

Make do and bend: the adhoc in sculptural practice.

I first came across Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver's 1973 book *Adhocism: the case for improvisation* some years ago, when researching for an AHRC-funded project, 'Made up: resourcefulness as a creative strategy'.¹ It cropped up in countless footnotes to more recent critical work and I realized that whilst it was now languishing out of print, it had once been a seminal text. I eventually tracked down a yellowing copy in an art school library, and was finally able to encounter its ideas first-hand. Once I sat down to read, I was struck by an acute sense of familiarity: it wasn't just that I had already experienced its ideas refracted through all those other author's works, but rather that it echoed so many of the thoughts I'd been having about artist's creative methods, and the intersection of their approaches with those being creative in entirely non-artistic ways (allotment gardeners, self-builders, etc.) The book resonates with contemporary issues of sustainability and resourcefulness; it felt a little like coming home. I've found myself returning repeatedly to its collection of ideas and examples, and it seems to me that its relevance to contemporary practice has in fact become more acute during recent years. When I came to think about the *Undone* exhibition at the Henry Moore Institute, so many aspects of the show related to ideas and issues familiar from the book, that I wanted to make a direct link between the two, and to explore adhocist incidents in contemporary art practice more generally.

The term *adhocism* had first been coined by Jencks and used in architectural criticism back in 1968; it drew upon the Latin *ad hoc*, meaning *for this or that particular purpose*. The first few chapters see Jencks setting out general ideas of adhocism, whilst the latter part has Silver focusing on more particular examples, many of which are derived from art practice. According to the book, adhoc approaches make use of an available system, or use an existing situation in a new way to solve a problem quickly and efficiently: it is a method of creation relying upon resources which are already at hand. For Jencks it is a particularly democratic kind of creativity, in which one fashions one's personal environment from impersonal subsystems that already exist. Both these aspects are present in Drop City, one of Jencks' key exemplars: this community of artists, formed in southern Colorado in 1965, and influenced by performances and ideas from the likes of Allan Kaprow, John Cage, Robert Rauschenberg and the Black Mountain College, built structures from a range of recycled, consumer waste. Drop City characterizes a species of what Jencks later terms *retrieval* adhocism, in that it is concerned with reusing what has been thrown away by others; such an approach continues in the 'biotecture' of contemporary 'earthships' and, albeit on an individually smaller scale, in the construction of allotment sheds (my own is made out of a conglomeration of old bedroom furniture and re-purposed PVCu windows, all parceled up in a waterproof skin of roofing felt...) In the UK it also exists in self-built homes such as the Humberston Fitties near Cleethorpes, which predate the likes of Drop City. The Fitties, a plot-land at the time of the Great War was used by de-mobbed soldiers in World War II and subsequently became a holiday park, where Yorkshire/Nottinghamshire steelworkers and miners built second 'homes': they constructed buildings from a motley selection of railway carriages, old garages, postwar prefabs, and a host of salvaged materials. (These days the park has been designated a conservation area: with property selling for high prices, the former adhocist approach is now strictly forbidden thanks to a raft of legislation specifying how homes are to be repaired or altered!)

Adhocism tends to be a general and loose approach to a problem rather than a tight and systematic one. Nathan Silver defines it as a mongrel creativity and assembles a set of soundbites: first, from an editor – '*it's what people do all the time*'; then an architect – '*it's satisfyingly familiar*'; & finally a painter – '*you work with what you have*'.² He suggests that people are drawn to adhocism for a number of reasons: its flexible and contingent responses offer opportunities; there's a realization that approximate means might satisfy a purpose; there are creative advantages in linking familiar concepts that modify and change each other, thus leading to an innovative whole; and finally there's simple laziness, in which the adhocist avoids the difficulties of seeking ideal methods and making long-range plans... One might say that it's a particularly human approach – the oldest and simplest method of creation – because it

is always easier to work with what is familiar and at hand, rather than opting for new and partially developed tools or deciding to use materials removed in space and time.

Jencks looks to ethnography/anthropology and sees adhocism in action within countless cultures. Unsurprisingly, he considers it as being closely related to Claude Lévi-Strauss' conception of *bricolage*. Lévi-Strauss tells us that the *bricoleur* works with their hands and uses *devious* means compared to those of a craftsman. I rather like that assertion of the devious. It makes me think of those artifacts from Soviet-era Russia collected by Vladimir Arkhipov's *Post Folk Archive*, where as a result of the scarcity of goods available in the shops, replacements were necessarily fashioned from what people had at hand: Arkhipov's collection includes a TV aerial built from a series of welded forks, and a shuttlecock fashioned from a plastic cup, stretched paper and an elastic band.³ (Contemporary allotment gardeners too are renowned for their use of available resources and cunningly salvaged materials: last weekend on my own site, I saw a tenant dragging huge hoops of blue water pipe that they'd found in a builders' skip and which they planned to reuse as supports for crop protection.) According to Lévi-Strauss, the adhocist *bricoleur* uses what is at hand and the constraints of available tools, whilst the engineer is always trying to go beyond the current particular state of civilization; and although the scientist also begins with existing systems, he/she seeks to *expand* a set of resources, whilst the *bricoleur* sticks with what is already extant for as long as possible.

No doubt this ad hoc resourcefulness and the propensity for sticking with existing tools or materials often has to do with a lack of money and the necessity of thrift: one makes do with what is available because finding new resources very frequently has a time and cost implication. In the *Undone* catalogue, the curators refer to the penurious reality of early career artists, and quote Tim Machin's realization of a possible solution: '*this is the way forward - to make works in the spaces I can, for nothing.*'⁴ My own art education came at a time (the late 1980's) when expensive materials, fancy perspex cases and the professional/industrial fabrication of art works seemed the dominant fashion. I can well remember the frustrations over having insufficient resources to make works with the techniques or materials I wanted, but at the time, the very idea of making things cheaply or for free seemed entirely beyond the conceptual pale. It was only much later and well after graduation, that I realized there were more resourceful alternatives, all of which was quite curious in retrospect, given my own family's creative adhocism. My father, for example, works as a dry-stone waller, and apart from a little initial instruction when he was a young farm labourer, he learnt as he went along, teaching himself by responding to particular situations, problems and materials. There is something intensely ad hoc about the practice because one has to use the particular stones available, many of which are far from neatly brick-shaped; in County Durham where he is based, alongside the commonly occurring limestones and sandstones, there are, for example, great, irregular, almost triangular boulders, formed of igneous rock from the intrusion of the Great Whin Sill. Whilst he is skilled in seeking out the 'right' stone for the job, he is always aware that none of them fit *perfectly*, which means he won't put down a stone once he picks it up, and will find a place for it: without such a rule he'd be perpetually engaged in a kind of crazy jigsaw puzzle, for which in fact there can be no definitive solution. So, although Lévi-Strauss suggests that the craftsman is less devious than a *bricoleur*, I'm not sure that matters are quite so clear-cut: craftspeople frequently use adhocist resourcefulness where necessary too.

Despite (or because of) having grown up with this kind of creativity I actually gave it short shrift at art school, thinking that it was in some way improper. I believed that there were better, somehow more serious ways to make things and I'm interested that this tension is still apparent in contemporary practice. As Tim Machin comments in the catalogue: '*I find myself trying to learn how to do things (plaster casting recently) that I feel I ought to know but never learned. You know, wanting to be a proper artist and everything.*'⁵ I hear this sort of thing a great deal from the student artists with whom I'm working, and indeed from more established artists of my acquaintance. There are huge anxieties of inadequacy, as if perhaps people fear that everyone else is doing it properly, whilst they themselves are not. Contemporary art frequently displays a

rather complicated relationship with its materials and means of making; artists aren't quite sure how to validate their practice to the non-cognoscenti when working outside an established craft tradition or with cheap, everyday materials (those employing Sellotape, as opposed to say, casting bronze) even though such materials and methods have been part of art practice since the early twentieth century at least. Doubtless a good deal of this anxiety arises from the critical beating such art receives from certain quarters: a few years ago, Ivan Massow, former Chairman of the ICA, famously dismissed much contemporary art as 'craftless tat', and such an opinion continues to preoccupy elements of the popular press.⁶ Whilst much of the art world is clearly enamoured right now with ideas of contingency, fallibility, and similar (indeed the *Undone* catalogue describes how 'each artwork has an air of spontaneity and improvisation, but also exudes provisionality, as if it might alter at any one moment through a process of unraveling') such work does not easily convince those for whom some clear demonstration of technical, 'artistic' skill is still a requirement.⁷ Of course matters are not so neatly binary: within *Undone*, lo-fi materials are at times laboriously crafted with the kind of attention normally paid to more costly stuff (as in Tom Friedman's work), and at others they are perhaps 'merely' selected, their presentation in the gallery being seen as sufficiently transformative (as say in the case of Mary Redmond); and there are of course those works that play a double game of material misrecognition as when Neil Gall's costly bronze or resin casts appear to have been made only from cheap ping-pong balls and electrical tape.

The catalogue text makes the case that these '*Ordinary, if not low-grade, materials are used by the artists in Undone to create a peculiar poetry of the provisional*': this provisionality relates to another feature of adhocism as articulated by Jencks.⁸ He says that whilst the scientist uses tools and hypotheses appropriate to the job, the adhocist starts immediately with whatever resources are available. Whilst there are surely multiple ways of being an artist, and many people obsess minutely over the planning and provisioning of tools and materials, this desire to dive straight in is something I've seen a great deal in art schools. A friend at college was invariably to be found constructing something whilst still wearing her coat, which soon became scuffed and stained, having become immediately and totally immersed with what was at hand when she'd walked into her studio space. Perhaps she had the sense that, were she to postpone the activity to a time when better tools or materials were available, the very idea might weaken and dissipate: let's face it, it's not exactly unusual for art students to talk themselves out of making things before they even get going as the initial excitement wanes with their realization of potential critical or practical pitfalls ahead. But for those with a more mature practice there is often a tension between what they think they are trying to do, and what in fact emerges from the attempt. Tim Machin (again) describes the cross over between the planned and ad hoc approaches: '*I'll go into the studio with what I think is a great 'high concept' idea for a piece of work, spend time and money sourcing things to make it, make it... then realise that the work is something else entirely.*'⁹ One might say that adhocism is characterized by the willingness – or propensity – to realize that the end to which one is devoting one's creative energy is quite other than one had thought.

This issue of ends emerges in another adhocist tenet. According to the book, adhocism is teleological, or ends driven, which is perhaps why design, with its focus upon the solution of perceived problems (of use... of production...), has continued to discuss adhocism within its critical literature more often than has art practice. But perhaps it is wrong to make a distinction: maybe in fine art, there is simply a different notion of an end? Ends may be contingent and shifting, but they are there nonetheless: all artists have to deal with the issue of conclusion in order to decide when to cease making and allow the results into the public realm. Ruth Claxton offers a nice observation on knowing when to stop: '*As far as individual pieces go, I guess I start with a sense of the shape in my head and just get to a point where it feels right. To a certain extent it's about old-school formal considerations and a desire for a kind of elegance, or a 'rightness' as you say. It's hard to quantify what that really means, but I suppose there's just a point where objects seem to make sense.*'¹⁰ That sounds a kind of ending, albeit one that might be temporary...

Another factor in defining adhocism seems to be that there is some element of chance involved, along with a willingness to embrace happy accidents. Of course, chance favours the prepared mind rather than a passive one, and indeed Jencks talks about people being '*serendipity prone*', a description I especially enjoyed.¹¹ He goes on to make reference to Picasso's assertion, '*I don't search, I find.*'¹² In this last I hear echoes of Jacques Rancière in *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, where he considers the pedagogy of one Joseph Jacotet, who believed that one could teach others a subject that one did not oneself know. (I've found this work very useful in conceptualizing aspects of contemporary fine art pedagogy.) Rancière says: '*Whoever looks always finds. He doesn't necessarily find what he was looking for, and even less what he was supposed to find, but he finds something new to relate to the thing that he already knew.*'¹³ It seems to me that artists are usually particularly good at this with their tendency to omnivorous curiosity, in which almost everything they encounter, however unlikely, can help their thinking and making. Carol Gray and Ian Pirie's study of how artists research – how and where they find things for their work or its contextualization – confirmed that a characteristic mode is eclectic borrowing: artists look everywhere and anywhere.¹⁴ This embracing of what is to be found at hand – of what at first might seem incredibly meagre but is at least *there* and available – is encapsulated nicely in the interview/dialogue between Alexandra Bircken and Michael Dean in the *Undone* catalogue. Dean asks Bircken why she uses branches; Bircken, after a little art world 'blah' as she describes it, admits: '*I use branches because they are lying around.*' When Dean asks: '*Which criteria do you apply for choosing the branches you work with?*' I especially enjoyed her reply: '*they have to fit inside my car*'. I like the ordinary admission: such criteria are no doubt at the root of a range of contemporary art works, though attention is rarely paid to them. She goes on in what is a more poetic, but somehow still also pragmatic explanation: '*they have to fit inside my imagination*' and '*they have to fit anyhow.*'¹⁵

Adhocism is about doing something with what you've got, and doing something *now* – not waiting for the perfect time in a perfect future where perfect materials and perfect tools are available. Nathan Silver relates some great stories about various design innovations. He offers one example in which a man traveling by train finds himself without a corkscrew and therefore unable to remove the cork from his bottle of whisky: a resourceful old Etonian fellow traveler improvised a solution by using a screw removed from the luggage rack with the aid of a screwdriver fashioned from a nail file and a shoelace... My favourite tale, however, describes the 'invention' of the limpet mine, which involved the use of tin bowls from Woolworths, some magnets, and bathtubs full of porridge to test the device's buoyancy... Silver pays particular attention to the inventors' problems regarding the mine's detonator: it was to consist of a spring-loaded striker maintained in the cocked position by a pellet, which would dissolve in water, but expert chemists simply couldn't find anything that worked with invariable timing. Whilst in the workshop one day, the team found themselves eating some confectionary – and realized that they'd found an answer in aniseed balls. Barratts' manufacture of these sweets was a precision job: it involved a core dipped into vats of material a specified number and periods of times with the end result that nothing was less varied than an aniseed ball. (Having established a manufacturing process for the detonator, they then had to devise a means of keeping it dry before immersion into water. They needed a rubber sleeve, so with further ad hoc resourcefulness, they bought up stacks of condoms from local chemists – earning themselves something of a reputation in the process...) Later limpet mines were 'improved' but, according to Silver, the refined model worked no better than its improvised predecessor.

As well as this inventive resourcefulness, there is also what Silver terms *feeble adhocism*, a type of simply getting by – real finger in the dike stuff. He articulates '*the aesthetic tingle that comes from successful coping*' and offers by example a range of thrifty ideas from what was then a nationally syndicated US newspaper column called *Hints from Heloise*, which sought to solve everyday problems or make life more livable: '*Making paper bags for lining garbage cans by folding sheets of newspapers and sewing them on the sewing machine; stop ants coming in a kitchen door by drawing lines around the sill with chalk and drawing lines around the sugar canister*

*and cake tin; stopping up a crack beside the stove by cutting a yardstick 'the correct length', covering it with foil and shoving it into the crack.'*¹⁶ The lesson, according to Silver, is that such hints and wrinkles allow us never to feel defeated and suggest that through some sort of activity, a little of life's melancholy can be removed.

This feeble coping is evident in Richard Wentworth's *Making do and getting by*, an ongoing photographic documentation of 'found' sculptures in which attention is paid to the curious solutions people have found to everyday 'problems': the pictures reveal a piece of carpet used to mend the damaged wing of a car, or a metal bar behind which countless commuters have carefully tucked their empty polystyrene coffee cups.¹⁷ They are perfectly ad hoc solutions. Of such strategies Wentworth has remarked elsewhere: *'I find cigarette packets folded up under table legs more monumental than a Henry Moore. Five reasons. Firstly the scale. Secondly, the fingertip manipulation. Thirdly, modesty of both gesture and material. Fourth, its absurdity and fifth, the fact that it works.'*¹⁸ That 'it works' suggests that whilst things might appear to be makeshift, this doesn't prevent them from being effective – as in the case of the limpet mines... He has said: *'I grew up in a world that was held together with string and brown paper and sealing wax and that's how it was. I slowly realized that this is the underlying condition of the world and there's nothing I like more than a sort of, you know, NASA disaster where they say if it hadn't been for the chewing gum... It's not because I want to fetishize chewing gum or the aesthetics of chewing gum pressed over some break in a membrane; it's because we have the intelligence to go: 'hey there's a malleable, mastic material and we can use that' and a large part of our lives is spent using that very edgy bit of our intelligence...'*¹⁹ This type of intelligence allows one to ask those 'what if?', 'why not?' questions and to arrive at a creative, purposeful solution as a result.

Such thinking is present in types of adhocism where there are no problems requiring direct solutions, but where creative opportunities are to be found. In Jencks and Silver's book one such example is offered through Reyner Banham's discussion of the chair. According to Banham, in their lifetime, chairs are so little sat in (only around 5% of the time...) that they could never justify the space/cost/design on that score alone. He lists the many other purposes to which they are put: they are bought to be looked at as cult-objects, employed for propping doors open (or shut, as in French farce), used by cats, dogs and small children for sleeping, and by adults as shoe rests for polishing or lace-tying; they form stands for Karrikots and baby baths; act as saw horses or work benches for such domestic trades as pea-shelling and wool-winding; they can function as clothes hangers; if upholstered and sprung they offer opportunities for trampoline practice, and if hard, they can double for bongo drums; and they can be stepladders for fruit picking, hedge-clipping, changing light bulbs and dusting cornices. He concludes by pointing out that the better a chair is anatomically designed, the less use it is the other 95% of the time. One might add to Banham's list the likes of Angela de la Cruz's 2004 sculpture *Upright (3 leg chair)*, in which the eponymous chair perches anthropomorphically atop a stool, whose own limbs have been lengthened by four stumpy struts. When Charles Jencks asserts: *'Everything can always be something else'*, this is surely something that artists, children at play, and indeed the tellers of fairy tales always know.²⁰ (In this last instance, think of how rather unlikely materials can be pressed into alternative service, as when Rapunzel's hair becomes a surprisingly effective ladder.)

According to Jencks and Silver, artists take the *'readymade clichés of industrial society or bountiful nature and disconnect them from their habitual context.'*²¹ In art, context is everything: were one to encounter Mary Redmond's sculpture *Embroque* out in the world as opposed to the gallery, it would be relatively hard to distinguish it from discarded household waste, no doubt because some of the material with which she works had indeed been thrown out as rubbish and subsequently retrieved by the artist. Artist Krysten Cunningham talks about the way in which removing a work of art from daily life allows something differently experiential to happen: *'Instead of worrying about knocking something over, a viewer is given the space to experience a precarious situation and to reflect on, say, 'balance' in a contemplative way. This detachment is an uncommon condition in the context of life's practical demands.'*²² Amidst the

world's noise and clutter, sometimes things can only become properly visible when the context shifts.

This being of and yet also being removed from the world, is present in a species of adhocism that involves a relationship with the made and the found, and between art and non-art. Jencks and Silver offer a host of examples of visual arts practices in which this is evident. Jencks names Duchamp as the Newton of adhocism, and goes on to list disparate adhocists from Arcimboldo via the Cubists, Dadaists, Surrealists and Assemblagists, before arriving at the collage of Hannah Hock, Raoul Hausman and John Heartfield and finally the suggestion that, in the 1950s, adhocism returned with a vengeance through such practices as Rauschenberg's combines. In Jencks and Silver's conception of adhocism, the hand of the artist doesn't *create* but *chooses*: they offer Duchamp or Warhol as exemplars. Jencks and Silver recognise that adhocist art practices often use art and non-art objects in combination: the book devotes a paragraph or two to Kurt Schwitters' aim to bring both categories together in a world-embracing MERZ-picture (they note his fixation on using inferior or *bad* material) and they attend to Allan Kaprow's consideration of the give and take between the ready-made and the newly created. In 1973 (according to Silver) adhocism in art was growing: '*Since adhocism encounters phenomena directly, often overstepping overloaded, more usual and perhaps trite associations, it matches a preoccupation of many modern artists. Plain forms are being introduced that were previously beneath notice or out of bounds.*'²³ The growth he remarked has surely continued: today the whole notion of looking at the overlooked is almost an art world cliché.

Silver goes on to draw attention to artists whose practice makes manifest the randomness of the world: in photography he notes Lee Friedlander, whose work might initially appear akin to amateur photography, with its curious, seemingly accidental framing. (Such approaches have of course since mainstreamed: think of Richard Billingham's project *Ray's a laugh*, published by Scalo in 2000.)²⁴ But some of the works in *Undone* seem to stem less from a simple attention to randomness, than to an absentminded sort of creativity, as if the artists have been alert to those actions and processes in which humans indulge without apparent aim – one might say that it's a sort of physical doodling. Franziska Furter's *Chlumpä*, was made when she took a break from making a series of labour-intensive drawings (at the time, something she considered her 'proper' studio practice) and started just knotting nylon thread '*without any plan or idea where it would go.*'²⁵ Nayland Blake, meanwhile has described making his wire and chain assemblages in a '*touching-the-thing-and-fiddling-with-it, additive*' way in which he literally feels his way through.²⁶ Such fiddling is familiar from Brassai's photographic documentation of involuntary sculptures, or Peter Fraser's interest in the curious things people produce when not really thinking about it: his photograph of a polystyrene cup speared with a host of cocktail sticks, which he'd found abandoned in a meeting room reminded me how, in one of the lavatories at my university, a small nail had been used by countless people across several months to repeatedly perforate a length of pipe lagging. This absentminded 'creativity' seemingly performed without aim and just because the material was there seems especially prevalent right now in art practice.

Adhoc approaches often allow the humorous pleasures of unexpected recognition; Jencks/Silver characterise the resulting objects as being the sort of thing which might provoke the viewer to exclaim: '*My God, it's made out of ping pong balls!*' or similar. It appears to me that the artist James Ireland explicitly enjoys creating such a response, as when his unlikely assemblage involving a fish-tank of blue-ish liquid, black plastic bin liners and a fluorescent light are viewed reflected in a small mirror, and instantly (and surprisingly) create the image of a landscape. Ireland's pleasure in seeing how these prosaic materials conjure a sublime image also relates in some degree to another tenet of adhocism, when viewers are pleased to note a maker's skill in minimizing the effects of ad hoc choices, (as also for example in the creative use of a rhyming scheme, or clever typographical play in concrete poetry.)

Early in this talk I considered ideas artists' anxieties over the propriety of process or material, so it seems fitting, as I head towards my conclusion, to return to the

determinedly improper, just as happens in Jencks and Silver's book: they make clear how adhocism is often involved in practical jokes and fiendish contraptions, offering examples such as a baseball bat to which a horseshoe has been attached (a weapon whose makers had hoped to fool police into thinking fatal blows had in fact been struck by a horse) or improvised weapons such as the use of a potato or bar of soap imbedded with razor blades. Once again, there are crossovers between such adhocist objects and the work of contemporary artists. Ben Woodeson, for example, seems to exist in a territory precisely between practical joke and fiendish contraption: on Twitter he goes by the name 'benisdangerous' and his *Health and Safety Violations* series of works playfully flout current regulations.²⁷ In *Schlagborer (Hammer Drill)*, a hammer is tethered to a drill, whose rotation has the effect of spinning the tool and gradually destroying the corner of the exhibition space in which they are sited.

When I proposed talking about the *Undone* exhibition and other contemporary artworks in relation to what is an old and now generally unloved book, I wondered what elements (if any) might still be relevant to contemporary practice, and whether the audience for this paper might see any merit in its views from almost four decades ago. Ultimately though, it seems that much of Jencks and Silver's thinking has in fact become commonplace knowledge within current art practice: a very great deal of contemporary practice is profoundly adhocist. Perhaps because it discusses a very human form of creativity, one with such a long history as a methodology of making and doing, it has simply become a sort of a truism? However, perhaps rather curiously, where I've actually found the book especially useful has been in terms of understanding current conceptions of research through art practice. It seems to me that a great deal of thinking and theorizing about contemporary art (especially that emerging under the rubric of doctoral study through art practice or the kinds of projects funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council) has emerged thanks to art's very adhocist tendencies. Very many of the conceptual and critical frameworks in use involve a good deal of borrowing from the humanities, social sciences and so forth: at best, such appropriation is a case of using what's to hand in preexisting systems and putting them to work for our own ends, but at worst it has led to a situation where practice-based researchers lay their hands on something like Carole Gray and Julian Malins' *Vizualizing Research* and then (anxiously? lazily?) position their art practice on one of its handy theoretical hooks.²⁸ In recent times we artist/academics have been pretty bad at proposing our own alternatives and speaking honestly about how research progresses or how works really develop; perhaps we fear that the resulting approach will sound both too stupid and too complex? (More anxiety over what is and is not *proper*.) It seems to me that the ways artists think and talk whilst making is too little acknowledged: no doubt this is why I enjoyed so much the artists interviewing one another in the catalogue, where such studio talk is actually transcribed. (Nicholas de Ville once recognised this as a sort of oral tradition.)²⁹

I want to end, then, by turning matters about, and suggesting that, rather than artists borrowing from other disciplines' methodologies, perhaps there is scope for a little role-reversal. I'm glad to say that evidence of such movement is emerging. In his work on *Non-representational Theory*, no lesser figure than University of Warwick Vice-Chancellor Nigel Thrift has recently been talking-up the 'resonant archive of practice'³⁰ in comparison to what he describes as the academic tomb 'full of dead, dead, dead geographies.'³¹ He has also suggested that we should instead open things up to 'more action, more imagination, more light, more fun, even.'³² When I listen carefully to the artists' own words in the *Undone* catalogue I hear again and again the way that work is derailed and pushed onto new tracks as they work with materials which shift their ideas unexpectedly. There's something about pushing stuff around in practice that enables concepts and theories to develop and I'm reminded of historian Keith Thomas' discussion of his working methods. Thomas confesses he set out before the advent of digital technology so that his practice of gathering and collating is resolutely analogue. (He also admits that he failed to bone up on the approved note-taking methodologies of his discipline, preferring to come up with his own rather ad hoc solutions across a number of years.) He describes how he gathers notes and sections from articles, snipping them into individual ideas, and then stuffs them over many months into various thematic envelopes: when the envelopes are full, he empties them onto a table

to reacquaint himself with what he's collected and starts to shuffle the entries into different orders and combinations. Thomas says: 'At this point a pattern usually forms. As Beatrice Webb rightly said, the very process of shuffling notes can be intellectually fertile. It helps one to make new connections and it raises questions to which one must try to find the answer.'³³ So this moment at which things begin to come together is also a point of undoing, as one realizes the issues and gaps now needing one's consideration, matters which may not previously have been on one's radar. He goes on to quote social theorist C. Wright Mills' essay 'On Intellectual Craftsmanship', which was appended to his 1959 *The Sociological Imagination*: 'As you rearrange a filing system, you often find that you are, as it were, loosening your imagination.'³⁴

I'm rather heartened by Mills recognition given to the imagination, and by Thomas' oddly handmade approach, which exemplifies thinking in practice: thinking is made possible by doing. It strikes me that a good deal of such activity happens throughout academia, but that this messy, rather lowly stage is frequently concealed beneath grander (grandiose?) ideas of 'method' and 'methodology'. Within the culture of practice-led research in fine art (at doctoral level and beyond) artists have become so worried over the propriety of their methods and methodologies that it has a paralyzing effect upon both their thinking and making.³⁵ I wish artists (and their supervisors!) would instead remember the confidence to use what they find and to *fiddle* with it (with all the impropriety suggested by that word.) I think that there is much to learn from this approach, which might yet have positive effects upon disciplines beyond the creative realm. In this pluralist world with its overwhelming amounts of knowledge, a host of competing philosophies, and huge discontinuities between fields perhaps it is the adhocist approach of the artist rather than tight disciplinary systems that will allow us to navigate uncertainty and use imaginatively what we find.

1. Charles Jencks and Nathan Silver, *Adhocism: the case for improvisation* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972)
2. *Ibid.*, p. 105.
3. A wide range of examples from the archive can be found in Vladimir Arkhipov, *Home-Made: Contemporary Russian Folk Artifacts* (London: Fuel, 2006)
4. Tim Machin, 'It's raining again', *a-n magazine*, (January 2005), p. 5.
5. Machin, 'Artist/Artist Interviews: Tim Machin/Franziska Furter', *Undone: Making and Unmaking in Contemporary Sculpture*, ed. by Stephen Feeke, Lisa Le Feuvre and Sophie Raikes, (Leeds: Henry Moore Institute 2010) p. 20.
6. Massow, I., 'Why I hate our official art', *New Statesman* (21 February 2002) Available online at <http://www.newstatesman.com/200201210007>
7. Stephen Feeke and Sophie Raikes, 'Undone: Making and Unmaking in Contemporary Sculpture' (curators' essay), Feeke, Le Feuvre and Raikes op. cit., p. 4.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
9. Machin op. cit., p. 19.
10. Ruth Claxton, 'Artist/Artist Interview: Neil Gall/Ruth Claxton', Feeke, Le Feuvre and Raikes op. cit., p. 33.
11. Jencks and Silver, op. cit., p. 131.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
13. Jacques Rancière, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster: Five Lessons in Intellectual Emancipation*, trans. Kristin Ross (Stanford: Stanford University Press 1991) p. 33.
14. Carol Gray and Ian Pirie, "'Artistic" Research Procedure: Research at the Edge of Chaos?', *Proceedings of 'Design Interfaces' conference*, (Salford: The European Academy of Design, University of Salford 1995)
15. Bircken and Dean, 'Artist/Artist Interview: Alexandra Bircken/Michael Dean', Feeke, Le Feuvre and Raikes op. cit., p. 26
16. Jencks and Silver, op. cit., p. 124
17. A significant body of this work was exhibited in Richard Wentworth and Eugene Atget: Faux Amis at the Photographer's Gallery, London, 4 October – 18 November 2001 Faux-Amis <http://www.photonet.org.uk/index.php?pxid=149>
18. Richard Wentworth in conversation with Stuart Morgan, cited on the Tate Liverpool website to accompany the eponymous exhibition, which ran 21 January – 24 April 2005. <http://www.tate.org.uk/liverpool/exhibitions/wentworth/>

19. Wentworth in Kevin Henry, *Parallel Universes: Making Do and Getting By + Thoughtless Acts (Mapping the quotidian from two perspectives.)*
http://www.core77.com/reactor/03.07_parallel.asp
20. Jencks and Silver, op. cit., p. 23.
21. Ibid., p. 27.
22. Krysten Cunningham in 'Artist/Artist Interview: Krysten Cunningham/Claire Barclay', Feeke, Le Feuvre and Raikes op. cit., 23
23. Jencks and Silver, op. cit., p. 107.
24. This body of work is collected in Richard Billingham, *Ray's a laugh*, (Zurich: Scalo 2000)
25. Franziska Furter in 'Artist/Artist Interview: Tim Machin/Franziska Furter', Feeke, Le Feuvre and Raikes, op. cit., p. 19.
26. Nayland Blake and Rachel Harrison in conversation. *Bomb*, no.105, (Fall 2008) pp. 44 – 53.
27. Ben Woodeson's work can be viewed via his website <http://www.woodeson.co.uk/>
His Twitter feed is at <http://twitter.com/benisdangerous>
28. Gray, C. and Malins, J., *Vizualizing Research: A Guide to the Research Process in Art and Design* (Farnham: Ashgate Press 2004)
29. Nicholas de Ville, 'The Theory/Practice Intermundium', *Drawing Fire: the Journal of the National Association of Fine Art Education*, Vol 2, Issue 3 (Autumn 1998)
30. Nigel Thrift, *Non-representational Theory: Space, politics, affect*, (London: Routledge 2007) p. 138.
31. Ibid., p. 138.
32. Ibid., p. 20.
33. Keith Thomas, 'Diary', *London Review of Books* 10 June 2010 K. p. 37.
34. C. Wright Mills 'On Intellectual Craftsmanship', *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1959) p. 212.
35. There has been a huge growth of such research in recent years for a host of reasons, not least the opportunity to gain a few years funding for one's practice through a PhD bursary, or access to AHRC funding beyond the limited coffers of the Arts Council. Now that art schools mainly exist within larger universities it has also become increasingly common to insist upon doctoral qualifications for those employed to teach fine art, as had not previously been the case in the discipline. I am concerned that these fiscal incentives and employment practices are helping to create something of a monoculture in terms of the kind of art practice/education being currently validated.

Joanne Lee 2010