DEEP PLAY AND SIMULATION IN URBAN SPACE: OF ART AND VIDEO-GAMES

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Ilfracombe

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Text by Lynn Froggett

> It was fun at first. Pokémon Go was the ideal nostalgia vehicle, reminding millions of millennials of the time they spent wandering through Tall Grass on Game Boys in the corner at family parties. It was simultaneously exciting and amusing, having a shared experience with other people hovering near churches clearly looking for Poké Balls rather than Jesus. During this decade of high body count atrocities and dystopian political figures, the game's immersive world was soothing; a happier headspace. (Christopher Hooton, 2016)

> New Knowledge-exchange corridors can be produced, between the specialized knowledge of institutions and the 'ethical' knowledge of 'community' and artists can have a role to facilitate this exchange, occupying the gap between the visible and the invisible. (Teddy Cruz, 2012)

Art, play and games

The ways we play increasingly shape our urban experience, whether or not we knowingly engage in games. If there is a distinction between play and games – which both arise from the same basic ludic impulse – it is that games are rule-bound, whereas play has a more flexible, open and emergent structure. The most compelling instance of the rise of the ludic in social interaction is the popularity of video games, which are transforming the ways leisure time is spent for vast numbers of people. At the time of writing, the augmented reality game *Pokémon Go*, measured by the number of its downloads, appears to be the most

successful video game of all time. It was initially released in July 2016; a mere eight days later the data analytics firm SimilarWeb estimated 9.5 million daily users in the US. More women were playing the game than men, confounding the stereotype of the gamer as an under-socialised teenage male. The average player was 25, but older age groups were strongly represented. By 26th July, according to Quora, it had been downloaded 75 million times worldwide. However, more striking than the sheer numbers of people involved are the reasons for the game's appeal, which appear to lie in the fact that it transports the fantasy life of games into the real world, so that the Poké hunt[1] enables a 'gamification' of the familiar urban streets and parks that make up public space. The simulations of the game aim to enhance the real world for its players, and the aesthetic of flow and immersion usurps the experience of the real, becoming – as Baudrillard (1983) recognised – more real than reality itself. The Playable Cities movement,[2] claims in its vision statement that "through interaction and creative installations [the playable city] unlocks a social dialogue, bringing the citizens into a city development conversation". Nijholt (2016) argues that "game environments and digitally enhanced real worlds, such as digital and playable cities will converge" (p.235) and sees this as building play and humour into the urban experience. There is clearly an appetite for new forms of mass play in urban space, and we might well ask how these align with, and differ from, socially engaged public art in the urban public realm, whether digital or real.

There are good reasons to believe that people have played as long as they have made art (Huizinga [1949] 2001), but the popularity of games which can be developed for commercial advantage has increased exponentially in the era of late capitalism. Indeed Giuseppe Ortoleva (2012) suggests that while the 20th century was the century of sex, the 21st could be regarded as the century of the game. He refers to emancipatory movements in relation to gender and sexual orientation, the liberalisation of sexual mores and the reform of sexual conduct within the modernisation process of Western societies throughout the 20th century. This was increasingly accompanied by a media-driven exposure of sex and its repetitive perversions, which have led to the 'pornografication' of much the internet. He argues that representations

of endlessly simulated sex, shorn of intimacy and emotional risk, have lost the power they once possessed to unsettle and challenge both selves and moral order – as a result they have been made increasingly banal. Instead of sex, it is now the ludic that offers a pervasive form for creative cultural expression within and against the 'rules of the game'. Ortoleva's thesis is intentionally provocative, suggesting a progressive displacement of sex by the game as the preeminent cultural preoccupation, and that gamification is entwined with the rise of consumerism and the financialization of capitalism. Here, I take the idea as a prompt to think psychosocially about art and games as distinct cultural phenomena, aside from the jobs they create, the leisure time they consume and the revenue they generate.

Clearly, it would be a mistake to conflate all digital games, or the motivations and satisfactions of gaming. In this increasingly diversified field there has been an exponential growth of 'Serious Games' designed, for example, for educational, organisational or military purposes (Dörner et al. 2016). The video game has also become an arena that intersects with art, becomes an art object in itself, or provides a medium for artistic development (Clarke and Mitchell 2007, Sharp 2015). It is also a subject of aesthetic theory (Kirkpatrick 2011) and for the elaboration of play theory (Upton 2015). At issue here, however, is the cultural impact of commercial video games which Wharf and Shaw (2009) argue are simultaneously commodities and sites of meaning that "penetrate into the innermost recesses of consciousness" (p.1). Maybe so, but we should still ask how 'deep' these recesses go. What is the impact on the public consciousness of repetitive simulation, widespread engagement in flow states, mimetic action scenarios, calibrated optimal frustration, seriality, digitally mediated affect and the 'Disneyesque' aesthetic of much game design? How does it affect human interaction in public space?

Play also diffuses into urban environments through the very different medium of socially engaged art – work that is processual, collaborative, performative, implicitly political – where fantasy is not intended to usurp reality, but to enable us to know it better. Theorists of the genre have been preoccupied in recent years with its critical, political and activist, rather than playful, dimensions (for example Bishop 2012,

Thompson 2012, Kester 2004 and Jackson 2011) and these commitments have informed their attempts to show how art can re-imagine civic space and how we live as citizens within it. Bishop's well-known critique of the ameliorative content of the socially engaged arts provokes anxieties about their playful aspect when confronting pressing social and political issues. Play can be intrinsic to the critical and reflective operations of art – but not all play, and not in all circumstances. It can also, of course, be distracting. A consideration of the ludic qualities of art in comparison with those of commercial video games will help to clarify how play *can* be a vector for art, just as it can for digital entertainment, but we might think about the distinction between the two.

Notwithstanding Nijholt's argument that game environments and real-world experience increasingly 'bleed' into one another, play theorists have generally agreed that play and games take place in a space apart from real life, and this apartness may either distance us from reality or, paradoxically, bring us into a closer, more curious relation with it (Winnicott 1971). It may allow us to bring the whole range of sensory, emotional and intellectual faculties to bear upon the object of our attention and forestall a *premature* rush to critique. One of the key services that art can perform in urban environments, especially in the face of current political retreats from the porous borders and supra-national solidarities of the open society, is to change the conditions under which 'strangers meet' so that we can know each other better and imagine other ways to live together. With the failure of 'politics as usual' and the manic optimism of populism, art as play holds out the promise of retaining a space of creative illusion that can unsettle the taken-for-granted and ground hopefulness in a relationship to reality that is both compassionate and critical. But it needs to be 'deep play' rather than the mimetic play of simulation.

In thinking about 'deep play' I am making free with a concept introduced by cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1974) to describe play which in symbolic form enacts unacknowledged aspects of the social order. By doing so it exposes taken-for-granted rituals of everyday lives and social institutions that are not ordinarily subject to reflection

or interrogation. Geertz refers, for instance, to manners, status differentials and what passes for an acceptable performance of the self in the public domain. Deep play can expose and reconfigure relations within what we take to be the real and put the 'what if…' question to serious use.

Alex Hartley's *Nowhereisland*, produced by Situations[3], offered an example that engaged audiences through several ludic modes and 'moods', including deep play that enacted and made available for reflection norms of citizenship. It threw into question the matter of nationhood by creating a space of illusion with which to play with a utopian idea – utopia understood as process and method, rather than outcome (Levitas 2013). It raised the question of how citizenship could be performed and communicated as well as what it might look like.

The centrepiece of the project was the island itself, built from the deposits of a retreating Arctic glacier that was mounted on a raft and towed around the coastal towns of South West England in the summer of 2012, prompting citizens to imagine how they would go about building a new nation. It was met by a 'festival' of choirs, processions and marching bands, and, in dialogic vein, was also accompanied by a vehicular terrestrial 'embassy'. The re-imagination of citizenship was fuelled by 50 or so resident online thinkers, and a dedicated website that enabled people to register their citizenship and vote on an evolving constitution in real time. A year after the event our research team[4] ran a group-based process called the Visual Matrix to reflect on the impact that *Nowhereisland* had made on the town of *Ilfracombe*, one of the places it had visited on its journey.[5] The aim was to understand what traces remained of the visit in the cultural imaginary and memory of the town. We ran the process with adults, recruited by public advertisement, and with young people from the local school. Despite using plenty of photographic reminders of the flamboyant celebrations marking the island's arrival, we discovered that little impression remained of them, or was rekindled. The visually arresting, interactive embassy was remembered better, apparently because of the 'retro' aesthetic that chimed well with the inclination of the adults to look back at the history of the town. However, the element that continued to do its work in the

Nowhereisland by Alex Hartley

imaginative life of the population in the months following the island's departure was the creative illusion stimulated by the barren piece of rock, moored fleetingly offshore, its stay truncated by bad weather. A year after its visit the adult group could still project onto the island their dejection over the decline of their town[6], the empty island symbolising their sense of desolation. The young people, on the other hand, populated it with melting ice caps, fragile rainforests and vanishing species, and also with their hopes and concerns. They made use of it to consider their responsibilities as global citizens of the future. In either case, the island offered an aesthetic object around which ideas and associations gathered, stimulating a collective illusion anchored in real generational experience. Establishing a dynamic between reality and illusion happens in 'deep play' – in this case it enacted for the adults what was already there, but had been disavowed, and for the young people what was conceived and in the process of finding form.[7]

In its psychosocial and artistic complexity, a project such as *Nowhereisland*, which itself combined a terrestrial and digital presence, far exceeds that of most video games, including those that take place in real and virtual space and require a community of players. I am not referring to technical complexity here, but to the difference between dancing on the surface of things, surfing the stream, and going with the flow on the one hand, and on the other encountering something that stops you in your tracks, disorients you, makes you think, frustrates any linear attempts at problem solving, demands creative effort, offers no clearly defined resolution and only comes to fruition with profound emotional and aesthetic engagement. It could of course be argued that it is the dynamic between real places and the illusional Poké hunt that accounts for the success of *Pokémon Go*, creating a gap between imagination and reality that the player has to navigate, and that therein lies its attraction. Maybe so: to date I have not investigated groups of *Pokémon* players using the same depth methodology that we employed with *Nowhereisland*. Nevertheless, I would still make a case that art and video games involve forms of play that arise out of different relations to the world, by considering how we interact in digital and real environments.

Affect in public space – real and virtual

A research-based vignette (Froggett et al. 2014) illustrates a real/digital interaction problem through a project that compared the quality of communication in an online and a studio-based civic forum. We worked with FACT (Foundation for Art and Creative Technology) in the city of Liverpool to create an inclusive space in which to address street drinking, a local issue on which stakeholders held widely divergent views. Invited participants included community members, voluntary agencies, businesses, services, street pastors, police, drinkers and other members of the public. We held a live webcast to discuss a way forward, designed so that a studio-based audience could interact with online participants, who could join in via a screen feed. This exercise in 'communicative democracy' (Young 1996) was intended to include seasoned public speakers, people who wished to remain anonymous, workers, experts, locals and remote callers. The aim was to move away from formulaic consultation dominated

by 'the usual suspects'. Four researchers joined as participant observers, three of them in the studio, and one online.

The forum turned out to be problematic. In the moderated debate of the studio, people observed time-honoured rituals of public deliberation, showing courtesy, respect, taking turns and offering structured comments, even when in conflict. Authority was accorded to the chair who held the space providing psychological containment as people became impassioned, controversial, indignant. The online contributions, by contrast, were terse, irreverent, humorous, inventive, but heedless of the affective climate in the room. Our online researcher, normally of sober mind and measured speech, discovered a new persona – or avatar – becoming wittily subversive in the manner of internet chat. The online participants seemed to be performing for their own benefit; the studio audience ignored them. Between real and virtual publics mutual indifference broke out.

We analysed the communication styles, paying careful attention to content, affect and dynamics, and concluded that the critical difference was the presence or absence of containing vertical structure. The implicit rules, and also the authority ceded by common consent to the chair, acted as a form of psychosocial 'scaffolding' – a 'vertical' support system affording stability to the studio-based audience and containment for conflicts in lateral communication between peer discussants in the room. Participants were nominally equal, but quickly sorted themselves into a provisional hierarchy based on expertise, experience and role. This seemed to promote good behaviour, but at the price of spontaneity.

The online participants had no such restraints. Our researcher, shielded by anonymity, found himself playing the joker in the liminal space behind the screen. In digital peer-to-peer, lateral communication there is little to sustain affective self-regulation. Given public anxiety about online malevolence, it is important to ask what the basic conditions for playful communication that is also respectful and thoughtful are. Does such communication depend on the real presence of the 'Other' and the effort and emotional intelligence needed to reach across the gap that separates

us, one from another? Or does it depend on an authoritative figure, or an ideal? And is this the essential difference between playing with a utopian idea among fellow citizens of *Nowhereisland*, and playing *Pokémon Go* in the local park?

Vertical and lateral relations, social movements and socially engaged art

Digital media have provided the engine and the grounds for new forms of play where peer interactions are relatively unregulated (Facebook has done its level best to avoid a moderating role). They are superficially free of vertical hierarchies and inequalities that constrain 'real' social institutions and communities. The essence of a network is, after all, that it expands laterally providing a (flat) 'platform' for the user rather than (multi-tiered) organisation. Ethical governance is accepted by social media companies only under pressure. In this they are symptomatic of generalised shifts away from vertical institutions. In urban environments we need only think of the contraction of municipal authorities and the diffusion throughout cities of 'flat' organisations created by new business models in the sharing and gig economies. The internet and social media (and of course video games) are affective technologies where communication flows laterally, although this has received little scholarly attention (for an exception see Karatzogianni 2012). They make it is easy to be playful, whether advisedly or not. The habits, norms and protocols of conflict moderation that occur in 'real' public space no longer apply on-line. Lateral relations enable spontaneous self-expression, and equally spontaneous innovations in cruelty: trolling, bullying and grooming. The imperatives of respect and recognition that arise in the physical presence and bearing of another are attenuated online and this has implications for 'how strangers meet' in public space.

The laterally impelled and ludic impulse has surfaced episodically in waves of radical politics, such as Occupy and a series of allied movements, where the aim has been direct, rather than representative democracy, with a mistrust of institutionalised leadership. The cultural politics of protest tends to be playful, inventive and expressive – carnival rather than political party – and also, by their very nature, transitory.

They are uplifting to activists, irritating to adversaries, and unable or unwilling to imagine a sustainable organisation of solidarity. The more recent (and successful) populisms have been of the right, with demagogic figures providing the vertical authority that enables the transition from mass movement to power.

A space is left open for artists, producers and local arts organisations working in communities to enable people to look at their everyday lives through play and imagine how things might be different (Froggett *et al.* 2011). This occurs where they embrace a civic mission, embedding themselves in communities degraded by poverty, racism and oppression, where there has been little cultural investment and little opportunity for play of any variety. In *Super Slow Way*,[8] the East Lancashire Creative People and Places project,[9] located along a canal with stretches of dereliction and poor monocultural communities, some artists have encountered hostility and abuse, while others have struggled to be taken seriously by local people. Art here is 'for the kids', welcome insofar as it distracts from day-to-day aggravations, possibly better than the bouncy castle or arcade, but essentially a childlike amusement. It takes hard work to generate the trust and latitude to introduce a degree of disruption into the adult order of things. Those who have succeeded, like Stephen Turner with his *Exbury Egg*,[10] have employed deep play to activate curiosity in relation to other people and the environment. Alternatively, Rachel Anderson and Cis O'Boyle's *Idle Women*[11], a floating art project on a narrowboat and butty, has held up to the light obscure relations of misrecognition, shame, social suffering and internalised oppression which were grafted onto the post-industrial and inscribed in women's experience. This kind of work is usually only possible (and possibly only ethical) where the artist 'holds' the art space as a containing space. In other words, where the apparent democracy and equality of lateral peer relations between participants is sustained by a structure in which authority is vested in a utopian creative illusion (*Nowhereisland*) and guaranteed by the safety and apartness of the setting. It is also, like it or not, held in the person of the artist and the institutional presence of the programme and its partners.

Exbury Egg by Richard Tymon

Idle Woman

> As publics become increasingly aware of the hit-and-run style of not only artists, but other industries of the spectacle …they develop a deep suspicion of those 'helping' them. As with many long-term efforts, the longer the project, the more the artist or artists must behave like organizational structures in order to operate efficiently and combat fatigue and over-extension.
> (Nato Thompson, Living as Form, p.32)

Affective play and social relations

The question at hand is whether and how the games that people play and the work that artists do in these environments support civic sensibility, which also implies attention to 'the needs of strangers' (Ignatieff 1994). This is a practical and ethical matter but also an *affective* one. The capacity to affect and be affected by the needs and claims of others – who are not of one's friendship group, community or kin – is a neglected aspect of civic life. Affect flows in public space, as it does in private lives, informing how we act into the public realm as embodied and emotional subjects. *Nowhereisland* did not impel people to think about citizenship by debating it, teaching it or modelling it. It created the island nation as an object of imaginative and emotional projection, for its citizens to populate with their dreams and disappointments. In the deep play that exposed how things had been, and what might be, the older population of *Ilfracombe* discovered within and among themselves not only their disappointment at the decline of their town but a way of sharing it with one another. The young people discovered a sense of attachment to community and a hope that they could do better.

This is a form of exploratory play that Donald Winnicott (1971) regarded as a process of bringing the world alive by discovering for oneself what is there to be found. It differs from the simulations of digital games, which depend for their effects on flow state, where there is a loss of self-consciousness and a gratifying sense of being at one with the object. In play, as Winnicott conceived it, exploration is stimulated by the non-identity of self and object and therefore the need to reach across a gap to find the other, who is always in some measure elusive. There is a

willing disorientation or destabilisation of self in the process. For Winnicott, the child may be momentarily lost in play, but most of the time this play is a process of negotiating the *strain* of reconciling what appear to be inner and outer realities, in order to discover the world anew. It is a process awash with affective cross-currents of love, aggression, creativity, destructiveness and care. Play is getting to know and knowing is emotional work.

Vertigo and simulation

In Man, Play and Games (1958), French sociologist Roger Caillois connected different modes of play with both the psychological needs of individuals and with cultural dispositions. He identified four basic forms of play and games which can occur separately or in combination: competition (*agon*), chance (*alea*), simulation (*mimesis*) and vertigo (*illinx*). Competition and chance are self-explanatory and normally thought of as games that are adapted for adult life. Both forms are now subject to intensive commercialisation, evidenced in the fabulous sums of money invested in professional sport and in online gambling. They are both socially and economically significant in contemporary Western societies, but they are not a primary concern here. In thinking about video games and socially engaged art, it is simulation and vertigo that are of interest. These, according to Caillois, are normally the preserve of childhood, with marginal significance for adults. However, he was writing in the mid-20th century. With the computer or video games, simulation has become a pervasive form of entertainment. The deep play of art, however, continues to depend on the disruptive power of vertigo to fulfil its critical and utopian promise. I re-read Caillois from a psychosocial perspective, drawing out implications that were never fully developed in the original text.

For Caillois, games of vertigo involve testing one's balance and bearing, by wilfully pursuing a sudden disorientation in temporarily controlled circumstances, out of which one re-emerges transformed:

> Essential is the pursuit of this special disorder or sudden panic… The freedom to accept or refuse the experience, strict or fixed limits and separation from the rest of reality (Roger Caillois, Man, Play and Games, p.26)

He had in mind not only sports, such as skiing and horse riding, but the ecstatic loss of consciousness in trance states induced by shamanic practices. However, he never fully explored the psychological drivers of this intentional loss of equilibrium, and what it might signify in terms of human consciousness. Contemporary writers on games seem not to know what to make of *illinx*. Upton (2015) takes it literally as pure physical sensation (the roller coaster, the bungee jump). However, games of vertigo surely start with the small child's attempts to stand and remain upright, letting go of the parental hand. Psychically speaking the release of the hand creates a gap and a moment of individuation, a loosening of the symbolic verticality of parental power at the risk of falling, impelling a search for a new self-sustaining equilibrium. This is a form of play psychologically re-enacted throughout life, in which one loses and finds oneself, immerses and separates. Other sporting forms are climbing, diving and kayaking.

If we extend Caillois's ideas to modes of creative thinking we could say that vertiginous play is a precursor to those forms of intellectual activity that demand depth, where we dig beneath the surface, render visible the unseen and unearth the obscure. Vertiginous play demands not only a tolerance of uncertainty, but an active embracing of it, as we travel imaginatively into unknown territories. Games of vertigo explore the possibilities and limits of verticality in order to measure oneself against a more powerful authority and value: parent; sea, sky or mountain; truth, justice and morality; or an ideal of citizenship. The vertiginous game, psychosocially speaking, involves an abandoning of a previously taken-for-granted order in favour of exploration and discovery, a wilful decentring of the self that dents one's narcissism. Much socially engaged art invites a letting go of the familiar, reaching across gaps in perception or understanding. It momentarily suspends the order of things and creates the conditions for a disorientating lurch into the unknown.

Nowhereisland invited just such an imaginative leap in reinventing an idea of citizenship and the concept of nationhood.

In the studio at the FACT webcast, a vertiginous disorientation arose when the incipient moralism of teetotallers, street pastors, bureaucrats and businessmen confronted 'real' drinkers. The debating game dissipated as participants were obliged to reach across a gap in understanding. The containment that made this discomfort tolerable came in the person of the moderator who supported the effort required of participants to relinquish their own certainties and see things from the position of the other; communication was thoughtful, impassioned and sometimes halting. Meanwhile online, it was detached, ironic, stylised and self-referential, addressed to no-one in particular. Our online researcher, seduced by the disembodied lateral connectivity of the web was surfing, free of anchors the real, in a stream of unpunctuated consciousness.

Games of simulation are quintessentially mimetic and performative. Rather than the disorienting exploration of deep play, they involve a fascination with surfaces, seriality, repetition, testing oneself against the lateral rather than the vertical relation. They are about imaginary scenarios – the dressing-up games of children, which find expression in adult life in the fairground and the carnival. The latter is increasingly prominent in urban re-appropriations of Mardi Gras that involve a cultural queering of distinctions and a celebration of alternative sexualities. In the pure simulation we are all as one, dancing on the same street, or on the same float, even as we seek singularity. Distinction is dependent on self-expression, and the aim is to stand out among the many with style and flourish. In the carnival there is no purpose, subjectivity, narrative or history – we are swept along in the joyous seriality of moment-by-moment existence – and the art is in the creation of a liminal space for controlled and culturally sanctioned irresponsibility.

> Mimicry is incessant invention – the rule of the game is unique. It consists in the Actor fascinating the spectator, while avoiding an error that might lead the spectator to break the spell.
> The spectator must lend himself to an illusion without first

> challenging the décor, mask or artifice which for a given time he is asked to believe in as more real than reality itself (Roger Caillois, Man, Play and Games, p.23)

Here then is the 'real' analogue to the coveted flow-state of the video game with its repetitions, calibrated challenges, gratifications and necessary pointlessness. Just as with porn (sex minus the risk of getting out of one's depth), its hyper-excitement is soon made banal. Simulation games have a time-limited allure – carnivals are fabulous and fantastical, but if they last too long they become tawdry and repetitive.

> For me, the addict, it feels like the crystallisation of a hollowness that's only becoming more prevalent in all forms of gaming, be it leaderboards yoyo-ing to infinity on online racing games or multiplayer shoot-em-ups' 'I die, then you die, then I die, then you die' ad infinitum premise (Christopher Hooton 2016)[12]

This distinction between the play forms in art and video games is not intended to be normative, though it may seem that I have argued myself into this corner. After all, the idea of depth is incoherent without surface. It would be an over-simplification to suggest that complex works like *Nowhereisland* are simply one or the other. The deep engagements that were revealed in the visual matrices would never have occurred if the island had not first brought people together in a carnival of collective celebration. The levelling and bonding effect of pure enjoyment established the ambiguous island as an evocative object (Bollas 2009). Celebrating its arrival was the emotional ground of the expressed desire for sustainable community, often associated with older people, but here embraced by the young.

However, we still need to consider the implications of these contrasting aesthetics of interaction in civic space: on the one hand the laterality, simulation, flow, seamless surfaces, hyper-excitement, peer-to-peer display, competitiveness and performativity of the video game; on the other, the verticality of seeking beneath the surface, or reaching across a gap, that is demanded in deep play and expressed

in forms of socially engaged arts practice where an encounter with otherness destabilises the self, and because it is understood to be play of a sort, the disorientation is willingly embraced. *Mimesis* and *illinx* can and do coexist and enrich one another – both are indispensable to the development of full human capacity and a rich civic culture – if there is a problem it is when the mass diffusion of simulation (and dissimulation) displaces deep play which, in its surrender of narcissism, seeks out the truth of the Other.

In a 'post-truth' world the meeting of strangers in civic space demands ever more effort, reaching across gaps in recognition and understanding, and in urban environments beset by division and discrimination the need arises again and again. It impels the citizen to take a critical and self-reflexive perspective on their relations with civil society and the body politic. This implies an ability to question the appearances of things, especially the taken-for-granted and settled forms of life that pass for everyday experience and common sense. It involves a positioning of oneself in relation to others, who are neither intimates nor acquaintances, in such a way that one accepts a degree of responsibility for their welfare. The idea of 'cultural citizenship' invokes the role of the arts and media in helping us to collectively imagine how the world can be differently interconnected, interpreted, communicated and represented – in perilous times it is about the basis for hope. Socially engaged art offers an exploratory route to this end when it is characterised by deep play, which in the fullness of its illusions brings us to a closer and more generative grasp of reality.

Footnotes

[1] *The game is downloaded onto mobile phones to provide a map of the player's movements in the real world. The object is to find and catch fictional creatures – Pokémon – as they appear on the screen by slinging Poké balls at them (also found on screen).*

[2] *www.playablecity.com/vision/*

[3] *www.situations.org.uk/*

[4] *The Psychosocial Research Unit at the University of Central Lancashire, including Lynn Froggett, Julian Manley and Alastair Roy*

[5] *The Visual Matrix was developed together with Michael Prior and Clare Doherty from Situations, specifically to fill a gap in the repertoire of methods available to research the affective and aesthetic, as well as the cognitive impact of public art. It is led by imagery and association and enables people without access to expert art critical discourse to express their affective and imaginative responses to a work in a group setting (see Froggett et al. 2014, Froggett et al. 2015 for a detailed methodological account, related to* Nowhereisland*).*

[6] *Ilfracombe has shared the fate of many English seaside towns that experienced precipitous decline in tourism since the introduction of cheap package holidays abroad from the 1960s onwards. It was cut off from the national rail network by 'the Beeching Axe' in 1963.*

[7] *Philosopher of art and music Suzanne Langer, describes the process of artistic symbolization as finding form for feeling (Langer 1948)*

[8] *www.superslowway.org.uk/*

[9] *Creative People and Places is a programme in which 21 area-based projects have been funded by Arts Council England to deliver art in areas of low cultural engagement. Super Slow Way is one such project, located in Pennine Lancashire along the Leeds and Liverpool Canal.*

[10] *Stephen Turner's Exbury Egg is a temporary, energy efficient, self-sustaining work space that arrived on the canal bank at Finsley Gate Wharf, Burnley, Lancashire in 2016 and stayed for six months, opening up the wharf as a site of environmental and social exploration for the neighbourhood www.superslowway.org.uk/projects/the-egg/>*

[11] *www.superslowway.org.uk/projects/idle-women/*

[12] *Rebecca Cannon (2007 p.38) asks "can one ever tire of killing and dying" and hence "the addictive fervour of gameplay".*

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Claire Doherty (Editor)

Claire Doherty is an arts director, producer and writer.

Previously, Claire Doherty was Director at Arnolfini (2017-19) and was the founding Director of Situations. Over the past decade, Situations emerged as one of the UK's most innovative and pioneering arts producers, commissioning and producing temporary and long-term public arts projects, creating public art strategies and visions for city-wide initiatives and leading publishing and research initiatives to improve the conditions for, and skills to produce, new forms of public art worldwide. Claire has developed an international reputation as a leading thinker in new approaches to public art policy and planning, and is dedicated to engaging those for whom the arts might have seemed irrelevant or inaccessible through transformative art and cultural experiences; advocating for the social value of the arts, and finding ways to catalyse positive change in specific places.

Claire was awarded a Paul Hamlyn Foundation Breakthrough Award for outstanding cultural entrepreneurs, 2009, and appointed MBE for Services to the Arts in the New Year's Honours List 2016.

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