

...the future belongs
to those who imagine it...

START WHERE YOU ARE:
SECOND DEGREE POTENTIALS
ART POSSIBILITY ACTION

Reality Trumps Fantasy

By Jane Lawson

Second Degree Potentias had its genesis last summer during a residency at Stryx, an artist-run studio and gallery in Birmingham; but it had many previous births as well – being part of a long personal thought process which is itself part of a lineage of attempts to think about whether and how the human world can be less destructive, to both human and non-human nature.

The word Potentia was suggested by the artist Helen Stratford, during after-hours conversations about how we would like the world to be. I had made a series of timelines that could take us from summer 2015 to possible Utopian futures, and we were looking for an alternative to the word Utopia that didn't carry the same baggage of impossibility and impracticality. Potentia seemed to fit well, being focussed on possibility and agency.

That was one step.

Then, an opportunity to do something at Bloc, in the form of mutual aid – Bloc was doing a crowdfunder. So I asked artists that I liked working with if they were up for doing a show based around the idea of the Potentia. They were. And at some point I told Elaine Speight from In Certain Places about it and she said it sounded great and I should apply for funding. I did – it took a month to write the bid.

I asked three more artists to show – Tim Etchells, Ellie Harrison and John Newling; I already knew Ellie but I was nervous about approaching the others, especially as I had no idea whether the funding bid would be successful. And they said yes, and it was.

I bought everyone a copy of *The Dispossessed* by Ursula le Guin. It is set on a moon called Anarres and is probably the most fully-realised description of the practicalities of an anarchist society in fiction or indeed non-fiction.



Workshop exercise: *Collective Drawing*
Photo by Roger Bygott



Annie Harrison: *Morning Service*
Photo by Sandra Bouguerch



Workshop Exercise: *Potential Elements*
Photo by Jane Lawson

And so, we started with a workshop. I had my own fantasies about how this would go, how I would start it with an inspiring session on consensus-decision-making, how we would work non-hierarchically and harmoniously and yet with everyone pretty much agreeing with me and acting how I wanted and, by the end of the process, being fully committed to bringing about social change through art. This fantasy did not last very long. Which is a good thing.

Each artist ran a half-day session relating to their own approach to Potentia. Sandra's was based around cocktails, and brought about a beautiful and intensely spiritual sense of communion. Annie opened our hearts with a Sunday service. Lea read us stories of open-ness, loss and darkness while we drew a big picture. Roger took us on a *dérive* through Ancoats. Claire T had us sowing seeds and constructing our ideal living situations. Clare B led us in a spectrum exercise about our optimism levels for the future. Monty wanted to show us Encounters at the End of the World and The Beach and one day we will watch them together.

As the week went on, I realised that redesigning society isn't everyone's idea of a good time. Not even with kittens! But we collectively got stuck into figuring out what was distinctive about communism, fascism, anarchism and capitalism, what their common elements are, what had made the different systems attractive and effective, and what postcapitalism might look like.

I hoped our process would deliver a series of worked-out visions of Potentia – what it delivered instead was something very honest: the experience of working with people who have broadly the same values, the same desires for human society not to be exploitative and destructive, and for all forms of nature to flourish, but a whole range of different perspectives and levels of political experience and motivation.

And this came to be the project's strength, because if we do want to collectively change things for the better, we won't be only working with clones of ourselves. We'll be working with people who may want a similar end point but who have radically different views on how to get there (party politics? direct action? mass social movements? strong leaders?), and the challenge will be to find common values and goals without ending up with lowest common denominator politics. Yes we might all want to reduce economic inequality and avoid catastrophic climate change, but what does that actually mean in practice? Do we need a systemic intervention or can we tinker with the current system? If the internal logic of capitalism requires constant growth, and the accumulation of resources into fewer and fewer hands, how do we get rid of it in the necessary very short timescale without chaotic social breakdown? Or is that an unavoidable evil?

So, in the end, most of my fantasies came to nothing, as fantasies are wont to do. But, instead, this rich process brought up possibilities, questions, uncertainty, messiness and movement. It embodied reality as it is, not as I would wish it to be. And in this, the exhibition feels like a true reflection of the process of working for social change: full of unexpected perspectives and experiences, a little chaotic at times, a puzzle that somehow fits together but doesn't look quite like anyone anticipated, a work very much in progress.

Start Where You Are: Second Degree Potentias

By Bob Dickinson

Artists are no strangers to ideal societies. From the work of Joseph Beuys, for instance, in the twentieth century, to that of Thomas Hirschorn today, artistic proposals for radical social reorganisation have often surprised and pleased audiences – although, tellingly, those artists' experiments carefully sidestepped the field of traditional politics. But why leave visions of change to traditional politicians, who have made quite enough of a mess of things in recent years?

Now, during the very uncertain times that Brexit has brought about, it seems even more appropriate that an art project, initiated in Manchester, brings together the ideas of several artists who are attempting to imagine more hopeful ways of living. On show at Bloc Projects, Sheffield, in autumn 2016, *Start Where You Are: Second Degree Potentias*, features new commissions by Roger Bygott, Clare Bonetree, Sandra Bouguerch, Annie Harrison, Jane Lawson, Monty, Lea Torp Nielsen and Claire Tindale alongside existing work by Ellie Harrison, Tim Etchells and John Newling.

That word Potentia is important: similar to a Utopia, but made from what's truly available. Jane Lawson, around whose curatorial vision the show has developed, defines Potentia as "A form of social organisation that prioritises human flourishing and environmental sustainability" - adding succinctly, "So that rules out slaves and dystopias." Thank goodness for that.



Workshop Exercise: *Living Spaces*
Photo by Claire Tindale



Workshop Exercise: *Mapping Postcapitalism*
Photo by Roger Bygott

I asked if the Referendum had had any effect on the exhibition. "In the immediate aftermath of Brexit I was thinking that it seemed a bit meaningless," Jane replied, "But also I thought that it's still really important to say that things don't have to be how they are".

So what kind of thinking has been nurturing this crop of new Potentias? In the project's early stages, the group met at Rogue Studios, Manchester, to discuss and "map" out different economic and ideological systems and attempt to plot a course for post-capitalism. Factored in were visits to *Utopia 2016* at Somerset House (this year being the 500th anniversary of Sir Thomas More's significant book), a talk by George Monbiot, and debates about the work of the science fiction writer, Ursula K le Guin, especially her 1974 novel *The Dispossessed*.

But working on a Potentia cannot be easy. Art (in the West, at least) provided the aesthetic setting for a Christian tradition that through history presented rival, evolving idealised visions of the way life should be led. The twentieth century brought revolutionary social experiments, notably in the Soviet Union, heralding a new aesthetic attempting to "restructure the very context of everyday life", as the critic Boris Groys puts it. Subsequently, whole populations (in Russia and Eastern Europe especially) have experienced a "post-Utopian" breakdown.

So, unsurprisingly, the Potentia group has been reading voraciously, as well as taking part in workshops, including one with the artist John Newling, who is also exhibiting *The York Texts* (an analysis of what the public in York wanted in a 21st century Eden).

Newling's advice, which was basically to keep everything as simple as possible, helped Sandra Bouguerch to work on her contribution, entitled *Template for the Future*. "It's basically a mirror that's illuminated," Sandra explains, "And I'm probably going to paint a big black circle in the middle. And that's it. I was also thinking of having an inflatable magic wand that comes out of the mirror, because it's something that requires effort to blow it up".

Roger Bygott (currently reading John Gray's *Straw Dogs*, which tackles the illusion that humans are radically different from other animals) believes "There's a progressive nature to people. Gray doesn't make me feel pessimistic but he does challenge my ideas about a progressive society." Roger's recent experiments with asemic (or wordless, non-semantic) writing, plus a series of pink sculptures inspired by the tradition of The Fool, are his responses to the idealistic promise of so many futures. "Christianity imposes these ideas about what the future should be," he says, "Even Buddhism. It starts to become oppressive. What are the pink sculptures about? They're a playful reaction to the idea that any of this is possible at all. We're all just pink sculptures really."

The gallery will also be decorated with flags made by Sheffield-based, Danish-born artist Lea Torp Nielsen. Her "longstanding obsession" is with crystals and her flags will each be emblazoned with a crystalline design. "We don't know how crystals form," Lea says, "We have lots of uses for them, like in watches and weapons systems, but they're also linked with magic and they're treasured for that." Crystals fill her with the sort of "glee and excitement" a child exhibits when it first sees a train. "If the world had been structured around those feelings, imagine how different it might look," she says, and perhaps her flags will do some useful mood-work when the show opens.

Annie Harrison's *Morning Service* promises to create a community for an hour: "When I was in my late 20s I spent about six months in America travelling around looking at what it took to make sustainable communities. And I came back and tried to create one here and it was a disaster". But recently she came across the book *Number 9 Bus to Utopia* by David Bramwell, who similarly travelled the world visiting intentional communities, only to return home to Brighton where he started organising a successful community event called Zocalo. Heartened by this, Annie wants to make her temporary community happen in the exhibition space: "Maybe that will inspire people to do something similar outside the exhibition."

Another performance piece is Clare Bonetree's *Democracy Outside*, an interactive work that will take place in Sheffield city centre ahead of the exhibition to find out what the public would like in a Potentia. Her "spectrum exercise" has already had an effect on other artists; Bygott describes how it was for him: "You line up in terms of either strongly agree or strongly disagree, or yes and no. And then, when you're on the line, you speak to the person at the other end and you justify your position to them a bit more clearly; while that's happening anyone can move. It's a dynamic line of discussion and shifting thoughts, feelings and beliefs. We might have assumptions that we're all in the same basic direction, but when you start asking questions, maybe not."

A famous example of an ideal or model community is Bournville, the village that housed the original workers at Cadbury's factory in the West Midlands. Claire Tindale has taken this idea of the model village and is building her own out of chocolate, which she first had to learn to "temper." "If you don't get it to the right temperature the crystals don't set properly and you get bloom," she tells me, "None of mine were very well tempered! It made sense to do this, because I was interested in a more even society. So it's trying to temper society and temper individuals. I'm making 313 houses which is how many were in the original Bournville village. Arranged like a town, or a floating city."

Approaching the idea of Potentia from a somewhat different angle, the artist simply known as Monty will present a model of Stonehenge made of cigarette filters. "I have no intention of gluing it so potentially it will be knocked down by the audience

getting too close, which I want them to do," he says, "Then the gallery staff will rebuild it every day." With references to archaeology, ritual, smoking, fragility, and filtering information, the work seems to sum up some of the drawbacks (no pun intended) inherent in ideal societies.

Jane Lawson herself is mapping her personal Potentia using diagrams. "I want to do one with practical details such as a maximum wage differential, and one embodying the key underlying elements of my Potentia" she says: "Appreciation, the ability to tolerate discomfort, solidarity, communication, and so on." Elements from the Clangers will also feature - a reminder to maintain a sense of humour during days like these, a long way from anyone's Potentia.



Roger Bygott: *Potentian Scrolls*



Democracy Outside
performance in
Brighton (2012)

A Potentia is something that might just be possible; that could be within reach; that, maybe, you can get to from here – except that you’ll never get there, because it’s always evolving; dynamic; changeable, malleable; subject to human being and doing.

Perhaps a Potentia is a process, not a thing. A way to approach possibilities for the future. A way to be together, talk to each other, create together.

Democracy Outside is about moving into the spaces between black and white and meeting there; Potentias gave me the

opportunity to evolve the work as a field for suggestion and reflection, as well as deliberation and conversation.

My work is about facilitating and encouraging people to shape themselves and each other through communication and self-awareness, hopefully expanding the sense of ‘self’ to accommodate the uncertainties of others. We make and find Potentias in these places of uncertainty and questions.

Clare Bonetree



“A - bra - ca - da - bra”
work in progress
Photo by
Katarzyna Jablonska

Template for the Future is an artwork responding to the idea of ‘Potentias’ and for my belief to improve this world on all levels.

For this to happen time and effort is required starting with oneself.

Instead of an external viewpoint one should adapt to thinking inwardly, thus experiencing how you relate to yourself.

Only then, through wisdom acquired from life experiences in our ever-evolving World, can we create belief and confidence in our own abilities.

I may look back on life’s mistakes, failures, regrets but when I look in the mirror and see strength and determination won due to personal lessons I can take pride in myself.

This position enables me to respond and contribute to Society and my environment in a positive, balanced way.

Co-operation will help to redeem Mankind and the first step towards co-operation lies in the hearts of individuals.

Look in the Mirror – say—‘ah-ha’ and wake up!

sandrabouguerch.wordpress.com

Sandra Bouguerch



Potentia Absurdia
(Neon Nonsense)

I wrangled with a plethora of words and language regarding past, present and potential ideologies. It was a collective melting pot of mind-maps and improvised cocktails. I wanted to get beyond the linguistics and let my hand drift into asemic possibilities. In touching the 'Spell of the Sensuous' I felt free to make marks without semantic meaning. This was not far from the joyful play of childhood, that innocence before heavy-handed impositions of how it all should be.

I felt a rebellious resistance to formulating a well thought-out Potentia. How serious does the future have to

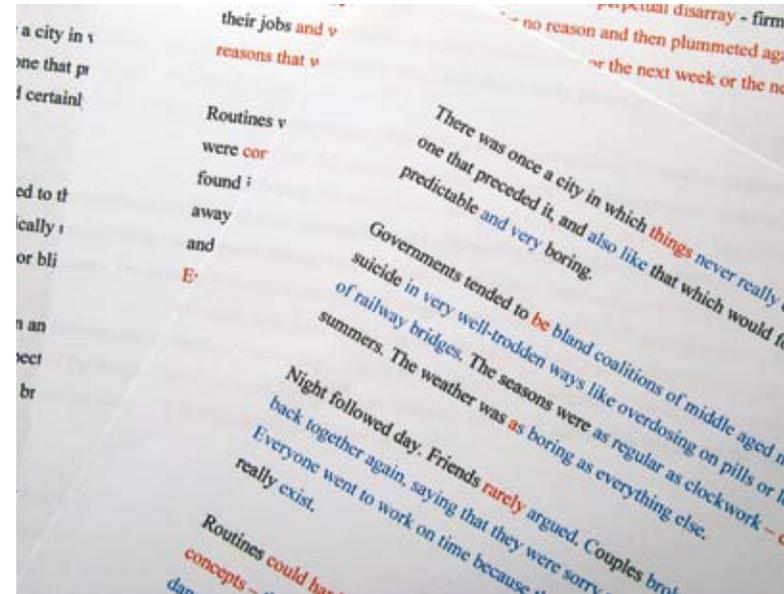
rogerbygott.wordpress.com

Roger Bygott

be? Maybe seriousness is part of the problem. All ideologies fall short of the experience and ungraspable complexity of the present.

Somehow a stuffed pair of pink tights staggered on stage. An absurdist Potentia allows for play, a critical response to seriousness, humour, and the embarrassment of failure.

City Changes (2007)
Image © Tim Etchells,
Hugo Glendinning and
Sonia Balcells



City Changes consists of twenty text works, starting with a description of a city in which nothing ever changes. This initial text has been rewritten 19 times to produce a sequence of increasingly preposterous variations, mutations and exaggerations of this imaginary place. The versions of the text alternate between invocations of the urban environment as a place of order and routine, and descriptions of it as a site of perpetual change and multiplicity. The process of continuous alteration in the text itself, switching back and forth from city-of-stability to city-in-chaos, is mirrored in the visual economy of the prints as changes introduced in each

successive version are presented in a new colour.

In its tracking of the transformation or mutation of a single text through numerous contradictory versions, *City Changes* also renders visible the process of writing itself, producing a complex colour-coded trace of the decisions, additions and omissions of each new incarnation.

timetchells.com

Tim Etchells



*Morning Service: Everyday
Ritual Objects*
Photo by Roger Bygott

I grew up in a family who were deeply involved in the Methodist Church, and much of my early political and social education came through that institution.

30 years after leaving the church, I still miss many things about it: the acknowledgement of life beyond the material, the opportunity to reflect on what it means to be human, the diverse community embracing middle and working classes, professionals, manual workers, and unemployed. As a child, it seemed that we were deeply involved in each other's lives, celebrating successes, supporting in difficulty, visiting the bereaved, elderly and ill.

annieharrison.co.uk

Annie Harrison

After many years of trying to create a non-religious community which could equal this experience, then giving up on the attempt, I now find myself involved in a different sort of community-building, focused on creating social capital and resilience through the arts in the place I live.

Morning Service takes the structure of the Methodist service and, using non-religious content, invites participants to share an hour together.



Launch of RRAAF at
Beaconsfield Gallery,
London (2015)
Photo by Michael Curran

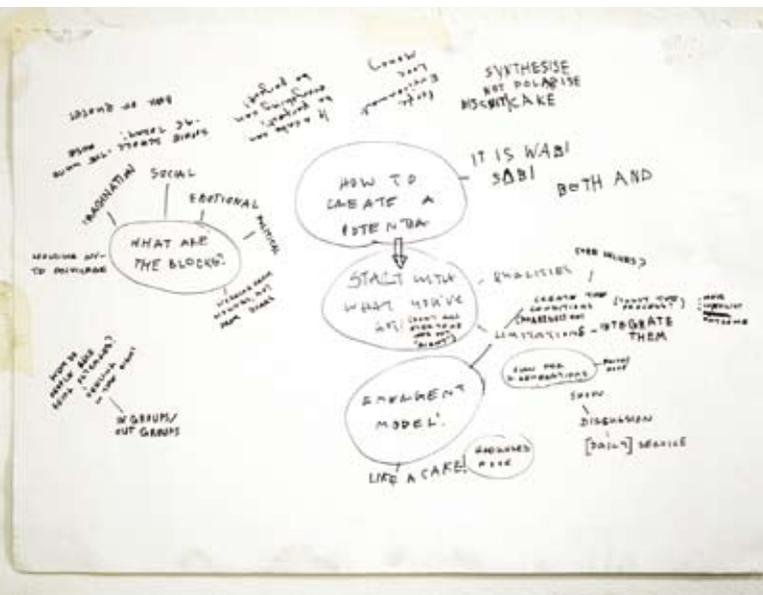
In 2015, in the wake of continued cuts to public funding for the arts and as an ethical alternative to private/corporate sponsorship, Ellie Harrison initiated the Radical Renewable Art + Activism Fund (RRAAF). RRAAF's aim is to set up a wind turbine and generate renewable energy as an alternative funding source for a grants scheme for socially- and politically-engaged art-activist projects.

From October–December 2015, with support from Beaconsfield in London, 10:10, the Centre for Contemporary Arts (CCA) in Glasgow and Creative Carbon Scotland, RRAAF ran a series of public discussion events in collaboration with

ArtCOP21 and The Only Way is Ethics and completed a successful 'phase 1' crowdfunding campaign, bringing together a network of 156 people around the UK (now known as the 'RRAAF Founders') keen to help make the project happen. A symposium in Glasgow in summer 2016 has laid out the next steps on RRAAF's path to building its own wind turbine.

ellieharrison.com
raafund.org

Ellie Harrison



Sketch: How to Create a Potentia (2016)

If imagination requires us to sit with discomfort, and if we find it easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of our high-carbon economy (because that requires hard work rather than passive or even gleeful acceptance), then the ability to sit with discomfort may be key to creating a better (or any) future.

along with the qualities of mycorrhizal networks – communication, mutual aid, resilience – and The Clangers – courage, pottering, appreciation, pinkness. And an acknowledgement of the difficulties – the discomfort – of sharing resources, power and ownership.

Discomfort – physical, emotional, psychic – is something I generally go out of my way to avoid – but when I can't, there is a liberation in finding that I can tolerate and even thrive with it. So, then, the ability to tolerate discomfort is a foundation element of my Potentia,

janelawson.co.uk



21st Century Eden (2014)

In 2014 John Newling took up temporary residence on a stall in St Helen's Square in the centre of York, asking passers-by what they wanted in a 21st century Eden. The results were read out at a filmed public event in the square and analysed and collated into a document.

According to Newling, "I want to ask people what they really want. Why is it that as a species of 7 billion beings we are intent on knowingly bringing about our own extinction? Why are we so reluctant to address causality, focusing on the symptoms of problems instead?...The 206 read texts in some ways articulated a sense of that desire coming from people

who travelled through the square. The texts were of their time and rooted in the now; a kind of contemporary set of distinct voices.

To read such thoughts out loud in the square momentarily charged the air and the square with a tension that people watching the event or simply passing through would have felt.

...It felt to me like a reading of desires in a square where people's voices were allowed to be and were heard. This in and of itself seemed to look back to times where people gave voice thoughts and desires 'out loud' in public squares."

john-newling.com

John Newling



Working Towards a Goldilocks Society, A Model Village: detail of work in progress

Rather than depicting an actual place, this chocolate village is a metaphor for aspirational ideals, linking to those of George Cadbury's Bournville. A self-contained community developed for the factory workers, with generous gardens and green spaces, this was used as a model for other new settlements at that time.

Over the course of several weeks, I undertook a symbolic cycle of tempering (a process of heating and cooling chocolate to an optimum temperature in order to achieve a good quality product) and casting chocolate in order to create 'generations' of miniature houses: a

recognition that in order to build a better future we must also look to the past.

The use of chocolate as a material references my personal hopes for a society and environment that are neither 'too hot' nor 'too cold' but 'just right'. With a melting point of body temperature, the use of chocolate also hints at where the ability to bring about change and achieve this delicate balance lies, hence *Working Towards a Goldilocks Society*.

clairetindale.co.uk

Claire Tindale

Art Possibility Action



Adamas

The flags are emblazoned with imagined crystals. Worshipped for millennia for their seductive beauty, quartz crystals can be found in the humble watch, in the computer I am currently writing on, in GPS systems for smart bombs and missiles; when light is pumped through a faceted ruby, coherent energy - i.e. the laser beam - is produced. Nikola Tesla, inventor of alternating currents, claimed crystals were living beings because of the way they formed, the way they organised themselves. Marcel Vogel, research scientist and esoteric, speculated that thought pumped through a specially-faceted crystal with consciousness, understanding and intention can create

coherent energy, thus tapping into crystals' longstanding links with magic.

Crystals were formed in the dark, deep in the earth's crust, many of them hundreds of millions of years ago and, as capitalism is crumbling around us, perhaps the intuitive knowledge that crystals represent is one to march behind or to carry forward towards a better world.

leatorpnielsen.dk

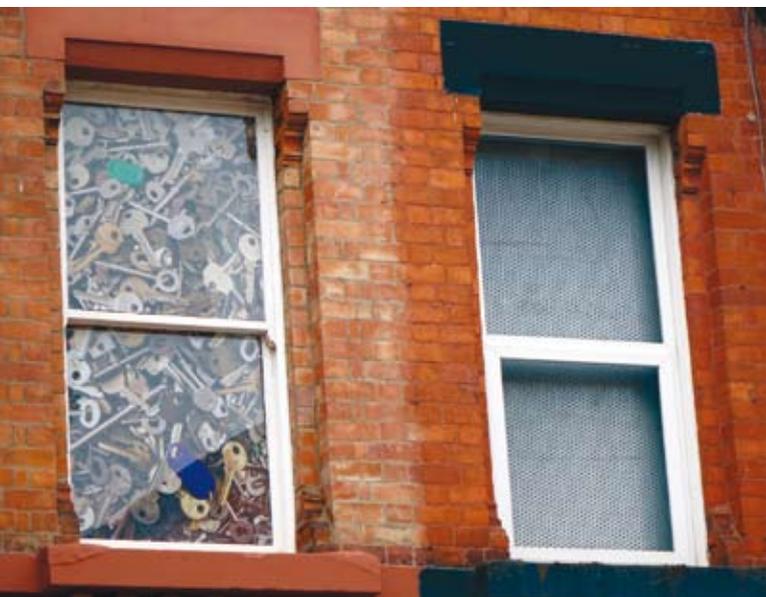
Lea Torp Nielsen

The exhibition *Start Where You Are* could never exist in isolation. Or rather, it could, but it would be a missed opportunity. The art world includes plenty of politically-motivated art; how much effect this work has in the wider world is another question. So when and how can art be politically and socially effective? What is the difference between the two? How important is creative satisfaction when set against the desire, or necessity, to bring about change?

The purpose of the workshop *Art Possibility Action* is to give space to these questions and to share ideas and information about how art strategies can function politically – from making information publicly visible to creating tools for civil disobedience; from chipping away at BP's social capital to carrying out practical positive interventions. It aims to bring together people – artists, activists and others – who want to use art to change the world and to think about art in the service of life.



Diagram by Jane Lawson



Contravision - wallpaper
for the dispossessed no 3.
*Keys for Lost Liverpool
Locks*
Photo by Ronnie Hughes

Nina Edge trained as a ceramicist and became known for subversive use of craft processes in shows with Black British artists in the 1980s. She is published by Third Text, International Journal of Art & Design Education, Feminist Art News & LUP. Exhibitions include *Virtual Duality* (Bluecoat, 1994), *Mirage* (ICA, 1995) *Transforming the Crown* (Studio Museum in Harlem, 1997) *The Fifth Floor* (Tate Liverpool, 2008), *Turning FACT Inside Out* (FACT, 2013). Live work includes *Sold Down the River* (Bluecoat Liverpool, 1995) and *Habeas Corpus* (Albert Dock, 2007).

Her practice is socially engaged and she has made longstanding collaborations

ninaedge.com

Nina Edge

with communities. Productions include bi-lingual advertising hoardings, radical textiles and sculptures made from cash. She is currently showing *Contravision*, a print installation that effectively seals up all her windows, as part of a long investigation into demolition and the forced removal of communities (Welsh Streets 2004–2016), and teaching a short course about how art and society are meshed at Tate Liverpool.



Time Piece (2015)
Photo by Martin LeSanto

With Liberate Tate Mel has co-created live art performance interventions to challenge BP sponsorship of Tate, including *The Gift*, in which over 100 people assembled a 16.5m wind turbine blade in Tate Modern's Turbine Hall; *Human Cost*, where a naked man was covered in oil inside Tate Britain's Duveen Galleries; and *Time Piece*, in which 75 performers transcribed a rising tide of words relating to art and climate change up the Tate Modern Turbine Hall slope during a 25-hour durational performance.

Her book *Artwash: Big Oil and the Arts* (2015), based on years of undercover research, grassroots investigation and

activism as well as performance and cultural interventions, tells the story of oil sponsorship of the arts in Britain and the campaigns against it.

Previously part of Platform, Mel also wrote and produced *Oil City*, a piece of site-specific immersive theatre made in the financial district of London to invite audiences to question and challenge fossil fuel finance by being part of the performativity of financial power.

liberatetate.org.uk

Mel Evans, Liberate Tate



Shake!
(2010 and ongoing)
Photo by Nadiya Aissa

James Marriott works as part of Platform. Within this collective he has co-created projects ranging from opera to a micro-hydro plant and co-authored several books including *The Oil Road - journeys from the Caspian Sea to the City of London* with Mika Minio-Paluello.

Platform's current work includes *Unravelling the Carbon Web*, which focuses on the human rights and environmental impacts of oil and gas corporations, in particular BP and Shell, and seeks to bring about their rapid closure - in part by separating them from the web of cultural institutions, finance houses, government departments and

law firms that enable the continued extraction of fossil fuels. This strategy has been successful in helping end BP's sponsorship of Tate, halting Shell's drilling in the Alaskan Arctic and forcing RBS to cease financing tar sands projects.

Other projects include *Energy Democracy*, focussed on establishing publicly-owned, democratically-controlled, renewable energy systems; and *Shake!*, bringing together young people, artists and campaigners to develop creative responses to injustice and ensure that people of colour take the centre ground in the movements for social and ecological justice.

platformlondon.org

James Marriott, Platform



Forever Flowing
(2013 and ongoing)
Photo by Luca Rudlin

Kerry Morrison is an experienced environment artist and ecologist who has worked throughout the UK, including commissions for Liverpool Biennial, Tate Liverpool, and Grizedale Forest. Since 2006 she has endeavoured to create art without creating demands on natural resources.

Kerry is a director of In-Situ, an artist-led organisation based in the milltown of Brierfield in Lancashire. In-Situ's vision is to make art a part of the everyday life of Pendle, changing people's perception of place, creating more resilient and innovative communities and helping them find solutions to local issues and challenges.

In-Situ has set up a cinema; generated electricity from rain harvested from the roof of the derelict Brierfield Mill; restarted the Mill's clock using the rainwater electricity which chimed when there was good news to be broadcast across the town; set up a temporary skate-park; served up an edible Pendle Hill made from waste food; started The Shop, a salvage food café and a community radio, and continues to run an artist-in-residence programme which has brought contemporary artists to Brierfield and Pendle.

in-situ.org.uk

Kerry Morrison, In-Situ



Camp for Climate Action
(2008)
Photo by Jane Lawson

Rhiannon is a founder member of Seeds for Change, a workers' co-operative providing training and resources to help people organise for action and positive social change since 2001. Seeds for Change specialises in developing consensus-decision-making and effective communication processes for small to large-scale groups, providing training, facilitation and workshops for grassroots groups in several countries.

All members of Seeds for Change have a background in grassroots social and environmental justice campaigning as well as in the co-operative movement. They have campaigned on various issues

seedsforchange.org.uk

Rhiannon Westphal, Seeds For Change

such as anti-fracking, climate change, roads, GM and Occupy and have been involved in setting up and running various community resource centres and co-ops.

Seeds for Change has authored a collection of publications including *A Consensus Handbook: Co-operative Decision-making for Activists; How to set up a Workers' Co-op; Co-ops and Communities*; and many more. See seedsforchange.org.uk/resources

Safer Space Policies, Physics and Oliver Postgate A long note by Jed Picksley

In physics, hot and cold are not described as two separate forces, but rather there is only one force: heat, and its absence is what we call cold.

In usual chatter, people do talk about hot and cold, and this is both useful and helpful. Still it can be very satisfying to really get-down-to-basics and understand the abstract facts of still (absolute zero) or bouncing (warmer) molecules.

These abstract facts inform our strategies for staying warm, cooking, using cold, designing spaces, or gaining further understanding of chemistry and physics. When first really spelled out at the molecular level, the basics of heat-physics can be as delightful as a sort of magic, which is always working around us whether we understand it or not.

In the same way that people believe in hot and cold, it is conventional to believe in good and evil. The actions and attitudes of human beings are often described in terms of balances between these two "forces", but I have come across a few elegant theories of a simpler 'base-physics of emotion' much more at-the-root-of-things than the unhelpful labels of good and evil, or surface evidence of actions and attitudes.

For example, Oliver Postgate* postulates that, like the single force/scale of heat, there is only one scale for human psychology, and that is fear. The absence of fear is the state of safety, wherein one can forget about the fragile self and just get on with whatever needs doing, easily believing in life, love and the possibility of change. Outwith safety though, in the various measures of fear, human beings behave very differently.

In his autobiography, *Seeing Things*, Postgate writes:

"Fear is the blinder that closes our eyes to hurt and unleashes aggression... This meant that some of the actions and attitudes that I had thought of as morally 'bad' could well have been no more than a side-effect of fear, perhaps not of physical fear but of a more subtle fear of personal isolation - anxiety. So I was reminded, not for the first time, that the key to the clearing of perceptions and the consequent elimination of potential conflict lies in the giving and taking of the safety that mutual acceptance can bring." (*Seeing Things*, pp 354/355)

There is a lot in that quotation, which I leave you to draw out. For this writing of mine, here and now, if I accept Postgate's assertion that safety is the necessary baseline to cut out conflict and aggression, then the rescent development of "safer space policies"¹ takes on more significance for me than it had before.

*Oliver Postgate wrote, made and animated Bagpuss, Ivor the Engine and The Clangers amongst others. He was also a campaigner for international nuclear disarmament.

If I accept Postgate's thought that absolute safety leads to effortless selflessness, then it leads me to think that in seeking to create "safer" spaces, we are aiming for the greatest possibilities of interaction. The most pure and excellent mutual aid. If the agreements we make in such policies are not taken on with sincerity, then our cynicism or fears could utterly undermine the efforts for harmony, productivity, friendship and openness that such policies represent.

The tool of 'the policy' is so fragile, yet simultaneously so potentially mighty. It can be defeated with merely a flicked phrase of cynicism, but if it is held to with genuine collective desire, it can crumple huge walls of cynicism, showing fear and aggression up as piffling personal delusions.

I think it's well worth exploring why people find it hard to use, refer to, create or uphold safer space policies. Very often, the spirit in which the "safer spaces policy" was written is crushed by the general unsafeness of our wider society and the resulting anxiety, aggression and division that we carry within and amongst us from the wider world. Letting people express their individual stories of this 'fear-pollution' can have the effect of reducing the fear, and gaining perspective on the experiences, both for those speaking and those listening.

To return to the beautiful rambling working-outs of Oliver Postgate's autobiography, I shall end on an enormous quotation, which could bloom into many rich discussions.

"Jesus Christ, for whose philosophy I have the greatest respect, put it more succinctly. He said: 'Love thy neighbour as thyself.'

I had always seen the truth of that injunction, but it had left me with a problem: where do I find, in myself, the love that I am to feel for the ugly sod? I can command myself to love him but, unfortunately, the only genuine emotion I feel is a sort of guilty inadequacy born of a muted exasperation with him (or her) for being so persistently and wilfully unlovable.

So love is not to be commanded. It is essentially an effect, the result of some prior reassurance. Consequently I can't expect myself to be able to feel genuine love until after I have received some confirmation of my own acceptedness, in fact until after I myself have received love and been made welcome by it.

That seemed like a ring with no starting-point and yet I was sure there must be some way into it, sure there was a simple possibility that I had missed...I had been using the conventional idea of 'love' as the only possible starting-point and had been trying to engender it in myself.

That had been a nonsense! There was no need for me to love anybody! Indeed there was no need for me even to like them, no need to admire, condemn, compare or make any judgement of them at all! All I needed to do was see them, recognise their presence and make room for them.

Was that really all that was necessary?

Almost certainly not all, but it was a starting point, and I had just seen, as clear as daylight, how it worked.

I know, from myself, that most of the anxieties I feel are caused by a hunger for something - a simple acceptance of me as a person.

That acceptance may be something which I need. But it is also something which I can give, and give quite easily, because giving it only calls on me to do something. It doesn't call on me to be anything more than I am or to feel any emotions I don't feel...

...if you accept my acceptance of you, I receive a greater gift because that is, in its turn, an acceptance of me, a confirmation of the reality of my existence. Then, as fear and hostility evaporate, one's attention turns away from oneself, life is good and one can do anything that needs to be done. 'Who one is' becomes irrelevant.

But isn't that what love is all about?

Yes, of course, but unlike what we call 'love', acceptance is not necessarily special, precious or particularly personal. It is just a part of ordinary seeing!"
(*Seeing Things*, pp 355/356).

Jed Picklesley has worked in sustainability, activism, community arts, low impact living and forming and running workers' and housing co-operatives for 15 years. She has found that the hardest thing to come by is most usually harmonious co-working, and so she now sometimes works in mediation and conflict resolution, but more often works to improve process, policy and communication in voluntary and non-hierarchical groups, so that the first two are less necessary.

1 Safer Spaces Policies are a feature of many anarchist, activist and therapeutic spaces, intended to make users of the space think more carefully about how their words, actions and assumptions affect those around them. The policies sometimes provoke controversy and even - ironically - conflict because their language can easily become academic and exclusive in itself. Learning how to deal with the unconscious hierarchies within everyday self-expression is an ongoing process and by no means simple.

PROJECT INFORMATION

EXHIBITION

Start Where You Are:

Second Degree Potentias

Artists Clare Bonetree, Sandra Bouguerch, Roger Bygott, Tim Etchells, Annie Harrison, Ellie Harrison, Jane Lawson, Monty, John Newling, Claire Tindale, Lea Torp Nielsen
10th-17th Sept 2016
Bloc Projects, 71 Eyre Lane, Sheffield S1 4RB

TRAILER EVENT

Clare Bonetree: **Democracy Outside**

Sat 3rd Sept, 2pm-3pm
Outside Sheffield City Hall

EVENTS

Annie Harrison: **Morning Service**

The creation of a temporary community within the gallery space.

Sat 10th Sept, 11am-12noon
Bloc Projects, 71 Eyre Lane, Sheffield S1 4RB

Jane Lawson: **Imagine the Possibilities**

Exhibition tour and workshop in which participants can formulate their own Potentia

Sat 10th Sept, 2pm-4pm
Bloc Projects, 71 Eyre Lane, Sheffield S1 4RB

WORKSHOP

Art Possibility Action

Speakers Nina Edge, Mel Evans (Liberate Tate), James Marriott (Platform), Kerry Morrison (In Situ)

Sat 5th Nov 2016, 10am-5:30pm
Sheffield Institute of the Arts
The Old Post Office, Fitzalan Square, Sheffield, S1 2JH
£6/£3 concessions/free for SHU students
artpossibilityaction.eventbrite.com

seconddegrepotentias.wordpress.com

This project has been supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England and sponsored by Dore Garden Offices



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**



Designed and typeset by Claire Tindale
Cover design by Jane Lawson
Printed by Rap Spiderweb, Oldham
www.rapspiderweb.co.uk
Cover: 300gsm Cyclus 100% post-consumer waste
Inside: 140gsm Cyclus 100% post-consumer waste
Inks: vegetable ink



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

