

**The Role of Diversity in the
Production and Reception of Art in
Belfast: *Space Shuttle***

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Schedule of Conferences:

- **First Conference “Understanding diversity: Mapping and measuring”**, 26-27 January 2006, FEEM, Milano, Italy. Contact person: Valeria Papponetti, valeria.papponetti@feem.it
- **Second Conference “Qualitative diversity research: Looking ahead”**, 19-20 September 2006, K.U.Leuven, Leuven, Belgium. Contact person: Maddy Janssens, maddy.janssens@econ.kuleuven.ac.be, and Patrizia Zanoni, patrizia.zanoni@kuleuven.ac.be
- **Third Conference “Diversity in cities: Visible and invisible walls”**, 11-12 September 2007, UCL, London, UK. Contact person: Valeria Papponetti, valeria.papponetti@feem.it
- **Fourth Conference “Diversity in cities: New models of governance”**, 16-17 September 2008, IPRS, Rome, Italy. Contact person: Raffaele Bracalenti, iprs.it@iprs.it
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The Role of Diversity in the Production and Reception of Art in Belfast: *Space Shuttle*

Summary

This paper complements Simic's broad overview over the types of performance art productions currently taking place in European communities by shedding light on the single performance arts piece called 'Space Shuttle' which took place in various locations in Belfast in 2006. The investigation into the role of diversity in the production and reception of the Space Shuttle project questions the historical reference points which enabled this project to operate as a cultural platform for dialogue across social and religious divides. The art historical reference point for such work in Belfast is the art practice of Joseph Beuys whose engagement with Belfast at the height of the Troubles in the 1970's has entered local memory. Yet while such art historical reference points can be seen to legitimize the project as an active intervention in cultural dialogue, the social, economic and political context of the city itself has changed radically since the 1970's with the effect of altering the definition of diversity which is active in the production of this performance art project. The post-peace process city is now undergoing market-led redevelopment, and it is in one of its new cultural quarters that the recent artistic intervention took place. The authors elucidate the function – at the juncture of commercial spaces – of the art under investigation and draw a line through the decades that seemingly are connecting the practice of Beuys and the methods of Space Shuttle, by questioning the apparent longevity of relational practice that supports much of current performance art in Europe. We come away from reading this essay with an acute sense that performance art of the 21st century embraces a concept of diversity that is no longer founded on a concept of culture, but on socio-economic conditions which divide proliferating luxury houses, shops and business from the corollary of a marginalized, disdained working class.

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The Role of Diversity in the Production and Reception of Art in Belfast: *Space Shuttle*.

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Hello

This is *Space Shuttle*-an experimental base for artists and urbanauts.

I have been launched to six different orbits around planet Belfast.

My mission is to explore the creative environment.

Please keep in contact. www.spaceshuttle.org.uk

Return to mother-ship PS2 (Mutschler 5)

Space Shuttle is a portacabin module which was "sent into 'orbit' for six 'missions'", which each lasted up to two weeks, at locations in Belfast in 2006. The project was initiated by Peter Mutschler of PS² and the module was used by a diverse range of interdisciplinary artists, initiatives and community groups to operate as "a platform for urban creativity and social interaction" and to "produce new and site-influenced work."¹

In order to investigate the role of diversity in the production and reception of *Space Shuttle*, we isolate a number of diversity-related characteristics of the project. Focussing on *Mission Three*, Aisling O’Beirn’s *Some Things About Belfast (or so I’m told)*, we examine art historical reference points of such work in Belfast, especially in Joseph Beuys’ practice, finding shared characteristics between them, and in other projects internationally, which address localised contexts using mobility to promote accessibility and dialogue. Following consideration of the diachronic similarities between *Space Shuttle* and the Beuysian paradigm, we flag the present context as a markedly changed one since Belfast in the 1970s, the period of Beuys’ engagement at the height of the Troubles. In the contemporary and so called ‘post-Peace Process’ context of intensive urban redevelopment and spatial re-privatization, we examine how *Space Shuttle* operated as a cultural platform for dialogue and for engendering new forms of representation, participation and for open-ended identifications. We then foreground how

the historical and contemporary case studies reveal both the relevance and limitations of current theories of the uses of culture in deliberative democracy, focussing on Seyla Benhabib's proposition of "complex cultural dialogues" (Benhabib 2002). We conclude with a brief assessment of the role of diversity in generating dialogue and polyvocal forms of representation.

DIVERSITY AND MOBILITY AS METHODOLOGY.

Issues of diversity were integral to the *Space Shuttle* project. They included the heterogeneity of artists, participants and audiences in terms of class, gender, and ethnic identifications. Diversity enters the production of *Space Shuttle* by virtue of it being a collaboration between artists of different origins: the involvement of foreigners is one way of interpreting the title "*Space Shuttle*". Another is mobility as part of the approach or methodology. Indeed, its very title speaks of a mode of transport, of transition and movement between locations, not to settle into rootedness but to temporarily arrive and depart again. This method of mobile creativity can be examined in relation to a body of cultural theory including Braidotti's (2006) writing on 'nomadic ethics', and Kaplan's (1997) on the trope of postcolonial travel as a way of encountering difference. As part of the methodology, mobility enabled engagement in a variety of sites and types of spaces chosen for public work, which expresses a concern that the greatest diversity of recipients should be attracted to engage with what happens and is shown in the portacabin. The fact that it is not a standard building site cabin, however, but that explicit mentioning is made of it being a scaled replica of the PS² gallery (project space) distinctly includes (fine) art and its dissemination, as well as its publics as reference points. The "art world" was invited to an opening, and on the website, the "missions" radiate from the central "mothership" PS² base. It is thus not only the so-called "general public" that is attracted, but a link is sought to the conventions and histories of art, which legitimizes the current approach.

The diversity of both art and traditionally "non-art" approaches that were chosen by the *Space Shuttle* team further extend the mentioned inclusion of "non-art" and art sites and spaces into the genres and materials used. Points of reference are popular culture (the TV series *Dallas* in Sarah Browne and Gareth Kennedy's *Space Shuttle* "mission"), as well

as (citizen/tourist) info stalls. Again, when focusing on diversity, entry points are clearly given to people with a wide variety of cultural backgrounds and preferences. The creative practices used were not meant to crystallise into the production of art works in any Modernist sense of a discrete object but rather, correspond with a now well-established legacy of socially engaged, situated art practices which focus on process and seek to contribute to social transformation through forming dialogues, engendering forms of activism and providing means of critical reflection, alternative modes of representation, protest and constructive engagement with institutions and agencies. The creative strategies could also address how individuals are affected by issues of power and inequality, issues which we must recognise as inseparable from 'diversity'. For if we say simply that there is 'diversity' to imply difference but equality, we can serve a hegemonic function of cloaking those inequalities and forms of marginalization by which oppression is differently exercised and experienced.

The fact that an envisaged diverse reception has guided the choice of approaches and techniques is underlined by the prominence of communication as a "material" and strategy within the project, as announced in its subtitle: "Urban Creativity and Social Interaction". In effect, meeting places were set up in public spaces and the performative and durational were stressed through the different "missions". Mission Three, *Some Things About Belfast (or so I'm told)* was activated by the presence of the artist, Aisling O'Beirn (or at times Amy Russell who invigilated when O' Beirn wasn't there) for open-ended conversation, information-giving and "guiding" to the material on view. Contesting official, dominant cultural narratives through the 'local knowledge' revealed in vernacular accounts of place is a central preoccupation of O'Beirn's practice, as the title of her project intimates. O'Beirn used the portacabin as a space, loosely fashioned as an unofficial tourist or citizens' information centre, in which unofficial information about Belfast was transmitted and received. Comprising a collection, this information took the form of hand-drawn maps, place nicknames and urban myths as anecdotes. O'Beirn also observes that the one-to-one communication through which the exchanges took place, led one to many further communications, as visitors to the Space Shuttle passed the word on to friends, leading more people to visit the shuttle.

O'Beirn's meeting place also stresses the openness of the format for the audience's relatively unguided participation. It is open for example whether they perceive the *Space Shuttle* as art or not, whether they assume an anthropological or community work interest or agenda. O'Beirn's nicknames of locations in Belfast provide a reaching out from the specificity of the portacabin to, in most cases, the visitors' own home, i.e. the area with which they are most familiar. Through the clear segregation of most of Belfast city, issues of diversity inevitably come to the fore, as naming implies claiming ownership of an area. There will be conflicting or overlapping names, but the members of one community only could never achieve the bigger picture that has slowly arisen through the artist's collecting. She is perceived as an honest, caring broker, engaging with people on their own terms and concerning their own issues, encouraging and valuing their participation – and not just their additions of nicknames. Diversity – in a broad (and temporary) understanding of the word – is both directly and indirectly or obliquely referenced. It is part of how the project was conceived and received.

BEUYS AS PRECURSOR OF CONTEMPORARY PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES

When now comparing the characteristics listed above with Joseph Beuys' various projects and collaborations in and around Belfast from 1974 onwards, we argue that similar issues surrounding and approaches towards diversity can be isolated. However, it needs to be said that we are not writing a stylistic history or engaging in formal(ist) analysis. It is far more relevant to note that the centrality of questions of diversity is not new in the art of the 1990s, as some theorists would have it (Bourriaud). While the gradual differences in approach are also interesting to note, we would like to propose that a troubled society, where identities and divisions have been in the foreground for well over thirty years has brought with it similar characteristics in the art produced for this context. Here, artists have had to take into account the intercultural dimension of both the production and the reception of their work. Deviating somewhat from what Ljiljana Deru Simic identifies as usual practice (Deru Simic 2003, abstract), artists in Northern Ireland have specifically created multi- or intercultural work. We would like to suggest then that they function – obliquely or otherwise – as “pilot studies” for peaceful coexistence, dialogue and the identification of shared spaces, while very much negotiating and renegotiating the by now venerable theory (if not history) of relational art.

Joseph Beuys let an exhibition of drawings, *The Secret Block for a Secret Person in Ireland*, travel South and North of the Irish border: the first exhibition to do so since the beginning of the Troubles. It had come from Oxford, Edinburgh and London (with the same title) and was shown at the Hugh Lane Gallery Dublin (25 Sept-27 Oct 1974) and, lastly, at the Arts Council Gallery in Belfast (6-30 Nov 1974). He thus “space shuttled” in. On 18 Nov, he spoke and discussed for 3 ½ hours at the Ulster Museum, also gave a talk at the University of Ulster’s Art School, at Magee Institute of Higher Education, Derry, and went to Coleraine and the Giants’ Causeway. Much of his activity was directed at finding a suitable space for the Free International University of Interdisciplinary Research, which Beuys had co-founded with Heirich Böll, the novelist and Ireland-fan. The FIU did eventually have a Belfast base, the Art and Research Exchange (A.R.E.), founded in 1978 by Belinda Loftus, Alistair MacLennan, Rainer Pagel and others (Coppock). This initiative has since had a long legacy in various artist-run spaces, studios, CIRCA Art Magazine, and teaching at the University of Ulster, out of some of which *Space Shuttle* has emerged. But what is the quality if any of how that possible direct line is informing thinking surrounding diversity? The characteristics previously isolated in *Space Shuttle* need briefly to be compared to Beuys’ Belfast endeavours.

Beuys “*Space Shuttled*” into Belfast as an outsider. Apart from great personal energy, he brought a hybrid identity that motivated his wish to (as well as his understanding that he could) contribute in relevant ways: coming from Germany, a painfully divided country during the Cold War, although its Lower Rhine area, the home of the artist, was historically a Catholic and formerly Celtic enclave, as well as (benignly) ruled by the House of Orange. Religiously, multi-denominational Germany could possibly be seen as a model of peaceful coexistence. Beuys brought with him Caroline Tisdall, a writer for *The Guardian*, who is English and “a quarter Irish”, as she puts it.² She helped Beuys with his English vocabulary, photographed and negotiated, wrote a feasibility report on the FIU to the then EEC. She was always present and testifies, above all, to Beuys’ sensitivity in grasping what distinguished and drove people around him. Beuys’ was certainly an anthropologically interested perspective, engaging in something that Ullrich Kockel terms “applied anthropology”.³

Owing to collaborations and his own hybrid identity, he hoped to provide multiple connection points for his audiences to loosen up entrenched mono-identity discourses. The duration of his talks, about 3 ½ hours at the Ulster Museum, was deliberate and instrumental for audience members to begin to contribute, even monopolize the floor. Community groups from West Belfast and other areas, who may not usually have visited the Ulster Museum, were specifically invited. Their issues were in the foreground, although what some perceived as audacious or naïve of a German to have offer as a “fix” for the Troubles was not universally popular at the time. It was communication – and as such certainly strengthens an interpretation of Beuys’ activities in 1974 as relational in the current understanding. He facilitated, rather than created.

Mobility was an important factor. While tourist explorations were part of the itinerary, Beuys lectured in places where his name was not known. On the European continent (and that is clearly a prominent part of the “Beuys package”), the by then canonical artist and his quasi-mythological persona were immediate attractions. In Northern Ireland, however, clearly owing to the politically desperate situation, he focused more than elsewhere on the issues at hand, collaborations, lasting friendships and support. One can evoke the conviviality (Bourriaud) that in current relational work is often not directed and happens for its own sake. Here it took place against all the odds – and for specific ends. The fact that he invited Belfast-based artists to participate in workshops on migration and other issues related to diversity at *documenta 6*, 1977, as well as even at the Guggenheim Museum in New York two years later, and initially paid the rent for the first premises of their A.R.E. group must in the current context appear as further relational aspects of his/their work. Just as he captured his teaching as art, his facilitating practice in and for Northern Ireland is also clearly part of that collaborative artistic practice.

Like *Space Shuttle*, the “mission” metaphor could easily apply to the various visits and projects that Beuys and his collaborators developed in and on Belfast. It may also be called a “mission” to use the Ulster Museum in diverse ways – and for relatively diverse audiences: as conventional exhibition space, but also as a discussion venue, stretching the boundaries of their remit at the time. Despite the fact that the FIU later used a Beuys invention: a mobile discussion and information space: the *Bus for Direct Democracy*

(which brings to mind Suzanne Lacey's more recent new genre public artwork on diversity in Colombia), Beuys was not comfortable letting go of the museum context altogether. He thus shared with *Space Shuttle* an assessment of the museum as usable for engaged work. It is one that was unpopular in much of the intervening period.

“Non-art” sites as well as “non-art” approaches are also common features of both Beuys' and *Space Shuttle*'s projects. When members of *Space Shuttle*'s audience were not conscious of the art context they were operating in, this is true also of Beuys' discussions with community groups, those who witnessed his visits to Jimmy Boyle in prison, and, most likely, of the assessors of the unsuccessful application for funding for the FIU. The A.R.E. programmatically exhibited local and international artists, as well as some popular culture and other “non-art” material: comics, Trade Union flags, posters etc. These were shown not just in the A.R.E's city centre premises, but “shuttled” around community and leisure centres on both sides of the divide. The diverse, international and thus non-partisan background of the artists organizing such events was a vital prerequisite in reaching diverse audiences. The mixture of art and “non-art” material was programmatic, but meant that A.R.E fell between the stools of “art” and “community” funding by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland – one reason for its eventual demise. Despite (from today's standpoint: because of his overly) ambitious aspirations, Beuys was largely unsuccessful: EEC funding for the FIU did not materialize, the A.R.E. did not become as central as it could have been (but was thus also not co-opted into restrictive structures), and Beuys, during his time in Ireland, had just (in 1972) been dismissed from his professorial post for accepting too many students.

Beuys may even have compromised himself by keeping entry points to his works as diverse and open as possible, especially through media contact, at times explaining his work in very brief and reductive ways, e.g. subscribing to the traditional role of the mythical artist, in order to facilitate approaches. This now provokes theorists and practitioners of relational art to offset their work against that of Beuys (Hunter, Kester, Zinggl).⁴ Beuys' engagement with diverse audiences, his open-ended, unhurried conversations e.g. within the parameters of the FIU, have – despite the voices cited above – been included in Claire Bishop's anthology of writings on *Participation* (Bishop 2006).⁵ It seems that now, an awareness begins to manifest itself that, while Beuys was

hopelessly naïve in wishing to “save” more than a small fraction of the world, he always prioritized relational matters and was thus far more humble and credible (“unsuccessful”) in what he did than it might first have appeared. Judging by the lasting friendships and collaboration (as well as careers, community projects and many enriching memories) that have arisen from Beuys’ activities in Northern Ireland, Beuys was, like the *Space Shuttle* artist O’Beirn, perceived as an honest, caring broker, interested in other peoples’ concerns, encouraging and valuing their participation also when no “artwork”, media headline or other benefits arose – other than furthering communication and strengthening diversity.

Thus, when working in Northern Ireland, Beuys accepted and adapted to the smaller scale and intervened in the modest but (locally) effective ways that now characterize practice in the area. If, as we have found, similar conceptions of art have been researched and negotiated in practice again and again, it could raise a “concern that younger artists in the area means that younger artists interested in this area are repeatedly forced to ‘reinvent the wheel’ in the absence of a sustained historical record [of dialogical art]” (Kester 190). This does not apply to Belfast, where the legacy of Beuys has continued to be very much alive – not necessarily in art historical writing, but in the recounting of lived experience, participation in artists’ initiatives that have arisen from Beuys’ visits and friendships with the artist. Alastair MacLennan and Tony Hill play particularly important roles here as the teachers of several generations of younger artists at Northern Ireland’s only art school, the University of Ulster’s School of Art & Design. Rainer Pagel and others carry the memories, as well as the impetus to further that tradition into both artists groups like *Beyond* and community work in *Inclusion Matters*.

The more likely reason for similarities in relational or dialogical projects is that, on the ground and over time, they seem to have been successful. This is nothing that has been verified through marketing studies or sociological questionnaires, but by sustained (artistic) practice. It almost seems as though Belfast kept attracting and catalyzing such approaches and processes: Maurice O’Connell recently drew up the “Articles of Association” for a company established in order to “explore and find successful process for an individual to participate in the ongoing social, economic and cultural development of an entire city” (O’Connell 76), that city had to be Belfast⁶ – and the “Articles”

repeatedly have the ring of Beuys' and Tisdall's EEC application for the FIU. This tradition, it seems, will remain a strong and promising one, but it also changes: O'Connell's envisaged outcomes are: "Ever changing methodologies to directly engage others in the delivery process of change" (83).

CONTEMPORARY CLIMATES OF REDEVELOPMENT AND ENGENDERING NEW FORMS OF REPRESENTATION.

While art history shows the links between Beuys' practice and current practices that engage with Belfast, the social, economic and political context of the city itself has changed radically since the 1970s and 1980s when Beuys and, later, A.R.E were operational. The 'post-Peace Process' city is now undergoing intensive market-led redevelopment, and it is in one of its engineered 'cultural quarters' that O'Beirn's *Some Things...* took place. It was located at the junction of North Street and Waring Street, on the edge of a non-residential quarter of the city centre undergoing market-led regeneration and gentrification which was relaunched as "Cathedral Quarter" in recent years. Marketed as a space for leisure and culture, the area currently features a mixture of flagship architectural developments and derelict and semi-derelict buildings characteristic of transitional spaces.

Aaron Kelly has written a searing critique of the uses of culture as the lubricant for consumption in the current redevelopment of Belfast into stylised quarters, there is also a "Titanic Quarter" and a "Queen's Quarter". Kelly names the political-economic contextualisation as the economic reconciliation of post-Peace Process Northern Ireland with the dynamics of a world system that only responds to the flow of capital around the globe. His analysis shines a light on the uses to which 'culture' has been put in the development of a homogenising, exclusionary sectarian template of 'two traditions' for the Peace Process, which is being redeveloped in the present by enlisting culture as a byword for consumerism and to repress the political by re-presenting 'Cultural Quarters' of the city back to its people as spaces of consumption eviscerated of their experiences of it (Kelly 2005, 548). The city's working class are excluded from participation in the civic and commercial life of these non-public spaces in what Kelly identifies as the extension of Third Way capitalism westward and the Celtic Tiger northwards through the

promotion of private finance to establish a market-led postmodernist pluralism that masks socio-economic divides.

Working to privilege the accounts of those who are not usually given a platform, O'Beirn's project could be described as running counter to the re-packing of the city as theme parks. She gives the city back to its inhabitants, turning to those who might best describe and represent it according to their own experiences, in contrast to the desiccated official culture which veneers over consumer consumption. The open access of the portacabin also meant that it was open for the participation of those usually excluded economically, from spaces of consumption.

Belfast is, of course, hardly new in experiencing the adverse social effects of regeneration. Naomi Rodriguez's film *All the Glitters* reveals the grim and all-too-familiar negatives produced by the London Docklands development in the 1980s, namely, shrinking public spaces, stratospheric house prices, proliferating luxury housing, shops and businesses, and the corollary of a marginalised, disdained working class (see Sullivan 2005). What then is the complicity of art in regeneration and market-led redevelopment, which turns land and space into real estate and a commodity for direct profit? How, by contrast, have artists exposed and organised against such processes? In the *Space Shuttle* publication, Susanne Bosch asks if artists are critical enough of politics and power. She phrases the scenario bluntly as one of artists being funded to "keep the neighbourhood in a good mood and to increase the value of property" (in: Mutschler 76). Artists are well aware of and resistant to this involvement. In 2005, the curatorial duo B&B ran "Real Estate: Art in a Changing City" as part of the ICA's London in Six Easy Steps series of events. The artist vanguard function in regeneration is well-known, which the US-based weblog Boxtank satirically formulate into "5 Easy Steps", as follows:

1. "Construe a poor neighbourhood as a frontier to be tamed
2. Create a rent gap between a building's value and its land value by neglecting maintenance and repair while investing money elsewhere
3. Map a strategy for re-investment by setting anchor blocks as starting points from which to take back the neighbourhood block by block
4. Create tax incentives for artists and gallery owners as the first wave of pioneers to authenticate 'gritty' urban experience

5. Raise rents and drive out artists to be replaced with wealthy entrepreneurs, hipsters and yuppies.” (Boxtank up)

The mobile, temporary nature of *Space Shuttle* is perhaps exemplary of the productive ways artists, art and cultural practices can critically engage with a location already ‘softened’ for redevelopment by decades of neglect and disinvestment. This mobility is one alternative to inhabiting an area of disinvestment until one is eventually driven out by those same processes of gentrification in which artists can function as unwilling facilitators of its initial stages.

DIVERSITY IN DIALOGICAL PRACTICES AND THEIR PRODUCTION AND RECEPTION

In order to elucidate the function – at the junctures of commercial spaces – of the art under investigation here, the line drawn here through the decades to connect the practice of Beuys and the methods of *Space Shuttle* is revealing in several ways. Linking *Space Shuttle* to the Beuysian precedent does not mean discrediting the contemporary artists involved as “little Beuyses”. Rather, it reflects that the work has been created in response to a perceived – and real – demand, not purely for formal or “artistic” ends, where originality would have been a prime motivation. The range of activities across the whole spectrum of artistic and social activity speaks of a low level of specialization in the Belfast art world, a dearth of art venues, and a diverse (and divided) society, where art and culture are in many instances shared, but have not so far become a widespread activity with participation of the majority of the population.

As reasons for the unbroken longevity of relational practices, one could cite an enduring allegiance with some Modernist practices – or “backwardness”. But we would prefer to assess with Terry Eagleton that (some of) postmodernism was unable to grapple with amorphous and contradictory identity politics as they were found here (Eagleton 86). That a remarkable line like the one from Beuys to *Space Shuttle* can be drawn, speaks of the continued currency of some of the key theories in the area of diversity, as they were formulated in Beuys’ times and pertain to the realm of art theory. Umberto Eco’s *Open Work* (1962, English 1989) has pioneered the relatively higher valorisation of the

reception of art (including literature) in comparison with the author's creation, regarding both as essentially active and creative. Reception theory (Wolfgang Iser) needs to be added, while Claire Bishop has recently anthologized such theoretical texts, featuring also Roland Barthes, Michail Bakhtin and Peter Bürger (Bishop 2006). Bishop has with her anthology been the first to historicize what had previously (Bourriaud) appeared as a new tendency in art from the 1990s.

Belfast has proven to sustain relational, dialogical or open practices and also let them appear right from their beginnings with Beuys (almost uncharacteristically for the artist) as low-key, practical and orientated towards individual people, forging small but long-lasting groups with an eye to the medium and long term. Relational art was taken large steps forward through and as a result of Joseph Beuys' initiatives in Belfast. Relational work has been furthered here in both art and non-art contexts (Rainer Pagel, mentioned earlier, is a case in point). Non-spectacular, often by necessity anonymous relational work has been furthered in Northern Ireland all through the 1980s, which, in the absence of a developed commercial gallery network and the presence of the Troubles, were not so commercial here. One can, therefore, look back upon 30 years of experience, fine-tuning, honing relational skills and networks.

With (loose) reference to some of the characteristics of both stages in art historical time, we will attempt to draw out some diversity-related points: Beuys and *Space Shuttle* seem to agree that "The rules of the game [art] cannot be radically changed, only in small steps. Radical changes disturb the continuity with previous notions of art, and thus inhibit the use of a common conception of art across social divides. Using the word art with a changed meaning and yet in a way that is understandable to a large number of people is a prerequisite for admitting any shift in the conception of art." (Zinggl 134) Such diachronic lines as the one explored here thus matter.

The museum or gallery space in particular is something that has not been left behind by these particular projects. One no longer sees the museum as the home of all cultural ills, regarding it rather as yet another public space that, despite its inevitable allegiances and often its role in regeneration projects, reaches diverse audiences and can provide a platform for parts of society that are inclined (initiated) and open towards cultural

experiences – or wish to perform themselves (Rogoff). There would have been a danger to forsake the traditional art publics just at the time when more of an effort was made to extend them. The museum/gallery can provide an alternative (relatively speaking) to the consumer space that the politicians have identified as the vacuous “shared space” in Northern Ireland’s “post-conflict” society. When politicians have created a mandatory bipartite like that of the post-Belfast agreement era, art allows for spaces in between – and, as Ljiljana Deru Simic puts it, the “envisioning of it [a shared community] is what makes it real.” (Deru Simic 11) Cutting the links with art history is also not viewed as beneficial (any more) by activist practitioners like WochenKlausur⁷ in a corresponding move to that described earlier concerning the acceptance of museums or gallery spaces. Even Julian Stallabrass, revealing the many ways in which art production and the globalized marketplace are complicit and interwoven, concludes: “the local liberation offered offered in the production of art, and its enjoyment, are genuine.” (Stallabrass 199).

Art like that pursued in the FIU (certainly initially conceived of as having a building as a base), A.R.E, or the *Space Shuttle* provides – literally – a sheltered space for diverse needs, outside the political or commercial realm, where seeing artwork inside and out, sitting, drinking coffee, listening to the artist, asking questions and contributing suggestions, chat and laugh in an unhurried way is as important as (and pre-requisite for) stating contesting views. Experience has shown that these then take a form that is non-prescribed but also (already) contained non-violently and more “normally”. Similarly, art has emerged as the only mechanism of truth-telling that could be inclusive. Soliciting stories within an art context thus harnesses all this and adds the therapeutic quality of telling one’s own story (although it may be still much too early for that, considering the fact that holocaust reports and memoirs began to appear only in the 1960s).

Jacques Rancière is the theorist who most clearly expresses what can here be called a return to such differentiated engaged practices as Beuys’ (in Northern Ireland, possibly not elsewhere) and the *Space Shuttle*’s. What seems authoritarian or obsolete to those for whom only activism writ large will count, their projects nevertheless give opportunities to listen, sit, drink coffee and look, acknowledging the need for “passivity” as much as that for activity and activism. Privileging activity for its own sake neglects the “being”

and reflecting. Rancière comes to the conclusion that “the politics of participation might best lie [...] in putting to work the idea that we are all equally capable of inventing our own translations. Unattached to a privileged artistic medium, this principle would not divide audiences into active and passive, capable and incapable, but instead would invite us all to appropriate works for ourselves and make use of these in ways that their authors might never have dreamed possible.” (Bishop 16). Beuys may have summarized this as “unity in diversity”.⁸

In order, therefore, to allow and provide for diversity in the recipients’ experience, the diversity of artistic media and spaces should be safeguarded (even if that means reconsidering the at times discredited museum) and invitations for independent appropriation appear to be the most effective in order not to patronize audiences. Excluding rather than re-interpreting and re-inventing the canon (like Beuys) may thus be counter-productive also. This is another outcome of establishing the current diachronic line: Beuys was creatively translated and appropriated in Northern Ireland. The work that has been created in Northern Ireland, like *Space Shuttle*, is dependent on and simultaneously independent of his legacy, dependent on and independent of the arts infrastructure and artistic traditions. The fact that Beuys’ name is so rarely mentioned positively concerning current relational practices, while his networks, legacies and approaches are alive and well, could then be taken as a sign of something that has worked, that has empowered a very diverse set of people to create and engage with work that paradigmatically addresses, captures, allows diversity (in adverse circumstances) and thus promotes it.

The *Space Shuttle* case study thus appears as a microcosm of what is important in current relational practice and its thinking on diversity *Space Shuttle*’s cosmic metaphor, together with Alistair MacLennan’s assertion that for him as a Scot, Belfast appeared as a tiny place with enormous differences that could show problems of humanity in a nutshell – like a small universe.⁹ Beuys shared this sense of Ireland as the most representative place, a “case study”.¹⁰

Its geographical marginality is one aspect that distinguishes it – marginality as a reconsidered notion, as bell hooks puts it:

“It was this marginality that I was naming as a central location for the production of a counter hegemonic discourse [...] I was not speaking of a marginality one wishes to lose, to give up, or surrender as part of moving into the centre, but rather as a site one stays in, clings to even, because it nourishes one’s capacity to resist. It offers the possibility of radical perspectives from which to see and create, to imagine alternative, new worlds.” (bell hooks 341)

However small this microcosm is, what Zinggl calls “cooperative shaping of life in society” (Zinggl 16) cannot be assumed to occur in an a priori “shared space”. When Deru Simic writes: “Social interaction can be based on the simple but powerful fact that different social groups inhabit the same territory. Cultural activities can play a key role in transforming this territory into a shared public space” (Deru Simic 12), where ghettoization has taken place or where different social groups do not necessarily inhabit the same territory, as in Northern Ireland, creating shared public space apparently has had to include a durational element, as well as mobility: meeting people where they are. Mobile Museums, like Deru Simic’s own (Deru Simic), the *Space Shuttle* portacabin, (strategically) travelling exhibitions, the *Bus for Direct Democracy* and many other comparable initiatives take this into account.

If we speak of universality in relation to diversity, seeming contradictions arise. Terry Eagleton confronts and integrates this, serving to highlight in the present context the sustained (time-consuming, painstaking) focus on the individual:

“What Culture itself cherishes is not the particular but that very different animal, the individual. Indeed it sees a direct relation between the individual and the universal. [...] It is the uniqueness of a thing that the world spirit can be most intimately felt [...] Culture is itself the spirit of humanity individuating itself in specific works [...] The universal is not just the opposite of the individual, but the very paradigm of it. [Eagleton continues: ...] the vexed relationship between individual and universal. It is no doubt for this reason that aesthetic questions crop up so often in a society which has less and less time for art. What the work of art promised was a whole new way of conceiving of the relationship at issue, refusing both empty universality and blind particularity.” (Eagleton 55, 62)

Indeed, the projects at the centre of this investigation help build and assert individual identities beyond those prescribed and determined by “communities”, but partially by focusing on markers of identity (like locations, nicknames etc.): “The paradox of identity politics, in short, is that one needs an identity in order to feel free to get rid of it.” (Eagleton 66) Art and culture help delineate identification, but participatory art, through the incentive it provides for becoming aware of and formulating one’s own individuality can then loosen the clearly delineated Northern Irish zero sum conceptualization of both identity and space (“What is mine is mine”).¹¹ As Eagleton puts it, in “revolutionary nationalism [...] culture could become a transformative political force [... Then,] Culture, in short, can come to oust the politics with which it was previously so closely bound up.”⁶³¹²

SPACE SHUTTLE AS A DIALOGICAL PLATFORM FOR NEW FORMS OF REPRESENTATION

To refocus on uses of culture to produce multiplicity, Deru Simic has argued that cultural projects, which enable dialogues between people in different social groups, can assist in the development of multiple identities. The potential transformations of ‘identity’ that art offers can in turn play a role in the formation of what she terms ‘creative cities’, that is, cities which foster a culture of openness and expression toward social cohesion. Though a segue from openness to harmonious social relations cannot be readily assumed, what is implied is a relationship between the creativity manifested in a city and the plural identities of its inhabitants. These are identities which are conceived as open-ended works in progress characterised by hybridity and fluidity. This marriage of identity and multiplicity poses a tension between the singular and plural which indicates the limits of ‘identity’ and suggests we might dispense with it altogether. “Who needs ‘identity’?”, Stuart Hall wonders, when the concept has been roundly deconstructed across a range of disciplinary fields, all of them variously anti-essentialist and sensitive to a ‘politics of location’, which reject and seek to displace a Cartesian concept of an originary, unified identity (Hall 1996: 1). Sticking with the Derridean impetus, Hall suggests the term needs to be put ‘under erasure’ to signal that it cannot be thought in old positivist ways, but that without it key questions cannot be asked. Acknowledging that the signifier ‘identity’ is

indispensable to identity politics, from which questions of agency are inextricable, Hall seeks not to reinstate a transparent knowing subject or identity as the centred author of social practice, but rather to think the subject in a decentred position within a paradigm of discursive practice. Influenced by Foucault, he stresses the process of identity-formation as one of subjectification to discursive practices, with all the exclusions it entails, before raising an argument for *identification*. Though not without its own conceptual difficulties, *identification* is preferable to 'identity' in a constructionist understanding as a contingent process without completion and always in progress.

Identification does not lend itself to notions of a property that can be 'won' or 'lost', whereas if identity is conceived of as something to be recouped, or safeguarded against loss or subsumption, it involves incommensurability with difference. Identification, by contrast, does not involve the obliteration of difference since as a signifying practice, according to a post-structuralist informed paradigm, it entails the play of difference and deferral for which Derrida coined the neologism *différance* (Derrida, 3-29). It is by working with this paradigm that political theorist Seyla Benhabib describes the other within the self, as that real or imagined other by which the self is differentially defined (2002: 4). Identification as a play of *différance* contrives a dynamic, processual concept rather than the essentialist notion of a stable core of self which remains unchanged despite the vicissitudes of history or social forces. This notion of identity as an innate property is dangerous, for once carried over to 'cultural identity', identity finds a platform for the ominous convergence of 'a people' whose claims of a shared history or ancestry that override all other differences bind them together in an exclusive cultural belonging (Hall, 4).

Conceiving of culture in a similarly post-structuralist vein, Benhabib uses an auditory metaphor to propose a "complex cultural dialogue" to view human cultures as hybrid, polyvocal and as constant creations, recreations and negotiations of imaginary boundaries between 'we' and the 'other(s)' (Benhabib, 8). For Benhabib, the difficulty is how to respect the other's difference, and recognize the other's fundamental right to human equality and dignity. This is a call for universalism in the moral understanding that, as human beings, we are all equally entitled to be considered equals and afforded equal moral respect. Yet the matter of our differences raises problems for the concept of

equality. Benhabib recognises how the moral question of whether we can all be considered equal interrelates with philosophical questions over the existence of a common human nature, and of a normative content of human reason based on the cognitive legacy of the Enlightenment, such as belief in the validity of objectivity, arguments and data, impartiality and intersubjective verification of results (Benhabib, 27). And yet most human communities will hold a generalized moral attitude that not all other human beings are worthy of being considered equal partners in settling moral, political and social matters (Benhabib, 30). Thus, moral discourses are situated within the boundaries of specific cultures and they support a normative philosophy, while an opened view of culture and of our interdependencies can lead to the more favourable process of a complex cultural dialogue which shows that the other's cultural traditions are receptive to universalist norms (Benhabib, 39).

With a feminist problematisation of 'equality', the task of respecting the other's difference is a more layered one than can be captured by Benhabib's term 'democratic equality'. She states that the task is "to create impartial institutions in the public sphere and civil society where this struggle for the recognition of cultural differences and the contestation of cultural narratives can take place without domination" (Benhabib, 8). Yet in the light of French feminist theory there can be much greater exploration of the difficulty posed by recognising the rights and equality of the other across sexual difference. This analysis can be deepened with reference to feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray's thinking on what she calls "sexuate rights"- a proposition for writing the rights and duties of each sex differently, since they are different, into social rights and duties. In and of itself, Irigaray's call for sexually differentiated social duties and rights has potentially oppressive results for women, witness for example how the Irish Constitution defines the role of women as that of motherhood within the home and nuclear family. One effect of this was the ban on married women from the civil service until the 1970s. However, a demand for equality must still deal with the problem of reducing the feminine other to the masculine self-same in a comparison where the latter constitutes the normative yardstick. Irigaray refuses the egalitarian demand amongst Anglo and US feminists since she believes all language and thought to be gendered and that there is no neutral from which to begin. "What do women want to be equal to?" Irigaray asks, "Men? A Wage? A public position? Equal to what? Why not to themselves?" (Irigaray

1992: 32) This raises again those crosscutting questions of identification and representation, of women's self-representation.

More usefully, in considering the practices of minority cultural communities and the rights of women and children, Benhabib – like Rancière in the specific context of art practice – remains an advocate of the capacity of individuals to negotiate their narratives of identity and difference through multicultural encounters (Benhabib, 104). Once we modify our view of culture, reject holistic essentialist conceptions, and retain faith in the agency of ordinary political actors, Benhabib argues that the rights of women and children within minority cultural communities can be respected without getting stuck between the equally undesirable practices of criminalising these communities or exercising a liberal tolerance that compounds the plight of women and children (Benhabib, 104). We propose then, that a central aspect of the negotiation of which Benhabib speaks, for women in minority communities, is to develop their own modes of representation and a symbolic system that is not a repetition of any dominant patriarchal one. We further suggest that *Space Shuttle* shows that art can contribute to the creation of new forms of representation authored by individuals themselves, and provide alternative fora where this struggle for recognition of cultural differences and contestation over cultural narratives can take place.

To eschew exclusionary, essentialist operations around questions of 'who we are' or 'where we came from', culture and identities must be about questions of becoming, of representation and of how we might represent ourselves. It is within these questions that identities are constituted (Hall). The question of representation returns us to Deru Simic's examination of the relationship between multiple identities, which we might now think of as open-ended identifications, and creative cities. How can art foster or underscore identification as a process open to difference? She establishes firstly, that art and cultural projects are not an alternative to regeneration initiatives. What they are is a vital component of urban renewal and what they can do, she claims, is transform a given situation (Deru Simic, 4). In both western and non-western contexts, there are virtually innumerable artist and architectural collaborations and groups with an urban focus which organise site-specific projects, temporary and permanent, e.g. City Mine(d), Art for Change, Stalker, or Park Fiction, to name but a few in Europe, while Sarai and Sahmat

are examples based in India. Considering some European examples, Susanne Bosch identifies a role for art in empowering people's creativity which, she argues, leads to problem solving (Bosch 77).

Thus, as Deru Simic contends, cultural projects which are enacted in urban situations can create altered or new situations in what we might conceive of as cities of creativity. Amongst the requirements for a city to become creative, she identifies the need, with reference to Jeremy Rifkin's work, for new forms of communication, new ways of describing things, new ways of monitoring and new methods of local research. Barriers between departments and institutions need to be dismantled, new forms of description are called for, given that the traditional language of geography cannot adequately capture the myriadly textured qualities of urban experience, and new methods of local research and monitoring are needed to define local aspirations, needs, trends and problems (Deru Simic: 4). In particular, O'Beirn's Mission Three, *Some Things About Belfast (or so I'm told)* demonstrates how these new forms of representation could contribute to the struggle for recognition of cultural difference and to the contestation of exclusive cultural narratives. In Belfast's microcosm, the social and political necessities (and relative lack of arts funding in comparison to community project funding) have given rise to sustained and fine-tuned cultural approaches and honed skills by practitioners in this field that are worthy of being noted as exemplary. Relational and dialogical practices here have not been a fashion but a necessity. If there now is a "shared space", it owes – more than to empty political rhetoric – to the sustained work of artists on the ground.

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Notes

¹ *Space Shuttle* 2007, <http://www.spaceshuttle.org.uk/mission1.htm>.

The project was initiated by PS²'s Peter Mutschler and started with a pilot launch 'The Launch : Lower Garfield Street & Project Space ', 10th - 19th August 2006

<http://www.spaceshuttle.org.uk/launch.htm>

The Missions, all of which are documented under www.spaceshuttle.org.uk were:

'Mission One: Donegall Pass', Call Centre Collective 22 - 29 August 2006

'Mission Two: Titanic Quarter ', Sarah Browne and Gareth Kennedy 31 August - 16 September 2006

'Mission Three: North Street / Waring Street ', -Some Things About Belfast (Or So I'm Told) Aisling O'Beirn 20 September - 5 October 2006

'Mission Four : Blackstaff Square ', - Siraj Izhar 9 - 19 October 2006

'Mission Five : Dublin Road/Shafesbury Square', - Mick O'Kelly 23 October - 2 November 2006

'Mission Six : St. Aidan's Christian Brothers Primary School',

H.I. (Humans Identified) (Amy Russell, Barnardo's) - 19 - 30 March 2007

The project culminated in 'Discoveries : PS², 18 Donegall Street and Space Shuttle Location at Royal Avenue/North Street', 27 April - 05 May 2007 Mission 1- 6: report, edited work and launch of publication.

² In conversations with Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, London 1993, Dublin 2006.

³ This would suggest an anthropological trajectory – if anthropology had not for a long time disallowed anthropology of “home”. The anthropologist was required to go to far-away places and apply what one would now call the colonialist's gaze. The artist or – more potently – the artists' group focusing on diversity issues in relational work cannot help but engage with anthropological questions. To be seen as a more “objective” outsider (while questioning notions of objectivity) and having the benefit of local knowledge and networks could be seen in both cases as the best scenario. For such artistic work, Ullrich Kockel speaks of “applied anthropology” (in a presentation at the Academy of Irish Cultural Heritages, University of Ulster, Magee, 26 April 2007). *Space Shuttle* in its investigation (by O'Beirn) of nicknames for streets and areas of the city can also be understood as anthropological.

⁴ “In contrast to the thinking of the seventies, today's Activists are no longer concerned with changing the world in its entirety. It is no longer a matter of mercilessly implementing an ideological line, as it was in Joseph Beuys's idea of transforming a whole society into a Social Plastic [...] and many other manifesto writers of the Modern. [...] Activist Art no longer overestimates its capabilities. But it does not underestimate them either. It makes modest contributions.” (Zinggl 16)

⁵ The present thoughts also motivated a reassessment of Beuys' legacy in a symposium in Dublin's Goethe Institut, January 2006.

⁶ “Objects of the Company [...] (a) To relieve poverty, distress and sickness among those living or working in the Local Government administrative area of Belfast and its immediate vicinity (the area of 'benefit').” (O'Connell 77)

⁷ Wolfgang Zinggl states: “The understanding of art changes very slowly”. And: “Filled with a euphoria not lacking a measure of hubris [...] In the end it did not work without the old institutions. The museums, the art journals, the galleries...” (Zinggl, 11, 14)

⁸ This is the title that Beuys gave to a “performance” at the Giant's Causeway, County Antrim. It is the point of departure of diversity-related thoughts on Beuys: Lerm Hayes 2006.

⁹ Alistair MacLennan in conversation with Christa-Maria Lerm Hayes, Belfast June 2007.

¹⁰ Ireland (Dublin) had already been captured as such by James Joyce in *Ulysses* – which had been formative for Beuys and provided a context for his engagement on the island, even his wish to find a site for the Free International University (FIU).

¹¹ For these thoughts, Brian Graham's presentation “Heritage and the construction of place and identity” has been valuable: delivered at the workshop “The representation of place by collectifs and through collections, University of Ulster, 24 May 2007.

¹² The artists featured here have their own stake in the “Culture Wars”, as Eagleton describes it: “Men and women are more likely to take to the streets over cultural and material issues rather than purely political ones – the cultural being what concerns one's spiritual identity, and the material one's physical one.” (Eagleton 61)