigh Chearsabhagh including gallery spaces and the café (Atlas Arts, 2015).

The core elements of the artwork were two large plywood structures that were constructed and painted to the artists' designs by Glasgow based architectural fabricators. In Portree the artists placed a pink clad 'jacket' adorned with monochrome motifs, around the Apothecary's Tower (figure 6). On North Uist, the artists installed a 'talking wall' in front of the gable end of the former Dairy that is located next to the Taigh Chearsabhagh Arts Centre, with audio material on a continuous loop (figure 7). The audio was created by the artists from text that they found on the internet that describes North Uist, including tourism sites and Taigh Chearsabhagh's own website. It is recited by what the artists referred to as a 'voice of God' intentionally using the 'Queen's English' that emphasised precise, accent less, pronunciation (artist 2, personal communication).



Figure 6 The 'Pink Tower'

(Photo Atlas Arts)



Figure 7 The 'Talking Wall or 'The Cosmic Chicken'

(Photo: Atlas Arts)

The two major installations were made in advance in the fabricator's workshop premises, and then partially disassembled for transportation to Skye, where they were reassembled in situ (Atlas Arts, 2015). This allowed Atlas to hold a 'soft launch' of the project in Glasgow before the main launch event on Skye. The Atlas Arts office also became a feature of *Are You Localisationised*. Atlas had only recently occupied The Gathering Hall (its location on Skye); in the early stages of the organisation's existence staff had been working from home. During AYL, a period of some six weeks, the four staff members sat in the back of the office, while the front became 'a white cube' gallery space complete with its own bespoke information desk designed by the artists (figure 8). Objects such as boxes of books were placed precisely and remained unmoved (Atlas Arts, 2015).



Figure 8 The Pink Desk
(Photo Atlas Arts)

The artists explained in the interview that the inclusion of the office was part of how people might 'read' interiors (artist 1, personal communication). A plan to put the information desk upstairs was abandoned in favour of the office, which also became a hub and a starting point for the guided tours. This ensured that people who did the tours also came into the office (Atlas Arts' director, personal communication). An extensive programme of outreach events and activities were curated by Atlas Arts. These included guided tours in several languages provided by 'cultural' guides recruited and trained specifically for the duration of the programme, artist-led workshops with the primary and high schools in Portree, and Travelling Dialogues, a curated weekend of speakers and performance that took place in September 2014 across the two islands of Skye and North Uist (Atlas Arts, 2015). Nine guides were recruited to deliver the guided walks. Many of them were known to Atlas Arts via a member of staff who runs her own, part time guiding business. Atlas produced a bespoke interpretive publication for the guides as part of their training. Access to the 'Pink Tower' as it became known locally was 'improved', with overgrown paths cleared, litter and debris removed from the site, and spray painted slogans removed so that different groups of people could get access to see it, including those with disabilities (director, personal communication). *Are You Localisationised* was open to the public for 60 days between 1 August and 30 September 2014. It generated significant amounts of publicity nationally and locally. Whilst on the one hand it was singled out by art critics in national newspapers as one of the cultural highlights of the summer in Scotland, and the wider UK (director, personal communication) it was

controversial locally. This manifested itself in complaints in the local newspaper and on social media. The artwork was likened to children's cartoon character, Mr Blobby, and in one case 'a shocking pink polythene condom' (West Highland Free Press, August 2014¹⁰). Colloquially, the artwork became known on Portree as 'The Pink Tower', a moniker that continued after GENERATION had finished (personal communication, various).

5.4 Experiencing *Are You Locationalised*

The following section is based on an analysis of interviews with nine actors. Their experience of *Are You Locationalised* reveals different perspectives and actions in relation to the contemporary arts practices described above. Documents that are analysed include a local newspaper and the manual produced for the guides. A businessman and local resident was one of the more vociferous critics of *Are You Locationalised*. He first noticed the Pink Tower as being out of the ordinary when what he thought was routine maintenance to the Apothecary's Tower turned out to be something quite different:

'Well, I first became aware of it, because I saw this pink sheet sort of going, you know, rising up from the base of the Tower, and the Tower's quite prominent and, you know, on the Portree landscape and it's actually very popular with tourists. As it was being erected, I thought they were actually maybe doing some restoration work on the Tower...I noticed all these sort of funny shapes and what have you on it, and I realised that, you know, no, it's not, it's something completely different.' (local resident 1)

He reports that local people were upset by the Pink Tower:

'I became aware then of, you know, just through local gossip and the indignation of quite a lot of the local people that were quite upset by things. It was an eyesore' (local resident 1)

This sense of local indignation was confirmed by a walks guide and local resident who showed visitors to the Tower and talked to local people:

¹⁰ 'Portree landmark "desecrated" by pink art installation', West Highland Free Press, 8th August, 2014

'I met a few local people up there who were just up there at the same time walking their dogs or something and quite a lot of them were quite anti it really. Somebody told me it was atrocious.' (local resident 2)

5.4.1 Art out of place

Some peoples' feelings about *Are You Locationalised* appeared to go deeper than a superficial affront to artistic taste and the challenges of contemporary art. The local businessman reflected on the fact that the identity of the traditional Tower was being usurped by the artists. In his view, it was an act of 'theft':

'You could still, you know, you could still view the original Tower, and I honestly thought it was, there was an element of theft involved in it, in that the person that built that Tower. It was a work of art to them and this, you know, here come these modern day guys who actually obscured the Tower. Used the Tower for their purposes, to obscure somebody else's vision of what that piece of ground should be.'

'I think, to steal, you know, to obscure somebody else's work, and put their own in, in situ... they, you know, they were depriving the artist of, you know, artists love people to view their work, and, you know, it's like painting over somebody else's canvas.' (local resident 1)

There is a sense that a local cultural identity was being threatened by something that did not represent it. This perceived, unwelcome, incursion into local cultural identity by one that was 'fake' was exacerbated by the timing of the artwork to coincide with the Highland Games:

'I mean, I was quite indignant that it was there on Games Day which was predominantly, you know, a sort of a, you know, it's a celebration of Highland Culture and a celebration of local culture, and I felt that it imposed on that a little. I felt that it probably should have gone before then, but I understand it was there principally for that event' (local resident 1)

However, for the director, the Highland Games provided a creative opportunity for artists to develop *Are You Locationalised* as a response to place. The development of the artwork had involved negotiating with the artists over many months in a collaborative curatorial process, including visits to potential locations. This included suggesting the timing of *Are You Locationalised* to coincide with the Highland Games. As the director recalled

'And I thought how interesting that would be to put it in front of a very different kind of public that we have here with our Highland Games. So I did approach them to make a work in response to the Highland Games here in Portree.'
(director)

The artists had some creative reservations about siting a work within the Games, fearing it might be 'tokenistic' until the director took them to see where the Games were held in Portree:

'And they were like "this is amazing, this is such a fantastic thing. Why is it so neglected and overlooked?"'(director)

The artists' perceived the Apothecary's Tower as having creative interest, and yet could see it was neglected. This perception of neglect was confirmed by the director when she took the artists to see the Tower while planning *Are You Localisationised*:

'Then I led them up the Tower and at that moment in time the Tower was surrounded by trees, quite shabby looking and had lots of debris of the population that visited, which was kind of the youth, all the bottles and worse. A den if you like and very seedy. We were finding every time we went up there we were finding disgusting objects' (director).

This was in contrast to the image of the Apothecary's Tower as a piece of valuable heritage, representing the history and tradition of the area, that was being spoiled in the name of art and depriving visitors of that history. As a local resident recalled:

'I actually thought it was depriving people of, who come to Skye and to Scotland to see some of the older architecture, and it's one of the most, you know, architecturally significant buildings in the village... To deprive people of that, or to obscure it, I felt, wasn't right' (local resident 1)

Similarly, a board member of the arts organisation believed the objections were related to the value people ascribed to the Tower as a local landmark, partly because it was familiar and unchanging:

'It could have been the fact that it (the artwork) covered up the Tower, and they didn't like that, because they maybe felt, "It's a local landmark. It's always looked like that. Why would you change it?"' (board member)

Another artist, who worked on site preparation and in fabricating the structure made a similar observation about peoples' reactions to *Are You Localisationised* in terms of

what was perceived as art and therefore unfamiliar, and what was part of the traditional landscape of the area. He noted the difference between the ways in which the colour of the cladding around the Tower had engendered a negative reaction from some people, whereas the same colour in the local landscape was acceptable:

'For me as well, it makes you kind of assess what people find objectionable. Working on The Tower the colour was really prominent. Some people were really angry about the colour of it. What they'd done as well (the artists) they'd colour matched a pink house on the harbour. You've got a skyline in Portree that already has that colour in place, but if you recreate that and put it in a different context, then suddenly people find it....you know, offensive.' (artist 3).

Perhaps the difference between the two was that one changed the identity of a local landmark to something unfamiliar and strange, whereas the same pink colour of the houses in the local streetscape represented the continuation of a traditional and familiar cultural feature of the harbour front in Portree. One signified art, that was strange, unfamiliar and unacceptable, whereas the other signified tradition.

5.4.2 Getting people talking about art

The artists justified the disruptive effect, and the timing of *Are You Locationalised* as part their approach to contemporary art and a hallmark of their artistic practice. They wanted the artwork to stimulate questions and debate, unsettling understandings and perceptions of the spaces and structures of the two locations they chose. Use of ridicule and notions of the absurd were an integral and intentional part of their arts practices.

'I mean the tower was kind of like the comedy gateway in a sense. It kind of declared its stupidity, its inappropriateness, it was embarrassing. I was embarrassed to see it. It was ugly. It was not a thing of beauty! You know, it's not attractive! It looks stupid. And to make something that looks stupid in the landscape. We got really interested a few years ago in making things that were just, really embarrassing.' (artist 1)

Admission of its 'ugliness' and the sense of ridicule it was intended to convey, paradoxically might be closer, in fact, to the view of some of those who opposed it:

'I think most locals had a negative reaction to it...There was a collective feeling with a lot of my friends that it was, you know.... This monstrosity was sort of taking over the skyline of Portree.' (local resident 1)

Under the headline 'Portree landmark "desecrated" by pink art installation' the local newspaper, the West Highland Free Press, followed up a letter written by a local resident, who had described the tower as being 'slowly sheathed in a shocking-pink polythene condom' (West Highland Free Press, 2014¹¹). This also sparked a brief exchange of negative comments on social media. The indignation of the local protagonist is expressed in rhetorical statements such that the tower was 'reminiscent of a 'Mr Blobby bouncy castle'. In his letter to the editor, there is a careful distancing from the notion of contemporary art: 'I am not qualified to comment on the complexity of the artwork, but provocation amongst its viewers there has been'. It might also be inferred that in elevating a contribution to its letters page into a news article and in assigning a provocative headline of its own, the newspaper was favouring local opinion.

A local artist on North Uist recalls the controversy got people talking about Are You Locationalised. Her perspective is one of a professional artist for whom the questions that it provoked appeared to be an important part of the artistic process:

'And it was all over social media, people were posting things, a lot of vitriol, then a lot of people started defending it. A lot of people started talking about it, so it created debate, so whether it was bad art, or good art, is actually immaterial, I think. What it did was it started people talking about, "What is art? Why did they do that? Who are these people? Why are they choosing that site?'"(artist 4)

On the other hand, others were more guarded about the 'talk' that ensued. Understanding that the art was intended to make people look at their surroundings does not appear to negate the strength of peoples' reactions:

'It certainly was a talking point, and it certainly raised a lot of eyebrows and it, you know, there was a reaction to it. I understood it was there to make a

¹¹ 'Portree landmark "desecrated" by pink art installation', West Highland Free Press, 8th August, 2014

statement. To make people, you know, look at their surroundings.’(local resident 1)

‘Getting people to look at their surroundings’ might well have been considered by the artists as a welcome reaction to their arts practices. They explained how there was a disruptive element. And they were no strangers to the controversy that might arise from their work:

‘Our work is a theatre, it’s an event, it’s a provocative event which allows for like I said an opening up of ways of thinking, ways of feeling, ways of re-imagining perhaps. Possibly allowing yourself to be provoked. And what that can then generate alongside. It’s a kind of change I guess...We were interested if there would be (a ‘reaction’)...we thought it (the artwork) could be vandalised on the first night... (artist 1)

‘That’s disruption isn’t it? You’ve got to be provocative’ (artist 2)

There is also a sense in which people talking about art and being angry about it is evidence for its powers of disruption, a belief in what art can do at the micro level of personal experience:

‘I love it when change can happen...That might be so specific, one person in one role who’s had to rethink how they do something and I do love it when that happens....’ You might want to effect actual change in terms of how art organisations are funded, or artworks are commissioned, all of those kinds of things. But at some point that will come down to changing how people think. You can’t change policy if you can’t change how people think.’ (artist 1)

The artist from North Uist considered herself to be artistically ‘literate’. Initially she found the work challenging, but saw the strong reaction to it as evidence of it being ‘successful’:

‘I actually had a very negative reaction to it when I first saw it. So you would think that somebody with the background I’ve got... I’ve questioned this myself, why I’ve become a bit complacent in my thinking. For me ultimately the work was really successful because it did what it was supposed to do which was absolutely provoked – and that was the key word – it provoked a reaction.’ (artist 4)

5.4.3 Talking about art: curating disruption

People talking about art as evidence for its disruptive agency, would, perhaps, have also have been viewed as a successful outcome by the director. As a passionate enthusiast about contemporary art she was proud of bringing Tatham and O’Sullivan to Skye, declaring in one interview that ‘I want to convert everybody’ (to art). She saw the opportunity of bringing their art to Skye as significant, a sign that urban arts practices could find creative potential on a rural Scottish island:

‘To see artists, and certainly artists who’ve got a very established career being able to make a work that is new and perhaps – that we’ve created a space where they can evolve their work. That was exciting to see that happening. So that’s the motivation for me to get on the phone to Creative Scotland and say what do you think?’(director)

Not only was the response being positive and encouraging, but it signified that Skye could be a location for exciting contemporary art, commissioned by an organisation located there:

‘And she said I think this sounds very good for (the artists) it could be a significant piece of work. And I thought wow! That’s so exciting. Artists who are often seen in an urban context – a place like this can generate a work that will be acknowledged as a new work, an important work.’(director)

She describes the appeal of Tatham and O’Sullivan’s work as its playfulness, and its challenge to audiences to explore what art means, even if that experience is uncomfortable.

‘Discomfiting people is something they’re good at. I guess I enjoy the fact that their work is a catalyst for different kinds of conversations with people and different responses and all that kind of thing...I was really interested in the power of artists being able to open up questions and dialogue with places.’(director)

The director appears to be willing to take a risk with the artwork and its potentially disruptive impacts as part of the artistic process. For example, in anticipating that people on North Uist might have found the photographic exhibition difficult, she nevertheless can justify this in artistic terms because forgotten pieces of public art are being highlighted, and people reminded of their importance culturally:

'But they were kind of saying "We should know about them" (The Road End Sculptures). I think that could have been misinterpreted by some. I got the sense that maybe in Uist it might have been. Because of the way they were placed alongside the Loughborough ones. I got the impression that people didn't understand why they'd done it. People found it difficult to kind of, they did find the exhibition quite difficult (director)

This was confirmed by the artists:

'The people involved in opening the space at (the art centre) they didn't want a series of photographs of Loughborough. They didn't understand why somebody would do that.' (artist 2)

Not only difficulty in understanding, but perhaps the arts professionals who worked at the centre were defending the identity of the island that was signified by the existing sculptures in the landscape. These had become part of its cultural identity over time, and had helped to make it 'special':

'Was Uist any more special than the University Campus in Loughborough? Because the thing about Uist especially on Uist, it's really loaded with being something special...So to do something which is just, in a way, a flattening of the objects...and bring them together as this kind of archive, with the thoughts, history of each one, in reverse chronological order. That was a disruption.' (artist 2)

Furthermore, there may have been confusion over what the exhibition was trying to achieve in the name of art: it was not what a 'normal' photographic exhibition might contain. In commenting on the reaction of some local people, the local artist in the group interview put it succinctly:

'I think it was a key piece of work to be commissioned, to open that whole way of thinking about art, to a circumstance where perhaps that idea isn't at the forefront of peoples' minds when they think about art. But still a cleaving to a sort of a traditional, classical, model of what art is. So it's got to be a painting on the wall, it should be about landscape.' (artist 4)

Similarly, the board member suggested that *Are You Localisationised* represented a radical departure from what people expected art to be:

'I think, pretty radical in some people's eyes...because the colours chosen, it almost looked slightly childlike, because it was big and bold, and so people

made statements like, “Well, I could do that. That’s not art”, because they expect, like a landscape painting or something.’ (board member)

5.4.4 Talking about art and feeling excluded

A contrasting experience from the interviews was that some local people and those outside the art world felt excluded from the dialogue about *Are You Locationalised*.

‘I think that people were annoyed that ...I don’t think anybody was ever consulted about it. It just appeared, or you know, the local population weren’t consulted.’ (local resident 1)

For the walks guide and local resident, the language of art and the need to explain it to visitors meant that she felt outside the artistic process. She describes the process of taking visitors to see the Tower, and that it was the guide’s job to explain it. The guides received some training and were issued with a manual by the arts organisation. However, initially she found the process of ‘talking about art’ difficult:

‘When we’d gone there with the artists they hadn’t really wanted to explain it. They sort of said they wanted each individual to get their own – to take their own view of it. So I did find that quite hard because people sometimes did want an explanation.’

‘As the time went on I felt more confident about it as well. As we’d done a few tours you sort of felt less worried. It was the only bit I felt a bit nervous about – talking about The Tower and the Art.’ (local resident 2)

A subtler point was made in relation to the ‘Talking Wall’ on North Uist. The text spoken by the Wall deliberately mispronounced the word ‘machair’ or ‘shell sand’, a Gaelic word describing a particular natural feature found on some Scottish islands. This had provoked a strong reaction:

‘The antagonism towards the piece of work that was here definitely opened up discussion about it. I can just speak for myself in talking to other people about it. People were really angry that machair was mispronounced. But it’s deliberate! It’s so obvious that it’s deliberate! And this was an artist. But then it opened up the conversation.’ (artist 4)

Two points emerge here: in mispronouncing the word there appears to be an affront to sense of place, connected to a distinctive natural feature and expressed in this

case by a local artist. Paradoxically, in being provoked, the artist as audience or participant in the work does not perceive it as such, suggesting that contemporary arts practices are even difficult for those who might be expected to 'get it'.

5.4.5 Talking about art and being 'locationalised'

Talking about art by the walks guides had also helped some people to be less opposed to the work. This appeared to be linked to the difference between 'art for art's sake' and art as something that was useful in terms that people could understand once they knew more about it:

'But when we explained some reasoning you know – they (the artists) were trying to draw attention to the Tower and things like that, they were quite for that and also they were quite for people learning the history of The Lump because there's really nothing there that tells you anything about it. There's no information about it at all. They were quite keen that that was sort of promoted. But they weren't necessarily that keen on The Pink Tower.' (local resident 2)

There is also a sense of the pride that some people felt about the Apothecary's Tower and its location: in being talked about (by the guides) and in drawing attention to its history they felt that the process involved in producing the art was helpful, whereas the Pink Tower felt alien to them. As an aesthetic object around a traditional building, as art, it seemed out of place. On the other hand, by drawing attention to the Tower, the artists and the arts organisation had revived interest in it and highlighted its history; it became art in terms they could understand. As the walks guide recalled:

'Do you know there were people who've lived here all their lives who never knew there was stairs inside the Tower until they went to look at because it was pink? And so I think that's had a big effect if people have sort of acknowledged it, even if they didn't like The Pink Tower it's drawn their attention to the old stone tower that was inside it.' (local resident 2)

The manual produced by Atlas Arts for the guides was an aid to their interpretive task, and a discourse that communicated positive messages about the arts organisation and its arts practices in relation to locality and local concerns (although it was produced before the local controversy arose). There are practical details about the walks, meeting points and so on, with material on how the guides should behave and dress which would be standard practice for tourism guides. There is an

emphasis on the prestigious nature of the artwork on Skye (and Uist) that is part of GENERATION and stresses Atlas Art's ability to attract high quality art to Skye. The logo is designed in bright pink, sans serif capital letters that communicate its contemporariness; it appears modern, clean. The logo is displayed prominently in the centre of the page, and is placed on its own (figure 9).

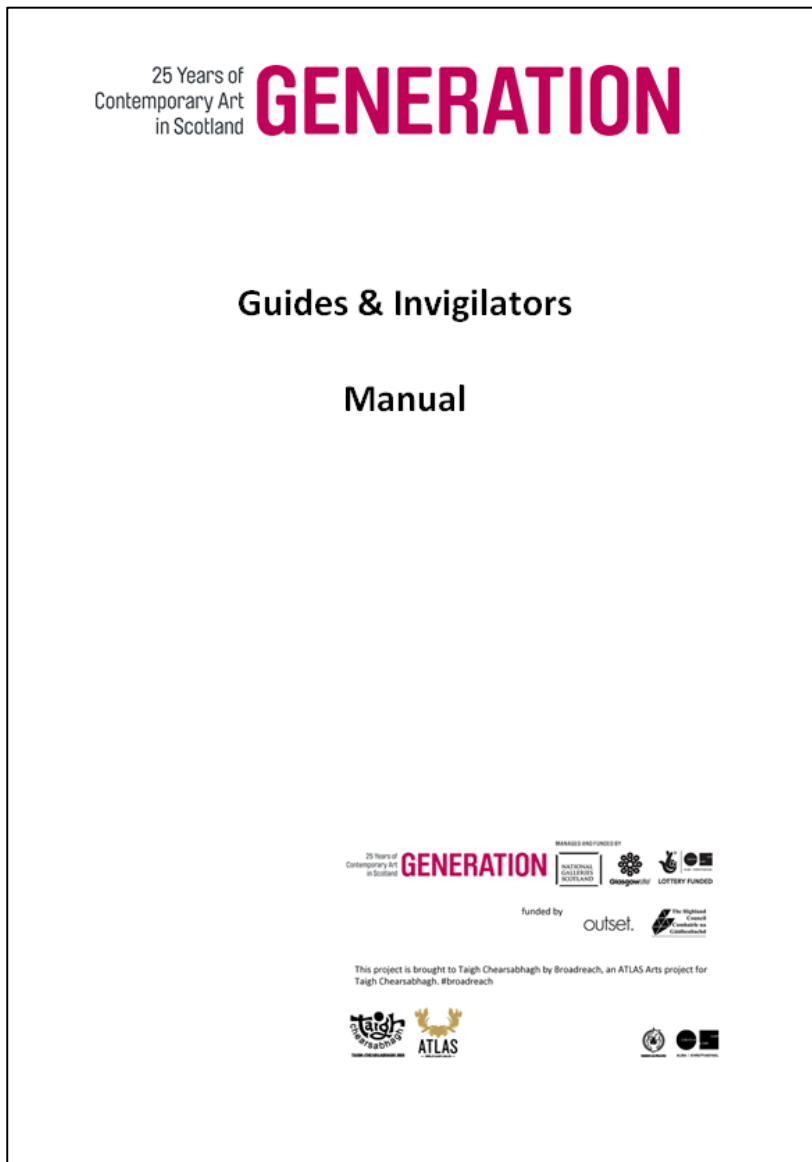


Figure 9 Guides & invigilators manual

The logos of the other organisations are much smaller, and are placed at the bottom of the page. This may have been a requirement of the funders, but the effect is the dominance of the GENERATION programme. The text, taken from an Atlas press release reinforces the message:

'GENERATION is a major, nation-wide exhibition programme showcasing some of the best and most significant artists to have emerged from Scotland over the last 25 years. It features over 100 artists in more than 60 venues across Scotland. The artists within GENERATION came to attention whilst working in Scotland, helping to create the vibrant and internationally recognised contemporary art scene that exists here today.'

'It is also the first time that an exhibition has stretched across the two Hebridean islands of North Uist and the Isle of Skye with the two public sculptural works taking centre stage'.

The texts are positive about the artworks; they construct the art as being important while providing benefits to the locality and for tourism:

'The Dairy wall is highly visible within the vicinity of Taigh Chearsabhaigh with a great vantage point from the ferry. Every visitor's first impression of the centre, and those coming to North Uist from the ferry, will be the talking wall'

'Over recent years the tower has fallen into disrepair becoming a local teenage hang out adorned with graffiti and rubbish. By cladding the tower Tatham & O'Sullivan are drawing attention to this once treasured tower that now lies in disrepair in plain sight.'

Two contrasting photographs of the Tower are included, one, showing it in its pink cladding against the view and looking well cared for, and 'the Tower as it is today', clearly neglected and in need of repair. Less than one third of the description of the Apothecary's Tower refers to the art, but when it does it is in terms of the value of the art in drawing attention to its neglect and in raising awareness of it. There is also a significant amount of history on the Apothecary's Tower. On the one hand it is important for the guides to be able to communicate something of this history; on the other hand, this could also be read as a subtle message about Atlas Arts' ability to be sensitive to a local sense of place. The colloquial term for the siting of the artwork in Portree, the Lump is used repeatedly. There is also an emphasis on the artworks being linked to the visitor experience through existing cultural infrastructure.

'Are you LOCATIONALIZED is a great example of how artists are challenging the way in which we view public art. The work is dynamic in that it spans two islands and two arts organisations and promises visitors encounters in unexpected places. In North Uist we hope that visitors will be encouraged to explore the Uist Sculpture Trail whilst in Skye they will have the opportunity to learn about the history of the Tower and the Lump in Portree.'

positively enjoyed their experience of the Pink Tower, the artwork not only appealing to her children, but also ‘cheering up’ a rather neglected feature:

‘My two boys loved it! They absolutely loved it! We go up there quite a lot go for a walk and run about over The Lump, they love to climb up the Tower. They watched it being built. They were very sort of sad when it came down.’

‘It was quite dark in there – you know they covered some of the windows, they quite liked going inside it, the little port holes to look out of. They quite liked that. I don’t know I just think it cheered the place up a lot as well.’ (local resident 2)

Similarly, a local taxi driver and resident of North Uist recounted how children had enjoyed visiting the ‘Talking Wall’ at Taigh Chearsabagh. He is enthusiastic in particular about the ‘Cosmic Chicken’ as it became known locally. He viewed children interacting with it and responding to its childlike appeal: bright colours, the element of humour – he says it put a smile on peoples’ faces. He perceives it as something that people were able to enjoy, outside a gallery setting as a piece of public art:

‘I thought it was fantastic. It was a great use of that one wall, which is just bland now coz it’s not there anymore. Again for kids especially, the kids could go and touch the button and this thing spoke back to them. Kids love that kind of interaction, I think it’s great. It’s a great learning aid if you like. . And it’s a great visual aid – it was so bright and colourful.’ (local resident 3)

He also remarks, with a degree of pride, that none of his relatives came to see it (the Talking Wall), perhaps because they found contemporary art difficult and intimidating. He had, however, felt able to relate to it as something ‘smart’, partly because his friendship with one of Atlas’ curators had enabled him to ‘talk about art’:

‘And maybe you need to be an expert if you like, maybe that’s the perception, you have to know what to talk about, or how to give a view on what you’re seeing and that...But I just thought visually, it was really quite smart.’ (local resident 3)

Furthermore, the artwork became acceptable because it could be enjoyed as an experience that felt familiar and ‘child like’, as enjoyment and something for children to do it was less about art for art’s sake as an artwork for recreation and visitors to the island. Yet as a more instrumental experience there is a connection to island identity:

'Anything that carries the history of the islands has to be a good thing. Because most tourists that's what they want to know about, they want to know about the history of the islands.'

'And we're fast losing the older generations who can remember every story. And I don't think we're getting the getting messages across like we used to...We evolve as an island just like anywhere else. Things have changed. I know from my own family we don't sit round the table often enough chatting, and once that used to be the island way.' (local resident 3)

While he regrets the gradual demise of traditional community structures and values, he still regards those as qualities that attach him to the island and values that are personally meaningful. Yet there is also a sense of missing some of the cultural resources that are available on the mainland that fits with his earlier observation that the island needs to evolve and that island life cannot stay the same:

'We have fantastic beaches to go to, lots of open spaces, but there's nothing with a theme here, nothing where you can go for walks and I'm not saying we should try to emulate mainland life if you like, but I think we need to do more to have things for kids to do especially when they're here.'

'It would have been nice for it to have stayed and even to have been expanded upon, because that's part of the problem of living in remote areas.' (local resident 3)

5.4.6 On being placeless

The artists make a connection between their relationship to place and how their arts practices work to create disruptive possibilities. In one sense, this becomes a disconnection. This involves not being immersed in one place for any length of time – being temporarily present, on retaining an outsider perspective:

'We actually wanted to remain outside. We didn't want to get to know the place, we didn't want to get to know people there, we didn't want to ask them what they wanted. We wanted to know that we were dropping in.....there is something about dropping in and becoming, in a way focussed on a context, and allowing some of that to permeate into the conversation that does allow certain things to happen.....It was always an outsiders' view'.(artist 1)

They also describe how working in different kinds of contexts, different kinds of places, helps their practice to consider multiple perspectives:

'We don't just work in one set of situations, we don't work in a commercial gallery situation all the time, we don't work in a public art context all the time. We work in lots of different places. And so we get to think a lot about lots of different kinds of audiences. So you see it differently to people who are always in the same place.' (artist 2)

For the artists, then, place is a mobile and dynamic experience that can be disconcerting:

'While we working on the project with Atlas, we were simultaneously working on a project in London, which is a gallery in the offices of B, so you've got that on the one hand, incredibly shiny, corporate, moneyed environment, and then 24 hours later you're standing in a bog in North Uist, not even able to get a phone signal. You're trying to make sense of both those things.' (artist 1)

There is a sense in which their creative response to place is both specific and generalised; the context and creative response is specific to location, frequently challenging accepted notions of what those locations mean and represent. At the same time by remaining outsiders, the artists are never immersed in a specific sense of place, remaining detached observers and interpreters of specific situations and locations. As such their practices may perhaps be viewed as 'being placeless', and almost intentionally as if developing a sense of place would no longer make them outsiders culturally.

The director makes a distinction between the opportunities afforded creatively of working with contemporary artists within the wider art world, and more local artists. The former come to Skye and find inspiration and space to create work of value and challenge established meanings of place: local artists in their own locality are not perceived to offer the same creative potential. Atlas is described by the director as being different from other, local arts organisations, in being located in Skye, yet not entirely of Skye. This is reinforced by the messages in the manual produced for the guides (see above). This is linked to achieving a certain cultural standard that is important to her. This may say something about the professional standard of arts practice to which she aspires as a curator, but also the perceived limits of parochialism in a rural arts context:

'I wanted to work with the positive energies were on the island and kind of enthusiasms and I didn't necessarily see the arts community as the place where we would sit or the group that we would communicate with...I think when

I arrived people thought that the role was going to be to help them get exhibitions or get work or you know a very kind of local development.'
(director)

This comment is supported by the board member

'The first time I came to see the office, and it was all painted white, and I was just like, "Well, this does not look like a community art space. This looks like the kind of space that you see when you go to galleries in London".....so to me that's very important, because the message that we are sending out to people is, "We are not a community Arts organisation".' (board member)

5.4.7 A rural place? A tale of two offices

Further evidence of the nature of 'placelessness' could be considered from the inclusion of the Atlas Arts office as part of *Are You Localised*. The 'Pink Desk' (see figure 8) was installed in the Atlas office, which became a micro site for disruptive encounters. The Pink Desk gives no clue to its location in the Gathering Hall in Portree, but is part of 'a white cube gallery' experience. It is positioned in a space that in its location in a traditional building, from the outside might be expected to look like a community arts space in a rural location. Inside, the design continues the pink colour and the sense of parody, in which the staff become part of the artwork (Atlas Arts' director, personal communication). It also enabled people to get to know the Atlas office better, to know where they were 'localised' as a relatively new organisation in Skye:

'So that was in response I think to the fact that people didn't know where we were. We talked about putting the information desk upstairs in the Gathering Hall itself but they chose to put it in the office, because it was to become a hub and a starting point for the tours. So it meant that all the people who did the tours came into the office. So there was a lot of disruption, and it communicated the artwork back to us in a way that we wouldn't normally have.'(director)

Yet, that location could have been anywhere; in a sense it was placeless. The following is an extract from my field notes of impressions of the Atlas Arts office in June 2015, nearly one year on from *Are You Localised*.

Field note dated 11th June 2015

Atlas Arts is based in the Skye Gathering Hall – a dour, grey historic building in granite whose main entrance promises a local market today. I am told The Gathering Hall was built specifically to host the Skye Balls that were part of the Highland social circuit, ‘proper Highland dancing’. Apparently, it is the Skye Balls Committee which runs The Gathering Hall, and is Atlas’ landlords. Crunching down a non-descript gravel path and down some steps I find Atlas tucked round the side of the building. They are not easy to find, and have very little signage on display to say who they are. Walking into Atlas Arts office is like stepping into another world. I feel as if I am transported into some cool architectural practice or the design office of a multinational corporation in a city. The office is a subtle shade of off white, bright and modern. It has shiny angle poise lamps, big white desks, arts posters on the wall including from previous arts projects, there are lots of open shelves with publicity material on them. I think it feels ‘urban’ although I’m not sure what I mean by that. I guess it is a sense that it could be anywhere; it is in a sense ‘placeless’. I find this surprising and it is in stark contrast to the exterior of the building, and to the homely interiors of local cafes, the B and B where I’m staying.

5.5 Conclusions

In summary, *Are You Locationalised* was intentionally disruptive from the perspective of contemporary arts practices. For some people those arts practices disrupted the identity of a specific local landmark, to which they felt deep attachment. Reaction in the local media also indicated questions over the appropriateness of those practices as ‘art for art’s sake’. The alien nature of *Are You Locationalised* as a piece of contemporary art appeared to provoke indignation, to construct art as being ‘out of place’, suggesting it was unfamiliar and in some cases, unwelcome. However, when *Are You Locationalised* provided access to a neglected landmark, and drew attention to its history, it could be understood in instrumental terms that made art more and acceptable and ‘in place’. For others, *Are You Locationalised* provided an enjoyable experience and helped them to gain cultural capital. Irrespective of perspective, actors agreed *Are You Locationalised* had got people talking about art. For the artists and director, talk became an element of the process of art making, an integral element of the interaction between artist and audience. Talking about art was also a successful outcome of project. Through the programme of guided walks, talk became a means of communicating the project to others, and a discourse that was used

instrumentally to place the arts organisation and its practices 'in place', attuned to local place sensibilities.

Talk also became a rhetorical device for the opponents of *Are You Locationalised*. When actors felt threatened by the disruption to their sense of place, they used the rhetoric of local media and social media platforms to do so. I would suggest these are indicative of the struggles over competing identities of place and the power relations involved. I would also suggest that the experience of *Are You Locationalised* highlighted differences between those with a clear sense of place, and those for whom place was a malleable and fluid experience. Rather than place having a clear identity to which actors felt deeply attached, place, became placeless. Furthermore, I would argue that *Are You Locationalised* signified less embedded cultural practices, and this was alluded to by the director in differentiating between the work commissioned by Atlas Arts practices and the arts practices of local artists on the island. Finally, peoples' experience of *Are You Locationalised* hints at differences between traditional values, and those that may be considered to be 'urban', from 'outside' and 'out of place'. These findings are considered further in the Chapter 8, Discussion of Findings.

Chapter 6 Deveron Arts: Putting Huntly on the Map

6.1 Introduction and Structure of the Chapter

This chapter follows the same structure as Chapter 5. It focusses on contemporary arts organisation Deveron Arts and on the disruptive ‘moments’ of the art project *Music for Street Fights* by artist Garry Williams, which took place in 2008. The first section begins with a short profile of Huntly, to provide context for the case study. Deveron Arts is then introduced, including a brief history of the organisation. The second section is a detailed account of *Music for Street Fights*, reconstructed from a number of sources. These include primary interview material, media reports, and secondary analysis of texts produced by the artist. The section begins with a short summary of the project, and is then described in greater depth in the analysis that follows. In the third section, I present an analysis of the data from primary interviews with eight actors, including the director and artist, local residents and board members. The final section briefly summarises the findings, before signposting to Chapter 8 Discussion of Findings, that draws its analysis from across all three case studies.

6.2 Setting the Context: A Short Profile of Huntly

Huntly is a market town in Aberdeenshire with a population of 4,768 situated on a major rail line to Inverness, and served by the trunk road, the A97 that bypasses the town (Vattenfall Clashindarroch community profile, 2014). It is around one hour’s commuting distance from Aberdeen by train. It falls within the Scottish urban rural classification as being a remote small town, that is with a population of between 3,000 and 10,000 people and more than a half hours drive from a major city (Scottish urban-rural classification, 2013). Traditionally, Huntly acted as a market town serving the surrounding area, comprised mainly of agricultural land, and agriculture is still an important industry locally in terms of land use, employing more people than the Scottish average (*ibid*). The other major influence is the oil industry: Aberdeen has been the epicentre of the oil industry in Scotland for the last quarter of a century, but has suffered from downturn in energy prices and global competition. It has been a source of well-paid employment for some people in Huntly, who commute to

Aberdeen but have chosen to live in Huntly for quality of life reasons, and to raise families (local resident, personal communication). Some people have done well from oil; but are now at or about retirement age and have come to live in Huntly (Stockdale, 2006; Stockdale and Macleod, 2013). Like many Scottish rural towns, the population is ageing: in fact, the proportion of over 75s in Huntly is twice the national average (*ibid*). The population is stable but the balance continues to shift towards the economically inactive and the elderly. Huntly also has its share of deprivation, with some parts of the town in the lowest third of the index of multiple deprivation, with low levels of income and high unemployment (*ibid*). Young people who can leave do, although some may return later in life (local resident, personal communication). Others who remain are dependent on the local labour market with its limited opportunities and low wages (*ibid*) and the number of people aged 16-44 is lower than the national average. The major employer in the town is Dean's Shortbread, but there are other businesses that serve the IT and oil sectors. In common with many other market towns in Scotland and elsewhere, the retail sector is struggling (Powe and Shaw, 2004). Some local businesses have reinvented themselves and seem to be doing well in the face of competition from the two supermarkets that arrived on the edge of town 12 years ago while others tied to local services are struggling (Huntly Business Needs Survey, 2006) . In addition to Deveron Arts, notable local 'cultural' institutions include the Nordic Ski Club, the Gordon Schools and Huntly Football Club, and there is strong culture of traditional Scottish music and dancing, including Huntly pipe band (local residents, personal communication; Vattenfall Clashindarroch community profile, 2014). A striking aspect to Huntly is the high levels of participation in voluntary activity: nearly 150 organisations in a town of fewer than 5,000 people, 20 of which are concerned with arts and culture (*ibid*) (see also <http://www.huntly.net/community/groups/>). Huntly is rich in history and the ruined Gordon castle, the former home of the Gordon family (and after whom the local school is named) is an important local visitor attraction, although in terms of employment tourism is relatively under-developed. The town is also close to the Clashindarroch Forest, which provides opportunities for cycling, cross country skiing and walking (*ibid*).

6.2.1 Introduction to Deveron Arts

Deveron Arts was established in Huntly more than 20 years ago by Claudia Zeiske and two friends in response to what they saw as 'a limited cultural offer' in Huntly at the time (Sacramento and Zeiske, 2010). Zeiske has led its development and curatorial direction ever since. Deveron Arts¹² (now Projects) is currently a regularly funded organisation, with the bulk of its funding coming from Creative Scotland. Zeiske is both an arts curator, and local resident, having moved to Huntly from Aberdeen when her children were young. Originally trained as an anthropologist, and with a varied career in a number of international locations, her foray into the creative industries began with employment in a whisky museum, via an art gallery in a coastal Scottish town, before setting up and leading the development of Deveron Arts in Huntly in 1995 (personal communication). The original vision for Deveron Arts was to establish the organisation in a permanent gallery. However, initial feasibility suggested such an enterprise would not be viable in a rural market town, nor was there a suitable space available (*ibid*). The 'Town is the Venue' and '50:50' (as their approach is named) are concepts that continue to underpin the organisation's ethos and arts practices. This is described by the organisation on its website as a concept or philosophy of working, and not simply a blank canvas for public art works (Lacy, 1995; Kwon, 2004). It implies an equal partnership with the local community where art and artists become involved with, and respond to, local issues. The idea of '50:50' means 'half local and half international, half community and half artistic' (Sacramento and Zeiske, 2010, p.39). The approach to art in place delivered through its curatorial ethos has been emulated by several other contemporary arts organisations, such as Atlas Arts on Skye (Atlas Arts' director, personal communication).

A distinctive element of its arts practice (and that of other contemporary arts organisations) is the use of artist residencies to effect art projects. These vary in length from a few weeks to six months or more, and enable the artists to become embedded in the locality as temporary residents. More than one hundred artists' projects have been delivered over the last 21 years (Deveron Projects website¹³). Artists from five continents have been resident in Huntly over the years through projects such as diverse as *Empty Shop*, a polemic against the rise of empty shops

¹² Deveron Arts was renamed Deveron Projects in 2016, but is here referred to as Deveron Arts

¹³ <https://www.deveron-projects.com/home/>

in the town (Eva Mertz, 2003), to a project drawing on the memories of older people in the town of their former cinema that closed in the mid-1960s (*Cinematic Tour*, Elsebeth Jorgensen 2006), and *Knockturne* (David Blyth, 2006-7) a project working with a local farmer on the everyday cycle of life and death on a sheep farm, that involved a temporary display of stuffed dead lambs in local shops.

As with contemporary arts practices in city locations, many of the arts projects have left no physical legacy; working with local people and interest groups is part of the artistic process, with temporary installations that are then documented. Some projects have left a more permanent mark on the landscape and townscape of Huntly. For example, in 2008, artist Jacques Coetzer was commissioned to develop a new branding for the town, and *Room to Roam* became an artist-led design process that resulted in a new branding and profile for Huntly (and entrance signs to the town) replacing the 'Family Town' identity of the early 1990s (local businessman, personal communication, Sacramento and Zeiske, 2010). Some physical works of art have been purposely located in shops and public buildings as 'mementos' of past projects. These might be an object on a wall, a photograph in a book, or a poem or song permanently inscribed on the wall of a local hotel. Collectively this is known as the Town Collection (and is available as a self-guided 'tour'). Deveron Arts employs a series of interns, largely from arts background, often trained at Scottish Art Schools (director, personal communication). One or two remain as longer term members of staff providing element of continuity.

In 2013, Huntly won a Creative Place Award from Creative Scotland, a portion of which went to Deveron Arts to further its development. The remainder was awarded to local cultural organisations. In the same year, Claudia Zeiske was awarded the status of 'Huntly Citizen of the Year' (Huntly Express, 2013¹⁴). Part of its 'new' direction encompassed projects that combined walking with art, and the subsidiary 'Walking Institute' was founded alongside the continuation of its residencies and the focus on Huntly as 'the Town is the Venue'. Since the end of 2016 the organisation's direction has shifted. This includes a change in name from Deveron Arts to Deveron Projects; greater embeddedness in local economic regeneration activities, with artists' residencies of longer duration, and a focus on a reduced number of projects

¹⁴ 'Arts group founder's top award', Huntly Express, December 6th, 2013

(director, personal communication). Yet in many ways Deveron Projects as it is now called, continues the arts practices of Deveron Arts. The physical footprint of the organisation remains in the centre of Huntly, and it continues to operate from a small office in the historic Brander Building shared with Huntly Development Trust and the local library. Its interns continue to come and go, and artists visit from many different countries, some deciding to settle in Huntly or the surrounding area once their residencies have been completed (director, personal communication).

6.3 The Story of *Music for Street Fights*

The choice of *Music for Street Fights* to investigate notions of disruption emerged while I was in the field. The following is an extract from my field diary:

Field note dated 25.08.2015

I noted from my interviews with the Board members on 13th that they talked about a project called *Music for Street Fights* that was controversial. I've just been looking through the file and the community council seemed to have a problem with it. I asked the director if we could talk about the project during our interview.

The following sections are drawn from interviews with two artists, the director, two board members, a member of a local community organisation, and two local residents giving a total of eight interviews in all.

6.3.1 Beginning the process

Youth unrest driven by alcohol consumption is a familiar issue for rural towns and villages in Scotland, and is not exclusively an urban phenomenon (Jayne *et al.*, 2008). Performance and video artist Garry Williams who was living in Huntly at the time of the project, approached Deveron Arts with the original idea for a time-limited, performance based intervention. Growing up in the city of Glasgow, he frequently witnessed drunkenness and street fighting as a regular occurrence from his flat window. His idea was to intervene in late night violence with a disruptive arts intervention, based on playing soothing classical music that would 'transform the brutality into a form of choreography, much the same way as music is used in the

cinema' (artist interview quoted in the Huntly Express, 2008¹⁵). Initially the artist planned to use a video surveillance/loud speaker system in and around the square manned at a remote 'HQ'. This 'Big Brother' approach was rejected in favour of the mobile version largely for reasons of cost, but also because the mobile 'version' would have a more conspicuous presence (artist, personal communication). The plan was for there to be live music performed by a pianist from the back of a van; this was subsequently abandoned in favour of a pre-recorded soundtrack.

Williams describes his arts practice as being based around site specific installations, and not in a gallery. Featuring an element of live performance his installations are temporary, and he chooses to focus on 'ideas, places and situations that are in tension or jeopardy, and that comprise an on-going inquiry and reflection into the precarious nature of our individual and collective existence' (artist's website).¹⁶ The director recalls that unlike some of Deveron Arts projects, it was the artist's initiative that in the first instance alerted her to the issue of late night violence, and persuaded her that the project was worth pursuing (personal communication). As a result, and in keeping with her immersion in local issues as part of the research phase of a project, she describes visiting the local hospital in Huntly and learning about what happened. Typically, Friday and Saturday nights were the peak time for hospital admissions from drink-related violence. Often these were in the small hours of the morning, when most people in Huntly were tucked up in bed and often were not aware of what took place when the pubs closed. Having decided that *Music for Street Fights* was worth doing, and with the artist securing funding from the then Scottish Arts Council, the artist and director set about planning the arts intervention in Huntly (director and artist, personal communication). This was to take place over two nights, a Friday and Saturday, in April 2008. The artist also planned to film the event and recruited the services of a video artist and an artist driver to help him out on the nights in question (artist, personal communication).

6.3.2 Encountering controversy

Several weeks earlier the prospect of the project had caused controversy locally. It was perceived as deliberately seeking to stir up unrest, with the local community

¹⁵ 'Music plan fears', Huntly Express, 25th April, 2008

¹⁶ <http://garry-williams.com/>

council being a vociferous opponent. Rather than the arts project calming down any violence, their fears were that it would stir up further unrest. Huntly might even gain the dubious reputation of becoming the 'street fighting capital of Scotland' (Aberdeen Evening Express, 2008¹⁷). The issue even found its way into several national newspapers, with articles bemoaning the waste of public money and drawing attention to peoples' fears over what could happen. In spite of reassurances by the artist and arts director, as a result of the controversy, the police became involved (artist and director, personal communication). The artist confirmed that at one point the chief constable was poised to stop the project. Local police in Huntly were quoted in the media as expressing concern over the escalation of violence that could result of the project 'fanning the flames' of unrest. Meetings then took place between Deveron Arts, the artist and the police in an attempt to find a workable solution (director and artist, personal communication). Negotiations with the police had centred on an arcane law that prevented anyone making a noise after 9pm. They had threatened to invoke this in order to prevent the project going ahead. After further discussion with the director and artist, and with the intervention of a supportive local councillor, eventually the police agreed to the event going ahead provided they could accompany the artist on the night. The director alludes to her fears that the artist might be endangered by intervening in fights, and expressed relief that on the night the police were to accompany him. Once police co-operation was secured the artist embarked on detailed planning for *Music for Street Fights*. The artist driver recalls meticulous preparation by the artist beforehand in his studio. This involved making lists of what was needed, and fitting them all with red boiler suits that would be worn on the evenings in question to give them an 'official' look (personal communication). In addition, Williams prepared a series of fliers and business cards to hand out in the local pubs, to raise awareness of what was going to happen. The two artists also visited the local disco a couple of weeks beforehand to hand out the fliers.

6.3.3 *Music for Street Fights: A re-enactment*

The following is a description of *Music for Street Fights* as it took place over two nights in April, 2008. The project was captured on video by the film maker, Jelke Platte, and released as a 7 minute, edited short film¹⁸. (The van driver was the artist

¹⁷ Music to soothe savage breasts', Aberdeen Press and Journal, 26th April, 2008

¹⁸ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9_CUvL83FSg.

Jacques Coetzer who was living in Huntly while working on another Deveron Arts project. The account is taken from my field notes dated 12th February 2016:

Field note 12.02.2016

Observations on video of *Music for Street Fights*

It is night time in Huntly town square, and it is raining. The place looks deserted and apart from the watery light from a couple of hotels and pubs, the Square is pretty empty. Then we spot a small white van loitering, the words 'Music for Street Fights' written along the side in black lettering. In the background we hear drunken voices, incoherent rather than angry. Two men are sitting in the van, one of them is driving, the other in the passenger seat. Both look bored. Not much is happening. The driver fidgets with his seat belt and rubs his arm, then fiddles with his glasses, pushing them up his nose. The man in the passenger seat supports his head on his hand, elbow propped on the partly open window of the van. Still nothing happens and the van continues to wait in its parking bay in the Square. In the distance, a car pulls away.

A taxi waiting near the van starts up as a man, dressed in short sleeves in spite of the cold weather, gets in. The taxi leaves. The scene changes. The white van drives slowly down the main street leading from the Square. It cruises past a gaggle of girls in high heels and very short skirts. Other young people wearing 'hoodies' are smoking in the street and talking. The van elicits mild interest as it goes on its way; someone shouts something about a music system. Two police officers arrive to talk to the young people. There's a man weaving along the street, looking worse for wear. The atmosphere is calm as the van drives off into the distance. The scene changes. We hear angry voices and two figures hove into view, but we can't see them that clearly. A man and woman are having a noisy fight on the pavement. We see the van with its hazard warning lights flashing. The man is being shoved off the pavement by his girlfriend. They keep on arguing. They barely notice the van as it passes by, hazard warning lights flashing; and now we hear music blaring from the speakers mounted on the top. We are in a spaghetti western. But it's not exactly High Noon. Remnants of angry voices hang in the air. Does someone shout 'real sorry?' The scene changes again and we see the van coming out of a side street. The music has stopped and there are no more angry sounds, just the odd car engine revving. A cat meows. We see a close up of the men in the van. One rubs his nose while the other strokes his chin. They look bored. They continue on their way. We hear cheerful, drunken singing in the background. The van goes across a crossroads and pulls away. A man walks down the pavement on the opposite side of the street.

Three young women are walking unsteadily down middle of the street, drunkenly intoning a rude version of a traditional Scottish song that we recognise as 'The Bonny Banks of Loch Lomond'. The van is parked up, facing them, looking vaguely menacing. There is plenty of swearing. 'I'll take' the high road, and I'll no get in... Raucous laughter." "You realise it's the voices that could be heard a moment earlier. There is more swearing as the women pass. They take a good look at the van but seem unconcerned. The van moves back again towards the Square. The driver flashes his lights at passers-by, but it looks as if they're calling it a night. Huntly seems pretty deserted. It is now past pub closing time and people have dispersed. It

starts to rain and drops of water appear on the windscreen. One of the two men starts to whistle softly a medley of the evening's entertainment; 'The Bonny Banks of Loch Lomond' interspersing with the Ennio Morricone soundtrack. A moment after the women passed the van we see a couple walking hand in hand. 'Music for Street Fights -waaay ha ha' parodies the man in a sing song voice, his orange jump suit brightening up what has otherwise appeared to have been a rather dull evening. “

The artist and artist driver both confirmed in their interviews that on the night not much happened and little violence beyond a 'domestic' brawl occurred. The lack of anticipated action is also reported in the local and regional press and commented upon in several national newspapers. The director recalls the lack of anticipated conflict, although she did not witness the event first hand owing to the fact it was happening late at night and into the early morning. However, she does reflect upon the fact that the experience of doing the project brought relations between Deveron Arts and the local police closer together and that a 'rather good relationship' then ensued.

Other actors were also aware of the project, but similarly did not witness it on the night. In summary, *Music for Street Fights* appeared to pass largely without incident, with the only violent episode being an apparent domestic row outside a pub, albeit fuelled by alcohol. The artist and artist driver both refer to the lack of anything happening in their interviews, which supports the material in the video.

6.4 Experiencing *Music for Street Fights*

The experience of different actors provides a more insightful analysis. This is explored in the following section. This section is followed by a discussion of the findings, then signposts to Chapter 8 that draws findings from across the three case studies.

6.4.1 Putting Huntly on the Map

The local community council were one of the most vociferous critics of *Music for Street Fights*, and instrumental in raising concerns over it. A local resident and official of the community council describes his recollection of the events leading up to the art intervention:

'This time there's a guy in a van with music who reckoned he could diffuse situations on a Saturday after the pubs are out and there's the potential for fighting and the like. And that he would go to the town centre, to the Square perhaps, or outside a pub and play his music which would diffuse the situation. Well, good – it might work but of course it got the publicity in the Daily Record and various newspapers that the Town was full of people with – prone to

fighting and causing disturbance. So again, it's the sort of knock on effect of that kind of publicity.'(community council official)

He voices the disquiet of others that Huntly would be portrayed in a less than favourable light.

'The impression would have been that they (Deveron Arts) were publicising the fact that this is a typical Saturday night in Huntly. But obviously there are these occasions that had happened, in any town. But it highlighted Huntly as being particularly bad.' (community council official)

Other actor's concerns were aired in the local press both before and after the art event. These ranged from speculation from a local councillor over how the art intervention might exacerbate, rather than ameliorate any violence, to the chairman of the community council questioning the ability of the artist to handle young people and their potential reactions. The Huntly Express¹⁹ also surmised that 'if the project attracted widespread publicity it could be very damaging to the image of Huntly.' However, this is presented as generalised example of local opinion rather than a quote attributed to any individual. Yet it would appear to support the comments made in the interview with the official that in some way Huntly might be misrepresented by *Music for Street Fights* as being particularly violent. There is a sense perhaps of denial in the following comment.

'It didn't impress a lot of people that this was being seen in national papers that Huntly was a place where people were getting beat up all the time.' (community council official)

In an interview with a regional newspaper, the councillor who voiced fears over community relations said she thought it (*Music for Street Fights*) was an interesting concept but stressed street violence was not a major issue in the town (Aberdeen Press and Journal, 2008²⁰). Similarly, after the event and before the public screening of the video, the chairman of the community council is quoted in the national press as saying: 'When this scheme started it seemed to imply that Huntly had many

¹⁹'Music plan fears', Huntly Express, 25th April, 2008

²⁰'Music to soothe the savage breasts', Aberdeen Press and Journal, 26th April, 2008

problems. But that is a bit unrealistic. The town is no better or worse than anywhere else.' (Daily Mail, 2008²¹)

In contrast, the director felt it was important that the problem had become better known as a result of the project. She felt that awareness had been raised locally of the issue of late night drinking and violence, and believed it was important that people knew about it.

'Much more people like me knew that these fights were happening. So that for me is something quite important because we always like to see oh this nice idyllic town, and it isn't idyllic at all actually if you think of these fights. I found that important that people actually get aware of these kinds of things.'(director)

Her actions in supporting the project professionally, and her position as a local resident, are both invoked to raise awareness of an issue others perhaps preferred to be kept hidden from view, or who denied there was a problem at all. The director identifies with other 'people 'like me' who did not know that such violence occurred after hours and on a regular basis. Recalling the project afterwards she maintains that:

'I still stand by that was a good idea.and you know I'm far too middle class. I'm not wandering around here at three o'clock in the morning. So I have never been aware of all these street fights. So it was the artist who had brought it up and I thought this was really interesting.'(director)

There is a sense in which Deveron Arts is providing something useful to the community. The director visits the local hospital to research the extent and seriousness of the problem. Along with the artist, she is committed to the project going ahead. They are both motivated by being able to shine a light on a social issue usually associated with cities taking place in a rural market town, although their motivation appears to be different. The artist is motivated by anger that he has found, yet again, violence on the streets, in the same way that it confronted him in Glasgow. His concern initially was in providing a soothing antidote to the violence for those forced to witness it.

²¹ 'Meet the artist paid £2,000 to play soothing music ... to drunks fighting in the street', Daily Mail, 9th December, 2008

'But I was actually thinking about the audience i.e. the other people and myself on the street witnessing something brutal and disturbing. My intention was to kind of disrupt and control its impact by kind of transforming it into choreography, like the emotive music in soundtracks placed over images in film. A soundtrack to late night violence not a cure. I think the cure begins at the other end of the telescope' (artist 1).

The director wants to 'reveal Huntly to itself' as an interesting cultural exercise, one that she is keen to initiate on behalf of other 'middle class people'. This is consistent with her explanation of the role of Deveron Arts, which is to raise awareness of local, social issues, rather than changing them, or offering solutions to social problems.

'Because projects are relatively short lived they are not normally designed in a way that they should really overtly change things as such...We just raise ideas more. I see that more our role, than constantly instigating change or something...Change is incidental. We give people ideas. If they can pick these ideas up and do something themselves with that, then that's a great kind of thing.' (director)

This is in marked contrast to how some local interests viewed *Music for Street Fights*, how its intentions were perceived as potentially negative. Rather than raising awareness of a social problem as something interesting or useful, potentially the art project was a threat to the image and identity of Huntly. There is, however, a shift in the rhetoric that both the director and the artist employ in order to 'sell' the project to the local community once local opposition to it becomes clear.

The change in intentionality, shared between the artist and director is evidenced by an examination of selected texts. From wanting to raise awareness of the issue of drink related violence on the streets of Huntly, and thus bringing into view its 'darker' side, the director appears to advocate an arts intervention that will instrumentally affect and diffuse potentially violent situations. Similarly, the artist's initial motivation of wanting to provide a soothing palliative to those forced to witness the violence, changes to using art to tackle the results of a social problem. The artist explained he had found himself being compromised into 'selling' the idea of *Music for Street Fights* acting as an antidote to the violence, as a piece of altruistic art with social purposes. To an extent this was a 'misunderstanding' that arose as part of the process of applying for funding. Once the project became controversial, the artist felt he had to

claim his intervention might be able to quell violence as it happened, even though that was not his original intention, nor motivation.

'This original misunderstanding led to me having to defend and promote its altruism in order to keep the police and councillors and press off my back. In short I lied through gritted teeth to get the project I wanted made...We also went into the pubs and club to hand out flyers. Basically false propaganda that declared the project to be a piece of socially engineered altruism which actually wasn't my intention'. (artist 1)

Analysis of the 'fliers' prepared by the artist support his account of what happened, how he had to 're-seduce the councillors and the police force' in order so the project could go ahead.

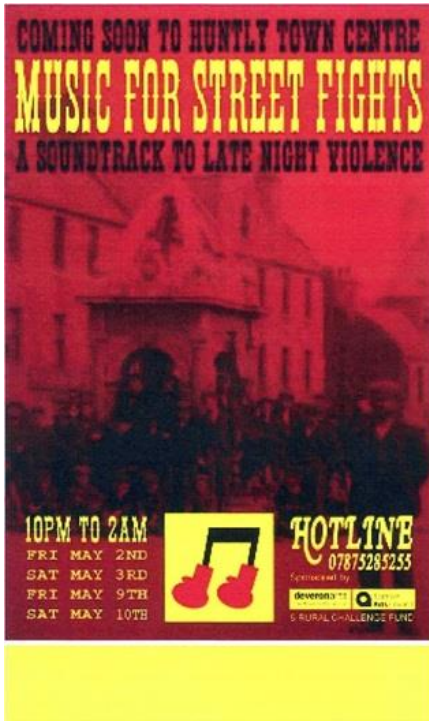


Figure 11 Fliers from *Music for Street Fights*
 (Images supplied by the artist)

6.4.2 Shifting intentions: fliers and handouts

The first series of images (figure 11) depicts silhouettes of rioters in cloth caps looming through a red background. The red suggests anger. A logo of a quaver, a musical note, is adorned with red boxing gloves. It features prominently. The words 'Music for Street Fights' appear in large capital letters, and there is a hotline number, where the artist, waiting for violence to erupt, can be alerted so that the van can be driven to where trouble occurs to play its 'Soundtrack to Late Night Violence'. The red and yellow colours, draw attention to the flier, they make it stand out. The design for the business cards depicts a white van that carries the stark message 'Music for Street Fights' written in black letters along its side. Behind it is the same red background. The images suggest menace, crowds gathering to have a fight, the white van, adorned with a yellow horizontal stripe down one side, carries an air of authority, like a police van. There is no disguising the message. It is easy to imagine how such images could convey to those with misgivings connotations of unrest, of threat, of things being made worse by the impending art event. However, later images are noticeably different. These are now less threatening, with intimations of violence muffled and disguised by beguiling images, and subtle changes in font and colour. The van is now spewing out hearts from its loudspeakers. It is the same van, in the same attitude, with the same words along one side. But this time it is shown against a neutral, off white background.

The change in colour, and the addition of the hearts, gives it a cartoon like appearance, the starkness of the message is softened. In the redesigned flier, the logo of the quaver with the boxing gloves remains, but this time it is enclosed in a yellow heart on a purple background (see figure 11). The word 'hotline' has been removed. This neutralises the situation before it has occurred: the absence of a hotline takes away the image of the artist waiting to spring into action as violence erupts in favour of quietly witnessing what happens while music is emitted from two loudspeakers on a van. We know from the artist that tactics were changed deliberately: 'Big Brother' (the artist's description) waiting for a hotline to ring has been replaced by a less threatening, mobile presence. One that is also visible to the police, and thus could be argued, offered them more control, and made them feel less threatened by the artistic project. In addition, the font has changed: gone are yellow capital letters, to be replaced by indigo italics. The strap line 'A soothing soundtrack to late night violence' is printed in small italics at the bottom of the poster,

instead of at the top, as in the previous version. The word 'soothing' has been added; it does not appear in the original. Instead of a billboard advertising a fight, the flyer assumes the appearance and tone of poster advertising a film. The boxing gloves look mildly comical, the yellow heart suggesting romance, violence enclosed in a loving casket and thus neutralised.

Similarly, the director appears to change her position. In the interview she states that not much changed instrumentally, but that awareness of the problem was raised. However, in the final project report (Deveron Art archive) and in the coverage in the local newspaper, the language is different and art is presented more instrumentally. The director refers to the 'received wisdom' of music being used to dampen down public violence and also talks about art as one possible way to tackle the problem:

'Above all we would like to state that there is no intention to celebrate street fights or put them on a pedestal of some kind. The opposite is the case. Using classical and other soothing music to deter aggression is a tried and tested method in a number of places across the UK.....Our interest in this project is solely developing a possibility of highlighting the issue and a potential solution.' (Huntly Express, 2008²²)

The project report talks about 'how to use socially engaged art practice to address the serious issue of binge drinking benefitting not only the people directly involved, but the whole community of Huntly by deterring street violence' (Deveron Arts archive). Having chosen to expose Huntly's 'underbelly', the artist and director participate in the subsequent rhetoric of change, albeit for the artist this is a compromise, but one that he is prepared to make pragmatically in order for the project to go ahead. Both the director and the artist could thus be seen as enacting the rhetoric of change. The artist describes his motivation as a determination to get acceptance for the project, by whatever means. There is perhaps a suggestion that the media discourse, and the reaction of local actors gave them no alternative to adopting a more instrumental positionality, overtly stating that as their intention. The artist notes that the director 'changed the discourse'. This contradicts remarks by the director in her interview that she did not see Deveron Arts being a social welfare organisation, that the purpose of art was to raise awareness and not to change things. Their combined interest is in ensuring the project goes ahead, for reasons

²²'Music plan fears', Huntly Express, 25th April, 2006

that are personal and particular, but different: the artist is motivated by anger that he has found, yet again, violence on the streets, in the same way that it confronted him in Glasgow. The director wants to 'reveal Huntly 'to itself' and to others, to challenge, perhaps, its image of idyllic rurality.

6.4.3 Enacting rhetoric and resistance

Yet the rhetoric is not one way. The reaction of the media and coverage in local and national newspapers suggests sticking up for the community in the face of unreasonable behaviour by the artist, even before anything has happened. Local interests are given prominence in the coverage by the Huntly Express, with three quarters of the coverage airing local concerns, compared with comments by the artist and director occupying 25 per cent of the article. The newspaper coverage also appears to stoke up fear of violence. For example, headlines such as 'Music to Soothe Savage Breasts' (Aberdeen Press and Journal, 2008²³), and 'Gary's mobile soundtrack to soothe the hooligans'²⁴ and even 'The Blue Danyob' (Daily Record, 2008²⁵) suggest Huntly could be under siege by violent hoodlums. The headlines infer the prospect of violence, and connect *Music for Street Fights* to doing something about it. They support the rhetoric that the artist said he was forced to employ to get the project made. There is also a tone of scepticism that art can make a difference, that somehow it is a waste of public money. Claiming an 'exclusive' coverage, the Daily Record (*ibid*) makes a point of emphasising the £2,000 that the artist was receiving from the then Scottish Arts Council. This is reinforced in the headline and also given prominence early in the article. A local resident is quoted as saying 'It is a crazy idea and the money would be better spent locking up the troublemakers instead.' Similarly, the headline in The Daily Mail: 'Meet the artist paid £2,000 to play soothing music to drunks fighting in the street' (Daily Mail, 2008²⁶) could be inferring that there is something ludicrous about the project or at least that it might be questionable. Why is the artist being paid for something a normal person might think was not a good idea? The Scottish Sun²⁷ goes further. In coverage after the event and prior to the public screening of the video, its report stresses that 'A

²³ 'Music to soothe savage breasts, Aberdeen Press and Journal, 26th April, 2008

²⁴ 'Gary's mobile soundtrack to soothe the hooligans', Aberdeen Evening Express, 26th April, 2006

²⁵ 'The Blue Danyob', Daily Record, 25th April, 2008

²⁶ 'Meet the artist paid £2,000 to play soothing music', Daily Mail, 9th December, 2008

²⁷ 'Street fighting van', Scottish Sun, 9th December, 2008

WACKY artist was handed £2,000 to play soothing music to fighting yobs — but couldn't find any' (Scottish Sun, 2008).

The use of the word 'WACKY' in capital letters reinforces the sense of ridicule. The artist is quoted as saying: 'Most of the time we were bored. We felt like Laurel and Hardy sitting there.' It could be argued that this choice of quote by the artist, on the eighth line of the article, emphasises that something comical had occurred, thus reinforcing the idea that the artist was 'wacky' or comical. The language suggests that *Music for Street Fights* was a questionable use of public money. The fact that 'driver Jacques Coetzer he got just SEVEN MINUTES of footage for his art project' is emphasised by the use of capitals that draw attention to the short length of the video as evidence suggesting perhaps that the public has been short changed? The subtler message is one that undermines contemporary art: not only is it ridiculous but the artists are dismissing their own project thereby emphasising the waste of public money. It also reinforces the message that the art intervention ought to have been able to soothe the fights; the fact that it did not, takes on a double meaning. Not only is there a sense of disappointment that not more occurred on the night, and that claims to the prevalence of street fights were perhaps over-exaggerated, but also the arts project failed to demonstrate its (questionable) worth.

The above extracts from interviews and the secondary analysis of various texts suggest power struggles over identity of place: who gets to create it and maintain it, and how this achieved. Both supporters and opponents of *Music for Street Fights* take advantage of rhetoric to achieve their intentions. However, their motivations are different. Through their arts practices the artist and director wish to shine a light on Huntly, to 'put Huntly on the map' and reveal its 'true' identity. This is not welcomed by some in the community whose motivation is to resist a perceived threat to the image of Huntly as a 'family town' of which they are proud. By contrast when recalling *Music for Street Fights*, two of the board members saw the controversy as little more than a 'storm in a teacup' that was exacerbated by the press coverage, even though they identified it as a project that had 'caused upsets'. Both of them had difficulty in recalling the artists' name:

'I forget the name of the artist...I've forgotten his name. He was a Glasgow lad, I think, he was tall, a very tall guy.' (board member 1)

'I can't remember who it was, but there was nothing really to it, but just the title got picked up by the papers, and it was "Oh, what's this?". Again, it was one of these "Why are we paying for this?" "What is this?", "Is this really art", kind of malarkey, but I can't remember. In the end, there was nothing.' (board member 2)

They recognise that some people view Deveron Arts as being 'quite way out', whereas others welcome the diversity of the projects and issues and that the organisation has become involved with creatively, even though some of these like *Music for Street Fights*, have been controversial. These projects make Huntly a culturally interesting place to live, something which as local residents they value:

'It certainly makes me much more positive to be in Huntly. I think it would, the place would be much less interesting, much less fun, to live in a place like this...We're not all hicks, really.' (board member 1)

'It's a lovely place to bring up children and things, but it risks being parochial... then these people coming in from around the world, with a different point of view, that's good...What is that Deveron Arts brings? It's the antidote to the parochial. That's what it is, isn't it?' (board member 2)

They express pride at living in a town that is different, a difference that is recognised by others with the perception of Huntly 'being an arty kind of place'. They recall an art project when Deveron Arts focussed on the issue of wind energy at the time when a windfarm was planned in the locality (*Breath Taking*, 2005). The creative process had involved consultation with the local community that was advertised in the town:

'I dare say windmills have gone up everywhere, but not every town has had that sort of approach, you know, billboards up in the Railway Station and billboards up in the carpark, ah, good stuff.' (board member 2)

Huntly being recognised and being different because of art was also valued by another actor in the community who was realistic about the challenges faced by small rural towns:

'The work that Deveron Arts does in Huntly makes Huntly stand out from other north east towns of a similar size... If you took away Deveron Arts, we would be just like many other north-east towns, and such a lot of north-east towns

are in decline because their town centres have gone and what have you, but we have the edge because we've got Deveron Arts with us.' (local resident 2)

This recognition through art was clearly welcomed by some actors, but as *Music for Street Fights* revealed, that recognition had been challenging for others. Theirs was not so much a fear of being noticed, but of being noticed for the wrong reasons. I would suggest that in these accounts there are hints of what may or may not be appropriate or acceptable in a rural market town like Huntly. How might different actors perceive what is 'right' in a place?

6.4.4 Contemporary arts practices: art in or out of place?

The following analysis introduces material from the interview with the artist driver, who was present on the two nights that *Music for Street Fights* was being filmed. He makes a connection between the meticulous preparation of the artist and for the artists' 'team' to be noticed as a component of the arts project. It could be argued that their intervention in any street violence needed to be prominent in order for there to be an effect. As the artist driver recalls:

'I remember him preparing this carefully at his studio, in an orderly way. He made lists of everything he needed and I remember we had to go and fit these red boiler suits he had got for us, which made us look quite official.' (artist 2)

When they visit the local disco to hand out their fliers, the artists wear the boiler suits; he recalls that this draws attention to them, the young people they encounter want to know what they are doing:

'Previous to the actual evenings, we went out, Garry and I in our boiler suit uniforms and we went to the disco and handed out leaflets with this design on it. So there was awareness before. During the handing out of the leaflets I picked up that some of the youth especially said "Hey what are you guys doing? What do you think you're doing?" and stuff like this.' (artist 2)

On the night of *Music for Street Fights* (but not captured on video) the fact that some people knew about the project, as was the artists' intention, presented a potential threat to the artists in their van. The artist driver recalls:

'And I can't exactly remember which of the nights it was but one of the nights, we went past a group of young guys, and they were quite boisterous by then

already! And they saw the van and they obviously knew about the project and they were shouting at us “Hey what are you guys doing?”

‘So they started banging on the side of the van which for a moment there you were thinking “Oh what’s going to happen here”, are they going to assault us or what?’ (artist 2)

It could be argued that the artists are marked out as being different through their actions and appearance, they are not part of the normal fabric of the place that is Huntly as experienced by the pub-goers and young people. They could be said to be 'out of place'. Their appearance and their practices are different to the everyday cultural practices going on around them, in this case drinking in local pubs, the disco and on the streets. In a second interview with the artist driver, that took place at the time of the 21st birthday celebration of the arts organisation (2016), we returned to the topic of street violence. The artist driver acknowledged that art remained powerless to change entrenched social behaviours (Bishop, 2012). His perspective also concurs with that of the artist and director that it is not the role of contemporary arts practices to act as a social corrective.

Upon his return to Huntly (in December 2016) the artist driver witnessed further violence:

‘The recent one was a case of again, it was a woman who was quite inebriated and was quite angry and shouting and fighting with her boyfriend. Late night, after the disco. On the street. We were walking on the street with some interns from Deveron Projects. One of the interns lived in Glasgow; she actually intervened very beautifully, and peacefully, and diffused the situation a little bit.’ (artist 2)

Considering the above statement, it could be inferred that the intern from Glasgow was well used to urban 'job culture', as was Williams, that it was familiar to them both. They intervened into a situation that was known to them, that was not 'out of place', only transposed to a different spatial context. The artist (Williams) had referred several times to the anger he felt at encountering street violence in Huntly: his reaction was to enact an arts intervention that had come to mind originally while watching street violence in Glasgow. Commenting on the controversy surrounding *Music for Street Fights* he expressed the generalised nature of drink induced violence, that it is a feature of society everywhere:

'Any alternative use of public space and time is controversial to someone. Especially when the artwork deals with a subject that is symptomatic of unhappiness in society...The inevitable weekend violence allowed the piece to function. Why inevitable? Where does the violence come from in the first place, why are people self-medicating on alcohol every weekend?'(artist 1)

There are hints in the reaction of local people to the prospect of *Music for Street Fights* that it is out of place in Huntly, and the artists by inference were also out of place. In one of the media reports, the local councillor is quoted as saying that the fact that the artist had been playing loud music late at night would disturb the occupants of the sheltered housing near the town square. However, she says nothing about the fact that street violence might have the same effect. The same councillor is quoted as asking how the project 'fitted in with the Ronald Center Festival, of which the launch of the project was planned to be a part' (Huntly Express, 2008²⁸). The Festival celebrated the life and work of 20th Century composer Ronald Center, who lived in Huntly all his life. There is a hint here of the inappropriateness of *Music for Street Fights*, in contrast to the celebration of a local cultural figurehead, one whose legacy enhances the image of Huntly. It is interesting that initially, the police drew on an arcane law in order to try and stop the project going ahead. The director recalls that:

'So now that they had been alerted they had to look into the law and basically we're not allowed to make any noise after 9 o'clock. And we said, OK we're not allowed to make any noise after 9 o'clock. And I said well what happens if we do now make any noise? We were sitting in the police station. And then they said, well there's a little cell. And I never even knew that we had a cell here, so that was interesting. So they showed me the cell and they might have to put this artist into this cell because he's making a noise after 9 o'clock.'(director)

There is perhaps a suggestion that she found this almost comical, while the police were putting forward a legal restriction that they regarded seriously.

²⁸ 'Music plan fears', Huntly Express, April 25th, 2008

There is a difference in perspective that becomes clearer when the director puts forward an alternative proposal:

'So we said, Ok, we come back to you and then we see what can be done, not what can't be done. So I said we could also put out some bungies? Hang them out, or we could just be Jonathan Cage or something, it makes almost fun of your law.' (director)

However, at this stage, the police were serious about invoking this law. The artist recalled that two weeks beforehand, the chief constable had threatened to stop the project altogether. The artist commented that the police were heavily influenced by the media attention *Music for Street Fights* received, attention that subliminally at least suggested that the artist was 'wacky', and the project an inappropriate use of public money:

'The project created some hysteria in the press media and to a certain extent with the police mentioned above. I vaguely recall one of the officers quoting verbatim speculation from the Sun which was a surreal moment.' (artist 1)

On the one hand the police could be seen as legitimately reacting to a potential breach of law and order, and stepped in with a legal safeguard, albeit one that seemed out of date and was little used. On the other, is there also a sense in which what was planned by the artist and Deveron Arts was 'wrong' or inappropriate, that it was out of place and needed to be deterred? The recollections of the director and the behaviour of the police initially might also suggest cultural differences. While one sees the situation as comical, even ridiculous, the police behave in a traditional way, and have the backing of local councillors to take action. They refer in the media to having advised the artist of the legal aspects of situation and the potential for creating disorder. Are both, in fact 'playing by different social rules'?

That sense of contemporary arts practices being 'out of place' and the arts organisation 'playing by different rules' is suggested in the interview with the official of the community council.

He acknowledges that people found some of Deveron Arts' early projects difficult:

'Well I don't know if people of Huntly really understood what Deveron Arts was all about when they first came into the town and started art projects. It was a bit obscure and some of the local people, their understanding of art wasn't exactly being portrayed by Deveron Arts.'

'And they had another example – there was another artist who was getting dead lambs from local farmers, taxidermy – stuffing them – and putting them into shop windows in the town. Well, again, there's people upset about seeing stuffed, dead, lambs in windows. It's a bit strange. It's understanding the artistic elements of some of the projects that is a bit of a concern I think.'
(community council official)

These early projects are reminders that when Deveron Arts first came to the town they challenged notions of what art should be, of what was acceptable. There is a perception that local people do not understand contemporary art and what it is trying to achieve. That their art is obscure, and perhaps does not belong in Huntly?

6.4.5 Art out of place, organisations out of place?

Not only have some of Deveron Arts projects such as *Music for Street Fights* been strange and 'out of place' but the organisation could perhaps be perceived as 'playing by different rules.' The arts organisation is accepted when it behaves in conventional ways and offers art that is considered more 'normal', and regarded with suspicion when it does not. On the surface the following passage describes amusing differences in practical culture:

'Some things like you know organising some of the events on the Square like Halloween in the early days. They had some great ideas on how they could present entertainment and artistic ideas but you know, the thing of having to get a license to close off the Square, having maybe first aid available and things like that.'

'They said "well you know we don't need to worry about that, that's easy, we'll just do it" sort of thing. And they have been kind of a bit stand-offish when we have tried to suggest well these sort of things do need to be considered and planned through and not be saying "well we're artists we don't need to worry about that"'. (community council official)

Artists and arts organisations are perhaps seen as rule breakers, who do not trouble themselves with petty bureaucracy nor conform to local institutional norms.

Conversely, the arts organisation and the artists are more accepted when they learn how to appropriately conform to the system of rules of 'how things get done' in Huntly. Over time the arts organisation has learned how to navigate the rules of the game in order to deliver its projects:

'So I think over time they have appreciated and learned that these things do need to be considered more. But it was certainly difficult a few years ago with the type of approach that they had, and the attitude to that requirement as well.' (community council official)

Nevertheless, in spite of earlier difficulties, the arts organisation had shown Huntly in 'a different light'

'On the whole, Deveron Arts has been good for Huntly and promoted the town in a different light than it would have been if it wasn't here. But some of the projects have certainly been a bit controversial I would say.' (community council official)

Another local resident reflected on Deveron Arts in Huntly and his own experience of various projects. He was less concerned with controversial projects such as *Music for Street Fights*, although he does reflect upon the fact that older, more conservative residents in the town have had problems understanding what the organisation and its contemporary arts practices are about. This interviewee was broadly positive about the presence of Deveron Arts in Huntly over the years, how they had enriched his experience of living there and bringing up a family in the town. He refers to the fact that for children not inclined towards sporting activities Deveron Arts has provided a valuable cultural resource. However, he makes an interesting observation about some of the young people who come as interns. He talks about 'the small clique' who tends to get involved in the more 'arty' and more conceptual sorts arts events. He says they tend to be younger and by implication 'hip' and culturally aware:

'It's an age group. It's people who have got time, you know, younger people which is great. It gives them something to concentrate on, it tends to be a sort of late teens, twenty something group that are very much into it, and have a great time, and that's the sort of people, at that age, that should be having a great time, and enjoying these sort of things.'

'But in a larger place, there'd be a larger group of people. If you went to Amsterdam or something that had something like this, there'd be a huge

number of twenty somethings, or thirties, doing these activities and getting a huge amount out of it.’ (local resident 3)

He describes interns sitting outside on the street in the summer trying to create a cafe culture, and makes reference to the innate conservatism in Huntly because of the numbers of older people who live there. And while this difference in Huntly is not something about which he is directly critical, he does question the value of what might be regarded as an urban cultural milieu coming to Huntly. It is almost as if through art that is ‘out of place’ there is too much novelty in Huntly, too many experiences:

‘If they were going to Edinburgh or Glasgow, or anywhere in England, big cities, they would find ... that’s half the point of moving on is that you experience new things and, if you’re in the town (Huntly), you’ve experienced a lot of these different things, you’re almost going ahead of where you’re supposed to be. You’re experiencing them too quickly and you don’t get that sort of, novelty factor later on.’ (local resident 3)

Too much novelty for one person represents art that is culturally ‘in place’ for others:

‘So it’s brought people from all over the world as artists and residents here, so it’s kind of opened peoples’ minds. You know, there’s not a big colour population here, there’s not a big ethnic minority population, if you like, and having these people coming, working and doing various projects, and being in the schools, and trying to get people to go to various gigs that they might be putting on, I think, has, in a way, broadened the spectrum and the minds of local people.’ (board member 2)

6.5 Conclusions

In the eyes of some, *Music for Street Fights* was art ‘out of place and offered a direct challenge to the identity of Huntly as peaceful rural town. In drawing attention to late night drunkenness on the streets, there is a disruption to the identity of Huntly that contradicts constructions of the town as peaceful and middle class; a ‘family town’, a slogan invented by local businesses. ‘Putting Huntly on the map’, as Deveron Arts has done, thus may not always have been a comfortable, nor welcome, experience for some local people. However, for others contemporary arts practices brought welcome cultural diversity, and marked Huntly out as being different from other places, giving it an edge that ensured it is was not just an ordinary market town

struggling to remain viable. The findings also suggest the reaction to *Music for Street Fights* was indicative of a disruption to an accepted norm, that I would argue is to do with what is acceptable, or considered 'right' in a rural market town. Relatedly, there are a second set of issues that arise from the analysis: between the power to disrupt the identity of place, and the power to resist. The analysis of *Music for Street Fights* highlighted the rhetorical opportunities and power of the media for the opponents of the project who aired their concerns in public when the identity of Huntly was threatened. Conversely the artist used other rhetorical device to ensure the project went ahead against local opposition, designing publicity materials that subtly changed the original messages about the project. I would argue the role of the director is pivotal. She states that the narrow, more parochial cultural milieu of Huntly was unsatisfactory to her and motivated the establishment of Deveron Arts. I would suggest that in order to reaffirm her own identity she needed to shape the place in which she came to live, to disrupt its image as an idyllic rural town and create a more cosmopolitan cultural milieu, thereby constructing Huntly as outward looking and culturally diverse. These topics are discussed further in Chapter 8, Discussion of Findings.

Chapter 7 Visual Arts in Rural Communities

7.1 Introduction and Structure of the Chapter

This chapter focusses on contemporary arts organisation Visual Arts in Rural Communities (known as VARC) and on the disruptive ‘moments’ associated with the production of a piece of sculpture in the landscape by artist Khosro Adibi in 2015. VARC is located on the High Green Estate in the area known as Tarsset, Northumberland. The first section begins with a short profile of Tarsset to provide context for the case study. VARC is then introduced, including a brief history of the organisation. The second section is a detailed account of the sculpture, which at the time was untitled and referred to generically as the sculpture in the landscape. The third section describes the ‘disruptive moments’ associated with the work. The section begins with a short summary of the project, and is then described in greater depth. In the third section, I present an analysis of the data from primary interviews with eight actors, including local residents, the artist, the chairman, and the project director. This is supplemented by secondary analysis of texts from the VARC archive advertising the exhibition ‘VARC in the City’ that took place in November, 2015. The final section briefly summarises the findings, before signposting to Chapter 8 that discusses the findings from all three case studies.

7.2 Setting the Context: A Short Profile of Tarsset

Much of the information in this section is taken from the submission draft of the Tarsset and Greystead Neighbourhood Development Plan (2015). The plan was prepared by the parish council, although it was not adopted (Tarsset and Greystead Parish Council, 2016).

The area around the High Green estate where VARC is based lies in the parish of Tarsset and Greystead. Local people, however, generally refer to the area simply as Tarsset. It covers an area of 73 square miles (189 square kilometres) and with a population of 289 it is one of the least populated parishes in the UK (1.5 persons per square km). The importance of the landscape in the parish is recognised through the national park designation which covers much of the area. The rugged landscape and long distance views across uncluttered horizons are a key feature of this sparsely

populated area and are highly valued by the people who live here (local resident, personal communication). In terms of the economy, farming and forestry are disproportionately important compared to the national average employing nearly 20 per cent of the population. The visitor economy is also significant and has been boosted by the designation of much of the area as an international dark skies park. The growth in astro tourism and the development of the Kielder Forest Observatory have provided new opportunities for small businesses in the area (national park official, personal communication). The Pennine Way and the Reivers cycle route also pass through the parish. The demographic profile of Tasset is ageing, and the proportion of older residents is high, with a number of retirees having settled in the area. The parish has 158 households, with 13 per cent of those being second homes. Greenhaugh has a pub (the Holly Bush) which is popular with locals and visitors. There is one first school in the parish (Greenhaugh First School). In spite of the sparse population Tasset is known for its active community life, much of which is focussed on Tasset Village Hall. Many activities take place there, ranging from traditional Scottish country dancing to folk music, an art class and a spinning and weaving group (local residents, personal communication). Film nights and ceilidhs are common and the area is perceived to have a particularly diverse and rich array of cultural activities with high levels of participation (local residents, personal communication).

7.2.1 Introduction to Visual Arts in Rural Communities

VARC is a long established visual arts organisation, founded by a key individual who provided its direction and facilitated its location (VARC chairman, personal communication). For the last 17 years, since 2001, it has been based on the High Green estate in Tasset, Northumberland. VARC was established as a private philanthropic charity and is not publicly funded for its core activities. The main element of its programme is a yearlong artist residency that is underwritten by an annual endowment gifted from an inheritance by its founder (*ibid*). This is supplemented by charitable, European and other public funding for specific projects that complement its main core programme. The founder's motivation was to offer aspiring artists in the early stages of their careers an opportunity to immerse themselves in a rural environment to find inspiration from nature (personal communication). A contemporary artist, working in glass, the founder began his artistic career in London, and still shows work in galleries there. After attending art

school and being a practising artist in London, he decided to move to rural France, where he lives and works. Personal friendships resulted in VARC being located at High Green (chairman, personal communication). Yet his influence over VARC's direction and objectives is still tangible, particularly in ensuring the continuation of the residency as VARC's main focus and its philanthropic work with a range of special needs groups (project director, personal communication).

VARC has a board of trustees, appointed annually, with several new members joining in recent years. The chairman is an arts curator and facilitator, running a touring visual arts organisation that is based in London (personal communication). The running of VARC has been overseen by its project director, Janet Ross, since 2001. Ross is responsible in large measure for its curatorial direction and programming. She has an arts background and prior to joining VARC worked for a community arts charity (personal communication). She is now guiding the organisation into a new phase in its development (see below). Owing to its remote rural location, the VARC artist in residence lives in a flat on site at High Green rather than in the community directly. However, many artists become integrated into the local community in and around Tarsset as temporary residents, taking part in the various social events centred on Tarsset Village Hall (local residents, personal communication). The recruitment process to select the artists takes place in October every other year and is overseen by the project director, the chairman and some of the VARC trustees. Two artists are selected simultaneously: one for the year ahead and the other the year following (although the structure of the residencies is being reviewed). Residencies usually commence in October and continue until the following September. While in residence, the artists spend the majority of their time developing their personal portfolio. In addition to being provided with somewhere to live, the artists have the use of a dedicated studio at High Green. At the end of their year in residence, the artists produce an exhibition of their work at High Green and some of their work may be exhibited in venues in local market towns such as Hexham, just over 20 miles away (project director, personal communication). Each end of year exhibition has a catalogue for the artist that is funded by VARC as part of its core programme (*ibid*). Over the years VARC has developed its wider philanthropic activities in the North East region. This involves the artist in residence providing a portion of their time to work on arts projects with community groups; the main focus however remains on their personal arts development (*ibid*). Work with special schools

for autistic children is a core part of VARC's philanthropic outreach; in more recent years this has expanded to include charities working with the homeless, refugees and asylum seekers, which the project director has been influential in bringing about (personal communication). There are limited facilities at High Green and no residential provision; artists frequently work with the groups *in situ*. However, VARC arranges day visits to High Green for groups to work with the current artist in residence. Alongside the residencies, the project director has introduced time limited projects of one or two months with artists commissioned to work with specific groups such as local schools. Creative projects with local and regional partners have also taken place, including VARC's Tenth Anniversary Celebration Weekend (2010) and WALKON²⁹, a Walking Art project with Sunderland University in 2013.

Over nearly 20 years of running its long term residencies, VARC has selected contemporary artists with a wide array of arts practices. This includes painting, drawing, photography, film and video installation, textiles and sculpture. In all there have been 19 residencies, with artists from as far afield as Norway and South Korea although the majority of artists have been UK based. The artists have responded in different ways to the landscapes and lives of the area, and reflected its rurality. For example, artist Helen Pailing³⁰ made 'an object a day' from materials gifted by local farmers or found in the landscape, while installation artist Leo³¹ inserted texts into the landscape in the form of words built in to dry stone walls.

The project director is due to leave VARC at the end of 2018 (personal communication). The core programme will shift from a yearlong residency with an open brief, to one that is themed. Residencies will be shorter (9 months and not a year) and will be more integrated into local community issues and concerns (*ibid*). There is also a shift away from an emphasis on special needs towards 'everyday' cultural elements that are rooted in community issues. For example, there may be a one-month artist residency at Hexham Livestock Mart. The shift in focus is to encourage artists to engage with rich sources of local cultural material, to be more embedded in community settings such as the village hall and pub, and engage with

²⁹ <https://varc.org.uk/projects/walk-on-highgreen-exhibition/>

³⁰ <https://varc.org.uk/air/helen-pailing/>

³¹ <https://varc.org.uk/air/leo/>

issues relevant now to rural living and working, such as sustainable energy, access and re-wilding, new technologies, farming practices and skills (*ibid*).

7.3 The Story of the Sculpture in the Landscape

The controversy over the artwork described below and its selection for study as a potentially disruptive moment arose during the fieldwork stage of my research project.

Field note 03.07.2015

The project director calls to discuss a situation that has arisen with the artist's sculpture in the landscape. There have been complaints from some members of the local community to Northumberland National Park about the 'destruction' of rocks arising out of his work. The director is worried about the consequences for the artist's show in the Queens Hall in Hexham in July. She is thinking about bringing members of local community together for a 'round the table' meeting. I ask if I can observe this.

Iranian born artist, Khosro Adibi was appointed to be the VARC artist in residence for 2014-15. He left his homeland in the 1980s following the Iran-Iraq war and the establishment of its theocratic regime owing to his Marxist views and activities at the time (artist, personal communication). He has not returned, although he describes his exile as self-imposed rather than forced (he could now go back). During the 1990s he trained in fine art in the Netherlands, studying sculpture for five years, developing his arts practice in video installation. An interest in movement and access to dance courses while at art school led to him adding a portfolio of creative activities and he still works as a dance teacher alongside his contemporary visual arts practice. An interest in, and experience of, working in wild landscapes has developed over the last 10 years or so, with repeat visits to locations in Northern Norway (*ibid*). Adibi began making temporary installations in the landscape (that he photographed) responding to nature and using what he found there as materials (*ibid*). Being largely itinerant he has eschewed a permanent living space, living much of the time from his van. The residency at High Green offered him an opportunity to develop his practice, and unusually to be settled in one location for a year. He discovered working in natural stone during the residency, never before having used it as a material (*ibid*). Over the

months of his residency the artist developed the skills to produce the range of works that appeared in his final exhibition. He continued his practice of working in the landscape in addition to the studio. The artist describes being inspired by the natural sandstone found in the area and the cup and ring marks found in Northumberland (*ibid*). He started to explore the potential of working with the rocks near to High Green. Having been given permission by the landowners at High Green (artist and chairman, personal communication) he felt he had the freedom to experiment and develop his practice (artist, personal communication). During the spring and into the early summer he began working on the sculpture that was to prove controversial (figure 12). This involved drilling holes in a rocky outcrop near to High Green. The artist's sculpture came to the attention of local community members, some of whom were unhappy with what was happening. The arts practice was described variously as 'inappropriate', and even by some as 'vandalism' and 'destruction' (local resident, personal communication). The rock outcrop where the artist was working, marked on the map as Black Crag, was also a prominent local landmark, that had over the years had been given the colloquial name of 'The Lizard's Head' because of its reptilian appearance (local residents, personal communication).



Figure 12 The sculpture in the landscape, High Green (Photos Frances Rowe)

A local amenity organisation led by a community member made enquiries to Northumberland National Park as to whether such activities were permitted in a protected area. This included whether there were any policies that were relevant to guide decisions about what the artist was doing (local resident, national park official, personal communication). Phone calls were made by the national park to VARC.

Seeing that a possible rift with the local community could develop, the project director considered offering a meeting to confront the issues being raised, although this never materialised (project director, personal communication). Meanwhile the artist stopped working on the sculpture.

The official of the National Park responded to the amenity group. He said that in the Park's opinion, the work appeared to fall outside the scope of the planning system, and thus there were no policies in the national park plan that could prevent it. In general, the park's approach was one of negotiation and discussion with landowners (personal communication). The artist subsequently completed the sculpture and it featured in his final exhibition. This included a guided walk to the site in addition to the works located on the High Green Estate and in the artist's studio. Unlike the other two case studies, the issue was not picked up by the local media and remained 'below the radar'. However, tensions associated with it remain, although these have diminished over time (local resident, personal communication). Since the end of his residency and following a period of travelling and working in South America and Europe, the artist has returned to High Green to continue his practice, developing studio based sculpture in the natural sandstone of the area. He is currently renting another building on the estate where he also lives (artist, personal communication).

7.4 Experiencing Sculpture in the Landscape

In the following section, the experience of the sculpture in the landscape by different actors is presented and then the findings are discussed in Section 7.5. One local resident, and a member of one of its amenity organisations describes being made aware of what was happening by a friend:

'She said I want you to come and look at this. Because she wasn't at all sure what she thought about them. There was a fantastic rock there that looks like a lizard's head. That was before it had eyes drilled out. We're in various groups and one of them is to do with environmental and historical things. So I went to look at it and we were both very disturbed by it I think. Actually there were people who thought it was vandalism.' (local resident 1)

Others also felt the arts practice was destructive. One of these actors was a local resident who was brought up and worked in the Tarsset area before moving away to London, and had subsequently retired in the locality:

'This is a piece of carboniferous sandstone three hundred million years old. It looks vaguely like a fish or lizard depending on taste. It's been well known in the neighbourhood...It seemed puerile, destructive and pertinent to me. Those holes are going to be in that rock for 500 years or more.' (local resident 2)

There is a suggestion that the impact of the sculpture as it was being constructed had deeper resonance with some people beyond aesthetic affront.

'And for some people it means – like internal mapping that people have a great attachment to place. Perhaps because they've been there for a long time, or for whatever reason. So it raised questions.' (local resident 1)

The fact that the rocks had a colloquial name was mentioned by several actors. It could be argued that by naming the outcrop, it becomes meaningful as part of a 'mental mapping' of place.

7.4.1 Expressing long term attachments to place

The way people feel about the landscape may also be associated with ideas of permanence and notions of home even for those who no longer live there. One local resident refers to the Tarsset landscape as some peoples' 'home landscape', with an implication for the magnitude of the affront caused by the artist's work.

'It seemed to take for granted that it was OK to make permanent marks in the landscape which was actually Tarsset's landscape and for some people, it's their home landscape' (local resident 1).

The use of the phrase 'home landscape' denotes a place that is unchanging, to which actors return in the hope that it remains as they once knew it. As such, another local resident regards the landscape of his birth as being under threat: there is strength of feeling that comes across in the interview, arising from having been born and brought up in the Tarsset area:

'I'm very fond of this landscape and this countryside which is where I was born and where I worked at one point. I lived most of my life away. We moved away when my father came back from the War. But I've been coming back very

regularly ever since and I worked here after I left school on the forestry...It's under a certain amount of threat.' (local resident 2)

Depth of feeling about this particular landscape would also appear to be associated with permanence. What is perceived as an act of vandalism by some people is made more meaningful for its detractors because it cannot be undone:

'And it was very interesting the responses I got from people. From discomfit to absolute fury. Just feeling that this was somehow wrong. Somehow this shouldn't happen and at an exhibition of artists whose work is described as temporary works in the landscape, this couldn't be, unless you took that temporary in terms of millennia, this wasn't temporary you know.' (local resident 1).

There is a difference between this piece of sculpture in the landscape, and a previous artwork 'Curious Wall' by a former VARC artist in residence, Leo (figure 13).



**Figure 13 'Curious Wall' by Leo
(Photo VARC)**

'To change the nature of a built wall which is already built by man, which is what Leo did, it will fade and so on, isn't the same thing. But to drill a huge hole right through a rock in a very conspicuous place, in a place that certain people are very fond of, including people who were brought up here at High Green...Who were probably some of the most angry and vociferous of all.' (local resident 1)

The permanence of the 'damage' to the landscape by the sculpture expressed by some actors appears to matter because of their deep attachment to its natural features. There are connotations, perhaps, of an idyllic rurality, one that does not change, connected to nature and natural landscapes. Yet another feature in the same landscape that is also permanent does not carry the same import. Partly this is because it is not perceived as 'natural', and has been built by man. By contrast,

another local resident who is married to a farmer, has a strong attachment to Leo's wall because in being man made, it denotes the skill of the craftsman and creates something lasting. She takes obvious pride in it, making a point of taking people to see it on the health walks that she leads:

'I was so over the top with enthusiasm I said I know where we're going this week. We're going up to see the Wall... I think Leo of all the artists, he learnt a skill, stone walling, he learnt from the best. He then went out and he spent days creating something in the landscape which isn't offensive, it isn't controversial. He thought very, very seriously about what he did. And I think it's true art because stonewalling is an art. Because it's lasting. It's still there, three, four years later. But it was something that he couldn't do before he came. So he learnt something. Which to me is quite important' (local resident 3).

The same actor took people to see the sculpture in the landscape on another of the walks she led.

'And then we walked up and round. I pointed out the one in the rock, the hole in the rock. And I said "now look, I want your honest opinion, what do you think? Don't tell me immediately but this has been a bit contentious." And they were all very interested. They didn't think there was any problem attached to it at all' (local resident 3).

The actor clearly enjoys being able to share the artworks in the landscape with others. Yet, in the phrase 'it's true art because stonewalling is an art' and the comments about the wall not being controversial, as was the sculpture in the landscape, there is perhaps a sense of what is acceptable in the local landscape, and what seems to be less in tune with local cultural sensibilities.

There is also a subtlety involved in the way actors attach meaning to features in the landscape that raises questions about freedom to act, to choose how they see something and how they interpret it. What might be identified as a lizard's head as part of a mental mapping of a specific location, could also possess multiple alternative meanings. In short, the insertion of holes in the rock represented a loss of imaginative potential, a reduction in interpretive possibility:

'I suppose what's not known is that people have a fondness for particular places too. Everybody knows it [this rock], the Lizard's Head, it's just what it looks like. But it doesn't have to look like that until you put eyes in it. And

once you put eyes in it in, to me it reduces it. It reduces it to having to be this. And this trivialised it.' To make it definitely a lizard's head and even with the eye drilled right through will look like... You're fixing one, single interpretation. ...It was denigrating something that had its own grandeur' (local resident 1)

Similarly, there was another example, by another artist in residence that suggested an affront to people's perceptions of the place they lived, and of which they were proud. This particular artist produced abstract drawings, often with dark and brooding images, based on the landscapes around High Green:

'It was an interesting example. People were very antagonistic to his stuff. Because it appeared to be negative about Tarset. Don't come in and diss our land, or represent our place as anything other than beautiful. Again...the artist is in conflict with the assumptions people have or that they live with about their own landscape. They live in a place of beauty. Therefore, to have someone who represents a dark side of it is resisted. One or two people were really quite agitated about it' (local resident 1)

This affront to local pride is summed up by another actor in the phrase 'art is what you can get away with, a perspective to which he appears to have mixed feelings:

'And then one or two of them were actually controversial. A little bit of controversy is not too bad. I think he was just wanting to be controversial. But then that is what he thought of the area. 'Art is what you can get away with' (local resident 4).

This suggests a 'contract' between local people and the artists, of respect for the people, and the landscape. Furthermore, respecting peoples' attachment to their locality that is embedded in the landscape and in nature is a fundamental part of that contract:

'The vision that I saw ...was what this community, this area could provide to the artists. And the ones who've got the most are the ones who have taken that on board and worked with the environment as it stands not trying to fight against it...Which is what Khosro did. The stone just appealed to Khosro, the stone walls appealed to Leo. Jenny Purrett (another artist in residence) found that she could find an awful lot in the lichens and the mosses.' (local resident 4)

7.4.2 Arts practices and global placelessness?

The artist describes the appeal of the landscape and materials that developed through his residency. The residency with VARC had enabled his use of stone for the first time. This was a departure from his normal arts practices which were largely temporary owing to the absence of a permanent studio, short term commissions and a transient lifestyle.

'And then at certain point, around November/December I think it was I discovered the stones and I start working with the stones. In the beginning just dragging the generator with me and to the nature and then doing things. Little by little I started to do some objects. It was speak to me a lot because of the material. I feel like material tell you what to do actually.'

'I just go there and this piece of rock, and I start digging in that and do something with that. I will not do such a thing if I am temporary in one place. But being there for such a long time, allow you to start a long term creation rather than doing something practical, then stopping it.' (artist)

He describes his inspiration to working in the landscape as a response to the materials he finds, rather than a predetermined concept.

'I feel like it is in a way very honest work rather than too much intellectualising – finding the reasons to do things. It is very much down to the earth. I don't have any criteria or limitation when it comes to material as long as at that moment I can do something with it.' (artist)

The artists' reaction to the disquiet over his sculpture was one of surprise. In the interview while being reluctant to discuss the issue in detail, he admitted to being disappointed – and confused – over some peoples' reaction to the work. He had sought the necessary permissions from the landowner, he said. His reaction belies a mismatch, a clash perhaps with British cultural values over the ideals of landscape and the rural; seeking permission was a formalised action that did not take into account the ways in which the local landscape was perceived, something of which the artist was not aware. At the level of peoples' reactions, he was willing to concede that people were entitled to different viewpoints, which may be positive or negative.

'I feel like you cannot please everybody in the world with your work, with who you are as a person, with what you do. So in that sense I feel everybody has a right to feel something is interesting or not. Or have to be there or not.' (artist)

From discussing his arts practices and the experience of working in this particular landscape emerges a contrasting perspective to those who felt his work challenged the identity of the place they knew intimately, and their deep attachment to it. First, there is a sense in which the artist's practices suggest a universal 'placelessness'. His frequent use of the term 'nature' may be a linguistic response by a non-native English speaker, but also indicative of a universal concept of the wild landscapes where he chooses to work, nature 'red in tooth and claw'.

'I have that crazy feeling that nature offer me something. And I respond to that and that is a kind of exchange, dialogue. I call this nature 'Lonely Land'. It has something very primary, very basic, very old, the land here. When I was in north of Norway I felt the same. It is not for nothing when people want to make those old movie they come in this kind of landscape to shoot. Because somehow it has something from way back. When people call 'lonely' it consider somehow negative. It's not negative for me. It has something authentic, it has something pure.' (artist).

In spite of the specificity of the Northumberland landscape and its cultural, historic associations, he relates to it as a universal phenomenon one that he has come to know through watching documentaries:

'Even if it is here in Northumberland – cup and ring marks – I'm really crazy about those things. I never seen them but I look at so many documentaries that have to do with that kind of thing all over in the world about how they discover something and I feel somehow certain relation to that. What it is rationally, actually, intellectually, I don't know really. I feel like somehow something speak to me and I respond to it.'(artist)

Second, there is a commonality through materials, and the traditions and practices of working the land. Meaning for the artist arises out of the work, the skills he has learned and the tools he uses. He also relates to others who work the land, in a shared language of physical work and response to the challenge of the seasons. This is expressed through his relationship with some of the estate workers, or who work the land nearby; theirs is a shared language of practice. There is a suggestion that farmers understand 'nature' whereas perhaps others do not.

'Some other people which they are considered farmers or nothing to do with art they appreciate a lot what I'm doing here. The reason is not always the static object they see. They also see whatever day, raining, snowing, Khosro is working. I think in the first place that is what speak to them. Because that

is something that is closer to their experience and they feel that is a person here I might not relate to what he is doing, but he is doing it every day like us standing up in the morning and coming back in the evening.’ (artist)

Third and in conclusion, the artist's sense of freedom to respond to nature was culturally different to the people who objected, in that the latter were aware of the 'rules of the game', while the artist had no comprehension of this beyond asking the landowner for permission. This indicates different values that can be explained in part by differences of ethnicity and culture, and lifestyle. This is also expressed in the concept of mobility:

'I consider myself a nomad and I'm quite proud of that. It was not what happened, it was a choice for me. It keep you aware, it keep you awake, and sensitive towards what is going on, involved in a global understanding and not being Dutch, being English, being Iranian, being whatever. I don't consider all those borders. I feel like the world is like a big city I am living in.' (artist)

The artist experiences the rural as nature unbounded: as such he is not aware of the cultural norms of land ownership and use beyond the permissions granted by the landowner. The discourse of the rural in an English context is not meaningful to him. Hence he expresses confusion and disappointment in connection with peoples' reactions towards the sculpture in the landscape. This perhaps lies in contrast to the notions of the rural as a pastoral ideal, of community, and landscape in the English cultural tradition of the 'rural idyll'; one where the rules of land ownership are observed through complex institutional norms and values.

7.4.3 Art not out of place, just misunderstood?

The chairman's account of what happened confirmed that there were people who had complained about the artist's work, that they felt he was 'disfiguring the landscape'. While accepting that people or local organisations had the right to raise concerns, she defended the artists' work and intentions:

'We just feel that particular artist, has the complete honesty, he's not an artist who's going to go out disfiguring landscape. His approach to land art is completely genuine, and he asked permission. We just feel that it was enhancing something, and giving a legacy of something for everybody to enjoy, so obviously when somebody comes back, and says, "What is this

destruction?”, obviously it doesn’t fit quite right...It feels like a, yes, more than a criticism of the artist who we really stood by.’ (chairman)

‘Anyway, as it turned out, there was nothing, there was nothing, the National Park stood by VARC, and said there was absolutely nothing wrong, that the artist did nothing wrong.’(chairman)

The recollection by the national park official was more nuanced:

‘The first we got was knowledge of what was happening was a complaint from the local community. Who were saying what’s happened here? Are the authority aware of this? Have you given planning permission for it because is this not development? And the complaints from the community, they saw this as vandalism, changing their landscape in a way they hadn’t been asked about, they hadn’t consented. How can that happen to our place without us even being asked about it? (national park official)

The belief that the sculpture would enhance the landscape and leave a valuable cultural legacy was supported by VARC’s project director:

‘There’s no way Khosro would make something that looks like a face, it’s not what he does. He works with abstract shapes...And I think it will be a really beautiful piece and it will be so biddable every way and the fact that’s it’s integral to the land is something that I think will make it extra special, rather than something that is placed. I think it will add to the artwork and add to the landscape.’ (project director)

Both the chairman and project director were keen to bring people together to discuss their concerns, although no meeting took place. There is a belief, perhaps, that explaining the work in the context of land art in general might help people to understand it:

‘Well why don’t we have a meeting, a talk, in the pub you know, just invite people just to talk about, just really talk about land art and their objections, what is it? Maybe the artist could even just talk more about his approach. I mean, Anthony Gormley’s just written a book about land art which is very interesting, with examples of work exactly like Khosro’s, so I do think, in terms of sort of informing, this would be like an art history thing.’ (chairman)

The chairman and project director would be expected to support the artist and his creative intentions, and believe in its creative worth. There is a faith in explanation around the meaning of art as a way to help dispel local objection and bring people on

board. This is consistent with wider views expressed about the propensity of the local community to engage in contemporary art that had developed over the years VARC had been in the area:

'I feel that over the last fifteen years, there's been a big shift in terms of their understanding of contemporary arts, and I mean what I say, when I say understanding. I don't mean to say appreciation or love...I feel that they're much more accepting that yes, this isn't a water-colour, this isn't a drawing. They still like that, more, I feel. They are much less engaged with the very conceptual artists, and I can really understand that.' (chairman)

Yet there is still, perhaps, misrecognition of local concerns and differences in the way the local landscape is perceived. For the chairman and project director, the countryside is an opportunity for creative inspiration in the name of art, which validates the intentions of the artist. They believe it will genuinely enhance the peoples' experience of the landscape. Given the exposure of the community to art over time, perhaps local people could be expected to appreciate the sculpture as something that adds to the landscape aesthetically? For others in the local community, however, those intentions threatened the identity of a landscape which they felt was 'theirs'. The local complainants wanted to invoke the rules of development control to stop the sculpture being completed; however, the national park had no powers to stop it:

'Just looking at it from an administrative point of view. It isn't development, it didn't need planning permission and we didn't have any way of controlling it. If they'd gone and quarried the stone out then we would have had the ability to consent it. I read it as an absence of dialogue rather than we don't want any change. I read it more as an emotional response. This is common heritage, this is a really well used route we use this route all the time. How come someone can decide they want to interpret it in a certain way and we have to live with that? How can someone else's view dominate our view?' (national park official)

7.4.4 Bringing an urban mind-set?

The analysis in the previous section has highlighted how the landscape was connected in a specific and intimate way to actors' attachment to place, an attachment that was culturally specific, rooted in the permanence of landscape and

nature. I would also argue that the artist's confusion over the reaction to his work indicates a cultural misunderstanding in relation to an English concept of rurality and landscape designations such as national parks that enshrine it. This was in contrast to the artist's perspective of a universal quality of nature that was culturally mobile, an absence of a situated sense of place. It also starts to bring into view the different cultural identities and experiences of 'the rural' that are signalled through arts practices, and how these can be in conflict. Furthermore, there are power relations involved in determining which identities prevail.

The cultural specificity of the rural in an English context is also expressed through its relationship to the urban. Contemporary arts practices can be seen as signifiers of that relationship not only as physical artefacts, but also as a set of values as indicated in the following response:

'We were going past Green Park. It has nothing in it but trees and plants. And lo and behold I see in it this – a piece of abstract art. I don't know why it's there. Obviously it's important to people but there was nothing on it that said what it was. It didn't have a name or a title, author or anything. And that set me thinking about the famous thing that looks like a lizard, or fish near High Green. Which it seemed to me was bringing the whole urban mind-set to the countryside...My feeling is it belongs in a city and not in a fairly wild part of the country.' (local resident 2)

The criticism of abstract art as representing urban mind-set could be interpreted as being in the nature of contemporary art: the natural rock formation had come to represent species in nature, recognised by local people over time as a lizard, or a fish. However, the insertion of the holes into it, rendered something formerly representational as abstract, and furthermore claimed to be art. Contemporary art as part of an urban mind-set is also expressed through an absence of practical functionality:

'A previous artist at VARC went up into the hills behind High Green and at some considerable trouble built a wall. In fairness it is so weathered now that it is not offensive, but it is pointless. People are crying out for wall builders - our beautiful walls fall down, nature – the frost does it. If you want to write Be Curious on a wall why not find a piece of wall that needs rebuilding and put it in that? That's what I mean by the urban mind-set'

'If you go up Deadwater Fell, there's an extremely ugly early warning station, with radar antennae, nasty sort of thing, utilitarian sort of thing, but somebody

has put what they call a shelter – an art shelter.... a hopeless shelter, because it only faces one way, but even more hopeless because it lets the wind through...And this is supposed to be a piece of art!’ (local resident 2)

7.4.5 Not understanding the countryside

Furthermore, there is a suggestion here that an urban mind-set is one that does not understand the countryside and the cultural qualities of the rural:

‘A couple of weeks ago, we went to one of the very few traditional hay meadows left in England up at Brush End, which is between Lane head and Donkleywood. We found 30 species of wildflowers probably in the first 10 minutes. Every one different, every one interesting, every one with its own little ecological niche, every one doing a particular job that aeons of evolution have determined for it, and that in itself is awfully attractive. And if one has an urban mind-set one probably doesn’t really feel it in the same way, is my feeling.’ (local resident 2)

Hence to ‘decode’ the rural and understand it culturally requires an appreciation of land management practices and natural landscapes as fundamental components of rural identities:

‘There are people who come and live in the Valley and they go to the pub and they love the peace and quiet, not having neighbours, but they know nothing about the country. They know nothing about farming, other than it’s a nuisance or mud on the road. So they’re not engaging with it as a rural place at all. They happen just to live here...And there are people who live here who are totally engaged, whether they’ve been here for ever, or whether they’re like me have come more recently. Because they get it.’ (local resident 1)

However, this sensibility toward the rural is demarcated by local knowledge, an embedded sense of the rural as a working landscape, not simply as a haven of peace and quiet to be consumed. ‘Getting it’ implies being ‘of the rural’ and not simply ‘in the rural’, a set of values and perspectives that attach to cultural constructions of rurality signified by land management practices and nature.

Contemporary arts practices appear to signify cultural practices and values that for some, do not ‘fit’ with these constructions and are labelled as ‘urban’. For example, this actor recalls an earlier work by Leo, a wall depicting a cannabis symbol on the land of a local farmer:

'He also did something on their land, which was the symbol for cannabis. I just thought, you know, you see this all over Berlin maybe but if it was my land, it just seemed a bit...I wasn't sure about it.' (local resident 1)

Yet contemporary art can be appreciated by rural audiences but in ways that are different to people in cities.

'Yes, I do think that it (contemporary art) is more of an urban phenomenon. What I do also think is, when you do show contemporary arts in more rural, or less accessed, so it's smaller towns, if you want. The response, people on the whole, go to the exhibition and there's much more communication. If they don't like it, they'll tell you. There's much less of blasé-ness about, "Oh well, don't get it, don't understand it but so what." Take it or leave it. "I'll go to the next exhibition, somewhere else." There it's, "Oh, there is an exhibition at this venue, let's go", and I found that there's usually a real exchange in communication.'(chairman)

An 'urban' perspective is also expressed in another way by the project director and chairman. The project director sees VARC's activities in relationship to the urban, and the value of the countryside as a 'magical place' for city people, like she is, to come to.

'Living in town and experiencing High Green for the first time, and feeling it as a sort of magical – a place that had so much to offer. So I suppose the area that I've kind of developed has been offering chances for groups and for people to come from an urban environment at the minimum. And more recently marginalised or disadvantage people that wouldn't be able to access Northumberland as well as making things creatively' (project director)

Similarly, the countryside has a value for those who work and live most of the time in cities as the chairman observed:

You know, the feeling of how much we take for granted, when you live in the countryside, going for a walk. You feel in one way when you go for a walk this closeness to nature, and not being confined to the city all the time...I suppose what I feel that High Green or the countryside there, with VARC, just opens up a whole horizon just, it's a big landscape, it's opportunities. (chairman)

These responses could be regarded perhaps as an urban perspective that regards the countryside as a source of freedom and inspiration, in contrast to the constraints of the city. Furthermore, I would argue that VARC could be seen as an organisation

with an urban cultural identity in a rural location that provides opportunity for cultural enrichment. As such it is embedded in place, yet remains relationally connected to the city. This brings opportunities and cultural value, but also for some actors raises questions:

'VARC brings a wealth of opportunity that you wouldn't otherwise have. There are a few of us who love art who go to art exhibitions who perhaps will read reviews, discuss art or whatever. Is it enough that it enhances the lives of people who live out here but are aware that they're missing the lives perhaps they used to live in the city, the culture that they used to have access to? Possibly.' (local resident 1)

'The ones that we've got to know (the artists) particularly you miss them when they go, yes. Like friends who move away. But life carries on...Maybe it's (VARC) a thing that ought to be in the city. Where there are more people.' (local resident 4)

I would suggest VARC could be regarded as a neo-endogenous cultural actor. Through its situated arts practices and the presence of artists, it is in the rural, yet it is also connected to the city via networks of arts practices, the mobilities of the artists and institutional relationships. This was illustrated by the exhibition VARC in the City that took place at the end of November 2015. Below is an analysis of promotional materials produced for the exhibition (figure 14) and a field note of my observations.

Field note 22.11.2015

I have arranged to meet the project director and one of the VARC artists at the exhibition VARC in the City. This is being held at the Breeze Collectives Abject Gallery in Newcastle upon Tyne. The entrance is slightly scruffy, suggesting a subversive art project or group, and there are members of the collective milling about as I arrive and ask where the exhibition is being held. I am directed upstairs. The gallery space is sparse and 'white cube'. Different artworks are on display some large scale and prominent, resting on the floor, others are smaller and arranged on the gallery walls. Several artists are in attendance to talk to people about their work. I spot the project director and go over and talk to her. There is a bar and nibbles and lots of art talk going on, with business cards being exchanged. The artworks look good and I compliment the project director on the quality of the presentation. I do not get a sense of the urban or the rural, rather that this is work (in a range of different mediums) that has captured something of the location to which the artists have responded in striking and very different ways. The rural is on view rather than in view. The purpose of the exhibition is partly to raise funds, and specially commissioned prints have been donated by some of the artists. I cannot

spot any local people that I have met through my association with VARC and am told by the project director that only one person from the Tarsset area has turned up. This may be because it is a long way to travel for people. Or that they do not feel it is as relevant to them as the artists' exhibitions at High Green.



Figure 14 Images from VARC in the City
(Photo VARC)

The purpose of the materials was to promote the exhibition and encourage people to attend. The documents can also be read as discourse that constructs the art organisation as a culturally mobile and connected actor, being of the rural yet comfortable functioning in the city. The name of the exhibition, VARC is in the City implies that it is not in the rural, or that it is in both in the city and the countryside simultaneously. The first visual advertising the show (figure 14) places the names of some of the artists who have been resident at High Green in an urban setting. It is intended to look like an advertisement for an exhibition in an art gallery; the letters reflected on an urban streetscape in Newcastle where the exhibition is being held. There are cars and a bus and a parked taxi. There is no representation of rurality, or hint of rural identities. It is not clear what VARC means, but it suggests something ambiguous or anonymous. It can be decoded in any way a viewer might want. The purpose of the visual is to advertise an exhibition of artists work, but they are not given any identity that links them to places outside the city. VARC is thus able to and fit in to an urban location. The second visual advertising the show (figure 13) depicts the rural and the urban together. The letters in the name VARC have been cut out to show an image of the landscape at High Green, the word 'City' is cut out to reveal an aerial view of Newcastle.

There is a suggestion that VARC is at home in the city and the countryside, that its activities span both. There is perhaps also a hidden message that the artists who have been resident at VARC produce contemporary art that can 'hold its own' in an urban setting. The words 'IN THE' are capitalised for emphasis. VARC is not visiting the city, as in comes to the city, it has claimed the city, it is literally, 'in it.'

7.5 Conclusions

The sculpture in the rock was an example of a controversial artwork that was 'out of place' for some actors. For them it disrupted the identity of a piece of landscape to which they had formed deep attachment. As such I would suggest it threatened their attachment to place, and disrupted their sense of place. For others it represented an enhancement in the landscape, a contribution that was innovative and offered new aesthetic opportunities for the public to experience. It could be argued this was legitimised through it being art and was thus art 'in place'. For the artist the controversy revealed an attachment to places with universal cultural values and an innate response to the materiality of 'nature'. The analysis also suggests power struggles over maintaining an identity of place; the power to disrupt and the power to resist. Being 'in place' is associated with embeddedness: not simply by being local but through an understanding of rural life and its practices that confers authenticity. Artists are felt to be more 'in place' when they respond to their environment and to local communities in ways that suggest cultural exchange, becoming embedded through their practices and attitudes but also demonstrating their understanding of the qualities of place. These resonate with some actors, who value the presence of artists in the locality, particularly those whose work embodies the values of craftsmanship and respect for working the land.

Part of the challenge to a sense of place is perceived to arise from those with an urban mind-set. These may be artists who do not understand the countryside, or those who commission art. Art is at its most 'stupid' when it masquerades as something functional in the landscape, and most damaging when it is permanent. There is a sense in which the urban mind-set represents 'the other' to the rural, values that do not respect how the countryside works, and that are insensitive to its cultural practices. On the other hand, the rural can be viewed as a culturally magical place, offering unique opportunities to artists and urban communities. Finally, as a neo-endogenous cultural actor, the arts organisation is embedded in place through

its arts practices and the presence of artists, yet those same artists and practices have a clear relationship to the city. These findings are considered further in Chapter 8 Discussion of Findings.

Chapter 8 Discussion of Findings

8.1 Introduction

In undertaking the research for this thesis I was interested in understanding the experience of contemporary arts organisations in rural places, as an exploration of cultural value in a rural context as broadly conceived. This was in line with recent interest in rural studies into the agency of rural creative expression beyond the monetisation of value that has responded to a perceived neglect of the rural in cultural policy. Cultural value as a point of departure opened up fresh analytical territory beyond notions of the creative economy and the valorisation of rural cultural assets through a focus on actors' lived experience of contemporary arts practices. Using a case study approach, I studied three arts organisations and spent time with each one, two in Scotland and one in North East England. The research employed an inductive methodology, with disruption as a 'sensitising concept' broadly orienting the research questions (see below). 'Moments' of disruption were either suggested in advance, or emerged while I was in the field and were explored via the empirical research. Analytically disruption became a conceptual bridge between individual experience and the wider rural context.

The research began with the following research questions:

- What is the cultural value of contemporary visual arts organisations in rural places?
- How are contemporary arts practices experienced in rural places?
- How do contemporary arts practices have a disruptive effect?
- How is disruption experienced, by whom and in what ways?

The empirical chapters described actors' experience and began the process of analysis. In this chapter I deepen that analysis. I first review the arts practices of the three organisations before discussing the findings of the research under the conceptual headings of 'art in or out of place', and 'disrupting and maintaining rural place identities'. This approach facilitates a comparison across the case studies in addition to discussing aspects of each. I then review the findings in relation to the

arts organisations themselves. I have erred on the side of caution in offering what Charmaz calls 'theoretical sensitivity' (Charmaz, 2014, p.160).

In Chapter 9, Conclusions, I discuss the findings in relation to cultural value, followed by recommendations for further research linked to the findings. Finally, I reflect on the strengths and limitations of the research. I have also set out the original contribution this thesis has made to the field of rural studies.

8.2 Contemporary Arts Organisations and Arts Practices

Researching the contemporary arts organisations, how they came into existence and deconstructing their histories did not show a 'grand plan' but rather reflected the life course decisions and motivations of cultural actors, although this varied across the organisations. In the case of VARC the motivations of its founder to enable artists to work in the countryside together with the financial means and social connections to realise his intentions, influenced its location at High Green. Atlas Arts was established out of the demise of a previous organisation by cultural actors in the public sector keen for contemporary arts to remain a feature of the cultural 'ecology' of Skye, while Deveron Arts existed because its founder moved to Huntly while her children were young and its cultural limitations motivated her and likeminded friends to establish a contemporary arts organisation. For pragmatic reasons each organisation had made a deliberate choice not to be gallery based. Each practiced a variant of new genre public art, with differing approaches to engaging local people (Lacy, 1995; Kwon, 2004). For Deveron Arts an initial plan to go down the gallery route was abandoned for reasons of viability and lack of suitable venues; the approach taken by Atlas Arts was much the same, influenced in part by the failure of its predecessor that had been venue based. VARC was limited by lack of premises in what it wanted to do, but its aims were focussed on providing early career artists with an opportunity to work in a remote rural setting rather than a choice about avoiding gallery based practices. In addition, some of the artists did exhibit their work at a gallery in a nearby market town before their main exhibition in and around the environment of High Green. However, none of the arts organisations commissioned work in order for it to be gallery based, and all were committed to socially engaged practices as broadly conceived. This meant the artists and their arts practices were visible in those places, often through artist's residencies that put artists 'in place' in the locality.

8.2.1 Socially engaged practice and participation

Each organisation facilitated socially engaged arts practices as part of its programming (Bishop, 2012). However, the nature and extent of participation varied according to the specific aims of the organisations, the projects they commissioned and the artists' creative responses to an artistic brief. Deveron Arts was the most explicit in claiming to respond to the community's issues and provide opportunities for participation through its ethos of 'The Town is the Venue', with many projects offering some form of interaction with local people and concerns. While artists commissioned by VARC to spend a year at High Green often worked alone with periodic opportunities for audiences to view emerging work, engaging with (urban based) special needs groups was a feature of the residency in line with the organisation's philanthropic ethos. Hence artists spent a proportion of their time working on creative projects with groups at High Green and at their urban locations. The commissions and programmes run by Atlas Arts varied in the extent to which they aimed to engage the public and respond to 'vernacular' issues. Decisions about programming and artist commissioning tended to reflect the interests of the directors in their curatorial role rather than being rooted exclusively in community concerns or involving citizens in deciding what projects should take place, as might be the case with community arts (*ibid*). In all three case studies I found the lines between what counts as participation as socially engaged arts practice and 'participation' through art being visible in place became blurred. The fact of arts organisations being 'in place' meant participation became an 'elastic' concept. There were participants who chose to take part in arts projects, others who were neutral bystanders at an event or arts intervention that happened to be taking place in the public realm, and there were 'unintentional participants'. As some of the empirical material shows, the experience of arts practices by some 'unintentional participants' suggested the experience was not always comfortable, while for others the experience of contemporary arts was an affirming and enjoyable one.

Similarly, for all three organisations artists' residencies played an important part in their overall approach to producing art (Stephens, 2003). It was a characteristic feature of each organisation to invite artists to respond to an artists' brief. In Huntly, Deveron Arts residencies tended to be short – from one or two weeks to a month, in line with a rapid turnover of arts projects, while the main residency opportunity offered by VARC was yearlong (although this is now changing, see Chapter 7).

Residencies with Atlas Arts were also shorter. Similar to VARC, the organisation also commissioned artists already based on Skye for some of its projects. Deveron Arts largely brought in artists from outside Huntly. Once again, these practices are not exclusive to rural areas and artists' residencies are frequently used by contemporary arts organisations in a variety of locations, both urban and rural and in many international settings and contexts (*ibid*). However, their significance to rural places I would argue lies in the visibility of their arts practices and the presence of contemporary artists in rural communities, who were often living there for the duration of their residencies, and taking part in community activities.

8.3 Disrupting and Maintaining Rural Place Identities

While each project produced moments of disruption, there were differences in the artist's intentions that their arts practices revealed. In the case of *Are You Locationalised* and *Music for Street Fights*, the artists' practices were intentional interventions in the 'expected functioning' of place. Conversely, the sculpture in the landscape was an unintentional disruption to some local actors' attachment to place (Agnew, 1987). Disruption is considered further below. A significant finding of the research was the connection between actors' experience of specific arts practices and its relationship to place. As argued in the empirical chapters, contemporary arts practices were 'in place' for some actors, but 'out of place' for others. Place was not simply a location for arts practices in a physical or locational sense, but had deeper meaning for actors; in various ways they experienced place in terms of the subjective and emotional attachments they felt, or 'sense of place' or 'place attachment' (Agnew, 1987; Cresswell, 2004; Graham *et al.*, 2009). That attachment was associated with different aspects of place (Jiven and Larkham, 2003); the Apothecary's Tower of Portree was an historic building that was treasured in the local landscape, a specific rock in the landscape of Tarsset marked the way of a well-used walking route, the values of tradition and respectability were intangible qualities that made actors proud to live in Huntly. Physical features signified deeper emotional and subjective meanings for actors; the 'Lizard's Head' for example, was not simply a landscape feature but a marker of a familiar stretch of countryside known intimately to actors over time, in a landscape perceived to be unchanging and natural.

8.3.1 Art in and out of place

Contemporary arts practices that were felt to be 'out of place' disrupted actors' deeply felt attachments to place because they threatened the place identities that were constructed by those actors (Whitehead, 2012). Moreover, those identities were culturally rooted (Stedman, 2002; Cloke, 2003; Whitehead, 2012). Similarly, arts practices were not only disruptive, but I would argue, signified different cultural values for some actors in the anthropological sense of the word (Baudrillard, 2001, quoted in Newman *et al*, 2012). For example, for some actors, contemporary art was 'strange' and 'out of place', fraudulent and a waste of money, the antithesis of traditional values and practices. By contrast, for other actors contemporary arts signified values of cultural openness and a progressive outlook (Woods, 2018). Actors' attachment to Huntly was associated with the fact that it was not 'just like many other north-east towns' that were in decline, it was different, an 'antidote to the parochial' because it had a contemporary arts organisation in the town. Similarly, the installation at Taigh Chearsabagh on North Uist for one actor in particular, denoted an island that continued to have an open attitude towards visitors and was adaptable to change. The sculpture in the landscape in Tarsset was 'in place' because it enabled an actor to show others contemporary art in a landscape, to which she had lasting attachment, and as a marker of the cultural diversity of the area that was signified by contemporary arts practices. However, when there were perceived threats to place identities through the disruptions of contemporary arts practices, the deeply held attachment to place held by some actors motivated them to act to defend those identities (Stedman, 2002). In Portree this resulted in letters to newspapers and comments on social media about 'the Pink Tower' that got everybody talking about art – a reaction indicative of the artistic success of *Are You Localisationised* according to the artists and director of the arts organisation. In Huntly, fears about the effects of *Music for Street Fights* on the reputation of Huntly prompted some actors to defend its image as a law abiding, 'family town' weeks before the arts intervention was due to take place. Perceptions by actors in Tarsset that the sculpture in the landscape was 'vandalism' led them to have recourse to the national park to try and prevent what they saw as an irreversible change to the landscape, a loss of place to which they felt deep attachment. Summing up, actors' experiences of contemporary arts practices were linked to how they constructed rural place identities and the attachment they felt to those places. However, those identity constructions were different, and as the

empirical material suggests, sometimes conflicting (M Bell, 1994; Woods, 2011; Schaefer *et al.*, 2017)

The responses of the different actors in the three case studies and their constructions of place identities could be seen as on-going evidence of the influence of a rural idyll. As summarised in Chapter 2, the rural idyll is a persistent cultural trope of British rurality that has a long historical antecedent. However, it would also be oversimplistic to infer a universal condition of idyllic rurality as denoted by actors' differential constructions of place (Short, 2006). For some actors, place identities were more utilitarian and everyday, linked to farming and land use (Woods *et al.*, 2012). Understanding farming meant being able to de-code an authentic rurality, itself a construction perhaps of how the rural ought to be with its associations of 'back to the land' practicality rather than agrarian romanticism (Halfacree, 1995; Halfacree, 2006a). For others, the landscape in Tarsset represented timeless nature, 'natural' landscapes denoted by an absence of manmade structures, at least not those of modernity (Shirley, 2015). In Portree the Apothecary's Tower signified tradition and solidarity within a Scottish context inflected with on-going allegiance to national identity based on a revival of Gaelic culture (Bonnar, 2014). Finally, the desire of some actors to identify with rural places that were outward looking, an 'antidote to the parochial' meant that their constructions of the rural were associated with values that were more cosmopolitan, and less parochial while remaining rooted in the realities of living in a small rural town such as Huntly (Skrbis and Woodward, 2007)

8.3.2 Arts practices and distinctiveness

Contemporary arts practices also signified place and personal distinctiveness for some actors (Twigger-Ross and Uzzel, 1996) and maintaining those identities was important to them. For some actors, contemporary arts made Huntly an exciting place to live, a town where art was 'an antidote to the parochial'. I would also argue that the cultural capital actors gained from their association with contemporary arts as part of identity formation needed to be recognised by others in order to be validated (Bourdieu, 1984). Huntly's public recognition through winning a Creative Place award was an outward sign of cultural diversity with which actors could identify, including the director of Deveron Arts. At High Green a local resident took people on health walks to see art, including the artist's sculpture. Art is thus a feature of her distinctive identity as a culturally open and outward looking person signified through the

showing of the art to others, including pieces that have been controversial. Similarly, on North Uist, an actors' enjoyment of contemporary art when he views the 'Talking Wall' marks him out as someone with cultural competence that gives him cultural capital. Contemporary art makes place distinctive and his willingness to engage in it, and form an opinion as to its value, distinguishes him from others in the family, none of whom 'bothered to see it'. Conversely it could be argued that some actors were unwilling to engage in contemporary arts, regarding it as fraudulent, and a waste of public money (Newman *et al.*, 2013). This could be seen as a form of distinction in relation to their identities as 'authentically' rural people with values rooted in tradition, community and the land at odds with values of a perceived metropolitan arts elite (M Bell, 1994; Newman *et al.*, 2012; Woods *et al.*, 2012).

8.3.3 Arts practices and place dependency

In summary I would argue that place identities were not fixed, but malleable and closely connected to constructions of place by different actors, informed to a greater or lesser extent by on-going notions of the rural idyll. Furthermore those constructions were competing and co-existent (Mahon and Hyrylainen, 2017; Schaefer *et al.*, 2017) and were revealed through the experience of contemporary arts. Each moment of disruption indicated an on-going struggle over which identities might prevail. Some actors were motivated by a desire to maintain the status quo, for place identities to continue unchanged (Winterton and Warburton, 2012), while for other actors their motivation was to disrupt existing place identities for artistic and personal reasons. In order to explore these motivations further, the concept of place dependency is helpful, which in turn is linked to the ways in which place and personal identities are entwined and co-constructed (Twigger-Ross and Uzzel, 1996; Stedman, 2002). Place dependency or functional place attachment 'refers to the ways in which a place allows us to achieve our goals' (Graham *et al.*, 2009, p.17). These might be personal or professional and close attachments are formed to places that allow those goals to be achieved (*ibid*). This appeared to be the case for the directors of Deveron Arts and Atlas Arts. Both could be regarded as being motivated by wanting to bring greater cultural diversity to Huntly and Portree to fulfil their personal and professional goals (Twigger-Ross and Uzzel, 1996). For the director of Deveron Arts, her desire for Huntly to become a more culturally interesting and diverse place prompted her original actions to found the arts organisation, in tune with her experience of a more cosmopolitan way of life. Over time, the variety of

projects and artists who came to Huntly made the town into a place where the director wanted to live, an 'arts town' that was different to other places. Atlas Art's director was attached to Skye through deep rooted family connections, yet she needed it to be a culturally progressive place that allowed programmes of contemporary arts to be located on a rural Scottish island to achieve her professional goals as a curator. For VARC's project director, the 'magical' qualities of the countryside at High Green that gave it its identity meant that her goals of providing art to disadvantaged groups had particular personal resonance. Each of these examples denotes a differential attachment to specific places that was meaningful for actors in terms of their goals and motivations.

8.3.4 Arts practices, sense of place and placelessness

By contrast for some of the artists sense of place appeared to be less specific, perhaps even a condition of placelessness (Relph, 1976). Placelessness is associated with the idea that increasingly within modernity, distinctive places have been replaced by those that are homogenous (Relph, 1976; Agnew, 2011). Tatham and O'Sullivan's arts practices intentionally juxtaposed meanings of place in order to disrupt place identities as fixed and immutable. To achieve their artistic goals, they appeared to intentionally eschew acquiring a situated sense of place, remaining free to experience the juxtaposition of different place identities within a mobile arts practice that located their work in very different physical spaces in close temporal proximity – for example in a corporate bank and on a remote Scottish island.

For the artist in Huntly, sense of place seemed similarly to be a mobile and fluid experience, place identity as hybrid and networked (Murdoch, 2003; Woods, 2007), formed in one place and located in another yet signified in both by the culture of heavy drinking in public places (Jayne *et al.*, 2008). The motivation for the artist was to provide a soothing antidote to the violence he found in both Glasgow and Huntly, the latter challenging its identity as a traditional and peaceful rural market town. Similar to Tatham and O'Sullivan, his arts practices were perhaps motivated by a desire to disrupt these realities. In order to do so, in Huntly, his (temporary) sense of place depended upon its identification with urban social problems. Yet he was also aware of the cultural differences in producing art in a rural location, a juxtaposition of urban and rural identities experienced as 'you always expected someone to tap you on the shoulder'. By contrast, Khosro Adibi's attachment to place was formed through

a universal condition of nature that found its material location in specific places that he visited repeatedly. Here again, his sense of place was less located, and more mobile, networked and fluid, a global association with places he expressed as nature, a structure of feeling' that spoke to him as an artist (Williams, 1973) and provided creative inspiration. His efficacy as an artist required a continual interaction with this environment, with wild places that had specific, yet universal cultural meaning, arguably the rural equivalent of the experience of the global city (Woods, 2007) . This meaning was located materially and spiritually in the physical landscapes of Northumberland (Woods, 2016). However he was unaware of a particular sense of place attached by actors to the landscape where he was making sculpture that was culturally bound to English conception of rurality and its institutional rules and norms (Short, 2006; Gkartzios and Scott, 2015). Ironically, perhaps, their conception of a natural landscape was closer to the artist's perception of nature than the controversy over his sculpture indicated (Short, 2006). Both shared a sense of 'entitlement' to a common cultural resource that in Northumberland had been formalised through the creation of the national park, an entitlement that the pragmatic power of land ownership overrode. Nevertheless, the specificity of peoples' long term attachment to the 'Lizard's Head' and the importance it held for them was at odds with the artists' notions of a wild place for arts inspiration.

8.3.5 Arts practices place and power

The research suggests an on-going tension between competing constructions of place that were revealed through actors' experience of arts practices. Furthermore, these constructions were motivated in different ways for different reasons. For some actors, maintaining existing place identities was important, providing a sense of continuity (Twigger-Ross and Uzzel, 1996; Winterton and Warburton, 2012). For others disrupting place identities fulfilled personal and professional goals (Graham *et al.*, 2009). In disrupting rural place identities and in maintaining and defending them, I would argue that arts practices also became an instrument of power for different actors, exercised through multiple strategies of action (Allen, 2003). The artist's use of fliers to change the message of *Music for Street Fights* to ensure it went ahead could be seen as the exercise of power. Similarly, the director's ability to bring on side an influential local councillor to help neutralise the opposition to *Music for Street Fights* could be regarded in the same way. 'Putting Huntly on the Map' indicated Huntly was a town like any other on a Saturday night, with the same problems as in

cities, thus disrupting the identity of place that others wished to defend. Actors perceiving a threat to their constructions of place through these arts practices meant they were prepared to 'fight' using the rhetoric of the media and social media to their advantage (Stedman, 2002). These are all examples of the discursive power employed by actors in relation to their constructions of rural place identities.

In Portree, the comical rendering of the Apothecary's Tower through encasing it in a pink jacket could be seen as an act of power by the artists that was resisted through the use of discursive power by local actors. Similarly, the production and use of the text for the guides to use when showing people round the 'Pink Tower' could be seen as exercising power to promote contemporary arts to visitors as part of the local heritage of Portree. With the VARC case study, the mechanisms of power were less clear, but I would suggest that plans to give talks about landscape art were considered as a way of persuading local opposition to accept the artist's sculpture. While these did not go ahead, in intention they could be seen as imposing formalised knowledge about art over vernacular knowledge of, and connections to, the land, thus rendering local place attachments as less important. Conversely, invoking the rhetoric of 'an urban mind-set' implied the imposition of art that was inappropriate. While this did not become an obvious strategy of resistance, concerned actors responded to such concerns by recourse to the formal rules operating in the National Park as a possible means of stopping the sculpture from proceeding. An appeal that was overcome by the domination of the 'informal rules of the game' that enabled the artist to make his sculpture, without formal sanction. In summary, contemporary art was co-opted by actors to reinforce and defend their cultural positioning within competing constructions of rural places. In that sense arts practices had agency (O Jones, 2006).

8.4 Contemporary Arts Practices as a Relational Lens

The above sections have shown how contemporary arts practices disrupted actors' identities and how these were bound up in the attachments they felt to specific rural places. Furthermore place identities were co-existent and competing (Frisvoll, 2012; Mahon and Hyrylainen, 2017; Schaefer *et al.*, 2017). These were indicative of actors' differential constructions of place, and their own shifting cultural identities (Twigger-Ross and Uzzel, 1996).

In the next section, I focus on key aspects of contemporary arts practices using evidence from the empirical material to flesh out additional concepts derived from actors first-hand experience of disruptions to sense of place. These experiences can be thought of as insider outside perspectives that help to bring into focus urban: rural interconnections, and the local:global dynamics of rural places. This extends the analysis to consider contemporary arts practices within a wider context of rural places as relational, yet grounded in an analysis of rural sense of place. This also provides a foundation from which to consider future avenues of research in Chapter 9.

8.4.1 Urban rural, local global connectedness

Urban rural interconnectedness manifest itself in a number of ways through contemporary arts practices and the agency of cultural actors. Comparing across the three cases on first analysis there did not appear to be a common element that caused them to be located where they were, rather the happenstance of individual choice and personal motivation: the setting up an arts organisation by an artist motivated by rural experience and with the financial resources and personal contacts to bring it about, the in-migrant from the city arriving in a Scottish market town because of family circumstances and deciding to create a more cosmopolitan cultural milieu; the institutional influence of Scottish cultural policy makers capitalising on the closure of a previous organisation to maintain contemporary arts on Skye. Yet there is a thread that unites them. In the case of VARC and Deveron Arts, the founders were counter-urbanisers moving from the city to the countryside for a better quality of life (Mitchell, 2004). In the case of Atlas Arts, urban institutional actors were influential in bringing investment in contemporary arts in a rural location, demonstrating how the institutional connections of contemporary arts span urban, rural and global space (Massey, 1991; D Smith, 2005; J Harris, 2011). Furthermore, the arts directors brought values, experiences and attitudes that had in part been shaped elsewhere. Atlas Arts' director brought international experience of contemporary arts from Australia following an extensive career in largely urban based contemporary arts institutions, the director at Deveron Arts brought her experience of working with refugees and extensive travel as a cultural actor; her desire to set up Deveron Arts was motivated by a cosmopolitanism not found in Huntly when she moved there but perceived to be missing (Woods, 2018). Over time, the variety of projects and artists who came to Huntly made the town into a place where the director wanted to live, an 'arts town' that was different to other places.

VARC's project director brought arts practices from her background in community art in urban locations, while the organisations' philanthropic activities involved groups in urban locations whose concerns were universal and international, such as supporting refugees. Two of the three directors lived in the communities where the arts organisations were located, while VARC's director was frequently at High Green, involved in helping the artists with their residencies and facilitating participation by local artists and community members.

The artists physically moved between urban and rural environments as they undertook residencies and commissions. However, this connectedness was also revealed more subtly through the artists' sense of place. In Huntly for example, the artist found that the culture of heavy drinking was not confined to cities but appeared on the streets of a rural market town (Wooff, 2015). To that extent his was an urban experience and his response as an artist was that of an outsider's perspective, draw attention to it rather than denying its existence, using creative ideas from a universal cultural palimpsest (the theme music from a Spaghetti Western.) Yet in other ways his experience of living in Huntly was intensely rural, noting the fact that people knew who he was and were likely to stop him in the street. It was, however, an outsider's perspective, an everyday cultural interaction becoming noteworthy for him because it was not how things might be in a city.

The artists in the Atlas Arts and VARC case studies had a less located sense of place, that appeared to be neither urban, nor rural, but could be regarded as exemplifying the global connectedness and spatial fluidity of rural space; while their arts practices were located in specific rural places where actors had an intimate, culturally bound, sense of place. The reactions of some actors to contemporary arts practices helped to bring into focus the outsider cultural perspectives of the artists. For example, Khosro Adibi's attachment to place was expressed through a universal condition of nature while finding its material location in specific landscapes of Northumberland (Woods, 2016). However, as a cultural outsider, he failed to decode the specificity of peoples' long term attachment to the 'Lizard's Head' and the importance it held for them (Gkartzios and Scott, 2015).

The response of the artists on Skye as culturally mobile actors denoted an absence of a sense of place. Furthermore, there is a suggestion that they regarded sense of place as a reactionary concept (Massey, 1994), as if gaining a sense of place would

detract from their outsiders' perspective and critical viewpoint as artists. Hence they wanted to challenge the notion of sense of place on North Uist by disruptive arts interventions that posed questions about its apparent specialness. Their experience of practising art in different locations also demonstrated the cultural dislocatedness of working in two very different environments in close temporal proximity (Harvey, 1989) one intensely corporate and global, located in a city, with another on a remote Scottish island.

The sense of place expressed by some actors was intensely local and personal, and gave them a distinctly insider perspective on specific rural locations. Often these connections were longstanding through familial roots in specific places and longstanding attachments to specific landscapes and features. The perceived disruptions of some contemporary arts practices were in some cases expressed as an urban mind-set, associated with cultural practices associated with cities, even regarded by some as fraudulent and alien and coming from outside (Newman *et al.*, 2013). This could simply be associated with matters of personal taste. However, I would also suggest that these perspectives had deeper roots, based upon social constructions of rurality that also constructed the urban as other in terms of values and attitudes towards the countryside (D Bell, 2006). This was in contrast to others' sense of place; in Huntly for example, actors identified with the cultural diversity of having artists resident in the town and recognition by others of its difference to other small Scottish towns, while in Tarsat the availability of contemporary arts in a rural location was welcomed by some local people as a valuable addition to the cultural landscape, a marker of openness. On Skye the cosmopolitanism denoted by contemporary arts might be seen to be in tune with it being an international tourism destination, the revival of Gaelic culture, and counter-urbanising artists moving there from cities over several decades. Yet some local people in Portree resisted the incursion of the 'Pink Tower' as an unwelcome artwork that had been imposed by artists from outside, that detracted from traditional vernacular heritage and values, including its disruption to the setting of the annual Highland Games. For other actors however, the artworks in Portree and on North Uist represented cultural openness with which they could identify, and which gave them cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1984).

8.4.2 Contemporary arts practices, changing rural cultures

I would suggest that contemporary arts organisations could be viewed as ‘urban cultural outposts in a rural setting’, perhaps seen as part of a wider signifying cultural system of multiple ‘common cultures’ that co-exist and yet shift over time in the wider sense in which culture is used (Williams, in Miles and Ebury, 2017). Through their embeddedness in rural places, I would suggest that contemporary arts organisations are part of this cultural system as much as rural businesses or hill farming (Mansfield, 2012). However, I would also suggest that as relational actors, contemporary arts organisations are part of a global set of institutions, practices and values (D Smith, 2005; J Harris, 2011; Heley and Jones, 2012). By bringing a relational perspective to contemporary arts practices and institutions the research findings suggest they may act as indicators of cultural change within wider processes of rural restructuring as a component of rural places: hybrid actors embedded in rural places yet connected extra locally to global networks and flows (Heley and Jones, 2012; L Jones *et al.*, 2018). Furthermore, key cultural actors were instrumental in bringing contemporary arts practices to rural locations. In the case of the directors, this was through their embeddedness in place, while being connected to wider socio-economic relations of power and influence, while the artists were culturally and physically mobile actors who brought an outsiders’ perspective via their arts practices to the cultural dynamics of rural places. At the same time, each place had a strong local voluntary tradition with high levels of participation and an older demographic consistent with a more conservative, cultural outlook. So perhaps it was not surprising that the ‘common culture’ of continuity and tradition (Lysgard, 2016) found some contemporary arts practices alien and difficult as the empirical material suggested. Thinking ‘culturally’, could contemporary arts organisations be an indicator of wider rural change? A cultural ‘globalisation’ of the rural indicative of shifting identities of rural people and places, a process that is always in motion and sometimes conflicting, as evidenced by the empirical material (Mahon and Hyyrylainen, 2017). In Huntly for example, more localised, path dependent and embedded cultural practices and attitudes were juxtaposed within leanings towards rural cosmopolitanism (Woods, 2007; Woods, 2018) that were signified by contemporary arts practices, and was brought into view through the agency of those practices. Such leanings are not necessarily clear cut and progressive, rather Skrbis and Woodward (2007) note the ambivalence of ordinary cosmopolitanism, whereby open and outward looking attitudes may be

diluted by the persistence of cultural insularity and entrenched viewpoints. Similarly, Williams' idea of common cultures is helpful here. In Williams' analysis common cultures are not sequential but overlapping yet at different stages of 'cultural evolution' within the cultural 'system': emerging, dominant and residual (Miles and Ebury, 2017) indicators of the cultural dynamism of rural places, and ongoing processes of cultural change.

8.5 Towards the Creative Countryside?

As noted in Chapter 2, the *Differentiated Countryside* (Murdoch *et al.*, 2003) failed to distinguish culture as a distinctive analytical category for understanding countryside change. However, its focus on how change is mediated through land management practices that are influenced by networks of powerful rural actors enacting cultural values in actual rural locations, offers a point of departure from which to consider rural places and rural change. Informed by the findings of this PhD I would offer an alternative schema; one not based on land management but on creative practices. We might call such a schema the creative countryside. What might the components of such a framework comprise? Suggested elements are:

- Creative practices: broad distinction between market and non-market practices; e.g. contemporary arts practices; community arts, touring theatre, community theatre (non-market), crafts and design, computer games, architecture, creative materials.
- Creative actors (economic, social, market, non-market) artists, community, consumers, arts professionals (e.g. curators), local authority; creative businesses; networks of key creative actors.
- Creative places: demographics, cultural infrastructure and institutions, Creative cultures or common cultures in place e.g. cultural attitudes/histories/path dependency.
- Creative institutions and networks: internal and external network relations eg local global, urban:rural. Degrees of embeddedness of cultural institutions; economic networks e.g. creative clusters.
- Drivers for action/change (internal and external) cultural entrepreneurship; livelihoods, community development; (external) mobilities/counter urbanisation, cultural policy; institutional investment/influence (e.g. ACE/Creative Scotland priorities); technological development/connectivity.

Such a framework could provide a broad mapping of particular rural places, their 'common cultures' and creative practices. This might provide an analytical tool that could trace change over time according to configurations of interconnecting variables and factors. This could also provide opportunities for different ways of researching these changes, combining qualitative and quantitative methodologies that draw on different disciplinary approaches (Madsen and Adriansen, 2004).

A provisional framework for the creative countryside is sketched out below, in relation to contemporary arts practices. Different creative practices could be similarly analysed in order to build up a detailed 'creativity map' of a particular place (however defined). More research and conceptual development are needed to develop this framework further. This is highlighted in the following chapter.

Creative practices (IV)	Key Actors	Places (context)	Network Relations	Drivers of change
Contemporary arts practices	Arts curators Artists Participants Policy makers	Demographics Cultural attitudes and practices Cultural infrastructure Geographic/physical /cultural qualities of place Proximity to urban centres and cultural institutions	Local institutions/ degree of embeddedness Extra local institutions e.g. arts policy makers Global artists networks UK based professional artists networks Contemporary arts organisations	Mobilities eg Counter-urbanisation Demographic Economic Socio-technical Policy (inc funding)

Table 8.1 The Creative Countryside (adapted from Murdoch et al, 2003)

Chapter 9 Conclusion

9.1 Arts Practices and Cultural Value in Rural Places

The arts projects were temporary and arguably their effects were fleeting. To all intents and purposes, life returned to normal soon afterwards. Litter and graffiti returned to the site of the Apothecary's Tower (researcher observation). The sculpture in the landscape has been named and people frequently visit it (VARC, 2017). The artist has returned to High Green and has settled there. *Music for Street Fights* came and went, and drunken people still fight on the streets of Huntly (artist 2, personal communication). In essence these projects were snapshots in time, and time has moved on. However, disruption has offered a novel perspective on cultural value that indicates a more nuanced picture than normative assumptions about the value of arts engagement would suggest. The focus on experience also reveals the dynamism of rural creative expression and its effects, and the distinctiveness of that experience in rural places. Contemporary arts practices were experienced in place as a complex phenomenon. Analysis of actors' lived experience of those arts practices made visible struggles over rural place identities that were hidden and the power relations implicit in that. Furthermore, contemporary arts practices signified actors' different constructions of rural place identities and were also active agents in those constructions (O Jones, 2006). Turning to organisations themselves, I would argue contemporary arts organisations and their practices are relational actors, being local embedded and extra locally networked through artists and arts curators, and the conceptualisation of contemporary arts as a global 'institution' or system (J Harris, 2011; Heley and Jones, 2012). In terms of rural place identities and practices, this manifested itself in distinctive ways in terms of the nature of the arts practices, the temporary presence of the artists, and the disruptions to rural identities perceived by local actors. Similarly contemporary arts organisations can be thought of as one of many (competing) 'common cultures' in rural places (A Miles and Ebury, 2017), within a dynamic process of rural, cultural, change yet connected to global relations of power and place, and hence, contributing to cultural evolution. This also suggests the potential of contemporary arts organisations as 'hybrid cultural actors' in processes of (rural) place based innovation and development (Lowe *et al.*, 1995; Ray, 2006a; Hjorth, 2009). In conclusion through in-depth case studies, this research has opened up a rich territory for theoretical and empirical study upon which to build

(Flyvbjerg, 2006). As such, it has raised questions and points to avenues for future study. These are considered in section 9.3.

9.2 Original Contribution

In this research I took a deep and narrow slice of a wider 'cultural ecosystem' in place (AHRC, 2014) that encompasses many formal and informal cultural practices and institutions. In exploring an under researched element of that ecosystem, albeit one that has historic antecedents (Gee, 2004; Luckman, 2012) I have added new knowledge to the studies of cultural value in the rural about 'cultural ventures that work to reinvigorate the rural' (Shirley, 2015, p.157). Two out of the three arts organisations have not featured in the literature, although one has (through a different conceptual lens). Choosing to look through the lens of disruption is a novel approach that produced fresh insights. While the rhetoric of what art does in terms of personal transformation and cognitive and affective shifts to 'horizons of experience' have been explored (e.g. Grisoni and Page, 2015) there is less work on the relationship between art, disruption and place identities, particularly in the rural context, and little work on rural place identities and its relationship to identity formation (but see e.g. Winterton and Warburton, 2012). The research has therefore added to empirical studies of cultural value grounded in actors' experience, of which there are relatively few. Finally, I offer as an original contribution a provisional schema for thinking about creative practices as an analytical framework for rural places and rural change. In Chapter 8, section 8.5, I outlined the components of such a framework, using contemporary arts practices as an illustration (table 8.1). I further suggested that such a framework could be used to map or categorise rural places and trace change over time. This could also provide an opportunity to develop mixed methods approaches to such an analysis. Similarly, such a framework is useful to consider avenues for future research. This is considered in 9.3 below.

9.3 Future Research

As noted above there is value in an exploratory case study approach in opening up new avenues for research and in providing research insights were there were perhaps, none, or few, before (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Based on the provisional analytical schema developed in chapter 8, the following suggestions for future research build on this research and could further develop new avenues of enquiry. The framework

allows for a combination of factors to map or categorise rural change according to components of the creative countryside, as outlined in the previous chapter. Hence, for example, by taking an historic, longitudinal perspective of 'cultural ecologies' of rural places' it would be possible to develop comparative, case based methodologies to chart change over time. Not only might it then be possible to describe change, but also to explain its key components, and to compare across different places and institutions (e.g. Mitchell, 2013). The framework also presents discrete areas for future research within the overarching concept of the creative countryside. For example, there would be value in interrogating identities in relationship to constructions of place (Whitehead, 2012), for example from a mobilities perspective to gain a finer grained picture of changing demographics and attitudes in rural places (Halfacree, 2008). Third, there is merit in revisiting the role of the arts in opening up new conceptual spaces for change through the lens of social entrepreneurship, conceptualising arts institutions as entrepreneurial actors in rural places (Swedberg, 2008; Hjorth, 2009) and their contribution to rural resilience. Linked to this is the role of cultural professionals as leaders driving change and development (Dargan and Shucksmith, 2008; S Neumeier, 2017). Finally in developing the concept of contemporary arts organisations as relational actors in relation to rural capacities for change and development above, there would be value in returning to rural place identities through institutional ethnographies that trace their connections within a globalised cultural system, yet embeds them physically and culturally in rural places (D Smith, 2005).

9.4 Reflections on the Research: Strengths and Limitations

I would offer several reflections. These are organised under quality of findings and issues of research that aspires to be 'experience close' (Smith *et al*), followed by the challenge of an inductive approach, including the absence of a pre-determined theoretical framework to shape the research questions. A critique of grounded theory as an empirical methodology was presented in Chapter 4. The second is my reflections on what I did and would perhaps do differently were there to be a 'next time'. The third is the issue of researcher preconceptions and the challenges of interpretation, including in relation to researching experience.

9.4.1 Undertaking research without prior theory

I planned to draw my findings and conclusions largely from the data using an inductive approach to research design and analysis. As explained in Chapter 4, I did not have an overarching theoretical framework that informed my research design and approach to analysis; rather I wanted to capture the nuances of lived experience through the voices of my research participants and let the analysis emerge from the data. This meant, however, that my research was guided by a set of objectives and an initial open research question, rather than more detailed questions derived from theory. Furthermore, this approach means that I have been cautious about claiming theoretically watertight findings; my explanations are but one of a set of possible explanations of 'what was going on' and I accept that there could be others (see section 9.4.4 below).

9.4.2 Research quality

From a research quality perspective, I included a relatively small number of participants probably below the threshold of what grounded theorists recommend as sufficient for theory development. My focus on disruption as a sensitising concept inevitably influenced the choice of arts projects to study and selection of interviewees. A relatively narrow sample meant that there were missing voices, although I did my best to avoid preconceptions about what I would find. Furthermore, I could only take a limited view of changes over time. These are all issues flagged up by Charmaz in section on gathering rich data (p. 32-33), although they are not specific to grounded theory *per se*.

9.4.3 Focus on experience and the challenge of interpretation

The analysis of individual's experiences of arts practices in particular places and contexts through the lens of disruption allowed for a rich and detailed account that would not have been available from e.g. surveys and other 'nomothetic' approaches (J. Smith *et al*, 2009, p.30). Analysis of individual experience practices was also able to a degree to unmask its social and relational dimensions in terms of wider power relations implicit in processes of rural identity construction. However, there are limitations of the approach. First the extent to which findings can be generalised to other contexts and places. While similarities were found between the arts practices of the arts organisations and their effects on different actors, there were also key

differences. It cannot thus be inferred that all contemporary arts organisations in different locations, whether urban or rural, have produced similar effects. Context is an important factor in analysing and interpreting the findings of the research.

Second, there were limitations to understanding actors' perspectives and applying an analysis after the 'disruptive moments' had taken place. The events that were being recalled and participants' experience of them relied to a large extent on memory. Memory may not be accurate. However, it was participants' interpretation of the meaning of those experiences that led to the richness of the data and the subsequent nuanced analysis that, I would suggest, revealed fresh insights into rural identities. Furthermore, the arts practices that were experienced represent a moment in time in terms of what they indicate about key actors and the wider practices of the arts organisations in the case studies. As mentioned in the empirical chapters, significant changes had taken place in the direction of two of the organisations since my fieldwork in 2015. While I would argue that these changes support one of the findings of the research around the role of contemporary arts organisations as neo-endogenous cultural actors, the research findings are nevertheless indicative of a 'snapshot in time' in an on-going trajectory of rural identities in the making.

9.4.4 Researcher preconceptions

Charmaz acknowledges that researchers bring to analysis their own preconceptions arising from their values, attitudes, beliefs, research practices (including epistemologies) (p. 155-60). This is particularly pertinent for research that is interpretive and uses qualitative methods (see Chapter 4). However, she emphasises that it is important to be aware of these preconceptions and to employ strategies for minimising their influence on the research. Overall, I tried to remain open to the multiple aspects of cultural value suggested by the experience of arts practices, and to set aside my preconceptions about the value of art in effecting change. Being aware of these preconceptions meant exercising a degree of caution and scepticism. In relation to disruption, I was aware that in using it as a lens through which to conduct the research I had made a certain choice that carried with it a risk in confirming what I expected to find. Nevertheless, I did find evidence of a relationship between arts practices, disruption and place identities which emerged from the analysis and had not been determined *a priori*. I found writing memos as part of the working method of grounded theory helpful in trying to remain reflexive and in not

closing off possibilities too soon. This also meant being cautious about emerging findings, offering these as a possible set of explanations, but aware there could be others. For example there might be explanations that resided in more structural factors such as class and social status in relation to place identities (Savage *et al.*, 2005). However, a different research design would be needed to evidence a connection empirically. It was also important not to conflate disruption with negativity: disruptive projects were controversial, but that did not mean all projects were either disruptive or controversial, or that disruptive projects were 'bad', rather that they had dynamic and contingent effects that were experienced in different ways by actors in relation to the cultural value of contemporary arts practices in rural places.

9.4.5 Reflections on alternative approaches

There were alternative approaches to the research I could have followed. The focus on experience could have led to my choosing Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis, but I considered the numbers of interviewees made it unsuitable for an IPA study. I also wanted to consider context and wider socio-cultural influences at work, with bigger samples of actors and an ability to bring in other relevant, textual material, consistent with social constructivism. Conducting an ethnography of one or two organisations would also have been an alternative strategy that is complementary to grounded theory (Burawoy *et al.*, 2000). However, there were practical issues of being in the field in Scotland for long periods owing to family commitments and cost. Nevertheless, institutional ethnographies in particular would be a useful methodological option for future studies.

9.4.6 A last word

This research has been an exploration of contemporary arts practices in rural places through the lens of disruption and actors lived experience. This has provided a rich and nuanced picture of cultural value in the context of rural place identities and added new knowledge to the understanding of creative expression in a rural context. Overall contemporary arts organisations may contribute positively to developing rural capacities but further research needs to be done to investigate the cultural ecologies of rural places that might also signal wider socio-cultural change in the countryside.

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Appendix A: Example Interview Questions, Atlas Arts

What is your professional/personal background/history?
Do you live in Portree/Skye?
How long have you lived in Portree/Skye?
Do you feel part of the community?
What kinds of culture do you like?
What do you think about contemporary visual arts?
Were you aware of Are You Locationalised?
How did you become aware of it?
What did you think about the Pink Tower?
(Or on North Uist, the Talking Wall and exhibition)
How did it make you feel?
What did other people think about it in the community?
Has anything changed for you personally?
Has anything changed in the wider community?
What is your opinion of Atlas Arts?
Have you been involved in other Atlas Arts projects/events?
Were you aware of them before The Pink Tower?
For the Guides: how did you get involved in Are You Locationalised?
What did you do? How did you do it?
What sort of people came on the guided walks you led?
What was your impression/memory of what they said?
Were you aware of them before becoming a guide/participating in an event?
Does Portree/Skye feel remote?
Are contemporary arts/culture different in a rural setting?
If so, how?

Appendix B: Research Ethics Information Sheet and Consent Form

Does Contemporary Art Change Rural Lives?



Information Sheet

What is this research project about?

This research explores contemporary visual arts in remote rural places and its affects. I want to find out the extent to which artists may act as agents of 'disruptive change' in rural communities. What effect might arts programmes and projects have on rural communities? What changes might they bring about? What might this mean for peoples' lives and the places where they live?

Why does this matter and what are the possible benefits?

I hope the research will provide new information about the value of contemporary art for rural people and places and will be of use to arts organisations, policy makers, arts funders and communities. This is especially relevant at a time when justifying arts expenditure is becoming increasingly problematic. The continued squeeze on public support for the arts falls hardest on smaller arts organisations and their programmes, often in remoter locations.

Who is doing the research?

I am a PhD student at Newcastle University, studying at the Centre for Rural Economy. I live in Hexham, Northumberland. I have a longstanding interest in rural development, arts and culture. Before joining the University, I worked for One North East, the regional development agency in Newcastle, where I led their work on rural development. I am supervised by Dr Karen Scott of the Centre for Rural Economy, and Professor Mark Tewdwr Jones in the School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape. My research proposal has undergone full ethical clearance by the University. This means it conforms to internationally recognised standards of good practice in relation to the treatment of research participants.

What does the research involve?

The research involves a small number of in-depth, studies of arts organisations in England and Scotland, the programmes they run and the artists who come. Organisations include Visual Arts in Rural Communities in Northumberland, while in Scotland I am working with Atlas Arts on the Isle of Skye, and Deveron Arts in Huntley, Aberdeenshire.

How will the information be gathered?

I will be using a combination of in-depth interviews with selected artists, community members and other local representatives, together with observation of the arts organisations 'from the inside'. I'll be investigating past projects as well as observing the start of new ones and talking to local people about their experience and perceptions of the artists, their art and the arts organisations themselves. I will also be talking to policy makers such as Arts Council England and Creative Scotland.

What is involved in being a research participant?

Most of the research will involve interviews that I will record, supplemented by written notes. I may also take photographs. You will be asked to give your consent in advance. Interviews should take no longer than an hour and I would anticipate one interview, and occasionally two will be necessary. I will also contact you after I return to the University to check back or clarify anything with you that isn't clear. I can't offer you money to participate on ethical grounds, but I will offer tea, coffee and cake to thank you for your participation. I won't be able to pay travel expenses but have my own transport so will be able to meet you where is most convenient for you.

Do participants have to take part?

Your participation is entirely voluntary. There is no obligation to take part and you can withdraw at any time. We may also agree to stop the interview if either of us feels uncomfortable. If you decide to withdraw then I will note this on the consent form, so that there is a record of your decision. If issues are raised that you find difficult, then we can agree to take a break, or I can refer you to someone with whom you can talk things through.

How will participants' confidentiality be protected?

You will be asked to sign a consent form that gives your formal permission to be part of the research. The form gives you several choices about whether or not you or your organisation wishes to be identified. You can request to remain anonymous and we can discuss between us the best way of doing this e.g. by using pseudonyms.

The information you provide or 'data' will be stored on a secure hard drive while research is in progress. Access to that data will be password protected. Data will be stored securely thereafter on the University computer system. Any hard copy of interview transcripts will be stored securely in a locked filing cabinet in the University. All transcripts will be anonymised. The data will only be shared with other researchers if you agree and if the conditions of consent are met. The data will be kept for up to five years.

What will happen to the information provided by participants?

The information I collect will be used in my PhD thesis. Later on, it may be published in academic journals, or other publications and in presentations to conferences. Anonymity will be preserved so there is no danger of you or your organisation being identified in future.

When will participants know about the findings of the research?

The research will not be finished until 2017 so I can't say at the outset what my findings will be. However, I am committed to getting back in touch with participants with a summary of key findings during 2017. My findings will be made available to the arts organisations who have been involved. I will also be producing shorter summaries for policy makers, and writing a regular blog for publication on the Centre for Rural Economy website.

Further information

If you have any questions or queries, or want to record a formal complaint please contact:

Dr Karen Scott, Centre for Rural Economy, School of Agriculture, Food and Rural Development, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU:
k.e.scott@ncl.ac.uk

Professor Mark Tewdwr-Jones, School of Architecture, Planning and Landscape, Newcastle University, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU: mark.tewdwr-Jones@newcastle.ac.uk

Does Contemporary Art Change Rural Lives?



Consent form

I confirm that (please tick box as appropriate)

1.	I have read and understood the information about the project, as provided in the Information Sheet	<input type="checkbox"/>
2.	I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project and my participation	<input type="checkbox"/>
3.	I voluntarily agree to participate in the project.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4.	I understand I can withdraw at any time without giving reasons and without penalty	<input type="checkbox"/>
5.	The arrangements regarding confidentiality have been clearly explained (e.g. use of names, pseudonyms, anonymization of data, etc.)	<input type="checkbox"/>
6.	I have given consent for data to be collected and recorded in the following ways:	
	Written notes	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Audio recordings	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Photographs	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Video	<input type="checkbox"/>
7.	The use of the data in research, publications, sharing and archiving has been explained to me.	<input type="checkbox"/>
8.	I understand that other researchers may have access to this data only if they agree to preserve its confidentiality and if they agree to the terms I have specified in this form.	<input type="checkbox"/>
9.	Please select one of the following:	
	I would like my name used and understand what I have said or written as part of this study will be used in reports, publications and other research outputs so that anything I have contributed to this project can be recognised	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I do not want my name used	<input type="checkbox"/>
	I do not want the name of my organisation used	<input type="checkbox"/>
10.	I, along with the Researcher, agree to sign and date this informed consent form.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Name of Researcher

Signature

Date

Appendix C: Examples of Codes and Coding

(Deveron Arts)

Codes and Categories		Key	
Putting Huntly on the map			Emerging category
Being an antidote to the parochial			Focussed coding
'They've brought people in'			Initial coding
Missing DA if they went			
Making Huntly stand out			
Losing local colour			
Losing having things to participate in			
'But its a sign you can have a life here'			
Bringing something culturally unique			
Being exposed to different cultures			
Art creating pride in Huntly and being recognised			
Not every town has billboards up in the Railway Station			
Making Huntly stand out			
Huntly being an arty kind of town			
Art not in a gallery but in the town			
Art in or out of place			
Shifting intentionalities			
Planning a disruptive intrusion			
Not intending to stop the violence			
Believing MFSF could stop the fighting			
Art not stopping the violence			
Portraying Huntly in a bad light			
Revealing that Huntly isn't idyllic at all			
Creating fear of violence			
Operating with a different social code			
You know I'm far too middle class.			
Not understanding the intention of the art			
Not viewing MFSF as controversial			
Not seeing the bigger picture			
Media discourse getting in the way			
Making light of others' concerns			
Solving the problem and making fun of the law			
Having a good relationship with the police			
Feeling justified in doing the right thing			
'It's obviously not traditional art'			
Intruding into another world			
Identifying with being local			
Denying Huntly has a problem with violence			
Changing peoples' awareness			
Being marked out as different			
Strangers intruding and eliciting interest			
Cultivating a certain look			
Being part of the 'inner circle'			
Becoming used to contemporary arts			
Arts practices remaining controversial			
Art being frowned upon			
Acknowledging people can find art difficult			

Appendix D: Examples of Analytic Memos

Analytic Memo 13.04.2016 Deveron Arts

Putting Huntly on the map

Showing Huntly in a different light

Not viewing Music for Street Fights as controversial

In spite of misgivings about Deveron Arts and what they do being difficult for people to understand and in some projects being controversial, nevertheless the community council official thinks that the organisation has been good for Huntly 'because they've shown the town in a different light'. Makes point several times about how locals are proud of Huntly and don't want its reputation tarnished. *Empty Shops* and *Music for Street Fights* both involved challenges to perceptions of Huntly as 'nice middle class town' a description applied to it by the director.

There is ambivalence towards DA and its arts practices: on the one hand they 'show Huntly in a different light and have been positive', on the other they challenge the way the reputation of Huntly is viewed. The term 'in a different light' could be interpreted as having two meanings: different from what is considered normal, or acceptable, or desirable, the idyllic view of Huntly as a place to live, but also different in that Huntly is an arts town, and Deveron Arts has made it distinctive. Different is an ambivalent term, it does not necessarily confer approval or disapproval.

Analytic Memo 19.10.2017 Atlas Arts

Thinking about context

How relevant is the context of social life in Portree and what the director describes as 'landlordism'. The ways in which the dominant social class, often landowning, determine social activities that have a prominent public dimension to them, e.g. the Highland Games, displays of power etc?

So it's the aristocracy if you like or the landlords of Skye who set up The Highland Games for locals to perform in and then visitors come and watch these feats of strength. That dynamic is still present here today.

Also the Skye Balls, the bestowing of piping awards and other prizes by the MacDonalds, a prominent local family. Cultural manifestations of social status, which some are able to navigate and gain entry to, while others are not? The director describes herself as floating between these social groupings, that all have their own gatekeepers. Arts practices revealing disruptions between social hierarchies in place? Continual struggle for place identity that results?

Analytic Memo VARC 09.05.2018

Not understanding the countryside

On bringing an urban mind-set

'He also did something on their land, which was the symbol for cannabis. And I just thought actually did they know that was what he was going to do? I just thought, you know, you see this all over Berlin maybe but if it was my land, it just seemed a bit..... I wasn't sure about it.'

Local resident 1 recalls another work by artist Leo. Language suggests that it was somehow out of place. It belonged in Berlin, but not necessarily on a farm in Tasset. Perhaps also suggests something more: an urban sensibility or mind-set - you would expect to see this all over Berlin, with its connotations of liberal values and how these are represented in major cities? Does the phrase 'but I wasn't sure about it' reflect not only a view that the artwork was out of place, but also inappropriate, or unexpected in the landscape around Tasset? Not, perhaps because it was morally wrong, but disrupted a sense of what ought to be part of the landscape and its identity as a farmed landscape?

Is there a connection with the code *Not understanding the countryside?*

Local resident 1 reinforces what local resident 2 articulates in his interview about an urban mind-set. There are degrees of being embedded in rural Tasset, and by implication understanding how it ticks. That understanding is also linked to how actors construct meaning from local landscapes. Not understanding the countryside could also be regarded as a critique of a lack of understanding of what local landscapes mean to people, the value of their mental maps. Does this perceived lack of sensibility reflect in some measure an urban mind-set?