



# INTERROGATION: WALSALL



**HANDBOOK**





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# TOP SECRET:

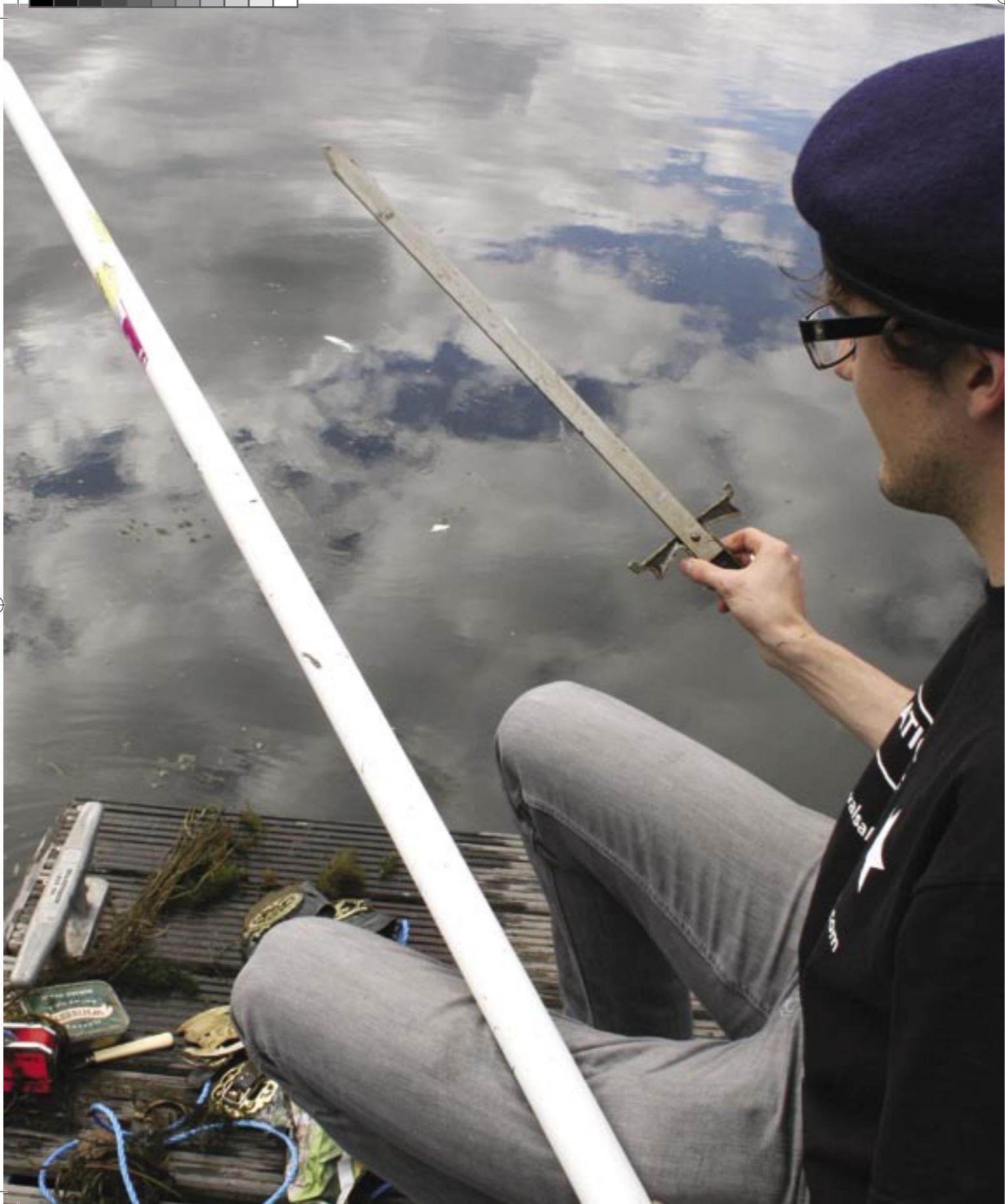
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**Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to become a secret agent for a day in order to interrogate the public spaces of Walsall.**

Using the New Art Gallery Walsall as a base, you will investigate the artist's role in the post-industrial world.

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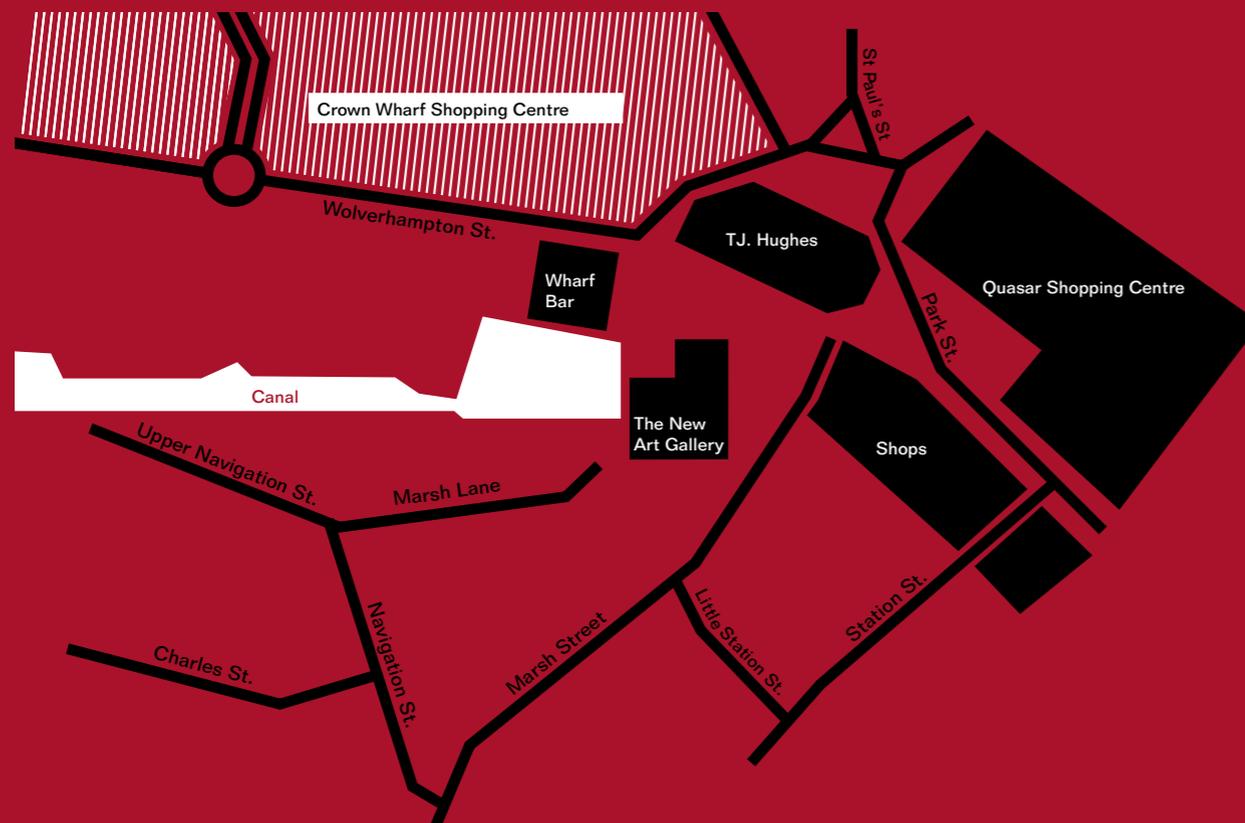


# INTERROGATION: WALSALL

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# MAP OF TARGET AREA



**longhouse**

**Longhouse** is an annual programme of work carried out by community arts organisation, Multistory. Longhouse provides exciting and rare opportunities for a wide range of artists to discover and explore new contexts and ways of working in the public realm by creating spaces for sharing knowledge and ideas, critical thinking and learning.

**The New Art Gallery Walsall**

**The New Art Gallery Walsall** presents, collects and interprets historic, modern and contemporary art in innovative and challenging ways. They aim to deliver a programme that reflects the diversity of contemporary art and the multi-cultural communities in which we live.



**Anna Francis** is an artist whose work examines private histories, public space and civic languages; using forms of intervention, mapping, performance, consultation and photography to investigate the impact of art and culture on the regeneration of cities, and the artist's role within this.

# INTERROGATION: WALSALL

**AN EXPLORATION OF THE IMPACT THAT ONE ARTIST CAN MAKE IN ONE PLACE, IN ONE DAY.**

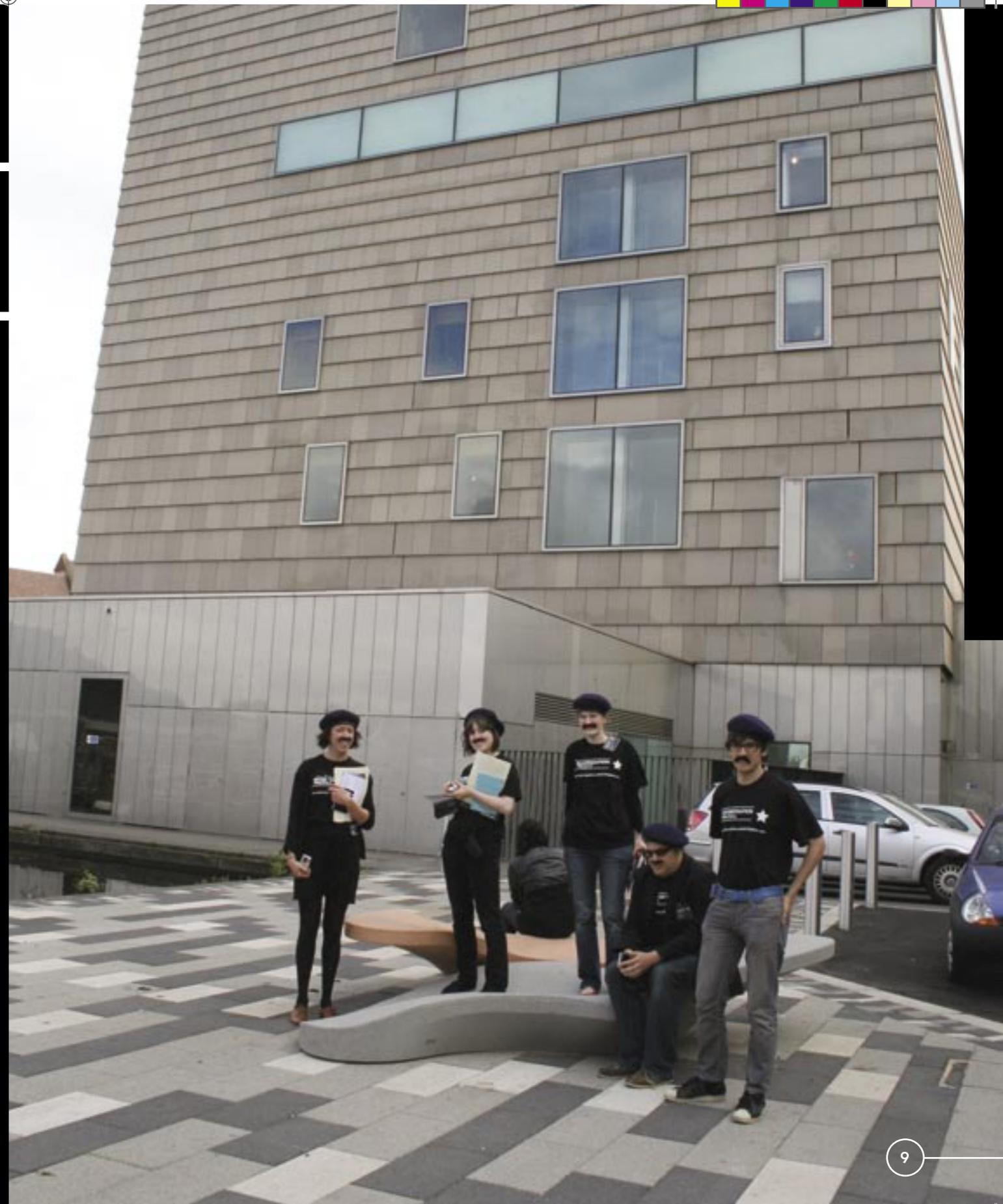
**Longhouse and The New Art Gallery Walsall approached artist Anna Francis to design a programme which would; use and animate the spaces outside the gallery, connect the gallery and the public in some way and provide professional development for artists. From those identified aims Interrogation: Walsall was born.**

Even before its completion in 1999 the gallery was committed to connecting with the people of Walsall, ensuring their thoughts and ideas were considered in its design. This commitment continues today. Interrogation: Walsall was part of the gallery's artist in residence programme. The gallery's only request was that, Francis, the artist in residence, should design a programme which created an opportunity for artists to work with the public in Walsall.

Over four Wednesdays in September, 2009, groups of artists were invited to The New Art Gallery Walsall to take part in a rare opportunity. The artists were carefully selected to go 'undercover' in the public spaces of this post-industrial town, in order to explore, excavate, and interrogate the spaces and people within the vicinity of the gallery.

The programme was carefully designed to provide a context, a structure and a suggested methodology, plus the space and resources for the artists to create a quick, responsive investigation. This way of working reflects Francis' own approach to practice, which can be described as, a very public thinking-out-loud, where notions and ideas are explored in the open, in a dialogue with the space and people of a place. This approach can be risky and unpredictable at times, but can also result in accident and surprise, and can create the perfect conditions for an artist's practice to develop.

Interrogation: Walsall created a situation where artists and the public could enter into a conversation about The New Art Gallery Walsall, the town and the public square outside the gallery and its uses. The individual approach taken by each of the selected artists meant that these conversations happened in innovative, enlightening and exciting ways. The result was a series of artistic interventions, which could be viewed as an elaborate but effective method for consulting the public on public space and public art.



# MY MISSION

ANNA FRANCIS

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN INVITED TO A MEETING WHERE SOMEONE OFFERS YOU THE BEST, THE MOST AMAZING OPPORTUNITY YOU CAN EVER IMAGINE? WHERE SOMEONE SAYS TO YOU,

**"WE KNOW THE SORT OF THING YOU ARE INTERESTED IN, AND WELL, HERE IS A SPACE AND SITUATION WHERE YOU CAN REALLY DO JUST THAT — GO ON, SEE WHAT YOU CAN DO."**

**O**f course those meetings rarely come around, if ever, but one day in August, 2009 I somehow found myself in just such a meeting. The New Art Gallery Walsall had offered their Artists' Studio to Longhouse for a month. Longhouse wanted to use the space to offer artists opportunities to develop their practice working in the public realm in some way, while the gallery hoped that the residency could be used to connect with the people of Walsall, and see how they felt about the public spaces surrounding the gallery, and public art in general. In that one hour meeting, **Interrogation: Walsall** was conceived.

Within my practice I explore the artist's role in the post-industrial world, exploring the contexts of regeneration, questioning the impact and logic of public art as economic rejuvenator, and trying to measure the lasting effects of garden festivals, capitals of culture and buildings as local heroes. **Interrogation: Walsall** was an opportunity to open the conversation out to other artists, and see what they might make of it.

I had heard of other live art projects which required practitioners to follow rules and push themselves into new and potentially frightening situations. I have always liked the idea of this, and wanted to experience it. As an artist who often works in public spaces, where thoughts and ideas are explored outside of my head, through conversations with people around the nature of public space, art and the artist's role, I was all too aware of this being my 'discomfort' zone. I find it terrifying to be so exposed, but enthralling and rewarding too. The unpredictable nature of working this way is absolutely what makes it worthwhile.

#### **This is what **Interrogation: Walsall** was built around:**

- The idea that over-thinking work can drain the life out of it
- That conversations in the street with strangers can be as valuable as well thought out conference speeches
- That sometimes working quickly and responsively is the best way to work
- That local people are the experts on places, not necessarily town planners, councillors or regeneration specialists

I had been to the gallery a few times, and been impressed. I like the way teenagers hang out on the sofas watching the art videos, and children pull their parents in by the hand to visit the Disco Gallery, and in general the space seems to be in constant, changing use. It bustles. This is a working, community space, and not just an art space. There is always something new to be seen; one day a library of secrets, the next, a wall of signs in response to Lady Epstein's letters to her son. Every day something new to discover.

# THE SET-UP

AFTER THAT FIRST MEETING THE WORK REALLY STARTED, A CALL WAS PUT OUT WHICH WAS DELIBERATELY WRITTEN IN A STYLE WHICH WOULD SIGNAL TO ARTISTS THE APPROACH WHICH WE WERE TAKING.

## THE CALL

**Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is to become a secret agent for a day in order to interrogate the public spaces of Walsall. Using The New Art Gallery Walsall as a base you will investigate the artist's role in the post-industrial world.**

## THE INTERROGATION ROOM

The Artists' Studio was designed to look like a spy headquarters (or at least how I imagine one would look.) Everything within the room, from the lighting to the hand drawn map, was carefully planned to create impact for the artists arriving, but also so that even when unoccupied, there would be something interesting for the public to see within the space. It also had to be a functional work space, so included a resource area, fully stocked materials cupboard, and of course a multi-media area. This was an important aspect of the design of Interrogation; the computer and video camera were not simply a tool for recording but were also a direct line to the public. A blog and web based TV channel was set up, and all activity which took place within the Interrogation Room, from inception through to symposium, was documented and screened live – allowing Interrogation to reach a wider audience.



INTERROGATION IN PROGRESS



INTERROGATION PACKS



WORKSHOP IN PROGRESS

## THE UNIFORM

On arrival, each of the selected artists were issued with a uniform. The uniform was designed with 3 objectives in mind. The beret referenced **'The Activist'** while the moustache was **'The Disguise'** and finally the T-Shirt was meant to make the artist feel part of **'The Team'**. Overall the idea of asking the artists to change out of their normal clothes and into the uniform was that the artist might leave their usual coat at the door – and perhaps their usual working methodologies.

The uniform design was purposefully released on the project blog, where artists thinking of applying for the opportunity were encouraged to go for more information. This was to ensure that all those who might be uncomfortable with the idea of walking around Walsall wearing a moustache and a beret **'need not apply.'**

**The night before each mission, the artists received a text message containing instructions.**



20:45



Agent, your mission starts 10:00hrs.  
Your contact will be in the foyer of  
TMAGW. Approach only when contact  
is alone. Contact will wear blue beret.  
U must carry a newspaper under ur  
right arm. On approaching deliver the  
following code phrase: The concrete  
hippo is on the move. & await further  
instructions.

Options

Reply

Back



The contact asked the artist to show identification, and would then issue them with an Interrogation I.D. badge. They were then instructed to go up to the Interrogation Room (where I was waiting) and knock at the door.

**AND THE MISSION WAS NOW UNDERWAY.**

# THE PROCESS

The Lead Artist's role was as lead interrogator, with support from Agent Orange and Agent Greenwood, who were under strict instructions, **'Do not smile at the artists. Do not be nice to the artists!'** The artists were purposefully treated sternly, and spoken to in a brusque manner for the first part of the day. This was a form of deprogramming which was meant to disarm them, and make them feel slightly uncomfortable, but would help them to step out of their ordinary ways of working.

Each mission was allocated an area of the wall within the Interrogation Room in order that the artists could document their response and allow the public to see what was happening. Over the four weeks, the wall of the Interrogation Room was filled to bursting. This included the response from the public to the artists' interventions.

The final part of Interrogation: Walsall was a symposium and panel discussion which saw the Interrogation Room open to the public. Guest speakers were invited to talk about the findings and some of the issues raised by the project.

INDUCT



DEPROGRAMME



INSTRUCT



INFORM



DISCOVER



PLAN



DO



DEBRIEF



DOCUMENT



# THE MISSIONS

## 1. ACTION RESEARCH

## 2. CONSULTATION

## 3. COLLABORATION

## 4. INTERVENTION

# EACH MISSION WAS PRECEDED BY A MASTERCLASS, WHERE THE AGENTS WERE PROVIDED WITH A MODUS OPERANDI AND EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE.

They were advised that their response should aim to interrogate the public space around The New Art Gallery Walsall. Methodology, though flexible, should consider; responding to a physical attribute of the public realm, it could be a social experiment, the response could aim to question the public, or require a response from the public or from themselves as artists.

They should aim to find out something about the place or its people, or perhaps consider the role of artists and public art in a post-industrial town.

The idea that the community and public are involved in the dialogue between the artists and the designated interrogation space is central to the ethos of **INTERROGATION**. The conversation should be public, and accessible.

Each week the invited artists responded differently to the space, the situation and the people. They noticed and picked up on different aspects of the public realm spaces around the gallery, but over the four weeks some commonalities started to emerge. One of the first observations made each week concerned the way the public moved through Gallery Square.

On the whole the public would take a route through the square which kept them as far away from the gallery as possible. The trajectory of walkers through the square saw most people 'hugging' the wall of what is now T. J. Hughes. The artists were interested in exploring this phenomenon, and perhaps affecting it in some way. The T.J. Hughes building can be described as Category E – in the Façade Evaluation Scale developed by the Centre for Public Space Research in their research pamphlet *Close Encounters with Buildings* (2004).

### This means that it consists of

- Large units, few or no doors (0-2 doors per 100 m)
- No visible variation in function
- Blind or passive units
- Uniform facades with no relief
- No details, nothing to look at (Carhon, Q. et al, 2004)

The study explores the way that pedestrians move through cities at around 3mph – which allows time to receive and take in information. When buildings and spaces offer no visual relief or stimulation the pedestrian will tend to walk more quickly through the space, whether in a hurry or not. This idea is certainly in line with the Agent's findings in Gallery Square. Another observation involved how willing the people of Walsall were to engage in the activities instigated by the Agents. Purely the presence of groups of Agents dressed in T-Shirts, moustaches and berets animated the square, creating a performance space and intriguing the public.

Agents came from all over the country, with varying degrees of experience of participatory public realm work – yet all noted the friendly, open readiness of the Walsall public to join in. Some individuals and groups, after finding out about Interrogation in week one, returned each week in order to see what was happening, and then came back for the exhibition and symposium at the end of the project. In this way Interrogation was able to continue the gallery's commitment to engaging the public of Walsall, and involving them in the creation and discussion of public art.

# INTERROGATION: ACTION RESEARCH



**ACTION RESEARCH MEANS EMPLOYING SPECIFIC OR PRE-DETERMINED METHODOLOGIES, IN ORDER TO FORM A CONSENSUS OR CREATE UNDERSTANDING AND ASSUMES THAT THERE IS SPACE FOR DISCOVERY, BUT DOES NOT INSIST ON A DEFINITIVE ANSWER.**

**For the five artists invited to undertake the mission, the specified methodology was:**

1. Decide exactly what, within the given context, you are trying to find out.
2. Do something in order to find out something.
3. Build in some method of uncovering or recording the answer to what you are trying to find out.

## ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT ONE:

Building on an alliance formed during the planning session, Agents Semp and Cooper-Willis used a variety of tactics designed to activate and interfere with Gallery Square, looking to find ways to change or halt the movement of the public through the space. One such play involved chalking out designated areas on the floor, such as "The Interrogation Zone", in which Agent Semp encouraged members of the public to stand whilst Agent Cooper-Willis would canvass opinions on matters relating to the square and its uses.

Agent Cooper-Willis attempted to encourage the public to break their habit of traversing the Square in close proximity to the T.J. Hughes wall and as far as possible from the gallery, a phenomena known as "hugging the wall". She experimented to see how far away from the wall she could stand, in order that the public would have to walk around her, and step out of the usual routes. She found that she could be 3 steps from the wall, before her physical force-field would be interrupted by brave souls, venturing between her body and the T.J. Hughes wall. Meanwhile, Agent Semp created a "Pepsi challenge" style conceit in which members of the public were invited to guess which of the three cups presented to them contained tap, spring and canal water. The tactic allowed him a chance to engage with the public in conversation about the broader issues concerning the Square and its uses.



## ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT TWO:

Agent Koszerek became an urban gardener, and went to the waste ground at the back of the gallery to investigate the types of weeds that could be found there. She documented these using sun paper, and collected a good sample. Aided by two willing members of the public in Gallery Square, she planted the weeds up into window boxes. They watered the weeds and made some further cameraless photographs with the sun paper. The window boxes were then brought inside, to a ledge overlooking the Garman Ryan Collection, which she had noted during the tour. Inspired by the collection's themes of nature, the idea was to bring some flora and fauna into the space. The resulting display worked very well with the wood work of the gallery. Agent Koszerek's volunteers had previously been barred from entering the gallery, after being suspected of drug taking on the premises. Agent Koszerek noted,



**Whilst I do not believe that the intervention has any political impact I like the coincidence that the alternative collection placed in the gallery for a moment was created by two people who were not permitted to be there. My intervention, whilst socially engaging with the public, engaged with a public that the gallery was no longer interested to engage.**

**ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT THREE:**

Responding to a Richard Wentworth photograph in the gallery's Garman Ryan Collection, which looks at items discarded in public spaces, but treating them as though they are a traditional still life, Agent Vaughan carried out his own photographic exploration on the streets outside the gallery, picking up on discarded and unnoticed objects. Motivated by concepts of exchange and value, he documented and then replaced the actual objects with their photographic representations. The objects would then be brought into the gallery, and exhibited as part of the Interrogation documentation. He took the idea further by photographing features that might otherwise have been overlooked, like drain covers, stains and patterns in brick work, this time placing the photographic representation over the original, creating a slight jarring of everyday life.

**ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT FOUR:**

Using performance and sculpture, Agent Bethell sought to pose a question rather than directly asking the public. Responding to "The Early Ploughman" by Samuel Palmer, a gallery exhibit, he inexpertly built a plough from some offcuts of wood and some twine, and set about "ploughing" the expanse of concrete that makes up Gallery Square using the markings left by artist Richard Wentworth (who designed the square) as guides. Agent Bethell wanted to symbolise ideas of change (from urban to greenbelt), industry and the working class, whilst offering the watching public the chance to assess the potential of the space. The inevitable destruction of the unfit-for-purpose plough was designed to highlight the decline of old industry and reflect the present economic climate.

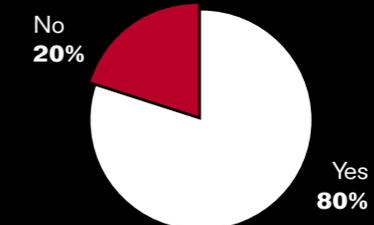


**This first Interrogation Mission was interesting, as the Agents launched themselves onto an unsuspecting Walsall public.**

Agent Cooper-Willis carried out a quantitative survey as part of her investigations, which revealed for the first time that the people of Walsall were very keen to see Gallery Square used for events and other activities. Over the four weeks this was reiterated a multitude of times, both in deeds and words, as Agents found time and again how keen the public were to engage in their responses.

**Responses to questionnaire administered to pedestrians in Gallery Square, Walsall**

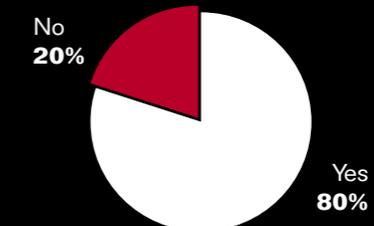
Are you having fun today?



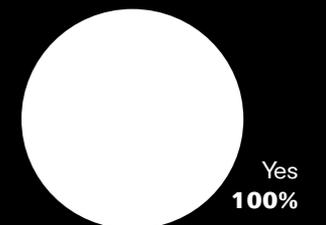
This space was designed by an artist; would you have guessed that?



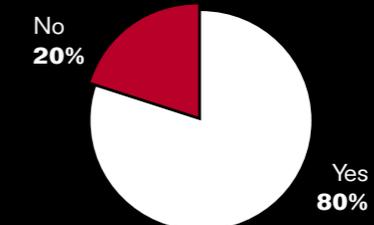
Do you come here often?



Would you like events to be held here?



Do you like this space?



Agent Bethell's interactions with the people of Walsall went from one extreme to another; he was given a lot of help (not knowing the area) in locating a wood merchant and also was shown particular hospitality as the wood merchant donated the wood he needed for his plough – but on the other hand he found himself moved to discard his 'moustache' after having 'Hitler Lover' shouted at him in the street.

# INTERROGATION: CONSULTATION



**THE MASTERCLASS FOR INTERROGATION: CONSULTATION ASKED THE AGENTS TO USE CONSULTATION TO EXPLORE THE ROLE OF THE ARTIST AND PUBLIC ART IN WALSALL OR UNCOVER SOMETHING INTERESTING ABOUT THIS PLACE BY ASKING THE PUBLIC. THE INFORMATION AND DATA GATHERED COULD POTENTIALLY BE USED:**

- ★ **TO Target** and uncover what people want or need from the public realm space around the gallery
- ★ **TO Plan** and use the space better by giving people what they want and expect
- ★ **TO Improve** the public realm spaces and use of the space
- ★ **TO Test** options for change in the public realm outside the gallery
- ★ **TO Prioritise** the possible uses of the space based on what people say
- ★ **TO Set** usage standards relevant to users' needs (and monitor them)
- ★ **TO Inform** the development and delivery of the changes planned for the square through active research
- ★ **TO Change** the public space throughout the duration of the consultation period, being an end in itself.



**The Agents were advised that their consultation should be interesting for the public to engage in, and should activate the square in such a way that even if the findings from the consultation were never used, the process itself validated the activity.**

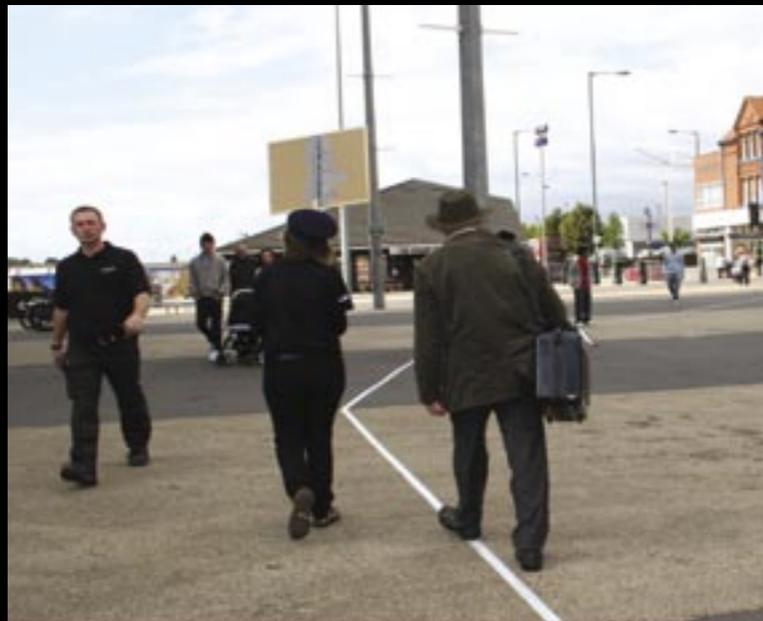
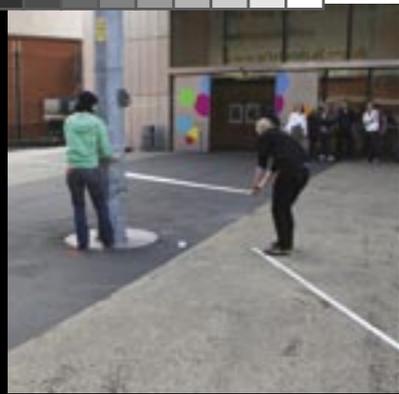
More than any other week the emphasis here was on the public's route through Gallery Square. The agents split into pairs and the two projects, which aimed to consult the public on the use of the square, worked in tandem to reroute the people of Walsall's trajectory through the space, and create new situations and events around the square as suggestions of alternate possibilities and opportunities.



## CONSULTATION PROJECT ONE:

**Agent Kemp and Agent Griffiths** started their intervention by offering the opportunity for members of the public to 'own' a piece of the square for a few moments, by drawing around their feet and then asking them what they wanted to use the circle for. One person said "to sleep", another "to draw" and another "to put a sculpture in". They then effectively cordoned off a large area of Gallery Square with bungee cord – going across the usual public route – and three quarters of the way into the square, creating a giant washing line. This meant the public had to either take a long walk around, or limbo underneath. This simple act succeeded in creating a focal point for discussion. Some members of the public simply walked around, while others stopped to ask what was going on or commented about having their usual course interrupted.

The washing line soon turned into a more complicated cat's cradle as passersby got involved. The artists worked with the groups to create a variety of spaces using the washing line, and then engaged the participants in conversation over what the space in the middle could and should be used for. It worked as a successful participatory consultation method, creating a literal, physical creative space which was used as a tool for creating dialogue. As well as this, Gallery Square was brought alive and the public were 'moved' to negotiate the space differently.



### CONSULTATION PROJECT TWO:

Agent Armstrong and Agent Beavis-Harrison went to the local hardware store and armed themselves with white gaffer tape, white boards and broom handles, which they turned into signs. They marked out an alternative route in the square, bringing the public closer to the gallery than before. They offered to accompany people along the new path, and while en route would ask them questions about the square and its uses. The signs they carried asked the public to 'Walk the new route today' which people did, but Agent Beavis-Harrison was surprised by the strong negative public reaction to her sign, which simply said 'Take a Walk.' The Agents found that around 20% of the public would take up the offer of an accompanied new walk, whereas 80% did their best to stick to the well trodden furrow close to the T. J. Hughes building.

### DURING THE MISSION THE AGENTS COLLECTED COMMENTS AND REACTIONS FROM THE PUBLIC ABOUT THE SQUARE, AND ABOUT THEIR INTERVENTIONS.

#### WALSALL ON GALLERY SQUARE -

'WHY DON'T YOU MOVE THE BUILDING FORWARD?'

'DO SOMETHING WITH THE WIND - WITH COLOURS!'

'MAKE IT A WELCOMING AREA'

'GET A PLINTH - LIKE TRAFALGAR SQUARE'

'GET A STATUE - LIKE THE BULL IN THE BULLRING'

'THIS IS THE GATEWAY TO WALSALL, DO SOMETHING WITH IT.'

'I'D LIKE AN OUTSIDE GYM'

'I'D LIKE A MOUSTACHE SHOP'

'I'D LIKE FLOOR ART - OUTSIDE THE GALLERY'

'I NEVER USE THE BENCHES'

'THEY HAVE PERFORMANCES INSIDE - WHY NOT OUTSIDE?'

#### WALSALL ON INTERROGATION: CONSULTATION -

'WHY DON'T YOU WALK AROUND LIKE NORMAL PEOPLE?'

'I LOVE MY OWN CIRCLE HERE - BEING IN MY OWN SPACE.'

'I'LL WALK WHERE I WANT!'

'YOU'RE INVADING MY SPACE!'

'IT'S MIND-BOGGLING'

'BRENDAN AND CHANTELE SKIPPED WITH THE ELASTIC'

'I'VE NEVER REALLY THOUGHT OF WALKING A NEW WAY!'



# INTERROGATION: COLLABORATION



By week three it was clear that although there was a set methodology for each mission these were not self-contained as each week the new group of Agents were able to benefit from the previous weeks' findings. The Masterclass this time focused on the way that a collaborative relationship should build on the strengths of those involved, and that roles should be both agreed and agreeable for collaborators. The Agents were also encouraged to consider the public's role. Were the people of Walsall to be merely participants or effectively co-collaborators? The emphasis was placed on the fertile creative ground between collaborators, and the fact that what is produced or emerges from a collaboration would not have been possible without the particular individuals involved.

## FERTILE CREATIVE GROUND



## COLLABORATION PROJECT ONE:

**Agent Taylor's and Agent Marsden's** approach was to set up an Interrogation Station in Gallery Square. They used a textual methodology to consult the locals, asking people to add a word to the prefix 'Inter', creating a new word relating to how they felt about Walsall and the square in particular. They photographed the participants and allowed them to keep their memento of the process. Of all of the mission days, this one was the gloomiest weather-wise, and this may have affected the public's mood – many of the words which people chose to write down were negative. It is interesting to note the way that an unidentifiable set of circumstances can create a particular response and disposition from the public, it is hard to know what this might be attributed to, the weather, the time of month, the particular people that happen to walk through that day – whatever it was there was a discernible feeling in the air.

In preparation for their mission the Agents had created postcards and badges saying **'I'm Inter Walsall'** which acted as encouragement for the public to get involved. It is always useful to have something to exchange with people, when trying to engage the public in some sort of dialogue, whilst also acting as a physical memory of the interaction.

(inter)home  
(inter)national  
(inter)greggs  
(inter)shopping  
(inter)changin  
(inter)ferre  
(inter)locking  
(inter)lectual  
(inter)cultural  
(inter)textual

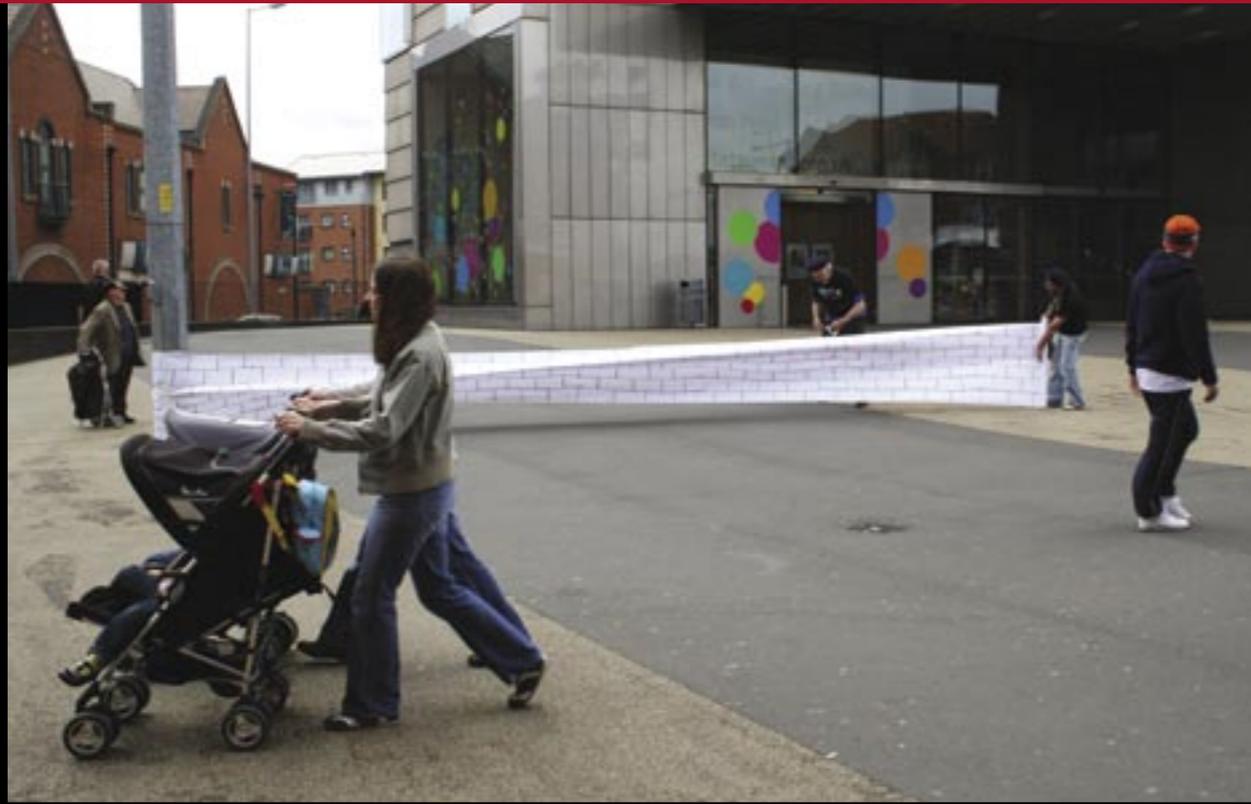
TWO PAIRS OF ARTISTS APPLIED EXPRESSING THE WISH TO COLLABORATE TOGETHER, WHILE A THIRD PAIR, WHO HAD NEVER MET BEFORE, MADE UP THE THIRD PARTNERSHIP.



**COLLABORATION PROJECT TWO:**

**Agent Charnley and Agent Holdcroft** focused on the invisible forcefield around the gallery, which caused the public to 'hug' the T. J. Hughes wall. Their aim was to build a physical wall out of paper, which would act as a tool for engaging the public in discussion and on which people could write their thoughts about Walsall. The wind, however, had other ideas, and saw the agents struggling to assemble the wall. At first it looked like it might work, as they slowly unrolled their wall. But once the wind had taken it, the wall started to rip. It flapped noisily around, and seemed to deter a good number of the public from approaching.

Eventually the agents decided to work with this rupture, and attached the wall to the ground, clearly indicating in chalk where the break in the barrier had occurred. They then created a performance space, within the middle of the break where one of them would lie down - in a passive protest - symbolising escape and resistance to power structures. Every now and again the Agent within the circle would come out of their foetal position, jumping up and crying out 'See through the glass!' or 'Lets do something different' or simply letting out an anguished cry. The agents were fairly experimental in their approach to the performative element of the work - testing out their bodies and vocal chords in this new situation. While one of the agents performed in the space, the other one was involved in an engagement activity, talking to members of the public about what it might all be about, and acting as a bridge between the public and the performance. This was important to them, as they felt that often work of this nature could be inaccessible for the general public.





**COLLABORATION PROJECT THREE:**

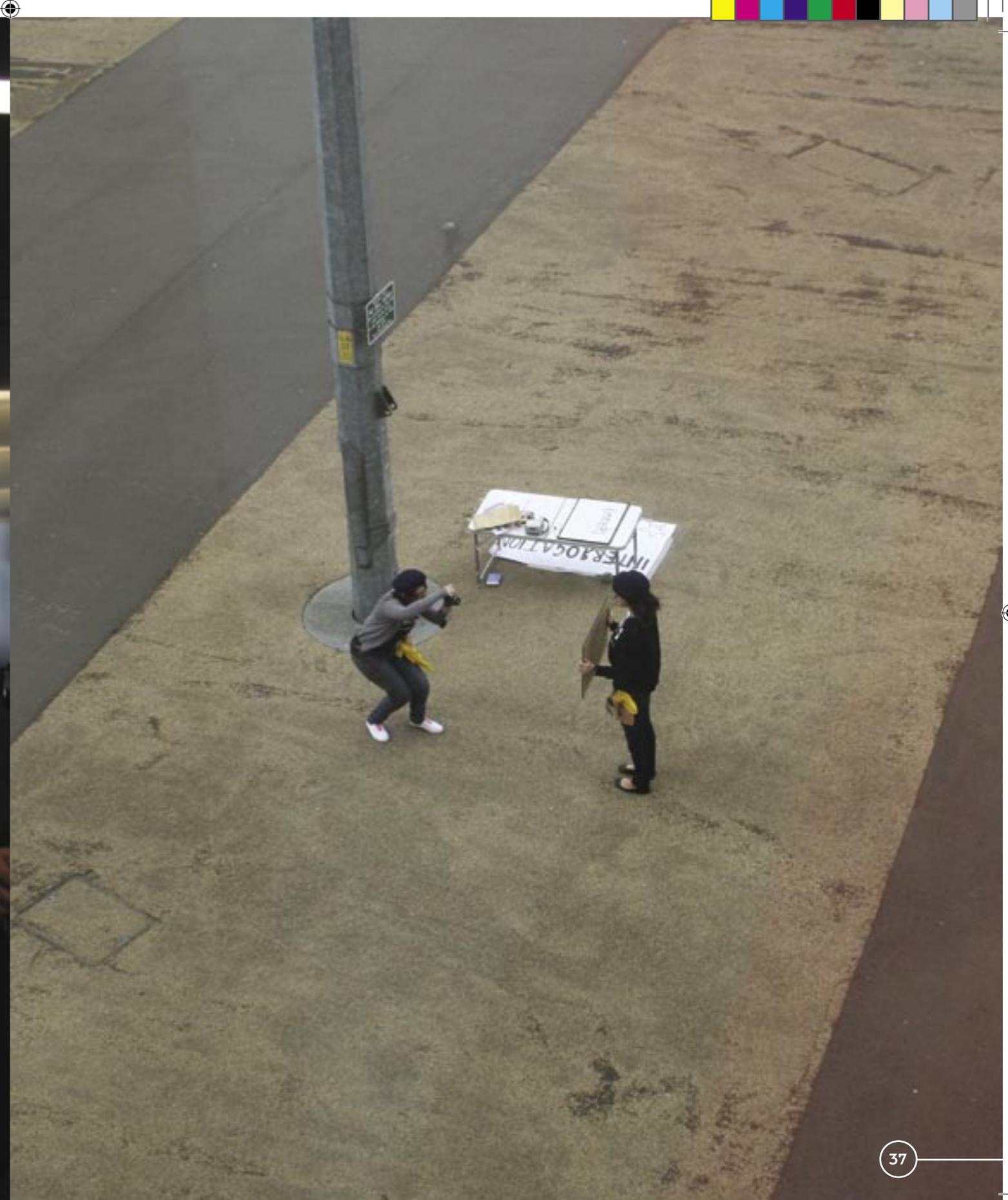
**Unlike the other Agents, Agent Shipley and Agent Strain** had never met or worked together before, although this didn't affect the development or implementation of their collaboration it brought a new element to their work as individuals. The pair decided to focus their interrogation on the canal walk, at the back of the gallery. Their activity was part intervention and part public service. They put on their protective clothing and went outside to dredge the canal - taking out a variety of discarded objects: bottles, teabags, condoms, cans, plastic - even some needles found floating around in the canal. The agents first laid out their finds in formal lines on the ground - creating an interesting display. The Agents then used the objects to draw attention to Richard Wentworth's piece of public art, the stripy floor, that continues on up the canal away from The New Art Gallery Walsall. They lined up the bottles and other objects into what reminded some passersby of mini cityscapes. The cityscapes were carefully placed on each stripe, as far along the canal as can be seen from the gallery. Finally, the agents selected one object from each grouping, which they tied onto a long string, creating a floating sculpture, which they returned to the canal - and floated back home to the gallery. The Agents then took their rubbish floating sculpture and removed it from the canal for good. One passerby asked in all seriousness, 'what's happened - has there been a murder?' responding to the Agents protective outerwear - **if ignoring the moustaches.**



**Interrogation: Collaboration**

continued to build on the success of previous weeks - by now, it was clear that some people were returning on a weekly basis to interact with the moustachioed Agents invading the square.

It is interesting to question whether an intervention like that of Agent Charnley and Agent Holdcroft would have been received with more antagonism (given its potentially confrontational approach) had it been an isolated event, rather than part of the ongoing programme. A grown man curled up on the ground in a foetal position in a public square could in other circumstances be a disturbing site.



# INTERROGATION: INTERVENTION



THE FINAL MISSION ROUNDED OFF THE INTERROGATIONS NICELY. ALL OF THE MISSIONS SO FAR COULD BE DESCRIBED AS INTERVENTIONS IN SOME WAY, BUT THIS WEEK THE FOCUS FOR THE ARTISTS WAS MORE DEFINED, AS EACH AGENT WAS ASKED TO CONSIDER THE NATURE OF AN INTERVENTION.

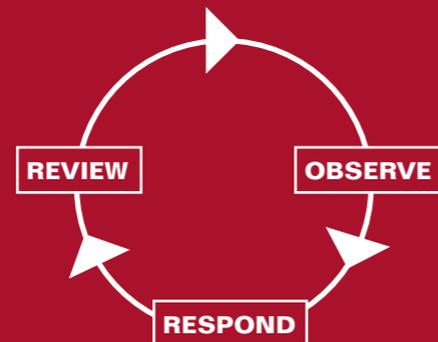
# INTERVENTION

**NOUN**

THE ACT OF INTERVENING, ESP. TO INFLUENCE OR ALTER A SITUATION IN SOME WAY | **INTERVENTIONIST**

**NADJ**

A cycle of intervention was introduced to the Agents, which was to become their very simple methodology for the day. They must observe the target zone, create an intervention which would respond to the target zone, in order to alter or influence it in some way for a period of time; then review the intervention, in order to reflect and consider the implications.



As with previous weeks the Agents were fully briefed on their Mission before a Masterclass to explore precedence and methodologies for the day took place.



Then we went on the whistle stop tour of the gallery - starting on the roof to see the view.



And checking out the view from Gallery Four.



We then went outside to look at the target area, and take a group photo.



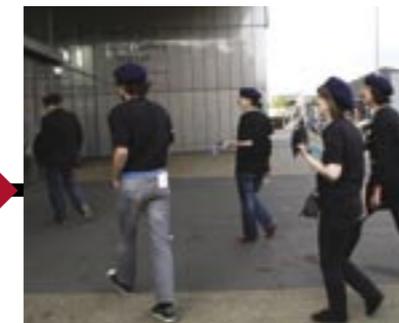
Quick peek at the video piece.



Before the fastest viewing of Gordon Cheung's show ever.



Before pausing to consider directions.



Then back inside for lunch and planning time.



Getting some funny looks from visiting school groups on the way.



ON THIS FINAL MISSION THE AGENTS WERE VERY KEEN TO GET OUT INTO THE PUBLIC SPACE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE, DECIDING TO DO MOST OF THEIR PLANNING ON THE SQUARE.

**INTERVENTION** PROJECT ONE:

**Agent Doubleday and Agent Duffy** arrived together, and are part of a group of artists known as Open City. Each of the Agents were given £20 for any materials they might need to help them complete their mission. Agents Doubleday and Duffy decided to use this £20 as a cash incentive for members of the public to participate and engage in their interrogation project. They were interested in the way people move through public space, and in the way that public life is speeding up all the time. People no longer seem to have time to stop and contemplate, pausing in our busy lives to look around us, or think for a moment about where we are going, preferring to hasten through life, getting from a to b with no thought for the journey. They decided to negotiate with the public, offering them payment for their time. They would have to stand still in one spot, for an agreed amount of time, for an agreed amount of money. In order to get paid the participant would have to stand absolutely still, not smile, talk or laugh, and just look in one direction - effectively becoming a human statue for an allotted period. Some of the Walsall public were happier to be employed in this way than others. The interesting phenomenon which occurred as a result of this activity, was that other members of the public (not being paid) would stand completely still in other parts of the square, watching the standees, and unwittingly extending the project. The project raised questions for all of us about the value of public art, what it is and who should pay for it, and be paid for it.



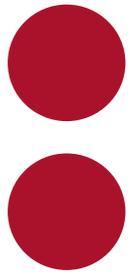
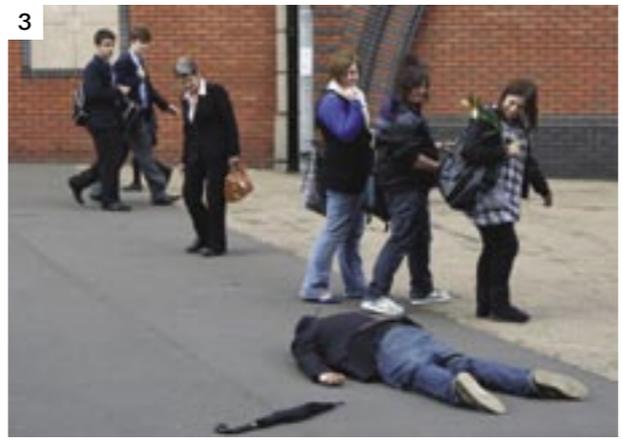
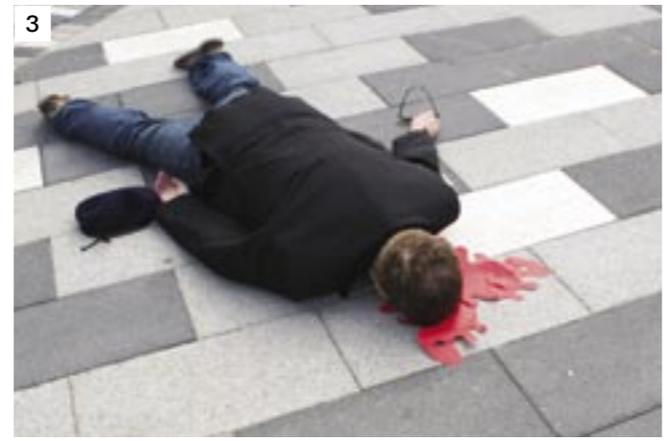


AGENT PITT TALKING TO ARTIST BOB AND ROBERTA SMITH.

**INTERVENTION PROJECT TWO:**

Perhaps the most enthusiastic (and most knowledgeable on all matters of espionage) agent of the entire project was Agent Pitt. Pitt had come prepared for his mission, having already created some Dope books (spy notebooks where details of assassinations and spy subjects are recorded), but Agent Pitt was also very prepared to respond to the given situation on the day, like all good agents.

- 1. Agent Pitt set himself up a base in the centre of Gallery Square, and set out a collection of postcards purchased from the gallery shop, showing selected artworks from the gallery's collection. He persuaded the public to write innocuous thoughts and remarks on the postcards, which were then posted to various intelligence agencies worldwide (CIA, MI5 etc.) These are known as 'Innocent Postcards.' Spies use Innocent Postcards to activate agents during a mission.
- 2. Another intervention which Agent Pitt carried out involved various formations of chocolate **MICE** around the square. **MICE** is a spy acronym meaning **Money, Ideology, Compromise and Ego**. Which, Pitt said, could also be an apt description for most public art.
- 3. Then the Dope books came into their own. Vantage points around the gallery were selected, and the Dope books left in the vantage points - resulting in three different assassinations around Gallery Square: one using the old poisoned umbrella technique, one saw the accidental death of a raven and the final one seemingly a suicide (though possible murder staged to look like suicide). Pitt pushed the boundaries of what could be achieved by one person in one day.
- 4. Pitt took his Interrogation Mission very seriously, even extending the project after the Mission Day, by going undercover on Antony Gormley's plinth in Trafalgar square.



### INTERVENTION PROJECT THREE:

Agent Smith responded to the floral still life section of the Garman Ryan Collection purchasing lilies, cyclamen, turnips and other natural objects which can be found in the collection, and held a Garman Ryan Tombola in Gallery Square. Winning ticket holders had to draw a picture of the natural object in order to claim it as their prize. These real objects, represented inside the gallery within the collection, had made their way out into the public realm, therefore raising awareness of the Garman Ryan Collection amongst the general public of Walsall. The participant's drawn representation of the object then returned to the gallery to be exhibited as part of the Interrogation Room documentation. A fantastic exchange had taken place. Even people who won a turnip were pleased, and each person (win or lose) was given a leaflet about the collection, with the aim of encouraging them to visit the gallery. This very simple idea was popular with participants, and certainly raised awareness of the gallery's work, and definitely resulted in quite a few extra visitors.



### INTERVENTION PROJECT FOUR:

The final Interrogation project was Agent Winnett's Heritage Fishing. Agent Winnett responded to the various romantic views of fishing shown in the gallery's collection. He was interested in exploring the romanticism of being a lone fisherman on the canal side, but he was not fishing for fish, but heritage. Referring to the importance of the canal in Walsall's industrial history, he used his extra strong magnet to fish the canal for metal treasures dropped into the canal's murky depths. Swords were discovered, as well as various saddles with badges (directly referencing Walsall's two main industries, stirrup and saddle making and mining for metals). Over the course of the afternoon Agent Winnett pulled one treasure after another from the water. Members of the public would come along to watch, letting out shocked gasps whenever a new treasure was discovered. The intervention attracted a purely male audience, as groups stood by watching and commenting on Winnett's equipment, fishing, and the importance of the canal in Walsall's history. The providence of the items collected from the canal was questioned by the public – but whether the items were authentic or not is really irrelevant – the point of the intervention was to create a spectacle and a talking point.



The strength of all of the Interrogations was summed up for me in what was to be the final exchange of the project with a member of the public. Proudly displaying an image from his mobile phone, a local man told of how Winnett was using the wrong equipment. The picture on his phone was of an enormous fish caught in that very spot the week before, and this was the delight for me. An artist's intervention created a space for exchange, celebration and dialogue specific to one place, which would not have happened without Interrogation: Walsall.

I was shocked and surprised by how inquisitive and willing to get involved the people of Walsall were. I have worked within the public realm in a number of cities and towns, and have experienced a range of reactions, from indifference to animosity to occasional curiosity – but Walsall's response was overwhelmingly friendly and positive, with many people telling us how much they want to see things going on in the Town.





WHY DON'T  
YOU WALK

AROUND LIKE

# NORMAL

PEOPLE?



## INTERROGATION: OPEN



THE FINAL STEP OF **INTERROGATION: WALSALL** WAS TO OPEN THE INTERROGATION ROOM AND THE DEBATE TO THE PUBLIC. EVERYONE WHO HAD BEEN ENGAGED OVER THE PREVIOUS FOUR WEEKS WAS INVITED TO RETURN AND EXAMINE THE FINDINGS. AS WELL AS THIS, THE PUBLIC AND ARTS PROFESSIONALS FROM THE REGION WERE INVITED TO ATTEND A SYMPOSIUM AND PANEL DISCUSSION.



**The Interrogation: Action Research** speaker was Gary Anderson from the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home. Gary and his family run the Institute from their council house in Liverpool, which they describe as 'a space for dissenting the Capitalism of Culture.'



**Interrogation: Consultation** - Architect Jeni Burnell from Architecture Sans Frontières - UK (ASF-UK) talked about the creative consultation processes which are at the heart of ASF's ethos and approach.



**Interrogation: Intervention** - Artist Rich White gave a wonderful insight into his interventionist practice, which often involves working quickly and responsively on a site, working with materials and histories and narratives quickly unearthed and accessed. Rich drew a particular distinction between his work, which he describes as location specific installation, and site specific work.

*"I think site specific is work that can be made beforehand and installed in a space, but in a particular way that responds to a space, where my work is always entirely made on site, with materials found on site".*

This way of working was very relevant to Interrogation, in the way that the artists were limited to working with what could be bought or scavenged from the immediate vicinity, being forced to work in a fast and responsive way.

**Interrogation: Collaboration** - Artist and experienced collaborator Sophie Hope had been invited along, in order to underpin Interrogation: Collaboration. Sophie read from her story 'Working Things Out' which explores the difficulty of achieving a truly equal collaborative relationship.

# WORKING THINGS OUT

SOPHIE HOPE

I WOULD LIKE TO BE A DEVIANT LIKE YOU, CAN YOU TEACH ME? THAT WOULD BE A GREAT ART PROJECT, TO ACTUALLY BE ARRESTED, HAVE SOME REAL LIFE EXPERIENCES FOR A CHANGE AND THEN USE THIS IN MY ART, NO THAT WOULD BE MY ART. I'M SO JEALOUS OF YOU, HAVING SUCH A COLOURFUL LIFE EXPERIENCE TO DRAW ON. FUCK. ALL I'VE GOT IS INTER-RAILING ACROSS EASTERN EUROPE AND PATHETIC TEENAGE DABBLING IN HALLUCINOGENIC DRUGS TO DRAW ON. EVERYTHING SINCE HAS BEEN A PROCESS OF LEARNING AN ART LANGUAGE IN ORDER TO FIND WAYS OF BEING PAID TO DISMANTLE IT.

The water is quite still now. We were sat here in the cold dawn for some time. I think I was telling you about how my art foundation year was like an unlearning process, where you got the chance to forget all that formal crap they taught you at school. Learning through unlearning. This seems to be what I'm constantly trying to do through life, use my learning to unlearn, question and throw things into doubt. Why would you ever want to learn as if that was enough, the end point? How many times have I heard, "what did we spend all that money on your education for?" ringing in my head when I constantly get general knowledge questions wrong or when I fall into an embarrassed red-cheeked silence thinking everyone surely knows that apart from me? You would have blurted something out, oblivious to the consequences, and damn it, you probably would have got it right! It's not that I'm glorifying ignorance, but that often the educated strive for a lost legacy of working and thinking instinctively without the baggage of analysing if it's right or wrong, justified or critically relevant. I yearn to be beyond that system and yet it is that system that has shaped my very being. I am conforming in my well-behaved artistic attempts at state-sanctioned deviance. You showed me another way of doing things.

You know what, you have been a good friend to me, without even knowing it. I've been listening to you contently over the years, like the lapping of these waves on the pebbled shore of the Thames. What joins us in my dreams is the need to develop a critical relationship with the world and that is my social responsibility, not a personal, self-help, therapeutic experience done to make ME feel better; this 'criticality' is a right and responsibility for everyone to enact. Except you wouldn't say it like that would you, you'd just get on with it. I'm learning to take this into everything I do – slowly realising, thanks to your inaudible teachings over the years, that it's not a separate thing called art that does that – art education merely creates a clever illusion that relies on you believing that's the case, but really art college is just a creative business school. Thing is, would I have realised that without having gone through it?

I must admit, it's a passive, tokenistic kind of listening I've been doing with you, I'm not really that interested in you as a person you understand, just what you can teach me, so that I may improve and become a better player in this game, learn some tactics, incorporate them as my own and you know, make the world a better place.

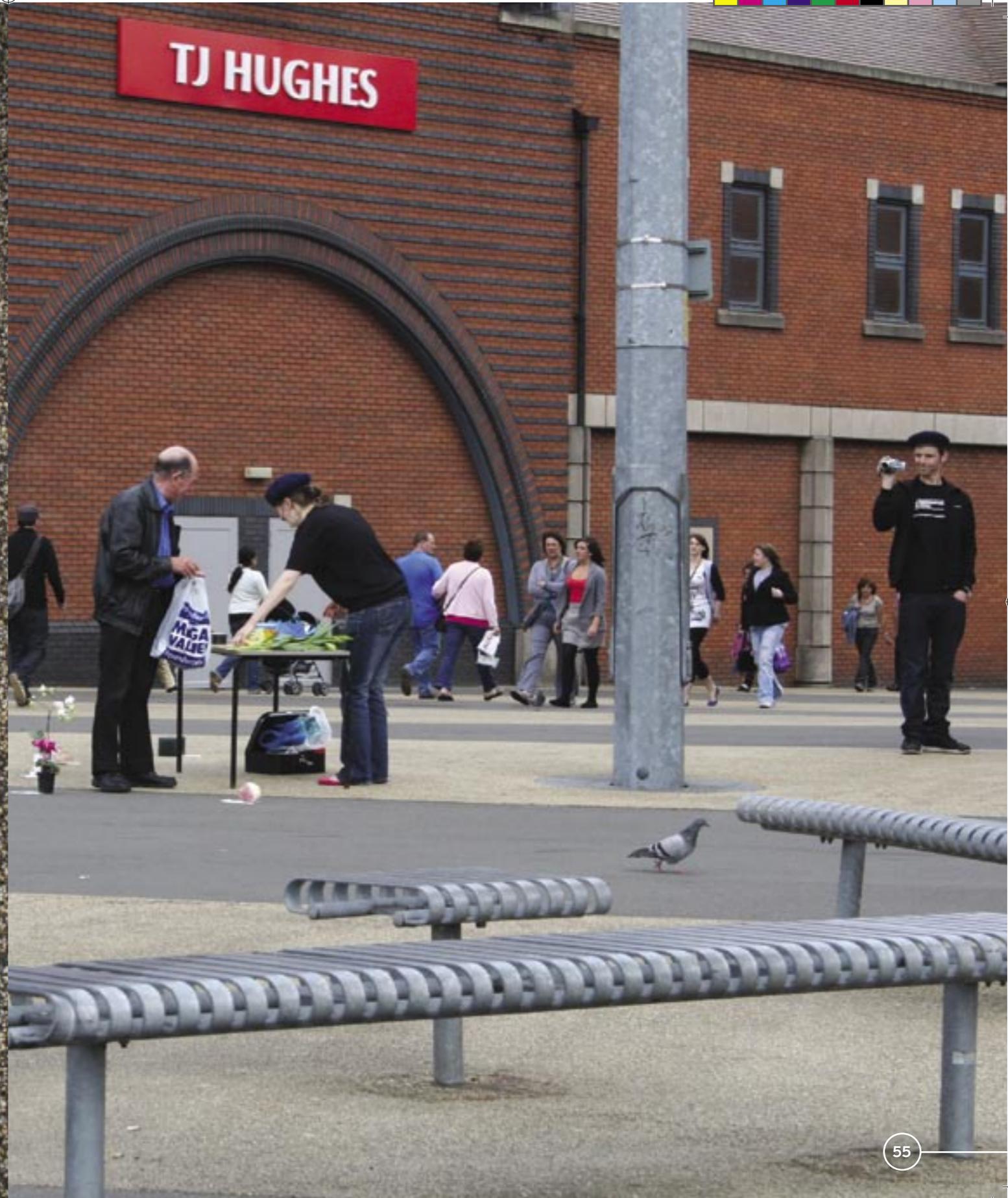
How can I write a list of friends to phone like I do with 'things to do this week, today, now, by yesterday?'. It's almost like you, my own little 'imaginary' friend, have taken over real friendships and got lodged in an uncomfortable place between my ear and heart. We have had two different lives, and yet we are flesh and blood. I admire how you can express yourself in your actions and the way you live, with so much more artistry than I ever could in my so-called art career. You are like the artful dodger, a Dickensian character that is so mischievous to the core it hurts. You hurt me.

I don't know why I had to kill you like I did. You hadn't done me any harm. Just hang around my neck like a dead weight. Pestering me to make things better for you, as if I had the upper hand and you were this vulnerable, uneducated glitch in the system. What bollocks. You didn't know your own worth. I can't say I'm sorry for what I've done. It was necessary to engulf you, discard your shell and use you so that I could become a childish delinquent. I couldn't have done it without you. This might be the way we can change things. By me becoming more like you, not you becoming more like me. I had to get rid of you, you understand that.

The capacity to fuck up is in all of us, some of us have become quite good at it, as expert failures. And we make careers out of it, get other people to believe in us, pay for the fruits of our failures and that genius ability to unlearn. You've been rubbing off on me your slimy putrid genius puke all these years and I have managed to absorb the stuff and now I can flick you off like a little spent parasite. I don't need you any more. Oh, I'm sorry, I appear to have hurt your feelings. Oops, I've accidentally trodden on you and kicked you into the Thames, where your body now floats amongst the plastic tampon applicators, syringes, coke bottles and elderflower petals. Free your mind you told me, and your ass will follow!

**Sophie Hope**  
(June 2009)

'Working Things Out' was written following an invitation to take part in an exhibition called reFRAMED curated by Hannah Hull at the Stephen Lawrence Gallery, 11-19 June 2009 (<http://hannahull.co.uk/page14.htm>)



INTERROGATION:

# DRAWING

CONCLUSIONS



**F**or Longhouse, the project's objective (while being concerned with talking to the public about art and the role of art and culture in a post-industrial town) was primarily to offer opportunities for emerging artists to explore a new area of practice and to engage in a challenging programme, which would require a new way of working, with a view to developing the artists' skills.

Longhouse's annual programme provides space for artists and the public to meet, creating valuable and meaningful dialogues. Interrogation's approach was to allow those dialogues to exist as works of art in themselves, even if just for a short time. The benefit to early career artists cannot be underestimated, but also the activities themselves are beneficial in place-making. For a few, Wednesdays in September 2009, Gallery Square in Walsall became a special place, thanks to the vision of Longhouse and The New Art Gallery Walsall.

When considering 'engaging communities' Interrogation created dialogues through the physical interventions made by artists within the space, but there was also the public symposium, which was designed as a more formal, theoretical space to consider what the project might mean, in terms of the role of art and culture in regenerating places. I feel it is useful here to return to the debate opened by Gary Anderson, from the Institute for the Art and Practice of Dissent at Home.

Gary started by talking about how uncomfortable he was with the situation he currently found himself in – as invited expert, asked to stand in front of a group of people, and getting paid to have them listen to him. This hierarchy, he said, made him nervous. He talked about the way our art institutions and activities are generally measured through 'bums on seats,' making us reliant on our audiences, and yet the hierarchy between performer and audience does not reflect that – audiences are never paid. Gary read from Paulo Freire's book 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed' (1970), in particular, in relation to the Institute's commitment to working towards social justice. This, he said, does not line up with the assumption within most art practices, of the artist as neutral – perhaps observing or responding to a given situation, as if we are not inside the system.

The Institute tries to recognise and explore the idea that we are all a part of a process and a system, and therefore complicit in the oppression of others. In reading from Freire's book Gary set out how the writer was 'demanding that the cultural worker reflects critically on their own position,' which is something that the Institute sets out to do, and generally asks others coming into contact with them to do. This criticality is often missing from arts practices, but without it, the practitioner can never be reflective, and will never truly move on, evolve or improve.

Gary very pertinently critically analysed the situation of the symposium, pointing at how as an invited 'professional' being paid to speak gets in the way of his idea of social justice and dislike of hierarchical structures which place some people in the role of experts and others in the role of non-experts. The inherent inequality of the situation represented by the symposium itself could go some way to explain why there was not one single member of the Walsall public in the audience. Even those who had come to see the exhibition had taken one look at the set up – with table of experts and audience, and headed straight for the door. The discussion which took place in the room after the presentations continued to explore this notion.

Interrogation: Walsall had been truly successful in engaging the public in a dialogue about public art over the previous four weeks, but had failed at the last hurdle to encourage any of that same public to enter the debate taking place within the symposium. This was seen as a problem by some, and it was suggested that the debate should have taken place in Gallery Square, in order to give the people of Walsall the chance to have their say. In my mind, however, the people of Walsall had already done so, through their interactions with the project, their willingness to discuss, publicly what we were doing, and their readiness to get involved and join in with the activities instigated by the artists in the square.

Twenty artists were invited to undertake an Interrogation mission. For some it has become the starting point for a whole new way of working, while for others the experience provided interesting food for thought. For me, in my role as lead artist I feel that the working methodologies set out in Interrogation: Walsall offer an approach that gets real results. It can activate public space in an exciting way, while involving the public in the conversation around the role of art in the public realm, and the sort of activity they wish to get involved in.

I have been asked what the legacy of a project like this might be. I feel that the event or happening is legacy enough. There may not be a solid bronze object to point to and say, 'that is what came out of it,' but I feel very strongly, that this is not always what is needed or expected from public art.

I like to think that the dialogues and experiences which live on in the minds of the artists and participants are worth a thousand expensive metal objects; and besides, these are not always what the public wants. The fact that one of Walsall's favourite pieces of 'public art' is a concrete hippo, said to have cost just £400 is testament to that.

I hope that this book is transparent enough to be used by others as a modus operandi when intervening (quickly, but meaningfully) in a place.

It is intended as a document of a project, but also as a handbook for Public Space Interrogators everywhere.

**Anna Francis**  
(March 2010)

**Responding and working in a short time period made me focus my thoughts, and naturally made me take more risks. This allowed me not to worry so much about a final product, but to think more about the process and the context of my response. The work made for Interrogation: Walsall also opened new doors in terms of ways of working, normally using installation, animations or sculpture but here to a performance based piece.**

**Since making the piece of work for Interrogation I have come up with new ideas that are similar to the way I was working in Walsall.**

**Agent Bethell (2010).**

**This was the first time I have ever conceived of getting involved in anything which could be construed as performance. I found the beret and the moustache amazingly liberating: particularly when others similarly attired were to be seen wandering around in the area. Then when I wandered off I forgot about the disguise and was surprised by some funny looks and ill concealed giggles or outright laughter. Moral disguise, or something which is perceived to be a uniform, gives one an unaccustomed freedom. But I need more practice to bring out the inner thesp successfully; it's up to me to create opportunities for that practice.**

**What I am trying to achieve is in a state of distinct flux at the moment; just getting off to a rather relaxed start to a part-time MA in Fine Art at UWE in Bristol and not at all sure where I am going or what I am doing. But the day at Walsall has widened my possibilities; performance could creep into my practice.**

**Conclusion: Interrogation: Walsall was interesting, mind-expanding, and may turn out to have been transformative.**

**Agent Cooper-Willis (2010).**

**I'd say I thought a lot about my experience of Interrogation: Walsall. It was good to get out of Leeds and meet other contemporary artists. I felt a little stagnant in my work having not worked elsewhere. It was a strange experience to work collaboratively yet anonymously. From previous collaborations I've found it essential to get to know the people you are working with in order to make decisions together. In this case we didn't have that opportunity and I still have no idea how 'Agent Shipley' found the experience. I think the experience made me feel more confident as a practicing artist and I was pleasantly surprised to see the project mentioned in a-n.**

**Since being part of the project I have decided to apply for an MA in Fine Art to develop my practice.**

**Agent Strain (2010).**

**Interrogation: Walsall allowed me to accept that often work is made instantaneously and that this is not a negative outcome. I was taught to think that art is a long time in production. I now question why?**

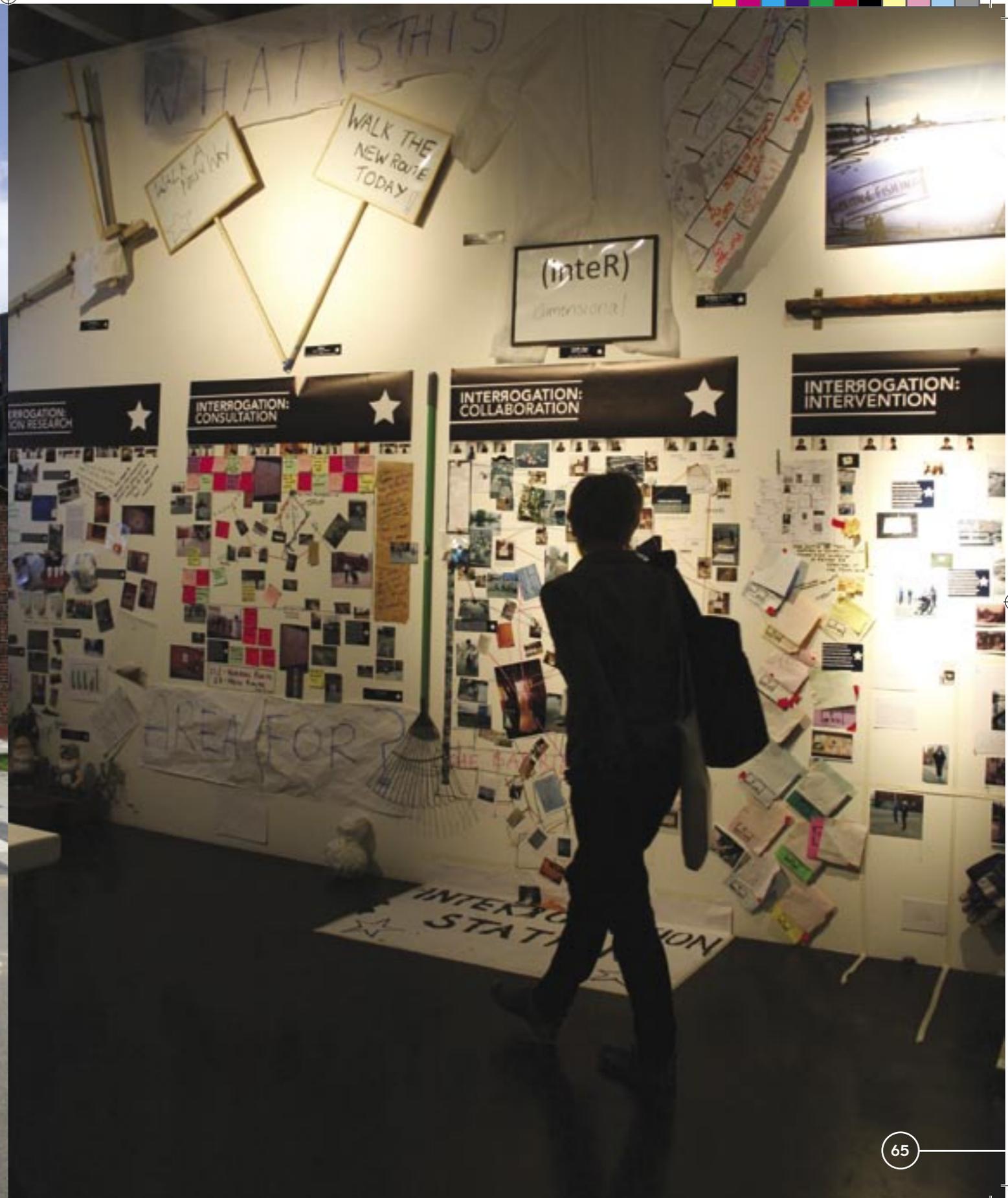
**I like the fact that it can be made of an instant. I am also incorporating some of the techniques used into my own curatorial research, and hope that it is equally as exciting.**

**Agent Beavis-Harrison (2010).**

**At the time, Interrogation: Walsall was an unusually exciting experience for me. I felt, for the first time in my practice in a while, that everything made sense, that I was really achieving some truly exploratory work whilst feeling free from the usual pangs of insecurity and doubt that scupper a perfectly good line of creative enquiry. In hindsight, I realise that Interrogation: Walsall was a significant turning point for me.**

**Previously I had been anxious that my collaborative tendencies were wrong - indicative of an inability to generate strong ideas - indulgent and sinful even. Interrogation: Walsall exorcised my demons. I am now a guilt-free, unapologetically regular collaborating artist.**

**Agent Griffiths (2010).**



# THE AGENTS



Alan  
**Armstrong**



Amelia **Beavis-  
Harrison**



David  
**Bethell**



Bernard  
**Charnley**



Anwyl  
**Cooper-Willis**



Katie  
**Doubleday**



Sarah  
**Duffy**



Rachael  
**Griffiths**



Brian  
**Holdcroft**



Emma Jean  
**Kemp**



Pippa  
**Koszerek**



Rachel  
**Marsden**



Nathaniel  
**Pitt**



Benny  
**Semp**



Katie May  
**Shipley**



Rose  
**Smith**



Rebecca  
**Strain**



Jacqueline  
**Taylor**



Graeme  
**Vaughan**



James  
**Winnett**

**THE**  
**CONCRETE**  
**HIPPO IS ON THE MOVE....**



# INTERROGATION: ANYWHERE

**NOW THAT YOU HAVE BEEN INDUCTED IN THE WAYS OF INTERROGATION YOU ARE READY TO SET UP YOUR OWN INTERROGATION IN YOUR CHOSEN LOCATION.**

**THERE ARE SOME RULES THAT SHOULD BE CONSIDERED WHEN PLANNING YOUR INTERROGATION:**

**INTERROGATION is an exploration of the impact that one artist can make in one place, in one day.**

**INTERROGATION requires you to DO SOMETHING TO FIND OUT SOMETHING.**

Interrogation could be about responding to a physical attribute of the public realm, it could be a social experiment, the response could aim to question the public, or require a response from the public or from you.

You should aim to find out something about the place or its people, or perhaps consider the role of artists and public art.

The idea that the community and public are involved in the dialogue between you, the artist, and the designated interrogation space is central to the ethos of INTERROGATION. The conversation should be short, sharp, public, and accessible.

**WALK AROUND YOUR CHOSEN LOCATION AND THEN FILL IN THIS WORKSHEET TO HELP YOU IN YOUR INTERROGATION:**

**Agent Name:**

**Disguise** (A beret and moustache is suggested):

**Materials:**

**Target zone/Location:**

**What interests you about the target zone, and what are the specific interest points?**

**Planned intervention:**

**How will you connect with the public here and how will you record the public's response?**

**How will what you do be documented?**

**How will your interrogation be disseminated to the public?**

**What can this become?**

**YOUR MISSION IS NOW UNDERWAY...**

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