

"Where is the artist in all of this?"

Notes on "Echo" by Wendy Kirkup.

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1.

Almost 2 years ago a geographer and an artist shared an office and some ideas about doing research on medical imaging.¹ Since then the geographer has not got very much further with his investigation whilst the artist has been busy. The geographer isn't too disturbed by his lack of progress since it is not so very unusual for ideas to remain in the form of a few notes on paper or some headings on a small computer file called 'medical imaging project' stored in a folder marked 'ideas'. After all having an 'idea' is not such a great labour. Nor in fact thinks the geographer is it some mystic spark of inspiration without which there would be no art or new artefacts brought into the world. There are billions of bright little sparks in the world and only a couple of hundred steel foundries. Just as there are echoes to be found everywhere, whereas ultrasound is a scarce collection of imaging equipment. Ultrasound is probably not something which we exactly take for granted nor normally see everyday, yet we now assume its definite existence and what it can do for us as a stable, straightforward scientific machinery². It does what it does, what more do we need to know or see?

Amongst other hopes the artist might entertain about the purposes of her activities is to help us know, see, hear and otherwise sense the world differently. She hopes perhaps to make imagination (and not necessarily *her* imagination) perceptible³. She finds imagination in the most unexpected places and the help she offers is as a guide in noticing imagination in these places too. To do so has required bringing together a collection of people and things which are normally far apart in a topological sense and a lot of hassle, struggle, cutting and pasting, phoning and arranging besides. The

¹ An earlier essay on the research carried out by Wendy Kirkup in the lead up to 'Echo' can be found in Laurier, E. 1999. Ultra-sound, art and geography, or, On the difficulties of taking pictures of the insides of your body. In *curious, artists' research within expert culture* (ed.) S. Brind. Glasgow: Visual Art Projects.

² For a much more detailed exploration of this sense of technology as a fragile project see Latour, B. 1997. *Aramis, or the love of technology* (trans.) Catherine Porter. London: Routledge.

³ This is a concept I take as much from Raffel, S. 2000. *Imagination*. Edinburgh: M'script, Department of Sociology (copies available from author), as Wendy Kirkup's comments on her work.

geographer has watched with some degree of awe the lengthy and complicated process whereby the artist's research turned into a 'product'. There have been crossovers between his practice and hers whilst he has been doing his steady work of ethnography, report writing, conference presentations and reading. Much of how they get their jobs done, as they have frequently remarked to one another, is the same. It is at the end of the artist's researches that something distinct was made, something quite different happened. Site-specific art unlike ultrasound is not something we take for granted nor that we expect to be the same everywhere we find it, even if that might help us at least recognise it as site-specific art. What does it do, how do we know or see it?

The story this essay tells pick up around a mid-point in the passage of "Echo" from idea to product. It only gains its position as a mid-point by being seen retrospectively now that "Echo" has come and gone at least once. There was no standardised procedure that made sure "Echo" appeared, it could just as easily not have happened or become something else. And yet there are regularities, organisational forms and known sequences which helped the artist shift along, and helped the initially distant elements begin to associate one with another.

There was, for a start, a mid-week public lecture at "visual art projects" who had funded the artist's research fellowship. Although titled as a lecture, "Mapping the Body within the City" it was more of a round table discussion given by the artist, the geographer and their friend and colleague: *the professor* (of human geography). Why they chose to discuss rather than lecture about their shared topics of interest was in part to reflect on the slightly different tack each took through their material. They wanted to rehearse for the audience a selection of the debates they had had over the past two years of collaborating with one another. Debates they had had over coffee and pizza slices in a deli called "Little Italy" near their offices, debates that continued in bars, over meals, once whilst crossing a city putting-green interrupting play, by telephone. Since they were no longer sharing an office the predominant way they were able to keep up with one another was by e-mail:

The artist wrote in an e-mail dated from September 1999:

I thought that I should ask S. if she had an overall idea of the sorts of general areas she hoped that all 5 of the seminars could cover. She ... did say that in many ways the broad umbrella under which the seminars sit is one which addresses the relation of art practice and the spaces of the city, as these concerns are central to the policy of Visual Art Projects. She also said that as a broad theme we could think about ideas of mapping (kind of broad enough to fly a space-ship through) but perhaps if tied to specific areas of our own interests...

The artist continued in her e-mail pushing toward questions about how human geographers, amongst others, think about space. Having been in a geography department for a year she had learnt to be careful about mentioning maps in relation to geography. So she suggested that it would be interesting to think about spaces that were unlike maps. Paralleling some of her own thoughts on performance and space she queried the geographer about the mutual elaboration of the two:

anyway, even though there is a dynamic relation here (between both the way we think about space and the way that we may think about ourselves) this must have some sort of static foundation which becomes quite interesting. So if I think about physical spaces then I really want to say that the overall design and the specifics of architecture (and following on from this any sorts of art-work ephemeral or permanent) has a role in the shaping of the perception of that space and may, in the end, affect the perception and the performance of the individuals that occupy it (which, of course, it must, otherwise we wouldn't have places like the Arc de Triomphe and the network of streets and boulevards that lead towards and away from it).

The artist went on to point toward the importance of the street plans and architecture of the city as metaphors for the self and technologies for the production of certain forms of urban subjects. Yet she urged an equal attention to the interpretative activity of its dwellers and builders (of all kinds) which in turn inform the design and architecture of the city, in a cycle.

And the geographer picking up where the artist left off:

... we think space and space thinks us. Maps are documents with a particular history and a particular way of ordering space. And the kind of spaces you might want to differentiate are those of Cartesian geometry from, say, spaces performed as regions (a classic geographical way of arranging places) through specific sets of connections, to more fluid spaces. It is the latter forms of spaces which tend to shape writing on medical technology that I have been reading. However at the 'Sociality/Materiality' conference I was at, the separation of network spaces from fluid spaces was criticised as a reductionist treatment of Bruno Latour's thoughts (see 'Laboratory Life', 'The Microbes/The Pasteurisation of France') on actor-networks which were certainly not as a HARD NETWORK (i.e. bits of engineering, axles, hinges, forceps, measuring instruments) as they have since been treated.

To loop onward to your last sentence, we might then come to saying something Deleuzian about folding or pleating as the active spirit/self. Which is to say that a 'self' does not have 'content' but rather is an intensity through which flows, movements, lines are deformed/bent/reformed/diverted. And that 'perception' is not something done by an 'internal' consciousness to an 'external' reality, so there is no back and forth between performance and perception as separable ways of going on, there is rather always an ordering contingently unfolding...

In response to this somewhat sketchy description the artist asked for some more details, especially about actor network theory which she'd already heard quite a bit about from several other geographers.

Pleased to be indulged in his ability to produce lengthy e-mails, the geographer went on:

Actor-network theory is/was a 'refrain' that came out of the Sociology of Scientific Knowledge, Science and Technology Studies and Ethnomethodology... Some of its principles are relatively straightforward and yet carry immense ramifications and can be very hard to 'think'. The best way to start is by considering the title... actor-network theory... which is the axiom that any actor is also and always a network, and a network is also and always an actor. So if we think about a classic Latourian example, a self-closing hinge (called a 'janitor/doorman' in French) can only be understood in its relation to a door, a building, the activities that go on in doorways such as opening and closing doors, holding doors, jamming doors open to carry furniture thru them, and that a self-closing hinge might be thought of as a social actor as much as simply an object. This is the most common move in ANT: to show the social agency of 'a non-human thing', however, an equally important move was to show humans as relational entities rather than essences... a nice point from Michel Serres (another French clever type) was to think about how even when we 'write' (somehow supposedly an utterly human activity) the pencil, the paper are co-actants in the writing, that is the pencil also writes us (and I guess this may be a quite banal comment in art studies). However the pencil point (bad pun!) is extended to all kinds of other non-humans that we work with, so for instance "the professor" has been researching on animals and society⁴ for a long time now and as you know I'm interested in telephony⁵... A key point is that 'things' are not essential, they are effects of actor-networks... contingent orders that can collapse as easily as they were briefly held together... as a body can dissolved back into a different disorder by the arrival of cancer... And scale and duration are again effects of how actor-networks are assembled, organised and arranged, rather than as causes. Actor-network theory is particularly opposed to BIG causes such as 'the economy', 'Politics', 'the cultural' etc. and looks instead always at HOW affairs and activities are accomplished in the specifics of any situation, and who become apparent as actors in any of those situations⁶... So it has a picture of pockets of order in a larger picture of disorder (or rather there is no larger picture).

There's an argument that 'network' as an over-arching term does not provide for understanding other possible topologies (especially medical ones) and yet this, to repeat myself, is only tenable if a reductionist reading of Latour is made... since he has been keen to emphasise rhizomes, capillaries etc. as ways that things are drawn together into more complex orders...

And the coda on all this is that ANT has been gobbled up, barely chewed over and swallowed by cultural geography and sociology - without ever really paying attention to its implications, it has been slotted in as yet another 'theory' when it is really barely

⁴ See Philo, C. (1995). Animals, geography and the city: notes on inclusions and exclusions. *Environment & Planning D: Society and Space*, 13, 655-681. (The original e-mail did not include endnotes – more's the pity that e-mail is not easily foot or end-noted.)

⁵ See Laurier, E. (forthcoming) 'Why people say where they are during mobile phone calls', *Environment and Planning D: Society & Space*.

⁶ Callon, M. & Latour, B. (1981) 'Unscrewing the Big Leviathan: How Actors Macro-Structure Reality and How Sociologists Help Them to do So', in K Knorr-Cetina & AV Cicourel (eds.), *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, pp.277-303.

a theory at all and certainly does not fit at all well with other 'high' theory such as psycho-analysis, Marxism, regulation theory, post-colonial theories etc...

At the seminar there were a mixed audience of artists, art students, medical historians, philosophers and geographers. The artist and the geographer thought their discussion was relatively well received, though the professor remained a little worried. In a brief exchange of e-mails afterward:

The artist:

The professor seemed a bit unsure about the seminar format...did he elaborate later?

The geographer:

Just that he like to everything pre-organised, making more improvised remarks is a little alien to his way of presenting material...

The artist:

What did your sister & her boyfriend think.

The geographer:

They seemed to enjoy it but were a little disappointed that we didn't say anything very technical about ultrasound or MRI or neurology. I think they were expecting some strange kind of Horizon and Hi Art crossover but I don't think that's our style. I'm pleased that we didn't 'blind them with science' or 'art theory'

2.

For a while after the seminar things went quiet as both the geographer and the artist were busy with other projects. The artist was briefly up in Scotland to visit an archive of medical machines stored by one of the hospitals. Whilst there she was given a great deal of assistance by the archivist, to the point where he became involved in organising a mini-exhibit of ultrasound devices which was shown at the Hunterian Museum in Glasgow as a preface to "Echo".

As the summer approached by coincidence the artist and the geographer in their separate institutions were editing videos, the artist for "Echo" and the geographer for the research project he was working on. They were both struggling to acquire the craft of cutting moving images and soundtracks together. In the past the geographer was tutored on a linear machine by a trained sound editor. He's now discovering that he never really paid enough attention - the friendly editor was always quietly assisting so that the geographer had the impression that he was a competent editor, whereas really he was talking his way through the editing and the editor's trained hands and ears were *handling* the machine.⁷

⁷ Finding where the action or indeed the skill is, if it's NOT in the heads of the actors but rather in the practical work of activities is suggested in both Latour, B. 1986. Visualization and cognition : Thinking with eyes and hands. *Knowledge and Society* 6, 1040 and Lynch, M. 1985. Art and Artifact in Laboratory Science, A Study of Shop Work and Shop Talk in a Research Laboratory. London: Routledge.

Editing with linear machines is more time-consuming and requires advanced planning, since once a cut is finally made it cannot be undone without a great deal of effort. The geographer knows this because video-editing alone he has made mistakes, cursed a lot in the tiny hot unventilated university editing suite and started over several times. Digital machines, like the one the artist is using, have the same easy reversibility of actions that computerised word-processing has. Until the video is committed to tape or CD or DVD it remains open to endless cutting, re-cutting, pasting, copying, doing and undoing.

When they chat about editing, the geographer expresses his envy of the artist's apparently labour-saving digital editing machine. She on the other hand grumbles about the sheer amount of time in front a whirring computer that it's taking her to put together the piece with Final Cut Pro (the digital editing software package). The geographer sympathises as best he can, he only uses a software package at the very end for transferring his edited videos to digital format so he has very little idea of all its nuances.

Aside from all the complications put in place by their different machines they both puzzle over the art they are having to learn or have had to learn. The art of cutting. It still seems new to the geographer because most of his time is spent either doing fieldwork or writing up fieldwork. The artist attempt to do her cutting in a phenomena-specific style each time, learning from the format she has been researching, in a previous work it was CCTV whose particular formats she hybridised with her artistic practice.⁸ This time she is concentrating very hard on the way medical experts collect, organise, cut, view and review their ultrasound material. Her ethos is not to lose the medium which she has spent a great deal of time finding in the first place.

The trouble with footage and sound is simple and familiar for any editor of moving images – to have a stock of strips of action, a stock which is nearly always and perhaps necessarily more than can be used for the work which they wish to assemble. Cutting is required to remove unwanted strips and to grasp the shots which will later be cut together to form a continuous, if punctuated, sequence of sounds and images. Cutting is a rich and ambiguous verb since like 'cleaving' it can be used to describe splitting apart what was unified and joining together separate entities. It makes the geographer think about how actor-networks can be cut-up or cut-off and equally how 2 or more might be cut together. A *cut-up* becomes a *cut-to* become a *cut-together*. This is all quite vague of course since it's ignoring the particularities and the difficult lessons that can be learnt from what video and film editors are actually doing.⁹

With little time and even less art the geographer is 'rough cutting' – the simplest way of progressing from strip to strip. Meanwhile the artist is step-by-stepping forward:

⁸ See: SEARCH - Pat Naldi & Wendy Kirkup, Videotape (8 minutes). An anthology of 20 ten second television adverts collected onto one videotape, featuring documentation of the artists on a synchronized walk in Newcastle city centre, recorded on a 16 camera surveillance system installed by the Northumbria Police. And: SEARCH: Newcastle and Adelaide - Pat Naldi & Wendy Kirkup Videotape (8 minutes). An additional development of the original Newcastle upon Tyne project, recorded on a camera surveillance system installed in Adelaide. Available from Locus+ (<http://www.locusplus.org.uk/>)

⁹ MacBeth, D. (1999) 'Glances, Trances and Their Relevance for a Visual Sociology', in P. L. Jalbert (ed.) Media Studies: Ethnomethodological Approaches, University Press of America, New York, pp.135-169

dissolving, wiping, cross-dissolving. Finding new ways of joining her strips of sound and image together in jumps, pauses, mergings and jars that stay as close to possible to the original material, as “found footage”. She purposefully avoids recolouring the footage, especially since the colours used in the original scans are frequently vivid. Indeed she is intrigued by the excellent choice of hues made by the original designers of the ultrasound image processing software.

With hours and hours of documentary footage the geographer understands one of the reasons why rushes are called rushes as he skims through them by twisting the round plastic knob on his linear editor. One of the pleasures of his editing machine is that it retains sound whilst winding unlike a home VCR - at FF a car engine whistles like a teapot and long conversations twitter by in seconds. He has gathered an excess of footage of suburban people doing suburban things for a research project he has been doing on a city neighbourhood. Most of his un-interrupted and ‘real-time’ video of everyday life will have to be cut away to produce a slight narrative that interrupts itself before the viewer gets bored and looks elsewhere. He has to cut together what he wants and he is still not quite sure of what that is.

With her ultrasound samples the artist has a smaller supply of images, and where the geographer’s are so ordinary they might be tedious, hers are already extra-ordinary, as are the doppler ultrasound samples. Fixed viewpoint monochrome scans of an eye blinking, skin made permeable by the penetrating gaze of ultrasound, whose distinctive speckle further disrupts the familiar vision of a blinking human eye. Rustlings and rumblings. Sideways sliding scans of bones and tissue which unfurl – again in monochrome grainy translucent detail like a seascape where the viewer can see depths, rippling solid surfaces and shadows upon shadows through the silvery liquids. Sonar pulses out of synch. Three dimensional sections of tissue which are made 3D by rotating them on the screen. A shock of orange, yellow and reds - blood vessels picked out by computerised image processing. For a moment it looks like a star chart, then a tree-shaped red lightning bolt as the arteries flash up. Almost too much to watch and listen to. Even the extra-ordinary, in quantity, will be rendered dull. Fireworks watched for four hours.

The artist looks at the images a lot. An awful lot. She goes away and has cups of coffee, does various other things. The video sequence has to be constructed, re-arranged and has to run along its own time-space (the possible time-space of a video?) She picks out the scan of the eye as an opening shot. It's an arresting vision that she and the ultrasound technician struggled hard to produce months earlier. More artful than many of the other images it will signal, with a wink, the diversion of ultrasound from its clinical purposes.

Once a first shot is put in place she tries adding a strip to follow. She wants to avoid jarring, perhaps to stop each scan standing alone. A mapping of one body section to one scan is the way it would be considered as part of the professional practices of radiology and diagnosis. Wipes and dissolves will help draw the viewer along with ultrasound as a not entirely medical way of seeing the spaces, forms, depths and shapes of the human form. Seeing them as matter assembled rather parts anatomised. Using the sonic similarities between the ultrasound and submarine sonar; its rumbles and tweets as a soundtrack to laminate across the cuts of the visual sequences of “Echo” slides the

attention along from strip to strip. In these incremental arrangements and others the artist finds way of progressing her work.

It would be a mistake to evaluate the videos of the artist and the geographer as films, animations or documentary in the expected sense. Which is just as well since by those expectations an audience might well ask for their money back. "Echo" - the twenty minutes of video of ultrasound images is only a part of the artwork. Unlike a Hollywood blockbuster which is meticulously packaged so that it can be shown in the specific anywhere that is the complex of cinemas, Echo's aim is to be shown in a specific somewhere. A place where the artist has spent weeks or months doing her research in order to locate her production there. A production which will echo the distinctive histories and geographies which find themselves networked together and performed in that space. Yet "Echo" is also mobile, never finally locatable, since that would be to mistake the nature of space and assume that anyone one place has a fixed map of co-ordinates into which "Echo" could be placed. "Echo" also as Bruno Latour would say, makes its own context.¹⁰

3.

Two days before "Echo" takes place (or maybe: place takes "Echo") the geographer and the artist are doing their best to meet up. There are all kinds of last minute hitches with "Echo" which, fortunately, the artist is only partially involved in since she has the assistance of Locus+ team. A large projection screen is being attached to the side of the University Tower onto which the artist's video will be projected. The university tower is a spikey dark edifice which juts out of the Victorian gothic of the university's oldest and central building. It's also one of the highest points in the city and thus one of the most exposed. With rain and high winds catching the screen like the square sail on a motionless tall ship there have been threats from various regulatory bodies. If the wind speed crosses a certain level then "Echo" will have to be cancelled, the risk of damaging a listed Victorian building or a spectator are too great. To establish whether this is so, an anemometer has to be attached near the screen to provide a measure of the wind speed. Which means the Locus+ team have more work to do: to find an anemometer, to choose how it will be positioned in relation to the screen to give a 'fair' measure of the windspeed since in the wrong spot it will read either too high or too low as the wind is either tunnelled or eddies. And moreover they will have to agree on how the measures will be communicated to the city council who asked for them in the first place.

Meantime the university estates officer is unhappy about something. The leader of the Locus+ team attempts to work out what the officer is unhappy about. This takes a long time since the estates officer appears to be dis-satisfied with a lot of things and very few of them have anything to do with projection screens and university towers. There have been many committee meetings in the Byzantine bureaucracy of the venerable old university to gather up all the approval and permissions necessary for "Echo" to occur,

¹⁰ In several different sections of his work on the assembling of a high tech prototype Latour shows how it organises and is organised by its context. There is no clear context to be seen just as there is no clear 'thing' to be seen without context. Latour, Bruno 1997. *Aramis, or the love of technology* (trans.) Catherine Porter. London: Routledge.

yet the struggle over unusual events like this occurs away from the meetings rooms as well. A lot can be learnt about art, material relations and institutions when one decides to hang a ten metre projection screen on the outside of a building rather than an oil painting in academic's office. A canvas, for instance, is an established settlement of the end process of artistic work. In its dimensions, in the choice of frame, in the hooks that hold up, in the way such an object can be picked up by its owner and hung in their next office without having to pass it by the estates' offices. Because all these apparently trivial matters have been agreed upon over hundreds of years, all that is left to be disagreed about is the assembly and representational work of the acrylics, oils, or charcoals on the surface.

Articulating a non-standardised art-object-event in to the space of the university requires many more negotiations, adjustments, permissions, meetings and some very big hooks. Indeed "Echo" joins together yet more unusual structures: scaffolding, a duplicate projection system in Newcastle and a satellite link-up from London. As the rain falls the geographer watches the finishing touches being put to the scaffold edifice which stands opposite the blackened stone of the university tower. He asks the artist about the scaffolders and she explains that they are a specialist company who have done a lot of work with artists. Not only are they used to the unusual sites on which scaffolding will be erected, the requirements of satellite equipment and projectors, they are part of the process with a broad knowledge of the practical matters of getting art performances to work in diverse locations. Her mobile phone rings, she apologises to the geographer and walks back under the tower to take shelter from the wind whistling on her phone.

The geographer interested, as ever, in the specifics of the work that go into making up any event, project or phenomena hangs around watching the Locus+ team putting together the 'support', tying together the fine threads, without which "Echo" cannot exist. There are not just scaffolders, there are electricians, sound and satellite broadcast engineers. It is the kind of crew you might also find at a rock concert or with an outside broadcast unit, yet as the artist noted they are a specialist subdivision who can both wield their tools whilst giving the artists the kind of feedback they need. While he is noseing around the satellite link-up is being tested and engineer is having difficulty getting a signal. The geographer asks some questions about this which the engineer politely fields whilst switching a jack between various sockets.

The artist comes back after finishing her phonecall explaining that she was being filled in on how things were developing in Newcastle where the duplicate tower and projector have been assembled at the Centre for Life. All appears to be going well there. Still intrigued by the satellite technology, the geographer asks the artist why she has chosen such a technically demanding and expensive way of transferring her video signal to the projectors in Glasgow and Newcastle. Wary, as ever, of glossing her work the artist responds by saying that she wanted to retain the link between satellite imaging for maps and ultrasound scanning of bodies. To make a connection between these two high tech image processing systems that are normally held apart. Hmm, replies the geographer, realising that he is being offered an answer that he needs to think about. There's a silence as he fails to think of anything further to say. Breaking into a smile over the pregnant pause, the artist adds, "and I always wanted to send a little bit of myself up into the stars."

A couple of last checks are made with the team and then the artist and the geographer walk away for coffee at a café called Tinderbox to catch up one another's lives. Leaving the team manager still debating with the estates officer and the satellite broadcast engineer negotiating with his multi-switch receiver unit. Up high above them balanced on a balcony of the tower the scaffolders attempt to untangle the fluttering lower section of the screen that keeps getting snagged on its frame.

4.

In the last minute run up to the performance the artist jokes to the geographer about staying home with her daughter and watching Coronation Street instead of attending "Echo". She hates the feeling of exposure when the work finally has to be released from the private spaces where she has been assembling it and she has to answer for it for the first time. There will be questions, criticisms, compliments which although directed at "Echo" will be directed via the artist. It is a moment which more than any other appears by its very public staging to make both successes and failures noticeable even though really it is simply another stage in the process which could have gone in various different directions before passing through this event. Appropriately enough for an artwork that connects up normally far away places *most* of the artist can only be in one city for the show – Newcastle at the "Centre for Life". The geographer says that he'll miss having her there especially since he too wants the artist to answer for "Echo", even though he knows how nerve-wracking showing work can be. She tells him to call her on her mobile - so some parts of the artist will be in Glasgow after all: not only her conversation and answerability on her mobile phone, but also the labour, thought, effort, editing, arguing and imagination that have been shifted into "Echo". And last but not least the images and sounds of her flesh and bone.

A fortnight before "Echo" was due to be shown the artist had circulated invites around the geography department where she had spent the year of her Visual Art Projects research fellowship¹¹. It would not just be the geographer attending "Echo", it would be *geographers* plural, including the professor too. A crowd within which the geographer's authenticity or even adequacy as a representative would come under question. In amongst that crowd he was more likely to be called an ethnographer or a cultural geographer to better place his affiliations and approaches. From time to time there were sharp questions raised as to what exactly the difference was between his work and the artist's. A matter on which the artist and the geographer had spent some time learning, over espresso-assisted chatter and observations of one another's practice, when and where there were differences and similarities.

Amongst other reasons why the geographer (being an ethnographer really) happily allowed his practice to become merged with the artists and vice versa was because it was one of the best ways of learning about phenomena, spatial or not. Further it is something that happens anyway when two practitioners hang around each other's workplaces too

¹¹ "Echo" was in part an end product from innovative research fellowships offered in Scotland by the Visual Art Projects to allow artists a public place for exchange of ideas and methods, see Brind, S. (ed.) 1999. *curious : artists' research within expert culture*. Glasgow: Visual Art Projects.

much; one or the other gets curious or lends a hand or starts to openly or slyly borrow techniques and methods. Not only that, the geographer subscribes to a particular field of investigation called ethnomethodology which

'...refuses to claim an independent expertise or normative grounding from which to review and evaluate other modes of investigation, (while) cultural studies antagonize practitioners with rival analyses and criticisms launched from analytic, normative, and/or political vantage points.' p227 in Lynch.¹²

In his research, then, the geographer does not simply deny himself the traditional *view from above*, but *any* view from elsewhere than that of the view of his practitioners (ordinary or expert). Viewing is not treated as a passive reception of projected images instead it is pursued by ethnomethodologists (and the geographer in as much as he can) as an activity engaged in by practitioners making sense of any scene as part an ongoing and unfolding performance. Whilst ordinary sense-making is taken as a basic shared competency for anyone, expert looking, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting in various fields (be they artists or ultrasound technicians or chefs) has to be acquired through a long period of training with the equipment and products of their profession.

By accident rather than design the geographer attends "Echo" with two artists - M & S, a mathematician and a surgeon. It's dark on the tarmac area in front of the main entrance to the old building where the audience gathers waiting to watch and listen to "Echo". By prior arrangement with the unhappy estates officer the normal floodlighting which illuminates the outside of this city landmark by night has been turned off. In the gloom the geographer is unable to find the crowd of geographers from his department and is pleased, at least, to discern the professor in his thick winter coat leaning against the projector scaffold.

Very little is said during the twenty minutes "Echo" runs for. The audience pays quiet attention as if they were watching a film at an (admittedly chilly) cinema. They are perhaps surprised by how loud the doppler ultrasound is, they are used to it as something one has to listen to hear. With powerful base speakers the sound, as the artist puts it later: 'will echo off the audience, get inside them and rattle their bones.' The geographer and S talk a little more in the quiet moments - they are talkative anyway; even at the cinema - and he finds himself squeezing S for commentary. During the opening sequence S and the geographer agree on how creepy the "eye" is, although at that point neither of them have been told that that it is the artist's eye and so they speculate instead on where this eye-like part of a body's interior might be. Later at the sections involving the 3D cut-aways they talk of how the images remind them of the stars. A resemblance all the more noticeable because in the early autumn sky the stars shine brightly above. In-between questioning S the geographer's mind drifts; he hears a newly remembered song in his head, footsteps on the spiral stone stairwell of the university tower looming above him, moonstruck but there's no moon that night.

After "Echo" is finished the crowd claps loudly, pauses for a while in small conversations and then disperses through the cloisters in search of cosy bars and cafés to warm up in

¹² Lynch, M. 1999. Silence in Context: Ethnomethodology and Social Theory. *Human Studies* 22, 211-233

and discuss what they have seen. Walking towards their chosen venue the surgeon makes a joke about the intimate parts of the body he identified from having seen similar ultrasound images many times before. A bit further on M and S say that they felt it was a bit of a shame there was no chance to get hold of the artist afterwards to provide a little more background on the project. The mathematician, a keen debater and always willing to play devil's advocate, wants to know where the skill was in what he's just seen. Anyone could show some ultrasound images and call it art. How, then, was "Echo" art? M, S and the geographer let his point slip by for the moment, though they debate it vigorously in the pub later once they're warmed up again. The geographer describing some of the artistic practice that has been described here. While they were still walking to the pub under the stars, the surgeon intrigued by seeing some of the *imaginative* elements of his work performed on a monumental scale on the side of a building adds without agreeing or disagreeing with the mathematician that "it was different." He is not sure how he would answer the big question the mathematician seemed to be posing but he is clear that "Echo" had done something exceptional with the images and sounds of his workplace. Sounds and image that had almost lost their power to surprise him.

A day or two later the geographer and the e-mailed each other about "Echo".

The geographer:

There was a reverential silence once your projection started - with my friend S and I being amongst the few actually talking about what was happening while it was happening. Something of a cinema effect I guess where people reckoned they should keep quite whilst your 'film' was running. I'm not sure that was so appropriate since there was no 'narrative' and if there were no sounds playing then I'm sure people would have talked. Nevertheless I think the sound was essential and made the whole effect much more powerful.

The artist:

I considered that the narrative was from the 'outside in' rather than the conventional narrative that you might expect from other cinema structures. I thought that the sound was great.

The geographer:

Unfortunately no one seemed to be aware of the involvement of the satellite link. Though I'm not sure if that was important to you or not?

The artist:

The satellite link was important to me. I liked the topographic reference although it wasn't really visible in Newcastle- it was there non-the-less. Hopefully the audience may make the project live in different ways - this invisibility of the all-seeing eye. (I was outside the other night looking at the stars and thought 'I was up there'.)

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