

Re: "Sense in Place" Site-ations International, Europe 2005/06

Abstract: Can or should artists attempt to create verifiable change?

The context of my work is the post industrial public realm. I am particularly interested in the increasingly rapid evolution of ideas that form our understanding of the relationship between nature and culture. I am also interested in the concept of transformative knowledge, critical ideas that have the potential to shape public debate. The question is what is known and what is not known? What information is missing in the oppositional discourse between vested interest and subordinate activists? How can artists and activists shift (help shift?) the public debate? Does entry into this debate demand new levels of creative responsibility and consistency of intent and action? Is it possible to still make art when working under such a brief?

In this paper I will outline ideas of shared and distributed freedoms, creative dialogue and a welcome forecast of the collapse of the subject-object approach to aesthetics. I will reference work with interdisciplinary project teams in Pittsburgh Pennsylvania and examples from some of my colleagues in the areas of art, ecology and social practice to explicate the application of what I consider to be relevant theory and critical analysis.

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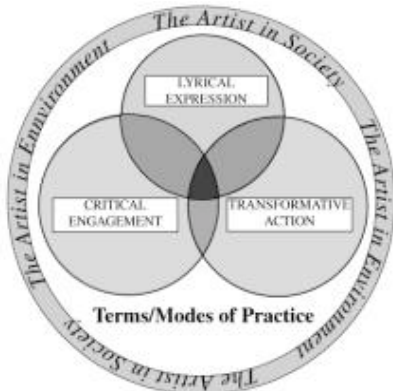
## **Can or should artists attempt to create verifiable change?**

(Excerpted from: “Art Ecology and Planning, Strategic Concepts and Creativity within the Post Industrial Public Realm” A PhD dissertation, by Tim Collins, University of Plymouth, 2006)

The physical context of my work has been the post industrial public realm. I am particularly interested in the increasingly rapid evolution of ideas that form our understanding of the relationship between nature and culture. I am also interested in the concept of transformative knowledge, critical ideas that have the potential to shape public debate. The question is what is known and what is not known? What information is missing in the oppositional discourse between vested interest and subordinate activists? How can artists and activists shift (help shift?) the public debate? Does entry into this debate demand new levels of creative responsibility and consistency of intent and action? Is it possible to still make art when working under such a brief?

Let me begin by suggesting a few guidelines:

1. Transformative approaches to art demand an ethical and responsible outcome. This is in conflict with much critical theory that demands that art remain at a distance from rationality and instrumental intent.
2. Following the statement above, the intent to emancipate, or liberate demands careful analysis of the means by which one might contribute to the delivery (or self-emancipatory agency) of another from controlling power or influence.
3. The changing inter-subjective (Kester 2004 and Bourriaud 2002) and immersive relationships (Berleant, 1992) in aesthetics raise essential questions about the function of art, as well as the relationship between nature and culture. These new positions challenge the authorizing limitations of traditional aesthetics.
4. Following the work of artists such as the Harrisons, Wochenklausur, Platform and others, I would argue that artists can contribute to effective, social and environmental agency. Work in this area demands an interest in post-authorship practice and an ability to work at a scale that is beyond typical artists training. The work is also difficult to validate as art.



I would argue that artists use lyrical, critical and transformative approaches to make art in a social setting; when these three approaches are envisioned within a Venn diagram, the overlap and inter-relationship becomes clear. There isn't one dominant value, there are three methods that more often than not overlap in practice. In addition most artists find themselves working in multiple areas throughout their creative lives.<sup>1</sup> Some, stay focused in one area alone. The work that I will

discuss here is deeply embedded in the intent to develop and test transformative methodologies for art practice. Working within an academic research setting, with primary funding from environmental and arts based sources, it was expected that new knowledge would be produced, and then coupled with strategic and effective outcome. In the project described we have simply taken art and juxtaposed it against ecology and public space with the intent to manifest change. I believe that there is much value in interdisciplinary approaches to art, in the interstitial spaces between the disciplines we find new knowledge and often the resource to move the work forward.

Transformative practices, art work that seeks to create social and environmental change are notoriously difficult to review from a critical perspective. Based on thirty years or more of relevant histories, it is not new but its lack of material product, and focus on process can demand extended attention from anyone that wants to fully understand the work. And, ultimately there is that suspicion that it may not be art all. Most that engage the work initially are somewhat overwhelmed with the problem of what to focus upon and which history to choose to test its mettle.

From 1996-2006 I was a research fellow<sup>2</sup> in the STUDIO for Creative Inquiry at Carnegie Mellon University, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA. During that time I was co-director of the Nine Mile Run Project and Director of the 3 Rivers 2<sup>nd</sup> Nature project. The intent of our project teams were to explore the artist's role in the changing ideas that define the post-industrial public realm and its environmental context. The projects were organized around ideas of public space its form, function and its definition. The means of definition are based in a critical and creative democratic discourse on the part of Nine Mile Run, and in tools for critical and creative democratic discourse on 3 Rivers 2nd Nature. In the former, we were able to conduct a deep dialogue over three years. In the latter, the project team was able to sustain a series of shallow dialogues over five years, while covering a larger spatial remit. Where Nine Mile Run focused upon the land along 2 miles of stream valley within a six square mile watershed, the 3 Rivers 2nd Nature project, focused upon 200 miles of riverfront in a County that is 745 square miles. The community at Nine Mile Run was primarily residing adjacent to a twenty story slag pile that was juxtaposed against a 400 acre park through which a stream 'Nine Mile Run' ran. Our work was specifically focused upon the redevelopment of that slag pile and the adjacent restoration of over 100 acres of park land, which would extend Frick Park to the mouth of 'Nine Mile Run' where it met the Monongahela River.

In this brief article, I will use the work at Nine Mile Run (1996-2000) as the setting for a discussion of the changing ideas of nature and culture and the complications of responsibility and ethical action when engaging the public in a discourse about the form and function of the post industrial public realm. The applied (art-based) research developed in Pennsylvania was planned to be transformative. We were not interested in symbolic contestation or radical, critical

pronouncement; we were interested in contributing new ideas to the region, and clarifying new ideas within the discipline. Working within the region we developed strategic knowledge that would initiate and enable individual and collective agency, which I would argue is a path to creative change. In light of this the place based work, contributes to a site specific body of knowledge. Working within the discipline we helped build new creative capability in the region, and through exhibition, publication and conference presentation we contribute to the international discourse that concerns transformative art practice.

### Insights from Nine Mile Run

As Nine Mile Run wrapped up, we had two points of absolute clarity. The project was defined by consistent and evolving platforms for discourse. We sought and received funding throughout the three years of the program to assure that we could develop, manage and follow through on the consensual discussions we had initiated. The other point is the means of leveraging change – what we came to call ‘strategic knowledge.’ As we got to know more about Nine Mile Run, we began to see the scope and intent of the knowledge base that was informing decision making. If you don’t want to clean up a stream, you assume it is filthy, dead and beyond repair. Strategic knowledge requires quantitative data, but its application is holistic and aesthetic. We used strategic knowledge in relationship to our community dialogues to enable consensus and advocacy, for systems ignored by the predominant development discourse.

The theories that support transformative practice are related to ideas about freedom and inter-sociality; the development of critical awareness, distributed creativity and social agency. The essential framework emerges from the ideas of rational discourse and consensus that are rooted in the ideas of Jurgen Habermas; and ideas of power, conflict and its analysis that emerge in the work of Foucault. During a break in the Site-ations conference, Edward Soja, insisted upon the inclusion of Henri Lefebvre, and his contribution to ideas of the everyday, modern spatiality and the alienating effects of capital as well. There is also the essential tension between conviviality and conflict in the public realm. Conviviality drives the desire that makes public space worth fighting for once it is lost to dominant interests. In the arts.

I would argue that these theories that address the form and function of the public realm are catalyzed by new ideas in philosophical aesthetics. From the discourse about subjectivity which is found in the ideas of dialogic aesthetics found in the work of Grant Kester (2004), to the Inter-relational aesthetic in the work of Nicholas Bourriaud (2002), and the subsequent critical engagement of that work in a series of articles by Clair Bishop (2004, 2006). There is another discourse that I think is essential to this topic, new ideas in environmental aesthetics based reactions to a ongoing discourse between Alan Carlson (2000) and Arnold Berleant (1992) where the fundamental subject object relationship is being debated. Berleant’s idea that we are immersed in our environment I think is

particularly useful and important shift away from the ideas that reinforce the separation of art, cities, nature and humanity

My hypothesis (following Meadows, 1997) is that dominant policies and programs can be transformed through changes to the information (strategic knowledge) that informs decisions and close attention to the rules that govern behaviour within the institution in question. In rare cases specific innovation can be encouraged by nurturing diversity in the organization of the entity you wish to effect. The Nine Mile Run project embraced all three elements of the hypothesis. The challenge as you will see in the paragraphs that follow is to retain focus and not let unexpected issues undermine the intent of the work. The question of authorship is framed by the social and political realities of being an artist as well as the moral and ethical issues of discourse, voice and representation. The question of proof of effect or impact is one of ongoing residency, tenacity or persistence of interest after the fact. The intention of the work at Nine Mile Run was to explore the potential for an issues-based public discussion that would produce a motivated and informed constituency prepared to participate in public decision-making about open space opportunities. The work wasn't just focused upon open space, from the beginning the intention was to examine the site for the potential to reclaim and restore ecological value. From the beginning our interest was clearly based in a need to understand 'nature' in the context of this post-industrial landscape. Nature became the focus of a three year program of tactical scientific and artistic inquiry linked to public dialogue. The public dialogue included opportunities to define and focus the research in year one; opportunities to review and comment on its process/progress in year two; and decide about the form and function of the greenway in year three based upon the presentation of multiple options. In the years after the project ended, members of our advisory board and communities of interest have developed and supported a non-profit institution, 'The Nine Mile Run Watershed Association' which continues the work today <<http://www.ninemilerun.org>>.

From the perspective of freedoms we were not facilitating an open interest discussion, we did not come with the intent to 'simply listen'. Our intent was to inform and enable a critical discourse about nature and public space. We sought funding to do that, our proposed process was sufficiently open to allow those attending our 'community dialogues' to shape the content, comment upon the method and inform and decide upon final design. Yet, because our program was circumscribed there was some conflict with members of the community that wanted more out of us, than we were able to provide. In a letter, included in the 'Nine Mile Run Watershed Rivers Conservation Plan', a member of the community asks the team for a critical and public response to the development plan and action on the slag-toxicity question. (Collins, Dzombak et al, 1998, p. 355-356 ) With our goal of transforming public space, any critical or oppositional approach to dominant forces (with whom we had to collaborate) needed careful attention. We also had to attend to our goals, the real limits of our abilities as artists, and the demands that were being made.

The challenge was finding the comfort zone between critical engagement and the desire for transformation. Too much of either and the success of the project falters either through conflict or complicity. The window of opportunity is very small the focus needed for success is quite difficult to get right. We believed that the questions with the potential for the widest impact were based in the design of public space and a new understanding of its relationship to post-industrial nature. Rightly or wrongly we felt that a public critique of the development plan took us away from our intended goal of public space advocacy. We wanted to coalesce a community with proactive long-term interest in nature and public space. Critical engagement with a development project is by its nature a short term exercise with limited potential for rewarding returns. A public insurgency while romantic and exciting, has limited strategic potential when up against an economic and political machine that has a stable of paid advocates that work over the long term to assure the success of a project.

We did address specific questions related to the development and its direct impact upon the public space. In bi-weekly meetings with Pittsburgh City Planning we would address issues of storm water plans and sewage lines, roadways and planting schemes. We did not however take any kind of stand on the design or intent of the development – it wasn't in our primary interest and we felt our affect upon it would be minimal. The issue of toxicity<sup>3</sup> is more complicated. It is highly emotional, a 'hot button' issue that is scientifically and medically challenging. After a review of the issue we knew a plethora of state and federal support was available for members of the public, pursuing these questions further we discovered the costs for medical/health/toxicology expertise in this matter were prohibitive. As a result we decided against getting involved in this discussion, as we felt we had little to offer.

Gablik has described the limitations (the entropy) of what I might describe as institutionalization of rebellious freedoms in the artworld that has resulted in obsession with originality and newness. She makes it clear that we need to rethink what freedom means at this point in time – suggesting a structure of moral/social constraint as a necessary component. Mierle Laderman Ukeles is referenced for her suggestion that one way to resolve this dilemma is to make freedom a condition for all, not just artists. This statement is an ethical truism, the scope of 'freedom for all' is a moral ideal to guide us away from our artistic obsession with our own expression. The Nine Mile Run project set to promote freedom to be heard and to make creative change within a specific area of development discourse. We were interested in philosophical and ecological ideas, and a recent history of transformative art practices as a means of creating change. The decision of what to do and how to do it was a carefully evolved strategy developed in responsible relationship to our funders, our partners and those we engaged through the 'community dialogues.' At Nine Mile Run, we were paid by foundations that invested in our vision, which required focus and outcomes. We were responsible to both our partners and members of the local

community that had invested time and personal interest in the 'community dialogues.' I would argue that post authorship practice demands responsibility for outcomes beyond creative process. To ignore the responsibility to those that invest money, personal time and political interest in radical social forms of creative practice is to miss the true nature of the dialogue, and ultimately the essential point of the work, a satisfactory outcome.

By late summer in the second year (1998) there was tension between the team's desire to express themselves and the responsibility to develop a rational design. The art of Nine Mile Run was feeling lost to the science and planning. Members of the team started to want more time for their own work, for some solitary inquiry and expression. At the same time the pressure to succeed and the workload at Nine Mile Run was increasing. Intellectually we were deeply invested in the ideas that informed the work from its outset; creating experiences instead of products, concepts instead of things and relationships instead of audiences. But what we were actually doing were concept designs, illustrated ideas that provide a practical overview of the project and its direction. A key question, which I will take up in a moment is, can you represent a plan in a singular image? We had a number of discussions about individual inquiry, authorship, expression, project representation and recognition. In the midst of this creative struggle we were preparing for the year ahead. The need to mount an exhibition, clarify the design options for a final community consensus discussion, and then oversee a challenging economic and institutional plan in relationship to the finalized concept designs.

The question of a definitive object or image that defines the work is what Newton Harrison refers to as 'prima facie evidence' of the creative act (Harrison, 2006).<sup>4</sup> However the nature of this work (NMR) is that it occurred at a planning scale, it was fundamentally about dialogue and interdisciplinary ideas about ecological systems. Newton's idea is simple, if the work is going to gain the attention of the artworld it demands an image or an object that either validates the ideas behind the work or makes those ideas self-evident.<sup>5</sup> I want to, ignore the artworld for the moment and examine the idea of the prima facie image. The Nine Mile Run team had developed a series of images that spoke to the history and the philosophy of our work, (See following spread) but in the end the 'design', the story of the artist's transformative outcome was never developed at a level of prima facie evidence. Instead we relied on a series of well designed planning boards, and images that defined aspects of the various levels of research that went into the development of the plans. This is a difficult issue, while we were all invested in alternative practices, methods and contexts in which to think and make work – at the end of the day the majority of us on the core team were all trained and employed as artists/academics. Socially and politically our careers are built upon creative output and response from art-based critics and institutions. Even if one were to be theoretically correct, and engaged in exemplary practice, being intellectually and/or creatively ignored is not a good place to be. The work must be validated. The question is given a profound artworld disinterest in this kind of

work, where might appropriate validation come from and what are the standards of evaluation?

Suzanne Lacy asks three questions regarding the standards of evaluation. What is the quality of the imagery in terms of beauty and invention? What were the artist's intention and the affect of the work? And, what is the method and means to convey meaning? (Lacy, 1995, pp. 176-184). I would argue that a critical viewer will have no problem finding answers to the second and third questions through the various publications and websites that are still available on Nine Mile Run. That is not to say that the project does not have dozens and dozens of images that illustrate that dual sense of beauty and invention, but in the end there is no singular image that defines the final collective design ethos of the project. Again the images focus on the site as it is, not in the discourse of what it was 'becoming' and there in lies the challenge. How might one represent a social and ecological transformation? Another colleague upon hearing a recent lecture to a group of Masters Degree students at the University of Wolverhampton, U.K., on public space, aesthetics and transformative practices recently commented: "The creative and transformative focus is absolutely clear, the method of the work is explicit, why muddle that up with questions of formal aesthetics?" (Bainbridge, 2006) The difference between Lacy's perspective and my current colleague's perspective is significant, from his point of view I assume he thinks its time to get on with it, to stop worrying about the links to art and make the work. Maybe we are planners in this case and not artists at all. But then again, we could also likely find ourselves amongst the humanists engaged in the discourse of public space, urban space or restoration ecology. Intuitively I believe we must simply stay mobile, moving from discourse to discourse because the answers are no longer reductive nor are they contained by one area of knowledge. On another level, I can't help but wonder if we aren't constraining art practice with this fixation upon images. Or maybe it is my misreading of these ideas... as images?

Prior to Lacy's publication and long before my recent conversations with Newton Harrison, Suzy Gablik has stated, "Interaction is the key to move art beyond the aesthetic mode: letting the audience intersect with, and even form part of the process, recognizing that when observer and observed merge, the vision of static autonomy is undermined." (Gablik, 1991, 151) I have always found that quote to be provocative. Gablik predates Arnold Berleant's (1992) idea of subject object collapse. As well as the work of Grant Kester (2004) and Nicholas Bourriaud (2002). Gablik suggests that we put aesthetics to the side, and move towards a focus upon creative change. I would argue that Kester and Bourriaud labor to develop an alternative aesthetic, in Kester's case based on discourse theory and in Bourriaud's case based on psychological theory. Kester provides us with an intellectual framework relevant to transformative practices, he provides guidance, but he doesn't help us resolve what we might call the 'art-gap' between Lacy's standard of beauty and invention and the depth and breadth of discursive practices. What he offers is a new aesthetic principle that refocuses our attention



away from physical product, to focus upon the process of dialogical exchange. Kester's critical method can be broken down into three points of critical analysis; the context which includes the speech acts and process of the dialogue, the quality of the intersubjective exchange and indications of empathic insight. Bourriaud provides eloquent insight into the politics and process of contemporary subjectivity as mediated through art but ultimately provides us with less critical structure than Kester. The artist group Wochenklausur suggests that there is no such thing as this 'art-gap' the product or process of the artists labor is never a priori art or not art. "It becomes art through its recognition, and that comes about within institutional mechanisms. Every art remains a fully harmless raw material until these mechanisms take this raw material and circulate an opinion about it" (WochenKlausur, [www](#), FAQ).

If we examine the Nine Mile Run project from within Kester's principles, we find a structured program which was designed from the outset to enable rational and creative democratic discourse about change. Defining the quality of the intersubjective exchange, or the level of empathic insight however are tall orders. The project was more obsessive than most in documenting the discourse that led to the process defined the practical research questions and the scope and intent of the design. In the end, a complex transformative project relies upon discourse, but also systems of democratic representation. If the program is going to evolve over time, it demands attention to the potentialities as well as the limitations and responsibilities of sustained discourse with citizens. On the Nine Mile Run project that meant a combination of open community dialogues which were then reinforced by a consistent and regular series of advisory board meetings where citizen leaders, city planners and non-profit group directors all sat and reviewed the work and its future plans. We also provided open access three or four days a week through the onsite trailer. Written notes, audio and/or video were taken at most of these meetings. The intent of the project from the beginning was to recognize citizen voice, along with expert voice in the initial planning and overall design. The project made a rational attempt to follow discourse ethics, but in the end the Habermasian ideal does not fully embrace the process and effect of interest politics. Some of the most capable participants, were also the least likely to consider issues beyond their own, or were simply disinterested in compromise. Compromise was perceived as an indication that their specific advocacy had failed. Success was determined on their issue alone, another element of the speech act that Kester refers to can be defined in relationship to power. Part of the process of learning that the project team went through was how to facilitate discussions so that every voice was heard. In the end these are moral and ethical ideals, good practices that don't take into account the dynamic passion and complication of actual discourse. The actual strength of discursive decision making lies in the collective commitment to the setting itself. At the same time, the intent of that discourse, and its setting must be clear from the beginning.

I am not sure we were especially empathetic in our program, although if you extend that empathy to the recovering natural ecosystem you could draw that conclusion with ease. Much of the work was intended to resolve the bias against recovering urban nature, using quantitative science as the means of validating that claim. If empathy can be construed as a consistent commitment to listen, we did return time and time again to talk with anyone that asked for our attention. Using Kester's critical framework, it is clear that there are issues with its application at least in terms of the Nine Mile Run Project; at the same time its application provides a methodological framework that lets me examine the work for new insight. Ideas that would not have been discussed otherwise if the critical analysis, were more traditional. This is the point of his treatise, at least as I understand it. The aesthetic critical dialogue is not a historic megalith that we have to defend, it is a living dynamic organism that we co-create through practice and theory.

Returning to Lacy, on closer examination her body of work does not easily parse into her own critical framework from 1995. Again, I see her ideas as a framework that provides insight, rather than immobile critical principles. Her projects from the 1980's "Whisper, The Waves the Wind" and "The Crystal Quilt" best reflect the position (described by Kester) as a setting for dialogic interaction. In these works her attention to the quality/beauty of the imagery and the inventive inter-relationship between the dialogue and the site for dialogue is quite clear. In the work from the 1990's and after 2000 remnants of this aesthetic show up in the staging of works like 'Code 33' but the bulk of the work is actually more dialogic and oriented upon process and outcome than imagery. [Lacy, 2006, www] This is also true of Newton Harrison's standard of *prima facie* visual evidence. In a conversation recently, to review the work with Helen, he agrees that "Future Garden Part 1: The Endangered Meadows of Europe (1996-1998)" stands up well to his own standard. The verticality of the bright blue spires of the architect Gustav Peichl's design sets up an important iconographic tension between the built environment and the Harrison's brilliant (horizontal) rooftop exposition on ecological aesthetics and biodiversity. Other work in the mid 1990's such as 'Vision for the Green Heart of Holland' has some of the same visual cues *vis a vis* the architectonic context of 'Future Garden.' Older projects like the 'Lagoon Cycle' (1974-1984) have iconic images describing elements of the process. There is nothing in that series that represents the overall intent of the work. Newton and Helen both claim that the recent work in 'Santa Fe Watershed: Lessons in Genius of Place' has a palpable *prima facie* element which can be seen in the complex social inter-relationships, that emerged amongst the network of activists that continue the work in Santa Fe. Talking this through with them, I suggested to Newton and Helen that this might be best described as *prima sententiae*, latent first feeling or emerging opinion that underlie changes to perception and the emergence of new general truths. Sometimes transformative practice can tap a whole range of unconscious ideas and feelings about landscape, a community, a place this is the collective root of renewal and new growth.

I submit that the vast majority of projects like these simply don't lend themselves to the explicit critical standards offered by Kester, Lacy or the Harrisons. At Nine Mile Run the primary focus was upon ideas that informed experience with the intent to enable a creative dialogue with people about the reclamation and recovery of natural systems. As I look back upon this work, I am quite clear that a dialogue based process operating at a social, or ecological planning scale is going to be very hard to capture through images alone. Yet, the effort we all put into the work demands critical engagement and the validation that comes from exhibition, publication and critical discourse. Kester, Lacy, the Harrison's and many others, recognize the value of artists writing for themselves. When we write for ourselves, we appropriate the means of validation; amongst colleagues and peers that understand the complexities of the area of practice. Part of the problem is this practice is difficult to understand and more difficult to sustain long enough to get good at it. The practitioners that have an interest in it are more intent in doing the work, than spending time in academic analysis, review and publication. The few academics that engage with the area struggle to develop a context of knowledge that is appropriate and useful as a frame of reference. That work is no where near completion. The work demands the interest and critical engagement of those beyond the artworld. Planners and architects, designers and scientists, philosophers and historians have all taken an interest, and often a role in these kinds of projects. They come as equals interested in applying research with the shared intent to change the world. Engaging them in a discourse of mutual evolution and growth is an essential developmental step.

I would argue that Harrison, Kester and Lacy all provide us with appropriate concepts that delineate a potential relationship to the artworld. We must continue to give this consideration where it is possible; however it is essential that visual evidence does not become the threshold or gateway for creative intellectual development of transformative practices. The work is ill suited to this kind of iconic, image oriented critical engagement. The work is simply too complex in authorship, process and outcome. Of course, this critical understanding does not remove the fundamental desire for the recognition of ones work by the institutions and critics that dominate the discipline; I would argue that we need to look to more than one discipline for the appropriate discourse.

There is a problematic dialectic between art, creativity and efficacy. In 1991 Gablik believed that part of the solution was to transcend the aesthetic mode. Over the last five years, Grant Kester and Nicholas Bourriaud have made recent contributions to ideas of subjectivity and aesthetic knowledge. Allan Carlson and Arnold Berleant, are locked in an ongoing discourse about environmental aesthetics that wrestles with the extension of subjectivity beyond human relationships to the context of life itself. These are important forays into the history, theory and philosophy that underpins the work. Nicholas Bourriaud has said, "When the aesthetic discussion evolves, the status of form evolves along with it and through it" (Bourriaud, 2002, p. 21). He is drawing our attention to the

symbiotic relationship between ideas and perception, and how they interact to reveal form from its background content/context. What is without form today can be revealed tomorrow through an evolution in aesthetic concept drawn from practice. Berleant, Carlson and Kester all draw their ideas through observations of practice, which is then examined and theorized, within their own new approaches to aesthetic philosophy. Their outcome, has the potential to allow the rest of us train our minds, then our eyes and our body to react to the world in a new way. What was once a study with the intent to develop general truths about perception and beauty has changed into theories of diverse and expanded perception, which reveal an evolution of value. Reading Berleant and Kester I sense a remarkable shifting worldview, that affects far more than form, it takes us into the realm of inter-subjective experience and immersion in subject transcendent experience. These are intoxicating ideas that can be experienced through the senses as well as through the intellect. Once we have it pointed out to us (so we see it) or we have it explained to us (so we understand it), we may be able to seek out and immerse ourselves in these experiences as part of a pleasurable and intellectually rewarding life practice. Pleasure at this level has transcendent potential, as it calls our fundamental values into question, it engages us and challenges us at the very core of our being. It is the antithesis of passive consumption and urbane criticality. I can not help but wonder if art history with its predilection for inherent conventions, will be able to keep up with these changing relationships. These shifts in our reality are an affect of the rapidly changing social and material condition of this new century. Aesthetic philosophy operates without the ponderous institutional infrastructure of the arts and seems to be more able to stay current with these new ideas as a result. In contrast the dominant critical discourse in art seeks contemporaneity a static approach to the core ideas of modernity. Ambiguity and equivocation are the foundational principles of art in that everlasting era.

I would like to close by suggesting that Infrastructure by its very definition is the framework that shapes subsequent response. While the infrastructure of art is focused upon validation and veneration of works; the process of validation has a secondary effect that shapes production. Much of the best work being produced in the area of transformative art practice, can not be validated by existing methods. This reality is at the heart of Gablik's idea that art must move beyond the aesthetic mode. With an understanding of the post-industrial impacts on the environment, climate and human health I ask the following question: Isn't it clear by now in the post-industrial contemporaneity that the dominant life-world is actually defined at this time by an irrational meta-narrative? And in turn, isn't it time to consider that the appropriate response by the arts has to be something different than more irrational action? Should we consider a new creative rational responsibility?

T.Collins July, 2006

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 <[http://www.wochenklausur.at/texte/faq\\_en.html](http://www.wochenklausur.at/texte/faq_en.html)>

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<sup>1</sup> This diagram has evolved over time, it was drafted in a seminar led by Malcolm Miles. Nicola Kirkham and I were sitting together listening to a group of socially active arts practitioners argue the veracity and import of their work to the exclusion of others. It occurred to us at that time, that there were other models and I sketched a variation of this Venn diagram during that discussion. Subsequently Reiko Goto has helped me clarify the idea and the graphic. She then submitted a paper to Malcolm Mile which examined the idea in relationship to specific practitioners. 'The Ecological Context' was published in 'New Practices New Pedagogies' edited by Malcolm Miles, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> I worked with my partner Reiko Goto, as well artists Bob Bingham, Noel Hefe, Jonathan Kline and Richard Pell. I also worked with architects such as Priya Lakshmi, and John Oduro, and landscape architect Roman Chiu. We worked with teams of consultants, from biology, geology, urban design and environmental law.

<sup>3</sup> We fully recognized the import of the questions about toxicity in post-industrial land and monitored the discourse with great interest. We had a soil scientist and a geologist with some understanding of the issues on our team, as well as an engineer/advisor with expertise in chemistry. They made it clear that the issue demanded a significant commitment of resources to understand the material science of what the potential sources of contaminants might be. The physical realities of 20 stories of slag spread over 200 acres made certainty a problem. However, the most significant complicating factor was the pathways of contaminants into the human body and the nature of the bio-chemical reaction within the body. We attended a number of discussions on this matter and it became clear that a cogent discourse would demand detailed bio-medical science informed by statistical analysis. Our opportunity to contribute to this discourse was limited. The resolution of this issue – put forth by concerned citizen activists living adjacent to Nine Mile Run demanded a total of six public health consultations from the Pennsylvania Department of Health, and the U.S. Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry, Division of Health Assessment and Consultation. The complete text of that report and its findings of 'no hazard' when dust from earthwork is contained can be found at the ATSDR website.  
 [[http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HAC/PHA/ninemilerun/nmr\\_p1.html](http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/HAC/PHA/ninemilerun/nmr_p1.html)]

<sup>4</sup> In a subsequent discussion with Newton Harrison and Helen Mayer Harrison, we began to talk through the idea that artists can help unpack primary cultural ideas that are nascent but a dominant unspoken subtext in a region. At which point the artist's role is to provide a platform by which ideas can become clear, where simplicity and metaphor can add to the general understanding of a topic... This is a variation of Newton and Helen Harrison's idea of *prima facie*. The alternate idea emerged during a phone conversation on 5, June 2006. Rethinking this, I propose that it might be best described as *prima sententiae*, latent first feeling or emerging opinion that underlie changes to perception and the emergence of new general truths. I would argue that the work at Nine Mile Run tapped a whole range of unconscious ideas and feelings about landscape and recovery. The work at 3 Rivers 2<sup>nd</sup> Nature, attempts to do the same at a much larger scale. I will discuss this again in the conclusion.

<sup>5</sup> Dominant names in the environmental sector of the artworld today include, the painter and neo-naturalist Alexis Rockman; the installation artist known for interrogating the scientific methodology of natural history museums Mark Dion; the artist/raconteur Peter Fend who vacillates between claiming that he is a businessman and an international proponent of applied environmental research and telling stories of international intrigue with scientists, governments and corporations plotting against him. Artists with an interest in ecology and sustainable systems include Nils Norman who describes his projects as a means of distributing propaganda about alternate environmental technologies; and Dan Peterman who manages a recycling facility in Chicago and is known for artwork that reveals the function of urban environmental systems. There are also various eco-technical experts such as Natalie Jerimijenko who works with the latest scientific technologies to examine the meaning of nature; and Eduardo Kac best known for the controversy

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surrounding the genetically manipulated glow in the dark rabbit, Alba. Each of these artists are doing very important work. They predominantly focus upon the production of either artifacts or installations that allude to (rather than act upon) social and ecological transformation. Their intention is to elicit a discourse that responds to their primary authorship, provocative product.