

Movement, Body and Identity

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Introduction:

Over this final unit of the course in particular, and of the course as a whole, I have been engaged with trying to answer a question I set myself: that is to establish if there was a possible link between our non body movements and our identities; and if so, how best to begin to establish that within a theoretical and contextual based practice.

Through keeping the weekly web log, undertaking action research, and taking part in the symposium I feel I have managed to begin to clarify some key points integral to developing my project proposal outline.

Moving forward from the research paper findings, I began unit 2 by filming sequences of myself walking barefoot through snow each day for 2 weeks in January. These videos were based on passages in Viktor E. Frankl's book 'Man's Search For Meaning' which relates the plight of Jews held in concentration camps during the Second World War and the dependency on footwear and the state of a prisoners feet being key to their chances of survival.

Making these videos clarified for me the importance that walking carries in our society.

I then continued to make several more short videos: Walking on Eggshells, Meat, Walk the Line, Cobbles, Rope, and Slip, in an attempt to explore the issues of the human body's place in society further, whilst continuing to tie in the facts that I established through previous research i.e. that our cognitive understandings and identities are directly informed and instructed in part by our physical experiences.

Key developments:

Although here have been a great many developments through out the course key developments in Unit 2 have come about from:

1. Seeing Alistair MacLennan's actuation at Newcastle in November 2009, which had a profound effect on my both my understanding of my project aims in terms of the role, significance and use of the human body in my work.

2. Use of the gallery/workshop space at Empty Shop, Durham:
In practical terms filming at Empty Shop gave me a non-domestic professional environment to shoot video in and also provided a level of face to face peer feedback and interaction with the artist studio holders there which was helpful in pushing the project further and making it less insular; I found that face to face interaction sped up development of ideas and the diversity of my understandings. I will continue to keep my links with Empty Shop in the future and hope to be able to develop further face to face projects after the summer.

3. Walk the Line, a broadcast actuation at Empty Shop on 13th June 2010. This project was extremely valuable as it allowed me to show case and document my work in a gallery space.

It also provided important insight into the emerging aspect of endurance involved in my pieces which is an aspect that is becoming increasingly fundamental to my understandings of the lived body. A reference to endurance in relation to the human body which is also present in work by Alistair MacLennan, Marina Abramovic and Gillian Wearing.

4. The ongoing issues with poor broadband connectivity from the gallery space when broadcasting from Empty Shop gallery/workspace, seemed at first to mean that the live cast wouldn't be able to take place. However it became obvious when moving to a space in the building with better connectivity, that this was a fortunate occurrence as it forced the piece to take on a new aspect and made me question my chosen methodology of staging work and whether or not the quality of an actuation taking place in a less staged manner was important. It brought home again that having engaged with the required research element within this MA has been the key to the

development of a less subjective, more objective practice; one that aims to be grounded in research and empirical evidence.

5. A similar set of issues arose to do with Adobe Premiere Elements software and sound file types codec's which resulted in poor sound quality video clips which I couldn't resolve, lead to my use of Microsoft Movie Maker when producing videos. Because it is a much simpler application it meant that my videos became more stripped back. This had a positive impact on the work as it meant that it stopped me concentrating on the look of the video and attempting to be descriptive in a video and focused me more on the event that was taking place in the piece I was creating.

6. Earlier this year we were asked to consider the role of digital media in our practice. I had initially tried to use several digital software programmes, i.e.: Isadora, Dance Forms and Korsakow.

All three of these I used as a form of action research. I was expecting a linear outcome and my aim was to find a specific digital software programme which would deliver my vision to do with issues surrounding the lived body. It was only as I began to reject these programmes for being somehow incompatible with what I was trying to achieve that I began to understand they were in fact becoming method for exploring and clarifying my understandings. The programmes did not deliver what I was looking for not because they weren't great, but because they did not dovetail with my personal instincts to do with the lived body and how I needed to pursue the development of my project proposal.

Through engaging with this question, I began to realize that it is through interacting with digital media that has allowed me to review the lived body in our society in new ways and gain a fresh perspective and therefore gain a new set of understandings for the lived body, something I was so familiar with and its place in our culture that it was invisible to me in many ways.

7. The symposium presented the opportunity to focus on drawing the threads of the project together. It also provided a platform on which to refine and clarify my ideas, findings and conclusions together. And in

turn, a direct challenge to my nervousness about having to present my theory and findings in a formal group setting.

It was one of the first points of interaction as on line students that we had with the face to face students. This opened up the peer group and it had significant impact in terms of producing an environment to view my project which I had been often insular and shy about trying to explain in a wider group setting.

The symposium was turning point. I gained a lot of confidence that I seemed at last to have been able to put forward a presentation that gave a clear outline of my project, goals and methodologies in a way which was accessible and understandable to others who were possibly not so familiar with my project proposal.

It was also important that it gave the opportunity to see the developed projects of my peers and take part in discussions of their practice and ideologies.

Transferable Skills:

Over the period of the course I have acquired a range of transferable skills, not least in the area of communications.

As the course heads towards the degree show I think I have at last begun to feel able to contribute more fully in the online chat sessions and be an active class member in helping discuss and plan for the show.

My increased confidence in my communication skills will be a very positive addition to take forward from the course.

I have acquired range of IT skills to take forward in to future projects:

Desktop Publishing through creating mail Art One zine

Expanding skills base in MS Office Systems

Creation of PDFs

Video editing using a variety of custom applications

Time and project management

Has the project work presented opportunities for future development?

The project has presented several opportunities for future development:

Earlier this year I met with Alice Thwaite of the Equal Arts project, Gateshead with the aim of discussing the possibility of offering work shops for older people, we also discussed the possibility of my observing workshops that are taking place, which will allow me to develop the understandings and skills necessary for leading workshops as well as helping me understand the challenges faced by those with less mobility and the link with loss of self-worth and feelings of self-identity.

I plan to continue with the quarterly edition of Mail Art One zine which has allowed me to collaborate with many artists from around the world. Printing, curating their work, and presenting it to galleries for distribution has been helpful in overcoming my shyness and corner stone to building a practice which is known and trusted by both the artists and distributing galleries involved.

Coming from a nine year period away from any art based practice, Mail Art One zine has been a useful means by which to create a platform to introduce myself, providing an established on going project which showcases some of my abilities, such as communication skills (which are key to liaising with artists and galleries), organization, production, the ability to meet deadlines and

budgeting. It has offered access to other projects which I have been invited to undertake such as:

Mail Art exhibition at the Long Gallery, Tron Theatre Glasgow
January 2010

Glasgow International Artists Book Fair April 2010

Censored Zine as part of Act Art's Censored event night at the Islington Metal Works, London July 9th 2010. This zine will be shown as part of my final show as it deals primarily with issues to do with the body in society and taboos surrounding the lived body.

I will be both distributing the zine as well as photographing and videoing the event night in order to continue further exploring the issues surrounding the lived body for future projects.

The responsibility of producing the catalogue for the Digital Arts MA show.

How will the practice you have developed be continued:

Following on from the backbone of research I have done through out this MA, and undertaking some practical engagement by leading workshops for older people through Equal Arts, Gateshead I aim to research, over next six months into the feasibility of undertaking a PhD in order to continue to pursue and develop the research I have begun into the link with our physical movements, our lived bodies and the building and maintaining of our identities. (Specifically looking to undertake an MPhil/PDhD through either the Slade School of Fine Art, London, or through Newcastle University.)

In order to question myself robustly over the reason why I feel applying for a PhD is the way forward following from the MA, and in order to asses the feasibility of undertaking self directed study at PhD level, I have decided to take a six month period of self assessment based on establishing the requirements for a PhD application.

In order to put forward a convincing PhD application to submit in January 2011 I will over the following six months:

1. Attend open lectures at Newcastle Universities Culture lab over the next few months with a view build a realistic platform for applying for a research place in 2011-12.
2. Continue to further my independent reading in areas already established and create a reading list for submission along side an application.
3. Keep an ongoing weblog outlining development of idea, practice and critical contexts.
4. Undertake a short course in digital video documentary film making as I have found that what feels most appropriate for my work is recording of events, in documentary style rather than a more creative form.
5. Following on from involvement with Equal Arts, Gateshead I will continue to build projects with in the local Durham community, and aim to be involved in art events at a wider national level.
6. Research further into the exact area of PhD proposal following on from the research I have established through the course of this MA i.e.: that our non body language movements are fundamental to the construction of our understandings and identities and to question further a possible type of Diasporas occurring as we become less active either due to age or our increasing technological reliance.

Conclusion:

My initial reason for taking the course was to see if it was possible to re connect with my practice which I had had little time to engage with for the previous nine years.

One aspect that really helped to bring about a new engagement through this MA was, for me, the fact that the course was conducted on line and in being thrust into an unfamiliar learning environment, alongside peers of very different backgrounds from around the world and professional practice bases, created an environment for study which was both supportive and challenging.

The discipline of keeping a weekly weblog was also a new tool and one that has been indispensable. It has been the first opportunity for me to record and present, across the board of discipline, journeys and progress in my undertakings and understandings. It has been a useful tool through which to learn to be methodical, and through using tag clouds and categories I have been able to look back over work and see areas of study not solely as a linear encounter, but as a methodology by which to gain fresh perspectives on the project.

Engaging with this MA study has proved to be an increasingly positive undertaking. It has pushed me further than I thought possible, providing more possibilities for practice than I would have believed prior to taking the course. In many ways this has been the major thing that I will take from this period of study: the challenge to and subsequent change of perception in my ideas about what is achievable, both in my practice as an artist and academically.

There is much that I will take forward from this learning experience which I currently do not have the distance to yet evaluate adequately and I am sure that the impact of many of the threads of research and group learning will become more visible with distance.

I am looking forward with a sense of excitement and positivity to exploring the fresh realization that the human body does not purely solely exist either as an unpredictable and fragile biological and entity, or as a site of social inscription; but that it surmounts these boundaries with an ability for endurance which makes us profoundly human.

