The spaces in between

Relationships in participatory work

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In his book *A Fortunate Man* (1967) John Berger reflects on the ways in which the GP, John Sassall negotiates his place as an outsider, and builds connections in the village where he works. This happens partly through becoming involved in joint enterprises. Berger points to an occasion when Sassall is part of a group of men who are trying to mend a car engine. ‘It is as though the speakers bend over the subject to examine it in precise detail, until, bending over it their heads touch’. The meeting place, where connections are made, is the work.

In this paper I want to examine the building of connectivity through the enterprise of making a piece of work together. As I have written elsewhere, a project can create an exoskeleton, holding a group of individuals through its purpose and direction, and allowing them to co-create bonds within it. Claire Bishop cautions against valuing work only because of the social bonds created (The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents ARTFORUM 2006), but I am aware that what manifests between people, and not only within individuals, in terms of growth, experimentation, connection, impacts the work being made, and the experience of making.

I will revisit research that I have undertaken for Magic Me, into the way in which different art forms invite participants to connect with one another in very diverse ways, (Detail and Daring 2010), and introduce my current research project, where I am examining the action of gratitude within three participatory projects, a ‘granularity of tiny interactions’[[1]](#footnote-1) that create a reciprocity that strengthens the individual and the group.

1. Madeleine Bunting: Guardian Newspaper October 10th 2011 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)