

# Cultural Value

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## Public Art and Local Civic Engagement

Development Grants 7042 Cultural Value Project Awards

Lynn Froggett, Julian Manley, Alastair Roy,  
Michael Prior, Claire Doherty



Arts & Humanities  
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## Executive Summary

This report compares the cultural value of two public artworks – Alex Hartley’s durational, dispersed *Nowhereisland* and Damien Hirst’s permanent, single-sited *Verity* that arrived in Ilfracombe in 2012. It assesses their contribution to reflective and engaged citizenship, local identity, regeneration, cultural tourism and legacy. The study responded to a methodological gap by developing a group-based participatory method – the visual matrix – that enables participants to express affective, aesthetic and cognitive experience of public art. The study compares methods and findings and triangulates with interviews and media analysis. Part 1 discusses the research methods and compares results. Part 2 discusses theoretical and conceptual foundations and analysis of the visual matrix, drawing on Alfred Lorenzer’s depth hermeneutics, the Deleuzian metaphor of rhizomatic thinking, Wilfred Bion’s conceptualization of reverie and containment and Donald Winnicott’s theorisation of transitional phenomena. In Part 3 benefits and limitations of the methodologies and their applications are discussed. It concludes that the visual matrix is a highly effective method of understanding participants’ experiences of public art because it is led by imagery and affect. The shared context and associative thinking of the visual matrix enables participants to articulate responses that people often find difficult to express. It produces strikingly different results to methods that rely on discourse, and is able to account for emotional and aesthetic reception of an artwork as well as the social processes it sets in motion and otherwise intangible aspects of impact and legacy. It is particularly useful for researching or evaluating complex, durational projects with multiple entry points. This study therefore has significant implications for how such artworks can be evaluated to capture dimensions that are not easily assessed by other methods and so inform the commissioning of public art.

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## Key words

Public art, visual matrix, hermeneutic, rhizome, reverie, transitional phenomena, evaluation, durational

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# Part 1

## 1. Introduction

Research and evaluation in public art has been vexed by questions of how 'value' should be defined and to what extent the focus should be on social, economic or artistic indicators and measures. This raises questions as to how far social science based research and evaluation methods are suited to participatory arts research, whose agendas they serve, and whether arts sensitive methods, can also capture the social outcomes of public art.

This report focuses on the visual matrix, a methodological innovation in the project Public Art and Civic Engagement (PACE), which was funded by the AHRC Cultural Value Project to address the need for arts sensitive research in the cultural sector. It describes the nature of the visual matrix and the hermeneutic interpretation that follows and contrasts it with the focus group - a well-established group-based method for eliciting the public's responses to an issue, object or event. It describes the quality of data and findings obtained by each method and concludes with an observation on choice of method for evaluation of public art projects. Whereas focus groups depend on people's ability to articulate explicit views and opinions, the visual matrix is designed to capture participants' experiences of an artwork, including aesthetic and emotional responses, which may otherwise be hard to articulate in words. The visual matrix also responds to growing demand for participatory methods in which knowledge is co-produced between researchers and participants (Kemmis and McTaggart, 2005). This project had a three-fold aim:

- Compare two contrasting forms of public art through a case study of Ilfracombe, which in 2012 hosted both Alex Hartley's *Nowhereisland* and Damien Hirst's *Verity*.
- Develop and test a group-based research method - the visual matrix - which uses images, visualisation and associative thinking, followed by hermeneutic interpretation.
- Compare the visual matrix as a method, and its results, with those of a focus group.

This report describes the artworks and the methods used to assess their impact on the town and the people who live there and those who visit. The findings from three visual matrices and one focus group (which was advertised publicly as a 'Citizens' Forum') were triangulated with data from rapid capture street interviews and semi-structured interviews. A summary of findings from this data and an analysis of media coverage on both artworks is included.

## The Artworks

Alex Hartley's *Nowhereisland* was towed around the south west coast of England as part of the Cultural Olympiad in 2012, stopping to visit towns on the way. Each visit was preceded by a public engagement programme, promoted through the island's mobile land-based embassy, ambassadors, and a website which provided a forum for its 50 'resident thinkers', a log of its self-declared citizens, a record of its journey and a participatory medium for its evolving constitution. The land itself from the Norwegian High Arctic region of Svalbard had been revealed by a retreating glacier, 'claimed' by the artist and mounted on a raft. This was towed into international waters and proclaimed a new nation.

*Nowhereisland*, a durational artwork offering multiple entry points to the public, was produced by the Bristol-based commissioning and production agency Situations. Claire Doherty and Michael Prior (2012) described it as follows:

*Nowhereisland is physical matter (it is a sculpture comprising material from the Arctic and a collection of objects, documents, photographs and films in the accompanying land-based mobile museum, The Embassy); it is durational (it unfolds over time); it is nomadic (it moves across locations, towed by a sea tug, accruing different meanings in different contexts); it is an intervention (a geological displacement of material, a landscape moving around another landscape); it is the words and images of others (speaking back to the project through the citizenship programme) and it is a utopian idea (a conceptual nation involving thousands of people across the world shaping that nation's values and principles online).*

Damien Hirst's *Verity* is a sculpture, that has been loaned to the town by the artist for 20 years. The figure is a 66 foot high bronze statue of a naked pregnant woman conceived by the artist as a modern allegory of Truth and Justice. The statue's pose is taken from Edgar Degas' 'Little Dancer of Fourteen Years' (c. 1881) and is reminiscent of Hirst's earlier work 'Virgin Mother' (2005) of which there are versions in New York and Monaco. On one side, an anatomical cross-section of her head and body reveals the foetus in her womb. The figure holds a pair of scales behind her back and a sword stretched upwards. It is now sited in Ilfracombe's harbour where it towers over the waterfront.

*Nowhereisland* was a utopian social intervention – durational, dispersed, nomadic. Its public engagement programme began a year prior to its arrival, and made a particular impact on local schools who incorporated the issues it foregrounded - eco-sustainability and global citizenship - into the curriculum. *Verity* is a single-sited sculptural object, supported by the international reputation of Damien Hirst whose often controversial work has wide appeal and impact. It will provide a commanding presence in the local landscape for at least a generation.

The arrival of these two works by art school contemporaries, in the same place, in the same year, offered an opportunity to contrast the public's experience of them and their ongoing legacy for the town. PACE was specifically directed at one of the Cultural Value Project's major themes - the role of culture in the making of reflective and engaged citizens. It has therefore asked of these two artworks:

- Did they contribute to local identity, civic engagement, and reflection on citizenship? If so, how?
- How did they generate public reflection on what it means to live in Ilfracombe?
- What is their on-going legacy and value within and beyond the town?

The study has implications for cultural policy:

- Is there a case for investment in temporary, dispersed, durational, participatory public art?
- Can arts evaluation move beyond measures of attendance and satisfaction towards an understanding of audience experience and artistic legacy stimulated by the qualities of the artwork itself?

## **Between Arts and Social Sciences: A Methodological Gap**

Since the 1990's a wave of arts practitioners and activists have produced a 'social turn' (Matarasso 1997; Jackson 2011; Bishop 2012). Describing their work variously as relational, participatory, collaborative, dialogical, co-creative, new genre public art, they have pushed publicly funded art for social ends beyond education or therapy and towards ambitious goals related to health and wellbeing, (Staricoff 2004; White 2009; Clift 2012), inclusion and citizenship, (Finkelpearl 2000; Kester 2004; Schmidt Campbell & Martin 2006), social and criminal justice, (ACE 2005) and regeneration, (Miles 1997; Landry 2000; Jellineck 2013; Kwon 2002).

This has happened in parallel with the marketization of the public sphere and hence demands for an evidence base to assess value for money and inform investment decisions, (DCMS 2010; ACE 2014). Controversy over public value and cultural value has been on-going, with Government (DCMS) demanding measurement of economic impacts, (ACE 2006; DCMS 2010) and Arts Council England (ACE) driving large-scale quantitative studies on audience access, attendance and satisfaction, (ACE 2003; ACE 2010; ACE 2009-2012).

Meanwhile evaluation toolkits and guides directed at the arts sector have proliferated, (Matarasso 1996; Walker et al. 2000; Angus 2002; Keating 2002; Moriarty 2002; Newman et al. 2003; Jackson Associates 2007; Mosley and Lister-Coburn 2008; National



Social Inclusion Programme 2009; DCMS 2010). Some of these have asked how artistic or intrinsic value (Holden 2004, 2007) might be empirically assessed given the supposedly 'subjective' character of the arts<sup>1</sup>. Disagreement remains over why evaluation should take place: there is uncertainty over what it should be looking at, confusion over how to go about it, and concern surrounding the time and money it consumes.

It has been argued that the arts have been co-opted into social and economic agendas (Bishop 2012) and that artists are becoming 'social workers' (workers in the social) - change agents carrying out social interventions (Jackson 2011). This has led to an emphasis on evaluation against desired social outcomes, rather than open forms of research-based inquiry. Evaluators have reached for social scientific methods - customised monitoring forms, participant satisfaction surveys, self-assessment pro-formas, self-esteem tests and questionnaires. Qualitative approaches such as reflective diaries, interviews, observations and case studies are advocated. However, these demand complex time-consuming techniques and theorisation. There is uncertainty about what claims can be made on the basis of such methods and whether people working in the arts sector have the time, skills or inclination to do this work; or whether funders are prepared to pay for it, (Matarasso 1997; Moriarty 1997; Merli 2002; Ruiz 2004; Hall 2004; Henderson 2004; Belfiore 2006; Belfiore and Bennett 2008; Clements 2007; Galloway 2009; Kester 2012).

Between the metrics of participation and what some regard as the intrinsic nature of an artwork lies an area that poses particular challenges for research - that of audience experience in its sensory, emotional, aesthetic and cognitive aspects. This is the ground where individuals and communities can be moved or transformed by a process, object or concept. Understanding experience requires methods that are sensitive to the characteristics of audiences and artworks and the interaction between the two. In this study, the visual matrix provides a group setting framed by images of the artworks where this experience can be re-visited, felt, explored, and articulated.

## **2. Research Design**

In the following sections we list the components of the study by way of overview. We then clarify the concept and practice of the visual matrix and the focus group as methods of group-based data collection. We illustrate them with examples from the public events held in Ilfracombe. We then briefly account for the ancillary methods that helped in different ways to triangulate and test the principle group-based methods. We outline and compare the findings before moving to the second part of the report, where we identify the theoretical resources used to develop the visual matrix. The selected theoretical

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<sup>1</sup>The depth hermeneutic and psychosocial perspective adopted here challenges any reductive subject/object binary: experience is seen as occurring where the life histories and dispositions of individual actors interact with common socio-cultural resources (Lorenzer 1986).

concepts presented are essential in understanding both the nature of the data produced in the matrix and the hermeneutic process that we have developed for the purposes of analysis. Finally, in Part 3, we combine the discussion and conclusions of the study.

## **Outline of Methods Used in the Study**

1. The principal axis of the research was comparison of the visual matrix with a focus group (the Citizens' Forum) which will be described in detail and compared below. Three events (two visual matrices and a focus group) were publicly advertised, open to all, and held in the early evening in the town centre. They were composed of self-selecting groups of 12-16 people.
2. An extra visual matrix on Nowhereisland was held at the school for 16-18 year olds as only one had attended a town centre event. We were aware that the school had engaged intensively with this artwork. The inclusion of this extra visual matrix offered us an opportunity to try and gauge the effect of the public engagement programme with a group positioned differently from the town visual matrix with respect to generation and the relationship of its participants to the local community, global citizenship and digital culture.
3. Forty rapid capture street interviews were conducted by members of the research team by approaching people in key town centre sites (high street, car park, arts centre) and asking for their views on the two artworks. The purpose was to identify any divergence in the distribution of opinion between the self-selected groups of the town visual matrix and focus group and other residents or visitors.
4. Six semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants to gain an overview of the arrival of the artworks and their reception in the town. Narrative interviews were requested with the artists to explore their artistic intentions for the two artworks, especially in relation to their significance for the public. An interview with Alex Hartley was completed by the research team. Damien Hirst was interviewed via an intermediary.
5. A media analysis reflected national and local coverage of both artworks.
6. Hermeneutic analysis of the visual matrices and focus group took place in a series of panels, of which the first three were composed of members of the research team who had participated in the group events, and the final one included an 'outsider' with expert knowledge of the public art field.
7. Thematic analyses of the interviews was undertaken by the researchers for the purposes of triangulation.
8. Emergent findings were presented to research participants and local cultural policy makers, and the discussions informed the final analysis.

As part of the dissemination of the research project the visual matrix methodology was presented to four workshops, which included both academic and arts sector participants. They were advertised as public events in Bristol, London, Leeds and Birmingham. Each

workshop included a shortened version of a visual matrix for each of the artworks, and afforded a further opportunity to test the methodology and potential further uses of the visual matrix.<sup>2</sup>

### **3. Visual Matrix: Concept and Practice**

The visual matrix is a development for research purposes of an antecedent tradition of social dreaming (Lawrence 2005). It yields a view of aspects of social experience that are difficult to speak about and might otherwise remain unarticulated. The social dreaming method of generating associative thinking and imagery in a group setting has informed the associative process of the visual matrix. Social dreaming originated in 1982 as a means of introducing shared dream experiences and associations in groupwork contexts. The gathering was called 'matrix' precisely to distinguish it from 'group'. It continues today under the auspices of the Gordon Lawrence Foundation, set up in 2013. Whereas the social dreaming matrix involves associating to dreams, the visual matrix uses associative thinking in a research context, where a visual frame, or other stimulus, is used to set in motion associations that bear on the research in question. Despite the essential difference between the two methods – the sharing of dreams as opposed to associative thinking in relation to a research topic or question – they share common aspects. These are:

- The 'snowflake' configuration of the seating that encourages a depersonalised sense of sharing contributions in the matrix, designed to avoid participants directly addressing one another and helps to avoid group dynamics.
- The contribution of the facilitators, also known as 'hosts', who take on a role of subdued guidance through modeling and producing occasional working hypotheses without using interpretation, judgment or expressing any sense of expertise or hierarchy.
- The privileging of emergent imagery rather than discourse, and the linking of the images and connected affects into an accumulated 'collage' of ideas, thoughts and affects.
- The use of a post-matrix event which provides a transition from the state of 'reverie' (explained below, page 17) to discourse and the beginnings of interpretation.

Both social dreaming and the visual matrix deal with what Christopher Bollas called the 'unthought known' (Bollas 1987); that is to say, with thoughts and feelings that are difficult to express through discourse because they are pre-expressive, unarticulated

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<sup>2</sup>The 'Thinking Beyond Measure' workshops were organised by Situations on behalf of the project. Thanks are due to Georgina Bolton for administrative support. Michael Prior and Claire Doherty participated as key speakers and co-hosts of the events.

thought elements.<sup>3</sup> Both the social dreaming matrix and visual matrix provide a 'container'<sup>4</sup> in which the complex affective knowing of the participants can find expression. (For a video sample of a visual matrix, see <https://vimeo.com/97731002>).

In this study, each visual matrix was framed by a set of images, to encourage associations directed towards the artworks and the related research question. For each visual matrix, the visual frames consisted of sequences of 20 photographs of the artwork, that were projected onto a screen and watched in silence by between 12 and 16 participants. The photographs were retrieved from the web and other sources, and an effort was made to reflect the range of imagery available, without any intentional selection, which might influence the associative process that was to follow. The images below show a selection from the photos used for the framings. They demonstrate the range of images used to illustrate Nowhereisland since the artwork and its associated public engagement programme included a number of elements. Here we show the island itself, the embassy, participation of local people including a procession through the town and school children, and a screen shot from the Nowhereisland web site.



<sup>3</sup> Wilfred Bion (1962) termed these elements 'beta elements'.

<sup>4</sup> 'Container' and 'contained' are fundamental elements of Wilfred Bion's psychoanalytical thinking (Bion 1970). The 'container', simply stated, is the capacity for moderating anxiety and retaining and processing unconscious affect linked to ideas. In both the visual matrix and social dreaming matrix, the container is the shared space of the matrix. What is 'contained' are the thoughts and feelings that are subject to the process of working through, (in the context of the present study, the process of the visual matrix).





**Figure 1** Images of Nowhereisland

For Verity, we showed images that captured the artwork from various perspectives:





**Figure 2** Images of Verity

Following the framing, participants were seated in chairs positioned to resemble a 'snowflake' pattern, rather than in rows or a circle. The facilitators were seated among the participants and also participated in the matrix. This arrangement minimises eye contact and discourages group dynamics. It also discourages direct addresses to the facilitator and any assumption that the facilitator is there to actively direct the process of the matrix. The facilitator introduces the matrix by asking what the images bring to mind. Participants are invited to contribute their impressions, feelings and further thoughts and images. They are informed that there will be an opportunity to raise

questions, discuss and analyse, once the matrix has concluded. The mode of associative thinking does not always flow from the very beginning:

*- A recollection came up as I was watching the slides of Lydia and Charley and the Arctic trip; and then of the primary schools and the range of experiences we had - experiences relating. It was fascinating.*

(First contribution to the Nowhereisland matrix, in descriptive mode)

However, the associative image-led style modelled by the facilitator at the beginning soon starts to emerge:

*- I have this image of the island like a carnival float, covered in palm trees and flowers...*

(A little further on in the same matrix, showing the emergence of image-led expression)

In this study the matrices lasted for nearly an hour during which participants associated not only to the experience of the artworks evoked by framing photographs, but also to one another's contributions:

*- I have this image of bronzes from Africa...*

(Verity Matrix)

This was a contribution to the Verity matrix, followed up a little later by:

*- I wonder how it appears to people coming in, not seeing it from the sea.*

*- Now I know why we have skin.*

*- I'm thinking of people suddenly coming to Easter Island; the first impression is one of awe.*

(Verity Matrix)

Here the associations start to trip off each other (the image of the bronzes from Africa connects with Easter Island through reflection on the artwork). This is combined with an awareness of how Ilfracombe as a place appears to people approaching from the sea.

Visual matrix facilitation is non-directive, aiming to maintain a space for associative thinking, often by offering an image and modelling the associative process if contributions drift into interpretation<sup>5</sup> or discourse. If we return to the opening of the Nowhereisland matrix, (quoted above), we can see how this process is facilitated:

*- A recollection came up as I was watching the slides of Lydia and Charley and the Arctic trip; and then of the primary schools and the range of experiences we had - experiences relating. It was fascinating.*

(First contribution)

*- I have a memory of youth and an excited trip I made to India when I was a student.*

(Facilitator's response)

In this example, the discursive nature of the opening contribution is contrasted with the evocation of a distant memory connecting the feeling of the artwork with the themes of journey, discovery and youth. Through modelling rather than further explanations, the facilitators attempt to steer the direction of the matrix towards the releasing of images and feelings.

Because interpretation or judgment of the images is avoided in the matrix itself by means of the facilitators' modelling, imaginative responses to an artwork can take precedence over analysis. The associative process is driven by imagery, affect and visualisation. Feelings and thoughts in the visual matrix are 'experience near' (Hollway 2009; Froggett and Briggs 2012). They arise spontaneously, initially stimulated by the opening visual frame, which then lessens in influence as the matrix proceeds and subsequent images and associations are offered by participants in response to one another. Participants make contributions whenever they wish and without turn-taking. After the visual matrix there is a short break. The chairs are re-arranged in a circle or semi-circle for a discussion of what has emerged. The nature of the interaction changes from the image-laden process of the visual matrix to interpretation and analysis. This is described in detail below.

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<sup>5</sup> Interpretation – or more specifically when and how to interpret – has been the subject of debate in both arts practice (for example text accompanying museum exhibits) and in psychoanalysis and psychoanalytically influenced practices where an ill-timed and intrusive interpretation can foreclose on the subject's own associative process or search for understanding. For similar reasons interpretation is withheld during the visual matrix itself and only introduced in the processes of sense-making that follow. In qualitative research interpretive methods are regarded as an essential means of extrapolating meaning from data which, except in the case of a 'naïve realist' epistemology, is never regarded as self-evident or self-explanatory. However, interpretation which does not ground itself in the data, or which forecloses too quickly on other meanings the data may contain, is to be strictly avoided. In this study, particular care has been taken to avoid overly definitive interpretations of the image-laden data emanating from the collage-like nature of the visual matrix. All hermeneutic methods must contain protocols that support analysis and researcher reflexivity to avoid premature or over-interpretation.



The image-laden process of the visual matrix can be compared to the states of 'reverie' that Bion (1962, 1970) characterised as a meditative and directionless free-floating attention. It depends on emotional attunement and receptivity where thoughts, instead of flowing in a linear or rational fashion, arise from pre-conscious and pre-conceptual embodied experience, often as images or associations that surprise the thinker and other participants. In reverie the apprehension of form emanates from the attuned experience of the object rather than preconceived categories of thought. It can therefore be understood as the originary condition of aesthetic perception. Ferro's description of Bion's theory of mental functioning describes these images and associations as 'visual pictograms' that 'poetically syncretise the sensory and proto-emotional experience of every instant of relatedness to self and others' (Ferro 2002). For Ogden (1999) reverie requires 'tolerance of the experience of being adrift' (p.160), and takes "the most mundane and yet most personal of shapes ... ruminations, daydreams, fantasies, bodily sensations, images emerging from states of half-sleep, tunes ... that run through our minds..." (p.158). Bion himself described the mental state required for reverie as 'negative capability' following the poet John Keats (1817) who in a letter to his brother wrote of Shakespeare's particular skill of "being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritable reaching after fact or reason".

The daydream-like states of mind of reverie are brought into language through the process of the matrix. These states of mind have not been fully conscious until they have been uttered and given a shared and social nature through the associative activity of the matrix itself.<sup>6</sup>

The following are further examples of the daydream-like contributions to the visual matrices in Ilfracombe:

#### **Nowhereisland:**

- *There was a feeling of barrenness, not even a spectacle...*
- *I have this image of a polar bear on an iceberg, and it's melting, like the rock.*
- *It makes you wonder what else could be out there... ? And what could be done with them?*

#### **Verity:**

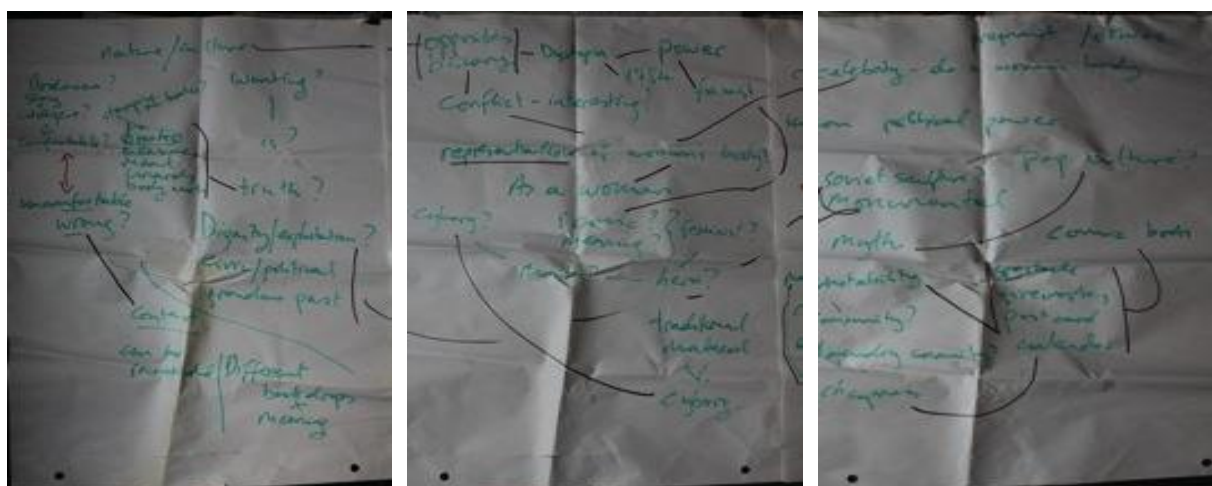
- *The image of her lying down was disturbing... it reminded me of death...*
- *I feel a great sense of warmth as a mother with the statue... things that were passing to me. The images brought it back. My son is now 1 year old, and has grown, but Verity has aged.*

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<sup>6</sup> The unconscious at issue here is generative rather than repressed, a strain of thought identified by Bollas (2009) in Freud as 'receptive unconscious': 'any self receives and alters reality, organizing life into memory banks (or meshworks) where perception nucleates in highly condensed psychic matrices' (p.28).

Both the matrix and post-matrix discussion are audio-recorded to provide a record for later reference during the period of analysis. The nature of the matrix is such that many of the contributions are softly spoken and may sometimes be difficult to record. One or more of the researchers should therefore also take notes in real time. The purpose of note-taking is partly to maintain a reliable record of the matrix and partly to support the facilitation of the session, allowing the researcher/facilitator to make the links that assist participants' understanding of the emerging collage of images. Most importantly, however, the note-taking allows recording of affect in the researcher/facilitator as felt in the here and now of the matrix. This use of the self as a means of understanding the affect related to the images is an essential part of the process that cannot be audio-recorded.

When the matrix is over, the chairs are re-arranged in a circle or u-shaped formation around a board or flipchart, and the process of interpretation gets underway. The post-matrix discussion, contrasts with the mental 'wandering' of reverie, as a process of extrapolating meaning, ordering, linking and interpreting begins. The session is facilitated by one of the researchers, who notes the ideas that have emerged from the matrix on the board or flipchart. Links are drawn between the ideas, images and affects so that themes begin to configure. This session is similarly audio-recorded for future reference. The post-matrix process resembles a form of 'image-mapping', where clusters of images and intensities of feeling and ideas configure as 'maps' and where the interaction between the images, affect and ideas relate to each other as 'scenes' that echo the scenes evoked in the matrix itself.



**Figure 3** The beginning of the interpretive process; notes taken on the flipchart for the Verity visual matrix

## 4. The Focus Group: Concept and Practice

Focus groups are a form of group interview that generates data from communication between research participants (Merton et al. 1956). In social research, group interviews are often used simply as a convenient way to collect data from several people simultaneously, however, focus groups explicitly encourage group interaction as part of the method (Kitzinger 1995). The facilitator attempts to exercise unobtrusive control of the agenda (Kreuger 1994), sometimes relying on a topic guide and emphasising to participants that there are no right or wrong answers (Bloor et al. 2001).

Participants are asked to reflect on their own experience and viewpoints and to work on these together. The emphasis is on encouraging group members to talk to one another sharing personal recollections and asking one another questions. The facilitator steers the discussion, seeking to elucidate opinion. The method is particularly useful for exploring how knowledge is constructed, positioned and contested within groups (Morgan and Kreuger 1998). The fact that people are encouraged to draw on their own experiences and to speak from their own positions and perspectives affords the opportunity to examine their thinking processes (Kitzinger 1995). It is this interest in people's shared and tacit beliefs and the ways in which these emerge in interaction with others in a local social setting that accounts for the rapid spread and popularity of focus group methods (Macnaughten and Myers 2004).

Originally used within communication studies to explore audience experience of films and television programmes, focus groups have become popular in health research as well as in examining public understandings of a range of issues such as health behaviours, political attitudes and social change. They enable a more natural pattern of conversation than might occur in one-to-one interviews and allow people to explore ideas together (Kitzinger 1995). Hence, Macnaughten and Myers (2004 p.65) suggest that they work well when they provide opportunities for people to discuss topics they could talk about in their everyday lives, but do not. Focus groups primarily allow for cognitive-analytic discussion and this reduces their suitability for examining aesthetic and affective interactions with an artwork.

In practice, focus groups, like most other forms of group, are vulnerable to domination by powerful voices which can override the unhindered exchange of ideas. People speak from conviction or expertise, often claiming authority for what they say, and alliances and conflicts develop among people who agree with or oppose one another. Ideas may be based in experience but can also be analytical, critical, political and polemical, and hence removed in time from the original stimulus or object of thought. The thinking in a focus group can sometimes be 'experience distant'<sup>7</sup> and this is reflected in the intellectual quality of language used, similar to that of politics, social science, and their

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<sup>7</sup> The terms 'experience near' and 'experience distant' are non-normative and were used by cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1974) to describe two different and necessary research attitudes within data collection and analysis. He advocated an oscillation between the two since experience nearness on its own leaves the researcher 'awash in immediacies', whilst experience distance consigns him or her to 'jargonistic abstraction'.

popular variants. Focus groups strive towards clarity and judgment, which demand a measure of 'standing back' from experience and an evaluation of it. A typical 'experience distant' statement from the focus group in this study was:

*...more visitors have come because of Verity and people may say that's because we had good weather, but in the first 6 months which was not good weather we had 6,000 additional cars park on the pier and even if there are 2 people per car that's 12,000 additional visitors.*

An 'experience near' statement from the same focus group was:

*I was down there one day and there was this little boy and the mother was saying what do you think she is doing and he was saying 'she has a sword and she is holding back the sea so that it doesn't come in a flood everywhere'. And I thought 'that is really interesting' because I had never thought of that but this little boy thought she was there to protect Ilfracombe.*

The first of the two quotations above is an important evaluative comment directed at the artwork's impact on cultural tourism. It does not tell us how it was experienced, nor does it relate to artistic quality. The second begins with an experience near comment but concludes on an evaluative note. Whilst there were some experience near statements in the focus group in this study, they were few and far between; in the visual matrices it was the other way around.

## **5. Ancillary Methods**

### **Interviews**

Forty rapid capture street interviews were conducted for triangulation with the findings of the principal group-based methods and to offset the risk that the public events would assemble a self-selecting group of active citizens, with views at odds with those of the general public. Questions were narrative-pointed and designed to help people express personal reactions to the artworks, such as "what did you think or do when you saw the artwork?".

Six semi-structured interviews gave an overview of the introduction and impact of the artworks in the town and the discussion they had evoked. They were conducted with key informants who were either in a position to reflect on the views of a particular segment of the community, or interest group, or who represented professional interests actively implicated in bringing the artworks to the town. The interviews covered a similar range

of topics to those broached in the Citizens' Forum and were expected to produce more reflective commentary than the rapid capture interviews.

## **Media Analysis**

National and local media coverage 23 October 2009 – 10 October 2013 was analysed: 75 reports for Nowhereisland and 136 for Verity. Sources included National, local printed and online media.

## **Interviews with the Artists**

The interviews with the two artists allowed us to ask whether or not the data gathered from the visual matrices resonated with the artists' original creative and aesthetic intentions for the work. As discussed above, the literature on the evaluation of public art shows that with the increasing pressure to consider the social purpose and effects of art, project evaluators can neglect to consider them as art and attend to the mediating object, concept, image or story that is the necessary link between the artist and audience (Bishop 2012).

## **6. Findings**

### **Summary of Findings from the Focus Group (Citizens' Forum)**

This forum elicited attitudes and opinions about the artworks. The contributions were concerned with instrumental, social or economic effects, and hardly at all with artistic quality. People spoke from positions of authority and expertise, sometimes illustrated by life experience. For example, the opening contribution to the focus group was as follows:

*Somebody has to be first [everyone laughs]. For those who don't know who I am, I am an elected member for Ilfracombe Town Council, an elected member for North Devon District Council and I also Chair the Ilfracombe Tourism and Marketing Group, so I have a pretty good idea what is going on ...*

**Findings for Verity:** The 'Verity effect' was much discussed: the positive impact of the sculpture on the local economy, cultural tourism and regeneration. There was widespread consensus that Verity was good for the town, whether people liked it or not. It brings wealth and optimism and benefits from Damien Hirst's international reputation. A number of people who had disliked the prospect of a Damien Hirst artwork arriving, said they had changed their opinion because of its benefits for the town. This was

communicated both in terms of feelings of optimism for the prosperity and culture of the town, but also in terms of the carnival atmosphere that greeted its arrival and erection. Hirst's association with Ilfracombe is a matter of local pride for some. Media coverage and on-line sources show that this view is not universally shared. Local policy is now to 'sell' Ilfracombe as a town of art and good food and people suggested that the arrival of Verity had made this a realistic proposition.

*As a result of that [Verity arriving] we have also had some new art galleries open in the town because they see it as an opportunity and we also had our first public arts exhibition last summer ... the council is now focusing on the arts and good food for both of which Ilfracombe is becoming renowned ....*

The minority voice (one person who claimed to speak for others not present) vehemently disliked the work, regarding it an affront to public decency.

There was some discussion from two people about the social and cultural symbolism of Verity. However, this was linked either to questions of heritage or to concerns about the future of the town. There was minimal discussion of Verity as an artwork, and much pre-occupation with its implications for trade, business and regeneration. A note of disquiet sounded when one participant asked towards the end of the focus group how much the town would have been prepared to pay for the sculpture, had it not been a gift.

**Findings for Nowhereisland:** The Forum was largely interested in Verity, and comments about Nowhereisland tended to be used as a contrast to Verity. The artists and the artworks were described as "chalk and cheese" and by the standards Verity had set (economic impact, artistic reputation, permanent legacy) Nowhereisland could not compete. Verity had been created and gifted to the town by the "number one artist in the world" providing a lasting physical, social, economic and psychological contribution, whereas Nowhereisland had been made by an artist most participants had not heard of and the work was transitory, offering no lasting physical presence. Two people voiced concern that Nowhereisland was a waste of money, quoting adverse press commentary on the Cultural Olympiad's 'Artists Taking the Lead' programme and on Nowhereisland specifically.

One person described seeing it whilst moored for repairs in a nearby town when any illusion it might have sustained offshore had collapsed, inviting derision.

*I saw it in Bideford and it was moored up there because it was broken down and people were openly laughing. ... there was a chap there explaining what it was and people were openly laughing and saying "it's a coal barge".*

Others defended the work, recognizing its 'intellectual' purpose and arguing that its impact was more subtle but also important. Defenders were mainly associated with the school that had worked closely with the producers and had integrated the project and Nowhereisland's visit into the curriculum making it the subject of a specially designed educational programme. These participants recognized that the on-line citizenship and embassy were integral to the project whereas others in the group focused, for the most part critically, on the island itself as an object. This promoted a very interesting discussion about the differences between the two artworks and the art in relation to environmentalism:

*... I mean Verity, people come and stand by it and have their photo taken and some say I like it and others say I'd prefer a dolphin, but Nowhereisland was much deeper as a project but to look at it, people said "what's that all about", it wasn't much to look at but if you got involved with all the intellectual thinking it was a much deeper project and much more intellectual, there was nothing about it which was "go and take a photo and stand next to it", you had to get involved with it to really understand what the project was about.*

- The question is, what is art in the end? Nowhereisland was not a thing to look at, it was a medium to prompt thinking.*
- For me it had gone to a different area, it wouldn't qualify as art.*
- It was about the environment and all those things, which is not the art side.*
- That's interesting because I believe art encompasses that ...*

The Citizens' Forum as a whole was only mildly impressed with the concept of citizenship underlying Nowhereisland. With the exception of one participant it was composed of adults, who had not been the target of the intensive education programme. Judged as it mainly was, as an object, exposure of its mechanics and structure signalled its shortcomings as an artwork. From less critical voices, there was an acknowledgement that something might remain in the town's memory from the visit but there was little inclination to explore this together or to think about the value of Nowhereisland as work of art.

## **Summary of Findings from the Visual Matrices**

In the visual matrices, by contrast, participants did associate to the feelings and ideas the artworks produced in them, and they did articulate aesthetic responses, both for Verity and Nowhereisland. By holding one matrix for Nowhereisland in the school and one in the town, differences between the life experiences of the young people and the adults in the town were highlighted along with the effects of a more intensive public engagement programme in the school.



**The Verity visual matrix** dwelt on the female figure, initially alien and now accepted by many. Pregnancy and strength were explicitly aligned. Some of the idea of strength was evoked through a comparison to the Statue of Liberty resisting a tidal wave, which nevertheless contrasted with an image of King Canute, questioning the town's ability to resist the waves of decline that it had recently been subjected to:

- *Looks like a protector*
- *It's a strong message, coming in from the sea*
- *Bit like Canute...*
- *The Statue of Liberty and a tidal wave.*

There was also a sense of community identification with an artwork seen as transformative for the town's identity. Verity's assertive war-like stance was held in balance with her fecundity. Her pregnancy, understood as a symbol for an Ilfracombe expectant of regeneration, elicited a question: could the town be re-born after years of decline? What might it now produce out of itself? Verity had already aged through corrosion since she arrived and this was disquieting. What did it mean to age without ever having given birth? Was this too a metaphor for the town?

**The Nowhereisland visual matrix in the school** responded with concern and hopefulness to both of Nowhereisland's key linked themes, climate change and global citizenship:

- *I have a picture of civilisation, a small group of people come back to civilisation after a long time.*
- *It makes you wonder what else could be out there. It's like a recent discovery, so what other islands could be out there? And what could be done with them?*
- *It makes me think of how so much percentage of the world is submerged under water and we are on land that we are able to live on and how much of that is wasted unnecessarily.*

Images reflected the island's journey from the High Arctic, followed by melting ice and heating tropics. Open questions were posed: What would this world become? What would they become? What would the responsibilities of citizenship be? There was a shared memory of the island's visit, and a wish for enduring community, briefly realised when the town came together to welcome it. Nowhereisland had set in motion changes



in the way the young people thought; they knew of its web presence and global reach and through this awareness had developed for themselves a wider network of connections.

**The Nowhereisland visual matrix in the town** attended largely by older adults gave voice to a very different experience. It was concerned with the island's vanishing and its barrenness and pervaded by loss and nostalgia for something lost before it had been understood, or its riches enjoyed. The island evoked the disappearing world from which it had come, and through the embassy, banners, marches and choirs reminded participants of past communities, now uncomfortably 'retro'.

- *I'm reminded of the people, what they were doing with the banners...*
- *The banners remind me of how when it arrived we all organised citizens' marches.*
- *Citizens were asked to gather and pitch proposals and welcome the island when it arrived.*
- *They were like trade union banners.*

There was interest in the tensions within the artwork itself: the emptiness and distance of the island and 'close up' hand-crafted detail of the embassy. The island in the mind was a provocation, imaginatively populated with trolls by children and grandchildren, but leaving many adults to deal with their own disappointment.

## **Visual Matrix and Focus Group Compared**

There were striking differences in the form and content of the thinking and the ideas between the public events held in Ilfracombe. The table below shows generic differences between a visual matrix and a focus group and has been clarified through the research. However, the visual matrices differed from one another reflecting the sharply contrasting experiences of adults and young people.

<b>Visual Matrix</b>	<b>Focus Group</b>
<i>Contributions to the matrix are participant-led with minimal involvement of the facilitator. Participants associate to the contributions of one another with largely non-directive involvement of the chair.</i>	<i>The forum discussions are chaired and directed. The chair maintains control of the agenda and moderates the discussion ensuring certain subjects are addressed and curtailing points seen as less relevant to the research questions.</i>

<p><i>Example: Start of a visual matrix</i></p> <p>Facilitator: "The task is to allow our thoughts, feelings, ideas, associations and images to Nowhereisland to emerge and be expressed whenever you want. There's no turn taking, no judgment or interpretation. Images might be memories, scenes from films, photos or simply an image that comes to your mind. As people express their images, you might find that someone else's image triggers an emotion, idea or further image in you. These can all be expressed, and in time you might come to feel that a collage of images is beginning to form in your mind, and that this might be both your own collage of images and that of other participants. Who has the first image?"</p> <p>"I'm reminded of a polar bear."</p> <p>"I remember I was working. On that day, when the island came round I saw it come in as I was working."</p> <p>"I have this image of the polar bear on an iceberg, and it's melting, like the rock."</p> <p>"It brought the whole town together, lots of people."</p> <p>"I have the feeling of jealousy, because my brother got to have a trip, an expedition to the Arctic, all paid for..."</p>	<p><i>Example: Start of the focus group</i></p> <p>The Chair introduced the project and described the role of both chair and notetaker asking people to indicate they wished to contribute by raising a hand.</p> <p>The Chair also intervened in the discussion when certain individuals were felt to be dominating the conversation, to encourage others who had not contributed and also when the conversation seemed tangential to the focus of the study. For example:</p> <p>Chair: "I want to draw the focus back to Nowhereisland and the education strand. Were there new ideas that emerged?"</p> <p>"I was going to add to that, because I was at the college and the whole school really buzzed with that and it did bring everyone together."</p> <p>"I think it was less about art, it was a lot more about citizenship, you were invited to become a citizen, the questions were part of the art, and the question was about what it means to be a citizen in this world..."</p> <p>"You talk about the Verity Effect, but with Nowhereisland, apart from the school what did it do for the community as a whole?"</p>
<p><i>The matrix captures people's emotional relationship to the subject often expressed indirectly though imagery. It is rare for speakers to claim particular authority for a statement.</i></p>	<p><i>The focus group works through argument and opinion. Views tend to be offered in the form of discourse. It is common for speakers to identify their claims to knowledge and expertise.</i></p>

<p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>"It was nice to see the Olympic torch and remember that whole summer, the torch journey. I felt the attitude of the country shifted, built around this idea."</p>	<p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>"I would like to offer a supporting view. I am a relative newcomer and have been forming my view along the way. The arrival of Verity has, in my view, created a sense of optimism. It has raised the bar for Ilfracombe in terms of what it might become."</p>
<p><i>The matrix works with visual imagination, contributions are image-based, scenic, metaphorical, allusional. A space is created in which people can relate to the art works in an experience near manner.</i></p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>"I have this image of Swallows and Amazons, a childhood story by Arthur Ransome, where the children sail around an island in a lake and create stories and tales of adventure around the islands."</p>	<p><i>Discourse is the prime medium. People offer viewpoints, generally pre-formed and experience distant. These are sometimes reworked through discussion</i></p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>"Well I am one of the people who didn't want Verity at the beginning and the reason I didn't like it was that I didn't feel it had anything to do with the heritage of Ilfracombe."</p>
<p><i>Participants offer associations and the matrix encourages further associative thinking. The physical and psychological form of the encounter encourages people to speak to the matrix as a whole rather than to one another.</i></p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>"I was pleased to get this piece of island, something tangible, like a piece of memory."</p> <p>"Memories, in useless pieces of rock."</p> <p>"Mine is going to sit on the desk beside a piece of the Berlin Wall..."</p>	<p><i>Participants offer argument and counter-argument often dividing into sub-groups and alliances according to point of view. The forum encourages analytical thinking.</i></p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>"I am really interested in your view, but I still question is it public art, is it art for all, and as it is intellectual, how does that engage with the public as a whole? You talk about the Verity Effect, but with Nowhereisland island, apart from the school, what did it do for the community</p>

	as a whole?"
<p><i>The matrix enables expression of things that are 'beneath the surface' and difficult to express (unrecognized or unspoken ideas and emotions). Rather than explicit self-disclosure, participants tend to reveal their relation to the artwork through memories, stories, and ideas.</i></p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>"I used to collect worthless stones from the beach, bits of rock from childhood, from holiday or moment. I remember in particular this stone like a perfect sphere, I don't know how it was formed, made by the sea. I used to throw it for the dog, instead of a ball! Sometimes this sphere falls off the shelf and on to the carpet, making it even more noticed."</p>	<p><i>The focus group enables expression of topics and themes that can be recognized, acknowledged and debated, capturing what is already known and understood by those who take part.</i></p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>"The arrival of Verity has been particularly significant, supported by both councils and the fact of the matter is that there have been a lot more visitors come to the town because of Verity and people may say that's because we had good weather but that is not correct because in the first 6 months which was not good weather we had 6,000 additional cars park on the pier and even if you only say there are 2 people per car that's 12,000 additional visitors."</p>
<p><i>The accent is on shared affects and ideas. Complex and ambivalent emotions can emerge.</i></p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>"The image of a land so far away, the island came from so far away, and then alone in the harbour, so distant. Distant things can come close."</p> <p>"Images of a parade, music, a marching band, lots of colour, banners, signs, excitement, joy, everyone marching in the same direction and getting</p>	<p><i>Accent is on personal and/or rational contributions; personal emotions may be revealed, especially related to participants' investment in a point of view.</i></p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>"I am going to be perfectly honest, I thought it was a complete waste of money and I thought it was junk. And it was, to spend tax payers money on it, I saw it in Bideford and it was moored up there because it was broken down and it was moored up there and people were</p>

<p>involved.”</p> <p>“This is a small town and I’m surprised at how isolated we are sometimes, here at the school, so I was glad to become part of it.”</p>	<p>openly laughing.”</p>
<p><i>Communication is branched and networked; it is relational, embodied, imaginative.</i></p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>“I remember the Nowhereisland day at school, just before the journey, it felt as if the whole school was focused with the same thing in mind that can be expressed in so many different ways, a feeling of excitement and anticipation, the journey ahead and returning.”</p> <p>“The image of the polar bear is back and the journey...”</p> <p>“The feeling of temperature, cold and ice, and the move from there to a more heated area and landscape with forests and more population.”</p> <p>“The rocks on the island...”</p> <p>“It united a lot of people who became citizens. It’s about knowing, really knowing what you are getting involved in, if you know what I mean.”</p> <p>“It helps to think about it and compare: you are only a small portion. It helps to think of what a high impact such smallness can have.”</p>	<p><i>Communication is sequential and linear; ideas are individual, positional and intellectual; there is a tendency to dualities and resolution of ambiguities and conflicts.</i></p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>“Somebody has to be first [everyone laughs] for those who don’t know who I am I am an elected member for Ilfracombe town council, an elected member for North Devon district council and I also chair the Ilfracombe tourism marketing group, so I have a pretty good idea what is going on ...”</p>

<p><i>Images and associations develop, accumulate and overlay each other as a succession of whole scenes with gathering complexity, like a collage.</i></p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>"It reminds me of Life of Pi."</p> <p>"Yes, being adrift at sea, so vast, on the boat and not knowing where he is, links to Norway, sparse and the sea as so vast. Nowhereisland makes you feel as if you're there."</p> <p>"I have a picture of civilisation, a small group of people come back to civilisation after a long time."</p> <p>"It makes you wonder what else could be out there. It's like a recent discovery, so what other islands could be out there? And what could be done with them?"</p> <p>"It makes me think of how so much percentage of the world is submerged under water and we are on land that we are able to live on and how much of that is wasted unnecessarily."</p> <p>"I have the image of the clock countdown on the web site, clocking on the people, more people becoming citizens, giving a feel good feeling about everyone coming together."</p>	<p><i>Discussions and arguments express contrasting attitudes and opinions and move towards simplification and clarity of either singular or competing perspectives.</i></p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>"Can I ask each of you to summarise your main point?"</p> <p>"All this Verity Effect is total spin."</p> <p>"One hypothetical question: there may be an effect, but say for some circumstances Verity had to be taken away, how much would the town pay for her to stay?"</p> <p>"I was going to say, maybe some people are car crash about Verity, but there are lots of people coming for positive reasons too. The content of her doesn't matter that much, the optimism is great and real and this is the first time when something promising has come to fruition."</p>
<p><i>The imagery may trigger a brief story or another image, but the overall experience of the matrix is 'lyric'. The sensation is of a succession of scenes each one offered in the 'here and now', rather than of narrative development through time.</i></p>	<p><i>Narrative tends to be documentary and events are sequenced and delivered for a purpose.</i></p>

<p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>"I have this image of a pebble which reminds me..."</p>	<p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>"I can remember when this happened, which goes to show..."</p>
<p><i>The matrix is an exploratory process and works towards understanding through the post-matrix discussion and further interpretation.</i></p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>Through the post-matrix discussion of Verity we explored how the matrix had dwelt on the female figure, initially alien and now accepted by many. Pregnancy and strength were aligned. There was also a sense of community identification, with the artwork seen as transformative for the town's identity. Verity's assertive war-like stance was held in balance with her fecundity, and her pregnancy, understood as a symbol for Ilfracombe, which elicited the question: Could the town be re-born after years of decline? What might it now produce out of itself?</p>	<p><i>The focus group works through debate and judgment towards finite conclusions.</i></p> <p><i>Example:</i></p> <p>Conclusions focus on the Verity Effect, the reality and motivations of additional visitor numbers and the financial value of the work to the town.</p>

## **Summary of Key Findings from Semi-structured Interviews**

Individuals are not identified in this summary but they speak for the tourist industry, the harbour and maritime interests, education, the on-line community of Ilfracombe, the culturally engaged and supportive public, and a strain of opinion that had been very hostile to one or other of the artworks. Since the interviewees were aware of the fact that they were speaking for others they were 'in role' and most said little or nothing about their subjective responses to the artworks.

As with the rapid capture street interviews (see below), the objective was to gather data for triangulation in order to ascertain whether and how the visual matrices might have skewed participants' responses to the artworks, or presented a very partial or idiosyncratic view. The interviews have allowed us to test whether or not particular community segments might have had specific views, which for some reason did not find expression in either the visual matrices or the focus group.

In the event, with one exception (the Verity 'opposition'), the general views expressed by stakeholders added little to our understanding of the reception by the town of the artworks, since they all expressed views that were also explored in the focus group. In the quotations below the attributions are those of the community segment for which the interviewee speaks, identified by the sub-heading.

#### TOURISM

Nowhereisland was disappointing from a tourism point of view. There was a sense that communications missed parts of the community, that the island was not attractive enough, and that tourist activity was not fully exploited due to the bad weather that caused it to move on:

*When it finally arrived most people thought it would be bigger than it was. Then, it didn't stay. People weren't happy, and as a tourist town when we are advertising that something is going to be here for a weekend, and it disappears after one day...*

In terms of tourism, then, Verity is more appreciated, since tourists from around the Devon area and beyond have been coming to see the statue.

#### HARBOUR/MARITIME

Nowhereisland resonated with the maritime community who could compare it with Lundy Island and its historical connections to Ilfracombe. It inspired a 'round the island race', while it was moored outside the harbour, and this race has been repeated since the departure of the island. There was an identification with a certain artistically knowledgeable and politically aware public who were represented in the procession accompanying Nowhereisland.

*People were involved with the embassy rather than the island, and the procession was very noisy and colourful. It was great, it was almost Greenham Commonesque, I would put it... The procession was very much about artistic people. Other people might have enjoyed it as a spectacle, but I don't think they would have wanted to take part. I wouldn't have taken part in the procession.*

In the case of Verity, views on the merit of the work were mixed but this was less important than the fact that the artist could be regarded as a local, a member of the community. There was agreement on the need for Ilfracombe to move on from its Victorian heritage and into the modern age.



#### EDUCATION

The Ilfracombe Academy has a clearly delineated role, and effects of the artworks were measured in terms of the benefits for the school community. A distinction was made between the 'wow factor' of Verity, where "ITN contacted the school and asked could we provide some knowledgeable and enthusiastic arts students to be interviewed for the News at Ten?" and the deeply appreciated educational contribution of Nowhereisland:

*Nowhereisland for us gave us a fantastic opportunity for an off-timetable arts day, involving every single child in the school, preparing, participating, performing and being an audience. Development, self-confidence, green values... a lot of movement around the school, lots of logistics and it culminated in two performances.*

#### ON-LINE COMMUNITY

The online community of Ilfracombe saw the possibility of representing an alternative to what was perceived as a negative media campaign against Verity. Social media gave a voice to people outside the mainstream media. There was a feeling that such an online community could represent the 'new Ilfracombe':

*The message of her being there: we are open to new ideas, we are arty ... positive message.*

Ironically for a virtual community, there appeared to be no connection between this on-line community and the web presence of Nowhereisland, indicating that social media and internet-based communities can be as parochial in their concerns as 'real' communities. Instead, the physical actuality of Verity was emphasised over the conceptual and durational Nowhereisland. The on-line forum was no more conducive to the expression of aesthetic and emotional understanding of the artworks than the other sections of the community represented in the interviews.

#### ENGAGED CULTURALLY ACTIVE LONG-TERM RESIDENT

In this interview a balanced view of the virtue of public art was advanced, identifying a positive value of both artworks in terms of tourism, regeneration, business and general 'buzz'. The interviewee was a mature woman and grandmother and as such very aware of Nowhereisland's effect on young children – she had been to see it with her granddaughter who was captivated and saw it as a home for trolls. She also felt it was a pity that Nowhereisland had been to some extent overshadowed by Verity. She personally appreciated both of the artworks and claimed that the impact on the town had been beneficial. Damien Hirst's generosity was in her view much appreciated, businesses had opened up and art was a good way to regenerate:

*A 'better' mix of visitors are now coming. Previously we attracted the poorer end of the tourist market... art is a good way to regenerate.*

#### THE VERITY OPPOSITION

A vociferous oppositional voice had been heard in Ilfracombe prior to the arrival of Verity, (our interviewee had not been to see Nowhereisland which was declared "not my scene"). Vigorous opposition can still be found on the internet and on a number of blogs. However, it appears that in public fora in the town this voice has become less audible over time, partly because of the weight of support that Verity now enjoys and the perceived collateral benefits to the town.

Concerns raised included objections to the artwork itself, which was described as "grotesque", "indecent" and "unsuitable for families". A worry was expressed that people who disliked the work had been "bought". A further contention was that the positive effects had been "spun" with greater visitor numbers claimed than had in fact arrived. In a similar vein, the interviewee voiced suspicion of the motives behind the giving and receiving of the statue, suggesting that Verity might have been intended to ensure favourable consideration of the artist's planning application to construct a housing estate. These unsubstantiated claims indicate the level of suspicion that such a controversial installation can provoke, (there was further commentary supportive of this point of view on blogs). This voice of protest and 'conspiracy theory' could represent a silent minority that was not represented in the public events convened in this study. This indicates the advisability of using other methods in conjunction with the visual matrix. It is worth noting that at the instigation of the facilitator, a focus group can provide a deliberative forum in which such suspicions can become the subject of argument and counter-argument, making transparent what could otherwise remain as innuendo. This is a question which will bear further investigation in the future.

#### DISTINGUISHED COMMUNITY CAMPAIGNER AND REPRESENTATIVE

This interviewee spoke of the 'rebirth' of the town, and hopes of transition from a maritime past to a future of art and culture that could raise Ilfracombe above its seemingly eternal rivalry with neighbouring towns. Until recently Ilfracombe's maritime identity had not given way to a newer, more vibrant energy. The local council had faced bankruptcy and being taken over by Barnstaple. In this context, both Nowhereisland and Verity were viewed positively. Nowhereisland caters for a certain sector of the town's community, the 'environmentalists'. Its arrival enabled recognition of that community and affected the town as a whole. Verity is seen as being even more beneficial because its artist has become a local with an emotional investment in the town, 'one of the regulars', whose mother, ex-wife and children all live there. Hirst has also invested in property and is developing an eco-village branch of Ilfracombe, helping to increase the population. His influence has brought other artists to the town, especially George Shaw, a Turner Prize runner up. Ilfracombe is becoming known internationally. Great joy and

hope was expressed in these developments for the rebirth of the town, financially, demographically and culturally.

## Summary of Findings from the Rapid Capture Interviews

Forty rapid capture interviews were conducted in Ilfracombe, with local residents and visitors to the town being stopped at random in places like the High Street, and asked what they remembered about Nowhereisland and Verity and how they felt about them. In order to encourage memories of Nowhereisland, (which had come and gone, as opposed to Verity, which is a fixture), interviewees were shown a picture of the island. The purpose of these interviews was to ensure that the views of the self-selected groups comprising the focus group and the visual matrices were reflected in the town. Interviews were audio-recorded.

Of the total number of interviews, 16 had no opinion on either artwork. Most of these were visitors to the town rather than residents. Only 2 of the interviewees responded in any positive way to Nowhereisland, whereas 13 responses to Verity were very positive. The positive views of Verity were mainly based on the artwork's contribution to the town. Where comments were made about the statue's artistic merit, these were either short, simple and routine-sounding appreciations, or directly connected to benefits to the town:

*...doing town world of good, visitor numbers gone up, art galleries opened up, artist's trail, we are all for it. Interesting as an artwork. Weather worn, becoming part of landscape. Looks like it's been there longer. Comes with controversy but all part of it.*

*...lots of different people coming, recognised on the map, people opening businesses, 2-3 galleries, and the catering industry, wonderful restaurants have improved themselves, really good ... extra money from car park... It's helped, people interested in art. There's room for everybody to do well, and there's been an influx of people to town recently. There are always people against and for. Whatever they think, it has been good for the town, above all the most important thing, international people coming to England, made an effort to come to Ilfracombe ... I don't object to innards and all that. It's a bit page three from waist down. Fantastic piece, lovely, people can sit there and admire it, it's fine.*

There were also comments of appreciation and gratitude of Damien Hirst as a local artist and worldwide celebrity, (even though there was sometimes a suspicion, surrounding his motivation), and how this fact in itself had put Ilfracombe on the map:

*Changed status? Yes initially, internationally put us on the map for a time, but that can dwindle over time, some lasting effect. People come into the shop and they've come for Verity, still some interest. Depends on what happens, and how Damien Hirst develops his interest. Not sure if town is increased in status in long term. Damien Hirst has put own money onto town which is good, but I suspect he has an ulterior motive. Money can then have input into the surroundings. It's not a bad thing for the citizens of Ilfracombe...*

Comments on Nowhereisland were often negative because it had been missed due to its short stay. It was also criticised in terms of being a "barge with rocks" and a "waste of money":

*Nowhereisland, visit? I didn't get a chance to go out, it came and went quickly. I was hoping it would stay longer. The weather was bad. I saw it but didn't take part... Don't know others who took part... not heard anything more about it.*

*Nowhereisland, rings a bell, yes, I wasn't not participating. It was bit rough, did it actually get there? Then they had to tow it away... I did know it was here. Didn't have any great effect on town, and can't recall much. A lot of people's comments were negative not positive: what's the point? Could have spent money on hospital or school, is a public point of view, a bit of a washout, something and nothing, generally that's what I've heard.*

*Nowhereisland? Yes I was aware of it ... participate? No. Don't know people who did ... it was like a barge full of rubbish. So didn't bother going down to have a look. The embassy? No not much impact ...*

This point of view expressed in some of the interviews demonstrates a striking similarity to opinions voiced in the focus group. The lack of aesthetic appreciation of either work, and especially of Nowhereisland, was very different to the complex aesthetic appreciations expressed in the visual matrices.

## Findings from Artists' Interviews

### ALEX HARTLEY

In this interview an adaptation of the Biographical Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) was used (see Wengraf 2001 for a full explanation). This method attempts to provide participants with the opportunity to tell their own story and the researcher the space to

attend to it. The BNIM interview starts with a single opening question, in this case “please tell me the story of your life in relation to how you came to realize the project Nowhereisland”. This initial question was designed to encourage Alex Hartley to reflect on the project in the context of his wider life and his artistic biography. In this section, we explore the material presented in the interview in relation to that emerging from the two visual matrices.

Alex Hartley began the interview with a series of recollections about his interest in explorers and climbers, which had begun in childhood and had influenced the direction of all his subsequent work:

*I have very strong memories of Tensing and Hilary on Everest when they first conquered it in 1967 ... and I think that idea of exploration has always been with me... My work has always involved myself in the landscape in some way or other...*

He described how the original inspiration for Nowhereisland had emerged during a trip to the Arctic in 2004 as a part of the Cape Farewell (Art/Science Expedition) project <sup>8</sup>. The trip had involved sailing to the High Arctic region of Svalbard, 350 miles north of Norway, an area that had been ‘no mans land’ until the 1920s. The Nowhereisland project also involved an expedition to Svalbard both to collect the material for the island and for the resident thinkers to develop the island’s constitution. Two students from the Academy in Ilfracombe had taken part in the expedition, which was highlighted in the school’s visual matrix:

- *I have the feeling of jealousy, because my brother got to have a trip, an expedition to the Arctic, all paid for...*
- *The image of a land so far away, the island came from so far away, and then alone in the harbour, so distant. Distant things can come close...*
- *It’s like a recent discovery, so what other islands could be out there?*

This sense of exploration and discovery is echoed in Hartley’s intentions for Nowhereisland:

*And everyone was making claims and they tried to rationalise it by giving it Norwegian sovereignty with all sorts of provisos that the signatories of the treaty had mining rights and the like... It meant that a lot of it was very uncharted and the last time it had been surveyed, where we were, was 10-15 years previously...*

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.capefarewell.com/expeditions/2004.html>

*so it became clear that there were going to be islands that would have been revealed from out of the glacier. And that became my project to search for and find an island and make some sort of project around that idea.*

In common with the artist, the young people in particular were able to use images of human exploration, environmental change and citizenship in asking a series of questions about the future shape of society and their own place within it.

Alex Hartley had wanted the island to work as a sculptural object that would allow unanticipated engagements with the work, aside from other elements of the project (the embassy and the web-site). This is interesting not least because the island was described as 'barren' on more than one occasion. It produced antipathy in the Citizens' Forum, and loss and mourning in the adults' visual matrix. The emptiness was further emphasised in the visual matrix by the 'absent artist'. Hartley expresses a desire to be absent, but for the public, this only added to the sense of emptiness and loss:

- *Almost an art work without an artist. Where was Alex?*
- *Not coming into the frame...*

Hartley describes how the process of building the material into a structure that could maintain the illusion of an island whilst also being seaworthy proved very difficult. Also, in some ports (Bristol, for example) the work was moored very close to the shore, which meant that the mechanics of the island could be seen and the illusion it was intended to create collapsed. Hartley describes ongoing feelings of ambivalence about how the island worked as an object:

*And I have some regrets about what it looked like now, but it was so dictated by how it had to go around the coast ... how do you make an art object ... I wanted something that could be far away and the Arts Council wanted rock bands to play on it and I said no way. I was always much more comfortable when it was far away and it was much more about engaging with the idea.*

However, he also described instances of deep satisfaction when people encountered the island by chance. On one occasion:

*...There were these teenage boys on their bikes and they were like "there's that piece of crap coming in" and then they went "oh it's fucking great init", it was proper teenage, and they didn't know whether to love it or hate it ... and that was*

*really exciting ... and in particular it was the difference between kids and grown ups...*

Hartley's memory of what he overheard is interesting for two reasons: firstly, it echoes the theme of isolation that has been central to his work and that was used so productively by young people within the visual matrix on Nowhereisland; secondly, it highlights a generational divide in the reception of the work in Ilfracombe. This divergence came out clearly in the contrasts between the visual matrices in the town and the school. Here again, the emptiness of the island seems to provoke a sense of potential in young people, whereas for adults it provokes a sense of mourning and loss.

Alex Hartley approached Situations about collaborating after being shortlisted for interview for the Artists Taking the Lead Commission. He describes having been quite fearful of socially engaged artistic practice. However, the relationship with Situations had been vital to the realisation of the collaborative components of the project, which he suggests were central to its eventual success:

*I have always made work in an art world context, you know the white cube that doesn't even have to explain itself. All the time I was like an anchor trying to hold back on, trying to hold it as a piece of art rather than these other things. Lots of these other things made me feel a little uncomfortable... But on reflection that bit between Claire [Claire Doherty – Situations] and it was a really great balance, I think*

Hartley identified that the public engagement components of the work had worked best when they had provoked a response from a community or interpolated a process, interest or activity that was already underway:

*It worked well when there was an intersection between their wants, wishes and desires and the artwork ... When we had stimulated something and walked away and they have run with it...*

The way the themes and ideas of Nowhereisland were taken up by the school programme and were then developed into the complex ideas expressed in the visual matrix itself a year after the event, illustrates Hartley's view of the potential resonance between the artwork and a section of the community. Where the school might have felt isolated from the town, and there was a desire to reconsider that relationship through the Nowhereisland theme of citizenship, Nowhereisland was able to provide the intersection that brought the separate communities of school and town together:

- *Images of a parade, music, a marching band, lots of colour, banners, signs, excitement, joy, everyone marching in the same direction and getting involved.*
- *This is a small town and I'm surprised at how isolated we are sometimes, here at the school, so I was glad to become part of it.*

#### DAMIEN HIRST

Damien Hirst was interviewed via an intermediary following our submission of a set of written questions.

He responded that he had hoped for a combination of aesthetic, affective and creative engagement with his work, and this resonates with several of the more nuanced appreciations of Verity that emerged in the visual matrix. Hirst based Verity on Degas' 'La Petite Danseuse de Quatorze Ans' because the piece is ambiguous for the viewer, "it keeps you thinking, the age of the girl is unclear". Hirst's direct connection with the theme of pregnancy, underage and unmarried mothers is linked to his own mother who was unmarried and to his childhood, and therefore to powerful feelings that link mother and child. This links to the emotional response to Verity expressed in the visual matrix and the explicit alignment of pregnancy and strength:

*I was so uncomfortable [when pregnant]... and it was like Verity gives me a sword in my hand... I feel a great sense of warmth as a mother with the statue. When you see the statue from afar it's carrying its weight well. It's well distributed. Things that were passing to me...*

This resonates with Hirst's view of the sculpture as "something that was down to earth yet powerful and uplifting... naked and exposed but not at all embarrassed" and holding a sword "making her taller and stronger". Hirst also points to the origins of Verity in his Virgin Mother series (2005). The apparent impossibility of a virgin mother resonates with the impossibility of a mother in permanent pregnancy, as pointed out in the visual matrix: "My son is now 1 year old, and has grown, but Verity has aged". Such impossibility somehow defies the truth, further symbolised, as Hirst would have it, by "the scales hidden to show that truth isn't as clear cut as it used to be".

Hirst's expectations for Verity in the context of Ilfracombe have been borne out by the reception of the work in the town.

*...Bring positivity and focus, I don't expect everyone to love it - that would be stupid but I want it to generate debate and become an accepted landmark, I want it to become an integral and accepted part of the landscape even by the people who hate it.*

(Damien Hirst)



As we have seen, the town has accepted Verity as a positive feature for tourism and growth, and the visual matrix clearly indicated this movement from debate towards acceptance that Hirst mentioned:

- *There isn't much negativity anymore.*
- *They've given up.*
- *Got used to it, accepting it. They were shaking initially.*
- *The alien has become part of the community now.*

One of the reasons for Hirst's satisfaction with the work is the feeling that his local knowledge has contributed to the correct siting of the statue:

*I think somehow living in Combe Martin for twenty years has enabled me imperceptibly to absorb and understand the place and come up with just what it needed and site it just where it needs to be.*

(Damien Hirst)

This observation is reflected in our data that records that Ilfracombe has embraced Hirst as a local citizen. Hirst's observation makes an aesthetic point of the emotional tie to Ilfracombe and Verity, so that belonging can be understood as a feeling that can be created in the combination of statue and harbour. In this sense too, Hirst identifies the statue as "totally" belonging to the town, even though it is on loan from the artist. This, he says, is to ensure that it cannot be sold but there was a fear in the matrix about what might happen to Verity after the period of loan. The belonging for Hirst, is in the aesthetic and emotional sense of the statue in situ, rather than in financial ownership, and the visual matrix certainly echoed this feeling.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the striking differences between the artworks, the interviews make it clear that there were certain commonalities in the way they were conceived and produced that bear on their reception in the town and their ongoing significance for our key themes of identity and belonging, and sense of citizenship and place. Each of the artworks was clearly significant for the artist in terms of artistic biography, reflecting life historical experiences and preoccupations, which profoundly influenced the works. Our key questions here are two-fold: firstly, whether and how these artistic intentions are realised in the work and reflected in the way it has been perceived and understood by

the population of Ilfracombe; secondly, whether the focus group and/or the visual matrix were sensitive to the interaction between artistic intention and public reception.

Damien Hirst makes it clear that Verity has her origins in an intimate family history, and the themes of pregnancy, endurance and single motherhood were central to the work. In his insistence on Verity's 'total belonging' to the town he alludes to the local and cultural significance of the sculpture and its resonances. On the one hand there is local knowledge of high rates of teenage pregnancy, not only in Ilfracombe, but in dozens of declining seaside towns where the prospects for many young women are constrained and motherhood offers one of the few pathways to self-worth. On the other hand, pregnancy remains a carrier of hope, symbol of creativity and a condition that locates mothers and their children in community and place. Elsewhere in the interview, Hirst makes it clear that the sculpture has changed the way in which he considers the connection between an outdoor work and place – so that now he seeks a closer relationship realised in Verity as 'total belonging' that aesthetically and emotionally overrides financial considerations. In this sense then, the visual matrix, which reflected all of these themes, showed that Hirst's primary intentions had indeed been realised and his apparent acceptance by the town as a local depends at least in part on the mutual comprehension that Verity appears to have brought about. As documented, the focus group gave little consideration to either the symbolic significance of Verity or the way in which she had forged a new relationship between the artist and the town or between its residents, privileging instead the importance of business opportunity and culture as a route to regeneration.

Alex Hartley reveals in his interview how Nowhereisland evolved out of a life historical interest in exploration to remote, undiscovered, empty places, and that his personal and artistic investment was primarily in the island itself as an austere formation of rock crafted to retain the aesthetic of the inhospitable, unpopulated landscape from which it had come. For him, the embassy and the website, central to the overall engagement of the public in a citizenship project, were secondary to the island itself and a source of some anxiety. He took pleasure in the wonder of its chance discovery. The ambivalence occasioned by the island's emptiness allowed it to function as the provocation it was intended to be. This was echoed in the visual matrices conceptually and affectively among the adults as a sense of barrenness and loss, and among the young people as protective concern. In the focus group, Nowhereisland's intellectual dimension was noted but could not be explored. Its emotional reverberance was extraneous to the group's concerns.

## **Summary of Media Analysis**

On Nowhereisland reports were divided between hostile and neutral to moderately positive, with a majority of negative reports. Negative reports in The Daily Telegraph, BBC News (on-line), Daily Mail, The Guardian and The Sun, focused on a perceived waste of taxpayers' money: 'rocks on a barge' in troubled economic times. However,

some of the later reports pointed to both enjoyment and participation (for example, Telegraph on-line, 6 Sept 2012), once Nowhereisland arrived at ports of call. The reports indicate the prejudice artists and producers face when artworks are difficult to understand, before they become physical realities.

Verity generated local media interest and heated debate. Of the few national reports, The Guardian published a negative appraisal, while the BBC, Telegraph and Daily Mail were neutral in October 2012, when Verity arrived at the harbour. Initial reactions in Ilfracombe were reported as evenly split. Since the arrival of the statue, 'against' reports are less prevalent and those in favour reflect those expressed in the focus group: increased tourism and associated benefits to the town.

## **7. Ethical Review**

The research plans and methods for this project were reviewed and approved by the Psychology and Social Work Ethics Committee at the University of Central Lancashire. All potential participants were provided with written information about the project, the focus of the study, confidentiality and data protection in advance of taking part in interviews, the focus group and/or the visual matrix. The limitations of confidentiality in a public event were made clear. Written consent was taken in each case. Prior to interviews, the focus group and/or the visual matrix, people were given a verbal explanation by a member of the research team. This was followed by an opportunity for people to ask questions. With the permission of participants all individual and group sessions were audio-recorded. In the focus group and the visual matrix sessions contemporaneous notes were taken.

All participants in the matrix were invited to a feedback session to discuss emergent findings of the research and their comments informed the final report.

## Part 2

### 1. Theoretical and Methodological Resources for Understanding the Visual Matrix

The overall approach adopted is psychosocial, insofar as it assumes that personal and social dimensions of experience are mutually constitutive, and also in that the aim of research analysis is to show how personal, cultural and structural aspects of any social phenomenon interact. Hence in the case of this study we are concerned with the personal experience of the artworks, the local, national and global cultural context in which they are received and understood, and the socio-economic and political conditions that inform their production and reception.

The theoretical concepts which are descriptively and analytically useful for understanding the visual matrix have been gathered from three theoretical traditions: As highlighted above, the conception of scenic understanding associated with the German cultural analyst Alfred Lorenzer (1986) has enabled us to ask how personal and community experience, disposition and life history produce the interaction forms through which the encounter with the wider culture takes place. This includes the references, meanings and genres in which the artwork is embedded. The notions of reverie and transitional phenomena developed within British Object Relations psychoanalysis respectively by Wilfred Bion (1962, 1970) and Donald Winnicott (1971) have enabled us to describe the particular nature of the visual matrix as a space where the aesthetic qualities of the object and its illusional and transformative potentials can be apprehended and thought about. The Deleuzian metaphor of rhizomatic thinking (Deleuze and Guattari 1980) has helped us to describe and convey the non-linear, branching, associative thinking in the matrix together with the sensation of timelessness it establishes. The matrix and the subsequent interpretive process demand different modes of attention from the researcher-participants. The three conceptual frameworks all offer perspectives on these modes of attention, each describing and accounting for a part of the research analytic process. Our study thus brings three theoretical traditions into dialogue with one another through the research practice that we have evolved and refined.

The rigour of the hermeneutic interpretation has depended on the use of a range of interpretive devices. Crucially, it has meant returning repeatedly to the data, to ensure that assumptions, propositions and hypotheses informing the final analysis only survive if they find iterative support in the research panel's re-visiting of the original data (from the matrix). Additionally and simultaneously, the hermeneutic approach has itself been tested by maintaining researcher awareness of the indissoluble nature of the original

visual complexities embedded in the non-constative<sup>9</sup>, non-discursive nature of the language of the visual matrix. The researchers have, therefore, ensured that the experiential quality of the matrix informs all stages of the analysis, by periodically re-establishing an 'experience near' (Geertz 1974) relation to the data of the matrix, whilst affording a place for appropriate researcher distance as the analysis proceeds towards higher levels of abstraction and theorisation. This has entailed a thoroughly self-reflexive stance in which the researchers' own perceptions, as influenced by personal disposition and life history, have been questioned in a panel.<sup>10</sup> In the paragraphs that follow we account for our theoretical sources before describing the steps adopted in the interpretive process.

**Alfred Lorenzer's** work (1986) is little known outside Germany and Scandinavia. However, it continues to inform a practice of depth hermeneutic analysis in cultural and social research (Bereswill et al. 2010).<sup>11</sup> Lorenzer was mainly concerned with analysis of cultural texts but his theorization of the 'scenic' implies a visual and embodied register of experience. It offers a method for appreciation of the ways in which individuals and groups interact with, or appropriate common cultural resources, according to their particular nature. In addition it contains a theory of how societal-collective unconscious processes are manifested through cultural material. Lorenzer's characterisation of the scenic register of experience focuses attention on the sensory, affective and image-laden qualities of the text. In Lorenzer's view, the primary, largely unconscious, apprehension of the world can be understood as a scene, or a succession or overlay of scenes, both visually perceived and internally felt. The scene is experienced as a whole before the interactions and relations within it configure in conscious awareness and are made available for symbolisation through language.

The important point is that the scene itself does not occur at one remove from the subject (whether audience, or reader of texts, or researcher) but arises through their interaction with the cultural material with which they are presented. If a theatrical metaphor were used, the scene would exist 'in-between' the audience and the play, creating a 'third' composed of the relations between the two. So it is with productions of the matrix – which arise out of the interaction of the participants and the artworks, each influencing the other. The forms of interaction depend on what is present within the artwork (configuration, material and aesthetic properties, cultural meanings) understood through the situation and life historical experience and disposition of the participants. The subjective and intersubjective dimension is thus encoded within the cultural and *vice versa*, thus creating a 'scene' – a whole in which the subjective and the cultural are indissoluble. Hence, in the case of Nowhereisland the arrival of the island and the expectation of excitement was immediately challenged by its size, (smaller than

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<sup>9</sup>Constative: denoting a speech act or sentence that is a statement declaring something to be the case, (often contrasted with 'performative', an utterance by means of which the speaker performs a particular act.

<sup>10</sup>See Wengraf (2001) for a discussion of the benefits of panel analysis; the Lorenzerian depth hermeneutic approach observes similar principles with the use of interpretation groups (Hollway and Volmerg 2010).

<sup>11</sup>Recent interest in his work has increased in Anglophone social research with the publication of two special editions of peer reviewed articles: *Psychoanalysis, Culture and Society*, 15, 3 (2010) and *Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung/Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, 13, 3 (2012).

imagined) and desolate, barren aspect. Then its subsequent disappearance, exacerbated by the unexpected abruptness of its departure due to bad weather, evoked the scenic experience of loss, which took shape around fragile and vanishing habitats and ways of life. On this the adults in the town and the young people were agreed, although their focus was different. The adults were primarily concerned with the disappearing forms of socially organised conviviality and purpose evoked by trade union style banners and citizens' marches. In the case of the young people a strong desire for community was bound to the preservation of disappearing eco-systems. However, apart from a different cognitive<sup>12</sup> focus, as expressed through imagery, it was affect (articulated through the imagery, given emergent meaning through the patterning relationship between images, and finally discerned through the scenic perception of the researchers) that registered the contrasting experiences of the two groups. These included the loss and consequent nostalgia and helplessness of the adults, and the concerned yet purposeful hopefulness in the face of ecological loss of the young people. Each group reflected what Lorenzer would have seen as societal-collective unconscious processes (not unlike Williams' 'structures of feeling', (Williams 1977)) for which the two groups showed a different life-historically produced valency in the face of a similar affective experience.

Lorenzerian textual interpretation has focused on language – not merely as discourse, but as a sensualized form of symbolic expression, as used in the matrix. According to Lorenzer language that is de-symbolised and de-sensualised produces clichés. The apprehension of the scene also depends on communicable cultural forms – in this instance the tropes and genres of visual culture are particularly important and provide the forms that contain the affects of the matrix. An example would be the 'retro' aesthetic of the embassy which was something of a provocation to the adult matrix, and which was described in their post-matrix discussion as "retro festival chic" signifying a questionable authenticity which perturbed them. Sensory forms (which could also be acoustic, haptic and so on) compose a presentational symbolic order (Langer 1942) that does not resolve into the discursive and emerges in the matrix as sensory-symbolic material: images, sounds, gestures, facial expressions to which feeling states are bound. Hence scenic understanding accommodates the idiosyncrasies of personal sensory, aesthetic and emotional response which, however, take shape through communicable cultural forms - both presentational and discursive - available to all.

In the visual matrix, the resonance between participants' images, feelings and thoughts may at first sight appear to originate in intimately subjective experiences insofar as they reach back to personal memories – pregnancy, for example, in the case of Verity, or childhood in Nowhereisland. However, these experiences are offered to and received by participants in the matrix through imagery and associated affects; they take on a shared character which is then compounded as they are inflected by the experiences of others that weave themselves into further emergent imagery and thought. The accumulated scenic experience of the participants is structured into collage-like forms of overlaid images which can only be completely understood by reference to the whole. In this study

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<sup>12</sup>We use 'cognitive' here and throughout this report in its traditional sense, akin to 'intellectual'. We are aware that there are other ways of understanding 'cognitive' that expand the use of the word, so that it includes, for example, the nervous system, affect and relationships between mind and body, (see Nuñez and Freeman 1999).

our interpretation panels were designed to identify unconscious, embodied, performative as well as overt cognitive elements in a scene.

**Object Relations Theory.** In the UK, Lorenzerian perspectives have been brought into dialogue with British Object Relations theory, which is concerned with the internalisation of social relations and objects (Froggett and Hollway 2010; Hollway and Froggett 2012). Its particular value in this study is that it incorporates understanding of links between attention, unconscious receptivity, feeling, linking and associative thinking derived particularly from the work of Wilfred Bion (1962, 1967, 1970). This, in turn, has its connections to social dreaming, rooted in the theory of Bion and an antecedent to the visual matrix, especially in its insistence on associative thinking and dream states leading to reverie. Bion's notion of reverie is descriptive of the thinking and feeling state of the visual matrix and central to its understanding and has therefore already been explained above (Page 17).

Another formative perspective in this tradition is provided by D.W. Winnicott's (1971) conceptualisation of transitional phenomena, referring to the genera of mental life which occupy a position 'in-between' that which emerges from what appears to be the 'inner life' of the individual and that which has a quality of externality. Transitional phenomena occur whenever a subject selects objects in the world and invests them with psychic significance so that they become simultaneously objects 'for' the subject as well as 'in themselves'. Transitional phenomena not only account for the possibility of symbolisation in the developing infant, but also in later life where symbolisation inserts the individual affectively and cognitively into a cultural-symbolic order. Its conditions are the 'potential space', which Winnicott (1971) described as an intermediate or third area "where it can be said that continuity is giving way to contiguity" (p.101) and where thoughts and images are offered and allowed to co-exist, often in paradox, without seeking resolution. This third area in life experience is that originally presided over by the non-intrusive containing parent, who safeguards the creative space in which the infant at play can select, manipulate and test objects simultaneously in their material existence and in its imaginative world, discovering for itself what was there to be found, hence investing everyday objects with a quality of 'aliveness'.

*This intermediate area of experience, unchallenged in respect of its belonging to inner or external (shared) reality constitutes the greater part of the infant's experience and throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work. (Winnicott 1971 p.14)*

For Winnicott this area is nothing less than the 'location of culture', "... that of play, which expands into creative living and into the whole cultural life of man" (p. 102).



The matrix can similarly be characterised as a 'potential space', characterised by playful exploration in which participants discover for themselves resonance and significance in images and thoughts contributed by themselves and others as they make use of both the symbolic potentials of a shared culture and their experience of the artwork through the matrix. In this sense, the scenes of the matrix are neither 'personal' nor 'collective' but come into existence through the shared space.<sup>13</sup> Of particular interest, given our hybridisation of intellectual traditions in accounting for the visual matrix, is the closeness of Winnicott's account of transitional phenomena to Lorenzer's theory of 'interaction forms', whereby in the constitution of scenic experience the individual brings life historical dispositions and characteristics, themselves acquired through socialisation and acculturation, into conjunction with the forms and resources of culture (Lorenzer and Urban 1978).

**Gilles Deleuze.** In this study, we have found the Deleuzian concept of the 'rhizome' useful to understand the complex, visual, intertwined and multi-layered aspects of the visual matrix data. Understanding the collage of images of the matrix as a rhizome enables the researchers to contrast the linear process of unraveling meaning through hermeneutic analysis, with the non-linear, 'nomadic' circularity of the rhizome. The nature of the associations in the matrix recalls the Deleuzian rejection of linearity as compared by Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, p.12) to the hierarchical metaphor of the tree, with its direction and branching out. By way of contrast, the rhizome in Deleuzian thought is compared to a map in ways that closely approximate our concept of the data in its original state as a set of scenes in collage. While embarking on the necessary untangling of meaning through the hermeneutic process, the research team has simultaneously respected the 'other' meanings that remain hidden in the original tangled collage of images that remain in a state of constant and resistant 'becoming'.

These 'other' meanings are understood as being those that can be ignored or left behind in the tracing of the spiral-like process of the hermeneutic search for interpretation. In their use of cartography as a metaphor for understanding, Deleuze and Guattari emphasise how the rhizome contains all potential directions at any key point. In exploring the implications of following a directional trace, other related elements may be temporarily subdued. By returning iteratively to the rhizome, meanings that have not yet been configured, but which have not been nullified, can still emerge. However, the nature of the data – heavily image-laden and strongly affective and oblique – means that the further the distance established from the original experience of the matrix, the less likely it is that the researcher retains the original complex affective meanings of the rhizomatic scene. The research team thus found it helpful to 're-live' the affective state of the matrix, for example by reading the transcript aloud, and allowing this to inflect or challenge the interpretations within the hermeneutic process.

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<sup>13</sup>The distinction here is that whereas 'shared' experience arises intersubjectively between participating subjects, 'collective' experience presupposes an identity of experience between the subject and the group.



The hermeneutic process creates a 'condition of truth' (Deleuze 1990, p. 18) to the logic of thought applied through analytical distance. This is a necessary process, without which there would be no interpretation. The risk is, however, that even in returning to the original matrix the 'near' experience is influenced by the *conditions* of truth that have been established. This is why Deleuze and Guattari insist on the distinction between short-term and long-term memory and ideas, with the former being associated with the rhizome and the latter with 'tracing' (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, p.16). The long-term memory employed every time distance is established as part of the hermeneutic interpretation "traces and translates, but what it translates continues to act in it, from a distance, off beat, in an 'untimely' way, not instantaneously". (Deleuze and Guattari 1988, p.16). In the early phases of interpretation the researchers rely on short-term memory of the matrix. They also attempt to re-discover the experiential immediacy of the original matrix by re-reading the material out loud or allocating time to free associate during the analytical process. The research team is therefore aware that "it is the task of language both to establish limits and go beyond them" (Deleuze 1990, p.11). This is why one of the researchers on the team was able to express his surprise in a third panel that the re-reading/living of the matrix felt quite different to the distant memory he had of the actual matrix. The cognitive process that had reached sophisticated levels of interpretation by the time of the third panel, was challenged by the affective re-engagement with the experience, feeding back affective experience to the cognitive interpretations.

## 2. Hermeneutic Interpretation of the Visual Matrix

The procedures described below have been developed and refined in the course of this study. There are a number of different models of hermeneutic interpretation in contemporary use in psychosocial qualitative research (Wengraf 2001; Hollway and Jefferson 2000; Lorenzer 1986). Further widely used interpretive devices for hermeneutic interpretation are summarised in Alvesson and Sköldberg (2000). Each offers elements or procedures that can be incorporated into the process of visual matrix interpretation, but this study evolved a distinctive model adapted to the associative nature of the imagery, affect, thought and setting of the matrix, and the questions (related to experience of artworks, culture and society) that we were asking of the data. The tradition of depth hermeneutics premised on 'scenic understanding' is associated with the cultural analytic tradition of Alfred Lorenzer as practiced by the International Research Group for Psychosocietal Analysis (Hollway and Volmerg 2010; Leithäuser and Volmerg 1988)<sup>14</sup> has proved particularly appropriate for our material although we would not claim to be following a strictly 'Lorenzerian' approach.

Each of the intellectual traditions cited above has contributed something valuable to our understanding of how hermeneutic interpretation can be adapted to the needs of specific research problems and questions. Common features have included:

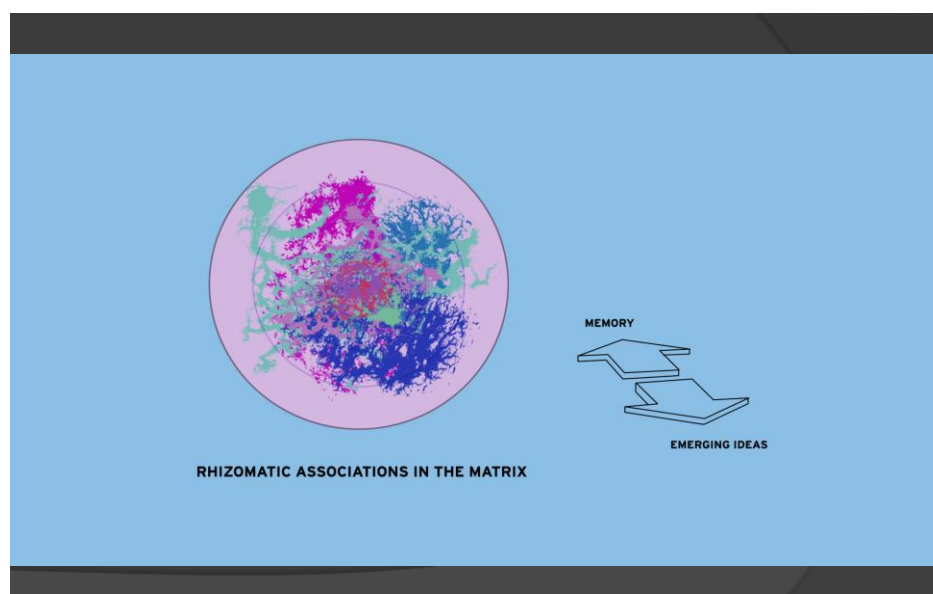
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<sup>14</sup><http://internationalresearchgroupforpsychosocietalanalysis.com/our-research-is-characterized-by.html>

- interest in the characterisation and interpretation of experience
- understanding of the relationship between the personal, socio-cultural and societal
- commitment to research which is 'data led' and 'data near'
- systematic psychosocial researcher reflexivity
- an effort to understand unarticulated and often unconscious affect, emotions, motivations, states of mind and 'structures of feeling'
- discernment of an embodied and sensory register of experience embedded in the data.

## **The Scenic Rhizome**

In the previous section we presented our selected concepts for understanding the hermeneutic process and the branching, non-linear, rhizomatic thinking of the matrix. This takes place dominantly in the lyric mode of 'here and now' experience rather than the temporality and progression of narrative (Abbott 2007). As has been pointed out already, the process of the matrix often has the dream-like non-directional quality of free-floating attention which can be likened to the state of reverie described by Bion (1962, 1967, 1970). Figure 4 depicts the associative nature of the scenic rhizome where clusters or intensities of imagery emerge through associations which may have their origins in the individual memory of each participant. These are then picked up by others in the matrix as stimuli for their own images and associations. As the matrix proceeds, they are shared so that the images and associations become intertwined and inter-related leading increasingly to a shared sense of meaning. The collage-like accumulation of images and their associated feelings and ideas that emerge from the matrix are expressed partly through cultural tropes and partly through a shared understanding. All these must be identified and interrogated to achieve a fully situated interpretation.



**Figure 4. The Scenic Rhizome of the Visual Matrix**

Further cycles of interpretation of both substantive and performative dimensions of the matrix are conducted at intervals by members of the research team, working as a panel. They thus move from relatively experience near scenic views of the matrix to relatively experience distant interpretations (Geertz 1974; Froggett and Briggs 2012). 'Relatively' is the operative word here since each cycle of interpretation returns to the original scenic and affective experience where the rhizomatic interconnectivity of the original sense of the matrix is 're-animated' in the minds and feelings of the researchers by reading the transcript aloud slowly and without interruption each time they are about to embark on the interpretive process.

In the interpretation substantive themes are identified and related to immediate and more remote social contexts. Further interpretive steps follow which identify implied meanings along with affects that produce a distinctive feeling state at any point in time. The images and associations produced are inseparable from the currents of affect that pervade the matrix and impel its movement. Although it is tempting to use the word 'flow' here – and there are episodes that resemble a shared flow of thought – it would be a misleading metaphor for the disseminated networking of connections that build the 'collage' of images, thoughts and feelings produced by a particular matrix. Further examination of this collage may reveal that the juxtaposition of its elements falls into a distinctive pattern or gestalt. However, it is important that identification of a gestalt is only tentative in the early stages of the analysis, in case it should foreclose emergent possibilities which only iterative re-visiting of the material can identify.

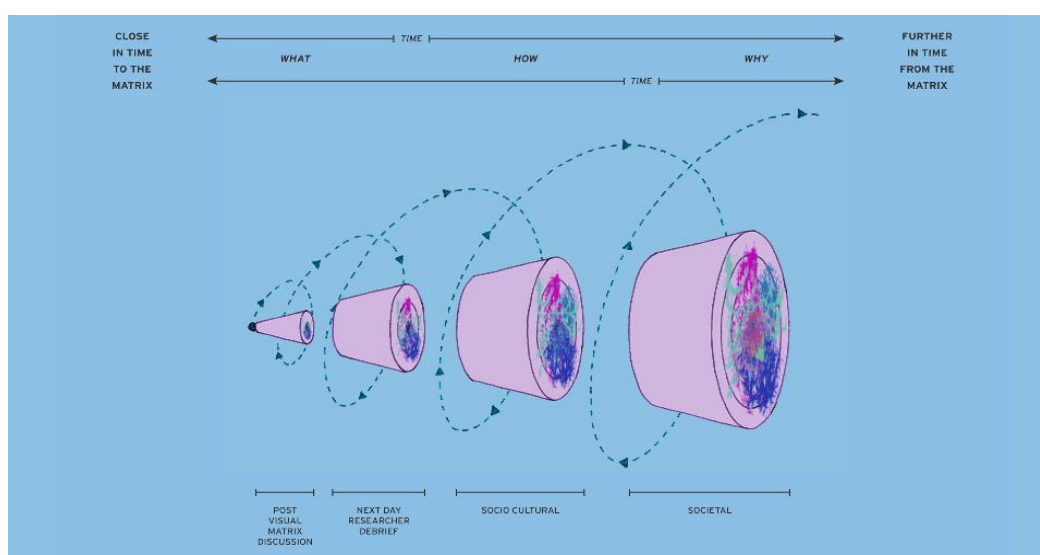
## Safeguards against 'Wild Analysis'

In line with more than one tradition of hermeneutic inquiry, safeguards must be in place to prevent foreclosure of latent meanings in the data and also of wild analysis. The safeguards are in part to be found in the protocols followed by the interpretation panels

- Analysis takes place in a panel composed of the research team in which a multiplicity of reactions to the original scenic rhizome of the matrix are advanced, drawing on the distinctive and contrasting life experiences, dispositions, tastes and preoccupations of the individuals concerned. Each panel member is sensitive to the dispositions of the others and provides checks and challenges to ideas and interpretations that may reflect ideosyncratic experience.
- The panel must accommodate both an oscillation between an 'experience near' relation to the scene and 'experience distant' researcher reflection. The movement is from a sensuous closeness to the material to abstraction and conceptualisation and back again as formulations emerging from the panel are further 'tested' against the data.
- Panel members must question and challenge one another's interpretations and hold each other to account to produce a self-reflexive orientation to the data, detecting the pre-dispositions of members to interpret the material in particular ways.
- The analysis proceeds in a hermeneutic spiral, or 'vortex', through iterations of the interpretive process. It moves between substantive and performative dimensions of the matrix to incorporate progressively wider contextual considerations (hence the metaphor of a vortex) in a process of conceptualisation and further theorisation.
- The panel produces and notes tentative structural hypotheses whenever they appear to crystallise in the discussion. However, in order to consider them supported (or discarded), the panel continually returns to the matrix.
- Simultaneously, the panel counteracts the difficulty of the distance established between the interpretation and the original rhizome of the matrix by returning to the experience of the original matrix since the directionality of the hermeneutic vortex is always at risk of 'forgetting' the original affective experience.
- The research panel proceeds through further cycles of interpretation (detailed and illustrated below). In each cycle oscillation between experience nearness (immersion in the data) and experience distance (reflection upon it) takes place. However the overall balance shifts as the process proceeds towards contextualisation, abstraction, conceptualisation and theorisation.

## The Hermeneutic Vortex

The diagram Figure 5 shows the phases of hermeneutic interpretation in the shape of a vortex where the original rhizomatic data of the matrix is represented by the central circle at the thin end, but the matrix is then depicted as running through each phase (or diagrammatic segment) and the whole process. Distance in time tends to modify the questions asked of the material, creating conditions of truth and incorporating ever wider contextual concerns (indicated in the text below each 'segment'). Simultaneously however, the original timeless collage of images and affect accompanies the hermeneutic process that proceeds in sequential time, creating a contrast and tension between the two. Through this tension, and the periodic return to the here and now of the primary material, the rich, multilayered material of the matrix is allowed room to express new meanings through accumulation rather than reduction. This allows the hermeneutic process to proceed without ever implying that interpretation reduces the possibility of new meaning emerging through material that has previously been subjected to the hermeneutic procedure.



**Figure 5 The Hermeneutic Vortex**

During the hermeneutic process, 'what', 'how' and 'why' questions depicted on the timeline above the vortex refer to the dominant note in interrogation of the material at any point in time: What is being said or presented? How is it being said or presented? Why is it being said or presented in this particular way? These questions are not necessarily posed sequentially but interwoven with an emphasis on the 'what', when the

interpretation is experience near, and on 'how' and 'why', when by virtue of the passage of time and process it becomes progressively more experience distant.

A description of the interpretation cycles follows:

**a) A Post-matrix discussion** follows the matrix after a short break and is mainly participant-led. Meaning is extrapolated from the collage of images of the matrix and links between images, affect and ideas are identified. The researcher/facilitator is also a participant who notes the interpretations, ideas and linkages as offered by the group. This may be done visually on a blackboard or flip-chart, offering the opportunity for participants to trace the links and meanings either diagrammatically, in drawings, or simply by offering their own inferences verbally. The post-matrix discussion involves a transition from the reverie of the visual matrix to a discursive mode, which is nevertheless directly concerned with the images of the matrix, the quality of experience evoked and the possible meanings behind *what* has been presented (the images and verbal associations). Sometimes the meanings are stated explicitly, and at other times through the identifying of patterns and links, implicit unarticulated meanings begin to emerge.

*Examples of Post-Matrix discussion (mainly what emerged from the matrix):*

The sense of disappointment and nostalgia that pervaded the adult matrix on Nowhereisland was now identified and named as such.

Verity's pregnancy was identified as a metaphor for the town's generativity.

**b) First interpretation panel: next day self-reflexive researcher debriefing.** This is composed only of researchers who participated in the matrix. Each one speaks for an agreed time, say five minutes, uninterrupted, and in turn, on the impressions that remain with him/her most strongly from the previous day, without looking at the transcript, and in the knowledge that the experience of the scene remains quite close. In this way, the researchers partly return to the rhizomatic experience of the original matrix, where - uninterrupted and without judgement - they are able to allow feelings and thoughts to return to the original matrix and allow further associations to emerge. The panel then discusses the currently emerging feelings and associations and compares them to those of the post-matrix discussion and the original matrix itself. They begin to adopt a self-reflexive stance and also to highlight performativity - *how* images and associations were offered, with what language and affect, and the fluctuation of feeling in the matrix as a whole. Collages of meaning and emergent constructions are further clarified. In this way, the panel shifts from performative to constative modes of thinking, and then back again. The reflexivity in this phase depends on the experience still being fresh, as solicited through the opening monologues, but with enough distance for the researchers to question themselves and one another on why they construe the material in a particular way. This is the point at which researcher dispositions or habitual responses are identified in order to avoid singular or collusive over-interpretation or wild analysis.

*Examples from next day de-briefing/first<sup>t</sup> interpretation panel (mainly how things were said/performed/presented):*

The researchers acknowledged they found the Verity matrix difficult and unstable and had difficulty in offering associations of their own. The matrix had to be continually pulled back by the facilitator from intellectualisation into imagery and reverie.

One of the research team had a strong negative aesthetic response to Verity and was prompted by the others to examine the source of her own reactions to establish greater interpretive distance.

**c) Second interpretation panel with transcript and notes.** This panel is still composed of researchers who were present in the original matrix. Further distance has been established by virtue of a break of some days or weeks. The transcript of the matrix is read aloud allowing researchers to re-establish experience nearness as the original scene of the matrix is brought to mind by the reading. This is followed by five minute expressions of feelings, memories and thoughts arising from the reading by each of the researchers in turn, without interruption. The panel then moves into interpretive mode, building on the re-animated memory of the matrix and the discussion in the first interpretation panel, but using the greater distance conferred by the intervening break to establish further links between the material (matrix, post-matrix discussion and interpretation of the first panel) and the social situation and context.

*Example from second interpretation panel (a synthesis of what was presented, how these themes were expressed and why they may have been presented as they were):*

The panel considered the difference between the concerned hopefulness that dominated the school matrix and the sense of nostalgia and loss that characterised the adult matrix. Both were understood to be intimately connected with the emotional and aesthetic impact of the artwork. However the differences required explanation in terms of how ecological sensibility had been evoked differently for the adults' and young people's groups by the aesthetic of the island. The panel related this to generational life experience and position in relation to digital culture and globalization.

**d) Third interpretation panel with transcript, notes and outsider contribution.** In a continuation of the second interpretation panel above, or at separate session, the researchers aim for a greater level of synthesis and abstraction from the material, now incorporating more remote ramifications and theoretical and contextual considerations to arrive at a fuller analysis of the research themes. At this distanced stage of the process, it is still beneficial and stimulating for the matrix transcript to be read out and for panel



members to be allowed uninterrupted time to comment, particularly 'outsiders', as a check against responding exclusively to interpretations that have already emerged rather than ensuring the original material is used as the source of interpretation. It is beneficial if this panel includes members who were not present at the original matrix, but can present an outsider view, bringing critical perspective to the proceedings. The panel is also mindful of the potential for the outsider to bring further feelings, thoughts and associations. This is also the point at which findings emerging from the matrix can be compared and triangulated with other data sources such as interviews.

There is a tendency with each successive round of interpretation which involves increasing distance in time from the original matrix to introduce wider contextual issues. This involves asking why, within this social context, the participants in the matrix used the imagery and associations they did, why certain feelings and affect emerged, and why it was expressed as it was. It is clearly the 'why' questions that enable the researchers to open up unconscious/unarticulated elements of the substantive and performative data. Were this not to occur spontaneously it would be important to ensure that 'why' questions which increase the explanatory power of the overall process, were explicitly posed. It is preferable for them to be posed more systematically in the later stages of the process (especially the third panel) in order to avoid moving to premature explanation and theorisation and foreclosing on interpretive possibilities.

In addition, however, during this process, the conflict between "reductive and recollective interpretation"(Ricoeur 2003, p. 376) is constantly kept in balance through the re-living of experience of the primary material that we have characterized as the scenic rhizome. In this way, the part of the hermeneutic process that tends towards explanation is balanced by the "recollection or a retrieval of the original meaning of the symbol" (Ricoeur 2003, p. 376) or symbols embedded in the collage-like, rhizomatic experience of the visual matrix that goes beyond the transcription of that experience into textual form.

*Example from interpretation panel with 'external' participants (a synthesis of what, how and why things were presented from an enlarged contextual and critical perspective):*

The panel introduced a strong comparative dimension addressing the question of why thinking in the focus group had focused almost exclusively on instrumental issues such as the economic benefits the artworks brought to the town. Its methodological assumptions were seen as congruent with and implicated in the discursive construction of a social agenda for contemporary public art. The panel then moved to a still wider set of questions on the implications of commissioning permanent versus durational artworks and whether, from the point of view of cultural policy, durational artworks would only be justified by their social impacts in a period of prolonged austerity.

## Part 3

### 1. Discussion and Conclusions

#### Introduction

Below we outline the development of the visual matrix as a new image-led methodology that enabled us to answer our three primary research questions, highlighting the contrast with the findings from the focus group:

- Did the artworks contribute to local identity, civic engagement, reflection and citizenship? If so, how?
- How did they generate public reflection on what it means to live in Ilfracombe?

The first two questions are closely related and will be addressed together in a number of ways in the sections which follow. The third question is addressed specifically in the section on researching legacy and value:

- What is their on-going legacy and value within and beyond the town?

In responding to these questions, refining and testing the visual matrix, comparing it with the focus group, and triangulating with findings from interviews and other ancillary information, we have also arrived at a number of conclusions regarding the benefits and limitations of both methods and the wider implications of using them to research and evaluate public art.

The visual matrix revealed the way in which the artworks provoked the imaginations of those who took part and engaged participants in a reflective process by eliciting clusters of ideas, images and feelings stimulated by the artworks. These contributed to an understanding of what it currently means to live in Ilfracombe in the local context of the town's history and present socio-economic circumstances, and in the wider international context of globalization, digital culture and anxieties around eco-sustainability.

## Reflective and Engaged Citizenship in Ilfracombe

Different dimensions of citizenship invoked by the artworks were elicited through the visual matrices. Verity had brought optimism, business opportunity, hopes of regeneration and international recognition. Citizenship was implicitly seen as dependent on entrepreneurship and economic participation (new art galleries, restaurants, enhanced cultural tourism), but also contained a hope of regeneration evoked by the pregnancy metaphor. There was anxiety lest this opportunity be lost. Local identities had shifted since Verity's arrival so that people now felt proud to 'belong' to Ilfracombe - which they now felt was 'on the map' by virtue of Hirst's local connections and international reputation. The Virgin Mother series in New York and Monaco had foreshadowed Ilfracombe's Verity, linking the town to an international cultural circuit. The Verity visual matrix revealed a somewhat singular vision of identity, civic engagement and citizenship in line with the unitary and iconic nature of the sculpture. Rather than standing as a modern allegory of truth and justice in accordance with Hirst's stated intentions, the citizenship in question was interpreted primarily in terms of the 'Verity Effect', which included activity in the business community and generalised optimism and prosperity. Ilfracombe was enjoying a re-branded identity as a town of art and good food which people felt improved its status in the competitive West Country tourist economy.

The Verity matrix was also able to acknowledge anxiety, ambivalence and fragility and a fear that the creative efforts of its citizens, might not rise to the opportunity the artwork had presented. Time is passing, Verity is ageing as she appears to corrode from exposure to the elements and has not yet 'given birth'. In a parallel sense, Ilfracombe though expectant is still waiting to be re-born. The pregnancy is frozen in time, as the town was for its 25 years of stagnation. She is a loan rather than a gift, implying a conditional relation with the artist's generosity. The question was posed and hovered in the air: What would the town have been prepared to pay for her if she had not been loaned for free?

The citizenship evoked in the Nowhereisland visual matrices differed profoundly between the adults in town and the 16-18 year olds in the school. For the adults it evoked a complex mix of nostalgia, disappointment and loss occasioned by the arrival and vanishing of an empty island, in contrast to the youth who could project into it their hopes and fears for the future. The disappointment of the adults was in the island itself and in themselves that they could not enjoy or use the riches the young people could imagine that it held. Nostalgia for the vibrant community of better times pervaded the adult group - leading to a sense of helplessness, and stalled creativity. This had been the generation who had experienced the town's decline and the loss of its self-confidence as a once thriving resort. The anxiety in the matrix appeared to emanate from the island's barrenness - the choice of word revealing an unconscious allusion to Verity's fecundity. In the school matrix the island, which had originally emerged from a vanishing arctic glacier, was populated imaginatively. Collapsing eco-systems were foreshadowed (the young people too were anxious, but their anxiety was other-directed). The island connoted disappearing species through images of polar bears on ice floes and imperiled tropical forests. Yet these losses had clearly already been mourned by the younger group

who had moved on with concerned hopefulness to assume responsibility as global citizens for a sustainable future.

In the focus group, by contrast, there was a lively discussion on the material benefits and drawbacks of the artworks. However the group was pre-occupied with the artworks as objects. Absence and barrenness were synonymous with lack, and a sense of 'let down' when the island, because of bad weather, failed to stay as long as originally scheduled. The island as absent object and its disappearance could not be 'used' in this group to re-imagine citizenship, whether global or local. Only a concerted effort by influential individuals could make something out of its disappearance: a year after the island's departure a 'round the island race' was repeated in its absence showing that a trace had remained in memory. On a community level, however, engagement was thought to have been transitory. Nowhereisland's tangible effect had been to contribute something to the school curriculum. It had once brought some tourists to the town.

We can conclude that both of the artworks in the study had the potential to contribute to a reflective and engaged citizenship, but in ways which reflected the fundamental differences between a durational work offering multiple opportunities for public participation and an iconic single-sited statue. Verity has offered the population of the town an object around which local identity can be re-constructed as we have described – both imaginatively and instrumentally. Because her presence in the landscape is assured, there is potential for the town's relationship with her to evolve, but for the time being the economic benefit overwhelms the artistic. This was clearly indicated in the focus group and the interviews. The visual matrix, however, provided conditions in which a more self-reflexive relation to Verity found expression, in which the participants were able to make use of her symbolic potentials according to their own anxieties and desires.

Where Nowhereisland succeeded it was not because of its transitory presence but insofar as it managed to make a provocation, sustain an illusion, offer a locus of projection, and set in motion an open-ended process in which people began to imagine a different relation to one another, to their environment, to their past and to the public realm. It entailed the emergence of a new social imaginary evoked by what the artwork called up from the past and hinted at in the future. Finding the images and words to convey ideas in the process of formation requires a potential space in which the imagination can attain the freedom of play. Free association (similar to the associative process of the matrix) was always for Freud (1923) a testimony to the everyday inventiveness of the self's becoming, and later writers (Winnicott 1971; Ogden 1999; Bollas 2009; Wright 2009) have stressed the particular conditions of containment and intersubjectivity that nourish this process, which is nothing less than the ability to insert oneself creatively into a cultural world. What art can do for citizenship is provide the experience around which this relation between self and world can be re-imagined, but in everyday life this is haphazard and the unconscious social processes involved take time to surface and attain communicable form.

The visual matrix appears to provide conditions under which the mind can meander and in which these processes can be recognised, imaged or spoken in a space which allows new thoughts to arise in the presence of others. This is important in the consideration of the shared space of public art, and there is more to say on the subject below. However

the essential process of democratic deliberation modeled in a good focus group, and the careful structured questioning of a one-to-one interview, can carry risks for the exercise of the creative imagination, partly due to the way in which they are conducted, and partly because performative expectations of clarity and persuasiveness prevail. The painter's analogue to this risk led Marian Milner to explore what we might call 'artist's or audience's block' in 'On not Being able to Paint' ([1950], 1981). She described the impulse to force fantasy and illusion too soon, and too definitively, into a recognisable form – of not having the self-discipline to delay the urge towards representation, or the will to continue in an unplanned manner. Simply put, the peculiar associative space of the visual matrix makes it easier for unplanned thoughts to emerge in a public forum where representation in image or word can be withheld until it feels 'ripe' for expression. In this way the participants can allow creative imagination a chance to relate to the material, before initiating the analytical process in the post-matrix discussion.

We conclude therefore that if reflective and engaged citizenship is the aim, and public art is the means, both the focus group and the visual matrix have a part to play in understanding, but differently so. The focus group offers a deliberative forum where ideas can be presented, elaborated, contested and in which the various segments of public opinion can do this in dialogue or argument with one another. In many ways the focus group, properly run, is congruent with the agonistic space of deliberative democracy (Benhabib 1996). The aspects of public art it can capture are those that bear on the materiality of citizenship: how it is exercised and debated, forms solidarities and divisions, regenerates or stagnates. The visual matrix on the other hand offers a method for sensing the operations of imagination: what is elusive, allusive, illusory, coming into consciousness and not-yet-articulated. It catches the drift of thoughts and ideas in formation and because the scenic is primary, language is a sensualised conveyance for the presentational symbolic of image, acoustic, tone, pattern and feeling. The matrix therefore offers a different kind of public space attuned to the aesthetic of a citizenship in becoming, prompted by the artwork itself and its heterotopian affordances (Foucault 2000).

## **Researching Legacy and Value in Multi-Layered Durational Arts Projects**

Since legacy is a fundamental standard of evaluation for public art it should be noted that the focus group responded to a largely instrumental conception of legacy – that of economic impact and associated contributors such as cultural tourism. In these terms the legacy of Verity was rich and that of Nowhereisland poor. On the other hand, the legacy of Nowhereisland highlighted by the visual matrix was that of social and educational processes still in motion a year after the island's visit.

The matrix also revealed in the adult group some of the psychosocial challenges of the changes initiated by the artworks. It may well be that this group could have been engaged differently by the producers of Nowhereisland, for example by working with a greater range of organised local interests (a Sea Ilfracombe representative pointed out that they had not been approached, and could have been of assistance). However,

meaningful audience engagement cannot be conjured out of thin air. In terms of the theoretical frameworks that have helped to make sense of the visual matrices in this study (scenic experience in the case of Lorenzer, transitional phenomena for Winnicott, and the rhizome in the case of Deleuze) an audience's active reception of a work depends not only on what is presented to them but also on what they bring and what is provoked in them. In this way they find the potentials within the artwork which they can use to elaborate a creative illusion of how things might be different (Froggett et al. 2011). The importance of this interaction is central to the very idea of socially engaged and situationally embedded art. It is mediated by the symbolic and aesthetic character of the work itself and it is surely this that makes the artwork different from most other forms of social intervention. For instance, what the older people brought to Nowhereisland was a perspective imbued with a lived experience of 25 years of Ilfracombe's decline. What they found through the matrix was an artwork around which the emotions produced by this history could attain a form. In this way they began to re-symbolise the experience and its associated losses, selectively using certain potentials within the work to do so – the island's barrenness, its sudden vanishing, a wistful sense of its absence, of being left behind, and a meditation on things not brought to fruition. The dimensions people pick up on are those that resonate with them. Climate change and digital culture resonated more easily with the younger group, helped no doubt by teachers and producers, but still dependent on the vitality of their primary experience of the work. The container of the matrix has been shown in this study to be highly sensitive to people's capacity to make use of what they find, so that the artwork, embedded in the lived experience of situation, becomes a transformational object around which the imagination can get to work.

If this is the case, no public engagement programme associated with a complex many-layered artwork like Nowhereisland can in and of itself predict or engineer an audience's straightforwardly happy or celebratory reception of it; or come to that, instructional or educational benefit. Nor can it engineer shifts in identity or determine how relationships get re-built. What it can do is provoke a psychological, emotional and cultural encounter with the work so that the possibilities of discovery are multiplied and the audience can make use of what they find according to their histories, capacities and inclinations.

Among the young people Nowhereisland had nourished a capacity to conceive of an enlarged relationship to local civic life and global citizenship, and a political and moral sensitisation to the implications of climate change. The evidence was not only in the content of the matrix but in its emotional tone, pace and vibrancy. Among the adults the matrix revealed Nowhereisland as an idea that had 'troubled' a deep-set helplessness, prompting a reflective self-questioning on the sources of disappointment experienced by the group. The methodological implication is that if legacy is to be understood in terms of reflective engagement and change set in motion – a key aim of socially engaged art – a method such as the visual matrix which is sensitive to social process and emergence is vital.

## Researching Durational Public Art in Time and Space

New directions in public art in any particular period reflect and reproduce the cultural tropes through which art reverberates with a wider set of societal conditions. So it is that in the time-space compression (Harvey 1990) of globalization, population displacement and digital connectivity, the temporal assumes a particular importance. As localities are unmade and re-made, they come to be seen as “a constellation of social relations meeting and weaving together in a constant sense of becoming through practice and practical knowledge” (Massey 1991). Reflecting these transformations the temporary, nomadic, hybrid and diasporic become pervasive motifs of a strain of contemporary art concerned less with site than situation (Kwon 1997; Deleuze and Guattari 1980). Nowhereisland might be regarded as a prime example.

*If we understand place as an unstable, shifting set of political, social, economic and material relations, and locality as produced and contested through a set of conditions that we might describe as situation, our experience of works which truly produce remarkable engagements with place will be characterized by a sense of dislocation – encouraging us no longer to look with the eyes of a tourist, but to become implicated in the jostling contingency of mobilities and relations that constitute contemporaneity. (Doherty 2009)*

How adequate then are the resources of social research to an art of situation? Although the emphasis on mobilities and relations has emerged in part as a corrective to the supposed fixity of place implied in site, the task of the empirical researcher is still to understand how the artwork provides an aesthetic third (Froggett 2008; Froggett et al 2011; Froggett and Trustram 2014) and a ‘potential space’ (Winnicott 1971) between location and social process. Our methods need to capture how affect and thought, time and space, sequence and configuration, intersect in the lived experience of the artwork itself. The methods favoured in interpretive qualitative research have with the narrative turn in social science (Hyvärinen 2010), privileged the temporality of experience – recounted in the sequential structures and narrativity of the interview, whether individual or group-based. The participation in the rhizome of the visual matrix attempts to combine a sensitivity to the lyric immediacy in the aesthetic and affective encounter – the point of pause, where time appears to stop in the instant of apprehension – with an understanding of how the artwork, as story, then unfolds in time, so that its situation in shared and individual awareness is one of poise between movement, rest and relation.

## Potential of the Visual Matrix and Focus Group in Evaluation

If they had been applied separately in evaluation of the artworks in Ilfracombe the methods used would have yielded very different results. The implication is that a wider application of focus groups and interviews on their own could have potentially serious consequences for the commissioning of temporary, dispersed artworks such as



Nowhereisland. The criteria of evaluation that the focus group set were closely tied to immediately tangible impacts, dependent on the permanence of the artwork as object. In this respect permanently sited objects such as Verity by famous artists will always be preferred. However, even for sculptural objects, the risk is that the focus group will miss the less obvious and less easily articulated artistic dimensions of the work and therefore offer a reductive and largely instrumental evaluation.

The focus group in Ilfracombe was unable to discuss the psychosocial, symbolic or aesthetic complexity of either of the artworks. In the case of Verity, relative permanence and the economics of the Verity Effect simply overrode less tangible considerations. The group found it hard, a year after the event, to hold Nowhereisland in mind. It merited a passing mention as something with educational benefit and it occasioned an interchange on whether or not this was anything to do with art. It also attracted some contempt, and echoing negative press coverage, was described as a featureless "lump of rock on a barge". Clearly, evaluative comments with such a polemical ring can be hard for producers and artists to hear, and devastating in their consequences for reputation and future commissions. The larger point here is whether the methods used allow the evaluators to adequately encompass and hold in mind the span and the multiplicity of the work, and for this they must be able to assess its execution and its shortcomings against concept, potentials, and the transformations that ensue.

Each of the visual matrices was able to respond to the specific nature of the artwork by which it was framed, including its artistic limitations and what it had set in motion in the town. The visual matrices all worked with the creative illusion generated by the artworks. They did this scenically (through metaphor, metonym, allusion and symbolisation) bringing the background experience of the group in question into relation with the cultural signifiers embedded in the work. In the case of Nowhereisland, the polysemic nature of this dispersed work with its multiple entry points occasioned, especially in the school matrix, a view of citizenship implicitly understood as poised between the local and global, as a function of digital connectivity yet anchored in a place-based community. For whatever reason - limits of the engagement programme itself, or because the adults had no opportunity to get involved with it - the adult group had had less exposure to the engagement programme. In its absence an ambivalence which reflected their generational experience came to the fore. Although some of them used social media, they were not yet fully conscious of the potentials of digitally mediated citizenship, and hence paid little attention to the island's website. Whereas the young people had enjoyed a festive sense of the community coming together, the adults had rather been aware of the passing of older forms of community vibrancy, represented in the citizens' marches which had greeted the island.

It can enable ambivalent and difficult feelings to be expressed in the context of an experience which may not be straightforwardly negative or positive. This is interesting in the light of another recent report:

*Visitors seek novelty and challenge, from which they derive a strong feeling of achievement after resolution. Families see the contemporary visual arts as a natural extension of the playfulness and experimentation of childhood. Critique is part of the contemporary visual arts experience and we observed that audience*

*members often articulated negative views about an exhibition and then rated their overall quality of experience highly. (Annabel Jackson Associates 2014, p.7)*

It can also show whether and how the artwork becomes differentially available for use by groups according to their life experience, position and disposition. Furthermore it shows for whom and under what circumstances the creative illusion that the artwork must produce in order to 'work' conceptually, can be sustained affectively and aesthetically. In short we conclude from the above that if used in either a research or evaluation context, the visual matrix can open up for reflection the experience of a complex artwork. This is the key to understanding its affective, aesthetic and symbolic potentials, whether it is temporary or permanent. We would argue that especially in the case of complex, dispersed, durational projects, these must be key evaluative criteria.

## **Summary of Benefits and Limitations of the Visual Matrix and Focus Group Compared**

*Visual matrix - benefits:* This is a method of choice if the aim is to enable people to express emotional and aesthetic experience of artwork in a social setting where their thoughts and feelings are based on emergent, shared imagery. This allows people to respond to the sensory and affective qualities of a work for which they may otherwise lack words. The image-driven associative process generates rich and creative use of figurative language: for example, metaphor, simile, metonym and symbolism. The visual matrix proliferates open questions and themes without necessarily seeking resolution and encourages complex thinking and attunement to the intrinsic qualities of the artwork. It addresses the *what*, *how* and *why* of engagement, quality of experience and process. The post matrix discussion and subsequent interpretation is better adapted to exploration of outcome.

The depth hermeneutic and recollective interpretation method used to interpret the matrix offers protocols within the interpretation process for the testing of all hypotheses and propositions. This safeguards against overly reductive explanations, as well as providing a framework for data interpretation that can be applied consistently within and across studies.

*Limitations/complexities:* The visual matrix produces data requiring further interpretation in a panel, to produce theoretical generalisations and defensible findings. Analysis in a group requires organisation and co-operation. Diverse perspectives may produce complex and ambivalent thinking responsive to ambiguities in the data that defy simple, clear-cut judgments. Like other qualitative approaches it does not provide a broad overview of participation which yields to statistical analysis. The conduct of a matrix feels unfamiliar at first and is difficult to explain remotely. The thinking produced in a matrix may be unpredictable, unrehearsed, emotionally-driven, and unsettling.

*Focus group - benefits:* This is a method of choice if the aim is to clarify opinions and contrasting points of view by bringing individuals together in a structured group discussion to respond to a specific set of questions. Participants can be selected to represent particular groups and are facilitated to debate with each other. Its benefit lies

in clear articulation of contrasting perspectives. The style of debate tends towards resolution and judgment. It shows how issues are agreed upon or contested in a group. Thematic analysis is usually straightforward. Discourse or content analysis are further options. It can reflect on outputs and outcomes.

*Limitations/complexities:* It is not well adapted to registering aesthetic experience, emotional response and reflective engagement. It provides a forum where participants can rehearse previously held views; sometimes these will be tenaciously defended leading to an adversarial climate where positions may become more entrenched. Powerful voices can easily dominate. It is not well attuned to process.

We would argue that triangulation and reflexivity are hallmarks of good qualitative research and evaluation, whatever method is used, and this holds as much for the visual matrix as for the focus group or one-to-one interview. Each of these methods has the potential to offer a different lens on the material under consideration. The visual matrix can fill a gap in what has hitherto been the methodological repertoire.

## **Group-based Methods: Inclusive or Inhibiting?**

The development of the visual matrix as a method is premised on the fact that many members of the public, who do not regard themselves as particularly culturally educated, find it difficult to articulate their subjective responses to an artwork. They may be intimidated from doing so, feeling that they lack the specialised art critical language that would allow them to speak on such topics with coherence and authority. Interview-based methods can make people feel they are 'on the spot', thus compounding the problem. The focus group creates a further difficulty: the individual speaks to an audience with potential for performance anxiety and loss of face if they struggle to articulate their views.

Yet, public art is, by its very nature, loved and hated in interaction with others. It involves encounters where personal experience is brought into the shared conversational space of the public realm. It follows that the creation of a shared space, in which people have time for their thoughts to emerge unsolicited, unjudged, and in which individuated responses can be intersubjectively achieved, may help people to talk about what the art prompts in them. Instead of the head-on one-to-one encounter, first with the artwork, then with the interviewer, they can approach it 'sideways' as they might in everyday life, but in a situation where they will 'stay with' the creative experience and the not-yet-articulated that is evoked in them. They can attune themselves, dwell in uncertainty, ruminate, wonder, struggle, day-dream, allow sensations to accumulate and insights to gather. They can also take cues from one another so that thoughts uttered disseminate and resonate throughout the group. Where ambiguous and paradoxical material is concerned, it can be tolerated in the presence of others so that the creative illusion provoked by the artwork can be sustained and the premature rush to meaning which forecloses on other potentials in the work can be restrained. What is produced by this process is not 'collective thinking' but a shared receptivity and an openness to the drift of something that passes between them.

Acceptance of difference and inclusivity of the matrix through the interlinking and interconnectivity of participation – suggests a 'situational' thinking process that comes closer to the shared experience of public art than many other methods. One-to-one interviews elicit a view from the interviewee that is rooted in that person's experience, and although this does not preclude the expression of something shared, even this shared view has its basis in that interviewee's personal attitude. In a focus group, there is a tendency for individual ideas, although shared, to be posed alongside or in contrast to other individual ideas which move towards conclusion (and hence necessarily reduction) rather than the expansion and open-endedness of the matrix. This is why the use of the visual matrix more closely approximates the actual experience of the artwork, so that 'place as situation' is replicated in 'mental space as situation' of the matrix.

## **2. Summary: Uses of Visual Matrix for Research and Evaluation of Public Art**

1. Artists and producers often claim that evaluation fails to capture much of what goes on in arts projects, and methodologies can seem alien to people working in the arts. The visual matrix reflects some of the processes artists are familiar with and aims to respond to their intentions and concerns.
2. It provides access to the aesthetic and emotional impact of a work and the social processes it sets in motion.
3. It aims to address quality and depth of engagement rather than quantity and breadth, and can be used alongside other methods adapted for that purpose.
4. Methods in use include customised monitoring forms, participant satisfaction surveys, self-assessment pro-formas, self-esteem tests and questionnaires. Personal reflections of artists are not generally regarded as a robust basis for evaluation. Qualitative approaches such as reflective diaries, interviews, observations, case studies are available but demand complex time-consuming techniques and theorisation. There is uncertainty about what claims can be made on the basis of such methods and whether sector staff have time, skills or inclination to do this work, or funders to pay for it. Complex artwork demands complex evaluation, and the visual matrix responds to complexity, and can be effectively applied with a modicum of training.
5. Temporary, dispersed, durational public artworks pose particular challenges for evaluators. Claims are made that artists can help us see things differently, step

out of role and set in train transformative processes. The visual matrix can show whether and how these things happen and help build a case for effects which are difficult to 'measure' and yet which are often the principal aim of a work.

6. The visual matrix is effective at understanding how a particular demographic and social group responds to a particular artwork. Matrices with different groups show how they may make differential use of its various layers, dimensions or entry points. In this respect a visual matrix differs from a focus group which is more likely to show how groups form attitudes and opinions.
7. Many methods (for example, focus groups, interviews, surveys) gather opinions 'after the fact'. The visual matrix evokes the experience of an artwork and can elicit complex, ambivalent, contradictory responses that in ordinary talk are hard to put into words. It also aims to capture a greater quality and range of response than gradations of enjoyment, indifference or dislike.
8. Most people do not find it easy to talk of experience of an artwork, so grading scales are often used to rate reactions to pre-set questions. The visual matrix is based on imagery and visualisation and enables people to express a nuanced relation to an artwork without recourse to expert language. This by-passes problems of focus groups which can often be dominated by powerful or knowledgeable voices.
9. Whereas interviews and surveys are highly individualised, the visual matrix enables a shared experience of public art to emerge in a group setting, in the moment, with other people whose attention is also directed to the artwork. This is especially appropriate where the purpose of public art is to set in motion social processes, and the purpose of evaluation is to understand how this occurs.
10. The visual matrix is participatory by definition. The process of making sense of it is also begun by the participants so that useful knowledge is genuinely co-produced. This can be further elaborated by researchers/participants depending on purpose and resources.
11. The visual matrix can detect the intrinsic qualities of an artwork in relation to processes which may accompany it such as public engagement programs and collateral (instrumental) effects.

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## Appendix

To access the Situations evaluation report for Nowhereisland, including the Nowhereisland web data, see:

<http://www.situations.org.uk/writing/nowhereisland-evaulation-report/>

To access Damien Hirst's story of Verity, see:

<http://www.damienhirst.com/verity>

To access a video summarising the visual matrix in action, see:

<https://vimeo.com/97731002>



