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THE STRATEGIC STUDIO:  
How to Access and Assess  
Decision-Making in Visual Art Practice

Johanna Titia (Jolande) Bosch

PhD

2009



THE STRATEGIC STUDIO:  
How to Access and Assess  
Decision-Making in Visual Art Practice

Johanna Titia (Jolande) Bosch

This thesis is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
for the award of Doctor of Philosophy of the  
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School of Arts & Social Sciences

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## Abstract

There are many motives for making art, but economic drivers are often acknowledged as key attributes of artistic success. In particular, they figure in discussions about the strategic orientation of successful artist's careers. However, in the literature on which this thesis is based, commercial factors are seen as important but limited, in relation to the actual range of values driving creative output. Hans Abbing (2002, p.59) notes, for instance, that other *value concepts* (such as social values) also have a strategic role alongside financial considerations. The *practice-led* inquiry asks what *key concerns* influence the day-to-day decision-making processes of artists and what information would be needed to be able to critically 'think through what being and artist means to you' (Butler, 1988, p. 7). In order to obtain access to the motives and *value concepts* of a practitioner, the author of this thesis has invented a '*strategic studio framework*', a tool by which to access and assess day-to-day decision-making in practice, thereby gathering the information needed to make informed professional decisions. The thesis argues a continuous *flux* in the values a practitioner may assign to the *key concerns* in the Framework at different points in time- and stresses the importance of self-conceptions and personal aspirations in this process. The degree by which these insights would aid judgement of the relative success of the decision-making process, is also discussed. As a result, this thesis provides a better understanding of the way artists make decisions, and of what would be needed to improve or stimulate such practices on their own merits. The thesis will be primarily of interest to artists and art school lecturers looking to find new ways of critical self-inquiry, reflection and discourse. Secondly, it could be of interest to theorists who deal with visual artists and to those involved in supporting organisations within the cultural sector.

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## Glossary

My thesis uses a number of technical terms. Some of which were adapted from existing theory, in which case the source will be referenced. When they are my own naming of a phenomenon, they appear underlined in this glossary. The page number where the term is first mentioned follows each definition. All terms that are defined in the glossary appear cursive in the key text.

**Abduction** represents the step in between a fact and its origin (Nancy Harrowitz after C.S. Peirce) '*...the instinctive, perceptual jump which allows the subject to guess an origin which can then be tested out to prove or disprove the hypothesis*', 51

**Action Research:** (Oxford Dictionary of Sociology, 2009) type of research in which the researcher is also a change agent... There is an iterative process of investigating a problem..., 77

**An Economy:** (Farlex Dictionary, 2/8/2009) '*the system by which the production, distribution, and consumption of goods and services is organized in a country or community*', 62

**Communal Culture** refers to the values, beliefs and behaviours of an interpretative community. In general, it is concerned with beliefs and values on the basis of which people interpret experiences and behave...(to define 'Communal Culture' the definition of Kotelnikov in chapter 1 has been reworked, replacing 'Corporate Culture with the here more appropriate term 'Communal Culture'.', 135

**Complex Adaptive Systems:** (Carlisle & McMillan, p. 4) '*Complex adaptivity could be described as a successful evolutionary response to the survival needs of certain species*', 41

**Conjectural:** (Ebcarta Dictionary, 2009) something guessed - a conclusion, judgment or statement based on incomplete or inconclusive information - or an unproved theorem., 21

**Corporate Communication:** The means and style used to communicate *Corporate Identity*, 33

**Corporate Culture:** (Kotelnikov) '*refers to an organization's values, beliefs and behaviours. In general, it is concerned with beliefs and values on the basis of which people interpret experiences and behave...*', 33

**Corporate identity:** (Cooper & Press, 29) '*Corporate Identity, while derived from information design, integrates product, environmental and information design. Far more than just a logo or letterhead, corporate identity aims to project an appropriate and consistent image of a company... its function, its character and its aims.*', 21

**Corporate Strategy** (Johnson & Scholes, p. 11) '*Corporate strategy is concerned with the overall purpose and scope of the organisation to meet the expectations of owners or major stakeholders and add value to the different parts of the enterprise.*', 33

**Difference:** Most concepts of 'difference' are concerned with '*the gendered, the sexual, and the racial 'Other'*' (Perry, p. 322)., 40

- Fluid Typologies:** (Dorsett, 2009) Research that takes shape and progresses through assessing analogies between objects arrayed on a horizontal plane (studio floor, workshop table, museum display case), which values 'the fluid interplay of perception and decision to act upon what you see' (after Hofstadter, 1996, p. 391)., 73
- Flux:** (Babylon Dictionary 28/03/09) flow, flowing, fluidity, continual change., 40
- Hermeneutics:** (Farlex Encyclopedia) *'the theory and practice of interpretation'*., 16
- Identity awareness:** (Thomson, p. 5) defines identity awareness as self-knowledge., 21
- Identity Entanglement:** the degree to which an artist is connected with the practice and work through a diversity of individual factors., 32
- Individual Complex Systems:** (Carlisle & McMillan, p. 4) *'People as individual complex adaptive systems are adept at self organising; at learning from their experiences; at manipulating their environments to enhance their survival chances; at turning things to their own advantage; but most of all at learning and adaptation.'*, 91
- Individual Value System:** a set of personal, artistic, professional and interpersonal values within an individual visual art practice., 92
- Interpretative Community** (Stanley Fish, 1976) a group of people who, for instance, share a religious, cultural or occupational background., 51
- Interpretative Disruption:** (Dorsett, 2009, p.8) *'the way in which the material presence of things (thinginess) undermines narrative'*., 73
- Key Concerns:** The motives a practitioner has in defense of their decision-making in day-to-day practice., 3
- Latent inhibition:** (after Kraft, 2005) a filter that allows the brain to screen out information that has been shown by experience to be less important from the welter of data, streaming continuously into our heads through our sensory system. The information is cast aside even before it reaches consciousness., 67
- Living Systemic Thinking:** (Marshall, 2004, p. 315) *'a form of inquiry, seeking to act with context sensitivity and agency in a multi-dimensional world.'*, 87
- Meta-position:** (after Tony Lewis, 2005, p. 73) the meta-position is used, particularly in coaching, to indicate taking a 'third position'. In a coaching situation, this would be to stand apart from the dialogue or behaviour of 'me' and the 'other person' and take a third position in order to get a broad overview of the issues involved. In this case it would be from 'me' and 'studio objects and actions'., 79
- Object-led Discourse:** the discussion of objects and their meaning to the observer – beyond obvious formal and textural qualities, which may include personal memories and associations connected with or provoked by qualities of the objects or their spatial arrangement, 172
- Object-led Narrative:** A story arising through *Object-led Discourse* , discussing objects and their meaning to the observer, beyond obvious formal and textural qualities, such 'stories' may include personal memories and associations connected to or provoked by qualities of the object or its setting., 43
- Organisational Aesthetics:** (White, p. 782) *'As a critical form it [aesthetics] allows description of (organizational experience) to decentre instrumental rationality... to give attention to aesthetics as the experience and expression of the environment through the senses. It is a mode of knowing that helps us challenge the reality and appearance of things.'*, 42
- Organisational Structure** (McShane & Travaglione, p. 4) *'Organisational structure refers to the way tasks are divided up [in organisations of more than one person], how the work flows, how this flow is coordinated and the forces and mechanisms that allow this coordination to occur.'*, 33

**Organisational Symbolology:** Although frequently mentioned by the authors, I could not find a clear definition of this term. I would define it as the study or the use of symbols and symbolism in organisations, 42

**Practice-led:** an investigation, conducted through the eyes of a practitioner, drawing from a mixture of practical experience and knowledge, experiment and investigation of other relevant sources like literature or visual documentation., 34

**Productive Practice** by using the term 'productive practice' I mean to make a distinction between what could be called 'practice research'; the collection and development of ideas for practice and 'productive practice' or 'practice production', 95

**Retention and Protention** (Husserl, 1928) that what still resonates and that what still is to come. Husserl uses these words to describe *'the intentions which, starting from a living and concrete 'now', are directed towards the immediate past to retain it and towards the future to grasp it...'*, 81

**Retrospective** (Farlex Dictionary 27/03/09) looking back on, contemplating, or directed to the past. **Prospective** (after Farlex Dictionary definition of 'Retrospective') looking forward to, contemplating, or directed to the future, 81

**Re-versioning:** or 'Retelling' (Barrett, 2007, p.199) In the discussion taking place through the process of retelling, the focus is not only on the researcher's own processes and revelations, but also on the evaluation of these within the context of relevant theoretical ideas and in relation to the stated aims and objectives as well as the ideas and practices of other practitioners in the field., 77

**Sense-making:** (Psychologist Karl E. Weick in Coutu, 2003) *'There are many definitions of sensemaking, for me it is the transformation of raw experience into intelligible world views... sensemaking lends itself to multiple, conflicting interpretations, all of which are plausible. If an organization finds itself unsure of where it's going, or even where it's been, then it ought to be wide open to a lot of different interpretations, all of which can lead to possible action'*., 16

**Strategic Assessment:** Assessing the quality of the strategies applied., 34

**Strategic Awareness:** (Olins, p. 1128) *'Appreciating the strategic position and relative success of the organisation [in this case, the artist].'* Within the context of this research project I would stress that 'relative success' might include reputation, satisfactory development of the work, general happiness as well as financial sustainability., 21

**Strategic Flux:** is used in the context of this thesis to indicate the continuous moving or flow of contributing values to decision-making, 138

**Strategic Identity Awareness** is used here to signal both Strategic Awareness and Identity Awareness and their mutual dependence., 34

**Strategic Studio Framework:** a framework of fifteen studio objects and furnishings, proposed in this thesis as indicators of fifteen key concerns in visual art practice regarding production, social and resource related values, 42

**Strategic success:** would be defined in the context of this thesis as: whether the strategies used by the practitioner help them towards achieving what they feel is important or valuable, 61

**Strategy:** The interpretation of the word 'Strategy' or rather 'Strategies' or 'Tactics' used in this thesis can best be expressed in the words of Nollett (2005, p. 130) *'an eclectic definition stemming from multiple meanings of strategy should be accepted because a strategy is a plan, a ploy, a pattern, a position, a perspective'*. Strategy can also be seen as a *'pattern in a stream of actions'* (Graetz, p. 246) that can also be to a degree unplanned. This pattern can be acknowledged by reviewing the actions and decisions of a practitioner., 36

**Studio Theoretician:** Theoretician that addresses the procedures of making, using their own experiences as 'maker', as well as theory to answer questions about artistic production.', 20

**Tactical Adaptivity:** The flexibility with which alterations to strategies and working methods are made due to changes in circumstances., 35

**Thought Experiment:** '*A thought experiment is an experiment that purports to achieve its aim without the benefit of execution*', Rather, to answer or raise a question by reflection on the experimental procedure (Roy Sorensen, 1992, p.205)., 16

**Value Concepts:** (after Abbing, p. 59) Within the context of this research project I would define *value concepts* as several, sometimes contradicting, ideas about what is valuable towards a practice. Such ideas can be contradicting in value toward different groups or individuals., 23

## **Declaration**

I declare that the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other award and that it is all my own work.

Name:

Signature:

Date:

## **Chapter 1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Two Rooms**

Imagine walking into a large well-lit room that has been furnished, as contemporary interiors sometimes are, with nothing but a sofa and a low table. The expanse of floor is the first thing you notice, followed by a row of colourful rectangular shapes that line each of the white walls. Some of these rectangles have been edged with protective strips, others have been covered with glass, all have been positioned to allow you to move back and forth across the open floor. In this way you can view the arrangement of panels on the walls from many different positions. This is clearly not a domestic environment. The space is almost certainly an art gallery. How long did it take you to guess the type of space described?

Now imagine walking into another large room that is also brightly lit. Immediately before you is a very large table across which are scattered numerous tools, pots and pans. At the other end of the room a series of coloured panels have been temporarily attached to the wall. Despite the presence of several chairs and numerous piles of paper, the floor has been kept clear enough to allow free access to the panels. On a small table by a large window overlooking a yard is a computer with a scanner and a printer. On the other side, along the sill of another window, is a row of books. One corner serves as a small kitchenette and you can see foodstuffs for making hot drinks and light snacks but, once again, this is clearly not a domestic room – it is an artist's studio

In the same way that the details of the artworks on exhibition in the gallery (the

paintings are produced using an encaustic surface laid over a ground of collaged printed matter) seem to speak of the inner life of the artist, the furnishings of the studio (the huge worktop is an old table-tennis table, the kitchenette has an oriental teapot, the window sill library contains Buddhist books) seem to say a great deal about the occupant, about the kind of artist who works in that space.

## **1.2 The Two Rooms compared**

It is obvious that one would not normally enter a room without making a clear decision to visit it, or any experience leading towards ending up in that room. The journey towards the space itself and the grounds for visiting it, add to the process of *sense-making* that will occur once it is visited. This *thought experiment* (Sorensen, 1992, p.205) imagines an interloper with no prior experience of galleries or studios, in order to draw out the different ways in which one reads signs in the two very different kinds of environments dedicated to viewing and producing art. What can we assume about the *sense-making* that occurs in these two rooms? Are there any reliable statements to be made about how they might compare to our interloper? What we do know is that he would be likely to start interpreting the things in the room immediately and treat them as clues about how the rooms are used. We know that as it is what humans do, we are interpretive beings. There is an area of philosophy called *Hermeneutics*, based on that principle.

How would the interloper be constructing knowledge as he moves around these spaces and familiarises himself with them? Standing in an unfamiliar room, his curious eyes are bound to go from one thing to another in order to make sense of their relationships: everything he looks at will be a sign that refers to the space

itself as well as the artistic product, the artistic process, and the artistic persona, the four P's of creativity suggested by Stein (1969, pp. 900-42). Each type of involvement is bound to influence his *sense-making* as he encounters gallery and studio 'stuff', the different kinds of accumulated materials that are associated with exhibiting and producing art. The idea here is that the interloper's engagement with objects and spaces might be thought of as a way of understanding artists, their background and preoccupations, their procedures and ambitions.

Galleries are, pre-eminently, spaces of interpretation. They are, of course, the places where artworks are put on display so that we can be attuned to the signs of artistic and creative endeavour, the processes that bring artworks into being. A gallery room, however, is also a neutral setting, which requires its visitors to bring an array of personal experiences to bear on artworks. In the gallery space, one is prone to comply with the 'code of instruction' of the gallery goer (Chris Dorsett, 2007, p. 80), artist or non-artist. In the studio space, the code of instruction differs between artists, peers and other visitors. In a studio space, artworks are embedded in the context of the procedures of the person inhabiting the space, whose actions have resulted in traces of activity. The way the material contents of the studio are interpreted will depend heavily on the kind of involvement and experience of the person who enters the space. If there has not been much previous experience with the processes of art making, or looking at art, it might be that the interloper turns more attention towards picking up clues about the person who works here. The presence of a teapot (as opposed to, say, beer cans) may, for instance, lead him to the inference that the artist is a mature female or, because there are books on Buddhism, he might surmise that the artist is Asian. This might, in turn, cause him to further contemplate religion or travelling, for instance.



### 1.3 Reading signs in the Two Rooms

The studio space described as the second room is modelled after my own memories of the workspace of the next-door neighbour at my studio building, Jenna Tas, who is a Dutch woman in her seventies with a very active visual arts practice. Some inferences about the inhabitant of the studio and their working methods might be correct, others inaccurate. In this case, for example, the artist is indeed a woman, but not Asian. The question is whether the assumptions made by an uninformed observer are reliable, and if these are in any way more sophisticated or accurate if someone who interprets the material contents of the studio who is an art practitioner or who is the day-to-day user of that space. From experience I know that, even when one is well acquainted with the practitioner (as I am with Jenna Tas) and involved with artistic practice as well, there are still difficulties when making sense of some of the visual clues in the studio- as well as the procedures to which they bear witness.



**Fig. 1 & 2. *Pictures of the Studio of Jenna Tas, January 2007***

Since artists work in a diversity of ways and under very different circumstances, there is no such a thing as a typical studio. These days, well organized, office-like studios are just as common as messy workshops. Studios may also look very different, depending on whether work is in development or packed for exhibition.

Different studios are therefore bound to result in different kinds of visual clues about the occupant and his or her procedures at different times.

As a site of production, a studio seems certain to reveal more personal details than a gallery full of artworks. For this reason, museums buy up the contents of artists' studios to place them on public display, in spaces that reproduce the environment in which celebrated artworks were created. Examples include the Brancusi studio next to the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and the Francis Bacon studio in the Hugh Lane Gallery, Dublin. However much we accept that studios provide special access to the workings of an artist's mind, perhaps because the labours of a practitioner seem to be embodied in the materials and tools that accumulate in the proximity of creative production (Michel de Certeau, 1988), it is not necessarily the case that the studio environment is seen as the central interpretative space for understanding the ambitions and intentions of artists.

In comparison to the literature on the interpretative nature of visiting galleries (for example, classic texts such as Brian O'Doherty's "Inside the White Cube", 1999, and more recent books such as Nicholas Bourriaud's "Postproduction", 2005) there has been very little theoretical writing on how we operate interpretatively when we visit a studio. There have been publications that address the spaces in which artists work, from a historical point of view (an example is the book 'Ateliergeheimen', 2006, Haveman et. al)<sup>1</sup>, but this approach, in exploring

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<sup>1</sup> 'Ateliergeheimen' would translate as "Studio Secrets"

changes in studio contents and furnishings over long periods of time, is rooted in the detached observations of our contemporary moment, it is primarily an academic exercise. The speculations of a modern historian address the missing past; the *studio theoretician* I am describing would seek to capture the knowledge that all practitioners bring to the space of production. This kind of theorising would use inside information to provide new levels of access and assessment to studio life; that is the topic at the centre of this piece of *practice-led* research.

Therefore, an important proposition in this thesis, is that the studio environment provides more detailed information about the artist than an exhibition of completed works. This information concerns, of course, the day-to-day decision-making of practitioners rather than the changing critical perspectives of exhibition audiences. The core idea here is that production is a very different experience from reception. The preferences and routines of artists, even though they impact greatly on the interpretative experiences of gallery-goers, have a special role in the generation of *practice-led* inquiry where traces of creative production are continually valued as indicators of new ways of making, rather than viewing, art. The gallery space is full of meaning related to the discourse of art reception; galleries produce new forms of reception-led inquiry. In this thesis, the studio is presented as a rival space of interpretation in which new forms of theoretical speculation address those aspects of art practice that are too often eclipsed by reception-led discourse; those aspects of an artist's thinking that strategise, not only the execution of successful artworks, but also the need for a favourable balance between ambition, social inclusion, remunerative provision, etc.: in other words, the artist's 'practice' as a whole.

## 1.4 Questions

Back in 2005, when my research project started, I was motivated by two questions, derived from my interest in management studies: firstly, how does art practice relate to the concept of *corporate identity* (Rachel Cooper & Mike Press, 1995, p. 29) and, secondly, how do *identity awareness* (John L. Thompson, 2001, p. 5) and *strategic awareness* (Wally Olins, 1995, p. 1128) function in art practice? The idea was to discover if and how, within the highly complex world of visual art practice, models for *strategic assessment* could be appropriated or, if needed, invented.

This initial exploration led me to conclude that existing models for strategic analysis, being mainly focused on organisational *strategy*, were not sufficiently adaptable to my field. There was a tension between the ‘personal’ and ‘organisational’ in organisational theory, even when personal values were explicitly addressed in models of *strategic assessment*. This inability to address the personal made it almost impossible to apply this literature to art practice.

There is one recent relevant book, written by American artist and business school graduate Lisa S. Beam (2008). Here, the most common techniques of strategic planning are illustrated with examples of ‘creative’ scrap booking, in the assumption that creative people would be able to grasp business-like concepts better, if encouraged to creatively engage with them. This approach suggests that the only reason why artists would have problems making long term plans and confident business decisions, would be that they are not part of the ordinary process of creating and that by pulling them into a more visual process of ‘making’, these issues may be solved. Although artists may be prone to work in a *conjectural* fashion, which is more to do with problem finding than with problem

solving (Dunning & Mahmoud, 1998, p.21) the book does a good job in providing ways to register ones dreams and ambitions as well as offering a clear and concise overview of common methods for *strategic analysis*. My guess is that the method would appeal most to creative people within applied arts rather than contemporary artists, as the scrapbook examples have so much of a home craft appearance, that the very large amount of time spent making such scrapbooks makes it unlikely that they would be updated regularly. Furthermore, it does not offer tools to access and assess what realistically happens in a day-to-day practice. Using the book could therefore most likely fail to critically bring to light what the quality and flaws in ones endeavours may be; the exercises may end up becoming another distraction from actual critical assessment.

Where theoretical material is oriented towards organisational concepts but specifically applied to artists' strategies - for example, in the work of Hans Abbing (2002) and Camiel van Winkel (2007) - there are still problems in relating the personal to the strategic. Even though one of them - Hans Abbing – is himself an artist, and both are apparently championing the complexity of the artistic persona, they still attempt to categorise and fix this elusive and multi-faceted phenomenon. My position is that a *practice-led* researcher, the kind of researcher who uses their own creative practice as a mode of enquiry, would look for alternative forms of conceptualisation and I suspect that too much theorising is trapped in the academic context of fields such as, in the cases of Abbing and van Winkel, economics and art history. Both are based within reception-led traditions. Hans Abbing admits that there are controversies between 'the artist' and 'the economist' in him. Abbing indicates that whilst, human beings are the building blocks of the economy, 'social' values do not really exist in the traditional economical approach (2002, p. 58). All the way through his writings, contradictory

'*value concepts*' (as he calls them in p. 59) towards his work as an artist and as an economist, dominate his observations. Abbing regards such contradicting *value concepts* as a logical result of moving between the group attitudes of economics and artist-hood (ibid, p. 59). He explains that in the context of his book, which is grounded in economical traditions rather than sociological ones, an analysis of *value concepts* is not necessary and would ultimately be confusing (ibid, p. 59). In his use of the term *value concepts*, Abbing mainly refers to social values like inclusion and reputation, not to productive or personal ones. My adaptation of this term tends to carry a broader definition including personal and productive values. When I refer to 'values' or '*key concerns*', from here onwards, this broad definition is the point of reference.

Following this, it would be fair to say that the analysis of different *value concepts* art practitioners may have, aside from economical motives, have not yet been given sufficient attention. As a result, I became particularly interested in how a *practice-led* research perspective might contribute a more subject-specific and flexible approach towards *value concepts* or, as I call them- *key concerns* in art practice. Hence, I tried to take a holistic view of the personal, professional and social values involved in the development of an artistic persona. I also tried to capture the complex impact of resource availability and the subtle process of decision-making that occurs in the creation of artworks. I attempted to construct a broad vista that reveals how all the different aspects of being an artist are mutually dependent.

Within this broad outlook I hoped to include, not just matters of personal background, preoccupation, experience, personality and circumstance, but also the different phases of career and life. In this case, I even wondered if it would be

possible to embrace the dreams that feel so important in the construction of artistic ambition. I asked myself how I could create a framework of theoretical concepts that maintained flexibility in the face of these complex and highly individual experiences. For this reason, in the end, I chose to introduce the terms 'access' and 'assess' into the title of this thesis. Through my reading of the literature on strategic analysis, I now understood that informed 'access' to the privacy of the studio would be needed if one is to develop a method of 'assessing' the motivating values that keep artists committed to their practices.

The purpose of this Introduction has been to establish that any form of access and assessment that captures the full range of *value concepts* acting on decision-making by artists, is currently well beyond the scope of existing theory. As a result, it is a timely matter to attempt an investigation of these processes despite their inherent individuality and tendency to arrive at different solutions in different cases at different times.

My main concern is to offer a practitioner's view on what motives may affect decision-making processes in an art practice. The research project asks why certain decisions are made that may appear counter-strategic - for instance economically - and what other types of concerns may affect the way artists prioritise their (as always limited) time, energy and resources. Through a broad investigation of what *key concerns* decision-making stems from in artistic practice, this research project also asks what specific problems one is likely to encounter when an attempt is made to access the *tactical adaptation* that occurs in the artistic, personal and professional spheres of artists.

This thesis argues that detailed access to practitioners' motives is required to make a valid statement about the relative success of practitioner strategies, and that one would have to rely on practitioner-involvement and a high degree of self-inquiry, in order to obtain such detailed information. Only then it becomes possible to find out how success is perceived internally- and if the strategies that artists use to keep their practices thriving, actually work to their advantage.

Through my research I hope to move a little nearer to understanding what kinds of decisions are prioritised in terms of the allocation of an artist's time, energy, attention and resources- and what motives lie behind that decision-making.

## **1.5 A brief outline of the practice-led inquiry**

In the following Chapter, Chapter 2, the context and origins of the research project will be introduced further. This is followed by a short discussion of the main bodies of literature that have been consulted and how they are seen to have affected the course of the research project.

In Chapter 3, three essay-like sections explore the artist as researcher, maker and as human being. Their aim is to help the reader grasp the situation artists find themselves in these days, and to understand what typical needs, hopes and dreams may be considered to affect decision-making in this research project, beyond the ones that might initially spring to mind. At the same time they indicate specific problems involved with any attempt to access such information.

Following what has been discussed in the first three chapters, Chapter 4 reports on how the outlines of a useful *practice-led* approach have gradually become



visible, and what types of experiments and reflective engagement have supported the investigation in its more advanced stages. The methodological approach and key concerns of the research project become specified into a series of more detailed questions, informed by the first stages of literature research and reflective engagement.

The reflective writing experiment in which I used reflective writing on fifteen non-art studio objects- leads to the proposition in Chapter 5, for them to be framed as indicators *to key concerns* in the decision-making of individual art practitioners.

This framework is expected to provide access into the *prospective* and *retrospective* concerns or values practitioners may prioritise at different times.

These include practical concerns such as, for instance, experiment and execution; social concerns such as presentation and peer communities, as well as concerns relating to resources like money, materials or knowledge.

Chapter 6, further discusses the different ways in which strategies occur in visual art practice whilst referring to the proposed framework, existing theory and my own experiences as a practicing artist. Through a further reflective writing experiment, it is demonstrated how the value a practitioner assigns to the different *key concerns* in the framework are in constant *flux*, as are the resulting individual strategies.

The concluding chapter, Chapter 7, assesses the practical applications and theoretical implications of the research findings and evaluates the project as a whole. This chapter also provides some suggestions towards future research.

## **Chapter 2. Initial Exploration**

### **Introduction to the Chapter**

This Chapter provides more detailed information about the background and circumstances of the research project. It is hoped that this information will be helpful towards comprehension of the context and background of the researcher, as well as the main bodies of literature that have initially been consulted; and how they are seen to have affected and informed the course of the research project.

### **2.1 Context of the Researcher**

First allow me to elaborate on three circumstances that shape the background of the project's original questions. I believe each of them to have been of significance to the course of my research interest into practitioner strategies.



**Fig. 3: *Picture of My Studio in Rotterdam, February 2007***

### ***2.1.1 Individual and collective experiences in art practice***

In 1998, aged 21, I was awarded my art school diploma in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. The certificate was accompanied by a brochure containing advice on funding opportunities and a how-to leaflet to apply for welfare. This might seem a bit odd and certainly felt that way to me as a young artist, ready to conquer the world. However, in that year, an important change in the provision of support for individual Dutch artists was at hand and its effects are of importance to comprehend the position taken by me as a practitioner towards this research project.

At the time the provision for public income for artists in Holland was in a state of transition between the old “Beeldend Kunstenaars Regeling” (BKR) law<sup>2</sup> (which considered being an artist to be simply a poorly paid, yet important enough, job, that could be compensated for by selling work to the state), and a new system called “Wet Inkomensvoorziening Kunstenaars” (WIK)<sup>3</sup>. The BKR warranted a basic income through a combination of welfare, public funding stimulating art practitioners to produce and market work, as well as state acquisitions of art works in order to allow artists sufficient time to do their work. Although the sum of these sources of income was generally sparse, it provided a basis on which most artists managed to survive. Artists were not forced to meet the requirements for job applications. By the time I graduated, this provision had been terminated and the WIK was on its way. For finishing art students in that particular year, this

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<sup>2</sup> Translation from Dutch would be: visual artist arrangement

<sup>3</sup> Translation from Dutch would be: law for income provision of artists. For an explanation in English of both the ‘Beeldend Kunstenaars Regeling’ and the ‘Wet Inkomstenvoorziening Kunstenaars’, see Abbing, 2002, p. 134

meant that they could start using this arrangement in half a year's time. In the mean time, one was advised to apply for welfare, awaiting the new legislation to start.

The WIK is based on a different principle to the BKR provision. It sees artists as independent entrepreneurs rather than cultural labourers provided for by the state. The WIK is set up to provide short-term limited financial assistance in starting up shop. Simultaneously, it aims to stop providing for artists throughout their careers. Artists remain eligible to apply for – nowadays generally more earmarked - public or corporate funding and take a break from the WIK when income is good. Over a period of ten years, an artist can apply for four years of WIK support in total. This means they get 70% of welfare, which they can top up with side jobs or artwork sales to a maximum of fifty percent welfare plus limited expenses. When an artist has failed to make a living out of their arts related activities after those four years and applies for welfare they are, just as any other person, required to apply for any job they can find or re-educate. Although the arrangement has been set up as a start-up measure, one can apply for it later on in life, provided one can prove a minimum of around £1500 worth of art related income a year and a total income below welfare.

At the time, July 1998, I had a part-time job at a bank, which provided me with little over a welfare-rate income. When I went to see the people responsible for implementing the new measure, they advised me to quit my job and live on welfare for a year in order to apply. The prospect of living on welfare as well as the likelihood of being told after the four-year period that you have failed as an artist, seemed unwelcome and unjust to me and I decided against putting in an application. Also, I do not think I have ever really wanted to be economically

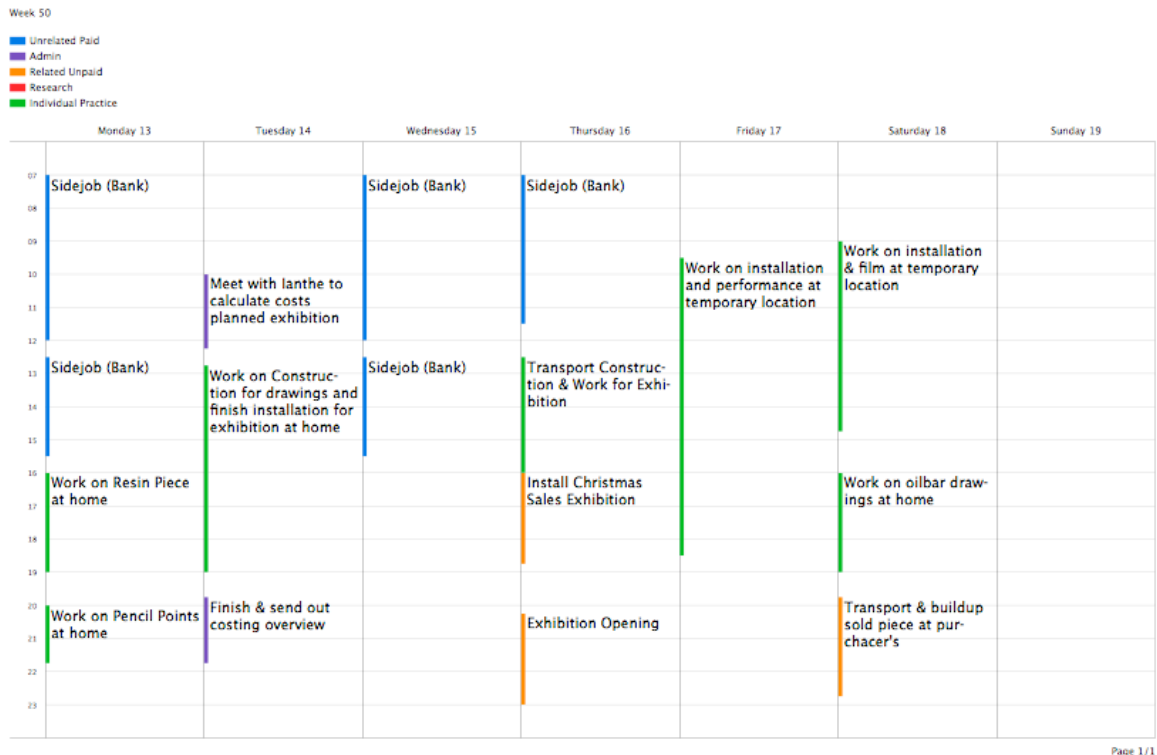
dependent on my art or on the state. This is not to say that I regard it as a hobby, but I always wanted to retain a security buffer, which allowed me at least some financial space to be able to maintain experimentation in my practice. I therefore regarded my side-job as vital to my artistic and personal independence, not just as a bread-earning job.

In retrospect, it appears that independence from support systems and experiment was valued over financial support at the time. My ideas about what makes me successful as an artist are not solely based on financial success or revenue or even recognition. There were other aspects like experimentation, knowledge, skill, artistic and personal growth and a sense of freedom of exploration that lured me into the arts and I saw the government's involvement as intrusive. I therefore had no objection to relying on part-time jobs, even if they were not related to my creative ambitions. I know very well that different artists hold different convictions about what counts as success. Many give more precedence to sales than I tend to, however I also know that my own stance on this matter is not unique.

Although independence from public support systems felt important, I did decide to register as an independent artist at the Dutch Revenue and keep my books; partly because I wanted to keep a close accounting of my earnings and spending, and because it allowed me to claim some VAT back, which was extremely useful. In retrospect, it also reinforced in me that I did in fact take my activities as an artist seriously, and that I wanted to do a good job. Perhaps it was an attempt to prove I could do this all by myself, perhaps even to gain my own approval for my choice of career. In 1999, I set up a planner on my computer to log all my activities in order to obtain proof of the twenty nine hours spent on the company's core – arts related – activity, which I was required to provide when asked. It was

probably then that I first realised how hard it can be to clearly define arts-related activity as opposed to non-arts related activity and to what degree life and practice get entangled. Below I have printed an overview from my diary – using a more modern application than the one I used at the time - of the array of related and less related activities in which I would invest my time in a typical week.

## 13 December to 19 December, 1999



**Fig. 4: An example of my activities in week 50 in 1999**

After only a year of being formally registered as an artist, I received a letter from the Dutch Revenue, which stated that it seemed my income from the side job was too large in comparison to my company's results. Could I prove how I actually spent the time? Whilst it was easy to make a computer-printout of my diary and provide such proof, this incident made an impact on me early on in my career. In my cultural *identity* and epistemologies as a Dutch artist, I must have still carried the conviction that I had a poorly paid, yet important job and that I was entitled to some help. Over the course of this research project I have been forced to look

back on my existence as an artist and will have to admit that at the time, a desire for public acknowledgement and recognition for my efforts towards independence was the motivation behind a lot of decisions. Therefore, however I valued my independence, experimentation, knowledge etcetera, some form of recognition of efforts was also a driver behind my actions.

In the first couple of years after leaving art school, I had a number of exhibition requests, which kept me sufficiently busy and provided me with deadlines to finish new series of work. They would even generate some income at times, although these would not compensate all investments made on a yearly basis. I entered a total of four grant applications in the first three years. The two smallest ones were granted. I also entered two commission proposals of which one was approved, the other made the final selection round but was not executed. At the time I felt these were rather poor results and I was generally unhappy with the way my practice was received. In hindsight, those results were not as disappointing as I considered them to be. The combination of my art practice and the ongoing side job left little time to present my work to more galleries or explore the potential market. Therefore it felt as though the time available was best spent on building up a sound body of work.

Soon I became involved in a regional artists' collective. This meant I had to deal with collective events and representation. I noticed that it was much easier for me to represent the collective or individual artists that I admired, than it was to represent my own work and myself. In retrospect, this was the first time I discovered a curiosity about what I would call *identity entanglement*; the degree to which an artist is connected with the practice and work through a diversity of individual factors. For instance, the influence of personal circumstances or

experiences on the production of art, but also influences such as peer groups, past education and religious convictions. I suspected this close connection of work and maker would produce difficulties in highlighting properties of the work without enabling them to at least partly reflect the individual character of the artist.

### **2.1.2 My introduction to organisational theory**

My activities for the artist collective demanded regular negotiation with local authorities and funding boards. As I had a limited knowledge of marketing and strategic planning, I decided to embark on a part time study Business Communication, which I started in 2000 and finished in 2002. The specific area addressed was called 'Design Management' which is a discipline roughly established to communicate and execute *corporate strategy* into all forms of *corporate communication* such as, for instance, tone of voice, branding and *identity* management. The theories that were drawn on were often based on a concept of *corporate identity* that attempted to include a broad inventory of the desired and existing *corporate strategy* and reputation, leading to a detailed advice towards marketing and communication. At that time, it was relatively new to consider even things like *corporate culture* and *organisational structure* as inherent capacities of *corporate identity*, informing the course of *corporate communication*.

Whilst working on course assignments and art in the studio, the theories I was introduced to began to relate to the questions I had asked myself about *identity entanglement*. Although the developments in *corporate identity* theory took on a more and more differentiated approach, in order to define the success of communicating the values and qualities the company intends to transpire, I



wondered about its relevance to smaller organisations and to *strategic assessment* of art practice. For my graduation project, I decided to write a paper on *strategic identity awareness* for the small firm, in which I worked on the development and trial of a compact method of strategic analysis and advice for small organisations. This proved to be an achievable proposition for the small companies attended, two of which were cultural organisations, yet I still expected it would not bring about relevant information towards *strategic assessment* of art practice and in particular individual art practices such as my own, in which all decisions typically rely on one person only; this is likely to make the distance needed to achieve critical assessment of decision-making particularly hard to achieve.

### **2.1.3 *Entering the practice-led research community***

When, in 2004, I had the opportunity to go to Newcastle, I decided to leave my busy side-job in a cultural communication office and enrol on the MA Fine Art Practice programme at Northumbria University. In my research paper I attempted to explore the appropriation of the theories accessed during my studies of Communications and the method I had developed for small organisations towards art practice. Halfway through the course, I was invited to join the group meetings of the *practice-led* research group directed by Chris Dorsett, who later became my PhD supervisor. Through the PhD project proposal that followed, I embarked on a project that would allow me to address the questions I had been asking myself in the studio, in relation to my own involvement with my work and the strategies I use to produce and communicate what I do.

The *practice-led* research group sessions provided a rich and international

knowledge base that allowed me to critically assess my ideas about my research and practice. Within this group, *practice-led* methodologies were discussed at length and all those discussions strongly related to my conception of *identity entanglement* and *tactical adaptivity* of artists, both of which are of key relevance to my research practice. Some of the methodological breakthroughs in my research project have benefited directly from what was discussed within the research group at Northumbria University. Examples follow in section 4.1.1.

## **2.2 Background Theory**

Five areas of literature have informed the research project. Although it is impossible to address each of these areas in detail, I roughly sketch them out in this section in order to provide a brief overview of the theoretical fields of inquiry the research project is either based on, inspired by or responsive to. A brief overview of those five areas of literature;

### ***2.2.1 Existing documentation of research into artists' working lives***

The first area comprises of research into artists' working lives. Most of the authors conducting research in this area focus on economic situation, employment and the impact and quality of government policy in relation to the public image of artist hood (Hans Abbing 2002, Alexander Alberro; 2004, Julian Stallabrass; 2004, Claire Doherty; 2004, Andrew Taylor; 1995, Linda Weintraub; 2003, and others). In regard to the employment situation, most quantitative research (2005, Arts Research Digest) signals that it is difficult to gain a full view of the economic situation of artists, as their activities are spread across multiple jobs combined with self-employment. Abbing (2002) and Stallabrass (2004) agree

that the economy of the arts is 'exceptional' and, in individual cases, 'cruel'. There seems to be the consensus that art practices are affected by policy and that policy and corporate sponsorship cannot be without an agenda. It is also acknowledged that various artists are clever at using policy and sponsorship to their own benefit. The views on what are the individual consequences of this on the artist cohort and how their outputs might be affected seem to differ from beneficial (Stallabrass & Doherty) to varied and, therefore, undemocratic (Abbing, Weintraub & Taylor).

### **2.2.2 *Strategy as concept***

A bulk concept like '*strategy*', as it is used in organisational theory, needed to be redefined outside of organisational theory, which focuses on larger, commercial practice instead of individual practice in which the motivations might vary. Growth of the organisation or of economic revenue might, for instance, not always be key to strategising in the case of art practices. Therefore, various potential misconceptions of the nature of my engagement with *strategy* as a concept should be addressed at this point, early in this thesis. I would like to stress to the reader to keep in mind that I am, in effect, interested in the decision-making process, therefore in what could rather be called strategies or even tactics, not the kind of *strategy* that has merely to do with a periodical registration resulting from organisational planning towards a determined goal like growth.

The way *strategy* is formed and endorsed in the organisational world is often in the form of simplification aiding clear communication within the organisation. As, in those cases, we usually deal with large corporate environments that might be geographically spread, several mutually agreed steps are determined over lapses

of time that are established as a focusing exercise to keep on course and to communicate intent. Evidently, a *corporate strategy* will be altered when changes in, for instance, market environment take place, however, the term '*strategy*' as used in such environments, suggests something more rigid than the 'strategies' I want to explore in my research. These are best described as decision-making, caused by a multitude actions and situations.

Moreover, individual strategies can be more adaptive to day-to-day circumstances. They serve to benefit the overall situation of the artist, but are usually applied on the spot and not always planned ahead. They have more to do with *tactical adaptation*, resulting from a combination of experiences and artistic, personal and financial urgency, and 'gut feeling'. Where in organisational theory, *strategy* and tactics are quite different, as the first relates to long term planning and the latter to short term responsiveness. In art practice there can be long term and short term ambitions as well, though it can be much more difficult to tell them apart. David Butler (1988, p.7) acknowledges that it is not possible to make plans '*until you have thought through what being an artist means for you*'. I remember that when I read that small sentence, during the MA at Northumbria, I realised that I was interested in finding out how to answer that question when your practice has such a close relation to yourself – one that is hard to take a distance from – and when you are caught up in a complex array of day-to-day practical considerations. Therefore, it would be of no use in such cases to set out strategic goals before it is clear what the practitioner in question regards to be success or failure.

As an example of that complexity I will use a quote from Hans Abbing who is both an artist and an economist. Here, he describes some of his working strategies

(Alex is the pseudonym he uses in the book):

Shortly after leaving art school, Alex began concentrating on drawing heads using live models. At the same time, he was doing commissions for portraits as well. These portraits were like his heads, except that Alex thought the commissioned work never reached the quality level of the autonomous artwork... Alex currently does not accept commissions anymore. (Abbing, 2002, p. 79)

This short quote provides a lot of strategic considerations coming into consciousness. The artist has been drawing portraits as he feels he is good at drawing portraits and many of the portraits sell well. However, the portraits that he does on commission he feels are less good in terms of quality, although they provide good revenue. He subsequently decides that it would be more valuable to him and to his practice, to make more of the better quality work and stop making the commissions. The strategies chosen; to stop making the commissions and focus on the free hand portraits prove that not only short-term economic considerations can be decisive for the used strategies. In order to get a full appreciation of the motives behind such strategies, we would need more information. Why is it that this artist values the quality of the free-hand drawings more than the ones on commission? Is there an actual difference in quality or are there epistemologies telling him that commissioned works are less artistically authentic? Why is the money issue sidetracked? Is there a conviction that a focus on these works will be more financially beneficial in the long run, or is recognition the aim? Or is the financial situation of this artist stable enough to be less of a determining issue at this particular time, and what if that changes? Abbing's own analysis reads as follows:

This was not a conscious choice of his. Alex just began to realize that he enjoyed commissioned work less and less. But he was sure that this displeasure was due to worries about his reputation. By just about cutting out commissions altogether Alex lost some income, but his reputation began developing the way he wanted to. (Abbing, 2002, p. 79)

To further complicate the situation, there is an anecdote in the book where Alex

confesses (ibid, p. 78) that he, at a certain point, recognised a former teacher in his free-hand drawings, a teacher who used to be critical about his work in art school and whom he now realises has always been 'looking over his shoulder' when he was working. This is an indicator towards an epistemological background to his decision-making process. Furthermore, what does one do with this information as it has come into consciousness, or rather, what strategies are developed in light of this information and what might be their impact on the further development of the practice? This example illustrates how small details, or personal reflexive observations, may have a severe impact on day-to-day decision-making as well as on the further development of an art practice.

### **2.2.3 *Identity and the personal***

Allow me to propose a more suitable description of these terms in regard to art practice activity. In the case of the term '*identity*', this concept stopped relating directly to *corporate identity* quite soon after starting the project, as in art practice the *identity* of the maker; the work and the entrepreneur are interwoven and individual (not collective). This made theories and methods of distilling *corporate identity* as a way of determining successful *corporate strategy* non valid to the nature of art practice. Neither could the concept of *identity*, where the self is built up out of usually an 'internal' and 'external' self (for instance Sigmund Freud's 'ego' and 'id'; 1962, Martin Buber's 'I' and 'thou'; 1937, and Margaret Mead's 'I' and 'me'; 1972), provide a base for *identity* analysis, foremost because I believe such 'opposed' categories to be mutually entangled. This would make it hard to split up any *identity* conceptions in art practice fully towards the one or the other.

Another term that is much used in art history nowadays to refer to *identity* is

'*difference*'. Art Historian Gilian Perry (2003, p. 322) uses the words 'complexities' and 'entanglements' as underpinning the notion of *difference*. The term *identity entanglement* I use to describe the self-involvement of an artist with his or her product, has a slightly different meaning than the notion of entanglement as it is used by Perry. She refers to the complexities of which an *identity* is constructed, not how they might be interwoven with production. In the case of discussing art practice, the complexities involved with the role of *identity* do, however, include individual methods of production, therefore I advise the reader to see this as a whole within the context of this thesis. When needed, I distinguish personal or artistic *identity* when specifically referring to practical or personal concerns, but I prefer to see them as one and the same.

What would be meant by the idea of the 'personal'? Since the sixties, there has been a trend in feminist and poststructuralist theory that challenges the objectivist social sciences to demand greater reflection by the researcher, with the aim of producing more inclusive power relations in fieldwork (Kim V.L. England, 2005, abstract). The study of self in relation to gender has led to a redefining of *identity* from more substantial models to a conception of constituted social temporality.

Gender is in no way a stable identity or locus of agency from which various acts proceed; rather, it is an identity tenuously constituted in time – an identity instituted through a stylized repetition of acts... (Judith Butler, 2004, p. 1)

The development of these renewed concepts of the personal and the self have had an important influence on the development of *action research*. The idea of social temporality, and the way conceptions of self could move within that notion, is adjacent to the idea of '*flux*' as used in this thesis. Briony Fer (1999, p.438), in a review of the book 'Three Artists, Three Women' by Anne Middleton Wagner, describes the subjectivity which informs how the work gets produced but also

inflects the work with unconscious as well as conscious meanings, both for the artist and their spectators as 'knotted'. Getting back to the way '*difference*' is used in theory so far, it still appears to me that, even though the concept of the way *identity* is built up is more individually based and differentiated within the theories utilising '*difference*', it is still not of much personal use, as it mainly refers to not more than a handful of *identity* factors, such as gender and race (John R. Campbell & Alan Rew; 1999, Louis Benson; 1979, Manuel Castells; 1996).

My second supervisor, Annick Bourguignon, introduced me to the work of Peter Weinreich (2003), who describes *identity* as a whole, non-permanent structure of the mind. Within this individual construct of *identity* there is only a division in past, present and future in regard to the individual's situation. Here, the individual narrative that is built and brought to consciousness represents *identity* as an ever-changing multi-faceted construct of the mind. This particular concept of *identity* as a multifarious but whole construct of the individual within their specific setting, is closest to the concept of *identity* I have used in my research project. Campbell & Rew (1999, pp. 7-8) express this mutual dependence as follows; 'The awareness of self combines with inter-subjectivity and involves a continuum of social categorisation and self-ascription'. In line with that, Linda Weintraub (2003, p. 195) observes that 'For artists, 'self' knowledge is sometimes discovered through the process of creating art'.

#### **2.2.4 Organisational theory on creativity and sustainability**

The fourth body of literature that has impacted this research represents a more recent stream of organisation theory to do with *complex adaptive systems* (Ysanne Carlisle & Elizabeth McMillan; 2006, Cynthia Lengnick-Hall & James



Wolff; 1999, Douglas Griffin et al.; 1999, Ralph Stacey; 1996, David L. Levy; 1994, Susan Weil; 2006), *organisational aesthetics* (Leroy White; 2006) and *organisational symbology* (Mary Jo Hatch, & Ann L. Cunliffe; 2006, pp. 221-50, Anat Rafaeli & Monica Worline; 1999). These theoreticians all show a great deal of interest in artistic activity, but merely to the area of innovation and sustainability.

When 'creativity' is discussed, this is usually a concept of creativity that is somewhat different to the kind of creativity connected to artistic practice, which has been acknowledged in Bourguignon & Dorsett (2002). This appropriation of creativity by, for instance, Chris Bilton (2006) and Mary Jo Hatch (2005), is defined by Isaksen & Tidd as:

...the making and communication of meaningful new connections; to help us think of many possibilities; to help us think of new and experience in varied ways and using different points of view; to help us think of new and unusual possibilities; and to guide us in generating and selecting alternatives. These new connections and possibilities must result in something of value for the individual, group, organization or society.' (ibid, 2006, p. 69)

The interest in artistic practice as a means to inspire creativity in organisations can be confusing in the sense that it suggests thinking of art practice as a model for *blue sky thinking* or proposes artist as collaborators. The purpose of such exercise however, is usually to develop areas outside of art. It is worth asking in which cases the art practice of the involved artist actually benefits from such endeavours. This would, once again, rely on the *key concerns* and perceived qualities of the practitioner. It is hoped that the *strategic studio framework*, proposed in this research project will help practitioners decide what activities or collaborations would be welcome to develop the qualities of their practices.

### **2.2.5 Literature that considers objects as communicators or**

## ***indicators***

The fifth and final relevant body of literature consists of writings of Roger Pol-Droit (2005), Cynthia Sundberg Wall (2006), Akiko Busch (1999 and 2004), Sheryl Turkle (2007), Edward de Bono (1985) and Dorsett (2009) who, all in their own ways, experiment with objects as communicators of or indicators to meaning. This reading of meaning communicated by objects has been conducted alongside further reading about the impact of practice on theory and vice versa (Paula Jarzabkowski & David C. Wilson; 2006, Ralph Stanley, 2005 and others) toward further development of a useful methodology of data collection drawing on what I would call '*object-led narrative*'. These authors have produced narrative around memories and meaning, evoked by looking at, and talking about everyday objects. More on the impact of some of this background literature on the methodologies of this research project will be explained in section 4.1: 'Inspirational Base of the Inquiry's Methods'.

## **Summary and conclusions Chapter 2**

In Chapter 2, the contextual and theoretical background of this thesis was provided and briefly discussed. What can be taken from the first two chapters is that it would be useful to have a full understanding of what is required in order to obtain more information about *value concepts* and *key concerns*; what they might be in visual art practices and how they may be recognized. What has also become clear, is that a *practice-led* inquiry after such personal motives behind decision-making will first have to ask what might be problematic and unique about decision-making in visual art practices. In the next chapter this is further investigated.

## Chapter 3. Identifying Problems and Particularities

### Introduction to the Chapter

In the first two chapters the scene of this research project has been set. The background information to the perspective and contentions of this research project has been provided. The question, if and how models for *strategic assessment* could be appropriated, leads to the question of what might be the distinguishing factors between strategies in art practice and the way *strategy* is addressed in organisational theory. I have touched on this briefly in the introduction and in the section on background theory (2.2). The terms '*strategy*', '*strategic*' and '*identity*' have, for instance, been defined more precisely in order to fit the conditions of art practice.

It is now time to further frame my initial observations and conclusions about what might be important when looking at decision-making in art practices, resulting from the literature review, conversations with other artists and observations in the studio. This initial analysis aims to provide further understanding of the challenges of the project and the typical problems one would encounter when looking at *strategy* in art practice. In this chapter, three interconnected 'stories' introduce several important particularities of art practice- and the challenges they might impose on a research project such as this one. The first one is that of the artist as researcher; the second one discusses the artist as maker; and the third one the artist as a human being.

## 3.1 The Artist as Researcher

### 3.1.1 *Dualistic requirements of action research*

I dreamed you were a cosmonaut, in the space between our chairs.  
And I was a cartographer of the tangles in your hair. (Andrew Bird, 2007)

The above lines from the song 'Armchairs' by Andrew Bird resonate when thinking about the particular difficulties with which the project has been faced. Besides having listened to a lot of Andrew Bird songs during the course of writing up; the image of the 'cosmonaut' and the 'cartographer' relate to the project's requirements for constant movement between intimate and detailed involvement, as well as the ability to obtain the critical distance needed to analyse what is going on in a broader sense. The success of any form of *action research* relies on successful negotiation of involvement with and distance from the project. This dualistic requirement has determined the main difficulties encountered in this project, but it has also contributed a great deal towards its achievements.

My role has been to switch back and forth from the attention to detail of a 'cartographer', registering the tangles in detail, to the wider perspective of the 'cosmonaut', attempting to gather sufficient distance in order to look at the bigger picture. It is true that this switching of roles can be complicated even further through the personal involvement that inevitably comes with being an artist, engaged in *practice-led* research. It has, however, become quite clear to me that it is exactly this involvement, and the way it forced me to invent and structure techniques to help me achieve the desired distance, that make the outcomes of this project valuable.

### **3.1.2 The role of my artistic practice**

The role of my artistic practice in this research project would be, that I can only access and assess the decision-making involved in day-to-day practice with authority, provided I am an artist in a studio situation. Even without highlighting any piece of work on the pages of this thesis, it is very much *practice-led*. The project has not been led by the products themselves, but rather by the day-by-day productive, social and professional activities involved in being a practitioner. As I have an ongoing practice, I am able to look at practice from the inside out, allowing my experiences and observations combined with reading, discussions and experiments to guide my reflective inquiry.

As indicated before, the information needed for the 'cartography' of this decision-making process can be extremely detailed: small lapses of interests or minor events unknown to others can have a big impact on the development of a practice. This makes close access to this practice of absolutely crucial importance. Researchers external to the practice would not normally gain such information or appreciate its relevance to productive strategising. Although I will only be able to make such detailed observations about my own practice, the 'cosmonaut' in me has been extremely conscious about other practitioners around me and that many artists are feeling similar experiences of complexity in decision-making. I know that because I am a practitioner, situated in a studio environment, an art school environment as well as the general cultural environment, surrounded by other practitioners, with whom I regularly have conversations about their work. The practice of being amongst other human beings lends itself to other experiences and situations relevant to this approach.

Beside the social, educational and support systems that connects us, there must also be a connection between us in the historic moment in which our practices are located.

### **3.1.3 Avoiding categorisation in types of artists**

Returning to the metaphor of the cartographer, the study of art history theory and organisational theory that seemed relevant starting out this research project, presents me with a difficult dilemma. When one attempts to say something about artists' strategies, it is not easy to avoid categorisation, for instance in types of artists. Dealing with bulk information like the history of art or strategies of large organisations, one quite easily resorts to such partitioning and to simplification. In organisational theory this is also a common practice. Although usually recognized as a weakness by the authors, categorisation is regarded as a necessary evil. In art practices that are often individually conducted, there would be as many categories as there are artists because the strategic considerations in many of these practices are, to an extreme degree, connected to the individuals' personal life. I call this phenomenon *identity entanglement* - even the determinants of the success of strategies are highly personal and complex and tend to change subject to life phase and personal circumstances. Especially when a practitioner usually works alone, it can be difficult to be critical about one's actions if you are so closely involved with the practice- and the practice has become an indistinguishable part of your everyday life and everyday life has become part of the practice.

As an artist, I know how deeply diverse motives in art practice can be and how complex their connections. Losing one's studio can result in work becoming

smaller in scale, for instance. Personal experiences or experiments in the studio - unknown to others - can have a significant amount of impact on the practice for long periods of time. This presented me with the predisposition that, in order to develop a system of individual analysis of practitioner strategies, one would need common denominators that do not force the arts practitioner into categories of practice. Rather, they should evoke information towards the reasoning that may go on behind the prioritisation process for professional, artistic as well as personal development, at various times.

As discussed in section 3.3, the information needed to fully grasp the complexity of an individual decision-making process asks for a very high level of access to that process. You would have to know what the artist in question finds important in his or her personal, artistic and professional life. Furthermore, the background or source of that information often needs to be known as well. For instance: if I make the decision to paint in black and white this could be a *strategy* resulting from having no daylight, from having been told I have no sense of colour, or because I am colour blind. It might also be that I find black and white more beautiful or that I simply can't afford to buy more colours of paint. Such information can be quite unimportant in assessing the quality of the work; however it has a high impact on the productive process and on the degree to which the artist feels confident and satisfied with the course the practice has taken. If, following the above example, I feel that the works should have had colours but circumstances have made that choice impossible, this may trigger tactical adaptation towards more sunlight or money for paint. Alternatively, recognition of the quality and strength of these paintings might lead to a conscious choice to proceed with them, whether or not the choice to make them this way was made voluntarily to begin with. This is how detailed knowledge of

the decision-making process can provide key information for useful assessment of the practice, its developmental needs, and the relative success of it as far as the artist is concerned.

### **3.1.4 *Dynamic strategies***

Chris Dorsett (2007), in a essay on interpretative experiences in fine art exhibitions, musical performances and reading literature, suggests that for contemporary audiences, the sort of groups that the literary theorist Stanley Fish (1976) calls *interpretative communities*;

interpretations are always fresh and liable to go off as fashions change. However, it is the strategy rather than the codification that is historically dynamic. (2007, p. 81)

He goes on to compare the complementary operations conducted in *interpretative communities* with military strategists (p. 83) after de Certeau (1984, pp. 36-7), who suggests that making use of cracks that particular conjunctions may open up in the surveillance of proprietary powers, offers alternative opportunities for the responsive creativity of the tactician. Time is of importance here as well, as 'the perceptual experience of our immediate future conforms to that of our immediate past' (Samuel Todes 2001, p. 79). I wonder if it is, indeed, possible to apply some form of codification towards the field of practitioner decision-making. Instead of distinguishing categories of artists or practices, I would rather highlight the values or concerns between which these dynamic strategies might move and put them, in relation to perceptual experiences of a practitioner's immediate future and past. There must be certain types of considerations, such as practical, social and financial, that provoke dynamic strategising. If I manage to explore all the possible types, they must give way to achieving the underlying argument behind decision-making in individual cases, whilst avoiding categorisation of types of practices or practitioners.



## 3.2 The Artist as Maker

### 3.2.1 *Productive conditions*

When I work, I see things differently. ... I live as in a fish tank, separated from the world by glass and water. Sometimes I see a familiar face coming towards me, it presses its nose against the glass wall that separates us to see if all is well here on the inside.

I smile and dive towards the floor. (Rasker, 2000, p. 20)

The quote above is a translated fragment from a Dutch novel by Maya Rasker. I would like to use it as a point of departure, structuring the story about some important particularities of art practice in the pages to come, in order to take the reader on a journey along several thoughts and observations involving art practice. In the run up to writing this essay<sup>4</sup>, I spoke to various other artists from Rotterdam who were to participate in the exhibition.

### 3.2.2 *When I work, I see things differently ...*

The first image that surfaces whilst reading this phrase is that of seeing things in a different capacity. The use of 'things' as an expression brings forth an image of all inclusiveness, containing both the physical and the non-physical. 'Seeing things' is after all related, not only to visual conception, but also to conception in the sense of 'view' or 'insight'. Of significance is the addition 'when I work', which suggests that this 'seeing' or 'way of seeing' is particularly 'different' in the productive mode. In relation to this it needs saying that, in visual art practice, this

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<sup>4</sup> This section is a translated and edited version of a text I was requested to write in relation to my research project for the book accompanying the exhibition 'Wederzijds' in Den Bosch, (Bosch, 2008).

productive mode is not always easily distinguished from a non-productive mode- and not just in the sense that artists are continuously involved with their work. The work might also enter the life and thoughts of a practitioner through a phenomenon called '*abduction*', which will be introduced later.

First let us look closer at how artists might see things differently through their daily working routines and to what degree this might connect with a personal 'way of seeing' and, beyond seeing, as a way of interpreting. How individuals interpret, relates to their personal experiences, in terms of *sense-making* and skill building, as well as the *interpretive communities* of which they are a part. (Stanley Fish, 1976). Any group of people with shared memory or experiences could share ways of interpreting the things in the world around them.

Visual artists are accustomed to play with an endless array of moments of associative recognition between one 'thing' and another. This process produces a situation which causes the 'well-informed mind' (Wheeler after Charles S. Peirce, 2008, p. 12) to form an explanatory connection or hypothesis. Peirce calls this phenomenon '*abduction*' (1992, pp. 137-54). According to Peirce, there are three main ways in which understanding of signs can be shaped in the mind; deduction, induction and *abduction*. *Abduction* represents the step in between a fact and its origin

'...the instinctive, perceptual jump which allows the subject to guess an origin which can then be tested out to prove or disprove the hypothesis.' (Nancy Harrowitz, p. 182)

We cannot confuse this with being abducted in the physical sense, which might suggest no active or wilful participation of the 'abducted'; as if the he or she is taken away without having contributed to the event. Rather, I would make the case that when this principle occurs in art practice, the well-informed mind of an

artist prepares itself for the creative exploit of guessing at links between one thing and another. Although this feels like being abducted, like being taken on an involuntary journey, there is, nevertheless, wilfulness at play. To me, this seems like being on a plane as it takes off; it is clear that you are being taken somewhere without having any influence on the course of the journey; however, you have boarded that plane voluntarily in order to be transported in this fashion. An artist is excited by the abductive workings of their mind because, following this analogy, they are able to give themselves over to the contingent and arbitrary dynamics of the creative process. Their imagination can 'take off'.

When the mind is operating in the mode of *abduction* the special sense in which I want to use the notion of 'seeing' leads to a very particular form of 'insight'. It is a very impromptu coming-together of experiences, observations and interpretations that, in this state of combination, produces a powerful sense of wonder. As wonder arrives unannounced within the working process, a very elusive phenomenon is experienced that does not let itself be understood particularly well within our objectivist culture, as it consists of magical, primary and subjective components. When the mind 'takes off', one can feel as if one has been led into a state of 'transcendence'. Indeed, the familiar, and overused, concept of 'inspiration' is embedded in the process of *abduction* and creative wonderment. The appeal to the supernatural has long-since disappeared for most artists, but we continue to rely on mystification. One purpose of my discussion of *abduction* is to provide terms of reference for arts practice that conform to a general theory of interpretative thinking: that is, the concepts of deduction, induction and *abduction* which date back to philosophies of the Ancient Greeks and the founding intellectual traditions of our culture.

It is my contention that those moments in which an artist's mind 'takes off', not only guide the progress of the artworks but also the sequences of decision-making that shape the artist's lifestyle and career. In my conversations with artists, many referred to instances in which forms of *abduction* led to them following a new trail of thought. It seems very possible that such instances of the well-informed mind of the artist 'taking off' could apply equally to different perspectives on the strategic potential of being an artist. My aim here is to reframe the abductive experience so that it serves the workings of the strategic mind.

### **3.2.3 ... *I live as in a fish tank* ...**

The work situation of artists is under significant influence of interventions that cause the mind to 'take off'; *abduction* breaks into the working process – or rather it breaks it open – through the evocation of spontaneous hypotheses in the well-informed mind. According to Wendy Wheeler (2006), the mind is allowed access to subconscious or preconscious – tacit – knowledge through this phenomenon that causes it to 'take off'. This formerly very unpopular form of practical knowledge that is very hard to share or pass on, becomes, through its connection with the rise of complexity theory to benefit subjectivist thinking, at last widely recognised as an indispensable element of knowledge as a whole. Aside from Wheeler, Jason Stanley (2005, p. v) signals, for example, how practical rationality and theoretical rationality are intertwined and that practical rationality can form a factual basis for convictions. Richard Sennett (2008, p. 1) comments on this very explicitly by saying *that "making is thinking"*. This is specifically true in artistic practice, which is usually built around such forms of tacit knowledge; the 'bodily knowing' of someone who becomes an expert in handling the 'matter' in their

profession on a day-to-day basis, expecting the wondrous moments of *abduction* and recognising them.

The fish tank from the quote suggests that the conditions of artisthood, in the productive mode, are semi-enclosed. Private yet public - for fully translucent -, with water and motion distorting the view. The glass and water form the barrier with the world, and therefore the distinction between private and public space. Allow me to propose the fish tank as a metaphor for the possible function of this alternative 'habitat' in support of the practice of a visual artist who 'lives as in a fish tank'. As a semi-enclosed space, the fish tank functions through the maintenance of control over the indoor climate. The studio, as an area of interpretation and focus on art production, can resemble such a space. It can also be compared to a greenhouse. In the case of the fish tank it means retaining the water, in the case of the greenhouse retaining heat. The principle is the same; an artificial climate that aids productive needs such as swimming or growing, yet is still dependant on external elements like sun, soil and water. Isolation is relative and only desired in order to obtain focus toward the conceptualisation, execution and validation of what has been brought from the world into the studio.

The construction of that indoor climate, which aids productive needs, occurs to individual insight and has strong relations with the practical sides of the chosen material or situation. The construction of the work environment also relates to practical experiences, for instance, to past occurrences or experiences of *abduction*. During my conversations with other artists, it has often been discussed how the instinct develops towards choosing the right mode of working to facilitate and recognise moments in which the mind 'taking off' can manifest itself, even though that process is, to some degree, beyond control. This can make some

practices quite repetitive in nature and different modes of concentration can be applied, like shifting gear between rigorous working and cautious distance or non-related activities like reading the paper or weeding. The studio can be empty or full, clean or messy. That does not just relate to the character of the artist or the method of production – painting or photography for instance -, but also to the moment of entry; for instance, if a work or series has just been finished. Of course, there need not be a studio in the physical sense. Since the principle of *abduction* is somewhat ‘interventionist’ at heart – it intervenes unexpectedly – a more public environment can also serve as the site of creative insight. In such cases, the greenhouse or the fish tank does not, however, cease to exist as an interesting analogy to the activities in day-to-day studio practice. The studio becomes, in the words of Davidts (2005. pp. 14-5), ‘internalised’; the artist carries it around as a place to where he or she can mentally retreat.

### **3.2.4 ... separated from the world by glass and water ...**

Artists may be divided from the world by water and glass; this division is, at the very least, vague and artificial. Think of the systems of income provision for artists, carrying the unavoidable political agendas. Most artists are bound to encounter good or bad press, art that sells and does not sell well, life and work ambitions; all of which can make it necessary for an artist to sometimes shake the audience off their shoulders in order to get back to work. ‘The world clings to me like a wasp’, Otto Egberts comments during our conversation in his studio.

Yvonne van de Griendt explains that she feels to have had to ‘literally’ erase the eye of the audience out of her drawings in order for it to be itself again and for a new series of works to take shape under her hands, after a show that was very successful.

The critical eye of the spectator who presses his nose against the glass can therefore surely not be seen as without power or influence. This all contradicts the idea of freedom and autonomy of the artist. Therefore, that autonomy is rejected by artist and economist Hans Abbing (2002) as a necessary myth that preserves the status of art and, at the same time, makes it dependent on a ruthless economy and a system of public funding that is dictated by political agendas. Art historian Camiel ten Winkel (2007) who works closely with practitioners in art school environments also draws a picture of immense dependency of the Dutch artist on governmental support structures, only to embrace the myth of the romantic artist, once more, in the last pages of his book. Both express a conviction that something quite ambivalent is happening with the idea of freedom in the arts. They try to find the root of this conviction - which is in their cases, grounded in practical experiences as artist or with artists - in the social and economic position of artists.

In light of the previous reflections on *abduction*, it certainly appears that practices are often constructed in anticipation of the appearance of that phenomenon. My position would be that the idea of freedom, at least within the productive mode of visual art, is determined by a need for an artificial condition rather than an autonomous one. It follows that the idea of freedom should not be confused with that of full autonomy or independence – which is a myth indeed – rather with individual ‘room to move’ in service of experiment, skill enhancement and focus, all of which are regarded as good conditions for the manifestation of *abduction*. This manifestation takes place for all human beings and in all occupations, however, in visual arts, it is both the productive and the communicative core. I will explain why I consider this element to be so important.

In every studio conversation ensuing with the artists I visited, the balance between personal and productive life, was discussed at length. Working in relative isolation and social and interpersonal aspects of life are both valued highly. The difficulty is often to find time to satisfactorily feed and balance social needs, financial needs and artistic needs. In their social life: relationships, side-jobs, walking around town, the work never completely goes out of mind. In the semi-enclosed space of the studio, the artists look for enough focus to bring these impulses into the creative process, in which the work will play a leading and filtering role. Everyday observations and thoughts can end up on paper, in resin, wax or on canvas, just like that, in a leading role, after being considered forgotten for years. The works that result from these processes lead, mostly in retrospect, to insights for the artist into his or her visual and personal values. The 'artificial' condition of visual arts practice; the swimming in the fish tank, makes it possible to work with great concentration on something of which the communicative meaning to the artist and on to the spectator, is seldom determined in advance.

This adjusted idea of freedom, including the function and conditions of the wondrous phenomenon of *abduction*, makes that wondrousness at once less 'mythical', at least in the sense of a myth that prevails and is carried against better judgement; the way it is described by Abbing and van Winkel. Now that we grasp some understanding of the conditions and effects of *abduction*, it suddenly appears to be possible to maintain the position that the origins and functions of art have wondrous capacities, as well as to regard the artificial as a natural element of art practice. As we shall see, this will also cast a new light on the supposed 'elitist' nature of art. Hereby we arrive at the receiving end; the familiar face that comes towards the swimmer in the fish tank.



**3.2.5 Sometimes I see a familiar face coming towards me, it presses its nose against the glass wall that separates us to see if all is well here on the inside ...**

As said, artists may distance themselves from the world as they are at work, yet this does not mean they would be able to break away from life itself. The function of art is also, in a strange way (including distortion; seeing differently through water) still communicative. Now that we have arrived at this point, it becomes possible to approach the notion of artistic freedom via the functions of *abduction*. If artists take their thoughts and concerns into their workspaces, where they often have developed very individual, routine behaviours, this should not be conceived as a sign of non-social or secretive behaviour. Rather, the focus that is sought is expected to deliver forms of *abduction* to the working processes so that the work communicates, for instance, empathy or criticism towards our world and being human, at least part of which is hoped to be recognised by others. Let me further explain how art communicates and how *abduction* plays a role in this communication process for maker and spectator.

To communicate, you need at least two actors; one who sends and one who receives. Let us imagine a simple situation in which the artist is the sender and one other person the receiver, and that the two of them are in contact through a singular 'sending' and 'receiving' action. This would mean that, in this case, our spectator stands eye to eye with an artwork by our artist and that, besides that, there is no personal contact between them. At the point of producing the work and through the process of *abduction*, the artist has seen things differently from his or her fish tank, and the resulting view or insight lies embedded within the

artwork. Now, our spectator sees the artwork for the first time. At his level a new layer of symbolism and interpretation takes place and perhaps that includes the wondrous phenomenon of 'taking off' through which recognition occurs. The communicative core of art reveals itself within that recognising moment. This is, on the whole, not a simple and exactly conducted recognition, yet it is a very direct and personal recognising that goes right into the deepest layers of personal cognition. Wendy Wheeler, following Peirce (2006) compares the process of *abduction* to 'the play of musement'. The notion of inspiration and of the sublime may come to mind in the way in which *abduction* works; yet it is something interactive and interpersonal rather than something overwhelming that is supernatural and inescapable at heart. Both from the sender and the receiver it demands active participation, for, in order to make *abduction* work, one needs a well-informed mind.

In 1946, Maurice Nicoll (1946, pp. 977-9) wrote about 'the psychological land' in his reflections on the work of Ouspensky. In order to understand the work, he writes, you will have to have been in the same 'psychological land'. He compares physical travel; the travels of the body, with psychological travels; the travels of the mind. One spirit can recognise the experiences of another by recognition of the psychological and therefore interpretative sensations of the other. The artist approaches 'the other' in his or her work as equal minded, without the ability to test if this assumption is correct – the other being nothing but an abstract notion –, recognition only occurs when symbols are recognised and/ or 'taking off' takes place in the beholder. The communication may be very indirect and unpredictable, the contact that results is one of the most fundamental sort; a contact that touches the most inner frame of reference of the beholder. Taken that the average artist's mind travels a great deal through means of 'leaving', this

recognition may be best expected in the other who has an equally experienced travelling mind. This would suggest that art would be most accessible to an intellectual elite. However, this is only the case if you expect art to communicate information directly and if you expect the spectator to stand in front of the work, carrying the exact same symbolic or 'leaving' frame of reference.

The beauty of the way these principles work is that they may touch upon the widest developed mental frameworks, yet still hold the ability to impact upon anyone. The way in which *abduction* is part of the day-to-day routines of the 'knowing through doing'; the focused interplay in the studio where the artist boards that imaginary plane again and again is, of course, different from the more or less casual encounters of an audience with artwork. However, this audience can come better equipped to these encounters through more regular engagements with art and artists. Naturally, this will add nuances to their frame of reference and thereby the chances of genuine recognition. Even so, there are never any warranties to audience responses.

### **3.2.6 ... I smile and dive towards the floor.**

Frank van der Veire (2005) describes how art is generally regarded within philosophy as a phenomenon that reflects the world back to itself as 'through a dark mirror'. The essence of art production may, in fact, seem to be covered in mystery, what it provides the artist with is essentially not much different to what it desires to provide to the audience. The spectator is seen and approached via an internalisation, necessary to retrieve, enhance and map a psychological landscape worth visiting, whether it be in the name of beauty or in the name of sharing other, inter-human, insights and emotions. Through its roundabout ways,

open-endedness and internalisation, its ultimate desire is to be recognised by the other at an inter-human level.

### **3.3 The Artist as Human Being**

Practice will have to be negotiated with life in the world beyond the private space of the studio. In order to frame the particularities affecting art practice and thereby this research project further, I want to give some examples in this section about the ways in which artists might balance life and work in individual cases and how that might provide clues to recognising personal, social, artistic and professional values and motives.

#### **3.3.1 *Defining what success is to you***

In the first Chapter, I have illustrated the way a typical week might be built up in my own situation. This may, of course, differ from week-to-week, year-to-year and practitioner-to-practitioner. On the issue of time allocation two things are of importance; firstly, that it can be difficult to point out exactly when an activity feeds directly into the practice; and secondly, that information about individual strategies can be distilled from the ways in which life and work are balanced. The specific difficulties that arise in any attempt to assess *strategic success* in art practice in part cause the ambivalence thriving in the 'exceptional economy' of the arts (Abbing, 2002). When we speak of 'economy', we often mean to refer to the monetary economy, the financial values and revenues of exchange. These are the areas in which economic research like that of Hans Abbing usually takes place. There is, however, a different meaning to the word when we speak of *an*

*economy*. Then, we suddenly deal with a wider definition that also includes exchange of products and services, social well-being, coexistence and stability in which people can grow, contribute and feel valued.



**Fig. 5: From the documentary film 'Man on Wire', by James March (2008) [filmstill] Discovery Films**

The picture above shows Philippe Petit walking a tight rope in the film 'Man on Wire' directed by James March. The documentary depicts the story behind what March has dubbed to be 'the artistic crime of the century'; Petit's journey and that of his helpers towards walking a high wire suspended between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York in 1974. Philippe Petit claims to have discovered his life's mission whilst sitting in a dentist's office, aged 17. There, he saw an advertisement in a magazine for the yet-to-be-completed Twin Towers in New York City. He had begun wire walking the year before and knew immediately, upon seeing the picture, that unless he at least attempted to wire walk between the towers, he would consider his life a failure.

Imagine what it must feel like to be the person on that rope. Looking at the picture, most people would feel a mixture of admiration of such bravery and skill as well as disapproval of such risk taking, and a relief it is not them high up there on that wire. Bravery bordering on compulsion that has a certain disregard for mainstream society causes such responses. Many people might look to artists in such a way.

### ***3.3.2 The ‘artist ideal’ versus the ‘artist reality’***

If I turn back to look at the time I spent on my artwork and art-related activities, three things come to mind. Firstly, it seems much time is spent on either earning money, gaining experience or knowledge, or interacting socially. In general it is hoped that, the more time invested in this direction, the more revenue is provided for my individual creative practice; however, it may be difficult to measure their impact. Sometimes, these activities take over my diary entirely and there is hardly any time left to spend on my artistic work. By analogy it can feel as though one spends every waking hour battling restrictions and regulations with city councils and fire departments in order to achieve permission to wire walk between the Twin Towers with no time left to actually practice the skills that would allow a successful completion of the undertaking (procedures that Petit did not enter by the way). Such related activities, however necessary they might seem towards achieving one’s goals, can also be something of a pitfall, keeping one too occupied to worry about the dramatic money pit the practice has become- or about the need to really put some effort into making new connections towards future exhibitions or projects.

Secondly, the distinctions between the different activities are vague. Perhaps the

most productive times are the blank spaces on the pages of my diary in which I may be cooking, watching the news or taking a shower. These would be typical moments in which some reflective distance from the practice might cause 'a penny to drop' on work related issues. Thirdly, I have rather crammed weeks in which things that are counted as at least 'work related' run far into my evenings. I have to agree with Hans Abbing (2002) that the financial revenue from these activities could appear like a rather expensive hobby in the narrowly defined 'the' economy, where the amount of financial revenue per hour worked counts as an objective measure for success. At the same time I know that this does not make me an amateur artist in '*an*' economy in the wider sense. I know, for instance, that I am of some influence to my peers and my wider social environment and that I still gain experience, knowledge and skill.

I suppose there might be a difference between being born into a circus family and running away with the circus when it comes to town. In the former situation a career following the family tradition involves no decisive change of context or re-orientation of one's life; the latter career option must surely have a pivotal effect on both life-style and *identity*. In a similar fashion, it has been a very conscious choice of myself to have an art practice and not to opt for another type of full time career although there were enough other options available to me and I was not born into a family of artists. As much as Petit, I would like to see myself succeed both in my accomplishments as an artist as well as in having some form of impact on my field and time. However radical it may seem to choose to be an artist or a tight rope walker in the face of possible failure, it is also not true that the procedures that occur in one's day to day practice do not remain somehow close to home. Michel de Certeau describes everyday practices as a combination of procedures, which are difficult to delimit. Their strategies and tactics are never

written on a blank page (1984, p. 43).

### **3.3.3 *The balancing act of art and life***

I wonder what would be needed to partially fill the gap between the *artist ideal* and *artist reality* and what strategies would assure at least some effective building work towards bridging the two. Ambitions can be unrealistic and the world of art is overcrowded and relies on luck as well as skill and hard work. Petit's claim that he would consider his life a failure if he did not at least attempt to walk the high wire between the Twin Towers does carry the fierce persistence I know I can hold, in spite of myself, towards my practice. All other things in life can, at those points, be regarded as brute interventions of my focus.

Balancing life and work can be an issue for any person, especially when it is balanced with expectations as well as reality and moral obligation. Immanuel Kant (in Roger Sullivan, 1989, p 5) observes that what we subjectively want to do is always called into question by a rationale of what we ought to do. One could say that you need not be an artist in order to become skilled at balancing on the high wire of life. True as that may be, there is something quite particular about the way life becomes saturated with work and vice versa in an art practice, which makes that balancing act often difficult to achieve. If an artist loses his or her studio, has children, gets ill or just sees a red car across the street; it can change their ways of working instantly. How many other occupations are affected on such a level by personal situations that the entire look, feel and function of the products could change at the blink of an eye? Imagine what would have happened had Petit not picked up that magazine on that particular day, his life work might have taken a different course altogether.



Within the balancing act between life and work, the skill to negotiate innovation with sustainability does appear to play a large role in day-to-day art practice, but not just economical values are sustained in this process. This is confirmed by the research of Hans Abbing (2002, p. 87), into the economy of the arts, in which it is indicated that money is mostly an issue if there is a specific lack of it that threatens the practice and general existence of an artist. When that existential basis is provided for, it often becomes less of an issue. From this must follow that the internally perceived success of art practice relies also on other things. It might be that the individual practitioner's ability to reconcile artistic production with self-maintenance alongside a mixture of personal, social, professional and productive ambitions are the real measures of success by which the practitioner judges his or her accomplishments. The requirements for such a mixture could just as well consist of social status, inclusion in certain communities, satisfaction derived from the work as well as a degree of financial stability amongst other things. Ambition patterns can also change depending on life, career stage and personal situation. My interests in creative practice in organisational, social and philosophical theory mainly relate to this quest for balance and individual perceptions of what is desirable and valuable; and, of course, in the stages in between preparing and achieving personally framed objectives. Ulrich Kraft claims that:

...the creative process... must involve an early 'preparation' phase... Preparation is difficult and time-consuming. Once a challenge is identified, a person who wants to solve it has to examine it from all sides, including new perspectives. The process should resemble something like an intellectual voyage of discovery that can go in any direction. Fresh solutions result from disassembling and reassembling the building blocks in an infinite number of ways. That means the problem solver must thoroughly understand the blocks. (Kraft, 2005, pp.22-3)

Other than preparation, 'incubation' of thought is of importance as the brain keeps working on a problem. Ulrich Kraft refers to the research of psychologist Shelley H. Carson (2003), who found that students who were eminent creative

achievers demonstrated lower '*latent inhibition*' on standard psychological tests than other classmates. Since creativity depends primarily on the ability to integrate pieces of disparate data in novel ways, a lower level of *latent inhibition* is helpful. This principle works well with our fish tank analogy. Incubation often brings about resolutions during unrelated activity – when stepping out of the fish tank into the shower - the act of 'making' exchanged for the act of 'living'; simple household activity. These processes are, however, non-linear. It may at times be difficult to define where an activity is related to preparation or incubation as is demonstrated by the way *abduction* functions in practice.

All in all there is no generic formula for the amount of 'making' and 'living' required to keep the balance and allow a practice to be sustainable. For example; it is impossible to judge if it is a good idea for an artist to work at a post office for twenty hours a week, unless we at least know more about the career stage, the practice and the personal ambitions of the artist in question. One could, of course, argue that independence earned with a side job is always a good thing or, alternatively, that time spent away from the practice is always time wasted. A well known example of an artist who worked nightshifts sorting mail and turned this necessity into an advantage by making very successful relief pieces of the mail slots is the Dutch artist Jan Schoonhoven (1914-1994). But would this mean that working full time is guaranteed to contribute towards any practice?



**Fig. 6: Jan Schoonhoven (1970) Relief R70-74, Courtesy The Mayor Gallery [Cardboard and white-painted papier-maché on board] London: The Mayor Gallery [online]**

I know from experience that there were certainly times in my life, especially after I first graduated from art school, in which a non-related side job made me feel independent and provided a welcome break from the art world every once in a while. It allowed me to stay focused on my work, as the side job did not hold too many responsibilities. At this point in my professional life, I still feel a side job is a welcome break from practice, but I certainly would like to be informed and challenged by it now. Looking at the way colleagues find the balance that works for them, this balance is made up quite differently in individual cases and often changes throughout their careers.

What can be said in any case is that the phrase 'artists have to suffer' in the light of the above, merely recognises the sheer flexibility applied by artists in order to sustain their practices in any situation, which is underlined in recent organisational theory. A specific string of organisational theory I briefly introduced

in the Introduction to do with '*complex adaptive systems*' has taken this regard towards making artist-hood exemplary in terms of balancing innovation with sustainability, whilst, of course, keeping reservations as to the degree of 'suffering' allowed in actual corporate environments. This line of theory draws loosely on chaos theory and compares this negotiation process to 'operating on the edge of chaos' (Levy; 1994, Carlisle & McMillan; 2006, p.2). In order to innovate, a certain amount of 'chaos' is needed to provide the creative space to invent new solutions to problems. Artists are seen as exemplary in working within these conditions of creative innovation, the studio being their laboratory (Chris Bilton, 2006). Rather than a critical commentary, this stems from a degree of admiration towards the way artists are known to struggle to provide and sustain themselves as well as to balance their priorities to benefit their own conceptions of productive quality and personal growth.

### **Summary and conclusion Chapter 3**

In this chapter, my deliberation on the way artists strategise their careers has resulted in an initial set of speculative characterisations: namely the artist as researcher, the artist as maker and the artist as human being (from now on I shall abbreviate these terms to artist-researcher, artist-maker, and artist-human-being). These were discussed in the following manner: firstly, the particular challenge that faces the artist-researcher is described as moving between the accessing of detailed information and the obtaining of an overview. In this section it was explained why the *practice-led* perspective is both tricky and key, as assessment is only possible provided there is an extreme amount of access. Secondly, in the section on artist-makers the notion of *abduction* as a productive and communicative process was discussed. As a result, we were also able to

examine some alternative ways of looking at the notion of artistic autonomy.

Thirdly, in the section on the artist-human-being, the balancing acts we all perform between life and art between the 'artist ideal' and 'artist reality', were discussed alongside the notions of innovation and sustainability. This section also explored adaptivity in art practice. It considered the particularities of adaptive strategising in individual practice and their consequences, suggesting that a complex and individual array of considerations drive decision-making. Here, adaptive strategies are seen as highly active; that is, strongly connected to the personal values, circumstances and experiences of the artist.

Taken together, these three characterisations confirm and elaborate my concern, expressed in Chapter 2, that it is difficult to use regular models of *strategic assessment* in relation to visual art practice because of the interwoven nature of art and life. In exploring the difficulties involved, this chapter has also thrown into relief the problems that the alternative approach developed in this research would also involve. In the next Chapter we will discuss the methodological approach taken in this research, how the *practice-led* inquiry has been conducted and what are seen to be the pros and cons of the chosen approach.

## Chapter 4. Methodological Approach

### Introduction to the Chapter

In the previous two chapters, my literature research, conversations with peers and observations regarding my own practice, have resulted in the identification of certain problems and the elaboration of three characterisations of the artist-researcher, -maker and -human-being. In order to access the full array of personal, artistic and professional values an individual practitioner might hold, it has been explained that a particularly strong involvement with the practice and the practitioner would be crucial. At the same time, the artist-researcher has to find a way of distancing themselves and developing some type of structure using the *key concerns* that may influence decision-making. What are these and what value do I assign to them in my day-to-day practice? How does this affect my own decision-making and how static or lucid would I consider this impact to be? What decisions, tactics or strategies are prioritised over others and why? And how would that be in other practices?

Three concepts have had a significant influence on the eventual approach taken towards answering those questions. I will introduce these briefly in the first section of this chapter: 'Inspirational Base of the Inquiry's Methods'. In the second section, more detailed information is provided on the methodological approach of my research following on from the inquiries in the earlier stage of the research project, which are reported on in the first two chapters. This is followed by a further discussion of the 'pros and cons' of first person inquiry in the third section of this chapter. It might seem a little unusual to discuss the project design later, rather than earlier on in this thesis. I have however, chosen to take this approach,

as the set of research interests and investigatory ambitions outlined in the introduction needed an explorative analysis of the context and potential of my project in order to arrive at a series of objectives for the latter stages of the research. As a result, it felt more natural to discuss my *modus operandi* in the fourth chapter, when the reader has been fully introduced to the challenge of providing better access to, and assessment of, decision-making in art practice. Following this methodological detour, the concluding section of this chapter will begin the task of reorienting the reader in relation to the overall ambitions of this research project, with a discussion of the pros and cons of first-person inquiry.



**Fig. 7: Picture of my studio at Northumbria University, June 2007**

## **4.1 Inspirational Base of the Inquiry's Methods**

### **4.1.1 Experiments with fluid typologies**

Within the *practice-led* PhD training sessions at Northumbria University, group

experiments have been conducted involving sets of material objects such as tableware, wooden blocks and even twigs, arranged on the large meeting table in the research centre. The point of such exercises has been to use the clustering of 'like' things across a supporting surface to debate the structure and content of practice-led research projects without using words (that is, through the shifting alignments created by visual analogies and distinctions – in other words, as Dorsett has termed them, 'fluid typologies'). Loosely based on Douglas Hofstadter's (1996, p. 391) essay "The emergent personality of tabletop, a perception-based model of analogy-making" in "Fluid Concepts and Creative Analogies: Computer Models of the Fundamental Mechanisms of Thought", this engagement with material presence involves, as it does in an artist's studio, 'the fluid interplay of perception and the decision to act upon what you see' (Dorsett, 2009, p. 7). The aim of the training sessions, described by Dorsett (2009, p.8) in a chapter on the role of material presence in doctoral research by artists, was to construct arguments by picking up and moving around the sets of accumulated things (artworks, equipment, source material) that form whilst undertaking research as an artist.

*Sense-making* occurs in such experiments in relation to the particular *interpretive community* that engages with the research. In such experiments, 'things' may be interpreted differently from how they would in their 'ordinary, everyday place', a situation which parallels the transformational character of exhibiting. Following the theories of the museologist, Susan Pearce, Dorsett (2009, p.8) notes the '*interpretative disruption*' generated by objects on display; the way in which the material presence of 'thinglyness' always escapes the definitive hopes of language (for example, explanatory narratives in a museum). The power of *practice-led* research is the artist's deep understanding of the contingency of



sense-making, the way in which objects such as artworks gain and lose meaning within the creative processes of studio production and the interpretative dimension of exhibition viewing. This form of research would never attempt to fix the meaning of things (as would, say, the work of an archaeologist) and, inspired by the results of the PhD group's tabletop experiments, I decided to allot associative meanings to studio objects as an aid to the exploration of the abstract world of strategic thinking and decision-making.

#### **4.1.2 *Six thinking hats***

Another source that should be named to inspire the coming into being of my *strategic studio framework*, is Edward de Bono's celebrated book 'Six Thinking Hats' (1985).

De Bono describes six, differently coloured hats as 'labels for thinking' (p. 5) and is quite specific in his instructions: they are 'directions' rather than 'descriptions or types of people' (ibid, p. 6). The hats have been created to give the wearer different positions towards an issue in their field of work. For instance; the green hat suggests a creative and fertile frame of mind, the black a critical one, etcetera. De Bono's main audiences are organisations, where the framework can be applied to issues that are to be resolved by, for instance, a board of directors- but it is also commonly used in educational settings. So, whether the hats are donned individually or by groups, it is central to de Bono's project that everyone is aware of all six hats, all the different positions they represent, at the same time. Since the method encourages different perspectives on a single problem or situation, a sense of pluralistic distance is established amongst the participants. This technique presents us with a particularly useful model for assessing the thinking at work in an art practice.

'Six Thinking Hats' proposes a method which the author describes in his preface as having several key qualities or advantages, three of which I have found to be useful towards the further development of my inquiry. I will briefly discuss their merits according to the author. Firstly, the Six Hat Framework allows one to do more than one thing at a time, which helps if one is dealing with complex issues. De Bono (ibid, p. xii) compares this with the way a conductor might lead an orchestra; one can call forth different instruments at a time. Secondly, the method encourages parallel thinking instead of mere argumentative thinking. Different people can take a similar position on successive points towards the same problem. This places them in a more neutral position towards one another and makes them collect views and arguments rather than spending time arguing that theirs is the only right point to take. In parallel thinking all views, no matter how contradictory, are put down in parallel. This helps us focus on 'what can be', not just on 'what is' (ibid, p. 3-4). Thirdly, the coloured hats work as simple mental and visual 'hooks', which makes the different types easier to remember, and to use in conversation. If one, for instance, is encouraged to wear the green hat, one would be assumed to take the 'fertile', creative position; coming up with lots of ideas; whereas wearing the white hat would mean a mere concern for facts and figures. This makes the method rather playful and fun to use.

The relevance of de Bono's representational framework to my project is his utilisation of two common vernacular expressions that generate a semiotic relationship between material objects and psychosocial actions. At one level the hat concept is little more than a catchy amalgam of two expressions that run something like this: 'I'm putting on my thinking cap' and 'I wear many different hats as a professional artist and doctoral researcher'. At another level, it is an

evocative representation of the transformational nature of mental outlook and capability: we can change our thinking as rapidly and effortlessly as we can change our hat. The notion of swift changes in approach and attitude seems to me to be analogous to the day-to-day strategising in studio practice. As explained in the previous three chapters, there is significant '*flux*' and '*entanglement*' within individual motives for decision-making. A form of 'distancing tool' towards investigating such complex motives, as a practitioner, would be useful. Since an artist is deeply 'entangled' by the day-to-day needs of their practice, the ambition to compile a list of *key concerns*, a set of contributing factors that lead to decision-making, would make it easier to discuss the strategies of practitioners.

Thus, following from the idea of 'thinking hats', I am now going to propose that a set of studio objects, mostly furnishings and pieces of equipment, could be used as directional labels when an artist wants to distance themselves from the deluge of day-to-day concerns that accompany the creation of artworks. These objects would function as thinking 'hooks' and also provide a distancing mechanism that compensates for the personal involvement of the studio practitioner. Talking about your motivations in relation to a piece of furniture, such as an armchair, feels different to talking about them in relation to your artworks or yourself as a creative agent. De Bono's method, a version of his life-long promotion of lateral thinking, provides an approach which still makes use of the practitioner's inside knowledge one could not do without, but offers a system of distancing and re-evaluation that is both playful and relatively neutral- and one that could both be used discursively - in educational or professional training environments – and in private reflection. In Chapters 5 and 6, it is discussed in more detail how de Bono's six hat framework relates to the ideas I have developed, in relation to discursive use of studio objects.

### **4.1.3 Reflective writing and analyses through re-versioning**

The third methodology that inspires my research is reflective writing, which is enhanced by the concept of '*Re-versioning*' or '*Retelling*' (Barret, 2007, p.199) of the process of researching. Through the practice of retelling reflective data, the focus is not only on the researcher's own processes and revelations, but also on the evaluation of these concepts within the context of relevant theoretical ideas and in relation to the stated aims and objectives, as well as the ideas and practices of other practitioners in the field. This relates to *action research*, where one would conduct practice whilst investigating what happens in that practice with research questions in mind. When, as in this particular research project, the information required to answer the stated aims and objectives are, to a large degree, dependant on access to details of personal decision-making, *action research* would be the only way to gain such detailed access. Whilst this would mean that it is most likely that access is initially restrained to my own practice, that self-inquiry is always seen in the light of the wider contribution such insights may provide. This is an emergent process in which I will intend to move from a more generic overview of the context of the inquiry, through my individual practice and reflections into possible applications and implications for a wider field of theory and practice.

## **4.2 Advanced Project Design and Approach**

### **4.2.1 Reflective studio writing and structuring**

The sought after fixed points within the lucidity of practice that would allow

distancing whilst avoiding categorisation, thus offered themselves in the shape of non-art objects and studio furniture. In order to achieve the required level of differentiation that would acknowledge the most important motives behind decision-making in visual art practice, I initially conducted reflective writing on a few objects in the studio that seemed to evoke interesting 'stories' about studio life; like the Easel, the Notebook and the Armchair. This reflective writing was then filtered on the basis of assigning specific strategic values represented by the functional or metaphorical role of these indicators. Gradually the collection of reflective writings extended and a conceptual framework appeared out of that writing. The studio objects, initially helped me, as a researcher, to distance myself from my private entanglement with my research subject, so that I can describe and order what the *key concerns* or values in day-to-day decision-making might be. Later on in this thesis, it will be discussed if, why and how this framework could be of use to other practitioners as well. The initial purpose of this process however, has been to establish a set of key motives or concerns that are of higher or lower importance at different times and that indicate tactical adaptation, the individual strategies of the practitioner. This *strategic studio framework*, consists of fifteen studio objects and furnishings, and proposes them as indicators of an array of values, active in the negotiation process between the *prospective* and *retrospective* image artists may have of their practice at different times.

It is proposed to make use of these indicators in reflective analysis or educational discourse, in order to point out the reasoning behind certain types of decisions, which might further explain the path taken or the strategies used. The intention is to count beliefs and desires as 'hard coin-type currency', contesting their mythological or elusive properties as long as their role in decision-making can be

pointed out and discussed. This makes them all, in effect, equally legitimate to the artist in question, regardless of whether they are valued rightly. The objects as indicators function as a means of providing access to individual motives behind decision-making, by allowing the practitioner to take a *meta-position* when engaging in reflective writing or conversation using the *strategic studio framework*. Furthermore, the degrees to which they are valued can provide information about the chosen tactics and the ambitions of the practitioner, information that would be key to any successful *strategic assessment* of the practice. The proposed method for *strategic assessment* makes it possible to add a distancing layer to the process of individual tactical adaptation and prioritisation.

Where de Bono defines six different ways of thinking, e.g. ‘thinking indicators’, I will thus be faced with the challenge of defining different types of concerns or motives; ‘concern indicators’. Sheryl Turkle (2007) edited a book called ‘Evocative Objects’, in which several authors tell stories about objects in their possession and the meaning they evoke to them. I have applied this term to define my reflective writing on the objects in my studio. So to say, this data has been collected through ‘evocation’ or ‘evocative writing’, which has then been analysed and reviewed. The archive of ‘journal’ data that I have accumulated in the writing experiment has resulted from telling and re-telling (*re-versioning*) practitioner insights with the aim to arrive at an index of *key concerns* to *strategy* in day-to-day practice. These sets of reflective writings have functioned towards establishing the conceptual framework of the research project, as well as towards establishing exactly which ‘concerns’ I was after and what might be their determinants. A very dense version of these writings can be found in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

Gradually, it became clear to me that, in order to explain decision-making in the light of *identity entanglement*, one would have to know the value assigned to various aspects of work and life. Even from day to day, the assigned value towards those currencies might change, and a revised understanding of them may be needed in order to arrive at some form of *strategic success* assessment. The highly situational and personal factors embedded in this realisation has made it even clearer that we would have to go ‘through’ the practice as well as the practitioner to acquire this key information, needed to assess what is going on in a practice in terms of informed decision making. It then seemed that the negotiation between the values embedded within those various sets of ‘parameters’ of the state of a practice, can go on to provide the diverse and multifarious set of strategies that would be needed for a useful strategic analysis of art practice, leading to the final reflective writing experiment in Chapter 5.

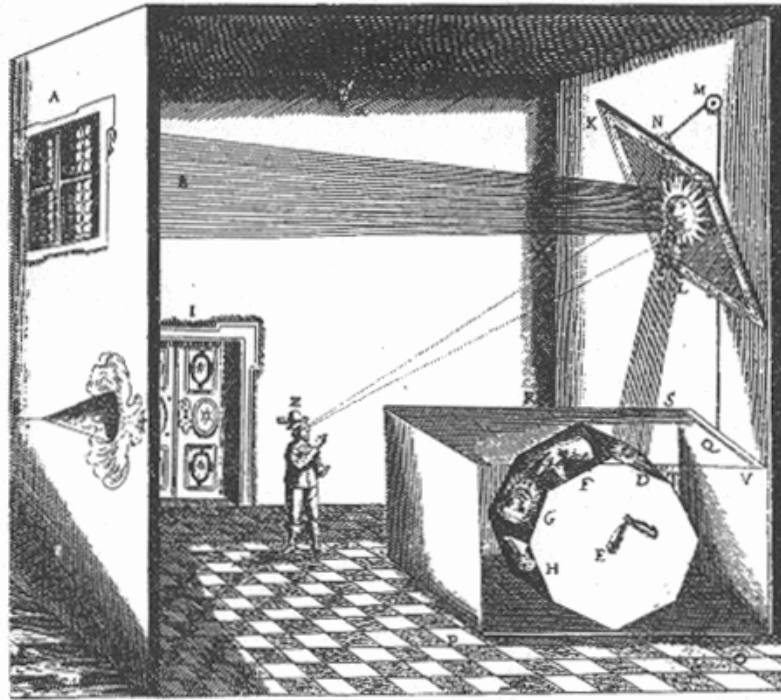
#### **4.2.2 About the use of metaphors in this thesis**

The approach I use towards my strategic inquiry emerges from reflective writing using objects, which, to me, have an immediate metaphorical connotation. I cannot exactly explain why I found this method of educating reflective writing through an imagined dialogue with a ‘thing’ in front of me other than that it has been proved to be effective in our research group – as demonstrated by the experiments with *fluid typologies* – (after Dorsett, 2009) in which I have found that I quickly arrive at ideas and concepts connected to objects (such as a fish-tank or an easel) or photographs (of Petit on a high-wire). Meaning emerges that moves quickly from the object itself to a more conceptual analysis of my own motives and values. As such, I would not describe this way of assigning meaning as phenomenology; the descriptions of these objects are not intended to withhold

judgement. However, there are certain aspects of phenomenology that are inherent in my methodologies. Not only does phenomenology deal with objects-with things in the world, it also addresses the tension between '*retention*' and '*protention*' (Husserl, 1928); that what still resonates and what is to come. Husserl uses these words to describe '*the intentions which, starting from a living and concrete 'now', are directed towards the immediate past to retain it and towards the future to grasp it...*' (Jean Paul Sartre after Husserl, 2004, p. 75). What interests me about the way Husserl applies these concepts, is that he makes interpretation reliant on – even short leaps of - time as well as personal histories and preconceptions. The 'now' in the interpretation of a phenomenon is hereby determined by *prospective* and *retrospective* situatedness.

In his book 'Metaphors of Memory; A History of Ideas About the Mind', Douwe Draaisma (2000, p. 1) uses the image on the next page (which was made by the monk Athanasius Kircher in 1646) of 'a machine of metaphors', an apparatus consisting of a wheel of images depicting heads of animals in which spectators see themselves reflected. This apparatus, used to make people look upon themselves differently, aids a shift of perspective from the conditioned looking at things in the world, which can be used to evoke new meaning or aid memory, much like *meta-positioning*. Metaphors have been used to aid memory and evoke thought and meaning since the time of ancient Greece (Yates, 1966), even before written words could register these things. It is not hard to imagine what happens when an artist would see their own image reflected in the things they engage with on a day-to-day basis in the studio.





**Fig. 8: Athanasius Kircher: *ars magna lucis et umbrae*, Rome 1646 in Draaisma, D. (2000)**

Similar to the 'Machine of Metaphors' I have evoked memories, thought and meaning out of non-art objects in my studio, in order to arrive at a better idea of what drives my processes of decision-making.

The use of metaphors in my writing has initially been to aid evocation of thought and memory about my practical experiences; and thereafter to aid and encourage reflective evocation of thought and memory by other practitioners in parallel to my own. It is hoped that, whilst reading my reflective analysis, images and thoughts about their studio objects (or the lack of them) and decision-making processes spring to mind, allowing reflective self-questioning about their own values and motivations. The metaphors in this thesis are thus meant to allow artists to assume a *meta-position* towards their own practices. Once embedded in the collective memory of an interpretive community, the framework of objects as visual labels could function in reflective group discussions in art schools as well.

When I am in the studio trying to reflectively engage with the objects at hand, recasting a look at them to see them as they are, I am engaging with them in a momentum in between *retention* and *protention* and this will determine how I will define them. This momentum, framed in between *retrospective* and *prospective* – which are terms I prefer to use in the context of this research project - has become of importance to understanding the importance of time and momentum in the study of strategic decision-making. This makes the concept of self, derived from feminist literature as referred to in Chapter 2, combined with Weinreich's (2003) concept of *identity* as reliant on momentum, particularly suitable in support of the way they occur in the situational *flux*, the 'fluidity' of art practice.

#### **4.2.3 Key questions**

This research project started out with the question of how art practice relates to the concept of *corporate identity* and how *identity awareness* and *strategic awareness* function in art practice, derived from my interest in management studies. I hoped this question would bring further understanding about the particularities of the decision-making process in art practice. As explained in the previous sections, it soon became clear that, in order to gain a productive idea of *tactical adaptation* within art practice, a highly differentiated approach would be required that considers the impact represented by personal, artistic, social and economic considerations, as well as more 'elusive' convictions held by the practitioner in question. Existing models provided by organisational theory did not offer a suitable approach to the specific conditions of art practice. As a result, the questions that have been on my mind as I continued work on the research project have been:

Firstly, how can strategies in art practices be determined without categorisation, considering the individual character and situation of the art practice and the practitioner and the personal aspirations of the artist within it? Secondly, would it be possible, within that complexity of individual functions, to create a framework that could be used as a tool to access and assess decision-making in art practice, offering enough flexibility to suit such a wide array of individual practices?

These initial questions can be answered by addressing a further, more detailed set of questions which frame the structure of this thesis:

1) What are distinguishing factors in decision-making in art practice and is their origin?

- This question has been addressed through further deliberation on the situation in which artists work and the way their practice evolves from a practitioner's perspective in Chapters 2 and 3.

2) What methodologies and approaches would offer the kind of information specifically needed to get a better idea of the forces that might impact on decision-making in art practice?

- The current chapter, Chapter 4, addresses the methodological background and approach of the research project in its more advanced stages.

3) To what degree can my studio environment evoke tangible information about the reasoning behind the strategies of its artist-inhabitant?

- Analysis of reflective writing about the studio is presented in Chapter 5. It lists fifteen *key concerns* represented by fifteen studio objects or furnishings as indicators of those concerns, followed by an overview of the proposed *strategic studio framework*.

4) Would it be possible to assign *prospective* and *retrospective* values to the

framework of *key concerns* presented in Chapter 5 and to use them as a sophisticated, flexible tool for strategic self-analysis?

- A second reflective writing experiment, in which I assign value to the concerns listed in the framework, is described and discussed in Chapter 6 along with the introduction of two further, accumulative studio objects.

5) Would this system be able to help other practitioners to reassess their personal values through the usage of it as a tool for strategic self-analysis, or in an art school professional education environment?

- In section 7.1 the focus on wider practical use of the research project intensifies.

6) Can these findings also provide organisational theory with new insights on the way success and quality can be validated and enhanced in and beyond art practice?

- In section 7.2 the focus on possible theoretical implications of the research project intensifies.

7) If so, what would be needed to encourage successful communication of the findings?

- Section 7.3 addresses this question and asks whether these six questions have been answered satisfactorily, in order to answer the original questions framing the research project- and what further research might be needed.

## **4.3 Pros and Cons of First-Person Inquiry**

### ***4.3.1 Pros of first-person inquiry***

My research project takes place as a first-person inquiry that is embedded in a

day-to-day studio based artistic practice. As such, it uses a first-person perspective on what happens in that practice, combined with application and invention of *action research* methodologies that provide ways of distancing and analyses of initial reflections and observations. Some of those methodologies, such as the previously described 'Table top research' and 'Six Hats Framework' as well as '*Re-versioning*', have been applied as techniques for reflective writing as well as pointers to alternative ways to generate and structure reflective writing. Methods of inquiry include experiments to generate *re-versioning* of reflective writing on studio objects and a small sample experiment that presents a sophisticated model to register and assess time and energy investment. The latter has been applied to develop an experiment in which I used reflective writing around the activities undertaken in two separate weeks in my practice, demonstrating the lucidity of personal value-assignment in individual practice and provides examples of strategic self-assessment using that data.

#### **4.3.2 Cons of first-person inquiry**

The *practice-led* inquiry demands methodological inventiveness. In itself, it bears an obvious degree of subjectivity. My direct and personal involvement with the experience is both of crucial importance, and at times a hindrance, when determining the wider implications and scope of my observations. *Action research* projects are built on the researcher's activity in a given field and their awareness of the issues affecting its progress. As I attended research training, reviewed literature on research methodologies and consulted researchers who undertake the kind of quantitative or literature-based research used to produce studies in other academic disciplines, I became increasingly aware that my *practice-led* approach would require different aims and objectives. Even when especially

developed towards *practice-led* inquiry, like the guide for developing and writing creative arts practice research by Estelle Barrett (in Barrett & Bold, pp. 186-205), there seems to be an assumption of a position that considers the research experimentation to be directly intertwined with the products as artefacts, rather than the totality of the practice which is vital to my project's objectives. Other than taking away pointers towards reflective inquiry and reflective data analysis in general, I still needed to find some type of distancing 'buffer' between myself and my practical work that would lead the discourse more towards working strategies, than towards evaluating existing or emergent art works. As a result, the most significant turning point for me was when I started to attach these background concepts to my observations in the studio.

#### **4.3.3 *Studio inquiry as action research***

Judi Marshall (2004) situates first person inquiry in *living systemic thinking*, stressing the importance of first person enquiry as a consequence of dealing with context sensitivity and agency in a multi-dimensional world (ibid, pp. 305-25). There are quite different modes in which I function as an artist and researcher and to which I direct my attention. There has been the quiet reflection in the studio or the lively debates with others, as well as the time spent in the library where theory feels nearer than practice, but in which reading seems to evoke parallels with practical issues and situations that might just as well happen on my way to the supermarket. I believe I am influenced by a large variety of frames of reference between which my attention flows towards action or reflection. The combination of artistic practice and reflective inquiry on previous, current and future practice is an emergent process.

My reflective writings have become the basis of further inquiry and a demonstration of my learning through the iterative nature of the process moving from action to reflection and between contexts. The effect of this process on the appearances of my art works remains, by art's nature and the nature of my practice throughout the years, largely hidden. Through the revelation of the processes from which these artworks stem, as well as through my own preferences, values and convictions, rather a quantity of information about the day-to-day decision-making that leads to such works of art is revealed. This is why not my artworks themselves would not provide authority to my research outcomes, but the existence and continuity of my art practice as a whole, and the way in which the research project has provided an intervention into that day-to-day activity, forcing key questions upon the ongoing activities in the studio. Although I am the sole author of this thesis, many peers and co-inquires have influenced the way the research project has progressed and through the process of retelling-, they remained in my mind's eye throughout the investigation.

#### **Summary and conclusion Chapter 4**

This fourth Chapter has concluded the initial stage of the research that aimed to find out if and how assessment of decision-making in art practice can take place using existing models of assessment. This initial stage discussed why existing models would not be applicable, and what difficulties and particularities are connected with the assessment of the strategies applied in art practices. Chapter 4 concludes the initial part of the project with a detailed plan to invent an alternative methodology using reflective writing on studio objects following Husserl's '*tabletop research*' and de Bono's 'six thinking hats' method. The aims and objectives of the research project are laid out following on into the proposal

of a framework and the 'hows and whys' of its structure and content. The aim of contributions to theory and practice through this research, has also been discussed. In order to start distinguishing types of strategic considerations, I have chosen to remain close to home and work with what was available: my practice and experience being amongst other practitioners, and see if it was possible to transfer some of that information into the professional and theoretical spheres of art practice and art practice research.

Finding a way of mapping those considerations would be of key importance towards establishing a functional model of *strategic assessment*. Though it might be entertaining to read the reflective writing that has aided me in arriving at a position to assign such labels to values, its function for the development of the method has simply been to establish the framework of strategic indicators which, in itself, becomes quite random- just like the choice of hats in de Bono's framework where likeness – for instance the green hat representing fertile thinking - only functions in order to aid memory. In order to become a clear introduction to the proposed framework for strategic analysis, the objects are each introduced in the next chapter as indicators of specific *retrospective* and *prospective* values of their owner. As such, they are proposed as 'direction labels for *strategic assessment*' following de Bono's 'direction labels for thinking'

The next Chapter, Chapter 5, will introduce the proposed framework consisting of fifteen studio objects as indicators of fifteen *key concerns*, after which the interplay between - and possible shifts in validation amongst - the *key concerns* will be discussed in Chapter 6.



## Chapter 5. The Strategic Studio: Access

### Introduction to the Chapter

Picture yourself as an artist in front of an easel supporting a blank canvas. How would you approach it? What types of decision-making occur whilst approaching the easel? Would you think of the work of famous artists from the past, colleagues that you admire? What individual choices determine where and how you put your first brushstroke towards a new painting? And what happens, for instance, if you take a break from work and sit down to rest in a comfortable armchair? What does it mean to 'rest' in a working environment? How do various modes of productivity and non-productivity function in art practice?

In this chapter, the reader is introduced to fifteen studio objects. Practitioners' strategies are evoked through descriptive-reflective writing on these objects. This reflective data has been *re-versioned* and reframed, proposing a structural framework consisting of five productive objects, five social objects and five objects representing resources. This structure aims to provide a framework of concerns towards which value can be assigned in individual practice at different moments in time, which we will approach in Chapter 6. Firstly, the specific concerns presented by each of the studio objects, will be investigated. In the first section, 'Productive Indicators' the studio objects described are: the Armchair, the Drawing Table, the Notebook, the Easel and the Drying Table. The second section 'Social indicators' introduces: The Display Cabinet, the Coffee Table, the Studio Garden, the Computer and the Studio Door. In the third section 'Indicators of resources', a further five objects include: The Window, the Tool Closet, the Book Shelf, the Clock and the Storage Room.

The used objects - such as the Armchair and the Studio Garden - are metaphors specific to my own studio situation, however the *key concerns* they represent in this thesis - such as 'Experiment', 'Peer Group' and 'Knowledge' - are generic concepts, which could have an influence on the decision-making of any visual arts practitioner. The use of studio objects in this thesis provides a model for how others might use and apply those generic concepts in their own strategising.

It is no coincidence that I came to be a studio-based artist. I am not somebody who would feel comfortable working in the public realm, for instance. I like to work in a private space that contains traces of past and present interests, and that I can cycle to in the mornings and leave behind in the evenings. It would be more convenient if it could be moved around with me, but in its fixed location it provides a place where I know where everything is and where it is easy to return to work. I am very much aware that my preferred situation does not apply to all artists. The key proposition of this thesis is that art practitioners' strategies are in effect '*individual complex systems*' that can be prone to change according to situation and life stage. This certainly affects the use of a studio space by different artists, or at different points in time. It might well be that my preferences, work or situation changes in the future, through which I feel happier working in the public realm or at home.

Several art critics such as Claire Doherty (2004) and Wouter Davidts (2005/2006) have, at length, debated whether the choice of a significant amount of artists nowadays to work in the public realm, rather than in a studio gives one authority to say that we are in a post-studio era. At the same time, quite a few contemporary artists still prefer such a 'home base' for their work, as is demonstrated by the waiting lists for studio spaces that exist in almost every

major city in Europe. Some possible reasons for this, could be found in the discussion in section 3.2 about the studio as a place where degree of solitude is sought and focused experiments are conducted. As a practitioner, I know that the considerations in favour or against a private working environment contain much information on the working methods and preferences of the practitioner in question. This *practice-led* research project relies on my own experiences within my practice and how these might relate to the practices of others. I take the position that the motives my studio objects represent in the *strategic studio framework*, are more generic and active in any practice, even if the objects or a studio as such have no (or a very different) physical equivalent. It could, in such cases, for instance, be expected that some are valued more than others. There will, however, always be some sort of engagement with all of them, if not physically, at least through the *key concerns* they represent. The *strategic studio framework* should in any case be useable as a self-reflective or conversation tool and provide artists who work in the public domain or online for instance, an equally firm base of common denominators.

Three sets of five studio objects surfaced as usable labels for the conversation tool, each indicate values held by the practitioner within the *individual value system* of visual art practice. Within the *strategic studio framework*, each of them ‘embody’ certain practical considerations in art practice. I now invite the reader to join me on a tour around this ‘Strategic Studio’, in which fifteen studio objects represent the day-to-day decision-making process in art practice.

## **5.1 Productive Indicators**

The Armchair

The Notebook

The Drawing Table

The Easel

The Drying Table

### **5.1.1 The Armchair**

Sitting in the Armchair I am likely to be both 'stuck' in the position and in my work process. Staring at the studio's 'productivity on hold' whilst sitting in it does not feel comfortable at all. (Reflective Journal, February 25, 2007)



**Fig. 9: Picture of the Armchair in my Studio**

The first studio object introduced to the reader is the Armchair. Once owned by an artist to whom I temporarily sub-let my studio, it now has a blue-grey cover. Sitting in the Armchair, I can take a short break from the hands-on work in the studio. These reflective pauses are usually a very productive side to art practice although I do not find them particularly enjoyable. Envision for a moment what it is like to pause in a working environment. The notion of 'rest' as it relates to relaxation does not really apply, if a break takes place in the midst of practice. Rather, the Armchair represents a reflective pause that has a very important role to fulfil. When I sit in my Armchair, I am likely to be stuck somewhere in a project or confronted with some problem I seem unable to solve without taking a step back and re-evaluating. Initially, it would appear that, until the impact of thought

applied in the Armchair becomes apparent in the product of art, what happens in the Armchair forms part of *research practice* as opposed to '*productive practice*'. However, the division tends to be blurred between these two modes of practice. In the section on the artist-maker in Chapter 3, it has, for instance, been discussed what the productive importance of *abduction* can be, and how this phenomenon makes use of the well-informed mind. A reflective pause in the recliner can help provide the right circumstance for an artist to be carried into a different line of thought or new experimentation.

#### Productive values represented by the Armchair

The key concern or value represented by the Armchair is '**Reflection**' or more specifically individual artistic reflection, through a productive pause. This puts the mind in a position where new ideas can enter the scene and new directions can be considered. Alternatively, it can be a sign of productive disengagement.

#### Types of decision-making indicated by the Armchair are:

<i>Retrospective:</i>	Reflection informed decision-making
<i>Prospective:</i>	Reflection oriented decision-making

### 5.1.2 The Notebook

It strikes me as remarkable how things appear important or interesting at one time, and then swiftly fade into the background, never to be considered again or, in contrast, reappearing unexpectedly in different ways. The Notebook reflects the mental creative process as it takes place in the Armchair, yet it appears to be troubled by a lot less 'baggage'. (Reflective Journal, February 26, 2007)

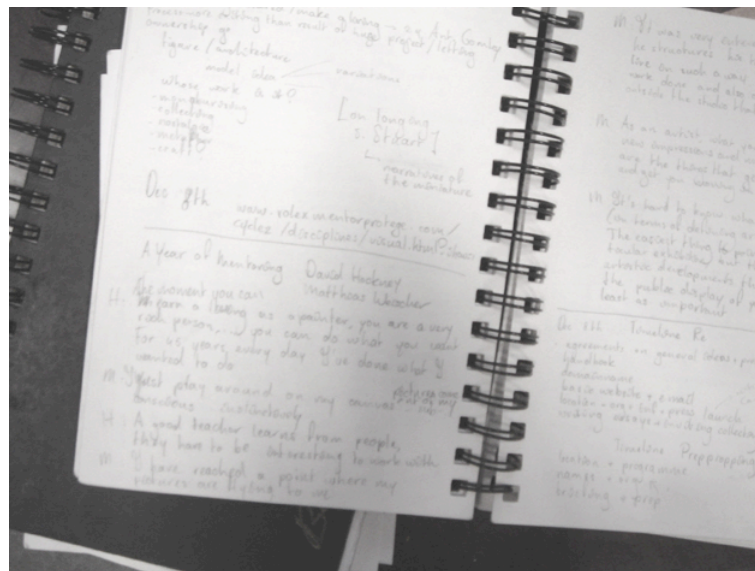


Fig. 10: Picture of one of my Notebooks

Considering the above deliberations from my reflective journal about the Notebook, can we contest its more 'concrete' nature in contrast to the Armchair? As a creative practitioner, I would argue we can, as the nature of concreteness suggested by the Notebook and demonstrated by the above observations, propose the Notebook as an in-between mode of concreteness, 'in-between' suggests no choice at all, no actual contestable position, a condition of 'creative limbo'. That is as long as it only performs that internal function and there are no objectives for it to perform in a different role, in which case we could say that the Notebook in question is, for instance, a Display Cabinet in disguise. In general, I

would say that the main concern of the Notebook is to keep the ideas flowing. I call this principle 'Generative Flow'. In the Notebook, the spontaneous arrival of thought is registered, whether in the studio or 'on-the-go'. As the Notebook can fit into a pocket or can be carried around in a bag, it has the ability to make productive use of 'unproductive moments'. If, for instance, an encounter with a red woollen hat in a bus triggers an idea about using red fabric in a sculpture, a train of thought can be quickly registered in the Notebook. As entering the bus has probably not originated with the intention to work on the practice, there are no expectations and the arrival of *abduction* is much less taken for granted. The Notebook represents continuity of thought, fluidity of ideas and a preference for temporality and for 'moving on'.

#### Productive values represented by the Notebook

The key concern or value indicated by the Notebook is '**Generative Flow**'. The arrival and continuity of ideas and the expansion of thought relating to further development of the practice. As such, the Notebook values temporality and continuity.

#### Types of decision-making indicated by the Notebook are:

*Retrospective:*            Generation informed decision-making

*Prospective:*            Generation oriented decision-making



### **5.1.3 The Drawing Table**

The image of the Drawing Table as an object resonates the practice of architectural grand-scale planning on precisely measured sections of graph paper. It forces an attention to detail onto the person sitting behind it, particularly if it has rulers, bringing the paper up close to the eye. (Reflective Journal, March 10, 2007)



**Fig. 11: *Picture of the Drawing Table in my Studio***

As many ideas jotted down in the Notebook tend to be swiftly forgotten or replaced, one that makes it to the Drawing Table is obviously considered to have potential. When an idea is taken to the Drawing Table and onwards from it, a step is taken towards it becoming a reality. As we all know, reality can have its ugly sides. Imagine yourself behind the Drawing Table with your wonderful idea for a public sculpture. In your Notebook the dream-version of it has been roughly described and sketched, and you might even have put attention towards describing some practicalities. When you draw out a detailed version of the construction, you will immediately experience its structural limitations. These are, for instance, gravity, cost and foundational issues. Those are just some of the

structural issues, the 'internal concerns' of the object. You may also experience other issues, such as public reception and regulations.

#### Productive values represented by the Drawing Table

The key concern or value indicated by the Drawing Table is '**idea execution**'.

That is, the bringing into being of artistic product and the expansion of the artistic work. In order to ensure this, it values aesthetic and conceptual potential of ideas and the consideration of their practical execution.

#### Types of decision-making indicated by the Drawing table are:

*Retrospective:* Execution informed decision-making

*Prospective:* Execution oriented decision-making

### 5.1.4 The Easel

My Easel has over the years had most use as a coat or bag hanger...the easel confronts me with an aspect that I tend to divert from: chaotic experimental development of work, starting from scratch in the face of all artists that went before me. (Reflective Journal, March 2, 2007)



**Fig. 12: Picture of the Easel in my Studio**

In the introduction to this chapter I ask which individual choices determine where and how you put your first brushstroke towards a new painting? The Easel is a support structure that witnesses the mechanisms of working on a piece of art 'in the making'. As such, it is familiar with the 'hands on' creative experience: works that take shape through experiment and perhaps *abduction* beyond their original intention, under the hands of the artist. Although easels were thrown out of art colleges in the nineties, they have since steadily reclaimed their corner. The Easel represents a history of painting that is inescapably present in the collective memory of visual artists. Any confrontation with the Easel is one with artists of the past, their contributions to a shared understanding of symbols and iconography, and what space they left to create something new. Artist and Easel mostly have a

one-on-one relationship, only witnessed by the occasional spectator when working on location or painting a live subject. As work grows under the hands of the artist, risks are taken. Things can fail dramatically. Alternatively, expectations can be exceeded. As such the Easel represents the trial and error side of practice where things can either end up in a gold frame or in a bin. My infrequent use of the Easel might indeed indicate an avoidance of those risks; however, I too, go through phases where for instance expensive materials have to be discarded, in order to arrive at the most appropriate techniques or sizes.

#### Productive values represented by the Easel

The key concern or value represented by the Easel is '**experiment**'. In order to conduct experiments, risks need to be taken, thus fearlessness, chaos, active and hands-on engagement are what matters most to this productive object.

#### Types of decision-making indicated by the Easel:

*Retrospective:* Experiment informed decision-making

*Prospective:* Experiment oriented decision-making

### **5.1.5 The Drying Table**

I must confess that in my own situation, finished products do not nearly satisfy me as much as the quest itself does. The enjoyment of the product seems to be reserved for the audience. (Reflective Journal, April 1, 2007)



**Fig. 13: Picture of the Drying Table in my Studio**

A work that is waiting for another layer to be applied might dry whilst the artist is working on another piece. It may be on a board, a plinth or an easel. Work can linger at this stage, sometimes for years, until it is finished or the artist gives up on it. The Drying Table is the last stage of transference towards a more public type of display. After the work is put on a wall or put in the Display Cabinet or wrapped for transport to an exhibition, the artist declares it 'ready'. From experience, I know that this can be a temporary conviction and that it is usually best to keep it on display in the studio realm for a little while, to make sure it really does not require any further changes.

As making art is a continuous process, art works always contain a degree of

open-endedness, not only in their interpretation by the audience, but in the process of making art as well. To the artist each art work, even if it is clearly finished and should be left alone, is part of the overall inquiry conducted within the practice, and opens up new possibilities. As a result, there is never genuine closure to the iterative creative process of making art until the death of the artist facilitates the uncovering of notebooks, experiments and discarded works lingering in the studio realm.

#### Productive values represented by the Drying Table

The Drying Table mainly values ‘**validation**’ or ‘validity’ of the artistic activity. Within that, it appreciates artistic satisfaction and ownership. Note that the type of validation meant here is mostly to do with personal, individual artistic considerations rather than reputation or an imagined audience.

#### Types of decision-making indicated by the Drying Table:

*Retrospective:*        Validity informed decision-making

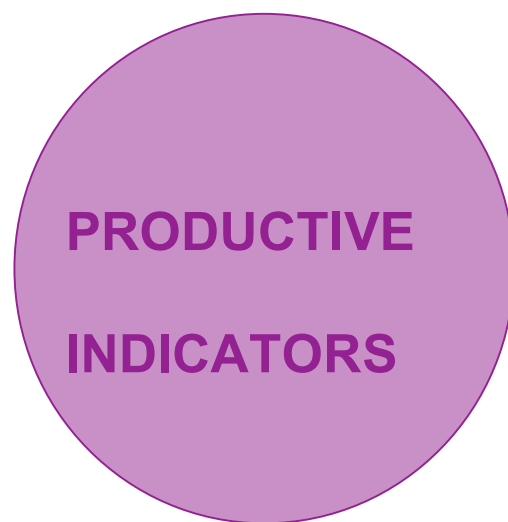
*Prospective:*        Validity oriented decision-making

**ARMCHAIR**

**NOTEBOOK**

**DRAWING TABLE**

**EASEL**



**Fig. 14: *Diagram 1A: Productive Indicators***

## **5.2 Social Indicators**

The Display Cabinet

The Coffee Table

The Studio Garden

The Computer

The Studio Door



### **5.2.1 The Display Cabinet**

The Display Cabinet in my studio bears quite a few phases of my artistic life. I wonder how it would do if left alone to represent me as practitioner.  
(Reflective Journal, April 4, 2007)



**Fig. 15: Picture of the Display Cabinet in my Studio**

The Display Cabinet is the studio object most concerned with presentation or representation. The arrangement in the Display Cabinet often provides an overview of art works and other objects of interest. It can take the shape of a clipping wall, representing a kind of snapshot of current interest. As the Display Cabinet, the objects look carefully, yet casually, arranged. It is a kind of trial version of potential contextualisation of work in which the products are introduced to some sort of impermanent setting amongst each other and amongst pictures of work of admired artists, loved ones or poems for instance. I often think the Display Cabinet can be thought of to be a kind of private shrine, celebrating the practice and its passionate pursuit. Though it is concerned with representation, this representation is at this stage merely meant as features to engage the artist.

The arrangements of the objects in the Display Cabinet allow the artist private consideration of their quality and how they work together towards an imagined audience.

The Display Cabinet's narrative unfolds in the discursive space between the objects selected for display. It is concerned with careful collection and ordering of artworks, visual references and other artefacts and with considerations of display. The Display Cabinet indicates the value of imagined audience responses.

#### Social values represented by the Display Cabinet

Where the Drying Table represents validity towards ones own practice, the Display Cabinet's key concern or value is the validity of the context of the practice, '**presentation**' to an imagined audience, considered in private.

#### Types of decision-making indicated by the Display Cabinet:

<i>Retrospective:</i>	Presentation informed decision-making
<i>Prospective:</i>	Presentation oriented decision-making

### **5.2.2 The Coffee Table**

By analogy the Coffee Table represents the more public 'studio tribune' as well as the more private 'studio dressing' room. Following this sports-analogy; within that atmosphere, there is no need for direct engagement with what goes on beyond the club, apart from welcoming the visiting team. However, there is a continuous awareness that lingers in the background of how other teams perform. (Reflective Journal, February 11, 2007)



**Fig. 16: Picture of the Coffee Table in my Studio**

The social function of the Coffee Table appears to be twofold. Firstly, the Coffee Table facilitates what the coffee machine or smoke corner offers to colleagues in a firm: peer information exchange of resources, experiences, contacts and knowledge as well as a non-work related chat. Secondly, it offers a viewpoint from which a visitor can look at the work and make a selection or express opinions. Whereas this anticipation of the practitioner (who within this anticipation still makes the decisions on what is on display) determines the character of the Display Cabinet, the outlook from the Coffee Table brings in the viewpoint of a visitor, usually another artist who works in the building and who is considered a trustee or peer.

As such, the Coffee Table represents the peer group in the *strategic studio framework*, a small group of people in whom the practitioner seeks to confide. The studio realm is quite an intimate space, and the people who frequent it become acquainted with the way a practice moves about and develops. They generally know when to comment and when to turn a blind eye to things they notice, as they know the practitioner quite well. Around the Coffee Table, these trustees share their experiences both in art practice and in the life beyond. Most artists will find some people they tend to share their work with first, and have built some sort of mutual coaching or mentor-mentee relationship.

#### Social values represented by the Coffee Table

The key concern or value of the Coffee Table is the '**peer group**'; sharing and presentation amongst and to trusted peers. The Coffee Table is considered with a sense of belonging, to hear and be heard in close peer relationships.

#### Types of decision-making indicated by the Coffee Table:

*Retrospective:* Peer group informed decision-making

*Prospective:* Peer group oriented decision-making

### **5.2.3 The Studio Garden**

The Garden offers a break from the intensity of engagement with work in the making. In that sense, it is an alternate Armchair, but one more social. Both have a strong epistemological impact, the Armchair self-referential and the Studio Garden in reference to art world communities. (Reflective Journal, February 12, 2007)



**Fig. 17: Picture of the Studio Garden**

The Studio Garden I share with my neighbours in the studio building, used to be a traditional school playground when we moved in. Plants and furniture have gradually been added over the years. It is a semi-enclosed space, bordered by fencing. Behind it, part of the original playground has been maintained to facilitate a supervised play area for the neighbourhood kids. During opening hours, the garden buzzes with sounds from playing children. In the summer there is a cacophony of music, coming from the open windows of the houses around. The local government supported the establishment of the studio building, hoping it would positively influence the regeneration of its neighbourhood. Apart from bringing the numbers of white people with higher professional education up in the neighbourhood's statistics, it is unclear what our presence really offers its

surroundings. The same is often said about the position of artists and art related communities in the larger social context. The Studio Garden could therefore be seen as an interesting visual indicator of the semi-enclosed nature of artist communities and of the art world itself in the general social realm.

‘interacting individuals seem collectively and continuously to generate and to maintain common ideas and behaviour patterns which they are reluctant to surrender or to modify unilaterally’. (Elihu Katz and Paul Lazarfeld, 1955, p. 44)

In the Studio Garden, outside elements, like music coming out of a window or playing children, have a direct impact. Artist communities or artistic/cultural communities may be self-affirmative towards outside influences; they are, at least in part, reliant on them.

#### Social values represented by the Studio Garden

The Studio Garden’s key concern or value is the ‘**close community**’. It values close encounters with *interpretative communities* with which the artist identifies him or herself. It values a degree of belonging, affirmation, safety and collectiveness.

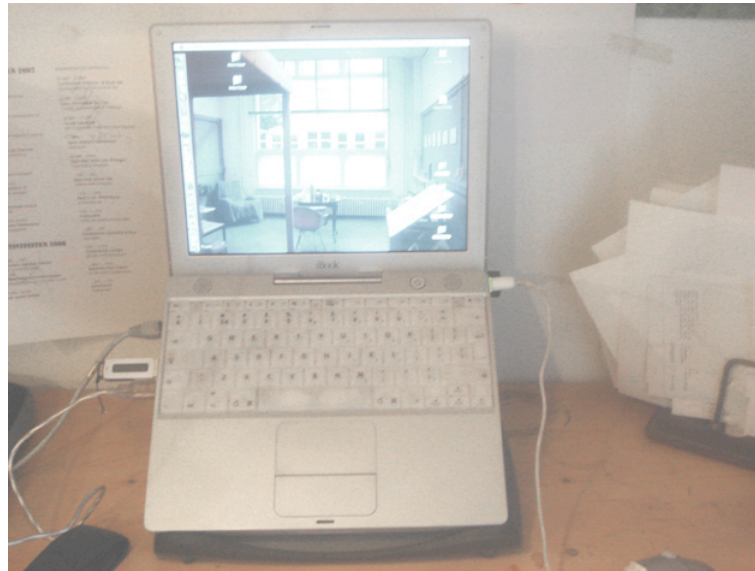
#### Types of decision-making indicated by the Studio Garden:

*Retrospective:* Close communities informed decision-making

*Prospective:* Close communities oriented decision-making

### 5.2.4 The Computer

Writings in online blogs or responses to a forum topic often are impulsive emotional responses to what is mostly an individual judgement of the condition of the professional and general social environment and the position of that individual within it. (Reflective Journal, March 11, 2007)



**Fig. 18: Picture of the Computer in my Studio**

The productive functions that are described in section 3.2 can all be found somewhere in my engagement with the Computer. In these cases, the Computer is used as a tool to develop, process and document work. The reason why I encourage the reader to direct his or her mind towards the phenomenon that is the Computer, in this section on the Social Studio, is because of its connection to the Internet. Through this connectivity, the Computer starts to play a whole new role in the social realm of art practice. The Computer allows me as an artist to find out background information of people I meet. If I want to know if I have received a competitive pricing on materials, I can check on the Computer. I can even check how customers review a certain shop. All of this can be done without exposing my *identity*. The Internet's democratisation of exposure brings about

interesting insights into artists' strategies, their life, work values and ambitions. I cannot help but be fascinated by the rich discussions on artists' blogs, advertising the importance of art (as they make it) and the arrogance of the art world and of the world at large. Often anonymously, personal frustrations and experiences are shared without self-restraint. I have noticed that in those circumstances every now and again the participants in the debate feel the need to show each other their work by pasting a link with their posts. This is a bold move. It can lead to a sudden drop of interest in the alter ego's commentary or alternatively to a fanatical debate about the quality of the work in the presence of its maker. Anonymously following posted responses – or the lack of them – to posted art works or discussion topics can be akin to listening in on an exhibition audience without being noticed or recognised.

#### Social values represented by the Computer

The Computer enables contact with '**distant communities**', swift encounters around the world at arms length. It can speak to a longing of the practitioner to be 'out there' in the world, and recognised beyond ones own private spheres.

#### Types of decision-making indicated by the Computer:

*Retrospective:* Distant Communities informed decision-making

*Prospective:* Distant Communities oriented decision-making



### 5.2.5 The Studio Door

The building's Studio Door is set within a small alcove, which has caused it to be used frequently as a public toilet. In an attempt to solve this problem, the buildings owners have placed an iron gate in front of the alcove. When entering or exiting the building now, it appears some security risk is being taken; it is unclear whether the building is protected against outside influences or whether the outside is protected from what is inside the building. The gate certainly adds to a distinct sense of transference when stepping into the building or onto the pavement outside. (Reflective Journal, April 20, 2007)



**Fig. 19: Picture of the Studio Door**

In the previous sections, connections to the 'outside world' have been discussed, from colleagues and peers through to the Internet. Why do we need to specifically address yet another social indicator aside from close and distant communities? This is because the Studio Door represents a social realm, which the previous sections have only slightly touched upon and that is to be reckoned with. This realm could be best described using the expression 'the forces that be'. Weinberg's observations led him to the conclusion (1957, int.) that '*Twentieth-century artists work not only in the studio but also in the world of public opinion*'.

The Studio Door represents things like legislation, social prejudice, family circumstances, health etcetera. The 'forces that be' are situational and, as we know, most situations can be addressed either by adaptation or confrontation, usually resulting in negotiation. Having spent over ten years moving between the private realm of the studio and the public realms of the art world and side jobs, pubs, supermarkets, family gatherings, trains, talking to a variety of friends, colleagues and strangers, hardly any occupation seems as much controlled by the contrast represented by the forces working on each side of the Studio Door as art practice. Negotiating or confronting that contrast can become the very thing that drives the art practice.

#### Social values represented by the Studio Door

The key concern or value represented by the Studio Door is the Social & Political Environment or, in short, the '**support structure**' which presents the artist with restraints and demands as well as encouragement and chances.

#### Types of decision-making indicated by the Studio Door:

*Retrospective:* Support structure informed decision-making

*Prospective:* Support structure oriented decision-making

ARMCHAIR

NOTEBOOK

DRAWING TABLE

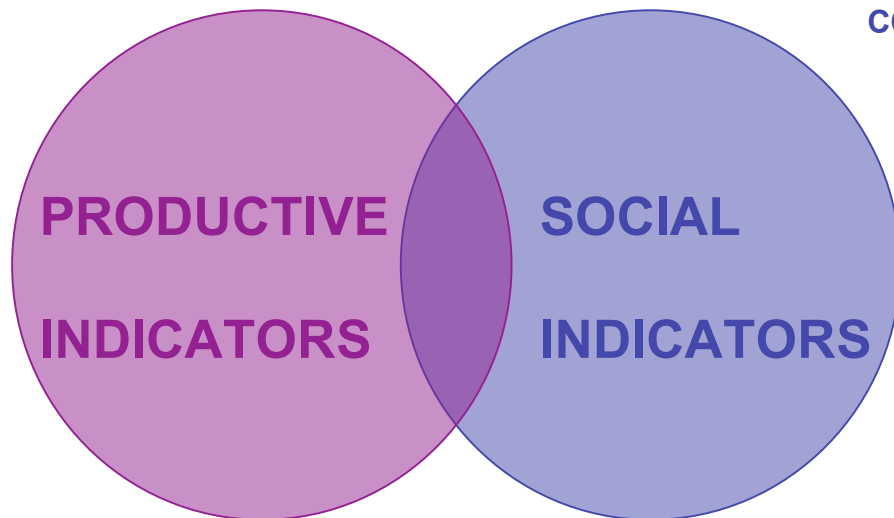
EASEL

DISPLAY CABINET

COFFEE TABLE

STUDIO GARDEN

COMPUTER



**Fig. 20: Diagram 1B: Productive and Social Indicators**

The diagram above visualises the productive and social indicators of the *strategic studio framework*, discussed so far. There is an overlap between both groups.

This is because most decision-making is interconnected. Even though the Framework encourages one to consider one key concern at a time, for instance, individual reflection represented by the Armchair, or close communities represented by the Studio Garden, this does not mean that individual reflection is never affected by what is discussed within close communities the artist is involved with, or vice versa. Rather, through initially pulling such concerns apart, one might get a better idea of their mutual connections and dependencies- and how they could be 'orchestrated'.

### **5.3 Indicators of Resources**

The Window

The Tool Closet

The Clock

The Book Shelf

The Storage Room

### **5.3.1 The Window**

When I look out of my window I don't really like where I am, I have often thought that to be a good thing, I don't really feel like going outside into the city, even if the weather is good, so instead I go back to work or sit in the Studio Garden.  
(April 1, 2007)



**Fig. 21: Picture of the Window in my Studio**

The Window relates to the Studio Garden and Studio Door in the sense that it is concerned with the space outside and inside, and the degree of contrast between the two. However, the Window is introduced here as an object that represents resources; demographic and spatial resources. By that I mean the location of the practice, and thereby the access to local resources. The inner space of the studio is also one of its concerns. These concerns include whether one has no studio or a small, large or temporary one, all of which can have a certain impact on the choices made within the practice- as can access to nearby stores and transportation, availability of space, heat and water. Among other concerns can be the choice to be in a certain environment; whether you are at your preferred location or it is a cheap or convenient compromise to the ideals you have

concerning where your practice is located- and how an enclosed space like a studio, accommodates your practice. The Window is concerned with its environment, the spatial qualities of the inner space, as well as the space on the other side of the Window and the convenience or attractiveness of the location and its outlook.

Resource related values represented by the Window

The key concern or value represented by the Window is the ‘**demographic and spatial resources**’ available to or desired by the artist.

Types of decision-making indicated by the Window:

*Retrospective:*        Demographic and spatial informed decision-making

*Prospective:*        Demographic and spatial oriented decision-making

### **5.3.2 The Tool Closet**

I once cycled all over town to find a specific kind of screw that when I found it at the very last possible retailer, didn't match my needs after all. At times like these I wish I didn't switch working techniques as often as I do. That is possibly one of the reasons why I always like to draw alongside other things. It allows me continue to work as long as I have enough paper and pencils available.  
(Reflective Journal, April 12, 2007)



**Fig. 22: *Picture of the Tool Closet in my Studio***

The more limited in budget and time, the more dependent I become on what is left in the Tool Closet. In that sense the Tool Closet represents resources in the broad sense; the wealth of what can be in it is dependent on what I am and have been able to afford. There are quite a few things in it that I have allowed myself to purchase in the experimental phase up to a project, and that I then ended up not using. In more meagre times, I try to find a new use for them, mostly without success. It is often said that a good artist can make use of whatever is available and have a strong practice in all circumstances. This theory is difficult to prove, as you cannot offer the opposite situation at the same time and compare the

resulting work.

In organisational theory, it has been increasingly recognised just how much influence the history, or historic narratives carried within organisations, have on the quality awareness and strategies of a company. In the case of an individual, this is even more eminent. In a way, the studio itself is a Tool Closet. It demonstrates how well the practice is utilised to deal with shortages or changing circumstances. To a certain extent it might also demonstrate how well the practitioner feels they need to be supplied with tools and resources in order to be most productive. How much wealth would one need to survive?

#### Resource related values represented by the Tool Closet

The key concern or value represented by the Tool Closet is the availability and prioritisation of materials and finances, of '**assets**'.

#### Types of decision-making indicated by the Tool Closet:

*Retrospective:*        Asset informed decision-making

*Prospective:*         Asset oriented decision-making



### **5.3.3 The Clock**

There is something nagging about the sound of a studio Clock. Like it wants to move you along in a hurry. It seems to me that a Clock in a workspace seems to tick faster than one in a home anyway and much faster than the one that used to be in my grandmother's house. (Reflective Journal, April 11, 2007)



**Fig. 23: Picture of the Clock in my Studio**

The element of time is of importance to the balancing act of practice and life. Development and execution of work can be incredibly slow paced or suddenly fast tracked. Days can feel wasted or very productive, and it is hard to predict which of the two the day will bring when one enters the studio in the morning. In the first section on the Armchair, I made some comments about the productive capacities of a break. The Easel has brought about comments on the productive capacities of rigorous experimentation.

What all of this has led to, is that I have a clearer idea of which mechanisms I have developed to keep me from having to deal with elements of practice and life I favour less. In an art practice, it is relatively easy to develop such mechanisms.

It shows, for example, in the things you complete or fail to complete on time.

Richard Lanham (2006) suggests that an important quality of artists is the ability to assign attention (which he regards to be the most valuable commodity of our time) and to study how human attention is allocated and how cultural capital is created and traded. Attention requires mental focus, the investment of time, energy and thought. If a job requires attention, careful study and manipulation of resources as well as a certain level of distance, it is clear that a personal and flexible, yet systematic, prioritisation is put into place. Thus, the Clock indicates the allocation of attention and time as resource in the *strategic studio framework*.

#### Resource related values represented by the Clock

The key concern or value of the Clock would be '**time**', its availability and the prioritisation in assigning time towards various activities.

#### Types of decision-making indicated by the Clock:

*Retrospective:* Time informed decision-making

*Prospective:* Time oriented decision-making

### 5.3.4 The Bookshelf

I don't keep books like these in my home, apart from the ones I am reading. The second floor office my partner and I share at home is merely taken up by our communal travelling and cooking books, photo albums and novels. I wonder if a more personal portrayal would occur if the books on the Book Shelf in the studio would have been mixed up with those representing leisure activities like travelling, cooking and reading novels and also with the 'life narrative' provided by the photo albums" (Reflective Journal, April 20, 2007)



**Fig. 24: *Picture of a Bookshelf in my Studio***

Most of the books on a typical Book Shelf in the studio are a mixture of art books, course books from the past and reference books. The presence of some required study books from art school and communication studies is obvious. As such, they indicate the desire to become part of certain knowledge communities by attending courses and engaging in advised reading.

The Book Shelf gives an overview of the knowledge reached for by a practitioner. There are practical or historical books; techniques or stories of specific interest; books that help application writing or creative writing; books that indicate

scholarly activity; books that are read to gain inspiration by or that help formulate statements; books containing interesting pictures; and books received as presents. Yet again, this object is an indicator of the past, present and future activities and interests of the practitioner, his or her longing for the enhancement of skills and understanding, thought to be either underdeveloped or key within the practice. The Book Shelf indicates keenness on learning, knowledge sharing, skill enhancement and keeping up to date. Here is no distinction between tacit learning – learning through doing and experience - and explicit learning, as they go hand in hand in practice-based learning processes. Teach an artist a basic technique or theory and it might surface at unprecedented times; for instance during experimentation, reflection or generation. In that sense, orientation towards practical concerns signals orientation towards learning and a desire to advance knowledge and skill.

#### Resource related values indicated by the Book Shelf

The key concern or value of the Book Shelf is '**knowledge**', the availability of it, the prioritisation towards it and the desire to expand knowledge beyond its current limits.

#### Types of decision-making indicated by the Book Shelf

*Retrospective:* Knowledge informed decision-making

*Prospective:* Knowledge oriented decision-making

### **5.3.5 The Storage Room**

Recently I embarked on a search in the Storage Room for work I am not sure to have kept or thrown out at some point. It seems to have disappeared. I did however find some other interesting things that I had forgotten about. (Reflective Journal, March 28, 2007)



**Fig. 25: Picture of the Storage Room in my Studio**

The Storage Room contains stock and work residue, most of it has been put out of sight and out of reach. This is mainly a result of the fact that, after my return from England, most of the work that I put up there at the time I sub-let the studio, has remained there by choice. The lack of work scattered about suggested a new beginning and I welcomed the idea of a fresh start at the time. Some work has been put in the Display Cabinet and recently some more has come down to assess for exhibition and/or to fill some empty walls in our new home.

Looking at the Storage Room I want the next work to be a success, I want there to be more, but particularly better things. The Storage Room largely contains stock. Art works that are finished are sometimes put away and forgotten about,

only to be rediscovered later.

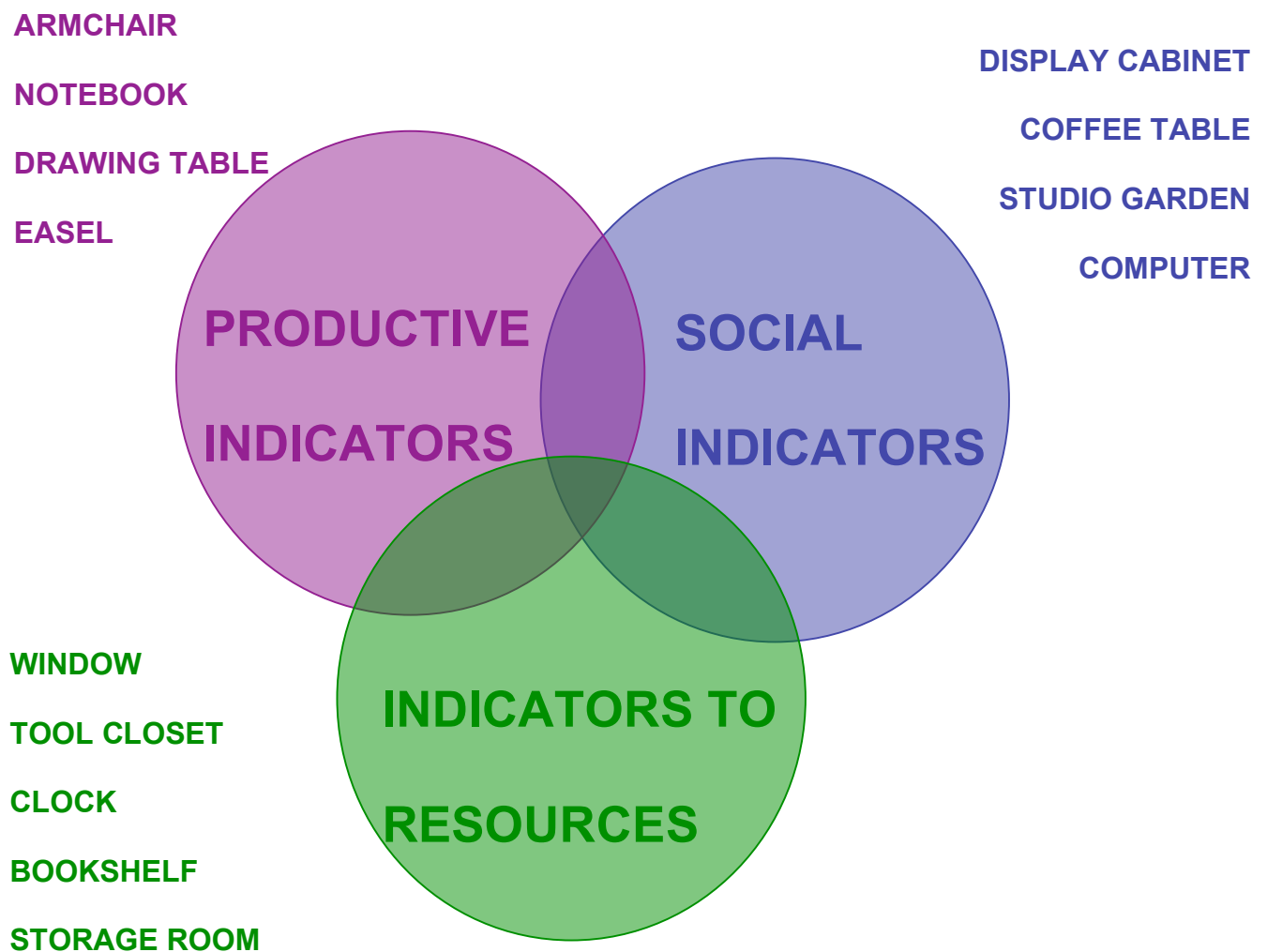
#### Resource related values represented by the Storage Room

The key concern or value of the Storage Room is '**stock**', as in finished work, the conservation and maintenance of a collection of art works built during the artists' productive life.

#### Types of decision-making indicated by the Storage Room

*Retrospective:*      Stock informed decision-making

*Prospective:*      Stock oriented decision-making



**Fig. 26: Diagram 1C: Productive and Social Indicators and Indicators of Resources**

As in diagram 1B, the different groups of indicators mutually overlap. In a single event, decision-making can relate to many of the indicated *key concerns* in the *strategic studio framework*. As I decide about the execution of a new series of works, I may for instance consider previous work that has just been made (Drying Table), a comment of a respected colleague about how I could improve that the way the surface had been prepared (Coffee Table), skills I like to develop further (Book Shelf) and try out (Easel) and what the materials will cost me (Tool Closet).

**Fig. 27: Table 1: The strategic studio framework: Overview**

<b>INDICATOR PRODUCTIVE</b>	<b>KEY CONCERN</b>	<b>RETROSPECTIVE</b>	<b>PROSPECTIVE</b>
Armchair	Reflection	Reflection informed decision-making	Reflection oriented
Notebook	Generation	Generation informed decision-making	Generation oriented decision-making
Drawing Table	Execution	Execution informed decision-making	Execution oriented decision-making
Easel	Experiment	Experiment informed decision-making	Experiment oriented decision-making
Drying Table	Validation	Validity informed decision-making	Validity oriented decision-making
<b>SOCIAL</b>			
Display Cabinet	Presentation	Idealised Audience informed decision-making	Idealised Audience oriented decision-making
Coffee Table	Peer Group	Peer Group informed decision-making	Peer Group oriented decision-making
Studio Garden	Close Communities	Close Communities informed decision-making	Close Communities oriented decision-making
Computer	Distant Communities	Distant Communities informed decision-making	Distant Communities oriented decision-making
Studio Door	Support Systems (Social/Political)	Support System informed decision-making	Support System oriented decision-making
<b>RESOURCES</b>			
Window	Demographic/Spatial Resources	Demographic/Spatial informed decision-making	Demographic/Spatial oriented decision-making
Tool Closet	Assets (materials & finances)	Asset informed decision-making	Asset oriented decision-making
Clock	Time	Time informed decision-making	Time oriented decision-making
Book Shelf	Knowledge	Knowledge informed decision-making	Knowledge oriented decision-making
Storage Room	Stock (available products)	Stock informed decision-making	Stock oriented Decision-making

In the above table, there is no specified column to indicate the 'present' in between *retrospective* and *prospective* decision-making. Any current concept of the present situation of the practice would be shaped by a re-evaluation of both the *retrospective* and the *prospective* situation of the practice, as the practitioner perceives it. In the next chapter, Chapter 6, it is further discussed how this re-evaluation process contributes to the identity conceptions of the practitioner and to assessment of individual decision-making.



I have struggled not to refer to the concerns listed in the framework as ‘values’. Of course, they do represent values that could be held by the practitioner. However, their inherent ‘value’ to individual practice relies on the value assigned to them; the validation of their relative importance in the eyes of the practitioner. ‘Validation’ might also be a confusing term for the reader, as ‘validation’ is also used to refer to one of the fifteen *key concerns* in the *strategic studio framework*, acting within the practice in relation to the validity of recent artistic work (indicated by the Drying Table). To avoid confusion resulting from this, I have chosen to frame the list of *values* or *value concepts* as ‘*key concerns*’. The vast array of interconnected influences at work in an art practice asks for some rough structuring, in order to construct a reflexive tool that allows the delicate complexities influencing individual strategies to surface. It has been demonstrated to what extent the notions of *identity*, ambition and production are interwoven in art practice. Many *key concerns* act simultaneously on decision-making and their impact is often mutually dependent.

## **Summary and conclusion Chapter 5**

This chapter discussed the variety of *key concerns* that shape the day-to-day studio life of visual art practice. The three sections introduced five ‘productive indicators’, five ‘social indicators’ and five ‘indicators of resources’. Together, they shape a *strategic studio framework* that can be used in reflective or educational settings, in order to access strategic content of the practice. Each indicator in the Framework represents a specific concern, resulting in *retrospective* and *prospective* decision-making within individual artistic activity, professional and social activity, as well as prioritisation serving the life-work balance of the

practitioner concerned. Truthfully, overlap will always exist in between some of the objects. The distinction between the Coffee Table and the Studio Garden, for instance, can be awkward as both welcome visitors from outside the studio. However, as our Studio Garden is a communal space, its visitors are considered to enter a less private space. It will have to be proven in time, through more extensive and broader use of the framework, if those two closely related indicators should continue to co-exist.

The indicators in the *strategic studio framework* function as a means by which to assume a *meta-position* towards day-to-day decision-making. Following on from that, as will be demonstrated in most of the next chapter, one can leave be the objects as labels or indicators, and use the five productive, social, and resource related concerns they indicate as a means to assess the previously accessed information.

## Chapter 6. The Strategic Studio: Assessment

### Introduction to the Chapter

This sixth Chapter aims to further discuss how the *key concerns* represented by the fifteen objects can shape the practitioner's value system. In the previous Chapters, reflective experiments using objects (indicators) have been conducted, to provide access to a set of dimensions (*key concerns*) behind strategic choice. In this Chapter I aim to move beyond assess towards critical assessment. The first section of this Chapter provides examples of how an *individual value system* might be impacted upon by a mixture of practical and idealistic considerations, indicated by the fifteen objects. Hereto, the identity concept of individual practitioner resulting from negotiating *retrospective* and *prospective* validation of ones practice is further discussed.

The second section of this chapter contains a sample experiment in which such validation is critiqued and assessed. In this experiment, the *flux* in my own time and energy allocation as well as *retrospective* and *prospective* values at two distinct points in time are rated and discussed. I have chosen to discuss the things that have the most immediate impact on me - because they are contrasting or contradictory for instance - in order to respect the size limitations of this thesis. The experiment functions as a brief example of how one might be able to use the framework of concerns to access and assess day-to-day decision-making. The Chapter ends with a section, which explores personal success validation. For instance by asking how success may be perceived in individual cases and what impact access to such information may help advance and stimulate art practices.

## 6.1 Studio Value Systems

### 6.1.1 *Structural frictions between ideal and reality*

Let me give an example of the way prioritisation between the fifteen *key concerns* I have defined within art practice, may occur in my day-to-day studio life. In this example, the effects of considering several of such *key concerns*, and prioritising some over others, is demonstrated, but also how acting on behalf of them might be negotiated between what I would call the '*artist ideal*' (the practitioner's aspirations) and the *artist reality* (the way the status quo of the practice is perceived by that practitioner). It should be clear that this is just one of many experiments that could be used to state my case. There will be more examples further on in this chapter, specifically in the reflective experiment in section 6.2.

Judging the quality of work on exhibition is always easier for me, when in retrospect. Amongst the exhibitions I have taken part in recently, there is one of which I have rather bad memories. It was a show dedicated to a particular project I had been part of, and as such, I didn't feel I could afford to pull out. As a result, I had put up new work that was not completed effectively, although I was not aware of this until after the show opened. I noticed that, on several occasions, my attitude towards the visitors at the preview was apologetic and, although I tried to conceal my feelings I was far from happy. By now, I would expect to have had enough experience to prevent me from hanging work that has not yet been properly considered (that has been at the Drying Table long enough). However, it had been a busy time and I did not have enough distance from the work to make a clear judgement on it, or to recognise in time that I had been trying to fit too large an amount of exhibitions in along with my research project. On the other

hand, it is worth mentioning that most of the other shows I have done in recent years have been more successful in terms of selection and preparation than those before taking on the research project, presumably because I have had to, consciously and frequently, apply critical reflective thinking to validate my work. In this particular case, however, I had overdone it and taken on a project I had little time to execute properly.

The dilemma described above is one that could occur in most work situations beyond individual art practice. To some degree, many of the frictions between what you would want results to be and what they become, are common in everyday life. The difference here is that it is very difficult to find out what exactly the qualitative norms are. As an artist, I am largely expected to determine them myself, at least until the work is 'out there'. And even then, visitors can be hugely enthusiastic and still I can be unhappy with the results. Vice-versa, I can feel as though I have not performed well and convinced of that opinion being plausible, in spite of any lyrical reviews of my work. The choice to make something that is not there yet and that is not asked for, generally requires that type of stubborn experimentation and belief. This is not to say that I would never feel hurt, flattered or demeaned as an artist, but there is always the need to eventually decide for yourself if it is worthwhile what you do, particularly in the light of continuity of your practice.

Taking a step back and assuming the *meta-position*, it becomes at least a little easier to start asking honest questions about ones expectations and reasoning, and brings about some important insights into personal convictions and aspirations. In the case of the example above, these are the expectations I have of myself as an artist and the quality of my work and the aspiration to remain an

active, exhibiting artist alongside the PhD. To some degree, I also know that, when I do not take up the challenges of planned exhibitions, I might keep practising, continuously delaying the point of exhibition which would mean there would never be any feedback to my endeavours, or any of the sense of closure or achievement exhibitions can provide. As my *artist ideal* is always hanging overhead, there is a continuous need to negotiate with a real situation that might not be perfect. One has to believe that one's visions for the future can be approached further through continuous practice and smart artistic, social and professional allocation of energy and resources.

### **6.1.2 *The personal value stock exchange***

The *key concerns*, indicated by the objects and furnishings we have discussed so far, can both be very practical, or more elusive. Imagine, for instance, the kinds of social strategies arising from desires that are not so much motivated by a practical need to expand networks of knowledge, feed-back or support, but more by needs such as inclusion or recognition. Reflection on the Recliner can be about what would be the maximum size of a frame that fits in the car or on the course of one's artistic career and how one consider that. The close communities represented by the Coffee Table and the Studio Garden introduce a kind of '*Communal Culture*' concerned with beliefs and values on the basis of which people interpret experiences and behave. An artist might be connected to several such communities consisting of colleagues, but also, for instance, of friends and family circles.

It is not just collective cultures that inform our *personal value systems*, they can also be informed by individual experiences. It can be that, through a combination

of praise from a certain community, epistemologies from art school and experiences of enhanced skill, certain qualities come to be experienced by the practitioner as key qualities of the practice. It then can be quite difficult to distance oneself from these ideas and look again at the practice and assess whether these convictions are still valid.

In general, the values represented in the framework in Chapter 5 can manifest themselves in any practice. Each individual artist is bound to have his or her own *individual value system*. The *key concerns*, take turns in becoming more or less valuable at different times and in different practices, sometimes at the cost of the value or attention given to the other concerns. This is why I call this the '*personal value stock exchange*'. As in a stock market, values assigned to different stocks, tend to be mutually influential. An investor will make a personal decision on where to put their trust, and invest into at different times. These personal decisions, however, sit in between a complex historic and topical context that also relies on personal preferences, experiences and scenarios the investor might envision for the future. In the *personal value stock exchange*, your own investments and values are at least as important as what others are willing to invest; especially if you are an art practitioner, who would have to prioritise factors like experiment, generation and validation at given times. An artist may, for instance, assign more value towards the commercial success of his or her work after a respected colleague has done well in selling work. This is an example of how the prioritisation among the *key concerns* in the framework can shift for instance from 'experiment' to 'assets'. All decision-making in art practice can, in one way or another, be represented by either the *retrospective* or the *prospective* equivalent of any of the fifteen indicators in the framework. When practical decisions become mixed in with more elusive convictions, the

counterbalance of the studio's value system may lead to, what may appear to be, illogical decisions. The practitioner in question may however feel vindicated to decisions, as they uphold what they experience as valuable at the time. For example; when an artist, fascinated by a string of abductive interventions and experiments, prioritises these activities above a profitable opportunity offered at the same time. The opposite could, of course, also be true. What is valued most relies heavily on the given situation of the artist. This is something only the artist, if anyone, would know much about.

So what happens if we take not only practical arguments into consideration in the assessment of strategies, but also, for instance, beliefs, emotional and epistemological values? So far I have used objects (indicators) to create dimensions (*key concerns*) through reflective *thought experiments*. Secondly, I am now to use those dimensions to apply assessment through an experiment of validating the dimensions, and evaluate those validations.

### **6.1.3 The state of a practice**

What is actually being pursued in art practice? I do not believe that artists are, in essence, prone to make a dramatic change or contribution to the world, but of course they do; everyone leaves a mark of some kind. I am also convinced that most artists generally spend more time considering their contributions, time and energy allocation and significance than non-artists. They have to, given that they rely so much on self-criticism and self-encouragement. Within the mix of my activities as an artist, job hopper, collaborator, volunteer, colleague, teacher and student, the product of my artistic practice alone cannot define the contributions I make to the world. Therefore, when I look at the pages of my calendar, the mix of



activities registered within it, including its un-recorded gaps, represent what the contribution of my practice and practitioner would be if it were put on hold right now.

It is not possible to assess the quality of the state of my practice without taking the sense of direction from past to future into account, or without considering the stories I tell myself, as a practitioner about the place and role of my practice and persona. In the end, the identity of a practice is to a very large degree determined by the practitioner's own grasp of his or her past, present and future, in real or aspired sense. The related and inclusive concept of self, described in section 2.2.3, has a significant impact on the strategies applied by that particular individual.

## **6.2 Sample Experiment**

In order to test how the *strategic studio framework* might provide access to detailed information about the prioritisation of the *key concerns* in relation to the 'strategic flux' that occurs in the *individual value system* of a practitioner, I have isolated two calendar weeks out of my individual practice for a small experiment. In this experiment, I attempt to validate (rate) my energy and time allocation within the fifteen *key concerns* of the framework. The first is week 50 of 1999, the week I have used as an example in my introduction; the second, more recent one is week 50 of 2008. In this experiment, all columns have been filled in aided by nothing but the isolated diary pages and memory. Initially, I considered a rating confined to either 1, 2, 4, 6 and 7 of which I allowed myself to use any specific rating on only one occasion. This soon proved problematic, as it would not be

possible to have multiple values become more important in the prospective view, whilst avoiding a loss of value of other concerns. Even though anyone has only a certain realistic amount of time to invest towards prioritisation of time, energy and other resources, bringing to light unrealistic expectations and ambitions can be important information towards an assessment of the strategies of a practitioner. Therefore, I chose to apply a regular rating scale from 1 to 10 instead, consulting the events on my calendar to reconstruct the allocation of time and energy towards the listed *key concerns* and rate the prioritisation towards each of them in that particular week. This rating has been done quite quickly and with no advanced preparation, filling in the whole table at once. These validations then became the basis of a self-inquiry into what I could have expected of that week in the ideal scenario, what might have been a better division of time and energy allocation and what could have been the maximum to be expected at that time. Then, I turn towards reconstructing what I felt would have been my overall *retrospective* rating of those fifteen *key concerns*, as well as my overall *prospective* rating of them at the time. Obviously, the only data which can be considered 'real' is time; time indicated by the calendars of each of the two weeks, everything else would be a construct of my own experiences and thought. Reconstructing my concerns at a time more than nine years ago also means that additional cognitive biases are to be expected. The point of the exercise, however, is that this *retrospective* re-telling of a life- or career-stories feels 'real'. Questioning those 'stories' may bring some further perspective on such matters, even though it is clear that there will be no such thing as a stable representation over time; one of the key points this thesis makes about personal choice-making. Strategising will always, at least in part, rely on our perceptions of reality- and the degree to which we allow ourselves to be critical about such perceptions.

Our description of reality makes a distinction between the world and reality. The

world is what is, it is an infinite difference and it is the world with all its entities. Reality is our awareness of, knowledge about, feelings for this world. Reality is what constitutes our concern, that which is of interest to us. Reality is that which works for it. (Hendriksen, Nørreklit et al., 2004, p. 17)

For the following experiment, I have used the registered time investment in my calendars (columns 1 and 2 from left to right) to represent the first type of reality, 'world' in order to ask questions about the other type; perceptions of 'reality', in order to get a complete picture of the identity of the practice (columns 3 to 8). This way an assessment is made of the value I currently assign to the different concerns of my practice, and how I perceive my past and future actions and ambitions; my strategies.

### 13 December to 19 December, 1999

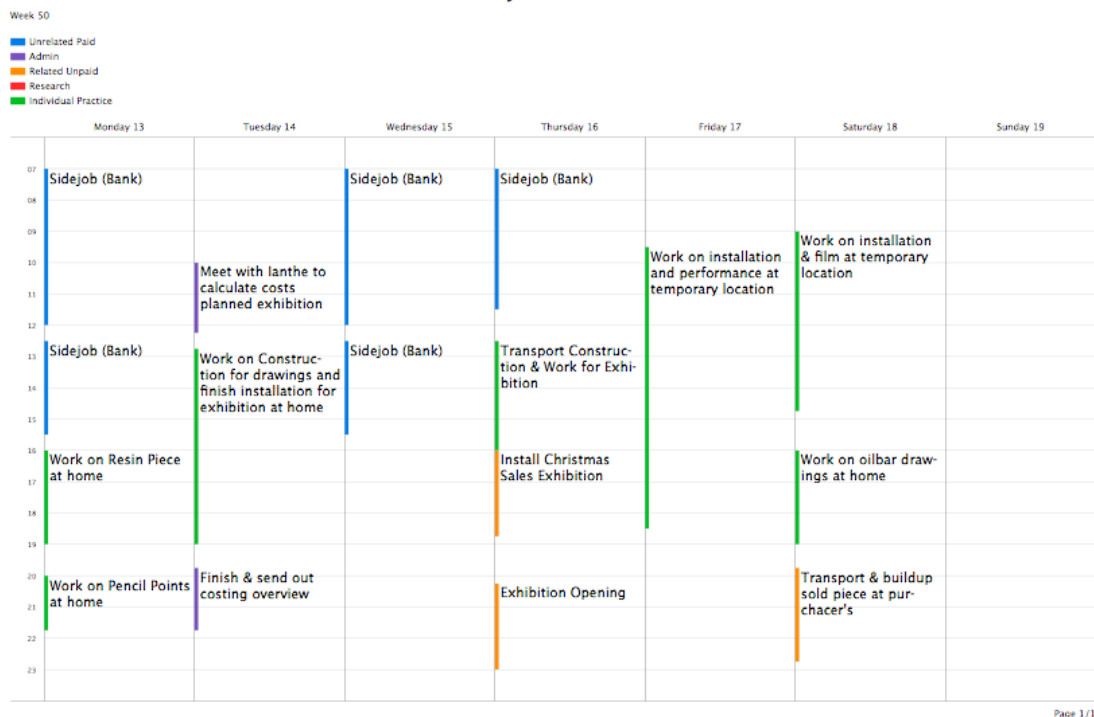
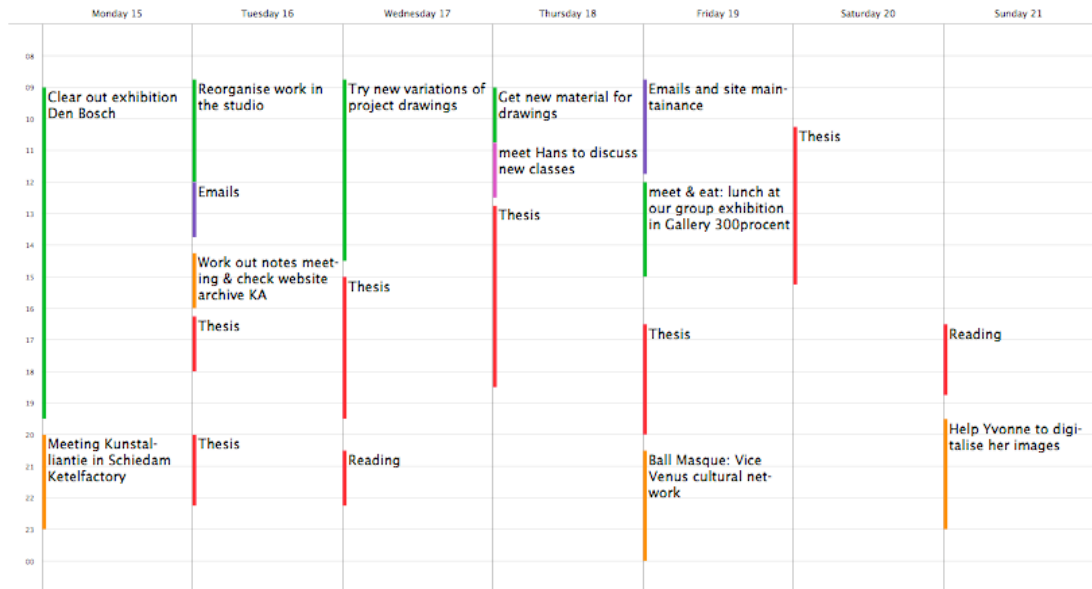


Fig. 28 (/4): My calendar in week 50 in 1999

## 15 December to 21 December, 2008

Week 50

Related Paid  
Admin  
Related Unpaid  
Research  
Individual Practice



Page 1/1

Fig. 29: My calendar in week 50 in 2008

### 6.2.1 Week fifty, nine years apart: rating concerns in day-to-day practice

Fig. 30: Table 2: Rating Strategic Concerns in Day-to-day Practice

INDICATOR	KEY CONCERN	Reality (time/energy investment this week)		Ideal (time/energy investment this week)		Retrospective overall time/energy allocation		Prospective overall time/energy allocation	
		(1-10)		(1-10)		(1-10)		(1-10)	
		wk 50 1999	wk 50 2008	wk 50 1999	wk 50 2008	wk 50 1999	wk 50 2008	wk 50 1999	wk 50 2008
Productive									
Armchair	Reflection	2	9	4	9	3	8	7	8
Notebook	Generation	4	3	5	4	9	5	7	7
Drawingtable	Execution	7	1	8	4	5	4	8	7
Easel	Experiment	5	3	7	4	8	4	7	7
Drying Table	Validation	3	8	6	7	4	7	7	7
Social									
Display Cabinet	Presentation	6	8	6	8	6	7	8	7
Coffee Table	Peer Group	7	8	7	8	5	7	8	7
Studio Garden	Close Commun.	5	8	7	8	5	7	9	7
Computer	Distant Commun.	1	6	3	6	1	7	5	7
Studio Door	Support Systems	7	1	7	1	6	4	7	6
Resources									
Window	Demographic/Spatial	7	4	7	5	5	6	8	7
Tool Closet	Assets	8	1	5	1	8	6	4	7
Clock	Time	6	6	7	6	5	6	7	7
Book Shelf	Knowledge	1	8	7	8	6	7	7	8
Storage Room	Stock	4	2	8	4	2	5	8	7

In the above table I have rated the fifteen *key concerns* of my practice as they appear in my diary in two isolated weeks, which are nine years apart: week fifty in

1999 and week fifty in 2008. However small and subjective, this personal rating experiment provides much of the information needed to comprehend what happens when, once accessed, decision-making is validated. The experiment provides a detailed 'ecology' of (in this case) my individual decision-making process and the motives behind my strategies, in a short timeframe.

The rating experiment is being used as a distancing tool rather than a specific measuring tool. Through the assignment of validations to my day-to-day endeavours, followed by a reflective assessment of what they might mean, I force myself to take a *meta-position* and evaluate my motives. It is obvious that this data is bound to be highly subjective and personal. However, the practice-led approach recognises that the ways in which artists are deeply entangled with their practices, means that core information about individual motives is never accessible for evaluation. In general, it is not possible to evaluate practice-led research in this sense, that is the point of having a distinctive category of research for artists to do. Practitioner knowledge is always an accumulation of singular experiences of creative action. The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) have recently published a document suggesting 'Future Directions for Arts and Humanities Research' (2009, p. 6) in which it is accepted that practice-led methodological experiments are research questions in their own right and that they offer new models of enquiry beyond the arts.

### **6.2.2 Productive concerns**

In this section, fragments of reflective observations are followed by *re-versioning* through *meta-positioning*. This reflective analysis, the secondary analytic thought about the observations, is printed in italics. Aided by the validations in the table, I

will first comment on the evolution in time and secondly on either the reality, ideal, *retrospective* or *prospective* validations, whichever has the most immediate impact. Looking at the ratings I have given the *key concerns* of my practice as depicted in Table 3, I particularly notice the following points:

**Fig. 31: Table 2.1: Productive concerns**

INDICATOR	KEY CONCERN	Reality (time/energy investment this week) (1-10)		Ideal (time/energy investment this week) (1-10)		Retrospective overall time/energy allocation (1-10)		Prospective overall time/energy allocation (1-10)	
		wk 50 1999	wk 50 2008	wk 50 1999	wk 50 2008	wk 50 1999	wk 50 2008	wk 50 1999	wk 50 2008
Armchair	Reflection	2	9	4	9	3	8	7	8
Notebook	Generation	4	3	5	4	9	5	7	7
Drawingtable	Execution	7	1	8	4	5	4	8	7
Easel	Experiment	5	3	7	4	8	4	7	7
Drying Table	Validation	3	8	6	7	4	7	7	7

- 1) In this illustrated part of the table, there is a significant shift in not only the amount of reflective inquiry applied, but also in the *prospective* value and even the *retrospective* value I assign to reflection.
- 2) Clearly, conducting a *practice-led* research project would bring the rating upwards, but it seems I have recognised reflective inquiry as an important overall influence on day-to-day practice that must have been there all along, much more than I had realised in 1999.

*Starting the research project, I wrote about the Armchair that I did not like to sit on as I connected reflective behaviour with doubt and indecisiveness. Nearer the end of the research project I found that I worked best writing this thesis whilst sitting in the Armchair. Reflective engagement had become very much part of my daily routine and now has different connotations altogether. I wonder how I will feel about this one year from now, or in ten years' time. I suspect this will not only depend on my day-to-day productive practice, how much more aware I am from this moment onwards of the reflective elements of practice, but also on other – social and resource related – circumstances, such as employment. I have noticed*

*that the classes I teach in art school have also increasingly had reflective elements added to them.*

- 1) Another element that could be aligned with reflection is validation. In the week in 1999 I rated my involvement with validation with a 3, as I had been very busy preparing and installing work and felt there had not been enough time to take sufficient distance to validate my efforts. In 2008 I rated my involvement with validation with an 8. In the ideal situation I claimed to rate this in 1999 with a 6, in 2008 with a 7.
- 2) In the *retrospective* validation the contrast is large again, a 4 in 1999 and a 7 in 2008.

*I think I have claimed that I have spent much time and effort validating my practice in week 50 of 2008 because I had been so involved with reflection in my research-practice. Yet, I feel there might be some misconceptions here. The pitfall to this might be awareness. In 1999 I might not have been as aware of the intensity of my self-validation and I am quite sure that this would have been about the rating I would have given my involvement with self-validation in that week. However, looking back, I notice that it was the week in which I had my first large-scale piece sold in an art space. When I brought the piece to its new owner, it was installed in a beautiful spot and put in the place of a well-known Dutch minimalist painter. This whole experience must have been on my mind enough to say that the realistic time and energy spent on validating practical work as rated with a 3 would have to be misleading. Overall, I could even go on to say that, at that time, I still held such grand ideas about my future as an artist that I might have become much more realistic since and therefore one would assume that I would spend less time validating. At the same time the research project has induced more of a feeling of urgency surrounding the validity and validation of my*

*work. All through writing this thesis I have been telling myself what actions to take in regards to my work as soon as it is completed.*

- 1) In regard to Generation, Execution and Experiment, I have rated myself much higher in the 1999 example.
- 2) Not only in a real sense; what had actually been achieved, but also in the ideal sense; what could at best have been achieved.

*I wonder if some form of enhanced realism is at work here or if my ambitions have been toned down under the pressure of finishing the thesis; in the week in 2008, there was a lot of generative work done for this thesis, which may have withheld generative thought for practical products to a degree. My thoughts were turned too much towards language, rather than form or colour. It has happened to me before that elements of a different project, which was an assignment, kept turning up in unrelated drawings as they were in my head at the time. Obviously similar cross-fertilisation often happens in day-to-day practice, but if all impacting elements are independent elements of that practice – with no other agenda, such as academic contributions – this might feel more natural and less intrusive. Again, the ratings need to be carefully questioned, but making sense of them brings about some interesting observations about the conditions of productivity and my own, evolving ambitions.*

### **6.2.3 Social concerns**

**Fig. 32: Table 2.2: Social concerns**



INDICATOR	KEY CONCERN	Reality (time/energy investment this week) (1-10)		Ideal (time/energy investment this week) (1-10)		Retrospective overall time/energy allocation (1-10)		Prospective overall time/energy allocation (1-10)	
Social									
Display Cabinet	Presentation	6	8	6	8	6	7	8	7
Coffee Table	Peer Group	7	8	7	8	5	7	8	7
Studio Garden	Close Commun.	5	8	7	8	5	7	9	7
Computer	Distant Commun.	1	6	3	6	1	7	5	7
Studio Door	Support Systems	7	1	7	1	6	4	7	6

1) On the social front, it is clear why my time investment towards distant communities would have changed.

2) This has not changed in the later columns.

*Although I had a computer at the time, I did not use the Internet often; it was slow, expensive and unreliable then. Now, along with having studied abroad, keeping in touch with distant communities and acquiring information on the net has become much more embedded in my day-to-day life, this was not a surprising factor.*

1) As far as close communities and peer groups are concerned, it seems they have been, and still are, a big part of my life as a practitioner.

2) I rated the overall *retrospective* importance of them lower than I did in that particular week in 1999.

*This must be because, at the time, I had use of a temporary additional workspace in an old church that was to be demolished. I worked there with two former classmates from my BA. Before and after that, my practice was relatively solitary. My partner at the time was an artist as well and we both worked at home. However, I noticed that I preferred to work in a space outside the house with others; because it allows one to choose when to be surrounded by practical work and because it felt more like an actual 'job' to attend each day and meet my colleagues, which encouraged continuity and a sense of belonging.*

- 1) There is also a big difference between prioritisation of support systems. In 1999 I applied for some generic and project funding and for specific funding for an exhibition. The project funding and the exhibition funding were approved, and so I had to finish the budgeting in that week.
- 2) From 2001 onwards I have undertaken little effort towards public funding for my individual practice. I have, however, successfully applied for funding in support of the research project or in support of organisations with which I am involved.

*I tend to relate funding for my individual artistic practice to dependence on the opinions of others and see it as a threat for my artistic freedom of experiment. Even in contacts with professional galleries, I tend to withhold close collaboration in order to still feel free to do as I please. This clashes with my ambitions for my artistic career and this is a problem I need to address. I also suspect it has, besides clinging on to a need for relative independence, mostly to do with pride or protection of self-esteem. My personal 'artist ideal' image must hold 'independence' and 'self-esteem' very highly. Such convictions are quite difficult to pin down, as individual notions of 'independence', 'quality' or 'credibility' will always remain subject to change and connected to ones own narratives about personal history and experiences.*

- 1) Overall, social concerns are rated highly in both weeks.
- 2) I put quite some time into meeting people to talk about art and beginning joint projects with.

*It might seem strange to people around me, but I wasn't so much aware of this until I wrote it out on paper whilst doing this experiment. I still feel like the artist-hermit that clings on to her studio practice and independence. It seems now that I arrive at that feeling of solitude, reflection and independence through contrasting,*

*social activity. This contrast, in balance, is much more a quality and skill than I might have realised.*

#### 6.2.4 Concerns to do with Resources

**Fig. 33: Table 2.3: Concerns to do with Resources**

INDICATOR	KEY CONCERN	Reality (time/energy investment this week) (1-10)		Ideal (time/energy investment this week) (1-10)		Retrospective overall time/energy allocation (1-10)		Prospective overall time/energy allocation (1-10)	
Resources									
Window	Demographic/Spatial	7	4	7	5	5	6	8	7
Tool Closet	Assets	8	1	5	1	8	6	4	7
Clock	Time	6	6	7	6	5	6	7	7
Book Shelf	Knowledge	1	8	7	8	6	7	7	8
Storage Room	Stock	4	2	8	4	2	5	8	7

- 1) The score for time investment towards demographic and spatial resources has been much lower in 2008, than it was back in 1999.
- 2) Satisfactory involvement with my demographic and spatial resources is rated poor in both cases, particularly in 2008.

*This is very unjust, but understandable. I had two studios and an office at the time divided between Newcastle and Rotterdam. This is a tremendous luxury as well as a logistical nightmare. Shows were taking place everywhere and I did not know where to leave my materials and my work. Also: when I was at either one of those places, I felt like I was missing out on the other. This is a typical example of a situation, which I would probably rate entirely differently in retrospect, later on in life.*

- 1) The value I assign to my assets is also a peculiar one. I have rated that very low for this year with a 1 and high for 1999 with an 8.
- 2) However, my prospective rating for 2008 scores a 7.

*This must be because my orientation towards funding, unrelated income and sales were high in 1999. In general, I would rate my efforts towards income in those first years of practice quite high, as there was quite a need for it to survive. As noted before, Hans Abbing (p.87) explains that artists tend to find money very important- as long as there isn't enough of it, although there are, of course, exceptions. If they, on the other hand, have enough to survive on, it becomes irrelevant.*

- 1) Further observations on the status of my engagement with resources include that my investment in knowledge has significantly grown.
- 2) It also shows an increased validation of knowledge towards the future.

*Perhaps the PhD explains why I now rate that element of my practice very low in the past; its importance in the past might have seemed extra small in relation to its present importance.*

- 1) My validation of Time in the experiment surprises me a little.
- 2) Particularly in regard to my ideal situation; you would say that there always is too little time available in relation to the ideal situation, which is indeed reflected in the ratings, but the differences are not huge.

*This is probably because, looking at the realistically achievable goals for a week, I know that there is only a little more time available that I would realistically be able to invest.*

The last observation worth mentioning in regard to resources is my very low rating of available stock. Although I have always been very productive, there is not that much stock of saleable works readily available most of the time. In some cases work still needs framing or printing; in some cases installations or videos

have deteriorated and cannot be shown any longer. *Again, this rating is very subjective and I know that there are works available and, with little effort, there could be a rather large amount of work ready for exhibition. Perhaps this rating relates more to my self-criticism of my lack of commitment towards task completion.*

### **6.2.5 Further observations on the experiment**

1&2) My *prospective* rates seem to reflect higher expectations for my future performance in 1999 than suggested in 2008.

*I noted before that I might have become more realistic towards my ambitions, or has the desire to improve at things lessened over time because I am more satisfied with my achievements? In any case, it seems that my prospective values of all key concerns in the prospective sense are rather equally rated, which I find really surprising. It seems that I find all of these functions important enough to invest time in them, especially Reflection and Knowledge. Again, it is possible these scores will be different in two years' time.*

1&2) The biggest contrast between my *retrospective* rates and my *prospective* rates appear reflect satisfaction with the growth of the emphasis on 'reflection' and a dissatisfaction with a general decrease in emphasis on 'experiment' and 'execution'. Both have been discussed before.

*This means that in the future, I plan to strive towards a more even spreading of time between productive, social and resource-oriented activities. I am looking forward to some designated writing-free days in the studio, at which I plan to leave my computer at home.*

## 6.3 Success Validation and Enhancement

### 6.3.1 Success validation and the personal

The values assigned to the various concerns of practice, in the experiment described in section 3.1, are tremendously situational and therefore temporary in nature. Their impact and meaning can only be analysed and weighed by someone with an extensive knowledge of the situational issues and the momentary status of the practice at the time. This must have an impact on the overall success-conception of the practitioner, which may be contradictory as a result of these complexities: personal and artistic values may get confused with those of the wider world; as a result one can be validating private *value concepts* much more modestly or fragmentary than social ones, or the other way around in *retrospective* self-narrative as illustrated in the quote below;

I don't know what success might be except to be of some good influence, that's success. Nevertheless, quite a few of us are now more well known than the white artists who were so well known in the 1980s that they got bus loads of German collectors coming to visit them. (Artist Jimmy Durham quoted in Doherty, 2004, p183.)

Therefore, it will never be sufficient to statically define the value of *key concerns* towards art practice. Such rating cannot be trusted; neither can it be considered to signal anything on its own. What it can do, however, is help the practitioner reconstruct the situational issues in light of overall ambitions and values and evaluate them by, for instance, asking; *Why this discontentment? Why have I put this much effort into something I do not consciously value highly? Does it help me to get nearer my ideal situation?* As demonstrated by the examples from my own practice, this information can go on to add to awareness of qualities, such as; 'I

*am not a hermit but quite a socially engaged person*', and flaws, such as the remark '*my reluctance to invest time towards access of support systems might clash with my future ambitions*'. Furthermore, it promotes an urge to reflect, and acts as a kind of stimulus to *meta-positioning*.

### **6.3.2 Contradictions in success perceptions and value concepts**

I have noticed how contradictory my feelings about the 'artist ideal' and the 'artist reality' of my practice can be at times. However confident I can be about doing research as a way of active and collective engagement with my field, aiding my understanding of it and contribution to it, that 'happy feeling' about my research achievements can instantly evaporate when I see one of my friends who has put all efforts into their artistic work, now reaping the benefits of good gallery representation and amazing artistic production; or when I am told that, since there are so many artists, I will be likely to contribute more to the discourse in my field than otherwise. However balanced the *prospective* value-allocation of my practice may appear, I thus know that the pulling effect caused by my ambitions and pre-perceptions can swiftly distort that image at any point in time. One would therefore need a process of continuous self-questioning and learning to become alert toward recognising such influences. It therefore seems worthwhile to discuss how much experience and learning is needed to evoke such meaning out of a studio environment, and if the results of such inquiries become more reliable over time, when one becomes more experienced with the critical assessment of ones day-to-day actions.

### **6.3.3 Assessment of strategies in individual practices: can it be done?**

When would one be able to read the signs in the studio? Do you have to learn? Is it a skill? In the discussions I had with foundation year students around random objects as well as art works on tabletops, there was certainly enough comprehension to enter into a discussion about decision-making. However, talking about the same issues with art school students at MA or PhD level or with mid-career artists, resulted in much more reflective *sense-making*. Greater experience and practice reflecting on art practice, as well as more of a practice to reflect upon, clearly adds to appreciating the complexities and time-relatedness of the issues concerned. Experience is needed in order to understand the *flux* of internal values in studio practice, and practitioners are themselves most likely to provide and obtain those and bring them into the general theoretical discourse.

What is really useful about the rating experiment in section 6.2, is that it considers the past, present and future and adds to that a more conscious engagement with the contrast between the *artist ideal* and the *artist reality*. In doing so, it utilises the concept of *identity* as a situational state of mind, rather than a fixed one. This is to say that one's *identity* - and the *identity* of one's practice - move along with situations and perceptions of the past and the foreseen future. The *key concerns* in the *strategic studio framework* can at any time be rated either equal or very different in importance. None of that would be right or wrong, there are no judgements attached to the system; the judgement is left to the artist who may decide for themselves when commercial revenue is important, or learning, or experiment for instance. This way, an *individual value system* of the artist and his or her own success conceptions can be assessed in light of the expectations of that artist at any point in time.



In the rating and evaluation of rating, conducted in the experiment in section 6.2, my own motives are held up against the backdrop of their specific contexts. As a result, it becomes much clearer what defines a successful practical, personal and professional life for myself as an artist in relation to what I strive to achieve towards my socio political environment.

#### **6.3.4 *The value of the practice, presently perceived***

In the first chapter of this thesis, I mentioned coming across a short sentence in the introduction of David Butler's book 'Making Ways' (1988, p. 7), in which it is mentioned that anyone wanting to use the book could not do so, until they have thought through what being an artist means for them. You could say that this thesis explores what this statement might actually mean and how one would be able to do what is needed to answer that question. As a result of my inquiries, it has also become clear that it would be worth adding the words 'at present' to that sentence. What being an artist means to you relies on the timeframe as well as the person involved. This means that, like any *strategic assessment*, one would have to keep doing this groundwork, providing access to how the *key concerns* of practice are valued at the time, as times change.

The processes by which artists make decisions about what they value in their practices and lives are non-linear, iterative, and always in *flux*. They depend on personal, productive and socio political circumstances. How one, by means of the analysis of currently held values in the practice, would best stimulate those, relies heavily on detailed self-knowledge and critical attitude. The small rating experiment showed that answers to that question might not be singular or straightforward. When asked what my practice needs at this time, I would best

not just consider what is lacking today, but also what is lacking in my *retrospective* and *prospective* view of my practice as well as ask, once again, to what extent such needs can realistically be expected to sustain.

This validates my previous conception, that stimulus of art practice, based solely on generic, reception-based terms or agendas would not necessarily benefit the qualities of every practice it seeks to support. It follows that any successful assessment or positive stimulus of the strategies applied in an art practice, would have to consider first-hand information in order to, if only momentarily, access the details of the terms by which success is defined for the practitioner involved. An outsider to the practice would, for instance, only see the calendar or the financial results, yet not the belief system or artistic aspirations of the artist. It is, therefore, highly likely that outsiders would take different measures of success to the practice, which might not be relevant or appropriate to the practitioner. In other words: it is recognised that a practice may be experienced as highly unproductive or unsuccessful by the practitioner, whilst it is regarded as very successful externally- and vice-versa.

Thus, the only way to stimulate the internally perceived strategic needs of the practice is by close collaboration with the practitioner in bringing together needs and expectations from both ends. In contradiction to prevailing ideas on freedom and autonomy of the arts, this research project frames this issue in a practical manner. So, whilst these elements are marked as 'mythological' (Abbing, 2002) in the narrow economical sense, they are indeed very functional and 'real' in the practical sense of the productive and existential continuity of art practice.

Examples of *key concerns* that practitioners may strategise towards and that would be part of a broader interpretation of *an economy* would for instance be

skill building, knowledge-sharing and social inclusion.

### **6.3.5 An economy of decision-making**

The personal experiment, conducted in section 6.2, demonstrates three important conclusions to this research project, which are:

- 1) the possibility of *strategic flux* in the value assigned to the listed concerns;  
what is important one week might be unimportant the next, as well as;
- 2) the self-narrative and self-conceptions involved in this process: their importance as well as their (un)reliability, leading to the observation;
- 3) that it might not be the socially acclaimed value or validity of the work – in terms of product – in itself that affects this *flux* of assigned value and resulting decision-making but rather the self-narrative and self-conceptions of its value or validity within the ongoing process of practice. This can be almost entirely self-constructed or alternatively hugely affected by commentary and validation of others, such as peers or critics.

Hans Abbing (2002, p.31) states that he intends to show, through means of his research project and book, that the myths or persistent beliefs about art and artists make the economy of the arts exceptional. I would rather claim that the 'economy' that is referred to must be too narrowly defined, if it does not allow such *value concepts* to be considered. As Abbing quite rightly notes; human beings are the building blocks of the economy; 'social' values do not really exist in the traditional economical approach. Perhaps it is not the economy of the art that is exceptional, but our definitions of economy that need reframing if they do not take the personal into account. Simultaneously, the frictions resulting from interdisciplinary enquiries like Abbing's, prove extremely valuable towards

addressing such epistemologies.

### **Summary and conclusion following Chapter 6**

Chapter 6 demonstrated ways in which the values that are most actively held by a practitioner towards the various *key concerns* of practice could be accessed and assessed, provided the practitioner is closely involved in this process. The analogy of a personal value system with a stock market - the *personal value stock exchange* - which is always in *flux*, may also bring to light the personal convictions and preferences that shape an artistic *identity*, as well as the impact of a wider context in a historical, topical and future-oriented sense. It has been demonstrated how the discursive method can evoke and clarify the presence and prioritisation of practical or conviction-based elements that inform tactical adaptation at different times, and to what degree those could change the overall professional *strategy* of the practice. In section 3 of this chapter, it has been explained that a practitioner judges the success of the practice in accordance with their *individual value system* and that one would have to find out as much as possible about the origins of such personal values in order to determine whether practical and conviction-based decisions are rightly justified, or if the needs of the practice will not met by them in the long run.

The experiment also signals that, whilst artists are prone to be very considerate towards negotiating their ideals with reality, they are also very closely involved with their day-to-day activities inside and outside of the studio, which can make it difficult to take a critical distance from the personal convictions involved. So, as much as *strategic assessment* of art practice needs the presence and critical engagement of the artist in question, there would also be a need for tools that

help provide both a sense of critical distance and a framework of handholds for critical self-assessment and discourse.

In the final chapter, the discussion about the contributions of this research project further intensifies. Besides suggesting and evaluating possible practical applications and theoretical implications, a thorough evaluation of the research project as a whole takes place. This evaluation will, of course, include recommendations for ways of communicating the findings and suggestions towards future research.

## **Chapter 7. Conclusion**

### **Introduction to the Chapter**

In the first section of this chapter, critical suggestions are made for some practical applications of the *strategic studio framework*. This is followed by an assessment of the theoretical implications of the overall research findings in section 7.2. In each of these two sections, it will not only be discussed for whom the research might be useful or interesting but also under which conditions. What would, for instance, be needed to deliver the findings to communities with the relevant practical and theoretical interests and how could they be stimulated to use it and how would that be monitored? Lastly, section 7.3 is dedicated to an overall evaluation of the research project, and the degree to which its key questions are answered in this thesis. Suggestions for future research are also included in this last section.

### **7.1 Practical Applications**

#### ***7.1.1 Anticipated users of the strategic studio framework***

I anticipate that the practical applications of my research findings would primarily consist of the use of the proposed *strategic studio framework* in reflective self-assessment conducted by fellow visual arts practitioners at various stages in their careers. In order to achieve functional application of the framework as a reflexive tool, the artist needs to be given the opportunity to be introduced to concept of using objects as indicators of decision-making. The best way to help individual

artists become acquainted with the framework would be by publishing a trades-edition of this thesis as a book. This would of course not only allow a wide range of individual practitioners' access, but also for instance policy makers and educators' access, which would make it a contribution to other fields of practice as well. In my opinion, it is important to address each of these audiences simultaneously, because the framework functions best if the objects become part of the collective jargon of relevant interpretive communities. If this thesis was to be edited into a book, it would, in my opinion, benefit from some other practitioners' perspectives on their engagement with each object. I would, in that case, probably add two short individual replies on each object from artists at different careers and life stages. It would also be interesting to add some short commentary of a selection of educators, curators, professional coaches, agents and policy makers as well. This would also give me an opportunity to see how the objects and their generic concepts are seen to act from different frames of reference.

I also intend to make an abstract of the *strategic studio framework* as well as an abstract of the research project itself available online via my website, to make the core ideas presented in this thesis available as soon as possible.

### **7.1.2 The *strategic studio framework* as a tool for group discussion**

The second way this method might work is through the use of it in collective environments; for example, like during professional training in art schools. I have experienced conversations about the different roles of indicators like the Easel and the Coffee Table in different practices. In those conversations, focussing on the role of one indicator at a time, would add both distance and clarity to an

otherwise complex discussion. Furthermore it prevents the discourse to remaining too reliant on externally imposed definitions of success alone; it encourages people to talk about the day-to-day concerns of their practices and their own expectations of it, as well as about what others might expect from them. The list of generic concepts, motives behind decision-making, were tested in seminars and amongst colleagues. The fifteen proposed concepts stand up; none have been added or taken away from the list. Much like de Bono's 'Six Hat' framework, reference to, or application of the *strategic studio framework* is hoped to function as a practical tool towards taking a broader and more distant perspective (a *meta-position*) in conversations about practitioner's strategies.

### ***7.1.3 Possible appropriation of the framework towards other disciplines***

Application of the *strategic studio framework* in other environments such as the performing arts or organisational studies would, of course, not be entirely unlikely. I would be keen to contribute to more research about for instance the 'Strategic Home', the 'Strategic Office' or the 'Strategic Theatre', preferably in a collaborative setting. Aside from appropriation of the framework of *key concerns*, I can see two further areas of practical use for the research:

Firstly, the argument of this thesis might, of course, be of interest to those professionally involved with the arts in a different respect, such as cultural management students, curators, museum directors or policy makers. It could diversify and broaden their interpretation of how individual strategising takes place in art practices and what key motives impact upon such strategising and on individual perceptions of success. This may, in turn, affect the way they go about



their respective processes of decision-making. This can also be said about relevant areas of academic research. I will explore the possible implications of this in section 7.2: theoretical implications.

Secondly, throughout the 'coming-into-being' of this thesis I have come to realise that, aside from the obvious users such as artists and educators, the story about practitioners strategies as told within the body of written work is also the story of personal value systems that should play a part in assessing any form of strategising. Writing my thesis during an economic crisis of global proportions, it became even more important to think of the term economy in a wider sense; as a complex system that is not just affected by what people earn, but also by what values and beliefs we assign to our day-to-day lives. This is not to say that my research process would directly address our social or behavioural attitudes, but it could be used to aid the discussion about personal values and labour, for instance. As discussed, there has been sufficient debate about the functionality of governmental and corporate involvement in stimulating the arts (Abbing, 2002; Eastham, 2009 and others).

It is clear, that my *practice-led* approach considers the inherent qualities of individual practice beyond direct satisfaction of pre-set external agendas. Moreover, preconceived notions about what artists are supposed to do could not deliver anything but unsatisfactory results to a field in which *values* like experiment, knowledge and skill are *key concerns*. The approach taken towards financial encouragement of some practices does not relieve the financial burden of society, neither does it make artists less dependent. It also makes only a few more prosperous, without any guarantee that they would have not made their art work in a better way otherwise. On that point I agree entirely with Hans Abbing.

To change that situation, the ideas in this thesis and the insights of authors like Abbing will have to encourage a conviction within funding boards and policy makers, that gaining the best from the inherent capacities of the practitioners' cohort will be beneficial. By providing inside information from first hand experience, I expect to at least have added to the argument that should accomplish such conviction.

This thesis questions the notions of 'economy' and '*strategy*' used in the context of art and reframes them, to better suit the *value concepts* of individual art practitioners'. I can imagine the outcomes of my thesis rendering less certain many stubborn public notions of artisthood. As an artist, I am regularly confronted with a great amount of misunderstandings about my profession. In that respect, I have been keen to contribute a more detailed transcription about the wide array of personal, artistic and professional considerations that determine the successes and failures of an art practice at any given time. I can imagine that at least a few of my non-artist relatives and friends would gain a much clearer idea about these complexities and their value than normally, from my response to their inquiries into the financial revenue of my work. In a discussion on a regional online forum, David Butler comments on a forum posting about the situation of artists in the economical crisis:

The issue of the art market is, I think, largely irrelevant in terms of artists' incomes generally since it has always provided a relatively small slice of the cultural economy. However, it is an arena that has taken up possibly an inappropriate amount of artists' attention (and similarly a large amount of public attention). (Butler, 09/03/2009).

I would like to emphasise that strategic analysis and the approach and tactical adjustments suggested in this research project are by no means conclusive: that is precisely the point. *Action research* of individual practices should remain alert to the *flux* inherent to their processes and to the environments they move within

and amongst. A practitioner would come to different insights and conclusions about the functionality of his or her strategies at different stages of life. A key point I believe to have made in describing my personal dealings with my studio life is that an artist - any artist - will always have to negotiate between idealism and realism to a certain extent, and the life and work situation of that particular artist can draw him or her more towards one or the other.

## **7.2 Theoretical Implications**

### ***7.2.1 Contributions to the field of practice-led inquiry***

The relatively young field of *practice-led* research in the visual arts owes its origins to the shift of the standard research orientation of research methodology in the social sciences from positivist inspired science and controlled experimentation towards a more subjectivist philosophy. The former was not designed to record or permit analysis of complex micro-practices in complex environments, let alone be participatory whilst collecting the information needed to complete the research. In acknowledging that there is always a degree of subjectivity within any objectification, it is recognised that contributions are always, to a degree, situational. Therefore, only a very broad spectrum of these situational studies will ensure a sufficiently informed theoretical field. Within this more subjectivist take on theory, research is conducted in order to fill gaps in existing knowledge as well as to re-evaluate and challenge it (after Barrett & Bolt, 2007).

While not exhaustive, this study offers new proposals for research methodologies that would suit and fully benefit *practice-led* inquiry conducted by the *studio*

*theoretician*, who, in contrast to a 'gallery theoretician', would consider the productive needs, motives and attitudes of day-to-day practice. This thesis has provided several suggestions towards tools for reflective inquiry and discourse, using studio furnishings and other non-art objects as means to aid distance and to generate and structure reflective data. I imagine this to be useful to other practitioner researchers who look to transcribe their day-to-day practical experiences towards more general conceptualisation of their research ideas. Also, apart from proposing tools for a more detailed and suitable, strategic inquiry of individual practice, my research has focused on how the strategies, applied in individual artistic practices, can be influenced by productive, social, and logistic considerations. As a result, the work has provided a theoretical understanding of the complexity of even the smallest decisions, their origins and potential impact on the decision-making of an art practitioner. This is intended to promote a more in-depth understanding of the highly differentiated field of individual visual arts practices. As such, the research can encourage the exploration of alternative attitudes towards professional practice and the assessment and validation of the success of individual art practitioners strategies. Such a change in attitude and understanding would allow greater democracy towards the acknowledgement of specific inherent qualities, embedded in the practice- and how they might be encouraged. This, it is the contention of this research project, would, in turn, deliver more flexibility in arts education and policymaking, which would benefit a more diverse array of art practices and stimulate their most vital qualities.

### ***7.2.2 Contributions beyond the field of practice-led inquiry***

In undertaking an investigation of visual artists' strategies, I was faced with a shortage of directly aligned research. Aside from several authors who describe

artist's strategies as complex and exceptional (Abbing, 2002; Arts Research Digest, 2005 amongst others), and some discussions of individual strategies, not many researches have attempted, let alone succeeded, in developing ways to evaluate the strategic considerations active in individual practices, beyond those directly related to economic status. As a result, this research intends to raise some concerns about the lack of insider knowledge, which is due to occur in assessment of the relative success of individual practices when one is looking at them from a purely reception-led orientation. My *practice-led* approach means to add some of that much-needed practitioner experience and insight to that debate.

During this research process I have become more aware of how interdisciplinary discourse can bring to light interesting questions about similarities and difference in the sociology of our respective working and thinking methods. I have found this to be very inspiring and constructive and intend to initiate or engage in more interdisciplinary collaborative research whether within or outside the academic environment.

## **7.3 Evaluation and Recommendations**

### ***7.3.1 Restatement of purpose***

This *practice-led* research project investigates the decision-making processes of individual art practitioners. It asks what problems one is likely to be faced with when attempting to gain access to the detailed practical, personal and professional information required to assess decision-making in art practice. This is followed by an investigation of the studio realm through reflective studio inquiry into what the key motives - beyond economic and recognition for instance - would

be in the decision-making processes of art practices. A framework, consisting of fifteen studio objects or furnishings as indicators to fifteen *key concerns* emerges from the *re-versioning* of reflective writing. This *strategic studio framework* is proposed as a tool to access and assess decision-making in art practices.

Through another reflective writing experiment, values are assigned to the *key concerns* in the framework, demonstrating the prioritisation process in day-to-day practice. It is subsequently discussed how the *flux* between different values of the practitioner can be interpreted, and how one would be able to assess the relative success of the decision-making process towards one's own practice. From this assessment, then follows a better understanding of what would be needed to improve or stimulate such practices on their own merits.

### **7.3.2 *The two rooms revisited***

In the introduction to this thesis, the proposition was made that the studio environment provides more detailed information about the artist than an exhibition of completed works. The previous chapters have exemplified what kinds of information artists, as *studio theoreticians*, would be able to acquire from reflexive investigation of the studio realm and the day-to-day activities in their practices. It will also have become apparent to the reader that such information is not of the kind that one would necessarily connect to interpreting an exhibition of completed works in a gallery, as it concerns the day-to-day decision-making of practitioners rather than the critical perspectives of exhibition audiences. At Northumbria, we work on the principle that production is a very different experience from reception and it is therefore concerned with different needs, preferences and routines. *Practice-led* inquiry is specifically suitable to investigate interpretive experiences in the studio realm. Strategising in art practice concerns

more than the execution and sales of artworks; it also concerns the balance between features such as social wellbeing, experiment and skills.

The research project calls for a very precise set of definitions and a related glossary in order to ensure that its audience will grasp the correct meaning of words like '*identity*' and '*strategy*' within the context of this research project. There are many different fields of research into those subjects that could be of relevance and I realise that, within those areas, their specific use and meaning might differ. It is impossible for someone with my specific background to comprehend every possible set of assumptions and epistemologies that may be attached to these concepts, for any one of the potential audiences that might read the work. Therefore, I have aimed for a solid explanation of my use of these terms and my personal reading of them early on- and have, apart from adding a glossary, at various points adapted or elongated terms in order to clarify their meaning.

The project was initially set up to include both quantitative and qualitative data analysis. Very soon it became clear that questionnaires do not make it possible to achieve the kind of detailed and relational information that I would need, in order to shed more light on the complex issues of decision-making in art practice. This became most apparent when I gave a studio colleague at university, Alan Lyle, one of the questionnaires as a trial. He immediately asked me in which capacity I wanted him to fill in the questions; as the artist who works on commission or as the artist who works independently. Given the multiple jobholding of artists (Arts Research Digest Research Feature, 2004, p.1) and the ever-changing relationships to their work (Weintraub; 2003, p.9), quantitative data could spell disaster for the credibility of my results and my supervisors convinced me not to

use questionnaires. The interviews that would be conducted with a cross section of respondents would serve to clarify things. My supervisor, and later the examiners in the Mid Point Progression viva, advised me to focus on my own experiences and, anecdotally, those of others I know well. This makes sense, as I had then already arrived at the conclusion that a full-scale *strategic assessment* of a practice can only be conducted if there is sufficient access to all kinds of different aspects of it. In other words: you would need extensive knowledge of the personal motives of the practitioner. Therefore, quantitative analysis would have provided a false sense of factuality and unreliable findings.

This makes it logical that the information I could provide in this thesis has been mainly about my own practice and some of the people whose working methods I am highly acquainted with, like my studio neighbour, or Hans Abbing through his written work. This also frames the potential use of my methods as as a self-assessment mechanism after which discourse could take place to add a fresh perspective towards the functionality of *strategy*. It also proves why, from a reception-led perspective, it has never been possible to construct sufficiently complex insights into the *key concerns* of individual art practitioners beyond employment and economic status (which are things which can be measured).

The combination of reflective writing on decision-making in the studio with my literature research, and regular discussions with peers, has eventually led to framing *key concerns* in decision-making in the *strategic studio framework*. The proposed framework respects the different values assigned to the various concerns in different cases. It offers a way of assessing what works and does not work, by means of the practice situation. Although it is impossible to claim that my own practice is representative of ‘art practices in general’ – it certainly is the



contention of my research that there is no such a thing - I am confident that I have offered valuable insider insights into the notion of practitioner strategies. Such insights are vital to gaining access to the motives behind individual decision-making and to setting up the *strategic studio framework* successfully. I am confident that my contributions present a suitable take on *strategic assessment* of art practice. As a *studio theoretician*, I offer an example of the value that *practice-led* approaches can have towards wider understanding of art practices.

Within a *practice-led* research project, the investigation is highly affected by the specific experiences and observations of the practitioner in question, without which the resulting practical suggestions and theoretical contributions would have been unlikely. The flip side of that coin is, of course, that the data and analysis are, to a large degree, based on the experiences of one practitioner. In my case, my single viewpoint is used to create an approach accessing and assessing motives behind decision-making that would be useful to other practitioners. In order to ensure that my ideas had some level of generality, I have had regular discussions with other artists about their motives, in which I kept asking myself if the values they expressed could be considered *retrospective* or *prospective*; if they sounded practical or illusionist and to which indicator they could belong.

The ethical difficulties facing this research process are limited, as the reflective inquiry makes use of mostly personal data about my own practice. I have asked the other artists to whom I refer, to read relevant sections and they have provided me with written agreements for their views or my description of their studio to be used, pictures included.

### **7.3.3 Summary of contributions and recommendations**

As stated in the introduction to this thesis, I was motivated by questions about how art practice relates to concepts such as *corporate identity* (Cooper & Press, 1995, p. 29), *identity awareness* (Thomson, 2001, p. 5) and *strategic awareness* (Olins, 1995, p. 1128). The idea was to discover if and how, within the highly complex world of art practice, models for *strategic assessment* could be appropriated or, if needed, invented. Soon after starting the initial inquiry, I was able to frame some of the key problems that appropriation of those concepts would have, as further explained in Chapters 1 and 2. In light of these observations, I decided the initial questions would need to be reframed as: firstly, how can strategies in art practices be determined without categorisation of artists into types, considering the individual character and situation of the art practice and the practitioner and the personal aspirations of the artist within it; and secondly, would it be possible within that complexity of individual functions, to create a framework that could be used as a tool to access and assess decision-making in art practice, offering enough flexibility to suit such a wide array of individual practices?

With regards to the recent reception-led and often quantitative research conducted into indexing artist's working conditions and income situations, it is diagnosed in "*Researching Artists' Working Lives*", a Research Feature of the Arts Research Digest (2004, p.1) that;

'Valuable though this data is, particularly when it comes to monitoring trends, it is a widely shared view that the broad occupational categories used by these surveys do not reflect, sufficiently, the complexity of artists' working lives.'

This is an incentive for this research to fill in some of the blanks from a *practice-led* perspective. The work already done by Abbing on the exceptionality of

economics within the art world and how this affects individual practitioners, has been a good starting point towards suggesting a more differentiated approach towards accessing and assessing the strategies used by individual art practitioners.

The added insights this research provides are not only likely to benefit *strategic assessment* of individual practices and critical discourse amongst creative practitioners, they also contribute towards a wider understanding of the considerations taking place in the productive, social and functional spheres of art practice. It suggests a different approach to recognising qualities and values embedded in these practices and thereby the opportunities they provide to support and enhancement of those qualities. For educators, policy makers and others involved in professional support of art, this suggests new opportunities to be of value. My '*object-led discourse*' has, I hope, helped reinforce a detailed, *practice-led* 'ecology' of relationships between function and practice and the more general environment in which artists have to operate.

I am confident that I have provided a thoroughly *practice-led* account of what decision-making can be like in art practice. This has ranged from suggesting the *strategic studio framework* as a tool with which one might successfully access and assess the decision-making processes in an art practice, to including the practitioner in the debate on what constitutes *strategy* and success. In my approach I feel I have succeeded in avoiding categorisation (into types of artists) and continually maintained a flexible approach. When a *key concern* like 'reflection' takes precedence over a practice on a specific day, week or year, this does not constitute a robust characterisation of that practice, because we would still have to investigate what the background to that precedence may be and how

it sits in between the past and present ambitions of the practitioner. The Framework works on the basis of acknowledgement that this precedence may change at any time resulting from other things becoming more important in the day-to-day procedures of practice.

This study is therefore not an attempt to undertake a retrospective, what we at Northumbria would call, 'reception-led historic' analysis, aiming to classify practitioners and the things they validate in different timeframes. Rather, I am concerned with the here and now of that practice, its current concerns, ambitions and needs. This is likely to suggest new ways of stimulating the internally perceived qualities of the practice- so that when the products of practice arrive in the public environment, they are more likely to succeed.

This thesis aims to encourage other *practice-led* researchers, as well as reception-led researchers, to further explore how decisions are made and success is conceived in individual practices. I envision this thesis having an impact on the academic discourse in a number of arts related areas, which the fine art PhD group at Northumbria would describe as reception-led and respondent-oriented, but also, for instance, in organisational sociology. The way in which life and work is balanced and which achievements are seen to be most rewarding, may be quite unique in art practice; however, there is a strong relation with sociological theory that could be further explored.

Most of the reflective experiments focused on the nature of my own individual decision-making processes, and therefore other artists' individual practices have not been discussed at length. The focus of the research has also not attempted a theory on collective or corporate environments. I am, however, very interested to

know how my results might translate into corporate theory. At the points in which I had to let go of this theoretic field in order to establish a more fitting point of departure, I am confident that the research could be picked up and re-appropriated by theorists involved in organisational *strategy*, organisational psychology, complexity theory or *organisational aesthetics*.

This thesis also provides analytical insights that would allow reception-led theory on art practitioners' strategies to progress in dialogue with the *practice-led* position. In this regard, I am confident that this *practice-led* inquiry has contributed many points for further discussion on the subject of practitioner strategies. I will be very interested in the response that the research project further generates, both from productive and receptive angles.

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## Appendix

### ***Overview of artistic practice and related activities during the PhD***

In this Appendix, you will find a synopsis of artistic work and activities undertaken during the time I conducted my PhD research project. You can find more images, as well as a full resume, on my website: [www.jolandebosch.com](http://www.jolandebosch.com).

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## Overview of artistic practice and related activities during the PhD

2005

July 5:

Attendance Research and Consultancy **Conference**, Participated in **Poster Competition** (2<sup>nd</sup> prize), Northumbria University Newcastle.

**The Artist and Corporate Identity**  
exploring strategic identity awareness in fine art practice

Johanne Bosch  
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**Supervisory team:**  
Chris Dorsett (Northumbria University, Newcastle)  
Amick Bourgaignon (Essec Business School, Paris)  
Katja Lindqvist (Bologna University, Bologna)

**Supported By:**  
Arts & Humanities Research Council  
northumbria UNIVERSITY

**Background**  
After graduating in Fine Art in Holland I studied communication. During my graduation project on strategic identity awareness in small organisations I started wondering about the differences and similarities between individual visual art practice and business theories that concern strategic and identity awareness.

**Start Date of the research:**  
October 2006

**Research Question:**  
Can the desire of the professional artist to communicate an artistic identity be understood, by analogy, through the notion of 'corporate identity' and 'strategic identity awareness'?

**Methods**  
- **Practice Led**  
Research takes place whilst retaining an active studio practice. This places me within both an academic research community and an art school community.  
- **Literature research**  
Of books and articles relating to the fields of interest.  
- **Quantitative research**  
Using questionnaires and SPSS.  
- **Peer group**  
Attaining more specific feed back by selecting a small maximum variation sample from the results of the quantitative analysis. This sample of around 12 artists that work in the UK and in Holland can help me confirm or question assumptions during the research projects.  
- **Building a relevant network of knowledge**  
Extending the existing pan-european team involved in supervising my research by contacting and introducing relevant research(ers).

**Approach**  
The research is meant to be an inquisitive exploration across the broad field it is based on in order to develop a practical theoretical viewpoint that can be of use to other researchers, arts organisations, educators and policy makers.

**Difficulties**  
Although the journey of practice led research is a very personal one, my research asks questions about other artists' practices too. I thus need to make sure I get as much input and feedback of other artists as possible to help me maintain a broad enough perspective.

**Expected outputs**  
I expect the outcomes (thesis and exhibition) of this research to clarify the richness of contributors involved in artistic and strategic decision making inside and outside of the studio walls. In relating to existing ideas about corporate identity, I will discuss contributions and influences that are and could be made in education and policy. These discussions will be exemplified by my experiences as a practicing artist.

**Diagram: Visualisation of the exploration, narrowing down to the central issues**

**Contribution**  
In the Arts Research Digest (i) it was stated that: 'The way in which artists earn a living, the conditions in which they work and systems that support (and sometimes hinder) them have been increasingly popular subjects of research in the past fifteen years'. Some books have been published recently that are of interest to the subject (ii). I expect the outcomes of my research to provide a clarification as well as an artist's reply on those topical issues. To my knowledge, not much research has been done on the particular subject of artists' strategic awareness as relating to their personal identities from an insiders point of view. As an artist with this particular background of art school and business communication training and with the use of the expertise of my supervisory team, I feel confident to be able to cast a new light on the process of strategic decision making in western European art practices.

**References:**  
i Arts Research Digest (30, Spring 2005), Research feature 'Researching Artists' Working Lives' p. 1  
ii Abbing, H. (2002) Why are artists poor? The exceptional economy of the arts. Amsterdam University Press  
Roberts, A. (2003) Conceptual Art and the Politics of Placidity. Cambridge & Mass: The MIT Press  
Bakshian, L. (2004) Art Incorporated: The story of contemporary art. New York: Oxford University Press  
Wentzels, L. (2003) Making contemporary art: how today's artists think and work. London: Thames&Hudson

Below: some examples of my studio work and work on commission

research poster

September-October:

**Researcher in Residence** (RinR Placement) in a secondary school in Hartlepool, supported by the AHRC UK

November:

Opening Gallery Suite Research Center, **Group Exhibition**, Northumbria

University UK

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November:

*Signs and Portents*, **Group Exhibition**, Frances Thirlway Fine Art, Durham  
UK

*you are invited to the opening of*

### **signs and portents**

Friday 18 November 2005 at 6pm  
Antioch House, Crossgate, Durham  
(next to Miro Hair, opposite St Magaret's Church)

Please reply to:  
Frances Thirlway Fine Art, PO Box 461, Durham DH1 9YZ  
07913 792753 info@francesthirlwayfineart.co.uk  
[www.francesthirlwayfineart.co.uk](http://www.francesthirlwayfineart.co.uk)

FRANCES THIRLWAY FINE ART



*The Four Hobby Horses of the Apocalypse*  
Matthew Cowan (2005) (detail)

The exhibition will be open from Saturday 19<sup>th</sup> November  
to Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2005 between 11am and 3pm  
(EXCEPT closed on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2005).  
Works by the following artists will be available for sale:

bob barron - janie bickersteth - eleanor bowen  
jolande bosch - mike clay - matthew cowan  
david gross - bill harris - ian hunter - james  
johnson perkins - stephen livingstone  
graham mason - frances mullarkey  
paul nieuwenhuis - stephen william ward

FRANCES THIRLWAY FINE ART



*Eleanor Bowen*

Invitation

## 2006

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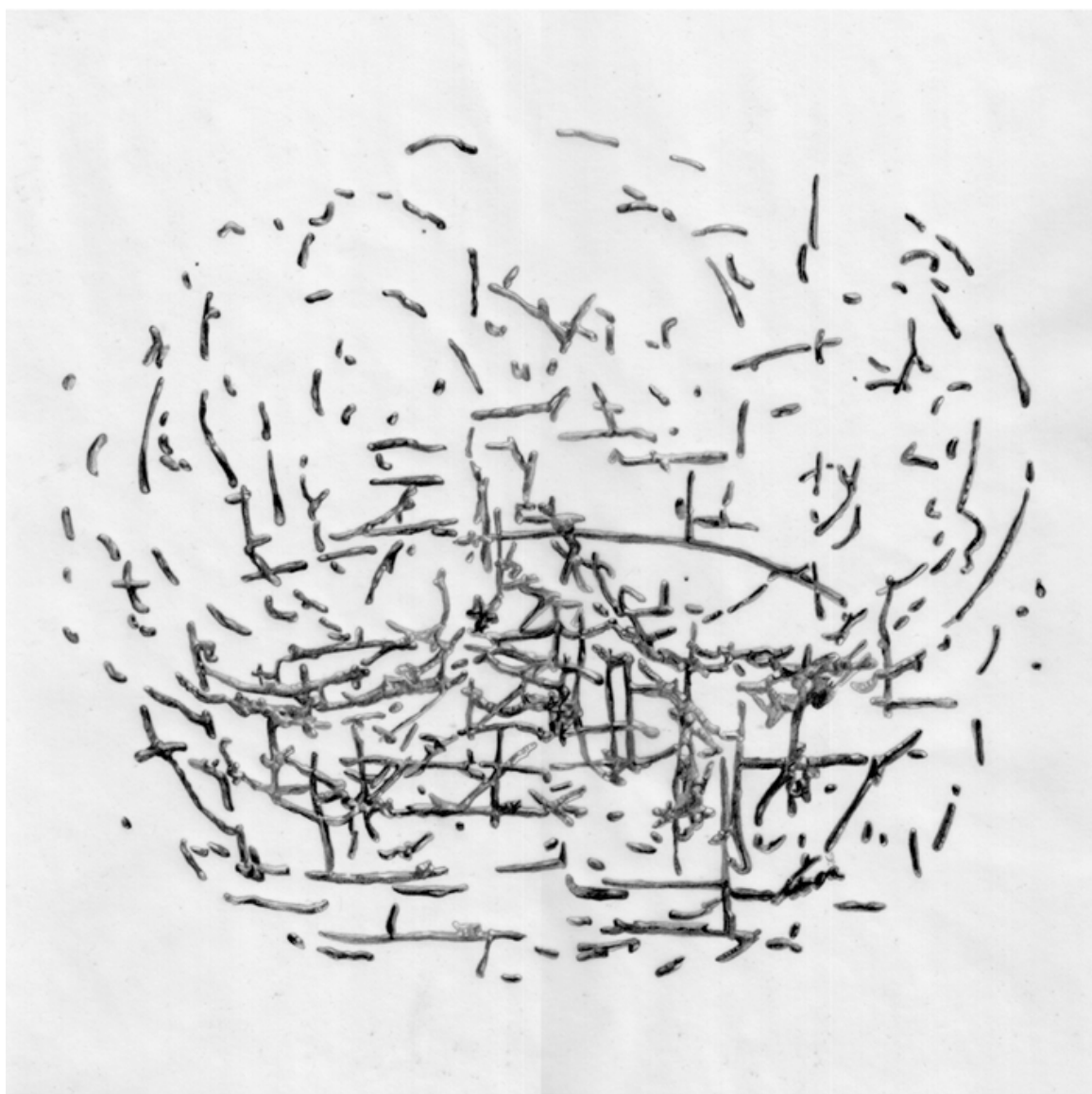
October-November:

*'SWAP 195'* Exchange Project, **Group Exhibitions** Postgraduate students  
Edinburgh School of Art and Northumbria University SC / UK

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August:

*'Art in the Garden Crook Hall: the Draughtsman's Contract'* **Group  
Exhibition**, Durham UK



Drawing, 2006, 30 x 30 cm, pencil on paper

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July:

'Conjunction06' **Group Exhibition**. My work was at Seven-Seven Gallery in London and in AIR Space in Stoke-on-Trent UK



My work on show in Stoke-on-Trent (left) and in London (right)

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March:

Affordable Art Fair London, **Fair**, Represented by Frances Thirlway Fine Art UK

## 2007

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January 25:

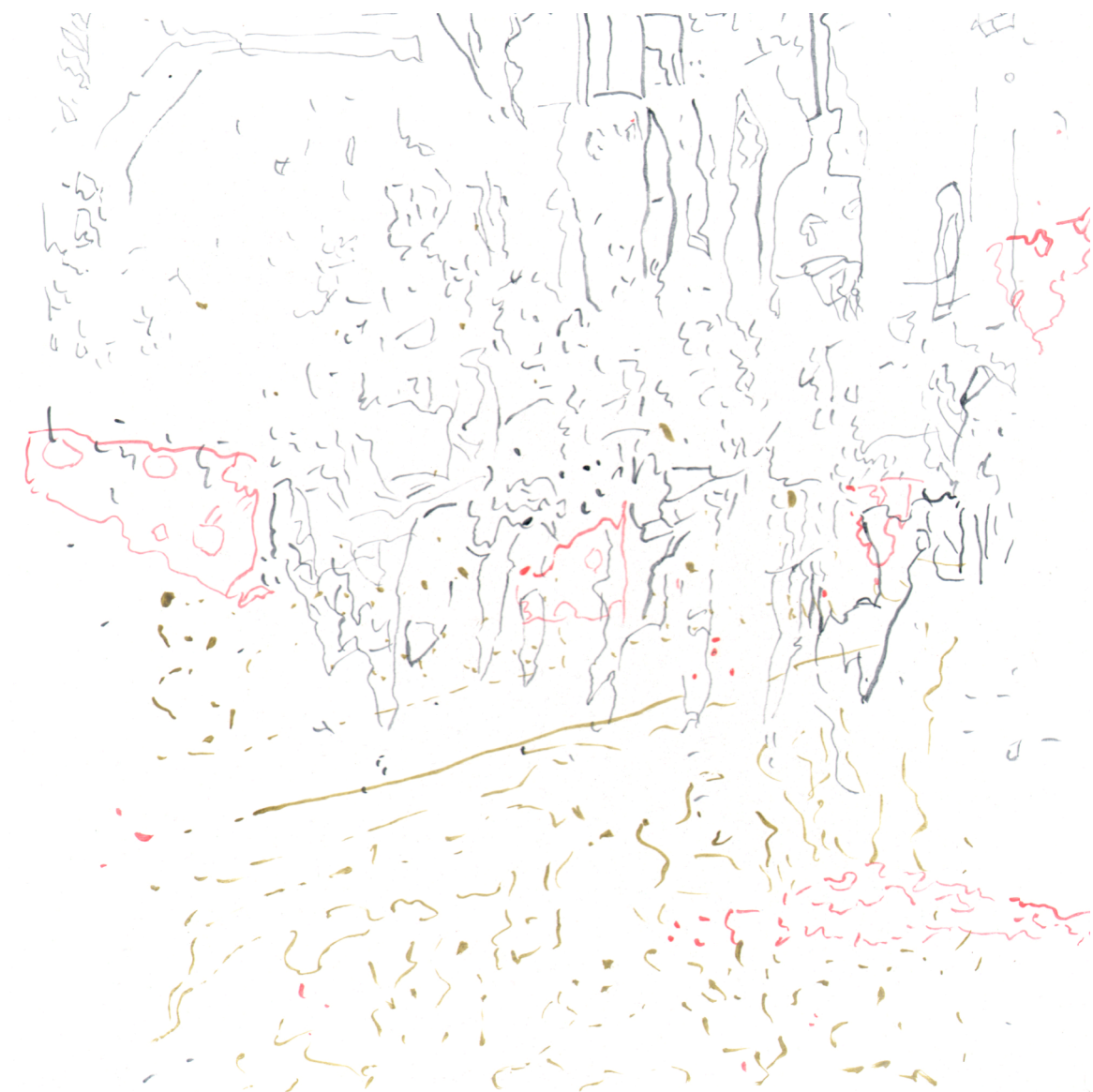
Involved in organising the student led **Conference** '*The Secret Life of the PhD*' at Northumbria University Newcastle UK

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February 12-13:

Attendance **Conference** '*Inventing Methodologies2*' on practice-led research, Goldsmiths College, London UK





**Oil on board, 2006, from series of 365 boards, 2005-2006**

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March:

**Teaching** Idea development, 3 evening classes short course (Orientatiecursus), Foundation Course, Willem de Kooning Academy Rotterdam NL

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April 24:

**Mid Point Progression Viva**, examiners: Mary Mellor and Daniel Dahl

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May:

**Artist in Residence** with sculptor Eelke van Willigen invited by Virginie Janssens Foundation in Mas de Charrou, Dordogne FR



**Inside Virginie Janssens house at Mas de Charrou during the residency**

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September:

**'5' Group Show** Galerie 300% Schiedam NL

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September 8:

**Talk about my research project** at symposium 'Het Kunstenaarsatelier' (The Artist's Studio) Stedelijk Museum Schiedam NL



Drawing, 2007, Ink on panel, 95 x 95 cm.

## 2008

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Jan-March:

**Teaching** Idea development (8 evening, 5 day classes) Foundation Course (Introductiecursus) Willem de Kooning Academy Rotterdam NL

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May 15-17:

*Affordable Art Fair*, **Fair**, represented by Frances Thirlway Fine Art UK

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March 19:

Practice-led PhD research students organized **conference** '*All Maps Welcome*'. Northumbria University Newcastle UK

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March-April:

*The Digital View*, **Group Exhibition**, Arti & Amicitiae, Amsterdam NL



Exhibition view Arti & Amicitiae (my work is on the left wall)





**Digital print on forex, 2007, from collection of 50 images, 40 x 40 cm.**

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April:

*Archief, Duo Exhibition*, Smudge Gallery Rotterdam NL

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May-June:

*Mooie, Lange, Groene Pauze, Duo Exhibition*, Pand Paulus Schiedam NL



Invitation

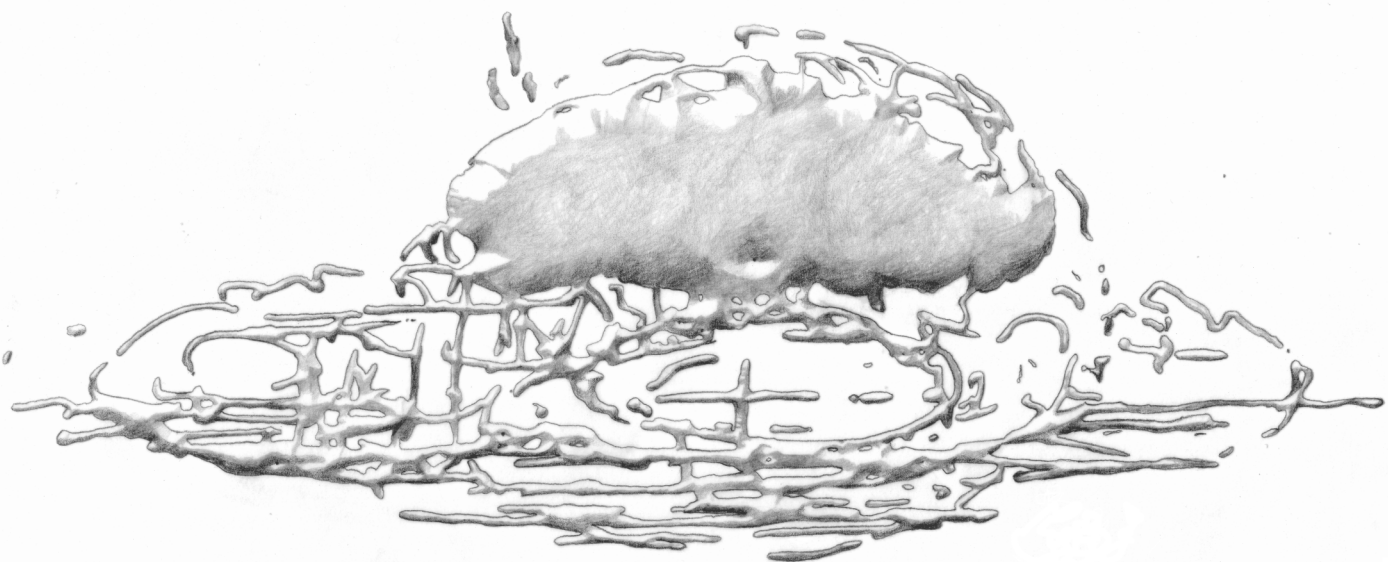
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May 9:

Meet the Philosophers: **Presentation** of my research and **discussion** with philosopher Peter van Zilfhout and a group of invited artists, philosophers, art historians and a theologian. Den Bosch NL



Pictures made during the discussion after my presentation

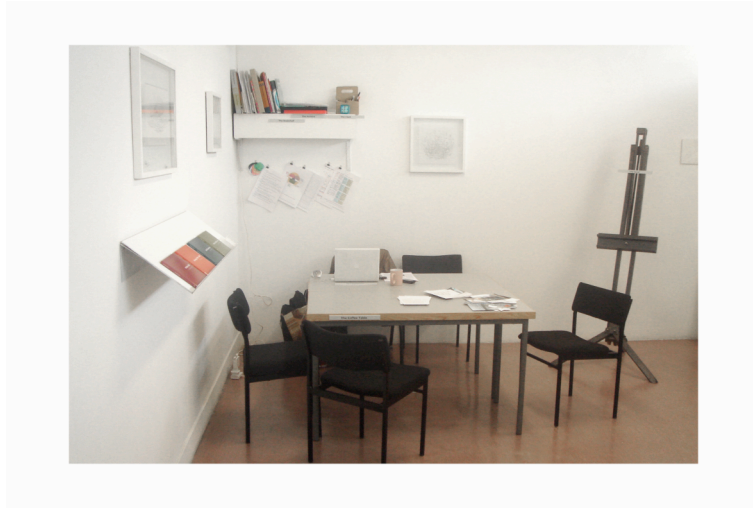


Drawing, 2007, pencil on tracing paper, 25 x 40 cm.

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September:

*Postgraduate Degree Show, **Group Show**, Northumbria University UK*



**Overview exhibition space**

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October:

Publication **Essay** 'Notities bij de praktijk van het kunstzwemmen' in *Innerlijke Spiegels*, edited by Oscar Schrover, Ansgar Editions NL

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November 29:

**Panel Discussion** about the imaginary with Peter van Zilfhout, Dorothea Franck, Peter Anton van Gennip and others (open for public), Den Bosch NL

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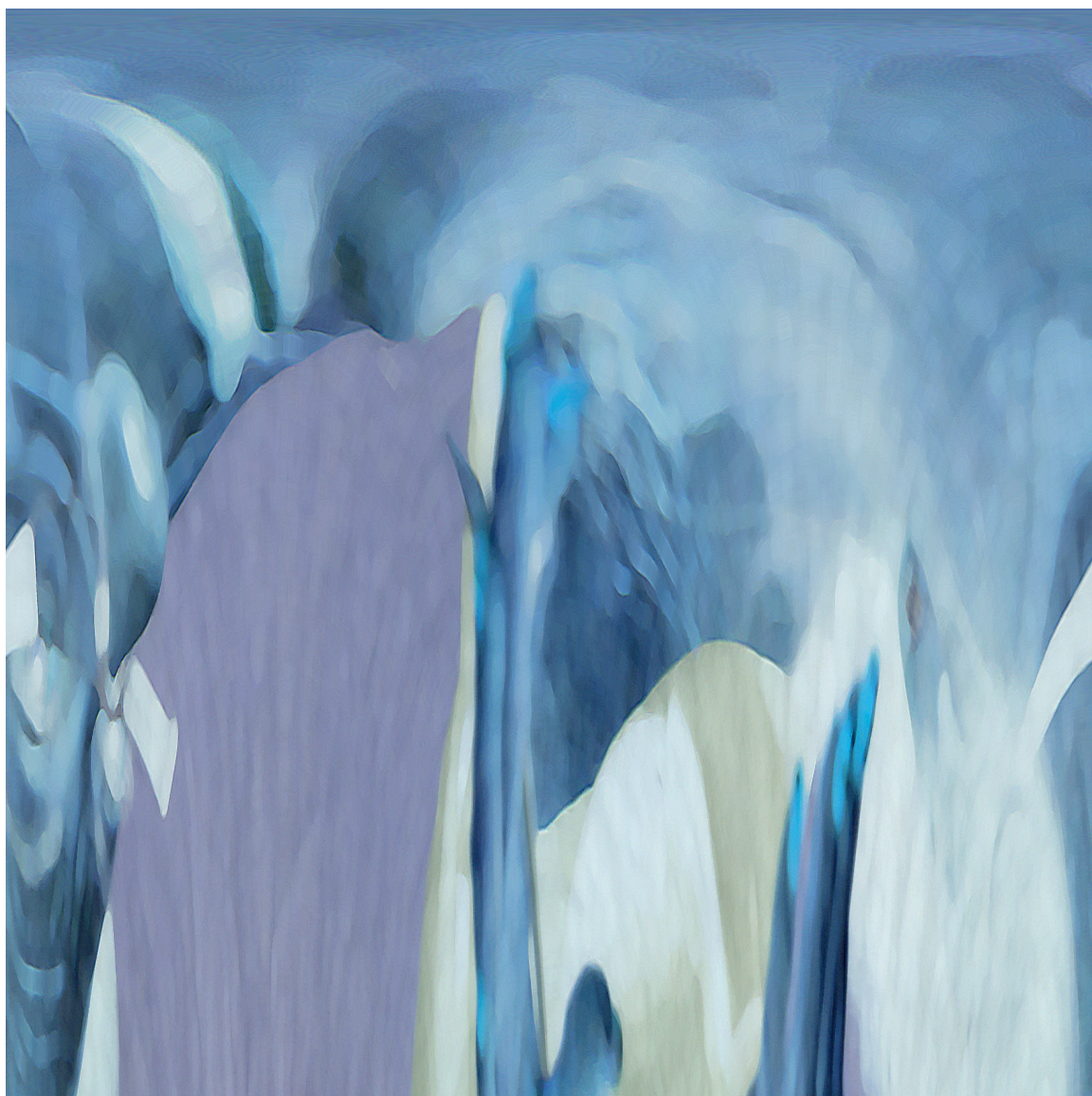
November 20-23:

Involved in **organisation** of '*Suikerzoet Filmfestival*', in historic buildings in Schiedam, NL



**Banner Filmfestival**





**Digital Print, 2008, from series of 50, 30 x 30 cm.**

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November-December:

'Wederzijds' **Group Show**, Kruithuis Den Bosch NL

## 2009

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January:

*Horen, Zien en Zwijgen*. **Group Exhibition**. Gallery 300Procent Rotterdam  
NL



**300procent** presenteert

**HOREN ZIEN ZWIJGEN**

Jolande Bosch, Jenna Tas, Efrat Zehavi

12 december 2008 - 14 februari 2009

Invitation

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Jan-March:

**Teaching** Idea development (8 evening, 5 day classes) Foundation Course  
(Introductie cursus & Orientatie cursus) Willem de Kooning Academy Rotterdam  
NL

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March 18:

Attendance **LOK Conference** of lectorats (research project divisions) in arts in the Netherlands. Utrecht School of Arts, NL

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April 20:

Founding of **Center for Study of the Imaginary** (provisionary title). Thinktank and Journal editorial. Members include: Oscar Schrover (publisher), Dr. Dorothea Frank (philosopher), Dr. Peter van Zilfhout (philosopher), Prof. Dr. Ilse Bulhof (philosopher), Dr. Peter Anton van Gennip (theologian), Drs. Mirjam van Rijen (art historian) and myself at Fontys Eindhoven, NL

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June:

'*Vit. PhD (Packing for the Crash)*', **Group Exhibition** practice-led PhD group Northumbria University, Gallery North Newcastle UK

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June 16

Leading a **salon discussion** at '*Matching: de kracht van co-creatie*' about the 'new rules of the arts' in a symposium together with Dr. Judith Thissen, University of Utrecht in Smart Project Space NL (planned, June 16)

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## **Forthcoming**

**Talk** at 'Luce', Post-academic institute Utrecht University NL (expected in October 2009)

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**Collaborative essay** with Dr. Ilse Bulhof (philosopher) about repetition and refinement in artistic practices. (planned, September 2009)

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**Exhibition** in Doetinchem NL (planned, November 2009)

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**Group exhibition** in The Hague NL (planned, November 2009)

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