

ETHNOGRAPHERS OF CO-CREATION AND COLLABORATION AS MODELS OF CREATIVITY

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ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELDWORK REPORT: INTRODUCTION

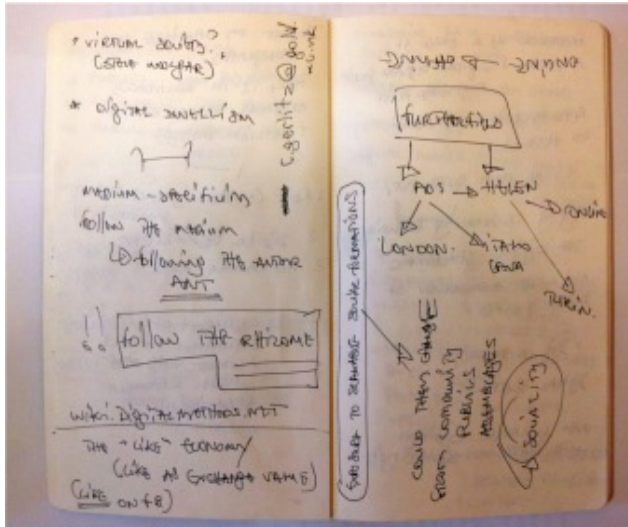


Fig. 1 Fieldnotes

The theme of my inquiry is how creative networked communities emerge in transnational and transcultural contexts, within a globalized and distributed communications environment. How do communities form and change through the collaborative activities of their members? How do members of these online communities come together to reinterpret and facilitate *creativity*?

I attempted to gain insights to these questions through ethnographic research with three creative communities that constitute and deploy themselves online and in physical space: Furtherfield, an artist-led online community and arts organization; Art is Open Source, the Italian artist duo of Salvatore Iaconesi and Oriana Persico, who develop ubiquitous publishing through co-creative practices; and Make-Shift, a cyberformance community represented by Helen Varley Jamieson and Paula Crutchlow. These three communities are closely interlinked. In fact, as I relate below, I happened upon the latter two

by following leads and lines of collaboration opened to me through my work within Furtherfield. Furtherfield was my principal host, my fieldwork home, and the community I spent the most time with and which I managed to observe most closely and longest.

For this reason, this report, the first to emerge from my ethnographic fieldwork and before I have had the opportunity to analyze and theoretically contextualize my field *evidence*, focuses almost exclusively on Furtherfield, with only passing reference to Art is Open Source and Make-Shift.

SOME NOTES ON THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF NETWORKED COMMUNITIES

NOTE 1. ETHNO+GRAPHY

My inquiry into the emergence of creativity through collaborative communities is ethnographic. Ethnography is “a decoding operation” (Apgar 1983), whereby the researcher expects to learn the verbal and symbolic language(s) and decipher the codes that underpin the existence of the community he/she sets out to *observe* from the inside. Ethnography, then, includes both the act of immersion in a community/culture and the methodological toolkit to facilitate decoding (e.g. participant observation, in-depth interviews with community members, etc.). Bate suggests that ethnography can be considered as a text that “drops the reader into the social setting, reveals the mundane and everyday, and delivers both a point and a punch line” (Bate quoted in Howard 2002, 213).

By enabling the researcher to observe first-hand interaction between community members within specific territories, and to probe the meanings of this interaction, ethnographic methods are particularly useful for capturing and decoding a community’s symbolic language. This is congruent with the symbolic anthropologists’ claim that communities result from “boundary construction through identity and shared systems of meaning” (Cohen quoted in Guimarães 2005, 146). Implicit in this understanding is the spatiality of any community. Ethnography, therefore, is a method not just for deciphering symbolic codes and meanings, but also for mapping territoriality and the physical presence of the community.

Schneider and Wright succinctly affirm that anthropology’s main concern is experience: “not just in the sense of fieldwork, but also in the sense of understanding and representing the experience of others” (Schneider and Wright 2006,

16). “Experiment” (here in the sense of *experience*, as suggested by the term’s etymology¹), Schneider and Wright argue, is a generative procedure whereby knowledge “emerges” (2010, 11). In the field, the ethnographer actively pursues a relationship with a particular site and its makers and users, participating in a culture. It is this experience of the site first hand and the participation in the daily practices, routines, and rituals that constitute it, that *may* justify the ethnographer’s claim that he/she has made sense of the *site*, and his/her subsequent attempts to represent this site.

As any representation, ethnography is limited. Acknowledging the limits of the ethnographic project, anthropologist Edward Bruner suggests that ethnography is “one mode of representation” among many; any claims of truth attached to this endeavor are, hence, declined (1986, 16). “There are inevitable gaps between reality, experience, and expressions,” he goes on to suggest; “our account does not fully encompass all that we thought and felt during that experience” (Bruner 1986, 7). Ethnography does not produce “an objective or truthful account of reality”; rather it is an interpretation of the “ethnographers’ experiences of reality” (Pink 2000, 22). And yet, these limitations can also be benefits in disguise: it is by probing these seams, chasms even, between reality, experience and representation, that new modes of representation and novel interpretations of the *field*, and the ethnographer’s experience within it, often emerge.

NOTE 2. CREATIVE LAND

This report is a first attempt to unravel the story of my ethnography at Furtherfield and to (begin to) give shape to the volume of field-notes and interview recordings compiled during fieldwork. As the word “text” (from the Latin *textus*: “to weave”) implies, the making of the story—any story—closely resembles the process of *weaving*. By this I am not referring (only) to the grammatology and materiality of the document, its letters, sentences, paragraphs and pages put together, but to the multiple stories, voices, and geographies that writing weaves together in the knots of text-as-cloth (c.f. Ingold 2010).

It is, therefore, on purpose that, as it tries to retrace the lines of my field-work and their interconnections, this text eschews a linear progression. Instead it is more like a patchwork, where fragments of field notes and recorded voices,

1 <http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=experimental&allowed_in_frame=0>.

nodes where people and projects meet, are stitched together to make a cloth which, in turn, purports to represent a journey.

My ethnography is about a creative land, a landscape of places and people and things. It is about creativity as a synergy of spaces, practices, and artifacts, interlinked so that they form an assemblage (*sensu* Deleuze and Guattari 1987). Spaces are lived by bodies (human and non-human); practices are performed by bodies; artifacts are made by bodies. The connecting commonality here is, therefore, a community of bodies—people, buildings, machines, objects, and networks that construct this creative land through their interaction.

James Leach's (2003) suggestion that cultural practices of making new things can also "create individuals and bind them in social groups, 'creating' the community they inhabit" (after Biggs and Travlou 2012, online) is topical here. Agency and becoming are immanent within assemblages of things and people. In other words, agency and becoming are innate whenever things and people come together. The unfolding of creativity is, thus, understood as a property of relations, of communities, and is "emergent from, and innate to, the interactions of people" (Biggs and Travlou 2012, online). Tim Ingold (2008, online) describes this emergence of creativity as lines:

along which things continually come into being. Thus when I speak of the entanglement of things I mean this literally and precisely: not a network of connections but a meshwork of interwoven lines of growth and movement.

What kind of methodological framework could be congruent with this understanding of creativity as an emergent property of assemblages? How should I go about my fieldwork in a way that would accord with the dynamic and constantly shifting patterns of interconnection between the communities I was about to *study*?

NOTE 3: ON METHOD AND FIELDWORK PRACTICES

As already hinted, a review of the ethnographic literature suggested that the methodological approach appropriate to my study would be beyond the pale of "traditional" ethnography: I was about to study communities assembling between physical and online space(s), in "transnational" (beyond borders) and "transcultural" (hybrid) locations. Accordingly, my methodology was informed

by insights from “multi-sited global ethnography” (Marcus 1995; Burawoy 2000; Hendry 2003) and “online ethnography” (Ward 1999; Hine 2000; Carter 2005).

Global ethnography, or “globography” (Hendry 2003), aims to describe discourse amongst members of a creative community who communicate through new global forms of technology (e.g. the Internet) and exist (primarily) because of these forms of technology.

Online ethnography acknowledges the peculiar characteristics of virtual communities: communities which exist only if their members perceive them to exist (Hine 2000) and, I would add, will them to exist. The boundaries of virtual communities tend to be fluid, changing according to the ways their participants define them. In virtual networks the ethos of community appears more important than a sense of place. Such communities can be based around common interests rather than shared geographic territories. Identity is not entirely a function of location. Online ethnography, therefore, recognizes that community members have the lead role in establishing the reality, status, principles, and boundaries of their community.

FIELD PRACTICES

Guided by insights from global and online ethnographic approaches, the fieldwork program included both on- and offline interviews with members of three networked communities (Furtherfield, Art is Open Source, and Make-shift) and participant observation with all three communities, in both virtual and the real space.

Overall, fieldwork at Furtherfield, the core host community, which also provided the theme for this report, lasted for twenty-one months, from January 2011 to October 2012. This fieldwork consisted of:

1. four months (February–June 2011) of *in situ* fieldwork at Furtherfield Gallery (HTTP) in Manor House, North London;
2. shorter field visits to events, exhibitions, and workshops organized in the old (Manor House) and new (Finsbury Park) Furtherfield galleries;
3. systematic online monitoring of the Furtherfield website for new entries (e.g. exhibition reviews, commentaries, workshops/exhibitions/events’ promotional material);

4. participation in online exhibitions and events (e.g. cyberperformances) organized by Furtherfield in partnership with other arts groups and communities; and
5. online fieldwork on NetBehaviour (Furtherfield's open email list community), from February 2011 to March 2012, with collection of over 8,000 emails.

Throughout the time of the *in situ* fieldwork, I visited Furtherfield Gallery every fortnight for a few days each time. During these visits, I spent time at the office to get to know my hosts and immerse myself in the setting, situations, and activities. Quite often, I was invited into discussions and meetings and was asked to assist in the organization of events and exhibitions. I was also invited to attend various events and activities with the Furtherfield crew outside the gallery. For instance, Marc Garrett, Furtherfield's cofounder, invited me to attend a number of his radio shows on Resonance FM. Ruth Catlow, Furtherfield's other cofounder, invited me to Writtle College of Design in studio crit sessions with her students.

My stay at Furtherfield also enabled me to carry out a series of interviews with key Furtherfield members and to video-record meetings, activities, and events.

These fieldwork practices were planned according to a modified version of George Marcus's (1995) six-stage approach to multi-sited ethnography:

1. follow the community;
2. follow the artifact (in this case electronic literature, performances, installations);
3. follow the metaphor (signs, symbols, and metaphors that guide the ethnography);
4. follow the story/narrative (comparison of stories with fieldwork notes from observation);
5. follow the life/biography (gather individual stories/experiences); and
6. follow the conflict (in this case, between transnational communities, e.g. in relation with copyright laws).

Furtherfield and the other communities that hosted my research emerge through non-hierarchical, multi-voiced, co-creative practices, where knowledge and creativity are shared—and, in the process of sharing, multiplied—across

members and groups. As I explain below, the topology of these networked communities is rhizomatic. In acknowledgement of this, I extended Marcus's (1995) six-stage scheme with an additional seventh stage:

7. follow the rhizome.

NOTE 4. RHIZOME

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. (Deleuze and Guattari 1987, 25)

As defined by Deleuze and Guattari (1987), the rhizome is characterized by heterogeneity, multiplicity, disjunction, difference, multiple entry points, and routes rather than roots. It does not respect borders; it generates many connections between ideas, things, people, and places and creates spaces where the “unexpected can occur, where change and transition are not only possible but necessary” (Graffland 1999, 3).

By opening up an infinite number of entry points and by blurring the boundaries between ideological, scientific, and philosophical modes of thinking, the concept of the rhizome promotes an interdisciplinary epistemology and invites an understanding of methodology as lived experience.

My following of the rhizome has been a succession of detours: I would start by following one line, and then another would appear and cause me to divert. At first, these diversions made me quite apprehensive. With time, I realized that they allowed me to map out, as it were, a larger part of the rhizomatic network I was *studying*—a network of formidable dimensions, which, as it was becoming increasingly more apparent, extended well beyond the few case studies of my research. While at Furtherfield Gallery, for instance, I met Salvatore and Oriana of Art is Open Source (AOS) and then went on a mission to spread the word about their project, Roma Europa Fake Factory (REFF), for which they were organizing workshops at different universities across London (University of Westminster, South Bank University, etc.) and across autonomous social spaces (e.g. the Really Free School occupation at the Black Horse Pub). This serendipitous meeting led the original line of my study (Furtherfield) to branch out into a second line (AOS), which in turn, and as I pursued it further, branched into further lines, intersecting and intertwining; routes that topologically resembled roots, the rhizome, dynamic, evolving, changing, and self-constituting over time.

NOTE 5. NOMADIC MOVEMENT

Lines, paths, and rhizomes entail movement. Tim Ingold, in his text “Against Space: Place, Movement, Knowledge,” suggests that we should look at places as “knots where the threads from which they are tied are lines of wayfaring.” Lines trail beyond the knot “only to become caught up with other lines in other places” (2011, 149). For Ingold, places are becoming through movement along paths, lines connecting place A and place B. Intriguingly, when a “person moves he becomes a line,” and as “the wayfarer is constantly on the move [...] he is the movement” (Ingold 2011, 149–150).

For Hazan and Hertzog, ethnographic research is intrinsically nomadic. They argue that, “besides being a major focus for research in the anthropological tradition, nomadism is a state of mind central to the understanding of the ethnographic enterprise” (Hazan and Hertzog 2012, 1). Ethnographers, like nomads, are in a continual adaptation to an incessantly changing world, which requires them:

to be physically mobile, mentally alert, emotionally resilient and socially agile; [they] must be prepared to modify and revise [their] theoretical standpoint time and again; and [they] must cope with the frequent unpredictable mutations in the articles of faith as to the desirable management of anthropological knowledge. (Hazan and Hertzog 2012, 1)

These insights have helped me to contextualize the state of wayfaring within the meshwork of lines connecting the places and people of this project. The communities/collectives/networks I worked with were constantly on the move, along paths that I had just begun to follow and whose complexity and mutability I had just begun to appreciate. As I was following and participating in the constant re-making of the rhizome, the communities were all lines and movement. Their movement was fluid, haphazard, and nomadic: from London to Cava de’ Tirreni, from there to Turin, and, later, (after my fieldwork had officially ended and as the rhizome continued to grow) to Rome.

NOTE 6. SERENDIPITY

As already hinted, serendipity, chance, and happenstance have had a major role in shaping the directions of this journey. My initial expectation, at the start of my ethnographic fieldwork, was that I was about to embark on a study of networked *online* communities. In many ways this did happen: online communities consti-

tuted a major focus of my research. Already in the first few weeks in the field, however, I realized that this study would take me on a journey across an intriguing, *physical-cum-virtual* landscape, shaped by fabric-like topologies, “a meshwork of interwoven lines of growth and movement” (Ingold 2008, online).

As anthropologist Dona Davis (2007, 3) succinctly puts it, “the field is not lab.” If scientific research is largely about hypothesis testing and prediction, ethnographic fieldwork, no matter how sophisticated the research design, is about happenstance and chance: “Much that emerges as desirable or worthwhile in fieldwork is unsought, unanticipated or not predicted” (Davis 2007, 3). Hazan and Hertzog (2012, 2) also emphasize that ethnographic research, as an inescapably nomadic “evidence-based form of creating and applying novel explanations to new observations,” relies on serendipity and discovery.

These remarks accord perfectly with my experience of serendipity and what Hazan and Hertzog (2012, 2) term “the nomadic force” as a crucial shaper of this study, constantly challenging me to reinvent fieldwork practices and research methods and theoretical orientations, driving me from “one idea to another, transcend[ing] boundaries, shift[ing] involvements and transform[ing] commitments until it is finally arrested and shaped in the published text.”

Nomadic by nature and subject to chance and happenstance, ethnographic research cannot be bound by prescribed formulae of *writing culture* (ethnography); even if we begin fieldwork with such a formula in mind, much of our ethnographic research remains uncontainable and evading.

NOTE 7. SCULPTURAL WRITING

As Michael Herzfeld remarked in his talk at the Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in November 2012, “while we all recognize the serendipity of fieldwork, virtually no one has recognized the serendipity of the writing process.” Herzfeld asks us to look at ethnographic writing as a craft that we learn to master through trials, faults, and happenstance.

Ethnographic writing is sculptural; it becomes through making. Herzfeld sees this as a “realist sculpture—not a socialist realism with its intolerance of anything ‘unscientific,’ but a more eclectic variety, one that actually tries to represent a cultural and social milieu with some semblance of accuracy.”

In view of the preceding notes, the challenge in my own ethnographic writing is to make a (written) sculpture that represents a bewildering entangle-

ment of lines. If I were a sculptor developing my work in physical space, the question facing me would probably be one of shape and the deployment of this shape in space. In the case of a piece of writing that strives to represent a meshwork of lines—multiple stories, voices, loci—the question is again one of shape: the shape that emerges from the (re-) arrangement of these lines traced in the (somewhat inchoate) narrative of ethnographic *fieldnotes* at Furtherfield—from handwritten records of *in situ* fieldwork, short field visits and online cyberperformances, to interview transcripts, video transcripts, promotional material, website information, and online discussions—and memory.

FURTHERFIELD

A BEGINNING

Looking back at my fieldnotes, the first thing that strikes me is that my ethnography seems to have not a single, but several beginnings.

Each (potential) beginning of my ethnography depends on how I re-interpret—a *posteriori*—the consequences of some events that constituted the early phases of my fieldwork:

I could argue that it all started with a talk I gave in 2009 on previous ethnographic research. My colleague Simon Biggs attended the talk and after its end asked me if I would be interested in collaborating on a new project for which he was applying for funding.

Then, there is the actual start date of the ELMCIP project (June 2010), with fieldwork commencing in July 2010. At that point, Simon Biggs, who had become my key informant, suggested a number of candidate network communities for me to work with: Furtherfield, ELO (Electronic Literature Organization), and Interactive Fiction.

Each of these organizations/communities/projects is a line in the meshwork of my ethnography. Some of these started as single lines and then progressed, intersected, and entwined with others, and from that entwining other, new lines appeared. Others were never to develop.

As this ethnographic research is linked with the ELMCIP project, ELO and Interactive Fiction were the first two groups that we considered as possible *case studies* (a term whose positivist undertones are not entirely congruent with ethnography). As our preliminary discussions progressed, however, the focus of

the project shifted from electronic literature to network communities of mainly digital artists and practitioners.

These discussions, false starts, and reconsiderations led me to Furtherfield. Furtherfield became, then, the starting point of my ethnography and the space where I was to return again and again during the months of fieldwork. Like a family, it provided me with shelter, guidance, and comfort as I was striving to familiarize myself with a new culture and language. At the beginning of my fieldwork, I was almost a complete novice, bewildered by the theories, practices, and semantics of digital arts and technologies. The few months of fieldwork were, thus, spent in a process of learning through trial and error, sometimes *lost in translation*.

“WE ARE A FAMILY”



Fig. 2 HTTP Entrance/metal door

I met the Furtherfield community on the 9th of February 2011, a warm and sunny day for that time of the year, at the very start of my fieldwork at Furtherfield Gallery (formerly known as HTTP—House of Technologically Termed Praxis), which at that time was located in Manor House, in a North London industrial estate. The place was not easy to reach: it took a fifteen-minute walk

from the nearest tube station towards a rather residential area. When I arrived at the gallery premises, I had trouble locating an entrance. I had to knock on a metal door and hope that people would hear me and let me in.

Reflecting back on that day of my first (physical) encounter with Furtherfield, I was very intrigued by the seemingly obscure, almost secretive aspect of its physical location, which contrasted with the very strong presence of the online community on NetBehaviour. Knowing that Furtherfield's online community consists of 26,000 users and that Furtherfield Gallery has more than 800 supporters, I expected that the space that houses Furtherfield would be conspicuous and large enough to accommodate its many activities. I was, thus, quite unprepared for the compactness of the actual premises.

Another striking aspect was that Furtherfield's space seemed to defy classification: was it a gallery, an office, or a home? It juxtaposed and mingled all of these functions: the first room was clearly a gallery space; the second room was used as a meeting place and, also, as an extension of the gallery space; the third room was an open-plan office with some desks used by the more permanent staff and others used as hot desks. At the same space, there was a kitchen with a cooking area and a table used for both dining and meetings; a small back room where all unused and recycled computers and other related material were stored in what seemed to be a rather haphazard way; a bathroom, complete with bathtub, washing machine, and personal toiletries; a series of bookshelves on one of the walls, with a selection of books on digital arts, politics, and literature; and a low-ceiling mezzanine with a double bed, for the use of resident artists and guests.

Furtherfield Gallery was clearly a multi-functional space: a gallery, an office, and a house. The shift between these uses was smooth, almost fluid: I could easily see how the gallery room could be easily transformed into a private meeting space; how, in exhibition openings, the office and kitchen space could be transformed into gallery and social gathering space; how meetings could be hoisted around the dining table with not much ado; and so on.



Fig. 3 Office space

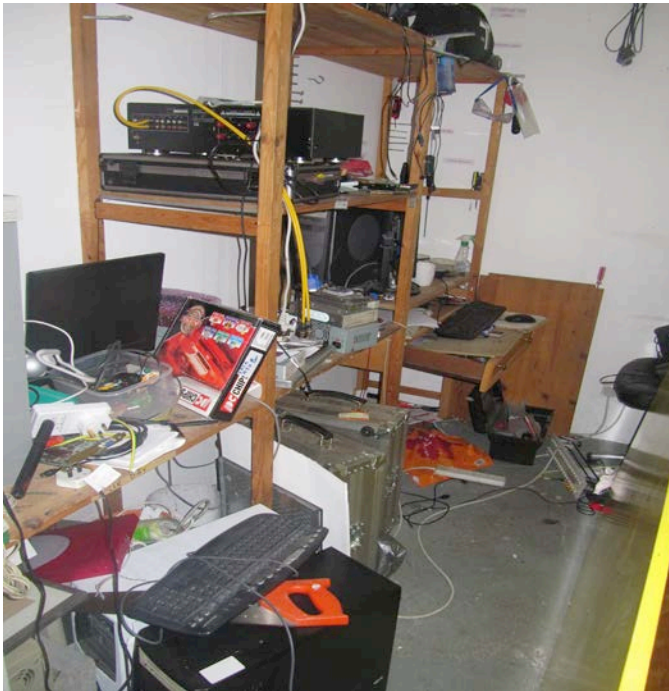


Fig. 5 Computer storage space

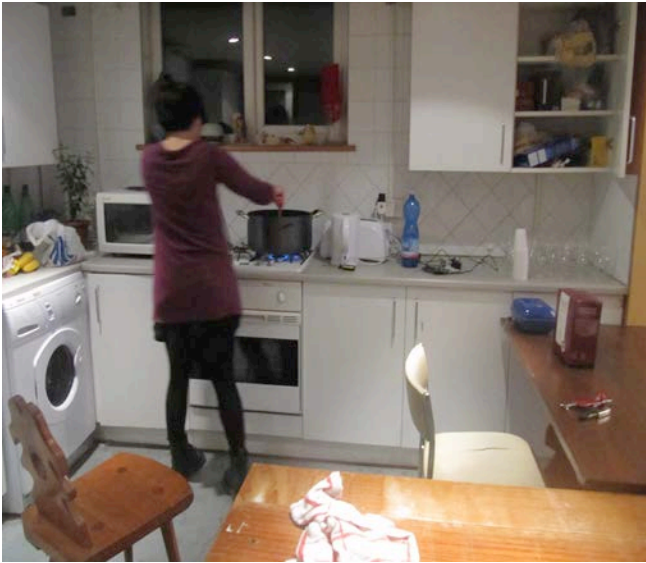


Fig. 6 The kitchen



Fig. 7 Panoramic view of the office space

This multiple use of space, the homely juxtaposition of space functions, and the striking absence of clear boundaries between uses that are often kept separate in *professional* settings also reflected (indeed exemplified) the way Furtherfield functioned as an artists' community, organization, and family. As Salvatore Iaconesi from Art is Open Source (at that time resident artist at Furtherfield) remarked on one of my first dinners at the gallery, Marc and Ruth were the parents and all the rest of us were the adopted children, relatives, neighbors, and family friends. In a similar manner, Alessandra (Ale) Scapin, the Furtherfield program manager and project coordinator, in her interview, described Furtherfield as a family for her:

it's my work, but I would say it's a family [...] A family because it is not just a boss and employee relationship. It's more than that. You really want to make things happen. So you would give 100%. Everyone who comes here gives 100%. So yeah, I think it's a community, it's a family, and it's a way of thinking. (A. Scapin, pers. comm.)

As a family, Furtherfield is expanding, expansive, and mutable, always changing its number of and relations between its members: a rhizomic entity that is growing from and towards different directions, as new collaborations and



Fig. 4 Office space

friendships constantly emerge while others wither away. During my three-month fieldwork in the gallery there were the following:

1. two opening exhibitions;
2. a school initiative project, comprising a series of design projects at Writtle College;
3. projects delivered by other Furtherfield staff and members;
4. various conference talks by Marc and Ruth;
5. workshops and symposia at several universities;
6. Marc's weekly radio show at Resonance FM; and
7. the artist residency (Salvatore Iaconesi and Oriana Persico).

These activities, projects, and events brought formerly unrelated people, communities, and organizations together and initiated new partnerships, collaborations, and friendships. Browsing back through my fieldnotes, I see here and there names, email addresses, and weblinks scribbled down: some of these people have become friends on Facebook, and I keep following their online whereabouts; with some I even met in person at events (e.g. exhibition openings) that took place in the Gallery after the end of my fieldwork or on occasions separate from Furtherfield.

STARTING UP

We've been friends from '91 [...] but we were both attached. And then, we weren't attached, and then, we got married (Ruth Catlow, pers. comm.)

And then, Furtherfield started in '96, it was kind of about the same year when we kind of got started working on this together. And, basically, Marc was working in homeless centers running arts projects for ten years. And I was working as a fiddler in a Greek wedding band for ten years.

But we didn't have a gallery at that time. We just did everything online then. As we got ... we were a success ... we got some funding through the Lottery Fund for ... I think our first, serious funding for Furtherfield project was for online residencies, artists' online residencies, which was called Further Studio. I think that was in 2002.

We set the gallery then ... we opened our first show in 2004. Again, with

no funding. So, everything was kind of doing everything, you know, using whatever we could get hold of. And doing work in partnership with people. And then, in 2005, we got the funding. Really, if we hadn't got the funding, we were ... I think we were about to go down, actually, we were really close to this. Yeah.

Furtherfield as an idea, institution, organization, community, gallery, and set of projects is the brainchild of Marc Garrett and Ruth Catlow. Marc is a Net artist, curator, writer, street artist, activist, educationist, and musician,

emerging in the late 80s from the streets exploring creativity via agit-art tactics. Using unofficial, experimental platforms such as the streets, pirate radio, net broadcasts, BBS systems, performance, intervention, events, pamphlets, warehouses, and gallery spaces. In the early nineties was co-sysop (systems operator) for a while with Heath Bunting for Cybercafe BBS.²

Ruth identifies herself as an artist, educator, and curator, with a background in sculpture.

Furtherfield, Marc's and Ruth's life-project, transformed from a vision to an actual space and community originally to accommodate the somewhat marginal digital arts scene of the 90s. When Marc and Ruth met in the early 90s, they both shared the same frustration with the art scene of the time, the YBAs (Young British Artists), and its blatant commodification. They felt that the YBAs were promoting a very uncritical and non-discursive kind of artwork, grounded in traditional conventions of artistic practice. The established art scene was becoming exclusionary, confined within the boundaries of the artist studios. As Ruth says, "people wanted to keep their ideas to themselves and were quite protective of their ideas and their work. It suddenly wasn't about sharing ideas and building something together" (Catlow, pers. comm.).

It was this individualistic culture of the Brit Art scene that made Marc and Ruth look for alternative practices of communication, collaboration, and partnership with other artists and practitioners. They were uninterested in selling their artwork to "rich people and pristine galleries." Instead, they wanted to make things "for people with whom [they] would be interested in having a conversation with" (Catlow, pers. comm.).

2 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org>>..

At that time, Ruth started experimenting with the Internet and digital technologies as a way to expand her artistic practice as a sculptor. For her, the Internet became that “space that could be durational, something where there was no ambiguity about whether you were dealing with human beings or machines.” This is when Marc and Ruth started making web pages for people whose work was not part of the mainstream Brit Art scene. Their web pages contained short reviews and documentation, which they then posted on early email lists such as *Rhizome* and *Nettime*. In Ruth’s words, “suddenly, we were in a place that was really interested in discussing in a kind of a philosophical context the work we liked” (Catlow, pers. comm.). This was when the Furtherfield idea was born.

In Furtherfield’s early days, besides writing their own reviews and documentation, Ruth and Marc invited other people to become reviewers on their weblog(s). In parallel to this, they began developing exhibitions and participatory projects. Their earliest project was “Day In—Day Out” (1999), something akin to a multi-blog project, in which they invited artists and musicians from around the world to contribute diary posts in the form of texts and images. With this material, they organized an exhibition soliciting the audience’s responses to the diary posts. These responses were then posted online.

At the beginning, Marc and Ruth ran everything from home and only online. When they first got funding from the Lottery Fund in 2002, they set up online artist residencies, the FurtherStudio. That was also the time when they came up with the term “Furtherfield,” to express their position as artists, curators, and educators: Furtherfield is something that goes beyond, even further than the mainstream (political, artistic, more broadly cultural) left.

THE WEBSITE

The (now defunct) Furtherfield website, which I first accessed in September 2010 before the start of my fieldwork, was my very first introduction to Furtherfield. That first encounter was rather overwhelming. The site was teeming with information: announcements and bulletins for events, exhibitions, workshops in London, the UK, and abroad, discussion forums, blogs, reviews, projects, and various other posts. I found that I was unable to make heads or tails of all this information to get a clear idea about what Furtherfield was exactly and what it stood for.

That old website was changed in early March 2011. Vincent Van Uffelen, the web developer who worked on the design of the new website, described the latter as:

a standard to more open source content management system. [...] The new website is more powerful, more flexible and it looks better. There's a lot of extension. It's a lot easier extension than the old system which was a custom-built system (Uffelen, pers. communication.)

This is how Furtherfield introduces its vision and mission on its website:

Vision

We believe that through creative and critical engagement with practices in art and technology people are inspired and enabled to become active co-creators of their cultures and societies.

We can make our own world—together!

Mission

Our mission is to co-create extraordinary art that connects with contemporary audiences providing innovative, engaging and inclusive digital and physical spaces for appreciating and participating in practices in art, technology and social change.³

On the current website, the information is classified in order and format almost identical to that of a wordpress blog. Posts are divided into:

- About (Furtherfield, gallery, contact, people, press, visit);
- Features (articles, interviews, reviews, Furtherfield blog);
- Programs (events, exhibitions, gallery, Media Art Ecology, outreach, projects, publications, radio, residencies);
- Get Involved (become a reviewer, create remix play, events/activities, join NetBehaviour, lexicon); and
- Community (user profiles, clear spots, community blog, calendar, common room, your art here).

The website also includes links to social networking sites such as Flickr, Facebook, and Twitter, where Furtherfield maintains accounts/pages.

³ <<http://www.Furtherfield.org/about>>.

The wealth of information on the website illustrates the diversity of the community and the strategic planning of the organization. It clarifies the role(s) of current grafters in the different projects and their relationships with neighbors and the wider (online and physical) community of Furtherfield. In these ways, it also reflects the dynamic character of Furtherfield, with new partnerships, collaborations, and activities constantly added to their program.

WE ARE PUBLIC: THE FURTHERFIELD GALLERY

HTTP (House of Technologically Termed Praxis), as the Furtherfield gallery was originally named, was London's first dedicated space for networked and new media art. Working with artists from around the world, HTTP provided a public venue for experimental approaches to exhibiting artworks simultaneously in physical and virtual space, and for online projects that explore participative and collaborative art practice. Artists' projects on DVD, real-time, webcast, software art, and live art have been included in the curatorial work of HTTP.

HTTP hosted its first exhibition in 2004 with no funding at all. Ruth recalls that, for that first exhibition, she and Marc did everything on their own "with a little work in partnership with people." Without funding, it would have been difficult for them to sustain the HTTP Gallery.

Nonetheless, setting up the gallery in the first place may have been instrumental for Furtherfield acquiring funding by the Arts Council of England, who supported "core costs and artistic programming and commissions"⁴ a year later. As Marc revealingly claimed:

Arts Council doesn't officially accept online cultures and art culture. They only set up the gallery. The only reason we get funded is because of the gallery. I mean not because of the rest of Furtherfield. (Garret, pers. comm.)

Regular funding from the Arts Council of England in 2005 and other public bodies a year later finally enabled Furtherfield to further develop its gallery space.

Furtherfield Gallery seeks to be a "dedicated space for media art"—providing a platform for "creating, viewing, discussing, and learning about experimental practices in art, technology, and social change."⁵ Like most other private

4 <<http://www.artscouncil.org.uk>>.

5 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org>>.

art galleries, Furtherfield Gallery features a regularly changing exhibition program (which has attracted established new media artists, such as Annie Abrahams, Stanza, Susan Collins, Iacose, and Irrational.org.) and also hosts other events, such as concerts, performances, and readings.

Unlike commercial private galleries, however, Furtherfield functions as a non-profit artist-run space, aiming to “initiate and provide infrastructure for commissions, events, exhibitions, internships, networking, participatory projects, peer exchange, publishing, research, residencies, and workshops.”⁶ Its purpose is to sustain the potential for a more open relationship between artists and audiences through experimentation with contemporary digital networks and social media: “This can radically change the life of the artwork in the world and the ways in which people come across it and sometimes collaborate in its creation.”⁷ These activities rarely appear in the mission statements of private galleries and, indeed, many public museums and galleries. Furtherfield’s clear commitment to and prioritization of collective and public activities of community engagement is among its defining characteristics.

RESIDENCIES

Until recently, the gallery space was also used for *in situ* artist residencies which formed part of Furtherfield’s program.⁸ In the words of Furtherfield’s website, these national and international residencies “offer a productive and dynamic environment to produce work and develop practices in art, technology and social change.”⁹

Residencies usually lasted between one week and three months. Each residency’s duration and aims were negotiable. The residency cost was £400/month for individual artists and £600/month for institutional bodies; individual artists were encouraged to apply for bursaries. Furtherfield provided resident artists with in-house technical support, studio facilities, Internet access, equipment, and exhibition space.

6 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org>>.

7 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org/programmes/exhibitions>>..

8 Since the move to the new gallery space in Finsbury Park, however, the Furtherfield Residencies program has been discontinued due to space limitations. There are discussions to open a new lab space in partnership with Drake Music in summer 2013; this space will also be used for artist residencies.

9 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org/programmes/residencies>>.

Artists who undertook a residency at Furtherfield were invited to present their work to the wider Furtherfield community through online platforms and public events at Furtherfield Gallery. Work created during each residency was included in the Furtherfield Gallery exhibition program. Among the resident artists were Helen Varley Jamieson, Annie Abrahams, Danja Vasiliev, Mary Flanagan, Richard Wright, and AOS.

Part of my time at Furtherfield coincided with the residency of Art is Open Source (Salvatore Iaconesi and Oriana Persico, also known as AOS), which gave me the opportunity to witness firsthand how the residency program worked. Salvatore and Oriana stayed at Furtherfield Gallery in Manor House for a month (February 2011). During their four-week residency, Salvatore and Oriana worked on the development of their project “*REFF (Roma Europa Fake Factory)*: the invasion of ordinary reality to reinvent a new one using a fake institution, a book, an urban performance, and an augmented reality drug.” Their residency resulted in a final exhibition, *REFF: Remix the World! Reinvent Reality!*, showcasing a live, glitch performance, an urban intervention, and a virtual entity by artists featured in the new *REFF* book. Artists included Garrett Lynch (Ireland), Rebar Group (US), and X-name (Italy), alongside a real-time interactive map that described the life of *REFF* all over the world, with sixty authors, artists, designers, architects, hackers, journalists, and activists performing various actions: a real-time stream of information produced collectively by a worldwide community of re-inventors.

In the three weeks prior to the exhibition opening, AOS ran workshops with students from different universities in London on the use of the augmented reality application AOS had developed. The students’ interventions formed part of the urban performances which populated the gallery during the four-week exhibition.

THE NEW GALLERY

Most of my field time at Furtherfield was spent in the gallery space, which also functioned as an office space. I kept visiting the gallery even after the end of my fieldwork time there. These visits reinforced my impression that the gallery was Furtherfield’s hub, a social space for gathering, reaffirming, and strengthening relationships and expanding the community.

The Furtherfield Gallery (*cum* office) was quite far off the center of London and not that easily accessible by public transport. Furtherfield members thought that—although as a space the Manor House gallery was ideal—the lo-

cation was not convenient for a number of people who wanted to visit it during exhibitions. There was also an ongoing concern about how the gallery failed to connect with its local neighborhood and community groups in Manor House and the nearby boroughs.

When Furtherfield acquired new funding from the Arts Council in spring 2011, they started discussing the prospects for moving the gallery to a new location. As Marc informed me, an increase of the monthly rent by the private owner of the building made the option of moving to a new place even more attractive. They entered in negotiations with Haringey Council to use the McKenzie Pavilion at Finsbury Park. Marc and Ruth were also moving out from their Green Lane flat to the countryside. A plan was thus formulated to use part of their flat in Haringey as of-
fice space, while the new rented space would be used exclusively as a gallery.





Fig. 9 Furtherfield Gallery sign, McKenzie Pavilion

In early January 2012, Furtherfield Gallery moved to the McKenzie Pavilion, at the very center of Finsbury Park, next to the adventure playground and the boating pond, near the park's café and the athletics track. The McKenzie Pavilion was offered by the Haringey Council free of rent for the first eighteen months on condition that Furtherfield will facilitate educational projects with the local communities and enable “many more local people [...] to enjoy this fascinating field of contemporary art and get involved with their projects” (Elena Pippou from the Haringey Council, pers. comm.). The high expectations from this new gallery space in heart of London's urban fabric are recorded in the Furtherfield website:

With this exciting move to a more public space Furtherfield invites artists and techies—amateurs, professionals, celebrated stars and private enthusiasts—to engage with local and global, everyday and epic themes in a process of imaginative exchange.¹⁰

The pavilion space is much smaller than the gallery-cum-office at the previous location. It comprises two rooms, with a kitchenette and some storage space. Ale is the only one with a permanent office space, while the other Furtherfield members use hot desks.

The Furtherfield collective have tried to address this by integrating the pavilion with a more extensive assemblage of interconnected—by use as well as by

10 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org/programmes/exhibition/being-social>>.

geographical proximity—spaces: the gallery is contained by, complemented and connected with, the nearby park, the common room, and the Internet. The park, for instance, is described as Furtherfield’s “context and inspiration,” with its “richly connected diversity of people, creatures, plants, activities, enthusiasms” alive within it.¹¹

While the gallery is used to display exhibitions of selected contemporary artwork that address technology and social change, the common room is for displaying work contributed by open call in response to exhibition themes, and curated with local people. A further aim of the common room is to act as the base for a series of free activities for local schools and visitors to the park.

Finally, the Internet is utilized to connect local users to an international network of people who work on/are interested in technology and social change. It provides a place for people to share their artworks, proposals, ideas, and commentaries. It also provides access to further information about Furtherfield exhibitions, including downloadable catalogs and essays, programs of free events and activities, and a living archive of all past work.

Furtherfield will exhibit the best of contemporary work in art, technology and social change in a truly “public” space, developed with and for local residents and users of the park, and wider participants and audiences. Ultimately, we are looking for ways for local people and visitors to the park and from further afield to use this art space imaginatively together and to connect with our international community of artists, designers, thinkers, and technologists.¹²

When I visited “Being Social,” the opening exhibition at Furtherfield Gallery in Finsbury Park on February 25, 2012, I met a number of people I knew from events and exhibitions at the former gallery. There were also people whom I had never met before in person, but I knew through NetBehaviour. Marc mentioned that by the end of the opening event, there were more than 300 visitors, including many people without *established* connections with the gallery or the event: mothers with toddlers from the nearby playground, dog walkers, families, and passerby. As he posted on his Facebook page, he was “very proud of the larger community we are part of 😊.”

11 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org/gallery/about>>.

12 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org/gallery/about>>.

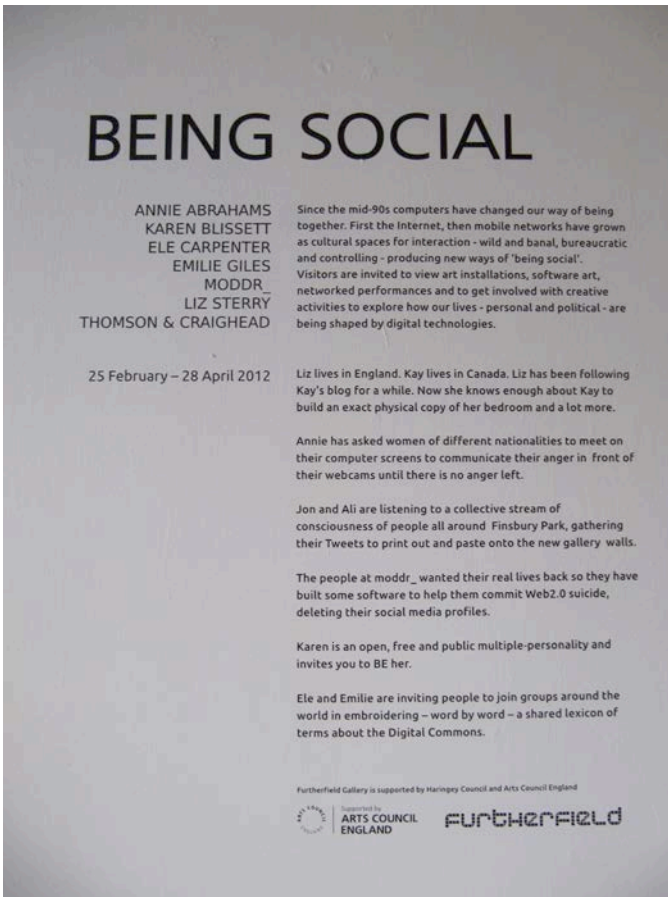


Fig. 10 “Being Social”—Exhibition program

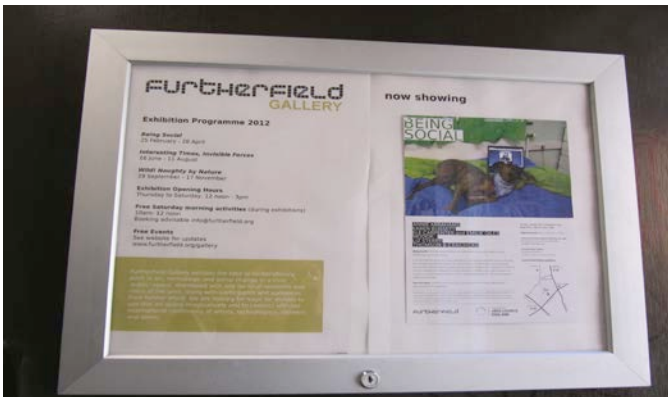


Fig. 11 “Being Social”—Exhibition events program



Fig. 12 “Being Social”—Exhibition opening



Fig. 13 “Being Social”—Exhibition opening

Since then, there have been a number of well-attended exhibitions and workshops, including events and activities for local communities and schools. Their plan is to:

1. host three exhibitions a year;
2. invite local schools and communities to respond to open calls for on-line artworks which will then be selected for display alongside those by artists of *international standing*;

3. and, organize free Saturday morning activities using technology and art. As Marc and Ruth stated on Haringey Community Online:

[u]ltimately, we are looking for ways for local people to use the space in a way that is imaginative and makes most sense to most people.¹³

The question of who constitutes the gallery's public is especially relevant to Furtherfield, as its new location at Finsbury Park opens it up to much more diverse potential audiences. Indeed, the themes of access and relevance to many and diverse potential users are recurrent in statements of vision for this new gallery space. Ruth describes this vision as follows:

We're looking forward to making what can be a quite tricky set of ideas and thoughts available to a much wider public. It's what we've always wanted to do, it really makes sense to us. It's great to be here! It's a truly public space.¹⁴

We would like people to feel welcome here and feel like this is a space for them where they can contribute and say something about them. We wanted the space to be accessible to a much wider group of people ("Being Social" at Furtherfield Gallery).¹⁵

Here are Marc's words from one of our informal chats:

We're kind of wanting something a little bit more grounded and something that can offer people social context and understanding beyond the individual alone. We are facilitating people to be creative by exploring different systems to reclaim culture in their own terms (M. Garret, pers. comm.).

The first workshop at the McKenzie Pavilion was the "Embroidered Digital Commons," a collectively stitched version of the "Concise Lexicon of/for the Digital Commons" by the Raqs Media Collective (2003) to coincide with the "Being Social" exhibition. The workshop, organized by Ele Carpenter and Emilie Giles, aimed to hand-embroider the whole lexicon, term by term, as a practical way of close-reading and discussing the text and its current meaning. It took place at the gallery on Saturday mornings for two months and involved embroi-

13<<http://www.haringayonline.com/forum/topics/digital-arts-collective-to-move-in-to-mckenzie-pavilion-finsbury->>.

14 <<http://www.labkultur.tv/en/blog/Furtherfield-virtual-physical>>.

15 Being Social at Furtherfield Gallery <<http://vimeo.com/39408401>>.

dery sessions where gallery visitors came together to stitch the term *Meme*—an idea that spreads through social networks—chosen for its relation to the theme *Being Social*. The resulting patches were then turned into a short film depicting the sequence of embroideries.

Most of the workshops, however, have been centered around educational programs allowing children in North London to experiment with new technologies and digital media. Since early February 2013, Furtherfield Gallery has been running a series of “Scratch Workshops” with children between 6–9 and 9–12 years old. The Scratch Workshop is a child-focused programming environment where young participants can create and share their own interactive stories, games, music, and art. The workshops are in partnership with Codadesign,¹⁶ wherein children learn to make a game or animation using the Scratch environment. On alternate Saturday mornings they have also been running the MaKey MaKey workshops, again in partnership with Codadesign. The MaKey MaKey is a kit that turns “anything into a controller.” During the workshop, the children practice using computational thinking and interactive design in a variety of activities.

As the ambition of the workshops is to invite the wider local community to participate in activities in the McKenzie Pavilion, there has been a keen interest in forming new partnerships. At the time of writing, the latest event at the pavilion is a music hack day to create and share new instruments that break down disabling barriers to music making (April 21, 2013). The workshop will run in partnership with Music Hackspace and Drake Music,¹⁷ and the music makers will have the opportunity to work towards one of two prizes for the most innovative work.

As Gawain Hewitt, the Drake Music associate musician and associate national manager, explained, “this event is the first of many, and allows us to collaborate with the widest range of talent in creating the most innovative tools for a sector that desperately needs them.”¹⁸

Ruth described the partnership with Drake Music as a good example of collaboration, sharing, and enriching knowledge exchange:

16 <<http://learning.codadesign.com>>.

17 Drake Music is a music and technology hub, founded in 1988 by Adele Drake with a national remit, and with regional bases in Bristol, Manchester and London. For over twenty years they have pioneered the use of assistive music technology to make music accessible and have developed a wealth of innovative and imaginative approaches to teaching, learning, and making music.

18 <<http://www.furtherfield.org/programmes/event/hacking-make-music-accessible>>.

What we brought to it [the music hack day workshop] was an understanding of social media and online communities. [What] we learned from them [Drake Music] was about accessibility, inclusion, and, really, how to work with people and how to make things available to people who are very different. That was always, from the start with Furtherfield, something that really fascinated us. The kind of fact that we could connect with people who were entirely different from us (Catlow, pers. comm.)”

These are just some of the workshops, events, and activities organized at the new gallery space in Finsbury Park since its opening in January 2012. The variety and richness of these events demonstrate the success of the new space as a *public* place, accessible to many more diverse people than before, and open to innovative collaborations and partnerships that engage the local community. This activity has not passed unnoticed: webmagazine LabKultur describes Furtherfield’s new gallery space as the “People’s Serpentine Gallery of North London,” noting its accessible and open character.

WE ARE VIRTUAL: FURTHERSTUDIO, FURTHERNOISE, AND NETBEHAVIOUR

Before setting up the HTTP Gallery in 2005, Marc and Ruth had established other projects within Furtherfield such as NetBehaviour, FurtherNoise, and FurtherStudio. Each of these projects, Ruth explained,

rose up depending on enthusiasms that came up in conversations that we were having with people. And very soon, we had an idea about something that seemed to really make sense. Sometimes it was just a good combination of energies. FurtherStudio is an interesting one because Marc met Jess Loseby online, an artist who was making really lovely kind of work using the Internet to do digital work. She was in a wheelchair, living down South England with three kids. And very bright and very talented, but really unable to make it to conferences or festivals. Marc met her through Rhizome list and noticed that she was making very good posts and everyone’s ignoring her. And what we thought would be interesting would be if we could make a window of her computer, so to create an online residency where people could log in, in real time to her computer and see what she was doing on her screen. And so that happened at the same time as with conversations we were having with Neil who is a programmer and also working with Rodger who is a musician. And things all came up together. Neil had a brain wave about how that could happen and then as we wrote that post, I thought “well, what’s going to make that more interesting for people to log in and see what the

artist is doing?” But, what makes it more interesting is if they could talk to the artist and exchange stuff and if they can get their own hands dirty and produce things. And what a better way to do that than to do it with other people? And that’s how FurtherStudio started. (Catlow, pers. comm.)

The FurtherStudio Artists in Residence program lasted for a year, 2003–2004. The idea behind the FurtherStudio program was to offer a landmark interactive tool that would enable audiences to watch and communicate with artists as the latter developed their work online, in real-time. The curatorial theme of the residency was “the appropriation and ownership of ideas, services, products and images” and the resident artists were Jess Loseby, Rich White, and replic**t.

Each online residency lasted for three months. In the first month the artists prepared and researched their projects and met with the FurtherStudio team of curators and programmers in order to set up the chat and forum facility and agree upon the residency events. The public program of real-time, open studio events commenced at the start of the second month.

The chat and critical forum facilities enabled artists, audiences and critics to discuss the artists’ work in progress in a series of live, globally accessible interviews and critical debates. There was also a visitors’ studio, designed for public participation and collaboration where the audience could experiment with the curatorial theme by uploading, mixing, and exhibiting their own works. Finally, at the end of each residency, were a series of critical forums with an invited panel.¹⁹

Resident artists and Furtherfield members alike remember FurtherStudio as a social area for the people who met through the online artist residency and “a way for people to explore and mess around with various files and see what it felt like to mix and remix.” In Critical Forum 2, which marked the end of Jess Loseby’s online residency, the artist described her experience at FurtherStudio as follows: “[F]urtherfield gave me a free run from its pages & contributors ... so it was like running round a gallery with scissors.”

FurtherNoise is a non-profit organization established in 1999 by Marc and Ruth as the sister site to Furtherfield: “an online platform for the creation, promotion, criticism and archiving of innovative cross-genre music and sound art

19 The transcripts from the forum discussions are available online on the FurtherStudio website (e.g. Critical Forum 2: <http://www.Furtherfield.org/furtherstudio/docs/critical_forum/critical_discuss.htm>).

for the information & interaction of the public and artists alike.²⁰ According to FurtherNoise mission statement, this non-profit organization

Encourages new methodologies and practices in creating adventurous music and sound that is not bound by the constraints of historically experimental genres. We showcase artists' work through critical reviews & features as well as organizing performances and events on the Internet as well as public venues and galleries.²¹

NetBehaviour is perhaps the most prominent of all pre-Furtherfield projects, still going strong and growing, with around 1,000 active members at the time of my fieldwork. NetBehaviour is "an open email list community engaged in the process of sharing and actively evolving critical approaches, methods, and ideas focused around contemporary networked media arts practice."²² The NetBehaviour site describes the list as follows:

NetBehaviour—is for networked media artists, researchers, academics, soft groups, writers, code geeks, curators, independent thinkers, activists, net sufis, non-nationalists, and net mutualists.

NetBehaviour—encourages individuals, small groups of mutual interest, and representatives of organizations to announce and promote their own projects and events on the list along with the exchange of related concepts/ideas/information/resources.

NetBehaviour—is a place where creative minds can share contemporary ideas and concepts, without either the censorship or endorsement of a centrally-imposed hierarchical canon, stunting their creative interests. All disputes are settled by all subscribers in the public forum of the email list.

We are the medium—the context—the source of networked creativity.²³

20 <<http://www.furthernoise.org>>.

21 <<http://www.furthernoise.org>>.

22 <<http://www.netbehaviour.org>>.

23 <<http://www.netbehaviour.org>>.

The last sentence illustrates very clearly the social and political context within which NetBehaviour²⁴ has evolved, that of people sharing knowledge and making *things* together. It “identifies individuals and communities as the determinants of mediality and situates the collective activity as the source of creativity” (Biggs and Travlou 2012).

NetBehaviour provided another major focus for my ethnographic fieldwork. For a year, from February 2011 to March 2012, I collected and archived all 8,751 emails sent to NetBehaviour by both regular members and non-regular contributors. Regular contributors included, among others, the current Furtherfield grafters, neighbors, and collaborators.

In that year, Marc, who also coordinated NetBehaviour, posted 1,541 messages; Ruth posted 521. Olga, who also assisted with the coordination of the mailing list, posted 102 messages under her name and 2,378 messages as “general info,” the latter mostly in relation to announcements for exhibitions at Furtherfield Gallery and other venues, workshops, conferences, residencies, competitions, awards, and newsletters. Other regular contributors included Alan Sondheim, an American poet, critic, musician, artist, and cyberspace theorist (1,541 messages); Rob Myers, Furtherfield Advisory Board member and regular reviewer (923); Micha Gardenas, a transgender performance and new media artist (797); Manik, a Russian digital artist, painter, and poet (717); Michael Szpakowski, one of Furtherfield’s current grafters (467); Simon Biggs, a digital artist and academic (417); Helen Varley Jamieson, a cyberformer and former resident artist at Furtherfield (362); and Annie Abrahams, an Internet-based performer (157).

NetBehaviour is used in various ways, as a mailing list, online platform, and discussion forum. Collection and initial analysis of the message-traffic made it apparent that each contributor uses NetBehaviour for specific reasons. Manik, for instance, has been using it mainly as a platform for the distribution of drawings (such as the “Alive 1–64” series and “Workers Son First Toy”). Alan Sondheim, the most regular contributor, has been using NetBehaviour as both a social space to communicate ideas and debate various issues with the wider online community, and as a place to publicize his poetry. Many of his prose poems have appeared on NetBehaviour: “Monk, Why I Can’t Sleep,” “Darkness/Wandering,” “Vicodin,” “Alan and His Birthday Buddies.” Evidently, for Sondheim, NetBehav-

24 I return to NetBehaviour later in the report to give a more detailed account of the way it functions.

our's online community is an important forum for communicating and sharing his creative work with peers, colleagues, and other practitioners/artists in his field.

In the year of my online monitoring, NetBehaviour hosted topics and discussions of a bewildering variety. Many posts were queries regarding specific software, technologies, coding, and technical issues. Others grew into discussions lasting for weeks, with many people responding and taking up the conversations from where others had left it.

Very often these discussions reverberated with political events that took place around the world. The Occupy Movement, for instance, was discussed extensively between NetBehaviour participants. Using the 2011–2012 protests as a paradigm of resistance against neoliberalism, Marc inquired whether—and how—we could develop similar resistance mechanisms within the art world. In another email thread entitled “Why I’m Not Visiting UC Davis in April,” members critiqued the way the University of California Davis had handled the student protests in April 2012.

In our interviews and discussions, most current grafters, neighbors, and community members described NetBehaviour as a vibrant online community of a nature more open and accepting than other similar email lists. Helen Varley Jamieson, for instance, described how, while she felt discouraged by the way other online forums/communities operated as exclusive and expert-centered, she found NetBehaviour very open and welcoming. As a female artist, Helen did not feel very comfortable on other online forums where the discussions were coordinated mainly by male members. By contrast, she felt that she was part of the NetBehaviour community and that her contributions to discussions were well received.

Olga also discussed her experience as a member of various online lists, some of which (e.g. *Nettime*) she found too theoretical and lacking the “creative edge” of NetBehaviour. She found, though, the technical knowledge and language used by other more regular members on NetBehaviour quite difficult to comprehend and relate to. In her view, there was still a certain element of exclusivity which restricted knowledge sharing between NetBehaviour members.

Regardless of the different experiences that Helen and Olga may have had with NetBehaviour, they agreed on the crucial role of discussions in sustaining this online community. They both described in a positive manner how through

conversations members resolved issues, learned new skills, shared artistic practices, and attended online art projects and events.

Helen's and Olga's accounts corroborated Ruth's response to my question as to how NetBehaviour was sustained as community:

Through conversation. I mean, we're very discursive and bring joy. I mean, you'll know that, through NetBehaviour, the conversations are sometimes very serious and definitive and about making decisions about things together. But often they're playful and silly and kind of open-ended and they ramble on. It's like having the breadth of expression and exchange that you have when you sit down and you drink a cup of tea with somebody. Those are the kind of online spaces that we want to support and generate (Catlow, pers. comm.).

FURTHERFIELD: THE EXTENDED FAMILY

Furtherfield comprises a web of some 26,000 contributors, including international artists, theorists and activists, many of whom know one another only through the virtual connections established and mediated by network initiatives such as NetBehaviour.

Among them there are a number of people who have been involved with, and part of, the Furtherfield community since its early days. Neil Jenkins and Michael Szpakowski, both well-known UK-based Net artists have been active members of this community from its very beginning. Mez Breeze, the internationally renowned Australian code-poet and net-artist and a former member of 7-11 and Net-Time, is also a close associate.

The "Furtherfield Crew," as the closest collaborators are called on the organization's website, consists of four groups:

1. The Current Grafters are members who are actively involved in the management, administration, and organization of Furtherfield and its various projects. The Current Grafters constitute, so to speak, the backbone of the organization. They are:
 - Ruth Catlow—Co-Founder and Co-Director
 - Marc Garrett—Co-Founder and Co-Director
 - Alessandra (Ale) Scapin—Producer and Coordinator
 - Charlotte Frost—Associate Context Editor
 - Olga Panades Massanet—Web Development Coordinator and Outreach Delivery
 - Rich White—Gallery Manager and Technician

- Michael Szpakowski—Outreach Delivery
 - Rob Myers—Co-Editor
 - Aileen Derieg—Blog Editor
 - Roger Mills—Furthernoise Director and Editor
2. The Neighborhood Crew are people in the extended neighborhood of Furtherfield, with specialist input into projects and sister-sites:
 - Pete Gomes—Outreach Delivery (artist and film director)
 - Tom Keene—Outreach Delivery (media artist)
 - Neil Jenkins—Technical Director for Projects (artist, curator and programmer)
 - Corrado Morgana—Game Art Curator (researcher, media artist, curator, and electronic musician)
 - Vincent Van Uffelen—Web Developer (artist and digital craftsman)
 3. The Advisory Board:
 - Mandy Berry—Joint Chief Executive, Golant
 - Rob Myers—Artist, Hacker, and Writer
 - Paul Squires—Managing Director, Perini
 - Joscelyn Upendran—CEO, Iovle and Public Project Lead Creative Commons UK
 - Evelyn Wilson—Senior Manager, LCACE
 - Lauren A. Wright—Curator, Turner Contemporary
 4. The Now-Sleeping Furtherfielders are people who, through their grafting, have at some time and in some way contributed to Furtherfield's current condition. These include:
 - Atty (Andy Forbes)—Programmer/Head Gardener
 - Stephanie Delcroix—Public Relations and Publicity (2006–07)
 - Adrian Eaton—Computer Programmer and Application Developer (2004–07)
 - Zara Hughes—Web Administrator and Technical Developer (2005–07)
 - Jade King—Administrator (2004–05)
 - Alessandra Marconi—Research Associate
 - Graziano Milano—Project Developer for VisitorsStudio (2005–07)

- Giles Pender—Office and Gallery Technician
- Daniel Perez—Web Developer
- U-Sun—Web Administrator Sysop (2005)
- Chardine Taylor-Stone—Marketing Officer
- Maria Yarjah—Technical Producer
- Mary Helen Young—Fundraising

Ruth explains the roles of the “Current Grafters” (or, otherwise, the “core family”) as follows:

When we first got started everybody did everything. Now, we have more defined roles than we had. So Marc’s main role is with the kind of editor, commissioning editor of reviews and interviews and articles and of informal marketing communications, but we don’t call it that. Ale deals with all the administrative stuff, finance and reporting to any funders and various people that we work with. She’s the coordinator of all those. She’s also the program manager which means that her role is developing. She is now responsible for the kind of communications and coordination of what goes on in the gallery. She’s the most important person, for God’s sake (she laughs). My role I would suppose is to write business plans and the kind of strategic partnership development and the kind of long-term strategic role of the organization. Olga works on web development and outreach stuff. I am also involved in the outreach stuff; I’ve been driving that. (Catlow, pers. comm.)

When I asked why they use the term “neighborhood crew” to refer to close collaborators and partners in current projects, Ruth explained that their choice of words is deliberate. For Furtherfield members, there is neither a single *author* nor an autonomous artist: “We don’t aspire to be an autonomous genius. We aspire to be neighborly; to see ourselves in relation to each other” (Catlow, pers. comm.). For this reason, they use words that define relations in real physical spaces like those of kinship and neighborhood, where people share, among other things, locality (a land, a home, a village). These words (and the relationships these imply) are also transposed on virtual space.

This understanding of creativity as an activity of exchange between multiple people and communities that can enable them (Biggs and Travlou 2012)—and the sharing of co-creative practices between grafters, neighbors and other people involved in the making of *artifacts*—constitutes Furtherfield as an example of distributed authorship.

The Furtherfield community is not limited to these four groups and the individual collaborators listed above. During my fieldwork in the gallery, a number of interns, short-term contract employees and students were involved in various projects. Usually, the interns were graduates from undergraduate and postgraduate courses on digital media, creative industries and/or cultural management, from universities across London (i.e. Westminster, Birbeck, South Bank). They were at the gallery for short periods, to work on a specific project or to gain more general work experience. In most cases, their role would be linked to their expertise (e.g. photography, digital media).

Short-term contract employees were there for a few months at a time, depending on their specific role and the time-frame of the project they were involved in.

Finally, there were students whose projects focused specifically on Furtherfield and, therefore, spent time at the gallery to collect material and/or use its space for their project activities. Pollie Barden, a PhD student in Media and Arts Technology at the Queen Mary University of London, for instance, used the gallery for her *telematic dinner parties*—a series of set-up dinners between co-located groups in London and Spain.²⁵

HOUSEKEEPING AND HOME ECONOMICS

During my fieldwork, I had the chance to meet all the “current grafters,” a large number of the “neighbors,” some of the Advisory Board members, and very few of the “now-sleeping” Furtherfielders. Getting to know people in different roles within and around Furtherfield gave me something akin to a perspective view on the project.

When Simon Biggs first introduced me to Furtherfield, he described it as a (networked) community. This description was what drove my initial research objective: to look at the formation and sustenance of the Furtherfield *community*. As my fieldwork at Furtherfield Gallery (the former HTTP) was progressing, however, the semantics began to shift, expand and blur, as the people I was interacting with described Furtherfield not only as a *community* but also (or instead) as a *family* and an *organization*. The choice of term sometimes appeared to depend on the role and position of my interlocutor in the Furtherfield community/family/organization. Nonetheless, there were many instances when the same people

25 <<http://www.paradesigns.com>>.

would use these terms interchangeably, or would shift between these as the context of the conversation demanded.

For Marc Garrett, Furtherfield was a community more than anything else, but when he had to meet with funding bodies such as the Arts Council of England he had to describe it as an organization with specific aims, objectives, management, and administration. Through various discussions I had with Marc, it became obvious that he was not very comfortable with the way Arts Council England (ACE) and other funding bodies perceived digital arts and the remit of spaces such as Furtherfield Gallery; yet he knew that there was a certain language that he needed to use in order to have a chance of success with applications and funding proposals. Ruth, on the other hand, was more at ease with calling Furtherfield an organization when the situation demanded. To some extent, these different degrees of reluctance to make use of the *managerial* terminology of funders may reflect the a clear distinction in Marc's and Ruth's role(s) within Furtherfield: Marc was the one who took more responsibility in nurturing and maintaining community networks, while Ruth did more of the overseeing of project and funding applications and the organization of meetings with ACE and other funders. Marc was also quicker to become involved in discussions regarding the political ideas around Furtherfield and would not make a secret of his resentment towards funding bodies and the arts establishment in general.

Referring to Furtherfield, Ruth made a clear distinction between *community* and *organization*. Speaking about NetBehaviour, for example, she described the platform as a community of people: "We have a community; we have really an active discursive community. I think we have taken over the role of rhizome for instance, for discussion and this stuff." (Catlow, pers. comm.)

Discussing the way Furtherfield operates, on the other hand, she talked about it as an *organization*:

It reflects the kind of dynamics of the organization more. I think we've got better at representing a kind of clearer vision of what it is that we're about. We've got a bit better at developing partnerships and improving our sustainability and thinking strategically about things rather than on a really kind of tactical way. We're thinking with a longer view now. (Catlow, pers. comm.)

As an organization, Furtherfield operates under a strategic plan. Ruth has admitted, however, that formulating a definitive future plan not only is "tricky"

and “challenging,” but can also contradict the ethos of the community. Reflecting on these tensions, she said:

As a requirement, as being an Arts Council funded organization, we have a business plan. Part of the business plan requires us to think five years in advance. It's a kind of ridiculous thing to have to do because everything is unstable at the moment and we may find that next year, we're £80,000 poorer than we are now. [...] It's quite difficult thing to describe precisely. But the underpinning of the thing that we know we want to achieve is to support the community that is developing its own sustainability. That's thinking about what kind of distributed network and community-focused ways of sharing and working together can sustain creativity, imagination, and contribute to material survival as well. (Catlow, pers. comm.)

My interpretation of Ruth's words is that Furtherfield is, at its core, a community and defines itself as such, but, faced with the funding bodies which have the power to decide its survival or demise, it has to use a different language, the language of an organization with a strategic plan. This linguistic flexibility is necessary to secure funding and sustain a partnership with ACE.

Other grafters and neighbors, such as Michael Szpakowski and Rob Myers, see Furtherfield mainly as a community. In one of the Furtherfield Gallery openings, I had the chance to talk with Rob Myers, an artist, hacker, and writer, who had come all the way from Peterborough for the event. During our chat Rob stressed repeatedly how important Furtherfield is for people like him who are working in more remote areas and are not part of London's digital arts scene. Due to NetBehaviour, he can have access to numerous discussions relevant to his interests and be part of an online community which is largely free of internal hierarchies and in which one can reasonably expect to be respected and treated as equal. For Rob, then, the gallery is the physical-social space where he can meet other members of the Furtherfield community in person. It was in an earlier opening event at the gallery where he first met Marc, Ruth, and other Furtherfield members, some time after he had joined the NetBehaviour forum. Since then he has tried to visit most of the opening events, both as a way to support the community and also to socialize in person with people he meets with and talks to online. As a regular reviewer for Furtherfield's website, Rob contributes to the growth of Furtherfield as both a community and an organization.

On the other hand, for Ale Scapin, who works at Furtherfield as program manager and project coordinator, the distinction between organization and com-

munity was not as sharp. Describing her day-to-day job activities, Ale reflected on Furtherfield as follows:

I am a program manager which means it's like [...] overseeing all the programming that we do in the gallery space, as well as outside. I've been doing fundraising, I've been dealing with artists and, you know, sort of supporting them throughout the management of gallery exhibitions and events in general. I've been arranging events, so contacting artists, inviting them to work something at our space. So it's much more interesting in a way, because I'm much more involved in the actual running and ethos of the organization. In a way, I feel like I'm also much more involved in the community. (Scapin, pers. comm.)

Ale's position and role has shifted since she first joined Furtherfield. As she relates in the above quote, she is now "much more involved in the community." Nonetheless, her administrative role serves and sustains Furtherfield as an organization, as Ale described in another of our chats:

When I started here, I was a coordinator, which meant, like, assisting the directors Marc and Ruth as well as assisting Lauren, the assistant director, working on exhibitions, sort of, like, preparing the marketing and, basically, sending out and doing the mail out stuff. I was also in charge of finance—I mean anything to do with budgets, payment and invoices. So it was sort of an administrative job and then I was dealing with HR, so like contracts, all payroll issues. Then I started working four days a week. I started this in July last year [2010], so that has been less than a year now. I took over what Lauren was doing because, obviously, she left in March. I kept my admin job, but on top of that, I am now a program manager. (Scapin, pers. comm.)

Doing fieldwork at the gallery, which also operated as an office, gave me the opportunity to experience first-hand the way Furtherfield was functioning as an organization and a community. In the months that I visited the gallery, I was invited to attend a number of meetings. These meetings took place at the kitchen table, or in one of the front rooms that was part of the exhibition space, and were organized by Ale. They were usually held on Thursdays or Fridays, when both Ruth and Marc were at the gallery (the rest of the week Ruth was teaching at Writtle College of Design while Marc was between Birbeck College for his PhD and Resonance FM for his radio show on Wednesday evenings, besides managing of NetBehaviour and other online projects).

Although they felt quite informal, the meetings were very well planned, with set-up agendas and clear aims and objectives. Meetings usually took longer than originally planned.

One such meeting (February 11, 2011) was also attended by Salvatore Iaconesi and Oriana Persico from Art is Open Source, resident artists in February–March 2012. The meeting was about the organization of their forthcoming exhibition, REFF (Rome Europa Fake Factory). Usually Ruth chaired the meetings, but on that day she had to stay longer at Writtle College, so Ale chaired.



Fig. 14 Meeting with Oriana, Salvatore, Ale, and Mark about the REFF exhibition

All matters concerning the organization of the exhibition, from the way the different posters would be placed on the wall to the smallest logistical details, were discussed, and further actions were decided collectively. There were, of course, differences of opinion on certain issues and different ways of doing things. It soon became clear that Salvatore and Oriana preferred a more *organic* way of dealing with organizational issues, while Ale, Marc, and Ruth were focusing on specific details and clear organizational plans. At the end of the meeting, Ale mentioned that she had tried to keep the meeting as structured as possible. She wanted to ensure that she chaired the meeting in the same way that Ruth would have done. However, she also said that she would have preferred it if the discussion had developed organically instead of being so structured:

It is a process which is more creative, so that people could bring “on the table” more innovative ideas, whereas the more structured discussion is

a bit institutional and reminded her of the meetings she had at the Arts Council when she used to work there. (from fieldnotes, 11 February 2012).

I had a similar conversation with Ruth after another meeting with Salvatore and Oriana. By that time, I was more familiar with Furtherfield and how people worked there, so it was much easier to understand Ruth's observations of that meeting. The meeting was again about the organization of the REFF exhibition. Perhaps because it was the day before the opening and everyone was stressed with last minute preparations, there was some tension in the meeting. At some point, the discussion moved to the way certain posters should be printed out. Ruth and Ale were anxious that the posters were still not up to standard. On the other hand, Salvatore and Oriana were happy with the overall preparation of the exhibition. As Oriana pointed out, they felt that certain things should be left a bit "messy" (pers. comm.). By the time the meeting had finished, certain issues remained unresolved. Ruth was anxious that there would not be enough time to prepare everything for the opening. She acknowledged that Salvatore and Oriana had a different way of working than the one she was used to.



Fig. 15 Meeting with Ruth, Oriana, and Salvatore

These differences in working practices became more apparent the next day, on the opening of the REFF exhibition. On the one hand, the opening was very well organized, with all rooms set up for the exhibition; all displays installed at the right place; and exhibition program leaflets printed and distributed on time. On the other hand, Salvatore's and Oriana's performance, which was part of the opening event, was executed quite organically, relying a lot on improvisation and happenstance. There were things that did not go under plan: the Skype connection with their colleagues in Italy failed to work at the end, as it had not been checked beforehand. Ruth stepped in and apologized to the audience for that. She also asked me a few times if I felt that the opening seemed a bit unorganized. I got the distinct impression that the lack of clear planning in the opening performance made Ruth feel quite anxious. Later, on various occasions, Ruth would mention that particular meeting and the opening as an anecdote that exemplified different organizational practices.



Fig. 16 REFF Exhibition opening and performance

Through my observations of the day-to-day conduct of events and activities, Furtherfield's power structure became increasingly evident to me. This power structure had its most clear expression with regards to decision-making. All activities were, of course, discussed at a round table and everyone involved in each project had the opportunity to voice their views on planning and management. When disagreements emerged between partners, collaborators, and members of each project and activity, discussions could be exhaustive. On most

occasions, however, the final decisions were made by Ruth and Marc. Decisions were, therefore, influenced—and often shaped—by many people’s ideas and suggestions but were made by the directors (Ruth and Marc).

Ale explained how important it is for her to know that there is not a top-down approach on decision-making, unlike, for example, in her previous job with the Arts Council England:

It is really important, just the fact that there is no position from where you say “OK, we’re doing this, we tell you what to do or things I’ve done” and we sort of, like, give you a kind of doctrine. It’s much more based on exchange, collaborations, and constant changes. Everyone’s sort of, like, contributing to an idea. I mean to an idea for a project, but it’s like, there is no hierarchy and I like that. [...] Well here, I like that kind that it’s more like a community. It doesn’t matter if I’m a coordinator or, you know, I’m a student and I know less than you. So everyone’s got a different experience and I think everyone can contribute and give their own idea and sort of like add to the overall project, and I like that. I think that’s why Furtherfield has been so successful in the years and that’s why it’s still such a huge community. (A. Scapin, pers. comm.)

This ethos of collaboration between people with different skills, expertise, backgrounds, and experience; of co-ownership of the project; and of authorship situated within the organization/community, has sustained since its Furtherfield early days. On various occasions, Marc stressed that Furtherfield is based on a heterarchical distribution of power, wherein every participant has a share in authorship and ownership of projects and activities. In an interview online, Marc referred to the ideology and operational practices of Furtherfield as follows:

We do not respect hierarchy in itself, we perceive ourselves to be working in a flexible heterarchy at Furtherfield. Our respect and relation to each other is based on our skills, ideas, shared values contributing to a larger set of adaptive visions.²⁶

FUTHERFIELD: A NOURISHING ENTITY—A COMMUNITY GARDEN

Olga Panades Massanet, the web development and outreach delivery coordinator, explicitly linked Furtherfield’s non-hierarchical (or, in Marc’s terms, heterarchical) character to its small, family-like scale of its community of regular workers.

26 <<http://www.interviewingthecrisis.org>>.

Furthermore, Olga likened Furtherfield to a community garden, collectively cultivated by its many contributors:

I still see the inner workings of Furtherfield as a community, because it is a very small sort of community. It's a small family and it is very much working on very flat hierarchies. So it is very much about fully participating in the organization, and other things, and all having responsibility, which I think it is very, very nice when you want to. And then, it's a much, much bigger community, where Furtherfield is a facilitator, or nourishing entity which puts the infrastructure to make it possible, and spices that a bit with ideas, with reviews, with events. So there is a marked filling into the list of [...] creative [...] movement, or within marked devices essential to the projects to make that community happen. So, yeah, there is a lot of gardening, community gardening. (O. P. Massanet, pers. comm.)

In Furtherfield's "community garden" people are free to plow the soil, plant their own seeds, and partake in the common harvest. Collaboration and reciprocity are key components in knowledge sharing, learning, and making.

In a discussion on "Creativity as Social Ontology" on Empyre, the Australian online community/listserv, Ruth introduced Furtherfield as an organization and community based on collaborative practice:

I am part of a larger context called Furtherfield, which is a collaboration. This means that myself and others explore together and share our imaginations, respecting each others' voices and contributions and skills accordingly. Each of us engages in pursuing our interests and passions within the loose framework of Furtherfield as a progressive media art organization. The way we work with each other reflects how we feel about the world we live in, and how we want to change it. As a group, we all agree that it is important to allow room for productive and contemporary social values. This influences the way we work with each other, and others. (21 July 2010)²⁷

As already mentioned, Furtherfield as a community expands in many different directions, depending on the core people involved in the various projects and the communities they collaborate with. The Furtherfield crew has been involved in a bewildering number of projects since the early 2000. Alongside art-related projects, Furtherfield has developed many outreach activities with schools and local communities across London, as follows:

27 <<http://lists.cofa.unsw.edu.au/pipermail/empyre/2010-July/003197>>.

in different community settings with lots of different kinds of people—including young people, disabled people and homeless people—on projects that explore co-creative processes in a digitally connected world. Learning together people gain the skills to create films, games, performances, and their own knowledge—resources to articulate their own lives and create their own cultures.²⁸

DIWO: DO IT WITH OTHERS

Ruth's emphasis on working with others reflects one of Furtherfield's core values and ideologies: DIWO, the acronym for *Do-It-With-Others*. Ruth and Marc coined the term in 2006, to represent their involvement in a series of grass root explorations between artists instigating critically attuned, mutual engagements, with the goal of shifting curatorial and thematic power away from top-down initiatives into co-produced, networked artistic activities. DIWO has now become a current term, even utilized as a business model and winning the accolades and praises of none other than the *Harvard Business Review*: “[c]ollaboration creates community. Fearless sharing creates community” (Hagel III and Seely Brown 2010). Furtherfield's website describes DIWO as follows:

a contemporary way of collaborating and exploiting the advantages of living in the Internet age that connected with the many art worlds that diverge from the market of commoditized objects—a network enabled art practice, drawing on everyday experience of many connected, open and distributed creative beings.²⁹

For DIWO, collaborating with others is, thus paramount. Creative practices thrive in collaboration rather than competition.

Marc describes DIWO as “artistic co-creation” and a “decentralized method of peer empowerment.”³⁰ In Ruth's words, DIWO is:

like a progression from the DIY which was a kind of maverick, pioneers, like Internet pioneers, “we can do it ourselves” which was a kind of autonomy. For us, we really understood that the best things happen when we talk to people; when other people knew how to do things better than us. By having conversations and combining forces, we could really move

28 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org/programmes/outreach>>. Besides the gallery space, Furtherfield's outreach agenda was one of the key criteria for securing funding from the Arts Council.

29 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org/features/articles/diwo-do-it-others---no-ecology-without-social-ecology>>.

30 <<http://www.seadnetwork.wordpress.com>>.

things forward. (R. Catlow, pers. comm.)

DIWO requires openness, spaces where components from different sources meet, mix, crossover, and combine to build a hybrid experience. It challenges and renegotiates the respective power roles of artists and curators. It brings all actors to the fore: artists become co-curators; curators can also become co-creators. The *source* materials are open to all, to remix, re-edit, and redistribute, either within a particular DIWO event/longer-term project, or elsewhere. Significantly, the process is as important as the outcome: these mutually respectful engagements constitute relationally aware peer enactments. According to Marc, DIWO “is a living art, exploiting contemporary forms of digital and physical networks as a mode of open *praxis*, as in the Greek word for doing, and as in, doing it with others.”³¹

As Richard Sennett argues in his latest book *Together*, cooperation can be defined as “an exchange in which the participants benefit from the encounters. [...] The act of doing so is wrapped in the experience of mutual pleasure” (2012, 5). For this exchange to happen, however, certain skills (in the Aristotelian concept of skill, that of *techné*: the technique of making something happen by learning how to do it well) are needed. Pursuing Sennett’s point further, DIWO can be considered as skilled cooperation, where the various participants in a project, event, and/or activity (learn how to) share ideas and authorship.

DIWO relies not only on skilled cooperation, but also on peer-to-peer (P2P) practices and Media Art Ecologies. Michel Bauwens, the founder and key spokesperson of P2P Foundation, defines peer-to-peer as:

a form of human network-based organization which rests upon the free participation of equipotent partners, engaged in the production of common resources, without recourse to monetary compensation as key motivating factor, and not organized according to hierarchical methods of command and control. It creates a Commons, rather than a market or a state, and relies on social relations to allocate resources rather than on pricing mechanisms or managerial commands.³²

This contemporary form of the commons (Yochai Benkler’s (2006) “commons-led peer production” or as Michel Bauwens’ “peer-to-peer”) shares some

31 <<http://www.seadnetwork.wordpress.com>>.

32 <http://p2pfoundation.net/What_this_essay_is_about>.

crucial characteristics with the historical, pre-modern commons (notably, distributed and horizontal access). Unlike the pre-modern commons, however, the new commons is not (necessarily) located in physical space, and the projects that constitute it are not (necessarily) local in scale.

Projects emblematic of the peer-to-peer (P2P) process include the Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) and the Creative Commons movement. FOSS projects often include thousands of workers who cooperate on making a piece of software which is then made readily available as a form of digital commons (by contrast with proprietary software which seeks to control and restrict access to a good whose cost of reproduction is effectively zero). In addition to the software itself, the source code of the program is made available, enabling others to examine, explore, alter, and improve upon existing versions of FOSS.³³ Taffel (2013, online) describes P2P as follows: “Rather than relying on economies of scale, P2P postulates a system of self-production which could offer a functional alternative which would have notable positive social and ecological ramifications.”

Furtherfield’s ethos of co-creation, collaboration, and heterarchy is absolutely compatible with and further reinforces P2P practices. Wider participation of, and open access for those involved in events, activities, and projects are shaped and pursued, while private appropriation of commonly produced knowledge and art is discouraged quite emphatically. Furtherfield is also explicit in its support for open systems where multiple workers/authors/practitioners can create, write upon, publish, and share software and files. An article on P2P on Furtherfield’s website goes by the title: “You can’t steal a gift: Peer to Peer Politics.”³⁴

Although I cannot be sure that the reference to Marcel Mauss’ (2001) study of the “Gift” is intentional, P2P practices provide some very interesting links with this anthropological tradition. Collaboration is fundamentally about giving and receiving—in this case knowledge of making things together. Voluntary cooperation, the core value of P2P, can, therefore, be regarded as part of the gift economy—learning and sharing mastery—which, within Furtherfield, is a much stronger motivator than money or extrinsic rewards.

33 Popular examples of FOSS include Wordpress—now used to create most new websites, as it allows users with little technical coding ability to create complex and stylish participatory websites—the web browsers Firefox and Chrome, and the combination of Apache (web server software) and Linux (operating system), which together form the backend for most of the servers which host World Wide Web content.

34 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org/netbehaviour/you-cant-steal-gift-peer-peer-politics>>.

Since 2009, Furtherfield has also facilitated projects that explored the intersection of art, technology, and environmental issues. These projects focused on Media Art Ecologies, stimulating practice and debate on ecological themes.

Media Art Ecologies draw on the ideas and writings of American anarchist Murray Bookchin and British anthropologist Gregory Bateson. Bookchin (1991) interpreted the present human conditions as a fragile ecological state compounded with a social pathology. The ecological cum social crisis is due to the hierarchical systems and the exploitative class relationships that permeate contemporary societies. Domination of each other, living things, and nature (falsely construed as an entity external to humanity), although often justified as natural may be catastrophic for human and non-human lives and for those abiotic processes that make our planet habitable. The constant drive for growth and increased production, controlled by fewer and fewer, increasingly more centralized agents, has resulted in a fundamentally unjust and environmentally unsustainable world. In a synthesis of the social anarchism tradition with ecological thought, Bookchin proposes strategies for social liberation and ecological sustainability based on more diverse ecologies of ideas, occupations, and values.

Gregory Bateson (1972) envisioned an interdisciplinary approach for exploring the changes and patterns of consciousness, at both the social and the individual level. For him, the scope of such an ecology of consciousness is analogous to the scope of biological ecology. Bateson (1972) stressed the parallels between the mind, consciousness, and ecosystems: he argued that ecosystems are best understood not as just material and energetic systems, but as communicating and informational, even mental systems, “minds.” Crucially, he also argued that, to properly understand ecosystems, we need to discover ways to think ecologically, recognizing ourselves as an integral part of the system we interacted with.

Furtherfield’s two-year (2009–11) program on new Media Art Ecologies, which was running parallel with their regular program, aimed to increase opportunities for art making, critical debate, exchange, and participation in emerging ecological media art practices and to engage with theoretical and socio-political debates on ecological issues. The program grew out of “an interest in the interrelation of technological and natural processes: beings and things, individuals and multitudes, matter and patterns.”³⁵

35 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org/projects/Furtherfield-media-art-ecologies-2009-12>>.

The Media Art Ecologies program interpreted theoretical insights into:

Ecological media artworks [that] turn our attention, as creators, viewers, and participants, to connectedness and free interplay between (human and non-human) entities and conditions. This points to the deep promise of participatory democracy: not its illusion in thin, isolating and ennuiproducing contexts that we see in the monitored interfaces of corporate owned social media; but the parallel universe of FOSS skills sharing and commons-based peer produced artworks and media. (Catlow 2012)

New work in ecological media arts across and between material, virtual, and cultural domains was supported through exhibitions, commissions, and flightless international residencies, resulting in artwork, reviews, articles, interviews, and essays by practitioners across a range of disciplines. Much emphasis was also placed on the dissemination of knowledge that emerged through the program's activities to the wider community, beyond Furtherfield's usual audiences/participants.

Furtherfield's Media Art Ecologies projects were diverse in both content and artistic practice. The first project was the Feral Trade Café, an art exhibition and working café serving food and drink traded over social networks at HTTP Gallery for eight weeks, over the summer of 2009. Curated by Kate Rich, the Feral Trade Café provided "a convivial setting from which to contemplate broader changes to climate and economies, where conventional supply chains (for food delivery and cultural funding) could go belly up."³⁶

This was followed by the *Zero Dollar Laptop* project, a recycled laptop running Free Open Source Software (FOSS), "repurposing otherwise redundant technology, gathering dust in bedrooms and offices across the country."³⁷ The project was inspired by the *Zero Dollar Laptop Manifesto*³⁸ and comprised a series of workshop programs with different community groups (among them the St. Mungo's Charity for Homeless People). In the workshop's twelve weeks (in 2010), participants learned about using their laptop creatively, from installing their own operating system, to customizing their machines, writing articles, and creating images to share and publish via social media. The project attracted inter-

36 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org/media-art-ecologies/feral-trade-cafe>>.

37 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org/media-art-ecologies/zero-dollar-laptop>>.

38 <http://jaromil.dyne.org/journal/zero_dollar_laptop.html>.

est from other European cities (Budapest, Nantes, Madrid, and Brussels), with many offers for developing collaborative projects.

Another project linked with the Media Art Ecologies program was the *Telematic Dinner Party*, organized by Pollie Barden, a PhD researcher in Media & Arts Technology at Queen Mary University of London. Pollie co-organized this event with Alex Haw from Latitudinal Cuisine,³⁹ a group of food enthusiasts who gathered weekly in different houses and other locations across London to dine together with food prepared in accordance with that month's corresponding longitude. On June 9, 2011, for instance, when the *Telematic Dinner Party* was hosted in Futherfield Gallery, the participants had to prepare food from Russia (as that month's longitude was 169, corresponding to a Russian geographic location). The event was co-hosted by Telenoika in Barcelona, an "audio-visual open creative community."⁴⁰ The goal of the event was to create a satisfying co-present experience of a dinner party, where two remote groups (London and Barcelona) were sharing a meal mediated by sonified objects embedded within smartphones. The plan for the dinner party read as follows:

The Dinner Party Plan

The dinner party will be formatted in the style of Latitudinal Cuisine (LatiCui). LatiCui cooks food from the longitude corresponding to the day of the year. For June 18th the longitude is 169th day of the year and therefore the 169 longitude. We will be eating from Russia or New Zealand.

There will be three courses: Start, Main, Dessert:

- one guest brings a Starter.
- two guests brings a Main.
- one guest brings Dessert.

Each participant will choose which type of dish they will bring. Make (or buy) enough for the four people with whom you will be dining.

At the start of each course, the dinner guest presents their dish and tells why they choose to make/buy it and any other stories.⁴¹

39 <<http://www.latitudinalcuisine.com/>>.

40 <<http://www.telenoika.net/>>.

41 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org/community/calendar/calibrated-cuisine-mobile-mobile-dinner-party>>.



Fig. 17 The *Telematic Dinner Party* at Furtherfield Gallery

Pollie video-documented the dinner to use for her PhD research on how the diners in the co-present and remote spaces interact; how we prepare, eat, and share food; and how human and non-human agents interact, mediate, and co-create practices of food preparation and consumption.



Fig. 18 Documenting the *Telematic Dinner Party*

The numerous collaborations, partnerships, and projects, both online and in physical space, have shown that there is a very distinctive model of creativity within Furtherfield. Their fascinating diversity notwithstanding, they share a common focus that goes beyond the individual maker or the single author to explore relationships and collaborations between different people and between things and people. Furtherfield has grown, first as an idea, then as life project, on the fertile ground of a real relationship, that of its cofounders. Ruth and Marc share many ideas and approaches to working and making, but, at the same time, maintain their very distinct individualities.

Let's not pretend that Furtherfield isn't driven by Marc and I. We talk a lot about distributed creativity and that we are part of the community. It is also quite driven by Marc and I. But I think the dynamic comes from our very different backgrounds and how we resolve things and fighting about things. We learn through this process to dynamically collaborate and co-exist. (Ruth, pers. comm.)

Furtherfield has evolved into a community and organization by expanding their membership into different directions and embracing people, communities, and far-reaching networks that share its ethos of collaboration, sharing, and co-creation and its willingness to immerse themselves in the texture of interactions that render creation possible.

When you bring two things together, it's kind of like an act. I suppose my fundamental understanding of what creativity is, is when you bring two things together that wouldn't ordinarily be together. And find that there's a dynamism and productivity to that you don't get with someone just going on their own and doing something and developing something for themselves. This is also what makes the community. It's a sense of being connected to people in an interesting way. (Ruth, pers. comm.)

THE FUTURE

In this report, I have tried to describe some projects, activities, and practices which demonstrate Furtherfield's ramified nature. To me, Furtherfield's most striking characteristics were its expansiveness and inclusiveness. These allowed new collaborations and partnerships to flourish in physical and online space, within and beyond the existing community.

Since 2011, when I embarked into my ethnography, there have been many changes and shifts on the strategic plan for Furtherfield's future. My fieldwork co-

incided with a time of major cuts at the arts and creative industries sector in England (and the UK in general). These cuts made Furtherfield's future seem uncertain. While their new three-year funding was secured, there were also discussions on how Furtherfield might be able to survive independent of state funding (and free of the compromises the latter often entails). Ruth, for instance, talked of the possibilities of developing synergies with other regional art galleries and museums. She was also keen to continue working on Media Art Ecologies, developing projects that link digital culture to issues of climate change. All these potential projects would be true to Furtherfield's ethos of "collaboration and participation, including audience and artists and changing the relationship between the audience and artist through touring programs."

Another project considered by the Furtherfield team was to develop a new educational scheme as an alternative to the ongoing privatization of higher education. Marc was particularly keen to explore the possibilities of establishing a scheme free and open to all academies for the arts.

So, it wouldn't have the formal higher education validation, but it would build on Furtherfield's reputation and networks. It would be some cross between education and apprenticeship and project production, combining that in a kind of a lab space with some very formal teaching so that people will really leave knowing how to do things. (Mark, pers. comm.)

Although Furtherfield began as a mainly online community dedicated to new media and the digital arts, during the last few years the interest of many of its participants has shifted toward its physical entity, as a gallery and workshop space. In our conversations in the months of uncertainty, before getting the new three-year funding (2011–14), Marc repeatedly talked about the importance of being physically present in, and engaging with local communities. Poignantly, he described his vision of Furtherfield as an online and physical entity:

The online element will always be there, but the main aim is for us to not always be reliant. We've always wanted to stay physical at the same time. Like a tree you know, they have the roots and they also have the branches. We always wanted to be like that, equal.

My visits at the new Furtherfield Gallery in Finsbury Park led me to conclude that Marc's and Ruth's vision for the future of the organization and community has been realized to a great extent: the new gallery space is more engaging, accessible, and open to a wider community; new collaborations and partnerships

have been established and older ones have been strengthened; and innovative educational and outreach programs have been initiated and generated very positive responses. For this reason, I was taken by surprise, soon evolving into concern and apprehension, when in early March 2013 I read on Marc's Facebook status an appeal to raise money for Furtherfield by late April 2013:

Until last year Furtherfield more than doubled its grant income by doing commissioned work in schools and with partners in a range of contexts. The current policy of austerity and cutbacks means that funding for this work is greatly reduced. As with many non-profit arts organizations we are running as lean as we can and core public funding is shrinking. This coincides with a growth in the range, depth of our activities, in our arts program and local engagement. So for the first time we are asking for donations to sustain and grow our work.⁴²

POSTSCRIPT

Although my fieldwork ended in October 2012, and since I have not had the chance to follow Furtherfield's unfolding in detail, I still consider our collaboration ongoing, unfinished, extending to the present, and hopefully beyond. The people who make up the Furtherfield community are present here; their voices resonate in the quotes interspersed within this report, their acts of generosity and wisdom continue to inform my understanding of creativity through sharing, collaboration, and co-creation beyond hierarchies in ways that I have just begun to appreciate and address with words. In these ways and more, this report is coauthored with my Furtherfield hosts.

42 <<http://www.Furtherfield.org/appeal/appeal-extra.pdf>>.

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