

Proposed Ethical Statement for Socially Engaged Art practice*Janey Hunt*

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1. Rationale

The following statement is to make Dartington College, Plymouth University and the participants in my art practice and research aware of the ethical issues that arise from that research.

The research title is *Conversations: Investigating the 'value-action gap' through socially engaged art practice*. From an existing environmental art practice addressing contemporary issues, I wanted to investigate means of stimulating public questioning of life-style values in the face of climate change and contribute to the enquiry of art as a catalyst for engagement in the real world.

Sociological research identifies the phenomenon of the 'value-action gap' (Kolmuss and Agyeman 2002) in which environmentally sustainable behaviour acknowledged as needed, fails to be adopted, and Darnton (2005:51) calls for further qualitative research. Probing the 'value-action gap', I am using my art practice as qualitative method to involve participants in consideration of its effect and consequences. I will also address the problem of ephemerality inherent in socially engaged practice (Kester 2004:189) and by deploying research methodologies produce a thorough record of the artworks.

Participants will work with the artist and contribute to artwork through direct participation, questionnaires and interviews. Although initially directed by the artist, a more collaborative artwork could ensue.

This researcher felt it necessary to explore the issue of ethics in some depth, given the requirement to openly state ethical issues within research, the specific ethical nature of the research questions and the issues raised by a socially engaged practice and the nature of participant contribution to a personal art practice. The ethical statement below is therefore developed specifically for this research project.

I would welcome any comments or contributions to assist the development of this ethical statement and in exploring its impact on art practice.

There appears to be an inherent tension between sociological good practice as described by the British Sociological Association, paragraphs 20 - 25 (2004) (appendix 1) and the production of artwork. In terms of this research project this is in the area of Ownership and specifically in participant contribution and subsequent consultation to this researcher's artwork.

This researcher feels that an artwork once completed should not be revised. Also the degree to which participants can influence work in production, as implied by paragraphs 23 and 24 is a difficult question. Unfortunately Dartington College of Arts code does not offer guidance on this issue. The code of practice published by an – the artists information company relates directly to professional practice rather than a specifically ethical code and therefore only touches indirectly on the issues of a research based practice.

At this time, this researcher cannot resolve these issues, but will observe the practice of this ethical statement during the research. It is likely that in the light of the pilot projects and further consultation, this ethical statement will be revised.

2. Underlying principles

This ethical statement follows the following general principles of Permaculture. These principles have been adopted because of the spirit of this research in particular:

- Earthcare
'all actions shall be judged in accordance with the requirement that they either heal degraded ecosystems...(or) leave them substantially intact.'(Devon County Council, 1995)
- Peoplecare
the development of a 'culture, which places great emphasis on the energy of mutual aid between people and communities.' (Devon County Council, 1995: 18)
- Fairshares
Carrying capacity develops the ideas of an ecosystem that has a limited ability to support any one species, with the implication of the need to reduce our share to support the whole.

The headings below are taken from 'Ethical Issues in Analysis' (Huberman, 1994) which significantly build upon those outlined in the Dartington College of Arts –code of good research practice (Dartington College of Arts, date unknown).

3. Proposed code of good practice

Competence boundaries

- I am prepared to study and be supervised by Clare Donovan and Tracy Warr.
- I am prepared to undertake training as identified in the Plymouth University Research Student Log Skills development skills audit (pp.47-52) and additional training as identified in discussion with my supervisors
- I am prepared to seek additional consultation and advice outside my immediate research team.

Informed Consent

- People taking part in the research are likely to be included as subjects, participants, collaborators or co-artists (referred to as participants hereafter)
- Participative artwork will be accompanied by a general contextual statement (*to be drawn up*) about the research, with further information available on a website and a sign saying that 'your participation may be documented'.
- All participants will be informed of the title, content and nature of my research through the attached statement (*to be drawn up*)

- Participation will always be voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time
- Participants should understand that their views and opinions may be used visually, audibly or quoted in the research. Completed artwork will not be altered. Participants will sign a release form
- Children will only be included with parental consent.
- Anonymity will be respected where selected
- Where the research is redesigned or altered during or following the research project, existing participants will be informed wherever possible
- Results and observations will be shared with participants during and at the end of the research in the form of a summary report
- Artwork will be displayed informally during the research and via a private view arranged for participants at the end of the research

Benefits, costs and reciprocity

- Currently this researcher is unsupported financially
- Participants will not receive any financial recompense
- Participants will benefit from insight into their understanding, consideration and implementation of sustainability

Harm and risk

- In a spirit of co-operation results and observations will be shared with participants as they occur

Honesty and trust

- The researcher is also a participant of the research and will always be super-critical of herself
- Results and observations will be shared with participants during and at the end of the research
- Participants will be acknowledged in the thesis, unless anonymity has been selected
- Other contributors and experts contributions will be acknowledged
- Artwork will be shown informally during the research and via a 'private view' arranged for participants at the end of the research

Privacy, confidentiality and anonymity

- Anonymity will be respected where selected
- Where possible participants specifically (rather than generally) represented in visual media will have given permission
- Participants should understand that their views and opinions may be used visually, audibly or quoted in the research. Completed artwork will not be altered
- Participants should understand that artwork may be displayed publicly, separately from the thesis
- All data (views and opinions) will be held by the researcher and will not be available outside of the final research report and artwork
- Participants should understand that the research will be published and exhibited
- Data (views and opinions) will only be shared with other researchers if they abide by this ethical statement

Intervention and advocacy

- Adverse opinions, where they may harm an individual or organisation, expressed during the collection of material will be considered for inclusion on a case-by-

case basis. They will not be included if they are libellous, unconstructive, illegal or unsupportive

Research integrity and quality

- Supervision of this researcher is provided by 2 supervisors, appointed by Dartington College of Art
- The supervisors and researcher are responsible to the research committee of Dartington College of Arts

Ownership of data and conclusions

- Participants should understand that their views and opinions may be used visually, audibly or quoted in the research
- The researcher will not distort or misrepresent the views and opinions of participants in the representation of the research (thesis or artwork)
- Completed artwork will not be altered
- Participants will be invited to contribute to the conclusion of the research, through their own reflection on the process
- Copyright of the research (field data, written thesis and artwork) will lie with the researcher
- If data sharing is requested by another researcher, all possible attempts will be made to contact participants to request their consent
- Electronic data will be stored with regard to the Data Protection Act, abiding by the removal of identifiers and use of pseudonyms with only indirect links between data and participants

Use and misuse of results

- Participants will be invited to contribute to the conclusion of the research, through their own reflection on the process
- Published evaluation of the research will help to expose the process
- Data (views and opinions) will only be shared with other researchers if they abide by this ethical statement

Complaints

Issues or complaints can be taken:

- In the first instance to the researcher (j.hunt@dartington.ac.uk)
- In the second instance to the first supervisor Claire Donovan (c.donovan@dartington.ac.uk)
- In the third instance to Dartington College of Arts Research Committee (a.payne@dartington.ac.uk)

References

- British Sociological Association, (2004), *Statement of ethical practice for the British Sociological Association*, www.britsoc.co.uk/new-site/index.php?area=equality&id=63, (accessed 27/2/06)
- American Anthropological Association, (1986, updated 2000), *Statement on ethics*, American Anthropological Association, www.aaanet.org/ethstmnt.htm (accessed 27/2/06)
- Corner, Lee (2003) 'Code of Practice – Artists', an The Artists Information Company,

- www.a-n.co.uk/cgi-bin/db2www.exe/tour.d2w/input?printer=1&menu=2§ion=4&topic=75008&id=92660&textonly=1 (accessed 28/2/06)
- Dartington College of Arts, (date not known), *Code of good research practice*, www.dartington.ac.uk/research/documents/index.asp (accessed 27/2/06)
- Devon County Council (1995) *Developing sustainable communities: A field workers' manual*, Devon County Council.
- Huberman, A. M. (1994) *Qualitative data analysis*, Sage
- Royal College of Art, (2006) *Good Research Practice*, Royal College of Art, www.rac.ac.uk/pages/research/good-research-practice.3072.htm (accessed 28/1/06)

Appendix 1

Extract from British Sociological Association, (2004), *Statement of ethical practice for the British Sociological Association, paragraphs 20-25*

- 20) Where there is a likelihood that data may be shared with other researchers, the potential uses to which the data might be put must be discussed with research participants and their consent obtained for the future use of the material.(iv). When making notes, filming or recording for research purposes, sociologists should make clear to research participants the purpose of the notes, filming or recording, and, as precisely as possible, to whom it will be communicated. It should be recognised that research participants have contractual and/or legal interests and rights in data, recordings and publications.
- 21) The interviewer should inform the interviewee of their rights under any copyright or data protection laws
- 22) Researchers making audio or video recordings should obtain appropriate copyright clearances
- 23) Interviewers should clarify whether, and if so, the extent to which research participants are allowed to see transcripts of interviews and field notes and to alter the content, withdraw statements, to provide additional information or to add glosses on interpretations
- 24) Clarification should also be given to research participants regarding the degree to which they will be consulted prior to publication. Where possible, participants should be offered feedback on findings, for example in the form of a summary report.
- 25) It should also be borne in mind that in some research contexts, especially those involving field research, it may be necessary for the obtaining of consent to be regarded, not as a once-and-for-all prior event, but as a process, subject to renegotiation over time. In addition, particular care may need to be taken during periods of prolonged fieldwork where it is easy for research participants to forget that they are being studied.