



PSYCHOSOCIAL RESEARCH UNIT

Qualitative Evaluation of the Super Slow Way Programme

2015-2017

PART 4

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PART 4 ARTISTS STAFF AND RELATIONSHIPS

Introduction

This part of the interim report consists of two sections, that were both referred to on Part 1. The aim was to arrive at some understanding of how the canal, as backdrop or setting for their work has influenced them affectively, aesthetically and cognitively. We were aware that they had had very different experiences and the visual matrix was not intended to capture their experiences as individuals. It is a group based method and what it produces emerged from the interwoven imagery and associations of the group as a whole. What it revealed was the way in which the imagery and feeling associated with the canal were processed by the artists. We were also aware that for some it became a forum to express some of their sense of vulnerability at working in an environment that they had experienced as hostile.

The experience of the visual matrix was cathartic for them, and they went on to talk in the afternoon about the issues it had raised. It also prompted us to look closely at the pressures of socially engaged practice, and the different ways in which the programme itself had sought to support artists. Our reflections on this appear in the section that follows this one

The Artist's Visual Matrix

Context

The visual matrix for artists commissioned by Super Slow Way was held in the summer of 2016. Participants had either completed or had ongoing projects which were well advanced. This was the first time that artists commissioned in the first phase of the programme had been brought together as a group. The 'away-day' was organised as a de-brief, and an opportunity for reflection. The Visual matrix (18 participants including the facilitators) was held in the morning and was followed by an afternoon discussion session convened by Sally Fort (critical friend to the Super Slow Way programme). It was thus framed in such a way as to give artists an opportunity to discuss both how their practice had benefitted from Super Slow Way and also the frustrations and challenges of working in what for many was a very difficult environment. A visual stimulus comprising 20 photographs on PowerPoint were presented to the group allowing 30-40 seconds for each slide without comment or discussion. The images were taken from a range of projects and also included photographs of the canal, its buildings and surrounding landscape.

The visual matrix was the effort by the research team to create a third space where the artists could take a step back from the immediacies of practice and through the use of imagery and affect could consider themselves in relation to the Super Slow Way programme as a whole, and the environment and communities with whom they had been working.

Emotional tone and self-assigned task of the visual matrix

Participants had not all had similar experiences by any means and this diversity was reflected in the different and sometimes sharply contrasting emotional ‘threads’ that wove together through this matrix.

The opening was, as we shall see, framed by anger and distress with imagery of violation and violence and it was a provocation to the group. This affect did not completely disappear and at one point the feeling was expressed that these difficult emotions were being countered with positive ones, effectively as a form of suppression, whether intentional or not. There was a clearly articulated demand that the abuse and distress some of the participants had experienced in the sites where they had worked should be witnessed and recognised. As the matrix proceeded other emotions emerged. Besides imagery of decay and degradation associated with the canal as a place of danger, there was the everyday life of the canal seen through the artist’s eye - strange juxtapositions of the banal, the beautiful and the bizarre. There were also occasional floating images of tenderness and care and this quieter, more gentle voice, was another kind of witnessing – an attentiveness to seemingly inconsequential details that make the familiar strange and worthy of notice, a celebration of small triumphs in unlikely places and the struggle to be human in dismal surroundings.

The canal: out of place and out of sorts

Super Slow Way is a place-making programme that aims to regenerate the canal as a cultural environment. The artists showed that in different ways they had incorporated this ambition into their practice. In the visual matrix we saw a more spontaneous, pre-reflective, unconscious response to the canal and we therefore gained an insight into the emotional and aesthetic challenges it posed alongside the social and strategic ones. From the imagery and affect they produced we see that they found the canal compelling, ambiguous, threatening and alluring, and by turns degraded and full of potential. In their imaginations it carried with it the violence and destruction that those with a historical perspective attribute to its construction. In a later interview an artist described it as ‘scar’ built at immense human cost that cuts deep into the landscape; then in its decline it became a place whose rationale had all but disappeared and in stretches it was left derelict and dangerous.

*Disused buildings reflected in the canal
Barbed wire and two machine guns on top of the canal boat*

The visual matrix begins by seeing it as a place toxic with pollution and casual waste, while somehow animal and bird life persist against the odds. At the same time it has always also held – somewhat ambiguously – the potential of a ‘promised land’ of prosperity, jobs and connected communities, symbolised by the abandoned baby Moses, found amidst the debris (rather than the bull-rushes) in the sequence below

*Factories, lots of factories
-Rubbish in the water
-A tumble drier pipe
-Shopping trolley
-Baby’s fastener case that had been chucked into the canal
-Moses*

Amidst these misplaced things lives unfold through an unromantic and unremarkable mix of rubbish, minor vandalism, alcohol, furtive sex and historical remnants

The leaves

-Graffiti

-Jimmy sitting and waiting for the pub to open at 9am every morning

-Cobbles

-Smell of beer

-Bodies locked in bodies

Bird-life and artistic 'flight'

The visual matrix was replete with birds. Taking as our starting point the image of "a baby pigeon that had fallen into the canal that a rat was pulling into a hole" - it is clear that these various bird images were expressed as a reflection on the meaning and value of art and creativity in an environment that some of the most vocal artists in this group perceived as hostile.

In a similar way the matrix produced an image of the "the swan that held the gosling under water". Where the potential of the 'baby' – the 'new life' that artists may bring - is drowned in an act of infanticide by a like creature (the goose) in what can only be understood as the struggle of the flock (tribe?) for survival.

The swan (symbol of the canal and logo of the Canal and River Trust) is a particularly ambiguous figure combining grace and aggression. It is both victim and perpetrator of violence, a problematic emblem of 'whiteness' and 'purity' on the polluted waters of the canal. In this matrix the swan appears vulnerable and damaged "with a broken neck" and "a broken leg sticking out of its back".

In yet another image, the swan is paired with children, expressing hope of creativity in the future, but the image is tinged with the reality of the context, in which the parents, dazed with alcohol are half absent: "Swans and children on the barge, while their parents look on drunk in the pub".

This image reminds us that some of the artists have been working on barges where they often become a magnet for the local children. However, it only by engaging adults will their work become sustainable. The adults however appear unable to 'mind' their children and are 'mindless' in their drunkenness.

There were images of other birds, again ambivalent. The idea of "packs of drakes that hunt and rape and drown the female" is allied to imagery of male violence that we shall describe below and contrasted with the humble duck, not as beautiful as the swan, but nevertheless capable of "lighting up Dave's face" in simple pleasure. Exalting the duck above the swan is an anti-romantic move that announces what the artists will do. Rather than seeking classical beauty – they will continue to respond to the aesthetic of the everyday, the noticing of small things and the possibility of "changing the world one cup of tea at a time". The Kingfisher, archetypal 'king' of birds, beautiful in plumage is mentioned once only, and in isolation – a hovering presence, but not one that fishes in the tainted waters of the canal.

Giving birth: art, creativity and regeneration

The matrix begins with a powerful image of giving birth in a toilet.

Woman giving birth in a toilet, two support workers, she can't cut her umbilical cord so she's got it tucked in her knickers. Folded and tucked into her knickers, before she goes to hospital.

The toilet is a place for excrement rather than new life, and the support workers are unable to complete the birth because the umbilical cord cannot be cut; the birth is at risk without healing resources (hospital) and the chord that sustains it also threatens to strangle the baby. Once again the baby is the creation (or artwork); There are later images in the visual matrix that develop this idea; the baby pigeon dragged away by a rat suggests that what has been born/created cannot be given flight in this environment. The baby's fastener case chucked in the canal shows a callous disregard for the safety/nurturance of the child.

'Shit' recurs throughout the matrix as the artist risks 'evacuation' from communities who will not digest and take nourishment from their art. Later in the matrix someone steals a bag, supposedly containing something of value, but in fact containing shit.

Building bridges and relationships

The Visual Matrix brought out various images of bridges as symbols of the artists as trying to connect to communities or stimulate connections between them. However, the bridges are troubled connections. There is an image of "a car crash on a bridge and the guy was too drunk to get out of the car".

In another image, a man jumps off a bridge for charity and crashes on the towpath instead, bringing out the poignant hopelessness of trying to 'do the right thing' and yet failing painfully and spectacularly. There is frustration in the task of relationship building and creating hope and creative aspirations. There is also a real sense of danger: people can get killed in these places. We were reminded that one of the artists aborted a planned tug of war across the canal for fear of causing bloodshed between opposing residents.

There were other images of falling: a woman falls off a barge into the water; so does a cat; someone falls into the canal trying to launch a canoe. The canoe, like the barge, may be understood as symbolic of the artist's potential to realise the improbable against the odds: "Sitting in a cardboard boat that's actually floating".

Finally, bird/shit/bridge are synthesised in a single image, "Pigeon shit bridge", bringing together the concerns about creative flight, the 'shit' of the artist, and the difficulty of building bridges.

The 'kernels' of art and local hostility

The matrix was peppered with images that brought out the sense of challenge the artists were facing. In one image the artist appears as a squirrel busily seeking and laying up a store of 'nuts' for future use. The "squirrels are probing a mobility scooter for nuts" – which then

mows them down – “artist being run over by a mobility scooter”. Is this the ‘disabled’ community unwilling to yield up its store of nuts and rejecting of the artist’s endeavours?

The difficulty of working in places with few resources is brought out in an image of “The quiet of a house that is utterly empty”. Normal channels of communication are thrown away as useless – “Screwed up newspaper”. And there is nothing to refresh or slake thirst – “woman drinking nervously from a cup with nothing in it”.

Nostalgia for a better past

The deprivation and austerity visited on the towns, is emphasised in the matrix through images of a kinder more prosperous past. We are told that The Beatles played in Nelson, not once, but twice. Victorian philanthropy or values are represented in shared and now empty or closing civic spaces such as libraries and churches.

- A bandstand with no band
- Library
- Church
- Expensive 90s photocopier

The last image is ironic reminder of the recent past - even when it was new it was a copier rather than a creator of originality.

The present is represented by “tombstones lifted from a cemetery and thrown onto the path, on to the road and shattered”.

The everyday and the artist’s eye

In the face of all this it would be easy to assume that the keynote of the matrix is despair or at the very least a scaling down of artistic ambition. However a very large part of this matrix is taken up with pointing out the unlikely juxtaposition of things in and around the canal. This ‘artistic’ noticing involves a collection and storing of details, in themselves banal, that will nourish or be turned into art. They are presented dispassionately as fragments – as yet unintegrated into any larger concept, but they demonstrate an active aesthetic intelligence at work and arguably a seeking of comfort and hope in little things. In the circumstances of this reality, the artists suggest that their work is not going to happen quickly or dramatically, it is rather a question of “changing the world, one cup of tea at a time.” The reflection here is about whether some real change might be possible, given the occasional expressions of positive identification of place from local citizens, such as the woman who is quoted as saying “I don’t know what I’d do without this place”.

The matrix is able to confront the reality of this situation through images of beds and sofas that do not serve their purpose of comfort and rest. It is as if there can be no comfortable solution to the issues confronting the communities where the artists are operating.

- No comfort
- Three policemen sitting on a sofa

- *Hurting my back on a sofa that was so old and worn...piece of metal coming through*
- The sofa wrapped around our propeller*

In these images, the policemen seem to suggest that it is necessary to have a presence of the law rather than a spot of comfort, alluding to the dangers that many of the artists have to work with. When on your own, the sofa is uncomfortable and even dangerous, as signalled by the piece of metal "coming through". Finally, if we understand the barge as being a place for artistic creativity, we see that progress is foiled by the sofa, turned from object of rest and comfort to another version of the "spanner in the works".

In a related image, the artist takes on too much more than she can handle, and in trying to bring comfort, is instead trapped by unrealistic expectations, as demonstrated in the following image of artist and mattress: "Being stuck under mattress 'cos I thought I could lift a double mattress and I couldn't."

Race and migration

The nature of the conflicts faced by the artists was often associated with confronting racism, summarised in the comment "I'm not racist but..." This is alluded to in the image of the "black woman pulling up nettles with her hands" and the mention of "The Roma gypsy camp", which in turn are contrasted with a kind of nostalgia as represented in "The Todd Disco"; "Imperial Ballroom", and "Going on a date with Phil Collins", evoking a past where maybe there were fewer immigrants, more wealth and less unemployment.

Women, animals and fragile things

There was also a clear suggestion that male aggression was an issue for some of the artists, although this was counter-balanced by other male qualities, as we can see in the following exchange that balances negative male violence with alternative pictures of maleness.

- Boys throwing stones*
- Boys throwing bricks*
- Man throwing cheese*
- Man chasing a twelve year old girl so that she could suck his dick*
- Man breaking into our boat*
- Man crying over the death of a cat*
- A man using 'Newt's?' deodorant to build fire outside our boat*
- Freddie learning to play the trumpet and dropping it to rescue a pigeon.*

The anger that this represents became a topic of the post matrix discussion where anger for some of the artists was channelled into an anger against male violence or violent sexuality.

Outcomes

1. For some of the artists working on the canal in more exposed circumstances, there was a feeling of danger and a need for practical and emotional support.
2. There was a combination of desire for change and a realisation of the great difficulty this entails, and therefore, a recognition of being satisfied with smaller step change rather than an expectation of sudden or impressive transformation.
3. There was sadness and sometimes frustration at the perceived gulf between the decline of the canal (and canalside communities) today and a sense there had been better times in the past.
4. The sense of decline was countered with artistic creativity, making something out of very little, out of the everyday. This was implicitly linked to feelings of giving birth and of urban and civic regeneration. The possibilities of art and the creativity it stimulates were regarded as potentially infinite, as in birds in flight.
5. There was an expression of surprise or even shock at having to confront xenophobic and homophobic atmospheres, and this raised the question of how to acknowledge and confront it, rather than 'sweeten' it through artificial balancing acts, such as countering a negative with a positive.

Conclusions

The visual matrix gave us insight into the anxieties attendant on working in impoverished environments with so little infrastructure, cultural or material, to lean on. There was much the artists had encountered that they found genuinely shocking in terms of deprivation and poverty among some of the communities with whom they worked. We know from other data that there was also humour, generosity, enthusiasm and we know that some of those who felt most deeply unsettled by what they encountered also did work that was experienced as revelatory and transformative, stimulated shifts in self-understanding and aspiration among participants, and evoked profound gratitude. However, the visual matrix was used by the participants as not only as a tool of reflection but a moment of enactment and catharsis. One of the conclusions we reached was that this had been needed far earlier in the year because it was part of the process of working through the emotional impact of the practice environment. In other words, although this was not the intention of the facilitators, the artists used the visual matrix as a quasi-therapeutic tool and a way of getting their experience heard. There is something to be learnt from this in terms of artist support. In what follows, this should be borne in mind because it shows what overwhelmed and incapacitated them as well as what nourished their practice.

Staff support, team culture and learning

Meeting the Challenge

The programme has been ambitious, ground-breaking and risk-taking in the ways that we have documented through the case studies and in the discussion of the programme's achievements. Staff and artists have willingly accepted a very intense working environment - working all hours and often weekends, with the inherent unpredictabilities of collaborative arts practice, in areas with little or no arts infrastructure. However, this does not mean that the pressures have not sometimes been hard to manage. Below we discuss some of the implications and suggested ways of supporting staff and artist that build on the strengths of the programme.

Learning Culture

It goes without saying that programmes that work outside of institutional frameworks or the 'comfort zones' of galleries and theatres are operating in an unpredictable arena of cultural needs and wants that imposes particular risks and pressures. When art becomes an intervention into a socio-cultural milieu, who never asked for it in the first place, what is at issue is the ability of arts professionals to set in motion and steer social processes that often cannot be controlled, to achieve outcomes that cannot be easily foreseen. As well as a balanced commissioning strategy that enables manageable workloads, the programme needs to support arts professionals in a culture of openness, perceptiveness, learning and relational skills. This helps people to exercise judgment in when to be flexible and modify the original concept, and when to carry on carrying on.

At the away day for Super Slow Way staff in December 2016, and in conversation with them over the course of a year, we have seen these skills developing and have been impressed with the good will in the team towards one another, and towards the programme as a whole. Together, the members reflected on what they had learnt from supporting challenging projects where relationships with artist and community were fraught, as much as from those that had been harmonious and developmental. Understanding of the areas in which they had been working, with their very different community profiles and needs, had grown exponentially. This has been a self-appraising, self-critical team, able to own up to its mistakes as well as celebrating its successes. If these qualities can be preserved in a re-configured team in the second year of delivery, they will serve the programme well

Recommendations

1. The challenge is to put in place the learning and support structures that can build these aspects of programme culture and its ethos in the next phase. This is potentially more difficult if projects are to be delivered by contracted producers, rather than core staff. Episodic half-day facilitated interim review workshops would offer the opportunity to ensure that programme culture is being articulated and consolidated for all people involved.

2. The local APPL arts organisations could play an important part in sharing and documenting the learning from the first phase to inform activity going forward. In order to do this they need to be brought together. Relationships between locally embedded organisations and Super Slow Way raise issues of accountability, ownership, oversight and the locus of responsibility when things go awry.

Supportive Team Culture and Ownership

There was general agreement at the away day that the team and office environment had provided the solidarity, support and stimulation that had carried them through some very pressured times. A number of people agreed “the office is a good place to come to work”. As expressed by Ruth Shorrocks in an interview in January 2017 - the staff group has *shared* sense of risk and challenge.

For me that is an odd question: how does SSW support you? We are SSW. For me that has come from Laurie I have never known anyone as Democratic as Laurie and for me that is a little scary. I think it has the potential to reap the most rewards
(Ruth Shorrocks)

This delegation of authority and initiative to the team has resulted in a communal sense of ‘ownership’, development of professional capacity in individuals and some highly acclaimed outcomes, along with a few others that were more equivocal. This would be expected in a programme which is pushing social arts practice into previously unexplored areas, that make huge demands on individuals.

Managing workload and personal impacts

It has also meant that there has been a tendency among individuals to take on more than they can comfortably manage. The support needed for staff working in areas of low cultural investment with disadvantaged populations can easily be underestimated, and there is always a temptation with conscientious and committed people to respond to manifest need by doing more, and working ever harder. Since creative capacity comes from a degree of autonomy and self-management this is an occupational hazard.

It is fair to say that by the end of the first year when a hiatus in delivery had been reached, there was also a feeling of great tiredness. Two of the team who were central to the delivery of the first phase were moving on, or considering doing so. A feeling of strain had been exacerbated in some instances (The Island of Mill Hill, for example, and to a lesser extent the communities who engaged with Harkat) by an over-estimation of community capacity and the dynamics of leadership in host communities, and an under-estimation of the level of input and support needed where cultural expectations were low, and infra-structure non-existent

The whole idea of the community commissions was for me, we had to manage them with a host. But what became apparent very quickly is that community hosts don't have the capacity, or the knowledge to provide support these commissions. We underestimated how much hard work it would be for the communities, the hosts, the artists and ourselves.
(Team member)

Although the team felt they had developed a strong protective culture among themselves, the general lesson to be learnt is that maintaining the conditions for arts practice in collaboration with communities is not only professionally demanding, it can also be emotionally exhausting, with a significant risk of burnout. The consequences can be severe. It is the role of programme staff not only to support individual artists working at the frontier of social arts practice, but also to hold open the third space within which a receptive audience, an engaged participation or a responsive co-production can occur. They will struggle to do this if they feel over-loaded and insufficiently equipped to deal with demands from artists and publics.

The experience of idle women is particularly instructive. This project achieved excellent outcomes for the women who participated in it, and made a unique contribution to the programme (see case study). However its producers experienced some aggression and abuse on their arrival, and this in combination with the practical demands of using a boat as a base, left them feeling very vulnerable. They decided to pay for external supervision to help them deal better with the anxiety and emotional demands of working with women who themselves were vulnerable and in difficult life circumstances. They have found the psychological containment offered by the supervisor particularly helpful and are in no doubt that it has improved the quality of their work.

Recommendation

Some form of episodic external reflective supervision or mentoring would seem to be the most appropriate way of helping staff deal with escalating and often self-imposed workloads, and the attendant anxiety, it is also of course relevant to dealing with the unknown and the personal impacts of working with deprivation and disadvantage, in environments that sometimes appear unstable, fragmented, or even dangerous. Consideration could be given to the routine availability of supervision or mentoring for individual staff, preferably by an external provider. It is vital that this is thought of as an optional, unexceptional and developmental resource to enable them to manage the personal and professional pressures of the work, rather than a form of crisis management that calls into question their coping abilities. It might also be made available on request to artists.

Commissioning the 'right' artists.

At a personal level, holding open a third space as a programme, so that artists can hold in 'on the ground' demands a capacity for thirdness within oneself (the ability to hold the inherent tensions in the artist/community/programme relation). This capacity can become a casualty of excessive pressure whether imposed from without or within

A lot of artists underestimated how much hard work it was as well. The pressure it put on them emotionally, how do I work and help that person with complex needs? We need to bring partners in that can provide a wrap around service as well. Some of the stuff that has happened the way the programme is led, it is a risky process and you have to live and die by it.

(Team Member)

Some artists are better suited to this kind of practice than others, and in an ideal world suitability would be assessed at the commissioning stage. However, there are good reasons and increasing expectations that where a community is to 'host' an artist residency they should be involved in the commissioning process so that there is both a democratic mandate for the choice and community 'buy in' for the project for the start.

In practice however, communities are not homogenous and the putative leaders do not always speak for the diversity of interests within them, nor are they necessarily any more practised in judging how well an artist will 'fit' a community, than an experienced commissioner. In the case of Mill Hill selection was made with the help of individuals who subsequently had no further involvement and responsibility, and assumptions were made about the Community Centre's ability to support an artist that turned out to be unwarranted

The ones that have been less successful, for loads of reasons they start on shaky ground. You need a strong artist who can deal with that.... Again it is linking with community hosts who don't actually represent the community and there is a lot of persuasive talk out there and it is easy to be hooked into that and having to navigate that and make the best of a difficult situation...

(Team Member)

Recommendation

It is important to be in continuous dialogue with communities with whom an artist will work. However, community led commissioning has proven to be fraught with problems (in a number of programmes we have studied) unless there is a stable, experienced and informed commissioning group. Even where this exists the ultimate responsibility for process and outcome remains with the programme, and it remains essential therefore that professional judgement is exercised and followed up. An intermediary, whether individual or an organisation is nearly always helpful.

Supporting Artists

Socially engaged art with disadvantaged communities is an area of practice which is still developing and the repertoire of skills and capacities required is not well documented and understood. Through 'The Faculty' Super Slow Way, in conjunction with In Situ and two other CPP's, has begun to explore these issues, to conceptualise them more rigorously, and to begin the work of identifying what is required for whom, and in what circumstances. The first iteration of The Faculty has shown that this work is difficult and that some artists, when they understand what they are getting into will opt out; others will simply be temperamentally unsuited to it, or have conflicting priorities. Those who do wish to continue working in collaboration with communities, and have the skills and capacities, may well still need support structures that would not be necessary in the studio.

As an indication of the pressure some of the commissioned artists felt themselves to be under, the artists' visual matrix that we ran in June 2016 (separately documented in the next section) revealed high levels of distress among some (but by no means all) of the participants, and the feeling – particularly among those who had experienced abusive situations - that it was a struggle to manage in a hostile environment. A sense of being unsafe in a working environment undermines inner resourcefulness and makes it harder to

meet the challenges posed by working in communities who have limited cultural resources themselves. Since resourcefulness is a basic condition of socially engaged practice this impacts negatively on process and outcome. For the artists who had particularly suffered in this way – even if only episodically - the opportunity to voice their feelings in the visual matrix was cathartic, while perceived attempts to deflect negativity by over-writing their experiences with ‘positives’ undermined the opportunity to be heard and witnessed.

It is pointless to demand of the artist that they exercise the skills of a social worker or mental health worker, yet they may well be operating in territories of what Bordieu has called ‘social suffering’* where these skills are needed yet in short supply (for instance with respect to safeguarding, discrimination, aggression). Even when they are professionally available, the severity and scale of disadvantage may require inter-professional team approaches to specific problems and sometimes partnerships with statutory services.

Below we highlight and comment on four models of support adopted in the first year of the programme

Models of artist support

1. There is great intuitive appeal in a model of artist support that Super Slow Way started with, where on the one hand a community hosts an artist, taking care of the local relationships and providing context, location, some resources and good will for their work; while on the other hand, the programme provides practical and professional support (acting to a greater or lesser degree as ‘producer’). In the case of The Egg this model worked well, partly because Stephen Turner came with his own egg-shaped ‘infra-structure’ leaving him free to concentrate intensively on process and community engagement as he refined his ‘performance’ as the care-taker of the site. He was thus able to draw on what the community centre had to offer without becoming overly dependent on it. This was critical to holding open the third space in Finsley Gate Wharf over a number of months and attracting people to it with different and sometimes competing interests.

In addition, Turner insisted on a six-month residency which allowed him to develop relations with the community at his and their own pace, in tune with the philosophy of ‘slow art’, of which the work he did on site is a prime example. The aesthetic of engagement in this case matched the aesthetic of delivery with similar nuance and attentiveness to how life is lived in Burnley Wood on the canal bank, under stones, in the dank vegetation, and in the streets, front yards and sites of sociability.

2. In the case of Mill Hill the community centre was unable to support an artist whose focus on a particular artistic outcome consumed a great deal of energy. In his view this was essential to the success of his project, whereas Super Slow Way saw it as misdirected effort which would have been better spent on engaging other sections of the community.

Whichever view had prevailed, it is important to emphasise that the artist would still most likely have had to contend with reactions which ranged from the uncomprehending to the abusive (in this case, homophobic). In this very challenging environment where the community had no previous experience of

art – artistic activity was seen among the adults as a diversion for the often unruly neighbourhood youth. Although some individuals were receptive, others were hostile. Without the mediation of a community institution of some kind, and struggling to realise his original concept, the artist felt very exposed. In fact, as it turned out the ‘centre’ that could have supported an artist may well have been the local pub which functioned as community hub. However, in the short time available (eight weeks) rapid adaptation would have been required to build a substitute there for community centre support. It seems clear that unless the host conditions are well-known and predictable, eight weeks is a very short time-scale, given the challenge, and that a focus on building relationships is key.

3. The third case, that of Alwyn Reamillo’s Harkat, illustrates a different model whereby the artist relies neither primarily on the community, nor on the programme for as the main source of support, but instead is hosted by a local arts organisation. The obvious advantages here are that the organisation has local knowledge, and is directly invested in the success of the project through which they build their own presence and capacity. The relationship offers a degree of fine-grained attention that the programme itself would struggle to achieve. To some extent this arrangement can offset the short time-scale for the project because the artist is can rely on the organisation’s established presence in the area. It is likely in this case that the artist’s loyalty will be with the intermediary organisation (i.e Action Factory in the case of Harkat, rather than the programme) but this is not necessarily a problem.
4. For a larger scale, more ambitious and longer-term project such as Shapes of Water, Sounds of Hope a combination of programme support and a local organisation is highly desirable. This signature commission simply could not have been delivered without the networks and local credibility that In Situ had developed over a number of years. In particular, it relied heavily on the efforts of Paul Hartley who effectively worked with Los Angeles based artist, Suzanne Lacey in a producer role throughout, managing community relationships and resources and ‘minding’ and ‘building’ this critical aspect of the project between the artist’s visits. At the same time communications and intensive office support were provided by Super Slow Way. Even so, the project demanded a scale of effort that left other members of In Situ feeling depleted as they struggled to advance other work and this created tensions within the organisation. In terms of profile, scale, community impact and inter-cultural practice, Sounds of Water Shapes of Hope achieved a great deal, putting In Situ in a position to build on the processes set in motion by this work that could achieve sustainable change. However, over the course of the months during which the project was built, it exacted a price and sometimes threatened to exceed organizational capacity.

Implication: planning for the long-term

We have argued elsewhere, and shall explore more fully throughout the forthcoming year, the fact that programmes like Super Slow Way need not only to embed themselves in the communities they serve, but to plan for the long term. Local knowledge, reputation and relationships are everything and the pressures on staff, artists, stakeholders and communities are likely to be most intense in the startup phase. A year is a short time for a

programme like this to establish itself in an area where there is no arts infra-structure, while also managing a concentrated period of delivery. An immense amount of learning from experience, working to build presence, and personal energy and commitment would be wasted if the programme were not to extend beyond a two or three year period. This has also been the experience of other Creative People and Places Programmes such as Heart of Glass in St Helens.

Furthermore, there is work to be done to identify the forms of ethical governance, training and cross-professional understanding that will enable artists to work safely and creatively within the parameters of their role, alongside other voluntary and statutory initiatives that address social problems. Super Slow Way, with the help of with initiatives such as The Faculty has the potential to be an engine of research in its own right to clarify 'the state of the art' and further develop knowledge and practice in this area. For that reason, amongst others, it deserves on-going support and investment.

One of the keys to building a sustainable infra-structure beyond the life of the programme will be relations with and capacity-building with the local arts organisations who will play vital role in carrying forward the Super Slow Way legacy. The relationship between the programme and these organisations has inherent tensions. For example In Situ, Action Factory and Mid-Pennine Arts would all have preferred Super Slow Way to act straightforwardly as a funder, and attempts to 'shape' their involvement in accordance with the character and strategic aims of the programme have at times been experienced as demeaning. These tensions have, by and large, been navigated with successful project delivery. In recognition of this and their indispensable role in the local arts ecology, it is to be hoped that the partnership will be consolidated with more ambitious roles for the small arts organisations in the future.