



The concept of the *Temporary Contemporary* initiative proposed to Kirklees Council was driven by a reconsideration of place as an expression of time. More specifically, a reconsideration of place as both an expression of the present moment and custodian of the legacy of its former use. Issues of place have dominated 20th-century cultural theory. The issue of place was also on our minds specifically because of the challenges for cultural workers in surviving in an unaffordable spatial environment. *Temporary Contemporary*, then, was driven by reconsideration of modern towns and cities as ‘cellular’ cultural ecological structures understood in their unique configurations as ‘contemporary’, ‘temporary’ and as part of an ecosystem and a system of legacies.

The site that the council proposed for this project was the extraordinary architectural edifice presently housing Queensgate Indoor Market in Huddersfield. The experience of this vibrant building presented an exemplar of constructed space layered by time and transformed by the many incarnations and disparate activities housed over its lifetime. The final proposal generated between the School of Art, Design and Architecture and Kirklees Council was a new contribution to this complex building and the cultural history of the town.

A key value espoused by the joint proposal was to respect the existing activities housed within the building and to work with these activities inside a new temporal envelope that would aid and abet the plural diversity and cultural ecology of the Queensgate Market site and the town of Huddersfield. This chapter will consider the terms cultural and mixed ecology through a discussion of five exhibitions from the Market Gallery programme. The exhibitions by Ryan Durrant, Richard Mulhearn, Jade Lord, Emma Rigby and Lizzie Harrison, Nicola Perren and Charlotte Goldthorpe exemplify ‘ecology’ in a broad sense.

## **Cultural Ecology**

The term ‘Cultural Ecology’ was originally derived from 1950s anthropological theory<sup>1</sup> and has now extended to the creative economy with the application of an ecological approaches to explain cultural developments.<sup>2</sup> By utilising the biological tool box of ecological thinking we were able to identify the importance of interdependence and interrelation between cultural forms of production and how they adapt and transform each other. Considering the relations between existing and latent cultural resources and their roles in the growth and generation of new forms of aesthetic, social and economic production were the



key goals of *Temporary Contemporary*. The operating principles were to investigate, for example, the intergroup relations between the School of Art, Design and Architecture, Kirklees Council, commercial traders, property owners, transport hubs, the town library, art gallery and performative music venues. These existing tangible and intangible assets represented a cultural ecosystem capable of expansive growth. By naming and measuring these cultural agencies and their entanglement within an immersive mesh of complex social relationships a new model of porous cultural production emerged. This new model thrived as an extended mixed ecology within a dynamic cultural space opened up by the rejection of the binary divisions of art and non-art, culture and nature.

### **Exhibitions in the Ecosystem**

Operationally the Market Gallery created a series of thematic group exhibitions that exposed visual work that would have otherwise gone unseen. As a quintessential 'white cube' gallery it has helped to render visible arts and culture research in the town. The multiple strands of the programme in Queensgate Market presented opportunities for showcasing music and performance practices from other Schools within the University of Huddersfield. The interdisciplinary nature of so many of the artworks shown in the first year of *Temporary Contemporary's* programme reflected the partnership between the School of Art, Design and Architecture, the town and Council, and demonstrated a plethora of creative and cultural research practices.

In Ryan Durrant's solo exhibition *Black Bag* the black bin liner was examined as a key icon of contemporary human malfeasance towards the environment. The ubiquitous black bag, synonymous with the repetition and reproduction of waste, was explored as a container of unseen content, a masked image of human forgetting and the site of our greatest fantasy, what Timothy Morton names as our imaginary concept of 'away'.<sup>3</sup> The black bag is a receptacle of the unwanted, discarded, disused, transformed into a toxic veil, a poisonous fantasy and ecological threat to our survival. In Durrant's artworks this image of the black bag becomes an emblem of both our mythical flight from responsibility and our contemporary fantasy of an elsewhere, an 'away' to where we can consign our unwanted excess with impunity.

Similarly, Richard Mulhearn's installation *Flood* (7-21 December 2018) had a direct link to an expanded notion of 'ecology' that is nonetheless rooted in the natural world. The title refers

to sudden changes in environments and their impact on conventional behaviours, and also to the experience of viewing a sequence (flood) of images that come together to create narratives. Mulhearn's photographs create a tension between the conscious and the unconscious and create the conditions for 'unreadable' moments to emerge. There is an uncertainty within the world of the image and in the experience of looking at images, the strategies of sequencing deployed in this installation generated arbitrary and porous photographic forms. Mulhearn's work equally resonates with this book's discussion of ecology as it does with questions of looking and representation, the topic of Chapter 3.

In *The Laundry Pile* by Jade Lord, Emma Rigby and Lizzie Harrison, the implications of laundry in contemporary culture are examined. The impact of 21st-century technologies in the form of household laundry machines and the development of synthetic fibres have contributed both to an expansion in the volume of garments owned and the frequency of washing cycles. The average increase to 284 washing cycles and 260 drying cycles per domestic UK household is detailed and the implications of clothes washing examined in the context of environmental impact. The implications for garment design through an identification of the environmental impact of the leaching of artificial dyes and the generation of microfibre pollution, as well as the increase in water and energy consumption, were explored in the exhibition. More subtly the socio-historical implications of the changes were tracked via the cultural narratives of collective activities and social interactions with a call for more sustainable practices.

In a similar vein, this lost sense of community was explored in Nicola Perren's exhibition *Quilting Together*. In these works, the implications of the professional and amateur environment of creative industries was explored. The identification of creative quilting as a form of collective enterprise was pursued through the evaluation of the Meltham Quilting Bee. This project brought together the amateur and the professional in the generation of a quilt and art object that incorporated the enormous social and historical resonance of textile and garment production in Kirklees. Of significance was the implication of this project for the expansion of craft practices in cultural ecology as a form of social making.

The 'social ecology' of networks and interactions, and the cultural ecology of disciplinary negotiations were both in evidence in the *Making Material Memories* (15 April-3 May 2019) exhibition



Flood  
Richard Mulhearn

7 - 21 December



The Laundry Pile  
 Jade Lord, Emma Rigby  
 and Lizzie Harrison

24 June - 13 July 2019









by Charlotte Goldthorpe. The show put on display the outcomes of her research, bringing together craft and storytelling in nine pieces. In 2015, Goldthorpe began to collect donated stories at her 'Lost Love Cafés'. The narratives documented relationships from the care of parental love to the fleeting passions of brief encounters. Goldthorpe processed elements from the gathered stories into bespoke craft artefacts. The narratives dictated the choices of materials, techniques, forms and processes. These included leather working, silicone casting, brass soldering, forging, wood and metal turning. Goldthorpe developed new processes – often in collaboration with skilled craft practitioners – to realise the finished works. Throughout the research process, friendships have developed between participants and craftspeople, allowing new stories and memories to be made. The show exemplified the notion of participation, partnership, collaboration, storytelling and rootedness that the *Temporary Contemporary* initiative offers as part of the solution for creating vibrant spaces through art and culture in UK towns.

## The cellular organism

The collaborative partnerships generated by the focus on the Queensgate Market site identified significant cultural opportunities. In taking an ecological approach *Temporary Contemporary* was able to produce multiple symbiotic benefits to all parties within an expanded cultural ecosystem. Time was a key element, impressed upon the local vendors and stall holders that our initiative would work within their existing spatial and temporal activities, that the title of the initiative meant that the existence of our project within any one existing place was indeed temporal, that if the project was not supporting the growth of the cultural ecology of the building it would cease to exist and move on.

The subsequent identification of abandoned or underused spaces within the building and the development of flexible times for the delivery of creative events were central to establishing the parameters of the project and crucial to building trust with our collaborative partners. The proposition of *Temporary Contemporary* was predicated on this open approach and the expectation of change and further development. It is important to stress that the model developed was not based on the specificity of any one space but on an understanding of the complexity of the concept 'place' as a stratified cultural construction of space and time. A new cultural paradigm conceived of as a cellular organism of great mobility and agency, adapting and inhabiting different spatial theatres, emerged as an exciting opportunity for urban transformation. This approach allowed for sensitive micro shifts in culture to be captured and named within the town and for the recognition of the complex interplay of factors that generate the locus of place and the subsequent integration of culture with daily lived experience.

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<sup>1</sup> Steward, J., (1955, reprinted 1972) *The Theory of Cultural Change*. Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press.

<sup>3</sup> Morton, T., (2013) *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.

<sup>2</sup> Holden, J. (2015) *The Ecology of Culture A Report commissioned by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Cultural Value Project.* Arts and Humanities Research Council. The full report can be found at: [ahrc.ukri.org/documents/project-reports-and-reviews/the-ecology-of-culture/](http://ahrc.ukri.org/documents/project-reports-and-reviews/the-ecology-of-culture/) [accessed 6 February 2020].



