Dunedin Does Not Exist

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Of the 2,342,075 articles currently and rapidly increasing on Wikipedia,[1] the most interesting for us is the history of Wikipedia's origins, co-founded by Jimmy Wales and Larry Sanger in 2001.[2] By 2004 it had become clear that Wales and Sanger had unsolvable, contrasting viewpoints on the structure of Wikipedia's open collaboration model.[3] Most notable were fundamental differences on the philosophies of peer-review and self-management, arguably two of the guiding principles of Wikipedia's current success. While both agreed that 'open-collaboration' was the best model, Sanger proposed success through an expert-led culture closely managed by executive leadership,[8] Wales' belief was that self-direction through communal governance would warrant its own successes.[4]

This project aims to consider the wiki platform and whether it facilitates self-direction by collaborative researchers or rather requires executive management. Specifically, within collaborative art practice, can a wiki articulate a shift from traditional collaborative methods? Of course, collaboration is not new nor limited to the internet. Collaborative artistic practices were explored widely and by numerous artists in the 1960s and 70s, with groups such as Fluxus creating an international network and profile. Similarly in the 1980s collaboration or co-operative enquiry became particularly interesting to computer scientists. "Research in Computer-Supported Co-operative Work" was a term first coined by Irene Greif and Paul M. Cashman in 1984.[5] Further, contemporary public art proposes a collaboration between people and art through the use of public space as a site for experiencing art. It is widely celebrated in biennale culture where art floods a city affecting more than just an art audience.

One Day Sculpture is a New Zealand-wide contemporary art series consisting of 20 new place-responsive public artworks (across 5 cities) by a selection of national and international artists. The series begins in June 2008. Led by the Litmus Research Initiative, Massey University, Wellington, New Zealand and UK-based curator Claire Doherty (www.situations.org, University of West England), the project is realised in partnership with galleries and artist-run spaces around New Zealand. The parameters of each art project are that each commissioned artwork will exist for no more than a 24-hour period. The works will range from sculpture and installation *in situ* for 24 hours, to performance and itinerant interventions at moments throughout one day.[9]

The Blue Oyster Art Project Space in Dunedin,[10] New Zealand, commissioned three geographically separate artists to work collaboratively to create one piece of work for *One Day Sculpture — Dunedin* and proposed to use the internet to inform open collaboration. Querying how different perspectives and knowledge of a place affect site-specific sculpture, the internet becomes another site if you like, and the one we could share with geographically disparate artists. The network becomes a tool for connecting the local (and terms surrounding site-specificity) and the 'internationality' of the artists' practices promised by the project. To some degree we hoped to use the internet as a way of critiquing site

specificity, and in particular an art biennale culture of landing and briefly (or thinly) engaging in site in order to produce art. How much could this communication, documented via a wiki, 'thicken' our relationship with a distant and physical location? This paper specifically focuses on the online research period and presents an analysis of the issues raised by this method of contribution to a shared project with a geographically disparate community. The finished art exhibit will take place in Dunedin, New Zealand in December 2008.

Selection of artists

We defined our parameters through our selection of the artists in terms of both their familiarity with located and mediated art, and their proven ability to work with other artists collaboratively. Each offers a different perspective and knowledge-set of the project site. Douglas Bagnall[11] is a New Zealander who lived in Dunedin as a student. Adam Hyde,[12] another New Zealand artist while never living in Dunedin, was a regular visitor, and maintains connections with communities in Dunedin, while living in Europe. Walker & Bromwich,[13] having visited New Zealand one previous occasion, have never actually visited Dunedin. All artists have also previously worked in conscious ways with site, and with digitally mediated artworks. They each have exhibited in international contexts. Rachel Gillies and Caro McCaw as project curators also embody this relationship. Rachel arrived in Dunedin from Edinburgh, UK two and a half years ago, and Caro has lived in Dunedin for the last 20 years. In the group, the only person who had met everyone face to face prior to the online collaboration was Rachel. Some of the others knew of each other but had never met nor knew about each others' practices.

Space for research

Our original plan was to use a wiki to share an active research space, almost a pre-cursor for everything up to the actual work itself, but in reality we found it hard enough to get email responses from artists. We began an email discussion list as a shared but private conversational space to start addressing notions of Dunedin that might help us develop the project. The emphasis of the wiki was necessarily shifted to become a storage and archival space for the material we found, so that all the artists (and project team) would be able to add and retrieve from the wiki as a common database. This signalled a doubling-up of the iterative process happening in the e-mail list, being 'copied' to the wiki.

Experience and reflection

Many artists and designers work intuitively in an iterative process that includes application, experience and reflection. Graeme Sullivan argues that visual arts research is "dynamic, reflexive and revelatory".[6] The expanded time that is enabled through the use of a shared electronic space (e.g. wiki, e-mail group) across several time-zones and continents should therefore insist on a process of reflection. However, we identified that in the wiki model, the *communication* of that reflection is a separate problem. Expecting people who are in separate locations (and who don't know each other) to

communicate meaningfully about their own creative actions and reflections, was more difficult. A creative, iterative process requires application, reflection and then action. In an artistic collaboration, the action is usually the making of an artwork. In collaborative research, the action is the 'active research'; the precedent to the next application of research material. The iterative cycle could not be completed without that action — and in this case, did not reach the action stage due to ineffective communication. We understand that these artists all have a strong understanding of making art and are all familiar with digital processes, however, this does not equate to effective collaborative communicative processes at a distance.

People matter

The *One Day Sculpture- Dunedin* wiki started as a centralised repository to replace the physicality of the location, Dunedin. (Dunedin Does Not Exist.) We had hoped that similar to the Wikipedia model, the critiquing/reflection would happen between the artists as a group and as part of their own practice. However, unlike the Wikipedia model, we found that executive management *was* required.

Some months earlier, Adam Hyde spoke as a keynote at a New Zealand Digital Art Symposium[14] and commented that "…a technical platform is not an automatic community…".[7] We realised that we had assumed too much. We had assumed a shared technical ability amongst our group, based on our own skills and knowledge about some of the group's members. We had assumed a community as involved as we were, at a very early stage in the project.

While all the artists were able to read and respond to emails, the geographic gap became a social distance with many personal matters unspoken. This in turn reflected a difficult creative process. In this instance, the wiki does not articulate a shift in the collaborative process, but a paradigm shift was required for the wiki to become an effective platform for a collaborative arts model.

1   http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/Special:Statistics visited 9.39am 22nd April 2008

2   http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_Wikipedia visited 9.42am 22nd April 2008

3   http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_ Wikipedia#Controversies visited 10.08am 22nd April 2008

4   http://en.Wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_ Wikipedia#Development visited 10.32am 22nd April 2008

5   Grief, Irene. 1988. *Computer-supported Cooperative Work: A Book of Readings*. Morgan Kauffman Press.

6   Sullivan, Graeme. 2005. *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in The Visual Arts*. London: Sage.

7   http://symposium08blog.aotearoadigitalarts.org. nz/2008/02/23/adam-hyde-some-things-i-have-learned-about-tending-networks/ visited 12.35pm 23rd April 2008

8   In 2006 Sanger launched 'Citizendium' "the world's most trusted encyclopedia and knowledge base" where the "general public and experts collaborate, using their real names" with this very model. [6]

9   Additionally there is a project microsite www. onedaysculpture.org.nz where audience and artists can collect updated information on the latest artwork developments and public events.

10 http://www.blueoyster.org.nz

11 http://halo.gen.nz/

12 http://www.xs4all.nl/~adam

13 http://www.walkerandbromwich.org.uk/

14 Adam Hyde was a keynote speaker at the Aotearoa Digital Arts Symposium, 2008 http://symposium08. aotearoadigitalarts.org.nz/