The Art of Slow Sociality
Movement, Aesthetics and Shared Understanding

Jo Vergunst, University of Aberdeen
Anna Vermehren, Deveron Arts, Huntly, Aberdeenshire, UK

This paper presents reflections on the theme of sociality from a mass-participation art event in the town of Huntly in north-east Scotland in 2009. Drawing on Alfred Schütz's notion of the 'consociate' and related concepts, our efforts are directed towards understanding the nature of sociality that the event created for the people involved in it. We consider slowness as an actual experience through pacing and cadence, and also the tensions between experience and the requirement that art should have measureable impact.

Keywords: sociality, art, slowness, Schütz, cycling, Scotland

This paper presents reflections on the theme of sociality from a mass-participation art event in the town of Huntly in north-east Scotland in 2009. Drawing on Alfred Schütz's notion of the 'consociate', our efforts are directed towards understanding the nature of sociality that the event created for the people involved in it. Two aspects should be noted: firstly, it was specifically a piece of art, and thus the involvement of art and aesthetics in sociality is of concern to us; secondly, it was art created on the move and through movement, and this encourages us to locate sociality in actual activity rather than in a pre-existing context or structure.

A biographical note is needed to explain our collaboration in this paper. Anna Vermehren is a curator at Deveron Arts, the organization in Huntly which produced the artwork under discussion here. Vergunst is an anthropologist at the University of Aberdeen and carried out ethnographic fieldwork focused on the event. Our working together comprises a contention that anthropology should not merely study art as if in a subject–object relation. Instead we find that there are questions of common artistic and anthropological concern that are most satisfyingly addressed by sharing authorship, though not entirely combining our voices. Schütz's perspective on the significance of co-presence in social relationships seems pertinent to our joint attempt to move beyond the usual modes of art criticism, and indeed anthropology, in which the critic/researcher constructs a relationship of distance towards the objects of concern.

We now turn to how the notion of sociality has shaped our work. As the introduction to this collection points out, scholars have tended to use the term to denote a concern

with the nature of social relations rather than social structure or 'society'. Sarah Pink gives a definition: 'By socialities I refer to different sets of concrete (and in this case face-to-face) social relationships that develop around actual activities' (Pink 2008: 172). We share Pink's concern to link 'sociality' to ongoing social action rather than any free-floating or a priori context of social relations, and by 'concrete' we take Pink to mean substantive rather than fixed or structural. Nonetheless, a more philosophically grounded approach to sociality could help specify what analytical insight is being gained beyond the well-rehearsed criticisms of the structural concept of 'society'. Alfred Schütz's *The Phenomenology of the Social World* (1932) provides one such approach. He gives weight to the phenomenal co-presence of people already immersed in shared worlds of meaning, taking us beyond the mere fact of a relationship based on activity.

Schütz was broadly concerned to form a response to the methodological premises of Max Weber, which he found flawed due to Weber's manner of disassociating objective sociological meaning from subjective experience (Schütz [1932] 1972: 31–33). He sought instead to pursue the nature of intersubjective knowledge in a public, shared world, or, as he puts it: 'The world is now experienced by the individual as shared by his fellow creatures, in short, as a *social* world' (ibid.: 139). How then are experience and understanding linked? 'In the living intentionality of this experience, I "understand" you without paying attention to the acts of understanding themselves' (ibid.: 140). People who share the same world can understand each other without reflecting on that understanding. Occasionally, attention is directed explicitly towards understanding – for example, when we need clarification in a conversation, or even, if we happen to be social scientists, when we are struggling to interpret what is going on around us (ibid.: 140–141). Schütz identified the starting point of social science in ordinary life. Researchers in real-life interactions with people do not make enquiries from a position of ignorance, but from some shared understanding in a social world.

People who gain a sense of shared understanding and meaning by way of directly experiencing social reality are termed 'consociates' by Schütz (or initially 'fellow-men', *Mitmenschen*) – as opposed to 'contemporaries' (*Nebenmenschen*) whose social world one may live 'with' but not share or live 'through' (ibid.: 142), and whose creation of subjective meaning can merely be inferred rather than directly experienced. Schütz goes on to argue that the consociate face-to-face relationship, the 'pure We-relationship' (ibid.: 164) is basic and most meaningful to being human. Relations conducted indirectly, such as through letters posted from afar, he says, do not have the same quality of interaction. It is perhaps harder to read Schütz now as digital communication is blurring the boundaries between social time and space ever more effectively, although he also recognized a 'spectrum' between consociate and contemporary relations rather than a single boundary line (ibid.: 177). And yet ethnographically we still find claims for the significance of shared direct experience, not necessarily posed in philosophical terms but nonetheless resonant with them.

The argument of this paper is that sociality may be usefully conceived of as the experience of immersion in a shared world of meaning and understanding, most readily and richly apparent in consociate relations. This is to be distinguished from a simpler concept of sociality in which a relation between people in and of itself would be seen as evincing it. Two questions come to the fore here. Can we conceive of sociality-as-

immersion as learned or purposively engendered? We might thus usefully enquire into moments when the course of sociality shifts, expands or contracts. Secondly, Schütz's thesis is relatively unconcerned with notions of place and movement. If these social worlds are at the same time material places experienced on the move and rarely with the isolated stability of a literally face-to-face relationship, what difference would it make to our notion of sociality? We want to ask these questions of our fieldwork material, while also recognizing the contribution of Schütz's ideas in theoretical discussions of experience (e.g., Throop 2003; Ho 2008). Examining these issues through the lens of an art project allows us to straddle the sense of enduring social worlds and the possibility that they can be created anew.

In methodological terms, both art and anthropology involve visual practices that have commonalities that could be further explored. Referring in particular to Gell's *Art and Agency*, Schneider and Wright (2006: 5) write: 'Recent proposals have called for anthropologists to focus on the performative aspects of artworks, but these have been applied to the cultures that anthropologists study, and not to anthropology's own visual practices.' They seek to encourage a 'methodological dialogue' centred around practice in art and anthropology, which is altogether different from the study of one by the other. Cycling, meanwhile, has also provided an impetus towards new visual methodological practices in the social sciences, for example through head and bike-mounted cameras where the emphasis is on engaging with experiential aspects of the activity (Brown et al. 2009; Spinney 2011). Our methodology has involved tracking the process by which a particular art project came to happen, and participating in and reflecting upon it when it did. In what follows we describe how the project situated itself amongst the social worlds of the town in which it was set and, for a short while at least, re-made them into something slightly different.

Slowing Down Huntly

Deveron Arts is currently run by Claudia Zeiske and Anna Vermehren, with occasional administrative support and interns. With a motto of 'The town is the venue', it has no formal exhibition space but specializes in art projects and events that involve the residents and the environment of Huntly. While Deveron Arts' practice could be understood as 'socially engaged art', that can also connote a top-down approach to community art as a tool for social change (Finlay 2008). Instead we look elsewhere for synergies in theoretical approaches to art and sociality, specifically to the concept of 'relational art'. Coined by Nicolas Bourriaud, this refers to 'an art taking as its theoretical horizon the realm of human interactions and its social context, rather than the assertion of an independent and private symbolic space' (Bourriaud 2002: 14). Bourriaud is concerned with the way that contemporary art works as 'a state of encounter' (ibid.: 18) and while his discussion draws on Marxist theories of the interstice as a space of non-profit transaction, there are also connections with Schütz in the emphasis on social interaction rather than individuality. Although for Schütz, the social is not so much the 'context' for interaction as the thing itself (i.e., the enduring process of immersion in a shared world of experience), in drawing on Bourriaud we follow a different path for anthropological engagement with art to that of a reading of the agency of the finished

artefact (Schneider and Wright 2006; cf. Gell 1998). Nonetheless, what the art 'does' for the people involved in it, and in its own terms, continues to be significant.

The 'Slow Down' project was part of Deveron Arts' wider three-year residency programme, funded by Aberdeenshire Council, the Scottish Arts Council, the LEADER programme of the EU, the Scottish Government's Climate Challenge Fund and the Forestry Commission, and focused on four topics: heritage, environment, intergenerational connections, and identity. 'Slow Down' was the first of a series of environmental projects, followed by '21 Days in the Cairngorms' with walking artist Hamish Fulton and 'Red Herring' by French artist Stefanie Bourne in 2010. Between 2009 and 2011 Deveron Arts' residencies were devised in the following way. Before the on-site residency, director Claudia Zeiske would choose and invite an artist whose practice suited one of the four given topics. The artists submitted proposals in response which were then collaboratively developed by Zeiske and the artist. At the beginning of each residency, the artist was introduced to selected members of the local community considered by Deveron Arts to be important for the project. During the first month the artist then conducted research and extended his or her network within the community. The second month was spent developing the ideas and working on a marketing and outreach programme while the last month concentrated on an event-based public artwork and a discussion event with invited speakers.

Slow Down itself evolved from a long-planned residency based on the artist Jacqueline Donachie's idea to do a project on cycling in Huntly. Her proposal involved using the central square of Huntly, historically a market square but today mostly taken up by roads and a car park. The idea was to ban vehicles from the whole town centre for a weekend, but eventually just the Square was closed off. The festival came to be themed around the concept of environmental awareness in conjunction with non-motorized transport, and links were made with the Cíttaslow initiative ('slow towns', which emerged from the Slow Food movement in Italy). During the final event the 'slow' theme provided the focus for a whole range of activities. While many of these took place in the Square itself – a snail race, a slow bike race, a tai chi session, together with Slow Down deck chairs and the encouragement to simply sit down, chat or read – others were in the wider vicinity, including an excursion to the nearby Bin Forest, a guided history walk around town, a foraging walk with a herbalist to gather natural foods and remedies, and two curated walks by walking artist Tim Brennan.

In describing these events, we are concerned to convey a sense of what participating in a 'slow' art event was like. Pink (2008) describes the emergent and specific social relationships formed through the Cíttaslow movement elsewhere in the U.K. as a contrast to what she sees as an uncritical approach to 'community' taken by other scholars of the Slow movement. Wendy Parkins, for example, tracks the more recent rise of a generalized discourse of 'care' in the Slow social movement (2004: 377). In our case, however, there was an experiential aspect to slowness in a literal sense that was integral to how the Slow Down Festival was devised by the artist: moving slowly rather than just a Slow movement.

This raises the possibility that sociality might have a particular pacing associated with it, which we could also understand as 'cadence' or rhythmical tempo. Social relationships were generated and played out through the very pace at which things

happened, rather than cultivating a collective adherence to the idea of a slow social movement in a sociological sense. Specifically, the notion of cadence for us approaches more closely the human experience of pace, rather than objective speed. Walkers moving their legs rapidly, at a high cadence, may feel they are rushing regardless of the fact that they are likely to take longer to cover a distance than the slowest car. Similarly, a cyclist turning the pedals quickly and strenuously may still be travelling more slowly than another rider on a different bike or in a higher gear. While cadence in this sense is most often used in bio-mechanical or engineering research, the bodily experience of cadence can also generate a pacing in social interactions.

Donachie was clear from the beginning that she wanted to present an alternative to the transport system of roads and parking spaces that the Square is today by creating (indeed recreating) a kind of informal commercial space. Aided by a warm sunny day, the Square took on a very relaxed, sociable feel – more akin to the Latin American plazas described by Setha Low (2000). The tai chi group slowly moved their arms and torsos in unison. The deckchairs were full of people doing not terribly much. Vergunst flicked through a book on fruit growing bought from a charity book stall in one corner while Vermehren was organizing the start of the parade. As a counterpoint to the participants' slowness, most of her day had been hectic, organizing the Deveron Arts team, closing the roads, setting up gazebos and tables, bringing out bikes and building a stage in the middle of the car park. Now people gathered around the stalls, and bought coffee and burgers from the Huntly Hotel. The artist created an opportunity for new interactions in an area where much 'public life' is otherwise composed of or is secondary to vehicle movement.

A call went up for entrants to the slow bike race and Vergunst joined in. About a dozen racers went off, slowly, in heats where the last person to cross the finish line of the ten-metre course was the winner. Here, slowness had an intensity to it. The cycling was about balance and control and momentum needed to be resisted rather than created. One cyclist in particular demonstrated remarkable skill on a fixed-gear bike, holding a track stand by angling the wheels and shifting weight on the pedals while standing up in the saddle and periodically holding the brakes on. Vergunst ended up using the same bike but could not remotely get the hang of it. In the head-to-head final, one contestant heroically kept his feet off the ground for a couple of minutes while only progressing about five metres, but on looking round he saw the track stand cyclist having barely moved from the start line at all.

One noteworthy aspect here was that the participants were trying something new with their bikes. Learning different ways of cycling was, to us, an unexpected outcome of the event. In amongst the deckchairs all kinds of bicycles weaved with various degrees of steadiness. A bicycle collector, 82-year-old Doug Smith, had brought an 1890 Penny Farthing and later expressed to a local newspaper his happiness at seeing it being ridden around the Square (*Press and Journal*, 22 June 2009: 14). Two student companions, one of whom was the skilful slow cyclist, had brought double-frame 'tall bikes' along – one frame welded to the top of another, making the saddle roughly the height of the Penny Farthing – and also offered rides to the crowd. As in the slow bike race, Vergunst appreciated the skill in keeping the right amount of momentum in going forward while not turning too sharply, and finally leaping bravely down from the

saddle. Other cyclists had, at the invitation of the festival, decorated their bikes with paper, flags, plants and flowers. In all this, the sharing of bikes went with the learning and sharing of skills in riding them, and, evocative of Schütz, this was the course by which a sharing of worlds of experience and meaning took place.

The centrepiece of the festival was a collective drawing made by around a hundred cyclists who took part in the Slow Down parade on the Saturday afternoon. In an interview Donachie explained to Vergunst that she got the idea for a device for making a bicycle drawing from the internet. But the image she had initially found turned out not to be what it seemed:

> We realized it was only ever this one image that was coming up, then we started thinking 'this has been photoshopped'. It's on my computer, it's lots of cyclists and pink and white and yellow lines and stuff, and that's been made up. So we based the project on something we'd seen on a website. I'd always said I wanted to visualize a cycle lane, and I thought about using chalk, because it had to be temporary. And I thought 'that's perfect, that's what we'll use'. Then we spent about a month trying to get it, or finding out how to use it, and then 'it doesn't exist'. It's just an idea. But now Allen's made it with bottles and duct tape.

This illuminates the creativity engendered during the project. During Donachie's residency, Deveron Arts had engaged two interns, Allen Breed being one, assisting the project. In the final phase they mostly worked on designing a device that could be attached to the bikes to leave a trail of coloured chalk behind them. Before the weekend, they spent most of their time trying out designs in the street. From various prototypes they progressed to Irn Bru bottles cut in half and pieces of plastic tub and rubber, held together with duct tape. All in all they produced over 120 of these chalk bottle devices and attached about 100 of them to the bikes, some of which had been donated for use in the festival, made fit for use, and painted bright blue.

Setting off to the playing of bagpipes, the parade rolled out from the Square east towards the train station, then north-west through residential areas towards the Gordon Schools. Pausing at the golf club on the edge of town, chalk bottles were refilled and the parade re-gathered before continuing through the school grounds – symbolically significant, as cycling to school had been a contentious issue locally. The drawing devices worked brilliantly, leaving smooth curved trails of chalk behind each bike. Each line became intertwined with others and became a colourful flow along the road. At one point the route crossed itself and we saw where we had been earlier: the lines swept up a slope straight over two 'stop' signs and white lines painted on the road. The drawing was somewhat less elegant in sonic terms, as the devices made a racket as the plastic and rubber scraped along the road, and Donachie had handed out dozens of Slow Down whistles for us to blow as we went along. She later joked that she would not do the whistles again.

Donachie's intention was that the parade should happen slowly, and she emphasized this in several planning meetings beforehand. As it turned out, people chatted as they cycled. Vergunst found the sociality of the parade very much like the sociability engendered by a group going on a walk together, in which social interaction and shared bodily orientation reinforce and find expression in each other (Lee and Ingold 2006).

In most urban parts of the U.K., talking while cycling is not a common occurrence, as cycling infrastructure is not good, bike lanes if present are narrow and cyclists are almost always in close proximity to vehicular traffic. Here, however, the slow pace together with the overall sense of fun in the collective venture led to a good deal of conversation and banter as we went along. Vergunst talked to a woman who worked in the Nordic Ski Centre in Huntly. Vermehren chatted to her close friends and enjoyed no longer having to be organizing anything. Vergunst heard a young child yelling to his friend: 'My house was just back there! Douglas, my house was just back there', seemingly a surprise moment of familiarity in the midst of an unfamiliar way of moving around, yet experienced at a pace that enabled its sharing with a consociate.

It was nonetheless tricky to keep together as a large and disparate group of cyclists. There was a number of very small children and parents who went at the pace of the youngest, and as we went up and down the hills there was a tendency for gaps in the parade to appear. Donachie rode at the front and she had a task in preventing some of the older young people speeding off. Vergunst asked her at the end if she had enjoyed the parade. 'I don't know if that's quite the right word. Cos I was at the front with all the boy racers, because I was the only one that knew the route. I kept on having to go "*slowwww down*, *slow down*!"' Jackie's visceral efforts to maintain the group bike ride contrasted somewhat with the overall tone of slow and easy social interaction. She had anticipated some of these difficulties in advance and stopped the parade every now and again to bring the group back together.

Figure 1: The Slow Down cycle parade. Photo courtesy of Deveron Arts.

The Socialities of Cycling

Phil Jones' (2005) account of cycling to work in Birmingham reaches towards the 'non-representational' aspects of his experiences of moving in the city, in contrast to the technoscientific discourses of cycling policy and urban planning. In describing the 'thrills and chills' of a daily commute, his cycling skills are linked to his knowledge of the city and the choices that need to be made along the way. It is nevertheless a distinctly individualist account. Although the skills are generated and mediated socially, in his reading it is the cyclist's individual experience, his experience of the streets and architecture of Birmingham as a lone cyclist, which is most constitutive of the bike ride.

As Jones suggests, cycling, like walking, is an activity that people constantly adjust and improvise as they go along. As people move in new environments, each step or turn of the pedals, itself indivisible from the last, is a form of adjustment in understanding the environment and a performance in relation to it. The interaction of the ground and the shoe or bike tyre produces sensations of texture which are central to how the movement takes place and the journey proceeds (Vergunst 2009; Spinney 2006). On a bike, sensitivity towards incline or decline and wind speed and direction increase. As familiarity with an environment increases (though is never fully achieved), adjustments take place more tacitly, through 'muscular intelligence' (Bachelard 1958), or 'thinking in movement' (Sheets-Johnston 1999): not a prior cognitive process, but a dispersed, bodily-led activity where the 'mind' may only later gain some understanding of what the body has done.

The Slow Down project was an experiment into what it would be like if we all cycled together, and moreover in a slow and sociable way. The familiarization with the environment, the movement and coordination of oneself within the group of the other cyclists was a shared social world encompassed by the parade. Cycling in the group offered participants an increased level of awareness about the activity itself and the environment one was in, moving perhaps towards Schütz's moments of 'paying attention to' rather than immersion in the flow of social experience.

What Donachie created in Huntly was a challenge to bodily *habitus*, remade from the personal to the collective, and social space. A theme of the artwork was of having the opportunity to cycle – indeed to move – in unfamiliar ways, together. In other fieldwork Vergunst has seen similar challenges amongst walkers in unfamiliar or difficult environments, trying to deal with loose or slippy rocks, steep slopes, stretches of water, wind, snow or ice (Vergunst 2008). In one respect the difficulties of movement are ultimately part of the overall progression of the journey, the minor or major adjustments in rhythm that one makes in order to deal with the environment being moved through. Purposively moving in an unfamiliar way relates to distinctive kinds of sociality. Like participating in a parade on foot, cycling slowly means not overtaking, while also not falling too far behind. Cycling downhill results in a faster speed, and uphill one goes much slower. The pace of the family groups differed to that of the older children. There were, therefore, a variety of movements and rhythms of cycling during the parade, and we could think of all of these as engendering particular socialities – amongst families and close friends as consociates in Schütz's terms, or amongst people meeting each other for the first time who, by virtue of their involvement, were already contemporaries and could yet become closer. It is therefore not so much that

a way of moving produces a way of being social, but rather that sociability and the cadences of travelling resonated with each other through immersion in a common stream of experience. The 'cycle lane' drawing became a trace of the sociable activity of the riders, rather than a route connecting two abstract points of start and destination (Ingold 2007).

For Vergunst in particular the enchantment of the artwork was the feeling of being together and being engaged in the same activity over a certain amount of time. Riders had an incentive to adjust and to learn how to cycle together, in order to create the parade and the drawing. The broad purpose pulled the riders together, and with the help of Donachie's efforts, kept the cycling rhythms from diverging too much. The collective, unfamiliar movement in time through what was for most a very well-known space, while at the same time leaving behind a memory of that very action with the chalk trace, was what Vermehren perceived as the core of the artwork. Using Bourriaud's terminology, we agree that Huntly became a social interstice, an example of contemporary art that is 'a space in human relations' that 'creates free areas, and time spans whose rhythm contrasts with those structuring everyday life' (Bourriaud 2002: 16). The relational space created through co-movement contrasted with the usual experience of the Square and surrounding streets.

Sociality and Sociability

While this new relational space could be seen by anthropologists as engendering distinct forms of *sociality*, the artist herself framed her work as an opportunity to engender *sociability* (see also Bourriard 2002: 16). Indeed, in previous research on walking in north-east Scotland, Vergunst has also noted the significance of 'sociability' (Lee and Ingold 2006; Vergunst 2010). Many people walked as a way of being sociable, a practice of sociality and its experiential reality. Walking together does not reflect general 'social relations' so much as create an ability to get on with someone through a shared rhythm of movement. On the other hand, where walking rhythms are very different in direction, pace and demeanour, even though walkers may be in the same vicinity, sociability is resisted. By such means walkers can achieve the feeling of being alone in a crowd in a busy street – to which we could contrast the feeling of togetherness or sociability created by a crowd walking together through the streets to a football match, which was an example used by Donachie in conversation with Vergunst.

Since the beginning of this fieldwork, Vergunst has started to notice other occasional moments of sociability between cyclists. Occasional waves and nods go beyond the standardized signalling before shifting position, and such gestures occasionally happen amongst vehicle drivers too. On his cycle commute to work, spoken contact with other cyclists usually happens at traffic lights, commenting on the weather or the traffic. However, conversations amongst cyclists can sometimes allow for a little more shared experience. Just before the Slow Down weekend Vergunst took his bike to Huntly on the train, and at Huntly station he helped a young Polish man, who had also brought his bike by train, to find an address in the town where he hoped to get work. Heading in the same direction the two cycled together and chatted a bit. From the town centre Vergunst sent him off down the road and wished him good luck with the job. He would

no doubt have found his way there by himself, but through sharing a way of moving, they opened up a way of being sociable for a few minutes.

Before and during the weekend, there were also points of tension and dissent amongst the townspeople. Very soon after Donachie had arrived in Huntly and publicized the initial plans for the event, there was an adverse reaction from local businesses. In a story headlined 'Roads Closed Threat to Business' published in a local newspaper, one shop-owner complained: 'The reality of the situation is that every time there is a road closure for something in the town centre or the Square my business loses money.' In Huntly town centre, shopkeepers battle against not just one but two enormous out-of-town supermarkets and they perceive car access to their shops as vital. Claudia Zeiske sent Donachie around all the local businesses and while in the end they came up with the compromise of limiting the extent of the road closures, most businesses did not seem to fully buy into the idea and did not join in the discussion symposium at the end of the festival.

During the main events, the sense that some communities had not become involved also became apparent. The symposium was held in a function room above a social club, and during a break in the proceedings a young man came up from the social club bar, a pint in his hand, to complain vigorously about the chalk all over the roads around the Square that had caused his 'bike' (motorbike) to skid the previous evening, and which he thought had been the result of children playing.

Some of the walking events associated with the festival also put participants themselves in rather awkward, unfamiliar situations which were not straightforwardly enjoyable for participants – trooping collectively into a pub to look at a piece of art commissioned by Deveron Arts, for example. In line with Allan Kaprow's call for the artist to enact the 'transformation of the public consciousness' (Lacy 1995: 33), Donachie was quite upfront about enabling 'disruptions' of the everyday. The socialities of Slow Down were not just about creating convivial sociability. Other currents circulated, encompassing those who saw their activities in the Square being encroached upon through to those unwilling to share in quite the same kind of movement as Donachie was suggesting. Yet we also have to look beyond the immediate social relationships to understand what kind of activism was being created.

Art and Efficacy: Cycling as a Continuing Spectacle in Huntly

In practice, arts organizations like Deveron Arts need to be entrepreneurial to operate in a competitive funding environment, and they draw attention to the more-than-artistic value of their work. They have to demonstrate 'impact'. The Scottish Government, meanwhile, has a National Cultural Strategy in which culture refers to the arts, and has a brochure entitled 'Culture Delivers' that sets out for local authorities and 'culture bodies' how the arts can contribute to 'local and national well-being and prosperity' (Scottish Government 2008). In a sense this fits well with a relational approach to art. If art becomes interesting not through what it is but through the interactions and encounters it enables, we might expect the value of art to be sought and circulated through a variety of discursive and material realms.

A few weeks before the festival, Vergunst asked Claudia Zeiske what she felt would make for a successful project, and her answer foregrounded artistic achievement, but also connected up a series of different outcomes:

> Of course, my first ambition is that it's a success as an art project. That it looks visually interesting and makes people talk about it. And talks about it means that people talk about it locally. And that maybe a significant amount of people would come to Huntly that day. And, er, that it is discussed in the media, if there are articles stuck on to that as well. And then in a nutshell, I would hope to see people walking and cycling after this. That would be nice. Very few people cycle here, given how such an easy place to cycle it is.

In this face-to-face conversation, the 'efficacy' and intent of the art is placed in immediate and experiential terms, and to some extent a tension can be discerned between this and the way that funding was secured. The sociable and space-transforming aspects of the project were not the same as the long-term practical outcomes many of the funders were interested in. The Climate Challenge Fund, for example, was introduced by the Scottish Government in 2007 to encourage community-led responses to the climate change and environmental sustainability agenda. Finding evidence for actual mitigation or adaptation to climate change through this art project would be difficult, yet the mix of artistic quality and ecological imperative in the funding package was part of the 'encounter' designed into it.

Donachie consulted locals about which routes in and around Huntly they would like to cycle on. Deveron Arts' staff and friends created small cycling groups during lunch time to try out the suggestions. Cycling the streets of Huntly in groups for the first time, Vermehren was well aware of 'cycling together' as people commented on the rare sight of cyclists in Huntly. Pedestrians waved and greeted, school children pointed and shouted, and we joked about the impact our small group of five or so made in town. Recently, Vermehren cycled from the centre of Huntly to the train station together with a friend sitting on the same bike, and felt it was again something of a spectacle in the town. While no quantitative research has been carried out, an impression has been gained of there being more cyclists in Huntly since the project. People in Huntly remember Slow Down, and often associate it with Deveron Arts: 'Ah, you're from Deveron Arts – was that the cycling thing?' Deveron Arts' artists in residence are still encouraged to cycle around town and are given a bike at the beginning of their residency.

Jackie Donachie's answer to the question on what would make for a successful project emphasized the lead-up and overall community involvement in the event:

> Well, one element of the success is that people had a good time making it. For me, I have to gauge if it works as an artwork, and that means if I get good photographs of it. And if it does make some kind of temporary imprint on the town, visually. That's how I gauge it. But also, you gauge it if people enjoy taking part. Cos the idea is what people picked up on, the idea is the most important part of using, thinking, using people on their bikes to draw a cycle lane around town. That is the most important part of it. And that idea is there, it could almost not happen. But then you get another level of success if you get people to turn up and they kind of enjoy themselves, and then the Square takes on a – it looks different, we turn it, we stop making it a car park and we start making it into a – like a place filled with deckchairs.

Donachie specified 'good photographs' as one important outcome. Photographs here seem to signify a documentary image-making capacity, literally a snapshot of how the art looks to create a transferable, representational object. Together with the social aspects, it was a priority to create an artwork with an aesthetic value. But like Zeiske, Donachie moves on from the visual aesthetic to an almost Platonic ideal – the idea of cycling as art – and from there to 'another level' again, the involvement of people in changing the public space of Huntly. Both Zeiske and Donachie demonstrate an unwillingness to compromise or to choose between these outcomes. They would rather see a proliferation of affects and effects, somehow combining a representational object with a material trace, an idea and a social process, which we feel is captured well by Bourriaud's notion of relational art. This is a critique of any single grand narrative in art, and in the end an idealist rejection of any dilemma between aesthetics and an environmentalist agenda. Donachie's art is not so much about aesthetics, or ways of knowing, as it is about a way of being – and, we can suggest here, sociality. Or then again, it is not 'about' anything; rather, it is an immersion in sociality in itself.

This was not lost on the participants. At the end of the parade, Jackie, along with co-artists Merlyn Riggs and Norma D. Hunter, had set up a 'Slow Down Soup Kitchen' at the disused Battlehill Quarry. A trailer tent – an artwork Donachie had exhibited in gallery spaces before – was a kitchen-base to feed and water the cyclists. Vergunst asked another participant what he thought of the art: 'The art? Um, well I think the whole thing was art, wasn't it, or do you mean the lines on the pavement?'

While others enjoyed the event, it was less clear whether they felt they were creating an artwork, although we do not think this was a major concern for Deveron Arts or the artist. These participants enjoyed the cycling without seeming to ponder much on what it might 'mean' on a more abstract level as 'art'. However there was some quirkiness in the parade created by the devices attached to the bikes that left a trace on the road as they went along – a reminder, perhaps, that there was something else going on besides a group bike ride. At one point, Zeiske said that Deveron Arts rarely suggested to local people that they should take part in 'art', with its connotations of high culture – rather, they would let it be known that a certain artist was coming to Huntly to work on a project that people might find interesting and/or useful. On the other hand, public organizations are more and more involved in explicitly promoting art as a demonstration of the more-than-economic or intangible impact of their own activities – at the same time as requiring art practices to show tangible and economic outcomes. These tangled webs of impact and cause and effect are one result of the accountability and audit culture that we live in (Strathern 2000). Yet what public, relational art can best demonstrate as 'impact' is not so much measurable and attributable changes in behaviour but, in the language of sociality, an offering up of the possibility of immersion in certain kinds of social relations or relations with the environment. People's participation in that offering, although temporary, would be the marker of success.

The Ephemerality of Slow Sociality?

> It was never going to be a permanent work I was going to do here, it was always going to be a temporary work – so the idea of doing something that was fairly disruptive almost, just for a day, was always part of it. Cos, as an artist, you're kind of able to do that, cos you're kind of coming in and go away again.

This was Donachie's own approach to the question of having to do a time-limited project. Her residency lasted three months. The parade itself lasted about an hour. There were two days of action over the weekend itself. Carbon emissions in Huntly were, according to the original funding proposals for the Deveron Arts residencies, to be reduced over three years. Any slow sociality could emerge only within these time-limited parameters. The artwork was created specifically as a brief, though slow, activity that everyone could be involved in, move on from, but hopefully also remember and return to in the future. By giving out whistles and badges, Donachie created an afterlife in memorabilia for everyone taking part. She felt able in her identity and role as an artist to make an intervention that would not permanently change the Square or the streets of Huntly but would broaden the range of possibilities of what they could be again in the future. Indeed, what the Slow movement in general does rather well is propose an alternative temporal mode where time is not 'lost' but rather 'taken', in the sense of gathered, or 'made' in the sense of cooking a meal – the effort put into making time for a meal is productive of further social benefits (Pink 2008). Slow sociality, as we have conceived of it here, contradicts the timescales imposed by project-outcome dispositions in the governance of funding.

The results of the artwork in this rendering are not orientated to the future as a particular scenario (in which carbon emissions are cut by a certain amount by a specific date), but to the future as a range of possibilities informed by past experience. This is also rather resonant of Horton et al.'s comments on the relationship between cycling, a wider social context and time: 'Is cycling of the past, the present or the future?' In some places, cycling is 'something to be left behind in the rush to modernity' but on the other hand 'the most mobile and affluent societies appear increasingly willing to re-embrace the bicycle' (Horton et al. 2007: 4). Although Huntly would fall into the latter category of relative affluence, the artwork becomes the mode of action, as Morphy (2009) puts it, to provide a different kind of possibility for the future.

Donachie herself took time out shortly after the event to reflect on the ephemeral work she had created. She described in writing her experience of the visual imprint of her work:

> A walk around the town later that evening (after a very frantic take-down) was very satisfying – whole streets covered in ribbons of coloured chalk that showed our route – sometimes clearly, sometimes just faint marks on busier roads, but enough to navigate a route round the town that we had made as a community. (Donachie 2009: 4)

For her, the best way to consider the art was to take another journey around town, and even slower this time through being on foot rather than cycling. The walk allowed her to reflect on the piece in its entirety, even though it was never visible at the same

moment or in a single photographic frame, before all the chalk traces of it were washed away by rain several days later.

Conclusion

The themes we have touched on here are about sociality as encompassing both the convivial, sociable, immediate relationships between people and the tenser and more political engagements they are involved in, all of which can be understood better through attention to process rather than structure, as the concept of sociality encourages. Schütz's perspective on the sharing of worlds of experience has helped us move beyond the 'mere' social relationship (as if such a thing could exist) and towards a sense of meaning, yet one that we have described as also necessarily emplaced, embodied and mobile. The distinction of consociate and contemporary, moreover, is not drawn according to a strict boundary but describes shifts in sociality. And understanding our art project as a 'relational' aesthetic further tracks common philosophical grounding in contemporary art and anthropology.

We have considered slowness as an actual experience through pacing and cadence but equally through the tensions between experience and the requirements that art has measureable 'impact'. The work endeavoured to create a dialogue between aesthetic achievement through art and sociopolitical efficacy. Finley (2008) argues that 'arts-based enquiry' is ideally combined with a radical and even revolutionary, politically active social science that responds at the same time to crises of representation in art and social sciences and to pressing social and environmental problems. In this respect, sociality has as much to do with an alternative politics of change as it does with sociability; a politically charged sociality, perhaps.

Finally, different kinds of pacing and movement can clearly be savoured in different ways. This was brought home to Vergunst at the end of the day at Battlehill Wood where the parade had ended. Four young folk on mountain bikes came spinning out of the wood, at high speed and high cadence, following each other in a line wheel-to-wheel. Down the entrance to the car park, then onto the main road and gone in an instant. They looked like a cycling pursuit team embodying speed, finesse and concentration. They clearly knew the woods and the tracks and they seemed to mock the slowness that the bike parade had created, and they may well have been the boys Donachie was yelling at to slow down. While we have affiliated ourselves to 'slowing down' in this paper, we can still admire these boys' demonstration of a high speed sociality – although we hope that bike lanes will one day be established permanently in Huntly, and other places like it, and that the boys will not rush to exchange their bikes for cars at the first opportunity they get.

Acknowledgements

References

Bachelard, G. [1958] 1969. *The Poetics of Space*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Bourriaud, N. [1998] 2002. *Relational Aesthetics* (trans. S. Pleasance and F. Woods). Paris: Les Presses du Reel.

Brown, K., R. Dilley and K. Marshall 2009. Using a Head-mounted Video Camera to Understand Social Worlds and Experiences. *Sociological Research Online* 13, no. 6. <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/13/6/1.html> (accessed 7 February 2012).

Donachie, J. 2009. *Slow Down Huntly. A Residency with Deveron Arts, Huntly, April–June 2009*. Unpublished report for Deveron Arts.

Finley, S. 2008. Arts-based Inquiry. Performing Revolutionary Pedagogy. In *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials* (eds.) N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln, 681–694. London: SAGE.

Gell, A. 1998. *Art and Agency. An Anthropological Theory*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Ho, W-C. 2008. Writing Experience: Does Ethnography Convey a Crisis of Representation, or an Ontological Break with the Everyday World? *Canadian Review of Sociology* 45, no. 4: 343–365.

Horton, D., P. Cox and P. Rosen 2007. Introduction. Cycling and society. In *Cycling and Society* (eds.) D. Horton, P. Cox and P. Rosen, 1–23. Aldershot: Ashgate.

Ingold, T. 2007. *Lines.* London: Routledge.

Jones, P. 2005. Performing the City: A Body and a Bicycle Take On Birmingham, UK. *Social and Cultural Geography* 6, no. 6: 813–830.

Lacy, S. 1995. *Mapping the Terrain. New Genre Public Art*. Washington: Bay Press.

Lee J. and T. Ingold 2006. Fieldwork on Foot: Perceiving, Routing, Socializing. In *Locating the Field. Space, Place and Context in Anthropology* (eds.) S. Coleman and P. Collins, 67–86. Oxford: Berg.

Low, S. 2000. *On the Plaza. The Politics of Public Space and Culture*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Morphy, H. 2009. Art as a Mode of Action. Some Problems with Gell's Art and Agency. *Journal of Material Culture* 14, no. 1: 5–27.

Parkins, W. 2004. Out of Time. Fast Subjects and Slow Living. *Time and Society* 13, no. 2–3: 363–382.

Parkins, W. and G. Craig 2006. *Slow Living*. Oxford: Berg.

Pink, S. 2008. Re-thinking Community Activism: From Community to Emplaced Sociality. *Ethnos* 73, no. 2: 163–188.

Schütz, A. [1932] 1972. *The Phenomenology of the Social World*. London: Heinemann Educational.

Sheets-Johnstone, M. 1999. *The Primacy of Movement*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Schneider, A. and C. Wright 2006. The Challenge of Practice. In *Contemporary Art and Anthropology* (eds.) A. Schneider and C. Wright, 1–27. Oxford: Berg.

Scottish Government 2008. *Culture. Culture Delivers.* Edinburgh: Scottish Government.

Spinney, J. 2006. A Place of Sense: A Kinaesthetic Ethnography of Cyclists on Mont Ventoux. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 24: 709–732.

——— 2011. A Chance to Catch a Breath: Using Mobile Video Ethnography in Cycling Research. *Mobilities* 6, no. 2: 161–182.

Strathern, M. (ed.) 2000. *Audit Cultures: Anthropological Studies in Accountability, Ethics and the Academy*. London: Routledge.

Throop C. 2003. Articulating Experience. *Anthropological Theory* 3, no. 2: 219–241.

Vergunst, J. 2008. Taking a Trip and Taking Care in Everyday Life. In *Ways of Walking. Ethnography and Practice on Foot* (eds.) T. Ingold and J. Vergunst, 105–121. Aldershot: Ashgate.

—— 2010. Rhythms of Walking: History and Presence in a City Street. *Space and Culture* 13, no. 4: 376–388.

Jo Vergunst is a Lecturer in the Department of Anthropology, University of Aberdeen. He is co-editor (with Tim Ingold) of *Ways of Walking: Ethnography and Practice on Foot* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

Anna Vermehren is Project Manager at Deveron Arts, Huntly, Aberdeenshire. She is founder of the Art Reader Network, a network of weekly reading groups in Scotland that promotes access to art-based knowledge outside the university context.