

Northumbria University LOG

Starting Wed 19 Sep 2007

When everything's so unfamiliar, it seems to take forever to get accustomed. Probably a sign of age, and, if so, it's worrying.

The induction day was exciting, inspiring, disappointing and frustrating all in one. To meet the rest of the cohort and to marvel at the wealth of experience and diversity of backgrounds was awesome. To discover how the structure of the course works was exciting, as I began to see unexpected possibilities and potential. To hear people articulate ideas and propositions, and to make intellectual connections between them, was stimulating. To see the work, however poor the presentation facilities, was a privilege, and made me respect the wealth of approaches and the range of skills that were evident in others' work.

Week 2

Came to Newcastle after buying some fruit & veg. Parking on Sandyford Rd cost me £4.50; which was probably still a saving on the f&v as well as the rail ticket. It was certainly a saving on time, enabling me to do more

CD's starting point was that sculpture came off its plinth somewhere between 1949 and 1971, whereas painting hangs on to hanging on the wall. Sculpture, therefore, particularly in a public setting, makes demands and challenges on its audience through its shock of presence, or its assumed presence. He then continued with a challenge to us to debate, define, construct and re-define the realm of the artist in the 21st Century.

Week 3 (3 Oct)

The Hatton had a ubiquitous video installation that I couldn't be bothered with (***Can't Get No) Satisfaction: Jordan Baseman***). The book selection, however, was very tempting. So I took some time over the Merzbarn wall by Kurt Schwitters. My concentration was interrupted by the audio track of "Ask for it, Ask for it", which was actually very funny; a football coach for a boys' team, streaming out his clichés. I began to think about an installation along similar lines as the Schwitters, but I reckon the time has passed for that. My barn will attempt to be a response to Peak Oil instead. ('The globalization of production will end with global relocalization replacing it.' (*Peak Oil, a brief introduction*, Jake Gordon, 2004)).

After the Hatton I went to the Northumbria University Gallery & Baring Wing, and enjoyed viewing the Maggie Hambling exhibition. I was intrigued by her ability to make marks with unmixed colours and to whirl them into wave-forms. I felt that she had only experienced waves from the shore. A breaking wave is different at sea. I didn't much care for her studies, though. It seemed slightly pointless to exhibit more than one. (Silly me – they were for sale!) I really enjoyed the oil paintings of Norman Adams, and some of his watercolours, as well. Lunch was the Food Hall in the SU building, of 'wok' food. I'm very uneasy about the amount of junk being peddled to students, and all the disposables.

WEEK 4 (10 Oct)

I left the car at the garage in Hexham to get its brakes fixed, and went in by train (cheap day return, £4.90; similar to parking price in N'castle). I then walked to the Baltic. I decided that I'd go to each exhibition and then trawl the descriptions for quotes to use as the narrative for the PP presentation.

The first exhibition was an awesome installation of old fridges that had been covered in small mirror tiles by French-Algerian artist Kader Attia, called 'Square Dreams'. It was eerily like a miniature metropolis of tower blocks. The next was all around the place – drawings and writings by Ant Macari. Then the Zabłudowicz Collection, which was a heady mix of vibrantly-coloured, large-scale 2D and 3D work. The most disturbing and powerful exhibition was by Kendell Geers, called IRRESPECTIV. A lot of it was about control and cruelty. The central space was a transept of red body bags hanging up, brightly lit by fluorescent tubes. You had to read an H&S warning before entry about the razor wire and broken bottles (which surrounded a plinth topped by a torched and wrecked car). The thought did strike me that the Baltic, like Tate Modern, has been exceptionally-well re-modelled. I was critical at first about the number of international exhibitors and lack of regional or British-based artists. I think the planners have got it right, now, and the mix of regional and international artists adds something to local distinctiveness. It says that the region is inward and outward in the way it looks. There was quite a number of Dutch visitors. Which reminds me, I don't see much about the region's 'culture-spots' promoted on the DFDS ferries.

...some great ideas began to be developed; flattening the ego; the artist as a bean; industrialisation of art; democratisation of art; historical relativity; the material practice of paint. Back by train after a half-hour wait and a pint of good ale.

Week 4 (17 Oct)

Basil Beatty, ...intrigued by the notion of tensions between left and right. I liked the idea of creating a drawing-wall as a means of solving the problem of staying focussed as ideas come in. A kind of gatekeeper. He described his paintings as being "on the verge of identity", and the process as 'a corridor of uncertainty' as he tries to keep in contact with, and respond to, what's happening, and as engagement comes and goes. The thought struck me that we may be instinctively attracted to that, as an audience. I also liked the notion of his 'figure' as being noisy, in contrast to the silence of the unpainted linen. Perhaps painting can have another narrative; a musical one, with patterns of sounds and rests?

Kate quoted Bertrum Russell,; the role of art is to prove that we exist. Art goes beyond documentation, to draw meaning from creations. Things are because they are. To remove obfuscation, try removing metaphor. This sparked a lively debate about punks and things.

Maiko started with the statement that art is bilogic, and is the key to access everything. We have an excess of information; art can help us understand it. I was drawn to the thought that although we have excess information, we have lost a lot of knowledge. Is this where the notion of 'bilogic' can help us? I explored the notion further, and became rather excited. I could see links between this and existentialism, 'irrational man', and even the way that political and religious doctrines become accepted. I formed this view from reading **On the nature of bilogic: the work of Ignacio Matte Blanco**, by Chris Clarke, Faculty of Mathematical Studies, University of Southampton (<http://www.scispirit.com/matteblanco5web.htm>). He explains that part of the human mind behaves as if it is governed by a type of logic that is different

from conventional logic. The interplay of this new logic and conventional logic results in a bizarre combination that (Blanco) called *bilogic*. He describes its essence with the following example.

‘Suppose I have a dream in which a friend of mine, let us call him Peter, turns into a dragon. Conventionally, an analysis of this dream would proceed by *association*: I, or a therapist, would elicit associations with the elements of the dream, which might include the idea that “dragons are dangerous” and this might raise to consciousness my feeling that Peter was in some way dangerous. Matte Blanco’s suggestion is that, rather than thinking just in terms of the rather weak link of association, we see the process of the generation of the dream as proceeding *as if* there were taking place a quasi-logical sequence of propositions, of the form

1. Peter is dangerous
2. Dragons are dangerous things
3. Dangerous things are dragons
4. (From 1 and 3) Peter is a dragon

The passage from 2 to 3 is (conventionally) a *non sequitur* because “are” denotes the relation of sub-class, and this is not a symmetric relation: a statement of the form “As are Bs” does not necessarily imply the statement “Bs are As”. Matte Blanco’s central postulate is that the Unconscious treats *all* relations as symmetric. From this postulate, a wide range of consequences flows, which unifies a great many aspects of unconscious processes.’

WEEK 5 (25 Oct)

This being half-term, I started the day taking the boat back to its moorings on Ullswater. There was a thick freezing fog and a white coating of ice over tents, trees, cars and grass. The ropes were frozen stiff and the coating of ice on the boat was lethal. Much of the crossing was done in a fog so dense you couldn’t make out the difference between air and water. However, I eventually found the mooring and Trish, and we came home before changing cars and heading for Newcastle.

Irena asked CD to read her (presentation), slowly. It was densely-packed, but basically proposed that the realm of art was of autonomous activity, of dreams, and presupposes an interpretation of mankind and our relationship to the world. It encouraged us to refer to Heidegger, ontology and his notion of ‘being there’; *Dasein*. Only human beings truly exist (in the fullest sense), and only when being-there for-themselves. We participate in ‘being’, and self-awareness leads to the authenticity of a life created out of nothing, in the face of dread, by reference only to one’s own deliberate purposes. ...There is no abstract essence of human nature; there are only individual human beings unfolding themselves historically. In the end, this is the answer to the question of why there is something rather than nothing. It is only because we choose being-there.

We went on to explore how ‘art’ changes, and to see what we could come up with if we replaced the word ‘art’ with X. CD thought that X makes progress – that things get better, bad becomes good, and things get revised. I challenged us to see if we could think of any culture or community that didn’t use factors of adornment, ritual and peak experience. He asked us to consider whether these were X-factors, what other X-factors there may be, and the notion of nothingness.

“There’s room in the artworld to write about bees, monasteries, mushrooms, Andy Warhole and shamanic practices.” This was the best talk so far.

From there I went to the talk by Francis Gomila. ...I was particularly interested in Gomila because of his work at Spaghetti Junction and The Custard Factory in Birmingham.

He wanted to make work that made a difference, so began by making public art. However, he found it limiting; it could only speak one kind of language. So he founded Fine Rats International and did a site-specific one-night-only installation at The Custard Factory. At this time, ACE had no funding regime for multidisciplinary work. Now, with ACE recognition of Live Art and Multimedia, funding is easier to access, and Gomila uses videos and light projections in his work. Videos are so easy with which to travel. You can work from a suitcase and distribute through DVD. His art explores difficult areas, such as immigration from Africa (‘Cargo’; transported by Meuse and installed in Tangiers, La Linea and Gibraltar, his birthplace). He seems to blur the medium with the message and the performance, as with ‘Guantanamera’, a sound installation in Madrid where he filmed people’s responses. I felt from seeing his work that people are the same wherever they are, but their approaches can differ according to their cultural experience. What he does is use video to take a small incident, observe it closely, and draw more meaning from it, by touching on symbolism, art history and other cultural references. This presentation was as good as the morning one. It was interesting that so many students left early, and couldn’t find any questions to ask. Perhaps young people find it harder to engage with this kind of art that has a social and political context? That would be bad news.

Afterwards I retired for mocha and a read of the file. It returned my thinking to the notion of nothingness, of creating and playing in an empty space, of making something from nothing. Data is nothing. Information is a string of data; a string of nothing. Knowledge, they say, is power, and so it is, because it is something that we can hold within us and also share between us. It can start just by wondering. Wonderment is a way of reaching knowledge. It’s like a journey towards knowledge.

CD used the evening CP session to deliver a presentation of who he is as a practitioner and to explore the nature of artistic identity. Almost by accident, it would seem, he has worked in a museum with artefacts classified in a unique way. He discovered that though the slightest intervention, people will participate with the artist and inform the intervention much more readily than in a gallery. I thought that a large part of CD’s art practice is in his phrasing, articulation and language – which figures, since he’s employed as a reader! He highlighted the role of museum attendants, which rang a bell from my own experience, and the need to work with them. I thought that they are the mediators for the artists, who are the agents of change. If so, their role is crucial between artwork and audience. Here was another subject (or should that be object?) of triangulation.

I reflected on the day’s experiences. I want to build my entire file as a website (therefore from nothing), connected to some other sites – Digital Crash Site in particular – but in virtual space, and as a place in which to wonder. However, I must remember the fruit boxes and the simple raw materials on which I want to experiment. Then I realised that I could/should be creating the barn as a material space. Perhaps I should develop it as a distribution point for the sharing of knowledge and wonderments? Instead of a database, build a wonderbase. Get people to use it for conversations between indigenous and travelling people, settlers and the settled. Include artifacts and lost objects. Get them to speak of how connected we had to be with the natural world before the industrial age, and how we

must re-learn in order to survive the post-industrial age and peak oil, only this time with the help of technological innovation and the new sphere of the virtual world. Celebrate the best bits of their/our past cultures from the fragments that remain. Learn once more that nothingness exists and is equal to beingness, as is illustrated by light and dark, earth and air, zero and one, sound and silence. Love is all you need. Richness lies in belonging, not belongings. The recitation of genealogies is like that; a counting of the family silver. Africans in the bush thought the Scottish explorer Mungo Park was a poor man, wandering alone, without his kin.

WEEK 8 (14 Nov 07)

As I write this, Foreign Secretary Davis Miliband is addressing a meeting in Bruges, setting out the direction of Europe over the next two decades.

"Across Europe, people are feeling a divergence between the freedom and control they have in their personal lives, and the sense of powerlessness they face against the great global challenges we face: from preventing conflict and terrorism to addressing climate change, energy insecurity, and religious extremism. They are confident about personal progress, but pessimistic about societal progress."

I can see a theme developing, here. Add to this global corporate power that diminishes social and environmental justice.

WEEK 9 (21 Nov 2007)

I went to Newcastle Uni and first of all looked in at the exhibition by Dr Lilian Mary Nabuline, who had given us a lecture the previous week. Her sculptural pieces had a much more powerful presence than her photo's portrayed. I enjoyed the craftwork, subtle colouring and quality of finish as much as anything.

Mark Titchner's work was concerned with the tensions between different belief systems, and started with an animated piece called 'Ivy meets Mike', named after two H-bomb tests, and showing them overlaid like a kaleidoscope, suggesting the birth of the sun, along with the sound track of the explosion with the word 'yes' repeated suggesting an orgasm. Mark described the final image as a mandala, which, of course, struck a chord with me. He said that nuclear fusion could help counter climate change, as a means of production of more energy. I'm not sure about that.

Mark explained that he started out wanting to paint, but discovered that he was more comfortable with photography – drawing with light – and PhotoShop. He is interested in the relationship between media, advertising and power, and likes to work in close proximity to media (e.g. Channel 4). One of his first pieces used the expression 'WHY IS THERE SOMETHING INSTEAD OF NOTHING?' This expression came from Heidegger, but he first heard it as the lyrics in a C&W song. His images refer to trade union banners, William Morris and the utopian '60s (such as the Black Panthers), from where he takes slogans and mission statements to compare with the Top Ten brands such as Coca Cola and Nokia. He said "our job, instead of producing, is to consume and accumulate". The irony of having his work included in a free slot in Times Square struck me as very impressive. This notion was amplified by the following day's news item – that Umbro (makers of the England football jerseys) and the British economy was set to lose two billion pounds next summer because England hadn't qualified for the finals.

Mark seems to have his work everywhere, including the Venice Biennale, where he represented Ukraine, using a repeating and tessellated pattern found on churches and also in Greek art. He finds the concept of a commercial gallery neutral, and prefers something more challenging (situationism was a word he used). His coded forms are a symbol; a will; a desire into the sub-conscious, and a process for distorting language. He uses advertising space to 'sell' something abstract, such as the erosion of civil liberties that has the illusion of democracy. This last concept was shown by five spinning spirals around a central one. Depending on how they turned, some gave the illusion that they were larger than others. The final piece was an assault on our visual and aural senses, to do with the speed of the strobe light (10hz) being the same as the alpha state of the brain, but also the onset of a stroke. Michelle remarked that words have no meaning. I said that making art with words was easier for getting a message across, precisely because words do have meaning, or that we attach meaning to words. It was a very interesting talk, and well presented. I was struck by how young Mark looked, yet spoke with great maturity and he has clearly achieved so much.

The afternoon talk was by Alessandro Vincentelli, a curator at the BALTIC. Although I was looking forward to it, I fell victim to a combination of sleepiness and boredom. It just seemed that he didn't actually do anything interesting. He could rattle off the names of dozens of artists – he clearly knows the field – but was unable to enthuse me about either the making or the exhibiting and curating of art. He did start to develop a theme about different ways for artists to show and promote their work, such as through badges, banners and stickers. He seemed to disapprove of this, as if the artist was not 'on-message'. He also spoke of Walker and Bromwich, who live in Berwick and have exhibited something called Limboland at the Gymnasium. I need to think about this mainstream stuff, and who has the power and control of mainstream exhibition spaces.

... I went over to the library to put some thoughts down and research some ideas a bit further. I became interested in the Green Anarchy magazine, which was influenced by the Situationists, covering Primitivism, Post-Left Anarchy, Radical Environmentalism, indigenous resistance, earth (and animal) liberation, and anti-capitalism. I came across the notion of 're-wilding' – that is, the process of undoing domestication and re-learning knowledge of wild plants and animals; primal living, a holistic reality... Anyway, it was time to stop if I was going to get a glass of wine before the undergrad's scoffed the lot at the PV.

WEEK 10 - 28 Nov 07

I spent the morning pulling my work together and attempting (and failing) to start the VW. So instead, I loaded the car. I only took in two 3-D pieces, since my main one had been smashed by a frame falling off the wall. I'd managed to forget to bring home the tube of drawings, so they were safely locked in CD's room. I didn't appear to have much work. Even one of the 3-D pieces was completely broken when I came to unpack it in Newcastle.

... the visiting lecture given by Chris Yeats, director of VANE Gallery. VANE is a new Gallery that has shown emerging artists and taken local artists working in the North East to UK, US and other international Art Fairs. This was, however, another uninspiring lecture that strung out long lists of names – of ex-N'bria graduates. Chris gave a detailed history of the development of the Vane. The speed with which it developed was certainly impressive. It started as an artists' collective and is now a gallery featuring a quarter regional, a half national, and the rest international, artists.

It goes to international art fairs. It is bringing practice into the region, as well as disseminating it elsewhere. I thought that it makes a good model of practice.

WEEK 11 – 5 Dec 2007

James outlined his degree show at the Royal College and his work in the New Contemporaries exhibition. I was slightly surprised and disappointed to discover how well he is regarded, as I didn't think his work said anything new at all, and by the end, I had not learnt anything I didn't already know about painting..

... practice-led research needs a routine and something to follow. One statement rang out strong for me – 'storing away materials is different from re-living their significance'. If objects no longer say anything, we create a meta-description.

WED 12 DEC (week 12)

I need to take a brief interlude from the diary of events at this point. It has taken me nearly a week to summon the thinking into writing about this final Wednesday of the year. For although I was late for every event, and I left each in an inconclusive way, they each had an impact upon me which has been difficult to define. It has not been until now that I've come to realise the extent and the cause of the frustration and alienation that I've been experiencing about the course. The realisation dawned upon me whilst reading *Resurgence* and researching the writings of Suzi Gablik. Part of the frustration has been that I seemed not to have got any further from my special study in 1973, based on the exhibition 'How to Play the Environment Game' by Theo Crosby at the Hayward Gallery. In the intervening 34 years, corporate globalisation has strengthened its grip on culture and nature alike, commodifying and privatising both. The frustration stems from a feeling of powerlessness to do anything about it, or to find anyone else with whom to collaborate in a meaningful or effective way. Whilst I've been drifting, others have taken the science and philosophy forward, but not the art (as far as I'm aware). I missed a recent symposium in Scotland called *More Than Us*, with speakers including the cultural ecologist David Abram and the naturalist John Lister-Kaye. Their interests seem to align very closely to my understanding of promoting an alternative aesthetic. There seems to me to be two different actions that I need to take. Firstly, to find out as much as possible, and to read all I can, about the key thinkers in this field. Secondly, to plan and implement a course of action that allows me to develop my art in that direction, in order to deliver a clear message. That includes arranging with Saul to run a workshop in oak-swill making.

An art auction was organised in one of the SU venues. This turned out to be a much bigger and better organised affair than I imagined. I completed a registration form, was given a number and directed to a table. As we were waiting, I fell into conversation with another man who turned out to be a serious art buyer. He said he had over £300,000-worth of art in his five-bedroom house in Darras Hall. We swapped cards. However, I thought the auction was due to start sooner than it did, so I had to leave before it started but I was still late for the CP seminar.

CD took us through the background and meaning of semiotics, with particular reference to Piercian semiotics, rather than the work of Saussure. We looked at examples of icons, symbols and indexes. His work was to do with bio-semiotics, so were cultural, rather than materialist. CD described the work of Alison Wilding as having the "presence of material/ stuff/ materiality – (an) obstinate presence of 'realness', not 'stuff'". He then moved on to interpretive communities, Starly Fish and

artists and audiences. Then on to Philip Rawson and his book 'Drawing'. PR said that drawing crystallises a whole, temporal, special event'. That struck me as important to my concept of creating 'situscapes'.

WED 9 JAN 2008 (Week 13)

After scraping the snow off the windscreen I set out for the Toon. Ice and snow on the tops meant a detour via Alston. The road over Whitfield Common was a sheet of ice, heralded by the warning lights from a police car. One car was on its roof.

Following the Christmas break, I was again struck by the limited range of food and refreshment. The pizza I had was OK, but not what I wanted. I craved something wholesome, lentil-rich and 'vegetatious'. Selling Ginsters, crisps and sticky cakes without any realistic choice to students seems to me to be almost immoral.

...I also played with the idea of creating fetishes that related to our dominant culture. Consequently, I went on line to learn more about fetishism (the attribution of religious or mystical qualities to inanimate objects as a primary stage in the development of culture or civilisation), shamanism (the visible world is pervaded by invisible forces (or spirits); thus shamans are the intermediaries between natural and spiritual worlds) and animism (the belief in souls, and that souls inhabit all or most objects). Karl Marx wrote about 'commodity fetishism', explaining that 'people within capitalist societies find their material life organised through the medium of commodities'.

WED 16 JAN 2008 (Week 14)

The whole day leading up to the evening was frenetic. I had spent most of the previous day as well, preparing to lead a seminar. I had been diverted by Seymour arriving at our front door unannounced on Monday evening – 'great to see him, but the timing was awful, and, of course, I couldn't help but over-imbibe on Monday night, which killed-off even more brain cells. It became clear by 10 am on Wednesday that I was not going to make the N'castle Uni talk, so I kept working through the pp, trying to find an order to the presentation that made sense. I wasn't totally convinced that it did, and kept adding last-minute material, which, on reflection, created a kind of eclectic mud, oozing out of the slides. By 4pm, I reached the point of no return, had a shower and headed for Newcastle. At that time of day I didn't know what to expect with traffic. It wasn't bad. I decided to strike west for the motorway-drop into the university area, and hope for a free close parking space. I was so engrossed with some cabaret singing on R4 that I ended-up going in a full circle back on to the A1. Feeling extremely foolish, and now worrying that time was slipping by, I found the right route and got to the Haymarket. However, stuck behind a double-decker bus, I turned too soon and missed the closest parking spaces. After another detour I parked near the far side of the footbridge and briskly footed it to CD's room. I reckon I arrived at about one minute to six.

PD helpfully took me back to the 'liminal' slide. The content of this slide seemed to strike some resonance with everyone. **In retrospect, I think I shall keep this for the core of my eventual proposal, coupled with the wonderbase. CD made the point that of all the subject areas I touched upon, the sense of wonder was the most compelling.**

WED 23 JAN (Week 15)

I went to the library and found a book on Aboriginal art. It was awful. It was written by some patronising western artist who had persuaded some aboriginal families to do western-style, home-counties landscapes, almost to a formula (two trees on the right and a hill or two in the background). I gave up on it and found a book which had me totally absorbed, which I came back to later. One title kept re-appearing – Bush Tucker Dreaming – amongst other strange terms.

The small group seminar was based around some old photocopied notes that CD had produced. CD explained that he wanted the CP file to be 'an eco-system of ideas, feelings and thoughts', and for the ensuing proposal to lead to an addition to 'art-school culture' that is practice-led. This degree is about creative *production*, which is not the same as critical theory or art history; that is, a degree of creative *reception*. CP is about expressing our interest, and that we need to make the transition from study-reading to synoptic reading. We can reference our own writing, including any retrospective study notes. The thought struck me that this way of working could lead to tensions between qualitative and quantitative academic disciplines; the differences between personal testimony and empirical investigation. This could be an area to explore as a proposal – could it be possible to identify and apply qualitative measures for subjective responses?

After the small group seminar, I went back to the library and retrieved the book I had found earlier, about Aboriginal art. I copied a few choice passages into the document 'x-currents' on my U-drive. The theme was absolutely central to my current thinking; representing the world through symbols, spaces and colours; proving a connection with the environment; making it the subject rather than the object. I also started to see that the environment could well be man-made, as in a city, and that could just as likely be subjectivised as anywhere else. The song 'I Belong to Glasgow' comes to mind, yet again.

WED 30 JAN (Week 16)

Throughout the preceding week I had been trying to figure out how my work could fit together. I had spent hours on 3-dimensional ideas that didn't work satisfactorily enough to carry forward. Then this morning I awoke to a glimmer of light. It was so strong by the time I reached Carrshield that I stopped the car to write more notes. Earlier I had written statements such as '**altar piece**', '**imperfect symmetry**', '**creating spaces**', '**elemental core**', '**earth carcass**' and '**earth ghosts**', mostly stimulated by reading Suzi Gablik. All of these seemed to point to my Wonderbase. I began to see that the crash sites could be circular montages of digital prints on canvas; they would be panels exploring 'geo-logy', with three colour areas subdivided into three textures or topics. They could be sprayed, areas masked, over-printed, and generally built into layers. I was reminded that time is divided into twelve segments, depicted in a circle as a clock, and divisible by the numbers 2, 3 and 4. I also remembered that minutes are collected in 60s, that there are 60 minutes in a degree of longitude and latitude. Equilateral triangles have 60 degree angles. It occurred to me that time and space can be calibrated the same way. When I stopped the car, I wrote down the relationships between my work, Mailout Journal and therefore Stephanie and CDI, Suzi Gablik and Hamish, the Wonderbase, the Hub, Creative Adventures, NPSF and the local context, Pennine Days, Open Studios, Allenheads, Lanehead and Common Ground. It is clearly a huge field and I need to construct a realistic action plan to find my way over it all.

The evening CP session was to discuss ways that the seminars could be improved, and ways that could relate them more closely to the final proposals. I felt that I was thought of as being too critical, but I just wanted to help with positive ideas. I came away feeling very tired and a tad flat. It felt to me to be rather inconclusive, and just seemed to hand-over the role of 'chair' to CD. I would have liked to have seen a system where people could select their own format.

WED 6 FEB (Week 17)

I took my time driving in, as there was some treacherous black ice; there was a great deal more traffic than usual for some reason. I overtook an RAC rescue truck, and a short distance further on I could see why he was needed. A driver, looking very sheepish, was sitting in his car on the wrong side of the fence.

At 3pm I went to the John Walker talk. There were no seats left again, and there must have been about 20 of us sitting on the floor. John is described as a 'Classic Post-Modernist' and is currently engaged in a two-year residency at the British School in Rome, thanks to a Sainsbury's Award. He showed his work from the last ten years, which included sculpture, books and performance as well as painting. His work is prolific, and he has explored themes, made work in series, hybridised drawings to kill things in his head, testing them to destruction as a means of refreshing his practice and moving on. He appropriates images from anywhere, including PhotoShop, and includes them in congested compositions. His 'concussion paintings' are large, fun, entertaining and articulate. He explores non-linear narrative and non-Euclidean space to find or corrupt meanings for himself and audiences. He said that working in series gives him a structure. His presentation provoked some good discussion, both within the room and later at KS's crit. The cognoscenti seemed to regard his work as too funky, too old-fashionedly post-modern. I liked the way he presented his sexuality with such openness without it being over-worked or too self-important. I also like the way he refused to be drawn into battles that he didn't want to fight, such as the role of British artists in international settings, or how corporate sponsorship might lead to self-censorship. I am getting used to artists describing their body of work as 'the work'.

WED 13 FEB (Week 18)

...Hans Abbing, an artist, economist and sociologist based in Holland, started his talk. In 2005, he was appointed as professor of art sociology (the Boekman Chair) at the University of Amsterdam. He has presented extensive papers on the relationship between art and economics and in 2002 his book, *WHY ARE ARTISTS POOR? The Exceptional Economy of the Arts* was published. He asked the fundamental question regarding supply and demand and whether or not equilibrium can be maintained – are the many artists, or *too* many artists? His research has revealed that 80% of artists in Holland are living below the poverty line. He outlined how artists think differently from other earners – they are bold risk-takers, they have unreasonably high expectations, they believe in myths and they come from families who are able to support them (how true!) He listed a number of 'non-monetary rewards' that artists seek, including 'authenticity'. The thought struck me that I could easily have researched and presented this. All I had to do was to find a topic and work it through with a contact group. And I was a little dismayed to find that neither he nor Nick seemed to understand what causes feedback to the sound system.

Factors that influence the number of artists include subsidy. In Hans' view, subsidies increase the number of artists, not the income of artists. However, the increased size of the art market is widening the scope of products that visual artist can provide,

especially in the public sphere. Also, widening the field helps to blur the divide between amateur and professional works against the professionalisation of art that the 'art establishment' always tries to create as a means of defending their position. He recommends a funding system based on commissions, deals and contracts rather than on grants, as he sees that the arm's length principle becomes less significant. The comments and debate that took place at the end of his talk was badly informed and shallow. I thought to follow-up on the blog-spot, but did nothing about it, since the story of Trish's car eclipsed everything else at the end of the day. The keyword I took from the event was 'authenticity. It is probably as much as for that as for any other reason that I create art and am following this MA course.

I went to the library to access my 'U' drive. I am becoming concerned about my ability to make any money as an artist. I wondered through several articles on [A:N] and scooped out the following final concluding quote from AN's article on making a living as an artist:

From this glimpse into the working lives of artists, it becomes apparent that a large part of being an artist is being adaptable and entrepreneurial. Unlike other professions, the driving force behind this entrepreneurial attitude may not be financial, but to seek other, non-materialistic rewards such as freedom, creativity and personal satisfaction.

If this is true, and it certainly seems to be, then finding a new model of income from making art is going to be a challenge. I made the following notes:

PUBLISHING – The Wonderbase: a yearbook/ journal. Also a series of lectures to illustrate the point. Explore what the working models are and compare them:

- Selling art from commercial galleries
- Selling art from a studio
(including multimedia, talks and open studio events)
- Commissions
- Solo & collective exhibitions; either selling or for a fee
- Engaged-based projects and consultancies (development: personal, organisational and/ or community)
- Curating
- Workshops and events (as above)
- Publishing (including the Internet)
- Increasing the breadth of the market (how?)
- Academic research and teaching
- Other?

See what comes anew from it. Is there a niche, and if so, how can it be exploited? Form a forum or event that also involves some discussion. Pay people for their participation? Get some funding upfront? How to get to a wider audience? Environmental/ecological/academic?

...I had further thoughts about trying to create a collaborative project as a student. I reckoned nobody needed to give us permission –we just needed to JFDI! I thought about creating a publication – a CD or DVD, a book and an archival print – and publish it through someone like Iron Press or Northern Voices. It could be launched via an exhibition and an event. The theme could be something from the course, or, more interestingly, about the Wonderbase. I would need to find a funder or two – perhaps sponsorship and advertising. I should write an attractive proposal and send out an e-mail call for participants. Yvonne would be good regarding her links to the university and theatre, and Irena would be good because of her printing, for funding

and for her East European cultural 'take' on things. Perhaps even a publication under the name of Companions of Dynamic Ingenuity?

Gallery North had an exhibition curated by Mike Wooton, drawing from classic pieces of art. I was very impressed by his own work, an animated drawing of the fabric from a Velazquez painting.

WED 20 FEB (Week 19)

...MH followed the theme of examining what makes a photograph an art photograph. She couldn't get the presentation to work on-screen so she had to do without. She started with three assertions: – that the art photo should contain repetition and a deliberate mistake (to appear non-authored), and be in large-format. She continued with a list of ten other attributes usually related to art photography, which included an urban setting, young people and dereliction. CD questioned whether this was the right approach, as I did also. I could see how repetition is attractive; it's like a mantra, it's reassuring, like a heartbeat, and provides 'cognitive resonance'. Likewise, we can enjoy deliberate mistakes because we enjoy chance and playfulness, and they acknowledge our imperfect humanity. Large-format is spectacle; it fills our vision. There was some good discussion around the problems of authenticating photography as art. I still believe that I want art to challenge me, to sometimes baffle, to inspire, to offer a unique perspective, or at least to elicit some sort of response or reaction. Irena asked why she always mentioned her partner; and felt that her work should be able to stand apart. I said that it they were like yin and yang. CD suggested that they could exhibit together for the course, to point up the partnership.

WED 27 FEB (Week 20)

...Another of GC's images showed a painting of John the Baptist's head. The painting appeared to be cropped, although GC claimed it wasn't, yet it defied the conventional proportions of its time, and the edge of the painting cut through the head and shoulders of an onlooker in the background. There was certainly much mystery in the painting, not least that the decapitated (and therefore dead!) head wore a frown. GC talked about style and cultural symptoms. I think he wanted to illustrate that ambiguity is one of the tools of an artist, but that disambiguity is important to AI.

WED 5 MARCH (Week 21)

I went for lunch at the Global Café, picking my way through teams of canvassers for SU positions, and then on to the CP small seminar, where we looked in greater detail at the writing of proposals, and at the role of reflective thinking in writing reviews and tutorial reports. The proposals should be based on experience-centred writing, with an abstract of about 80 words. It should be an analytic proposition, not a synthetic one, from the page or from the practice, since as artists we work in 'thought experiments'. This struck me as being close to dreaming, close to the experiences of manic depressives and those with bi-polar disorder. CD encouraged us to refer to Roy Ollison, although when I googled the name' it offered no useful return. He guided us through his handout, and we talked more about action research. I feel I'm beginning to get a better idea of how I need to present my proposal.

...I then went to the library and looked through a book about the life and work of William Blake. A stanza from the Preface to his 'Auguries of Innocence' moved me sufficiently to write it down, because it shows how humanity is connected to the

Universe. I was particularly interested that he chose the word 'augury', as it means to read signs as portents.

"To see the World in Grain of Sand
And a heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold infinity in the Palm of your hand
and Eternity in an hour".

Irena chose to read her seminar presentation without any visual aids. In part, she said, because she believes that visual culture is stifling reflective thinking; that object-matter outweighs subjectivity. She proposed that we need a re-thinking of new relationships in space and time (new art), and that painting develops seeing and looking. Mental imaging is fundamental in the cognitive process employed in creativity, as illustrated by the imprint of eidetic images. It links art and science. Life is energy; life is nature and art. She proposed that her methodology would be based on empiricism, deduction (or reduction), and looking at something as a whole, moving from the general to the particular. I could see how this proposal links to prehistoric mark-making, to the creation of 'meta-images'. We discussed the continuing relationship between art and music, which led me to thinking about the continuing roles of eidetic imagery and synaesthesia.

We finished a little late, and there was more obvious evidence of party-excess in the city. Two pigeons were greedily feeding from a pile of puke next to a pedestrian crossing as I walked past.