

Research, relationships and their infrastructuring: the reflexive mattering of dialogical correspondence as social sculpture.

Pesquisa, relações e as suas infraestruturas: a matéria reflexiva da correspondência dialógica como escultura social.

Investigación, relaciones y su infraestructura: la importancia reflexiva de la correspondencia dialógica como escultura social.

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ABSTRACT

This article presents a theoretical model developed from research which aims to explore how experiences of relationship can be used as a lens through which the complexities of an emerging interdisciplinary, transnational research project can be explored. Partners in the AMASS (Acting on the Margins: Art as Social Sculpture) project work in eight European countries on a range of activities that make use of creative arts-based research as a tool for addressing social need. The network of individuals, institutions and contexts making up the project delivers a unique collection of relationships which seek - through the actions of their project - to achieve concrete impact.

By using a novel participatory method for reflection in action via the materialisation of dialogue, it is possible to identify and discuss moments or instances in the development and formalisation of the AMASS relationships as significant in terms of the ways that a process of 'social infrastructuring' took place as the partners sought to develop the proposal document that would facilitate their project.

Through further reflection on concepts of 'dialogical interaction' (Kester 2000) and 'correspondence' (Ingold 2015), the process from first connections which are central to forming any relationship to its transformation when mutually-agreed goals have been achieved through the success of a funding application is analysed. This offers a set of examples which demonstrate valuable reciprocal connection between partners which are then used as the basis for the development of a model of 'dialogical correspondence'.

With a specific focus on one case study - one partners' reflection on their experiences of the establishment of the AMASS project's critical foundations - the article seeks to develop dialogical correspondence as a tool with potential for defining the key infrastructural characteristics of any such relationship, whose value may also lie in a future-facing application as such work continues to be developed.

keywords: dialogue, correspondence, association, social infrastructuring, complexity, research relationships

RESUMO

Este artigo apresenta um modelo teórico desenvolvido a partir de pesquisas que visa explorar como as experiências de relacionamento podem ser usadas como uma lente através da qual as complexidades de um emergente projeto de pesquisa interdisciplinar e transnacional podem ser exploradas. Os parceiros do projeto AMASS (Agindo nas Margens: Arte como Escultura Social) trabalham em oito países europeus em uma série de atividades que fazem uso da pesquisa baseada em artes criativas como uma ferramenta para atender às necessidades sociais. A rede de indivíduos, instituições e contextos que compõem o projeto oferece um conjunto único de relações que buscam - por meio das ações de seu projeto - atingir impactos concretos.

Utilizando um novo método participativo de reflexão na ação por meio da materialização do diálogo, é possível identificar e discutir momentos ou instâncias no desenvolvimento e formalização das relações AMASS como significativos em termos das formas como um processo de 'infraestrutura social' ocorreu quando os parceiros procuraram desenvolver o documento de proposta que facilitaria seu projeto.

Por meio de uma reflexão mais aprofundada sobre os conceitos de 'interação dialógica' (Kester) e 'correspondência' (Ingold), o processo das primeiras conexões que são centrais para formar qualquer relação para sua transformação quando objetivos mutuamente acordados foram alcançados através do sucesso de um financiamento a aplicação é analisada. Isso oferece um conjunto de exemplos que demonstram uma conexão recíproca valiosa entre os parceiros que são então usados como base para o desenvolvimento de um modelo de "correspondência dialógica".

Com foco específico em um estudo de caso - a reflexão de um parceiro sobre suas experiências de estabelecimento dos fundamentos críticos do projeto AMASS - o artigo busca desenvolver a correspondência dialógica como uma ferramenta com potencial para definir as principais características infraestruturais de qualquer relação, cujo o valor também pode estar em um aplicativo voltado para o futuro, pois esse trabalho continua a ser desenvolvido.

Palavras chave: diálogo, correspondência, associação, infraestrutura social, complexidade, relações de investigação

RESUMEN

Este artículo presenta un modelo teórico desarrollado a partir de una investigación que tiene como objetivo explorar cómo las experiencias de relación pueden usarse como una lente a través de la cual se pueden explorar las complejidades de un proyecto de investigación transnacional interdisciplinario emergente. Los socios del proyecto AMASS (Actuando al margen: arte como escultura social) trabajan en ocho países europeos en una serie de actividades que utilizan la investigación basada en las artes creativas como herramienta para abordar las necesidades sociales. La red de personas, instituciones y contextos que componen el proyecto ofrece una colección única de relaciones que buscan, a través de las acciones de su proyecto, lograr un impacto concreto.

Mediante el uso de un método participativo novedoso para la reflexión en acción a través de la materialización del diálogo, es posible identificar y discutir momentos o instancias en el desarrollo y formalización de las relaciones AMASS como significativos en términos de las formas en que un proceso de 'infraestructura social' se llevó a cabo mientras los socios buscaban desarrollar el documento de propuesta que facilitaría su proyecto.

A través de una mayor reflexión sobre los conceptos de ‘interacción dialógica’ (Kester) y ‘correspondencia’ (Ingold), el proceso desde las primeras conexiones que son fundamentales para formar cualquier relación con su transformación cuando los objetivos mutuamente acordados se han logrado a través del éxito de una financiación. se analiza la aplicación. Esto ofrece un conjunto de ejemplos que demuestran una valiosa conexión recíproca entre socios que luego se utilizan como base para el desarrollo de un modelo de “correspondencia dialógica”.

Con un enfoque específico en un estudio de caso - la reflexión de uno de los socios sobre sus experiencias de establecimiento de los fundamentos críticos del proyecto AMASS - el artículo busca desarrollar la correspondencia dialógica como una herramienta con potencial para definir las características clave de infraestructura de cualquier relación de este tipo, cuyo El valor también puede residir en una aplicación de cara al futuro a medida que dicho trabajo continúa desarrollándose.

Palavras chave: diálogo, correspondencia, asociación, infraestructura social, complejidad, relaciones de investigación

Introduction

Common ideas and practices of Art as Social Sculpture (AaSS), together with the ongoing application and development of the concept itself, invite a varied, extended, diverse and exploratory range of definitions. The aim to define its potential across and through a wide and, potentially unappreciated or unconsidered, range of activities can identify or define ones other than a formal production and consumption of arts practices and their outcomes.

The shared or common ambitions and values which drive the activities of AaSS - artists, individuals and communities actively engaging in work which seeks to transform both society and society’s impacts - also acknowledges and embraces the opportunities for a specific type of change which can become manifest when using the materials which both act very frequently, and work directly, upon society and culture such as language, thought, knowledge, objects, together with the concrete actions of both human and non-humans.

Art as Social Sculpture, therefore, can clearly result in sites or situations of great complexity which are themselves shaped by the intentions of each participant or agent, and which produce diverse consequences of some significance (whether these are intentional or not). Similarly, our human methods, processes and projects of knowledge creation might be themselves considered potential instances for the development of a particular type of social sculpture since their results and impacts often act and achieve the same intentions as those more formally recognised or considered activities.

For this article, a set of institutionally-derived methods and infrastructures (together with their tools and instruments)

form the basis of our reflection upon the potential of an exploration of the funded research project both as a model of knowledge creation and also as a *set of embodied and performative human activities and practices which can be considered an instance or exemplar for a distinct type of social sculpture*. In this review, therefore, we aim to establish a useful theoretical framework and outline a practical tool for assessing and developing shared understandings around expectations and experiences of participation within and through one particularly complex context and instance of AaSS - the externally-funded international, interdisciplinary research project called AMASS.

The AMASS Project (Acting on the Margins: Art as Social Sculpture) seeks to explore the potential of the arts to respond to and engage with contemporary social challenges, and by working across and within a broad disciplinary and geographical context in eight European countries, looks to identify, collate and disseminate best practice with the aim of making a concrete contribution to policy at a level where its impacts might be most significant. As such, AMASS has been designed deliberately as a complex collection and network of institutions, knowledges, experiences, associations and practices. Given the project’s ambition and intention to develop concrete opportunities which create and transform people’s lives, the range of participants, stakeholders and expertise being brought together through its structured programme of activities presents a very complicated and intricately interconnected mesh consisting of the relationships themselves and the opportunities they afford.

This article will describe research that has been undertaken to articulate stories of connection within the particularly complex set of contexts which constitute the AMASS

network. This research seeks to extend the potential for co-produced, reflexive methods of visual or graphic storytelling with an exploration of how the deliberate repetition of otherwise unconsidered or discarded narratives might lead to a recognition of their ongoing value and significance. It also endeavours to explore how those experiences of connection, partnership and the creation of fixed or formal association can be articulated by means of an active and collaborative recall of autobiographical memory with the use of a tool which employs the metaphor of relationship as a visual and spatial framing device.

Making use of participatory methods centred on dialogue to reveal attachment, connection and as a means to draft or conceptualise acts of social *infrastructuring*, our research looks to identify how a critical lens of *correspondence* can help to identify and describe threads or themes which can both serve as a key pillar in the development of any future-facing, sustainable relationships for research partnerships, and also in how they might go on to form the basis of meaningful and impactful communications as the project develops and works through its own processes.

Contexts, complexities and correspondences

The concept of correspondence has been developed by anthropologist Tim Ingold as a means to reframe ideas of social engagement or to view and review interaction in a way that acknowledges the multidimensionality of relationships and that our ways of understanding them and their effects is often limited in terms of what, why and how it chooses to look at them. Ingold (2015) asserts that "... Interaction is between; correspondence in-between" (p.154), and if considered in terms of activities or a type of connection that is made possible "...interaction is about othering, correspondence is about togetherness" (Ingold 2017, p.41).

Ingold's (2015) ideas of correspondence present us with a way to reflect on the types of activities and interactions that are part of a project such as AMASS. He regards correspondence as being an inherently social and socialised activity determined by the entanglements and co-existence of all partners who form any such relationship (p.11). At the core of correspondence is an idea of being-with others (and other things) and, consequently, of a weaving together of the actions, ideas and outcomes that are constituted or result from these acts. Correspondence is, fundamentally, an ongoing process determined by an ongoing coming and being together rather than something which is defined by a need to either arrive at a stable or concrete end, or by it being composed additively from sets of discrete elements (Ingold 2017, p.13).

Within arts, design or creative practices, correspondence acts to generate possibility and opportunities for speculation that themselves are responses-in-process and answers to a discrete situation or context (Ingold 2017b, p.88). Fundamental to correspondence is an idea of openness as critical to any activity (Ingold 2017, p.9) where a life lived with others depends upon engagement with all others - and that such relationships are determined by an idea of meshwork, entanglement and movement, of things travelling back-and-forth between participants and of joining-together (Ingold 2017b, p.118,155). Such connection, Ingold (2017b) explains, need not result in an ordered form for any resulting correspondence (or, in fact, an ordered structure to any situation) but, instead, seeks to call forward a harmony between participants - an attunement that is shaped in that *becoming-with* which essential to any act of correspondence. (p.199)

Wilson et al. (2018) have defined and discussed a 'correspondence' model (taking inspiration from Ingold) for design research as a means to explore the range of complexities that occur within scenarios such as international research projects. They outline a range of contexts within which correspondence takes place as an activity that is distinguished by particular types of relationship likely created or experienced in projects such as AMASS. Their model for correspondence begins at an institutional level (the academy, a funding agency, or non-governmental organisation) before moving to the individual (most likely, but not always, a researcher and also including such figures as stakeholders, participants or administrative workers) before focusing upon the activity as their final scenario (encompassing the research as it occurs and including the contexts of infrastructural or administrative 'events' such as meetings).

Such project-specific correspondences are often situated by, or make use of, a series of 'place events' which act as markers through which significant moments or instances of correspondence might be identified and, consequently, where their categories or characteristics might be mapped. From this research, Wilson et al. (2018) identify and develop the POM (People, Objectives, Methods) framework as a tool that helps to understand and discuss particular forms that correspondence might take within the context of a formally-constituted research project.

Correspondence, therefore, has value as a useful method for understanding the relationships which both underpin and emerge the complexities of such projects, which are often rich with opportunities for correspondence (and the exchanges that can be fostered as a consequence). The

development of such concepts applied to these contexts also recognises that, as the challenges we face grow more complex so must our responses and the methods we use to understand them - with the consequence that these tools also become equally multifaceted, intricate and (potentially) elaborate.

As mentioned, Wilson et al (2018) make use of a set of scenarios to help define or identify situations through or within which complexity is experienced when working in the context of multicultural, multidisciplinary research projects. Such situations are also the basis for the types, forms or experiences that make manifest or demonstrate Ingold's concept of correspondence. This article, therefore, looks to make use of an EU-funded research project within which the authors are currently working and, which itself may be regarded as a rich instance where such complexities (and their consequent correspondences) are likely to occur. The AMASS project is founded on the model of a mobilised, research-led response which is deliberately interdisciplinary and pan-European in its scope and expertise, and has been constituted in such a way as to address the ever-wicked problems that are emerging, crystallising and becoming more deeply ingrained in twenty-first century societies. For AMASS, ideas and experiences of cultures, contexts and connections become key tools in combating the inequalities faced by marginalised communities across the European Union, and arts-based approaches allow for experiments, interventions and impacts which hope to achieve social change or transformation beyond that faced by one community in any individual country.

The approach of AMASS, therefore, both recognises and explores a reality where the best likelihood of achieving meaningful impact can be reached through interconnected processes of evidence-based accretion, and where a carefully-choreographed series of studies, trials, operations or procedures establishes broad concepts of value that can go on to underpin social innovation which looks to impact upon individuals and their communities while, ultimately, aiming to have effects on policy and policy-makers.

Three characteristics of dialogical aesthetics

In 'Dialogical Aesthetics: A Critical Framework For Littoral Art', Grant Kester (2000) outlines a model for an immersive, participatory and community-led art practice within which relationships, aesthetics and ideas of exchange are (re) defined in terms of their being dialogical. For Kester, an arts-based practice which is established upon ideals of dialogue or discourse stands out for its sense of having coherent values, its utilisation of opportunities for bi-directional

communication and the potential for contribution to a strategy or approach which allows for opportunities to remake not only the artist but also their collaborators - which he regards as the *object* for any arts practice and the knowledge that might be created around and within any dialogical interaction.

He goes on to outline three characteristics of such 'a discursive or dialogical art practice':

1. Interdisciplinarity

Chiefly, of being 'between' (institutions, established discourses), at - or as - an interface between *people* and between established or emerging *knowledges*, to actively trace new disciplinary trajectories or routes between, through and around those that currently exist or have been developed.

2. Operating with/on multiple registers of meaning

Any meaning, here, is not held within an object or determined by a viewer but 'dispersed through multiple registers', both of space *and* time, where meaning can and should be determined by particular contexts of reception and the range of 'discursive systems' at play in any context. For Kester's notion of dialogical practice 'the work is constituted as an ensemble of effects and forces, which operate in numerous registers of signification and discursive interaction'.

3. Indeterminacy that is both dialogical and informal

Where meaning, however messy or difficult to ascertain, is still something that can be agreed upon or defined - this is a given in any process of dialogical engagement for knowledge production which aims towards any degree of novelty or innovation.

There are clear overlaps between Kester's notions of dialogical interaction and in the ways in which Ingold determines the characteristics of correspondence. Certainly, Ingold's emphasis on correspondence taking place between and within any relationship is echoed by Kester. Likewise, Kester's assertion that dialogical practices are determined by their 'ensemble of effects and forces' reflects Ingold's discussion of correspondence as being defined as an entanglement and a 'meshwork' of participants and their relationships, their activities and contributions.

Storytelling, connecting knowledge and facilitating interaction

Previously, Wilson (2020) has outlined the development and application of a novel method for participation which makes use of a series of bespoke, auto-ethnographic tools

as a means to encourage intra-community communications. These graphic tools are deliberately designed to create experiences of participation which, through a reliance on textual production and an ambition for dialogical interaction, are embodied, performative and encourage a use of memory or recall to identify significant moments or events in a community's life and in the lives of its members.

Such activities also have the potential as opportunities for reinforcing the value and potential power of storytelling as a means to articulate experiences in such a way that being recalled in this way helps to identify, clarify and reinforce their value. Such stories, therefore, become a means for communities to co-design (*designing-together*) a common sense of identity.

For Kestler (2013), such tools can be used as a locus for 'connected knowledges' and to facilitate (and mediate) a range of 'dialogical interactions' (pp.14-15) - where a community's structures or situations can be acknowledged and formalised through the visual appearance and in the bespoke design of tools such as those used in this research. With these knowledges becoming a basis for the tools' design they also have the potential to activate or reveal people's reflexivity in their own community with such revelations also helping determine a future for how they might then be used or further developed.

The four assumptions or hypotheses that underpin research making use of such a participatory approach within the specific context of the AMASS project are summarised as follows:

1. Interpersonal relationships are works-in-progress: making, growing, giving and taking etc. which can be caught or described at certain moment in their development.
2. Active reflection on recent experiences (of how relationships are formed, for example) by way of them recalled as memory lets us interrogate the interactions and dialogues that constitute how and why these relationships might persist and sustain (since these scenarios might be described as being moments of meaningful correspondence).
3. Reflecting on experiences prior to the formalisation of a relationship (a moment such as the successful submission of a funding application, for example) often reveals much which can further inform or reveal a relationships' critical foundations, shared objectives and intentions for achieving impact - such social *infrastructuring* can clarify a vision that may be useful to help develop any future activities.
4. Visualising, spatialising and materialising dialogue (or ways that dialogue can take place) and, in particular, the use of writing as a particular method for knowledge-making

offer us opportunities to articulate memory, narrative and experiences in novel ways.

Dialogue as exchange, as correspondence

As a way to explore the very foundations of the relationships upon which the AMASS project was built, a series of participatory activities were developed so that each project partner might be given an opportunity to partake in an experience of design-led dialogue around the values, needs and motivations which helped to establish their being part of the project's network.

Making use of a graphic tool which was structured around a visualisation of the stages or lifecycle of human relationships (Levinger 1976, 1980) participants from each of the eight institutional project partners were encouraged to take part in conversations which made use of the processes of a relationship as a way to encourage autobiographical storytelling and describe three dimensions of their relationships within and with AMASS.

Firstly, using the concept of *relationship-as-process*, participants were asked to recall how and why their own connection to both the project (regarded as having its own sense of presence and agency as one member of the relationship) took place. Participants were also encouraged both to respond as individuals together with those experiences defined by of their roles of and for the institution that they represented in the project..

Given the complex needs of AMASS relating to ideas of partnership, relationship and connection, the same model of *relationship-as-process* was also used to facilitate a discussion of the relationships that had been established and developed between each project partner (and their academic institution) and the external organisations or agencies which they are also working with, since AMASS requires each internal project partner to develop these external partnerships so that a range of experiments can take place to reflect, extend and evaluate arts-based approaches in the field.

Lastly, and as a consequence of the first two phases, participants were asked to consider questions relating to their own and their partners' needs in terms of communication and how, what and why they might wish to disseminate their work both in or as process and when the project is completed.

Relationship as process, as correspondences

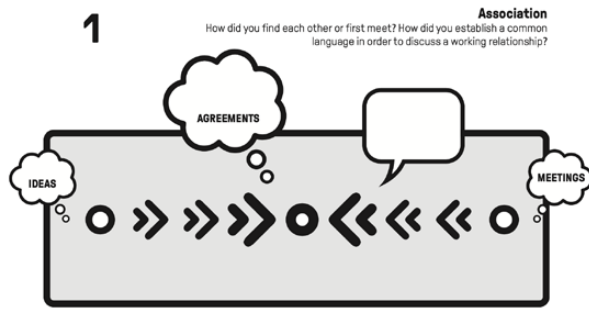


Figure 1. Association tool for AMASS workshop

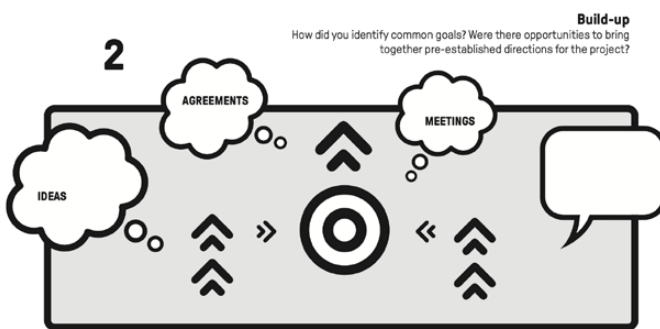


Figure 2. Build-up tool for AMASS workshop

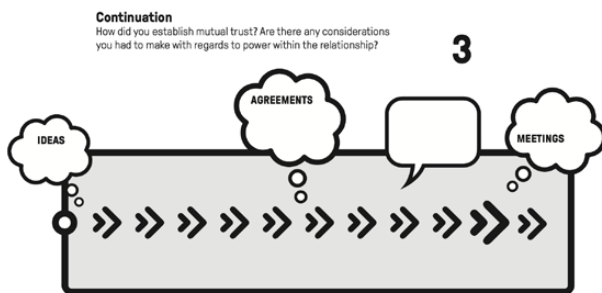


Figure 3. Continuation tool for AMASS workshop

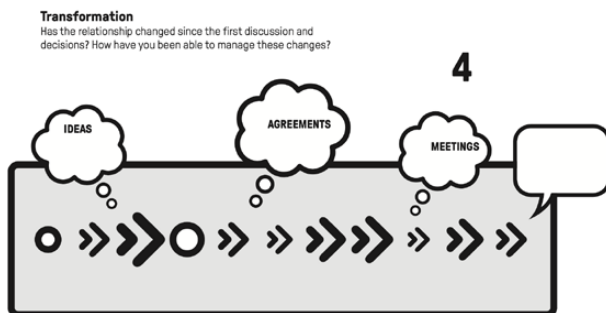


Figure 4. Transformation tool for AMASS workshop

Figures 1-4 show the bespoke graphic tools which were designed to be the basis of the participatory storytelling sessions that took place with each AMASS partner. These workshops took place using the MIRO online platform which allowed for a digital experience of remote participation that usefully replicated that which would otherwise have been possible if we had been able to meet face to face (but which was made impossible due to travel restrictions necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic). Each tool formed the locus for a semi-structured conversation between members of each AMASS partner team, which was prompted and facilitated by the researchers.

The relationship-as-process tool employed in this research was developed from the work of psychologist George Levinger, whose framework of interpersonal relationship defined the four specific themes and the related questions that are outlined below and which were visualised into the collaborative space of the MIRO board.

1. Association

Questions: How did you find each other or first meet? How did you establish a common language in order to discuss a working relationship?

Here, the intention was of establishing a context for becoming acquainted or being matched, of initiation or introduction and the significance of first impressions and initial *attraction* in establishing mutual interest or of having *things-in-common*). This discussion was focused on an identification of the experiences of stimulus (often regarded perhaps as negative, demonstrating shallow or self-interest).

2. Build-up

Questions: How did you identify common goals? Were there opportunities to bring together pre-established directions for the project?

Here, the tool hoped to reveal tactics and any means used to develop intimacy and trust, and to understand conditions for compatibility. This allowed for the identification of common goals and to gain insight into how conditions of interdependence could be created. Discussion was focused on identifying *the value of values* (often regarded as being deeper or more meaningful in helping to understanding the other in any relationship).

3. Continuation

Questions: How did you establish mutual trust? Are there any Considerations you had to make with regards to power within the relationship?

Here, the experience of participants and dialogue fostered by the use of the tool aimed to uncover the contexts or motivations for mutual commitment and to understand how stability was or could be established, grown and developed. Such progress (in relationship terms) is usually dependent on a deepening of mutual trust and with a continued association with mutual benefits and goals although these might be jeopardised when issues of power and / or hierarchy are introduced. Discussion looked to identify *the significance of roles* and how they might be helpful in establishing or developing the contexts for working together.

4. Transformation

Questions: Has the relationship changed since the first discussion and decisions? How have you been able to manage these changes?

Here, the tool sought to acknowledge a fluidity or process or development that is necessary in any relationship, and how participants viewed the relationship as being something dynamic or whether the earlier acknowledgment of mutual goals or values had helped to manage any changes which took place.

Correspondences as stories and story-telling

The use of Ingold's concept of correspondence allows for a particular mapping of ideas and of how we can understand or reflect upon the ways that relationships are and will be *entangled*. The use of bespoke participatory tools in this way allowed us to both define and explore each partner's relationships (with the project and with their external partners) as a process or state that could be distinguished by points or moments of exchange within which we hope to be able to identify as having particular characteristics of correspondence. Since they would be subject to forces from each partner and also marked by specific modes and *currencies* of exchange determined by their contexts and to those participating in the workshop, we were keen to consider how storytelling could be framed as and through dialogue.

The methodological approach taken in our research centred upon two interconnected activities: *active reflection* as *active writing*. A visual canvas (such as that accessed through the MIRO platform) allowed for a spatialisation of these activities and for the reframing of how memories of relationship can be elicited and articulated. We made use of three categories of experience which we hoped would allow for a useful structure through which the reflection could be organised: 'Ideas' (concepts and themes) - 'Actions' (specific activities or events) - 'Agreements' (points of consensus or when a relationship would change in some way) and these also allowed us to map the phases of the partners'

interpersonal relationships through a structuring of events, recollections and outcomes.

Results and discussion

We now aim to briefly review and discuss the results of one workshop which made use of the *relationship-as process-tool* and which took place as one part of the wider activities undertaken with each of the AMASS project partners. These results are a summary (of examples, moments, mentions or suggestions) of correspondence which were identified from one set of discussions with one of eight sets of participants. As such, the comments presented here reflect only one fragment of the broader range of responses which have been collected so far in our research. The collection in this article, therefore, aims to both demonstrate the potential of our tool and also to reflect upon the opportunities for analysis that are possible when using a critical lens of *dialogical aesthetics as a means to discuss experiences of correspondence*.

To structure this discussion, we will specifically and deliberately return to the *three characteristics of dialogical interaction* discussed above, which were used to cluster and structure emerging themes and to highlight useful insights. As mentioned, such a model of analysis is itself part of our wider research context and is one aspect of the broader processes and methods of data analysis taking place using each partner's workshop data. As such, this initial review is a snapshot (itself one moment of correspondence between ourselves and the data collected by our tool) which presents how the research currently is and, as a consequence of this publication, what it might become (one direction for how it may continue to develop).

From a participatory workshop with one AMASS project partner, therefore, the following notable moments or instances of correspondence have been identified, selected and organised in accordance with the broad categories of dialogical interaction. This synthesis of Kester and Ingold's concepts allows for correspondence to be mapped as one key characteristic (and outcome) of this distinct and particular instance of reflection and dialogue.

1. New knowledges at the interstices of collaboration

Three themes connected to Kester's category of *interdisciplinarity* emerged from the participants' narratives of *relationship-as-process*. Firstly, participants identified experiences of relationship as something active - an action and an intentional (or designed) activity which benefited from (and made use of) a pre-established 'network of networks'. There was value in previous relationships beyond the work they produced, and a need was recognised for

the collection and a careful curation of both your own and others' experiences so that the complex tasks and requirements of the project's *call instrument*¹ could be met - often with relationships (and their opportunities for correspondence) being shaped or moulded reflexively in response to the matter of the call text.

Second, there was a recognition of having to fit things together in ways that weren't precise or perfect and which, sometimes, might require use of a creative intuition in response to the uncertainties present in the call and to the cues that can be taken from others. Such exchange was described as an experience of '*feeling...sensing*' through things, and of having a tentative quality for how connections and correspondences might be developed.

Finally, when working in any situation where relationships are assembled by a careful combination of complex parts (and partners), it was acknowledged that dialogue must complement but not replace established hierarchies. There is, in order for dialogue to be sustainable, a necessity to both *cultivate motivations* and *recognise mutual need*. From these, a possible framework or axes for particular types of correspondence was suggested, perhaps determined or defined by a fuzziness or fluidity.

2. Operationally-polysemic meaning

For Kester, meaning refuses to be fixed into a particular thing or experience, or be determined by a viewer and their fixed position. Instead, through dialogue, any meaning that can or might emerge or be developed is situated across contexts and within or by relationships. From this constellation and the conditions and apparatus through which it is determined and contained, meaning can be identified and developed through the useful method of dialogical practice. Our participants' articulation of their experience in the formation of the AMASS relationships resulted in five notable insights.

First, that a perception of a project's value (however nascent or undeveloped at the early stages of the process) was situated by the range of constituents that made up its *network of networks* and of the connections between people

and institutions. Such perceptions were, in turn, defined by and dependent upon each partners' context (their institution, academic subject and disciplinary specialism or expertise).

Further, the indicative and open-ended nature of the project's call document meant that a deliberate activity of seeking or making meaning was itself developed through a series of dialogical interactions *around and through the call's text*. Such activities had value both in helping to develop an understanding of what was required or needed and also to consider the possibilities and opportunities that the nature and language of the call document would bring forth. Next, for our participants, the concept of trust was an essential aspect of how the network of partners were brought together so that connections could be established and extended - and that these activities of *research matchmaking* continued to produce new contributions to the mutual understanding of the project as it emerged from ongoing dialogue.

From this, participants recognised that an individual's motivations and connections between individual partners might not be enough to result in a stable or sustainable relationship through the project's initial stages of development. The *multi-directional and multi-dimensional attributes of how individuals connect to their respective institutions* (and whether they share common aims or ambitions) was not always easy or simple and, in some cases, resulted in relationships breaking down or in individuals disconnecting from the project due to a lack of confidence in whether their contribution could be institutionally guaranteed.

Lastly, the establishment (and continuance) of relationships in the AMASS network was frequently a *non-linear or interrupted* process and so didn't always mirror the sequence presented by and being used in the relationship model used in our research. Instead, it might be fractured or reconstituted and subject to its own forces and interactions so that certain aspects of the sequence might be looped or bypassed completely.

3. Uncertainty as one condition of meaningful engagement and dialogical exchange

Productive, innovative and potentially successful relationships (and their underpinning values) should, for Kester, embrace the *ambiguities and challenges which define their dialogical interactions*. In the context of an emergent research network and how any resultant actions begin to take shape, the call document's fundamental lack of certainty would need to be accepted and worked

1 A research project's formal call for proposals and participation (the instrument or mechanism through which applications are prepared for submission) is an intriguing document in itself. It's a text which must identify and establish a context that is explicit in how it invites a response - the proposal for a future action. These responses to the call must be both speculative (and therefore, in some sense uncertain) and also concrete (demonstrating the potential for success). The call text delicately solicits ideas for what could be, and require the assembly of a network (of individuals, institutions and experience) which they believe best fits the need of the call. Often the process which is set in motion by a call is itself exploratory and experimental, requiring the formation of new relationships, alongside a reconfiguration or renewal of existing ones.

through. Our participants recognised a number of instances of positive or constructive indeterminacy, where ongoing dialogue allowed for a correspondence which worked to co-create meaning for the network and its ambitions.

Progress in shaping the project's partners and their relationships was notable in how often it mirrored that of the project itself although the consequences of change (driven by both internal and external forces) did have to be managed. As such, it was also necessary to acknowledge and highlight how negotiation would take place at varying levels and how *interdependence was to be cultivated directly and deliberately through the relationships which would form the network*.

Also, *moments of certainty* (such as successes in the project's development and where progress could be observed) *were often a direct result of processes of dialogue and exchange*. So, for our participants, there was a need to recognise them as such and for an attempt to understand their meaning. However, change or challenges might often be unavoidable and unexpected and, in particular, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the project and its partners were significant. For AMASS, COVID-19 would force *dialogue and any resulting interactions squarely into and through digital space* and would radically transform those plans for the network and for the processes which would manage the project and its relationships that were developed as part of the network's response to the call document. Such plans (to meet, to work together, to make with others) would necessarily be swept aside but, participants would go on to acknowledge that new opportunities would be then created and that many of these positive changes would have been regarded as all-but-impossible until recently.

As a consequence, certain things which had been considered fundamental to the project's application and its execution would go on to be redesigned and, through such challenges, new methods for dialogue (and for correspondence) would need to be developed and trialled. The project's status or context as a form or type of fluid, dynamic and emerging social sculpture could be acknowledged, and with or through these the instances highlighted above, a *dialogical correspondence* would become recognisable.

Dialogical correspondences

"A dialogical aesthetic would locate meaning 'outside' the self; in the exchange that takes place, via discourse, between two subjects. Moreover, the identities of these subjects are not entirely set, but rather, are formed and transformed through

the process of dialogical exchange... in and through dialogical exchange." (Kester 2000)

It is perhaps worth noting that, as Kester suggests, what we might think of as the subject of or within any dialogical experience is not only or strictly limited to the individual or even their institution. We might also see such a claim as inherent in the earlier reflection that something notable occurs at points *between* dialogue and / or correspondence.

From this, it is possible to describe an experience of *dialogical correspondence* as something taking place in the spaces between the workshop participants, the storytelling tool, the project itself, the other AMASS partners, their own external (local) partners etc. Each is subject to an *instrumentalisation* by and within the context of the project which is marked by actions and activities that both serve the project's ambition, the project team's shared motivations and an individuals' own needs.

"Attachments, therefore, can be useful ways to describe how relationships are formed (by suggesting their 'dependency on' or 'commitment to' a particular cause), they reflect the fluidity of '... entanglements as sources and resources...'"

(Marres 2007, p.775)

Kester's model of *dialogical exchange* posits that meaningful and valuable connection and those moments of *correspondence* as a kind of *gift-giving* are characterised by a reciprocity that has impact. They are founded upon a *sustained relationship in space and time* so that both trust and any necessary sense of mutual understanding can be founded and developed. Such association constitutes the basis of shared experience, and in the making and developing which happens when together - a *co-participation in (the) specific material conditions of existence*.

Within the context of AMASS, therefore, such an exchange at points of correspondence also presents opportunities at which connections can be both made and reinforced. Such connections (perhaps particularly when undertaken during the preparation and writing of a project's application) *establish a set of attachments which act to develop those social infrastructures that have power in the potential that is brought together by a complex collection of individuals, communities and activities*.

From our participants' discussion the tools of a research project and, in particular the call document and their responses which go on to become the text of an application, establish a context *which is then populated by humans*

whose correspondences determine the potential scope, impacts and ambitions of any work that is to result. These relationships and their work are clearly bounded by a sense of attachment as Marres (2007) would define it. These human activities work to reshape those instruments which have in fact brought them together through a series of meaningful dialogical interactions between one other which are marked by exchange in moments of being-together, and which further help to determine the formal mechanisms through which their community is constituted (the submission of a grant application, for example).

The knowledge and language outcomes which can result both from a project and, perhaps most interestingly, the material that forms the basis of people's day-to-day correspondences, sets up how any outcome or impact might be considered. Those dialogues and their entangled mesh of correspondences which might otherwise fall between the gaps in a project such as AMASS can, we argue, have real value. Through our attempts to capture and / or (re)articulate them via a particular method of storytelling, we may be able to identify and make use of those insights that would otherwise be in danger of falling through gaps (or which might be overwhelmed by the other information resulting from a project's complex activities).

This article presents a brief initial review of and reflection upon one tool and its rationale which attempts to capture dialogue and help identify or even understand instances of correspondence within a very specific set of moments. Through the use of one scenario within the AMASS project's development, and working with one group of participants (themselves part of a larger community or artists, activists, educators, practitioners and researchers), we present a tentative summary of our initial findings. This work has also been undertaken to suggest how our theoretical framework and research tool might be further developed as we continue to apply it across different contexts and take other opportunities to engage with the varied communities of participants who are themselves at work within the broad activities of the AMASS research project.

It is perhaps obvious that one practical function for an approach and a tool such as this will be in how it helps or assists members of the AMASS community to gain insights which for themselves may be useful for the work. It may, in fact, also have value as a thought experiment in or of itself: where a conceptualisation such as this (of how dialogical interactions are made meaningful at or through particular points of correspondence) actually works to help us understand these complex scenarios and how our experiences might be defined or discussed, perhaps without

requiring further application or making any other impacts unnecessary.

Coda

It may also be worth considering that those socially-engaged arts projects which have also focused upon or made use of the languages of bureaucracy and which have reflected institutional formalities within and through their work (often as the basis for the production of visual and or conceptual arts outcomes) do also often work to occupy a space of criticality and take inspiration from the formal structures and perhaps invisible or deliberately opaque rules and systems through which such work (or in fact any work) must today exist within. And between.

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