Distributed authorship and creative communities

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abstract:

In its requirement for both an author and reader art can be considered a participatory activity. Expanded concepts of agency, such as in actor-network-theory (Latour 2005), question what or who can be an active participant, allowing us to revisit the debate on authorship from a new perspective. We can ask whether creativity might be regarded as a form of social interaction rather than an outcome. How might we understand creativity as interaction between people and things, as sets of discursive relations rather than outcomes?

Whilst creativity is often perceived as the product of the individual artist, or creative ensemble, it can also be considered an emergent phenomenon of communities, driving change and facilitating individual or ensemble creativity. Creativity can be a performative activity released when engaged through and by a community and understood as a process of interaction.

In this context the model of the solitary artist who produces artefacts which embody creativity is questioned as an ideal for achieving creative outcomes. Instead, creativity is proposed as an activity of exchange that enables (creates) people and communities. In Creative Land (Leach 2003) anthropologist James Leach describes cultural practices where the creation of new things, and the ritualised forms of exchange enacted around them, function to "create" individuals and bind them in social groups, "creating" the community they inhabit. Leach's argument is an interesting take on the concept of the gift-economy and suggests it is possible to conceive of creativity as emergent from and innate to the interactions of people. Such an understanding might then function to combat an instrumentalist view of creativity that demands of artists that their creations have social (e.g.: "economic") value. In the argument proposed here, creativity is not valued as arising from a perceived need, a particular solution or product, nor from a supply-side "blue skies" ideal, but as an emergent property of communities.

This paper seeks to articulate these issues, identifying a set of core questions and describing the context within which they will be addressed, indicating how these questions will be at the centre of the pan-European ELMCIP collaborative research project. The paper examines a specific example of a creative community and outlines the research methods we intend to employ during our proposed field work. The paper concludes with an outline of our expected outcomes.

Introduction

This text is written within the context of a research project being undertaken by a team that includes the authors. The authors have backgrounds in interdisciplinary arts and digital poetics (Biggs) and geography and ethnography (Travlou). This text reflects the shared but distinct research foci and methods of the authors. Other research team members are creative practitioners and researchers at the University of Bergen (Scott and Jill Rettberg), Blekinge Institute of Technology (Maria Engberg and Talan Memmott), University of Amsterdam (Yra van Dijk), University of Ljubljana (Janez Strehovec), University of Jyväskylä (Raine Koskimaa) and University College Falmouth (Jerome Fletcher). The project, titled Developing a Network-based Creative Community: Electronic Literature as a Model of Creativity and Innovation in Practice (ELMCIP 2010), seeks to address a number of questions regarding authorship and social relations within a contemporary networked culture which is typified by local difference and global continuity.

The primary research questions are:

How do creative communities, amateur and professional, form and interact through distributed media? What are the affects of these processes upon creative practice and its outcomes?

What are the models for creative communities in the field of electronic literature? What forces, such as diverse linguistic heritages, affect the development of such communities? What general insights do these models facilitate?

How might education function in the development and formation of electronic literature communities? What are the implications for and models available to educators?

How do electronic literature practices link to networks and materialise in culturally and linguistically specific contexts? How might innovation emerge in this context?

This particular text seeks to address and articulate, in greater detail, aspects of the first and last questions and specifically asks how distributed networks facilitate and

affect the formation of creative communities and the creative outcomes associated with them and how we might understand such communities. A key apprehension that informs our approach to these questions is that art can be considered as essentially participatory, as a form of cultural exchange. This is in contrast to the more commonly held understanding that creativity is a property and outcome of individual activity. This text will articulate in greater detail our questions, outline the context of the research, provide an example of a potential subject for analysis and describe the methods we intend to employ, particularly as regards the ethnographic fieldwork component of our programme of activities. It will conclude with our proposed activities going forward and a description of our anticipated outcomes.

Creative Communities, authorship and becoming

There are numerous examples of communities that are facilitated by and seek to explore creativity. These range from professional associations to amateur groups through to the more motile and diffuse communities often found where less formalised creative practices represent the common interest. Network technologies have impacted upon the mediation of such communities and how they might evolve. In some instances it is likely that particular communities would not exist if it had not been for the role of network technologies in their formation whilst in other instances the character of an existing community has been significantly affected. Given the centrality of networking (here we do not just mean computer networks) in the formation of any community it is not at all surprising that changes in the technologies that define networking and networks will have far reaching consequences.

Here we can consider creativity, and subsequent knowledge formation, as forms of social interaction rather than the outcomes of social activities. Creative social interaction occurs in communities that develop and evolve as cultural paradigms crystallize or dissipate. This would seem to be a reflexive process involving complex interactions of agency and becoming. Particular creative communities can act as a lens through which social change may be observed. Examples from networked culture can include large scale communities of dispersed interests such as Facebook (2010) and specialist professional communities with finely focused interests, such as the community of creative practitioners, working with networked technologies, associated with Rhizome (2010).

Thus, whilst we commonly perceive creativity as the product of the individual artist, or

creative ensemble, from this perspective creativity can also be considered an emergent phenomenon of communities, driving change and facilitating individual or ensemble creativity. Creativity can be a performative activity released when engaged through and by a community. Within this context we accept Latour's concept of actor-network-theory as useful in expanding our appreciation of what the "players" in this process can be, involving individuals, groups, apparatus and systems. Thus creativity can be understood as a process of interaction within a complex field of agency - a field so complex that Tim Ingold identifies the concept of agency as the outcome of a reductive logic; "to render the life of things as the agency of objects is to effect a double reduction, of things to objects and of life to agency" (Ingold 2008).

In this context the model of the solitary artist, producing artifacts that embody creativity, can be questioned as an ideal for achieving creative outcomes. Instead, creativity can be proposed as an activity of exchange that enables (creates) people and communities, considering these processes within an expanded field of what agency can be considered to be, as a collective becoming. James Leach, in his book Creative Land (Leach 2003), observes and describes cultural practices where the creation of new things, and the ritualized forms of exchange enacted around them, function to "create" individuals and bind them in social groups, thus "creating" the community they inhabit. Leach has observed "the role of 'creativity' in the ways people generate new places in the landscape" and has argued that,

> "...in so doing, they also generate new people, who emerge from these places, and objects which facilitate or even participate in these creative processes. Making people and places involves relations to other people and to spirits and ancestors that embody, through song/design/dance complexes, the generative potential of land itself". (Biggs & Leach 2004)

Leach's argument is an interesting development of Mauss's concept of the gift-economy (Mauss 2001), emphasising its transformative potential. In this context creativity, as a performative instance of exchange, can be considered as emergent from and innate to the interactions of people, whether in a landscape or a network.

Ingold describes such eliciting of creativity as less a quality of interactions than "lines *along* which things continually come into being. Thus when I speak of the *entanglement* of things I mean this literally and precisely: not a network of connections but a meshwork of interwoven lines of growth and movement" (Ingold

2008). Such an understanding of creativity, as an ontology where agency and becoming are dynamic qualities between things (including people), can function to combat the currently fashionable (within government and the corporate world) instrumentalist view of creativity, which demands of artists, and others, that their creations have a clear social (e.g.: "economic") value. In the argument proposed here creativity is not valued as arising from a perceived need, a particular solution or product, nor from a supply-side "blue skies" ideal, but as an emergent property of relations, of communities.

Complicating this field of fluid relations further are the implications of what happens when forms of agency are incorporated into the network of relations that underpin creative activity which are artificial systems or artifacts in their own right. As has already been noted, networks of agency can, and often do, include non-human things within their constitution. The internet is possibly the largest and most pervasive example of such mediation.

In this context we can again ask what "creativity" is? We can seek to situate it as an activity defined by and defining of communities, transcending the debate on the instrumentality of creativity and knowledge and situating innovation as an ontological factor in the formation of communities. A performative analysis of creativity is possible. This approach allows for the deconstruction of traditional perceptions of creative activities and the development of a less reductive understanding of its value. This leads directly to fundamental questions regarding the public value of creativity and the role it plays in creating communities - with creativity proposed as a process of becoming for individuals and communities, where immanence can be understood as an interaction between various agents which leads to the unfolding of being through an exchange of symbolic value. The intention here is less to evoke the Deleuzian abstraction of a "plane of immanence" (Deleuze 2001) than to socially situate the construction of self within the interplay of relationships between individuals and communities, with the role of creativity thus emerging as an ontological determiner. The cultural economies of exchange and becoming, as described by Leach, are regarded here as the pertinent examples.

Communities in the net

There are numerous examples of creative communities that have emerged since the World Wide Web was first popularised in the early 1990's. Such communities are well

documented in specialist literature but also in mainstream publications, such as Thames and Hudson's World of Art series book Internet Art (Greene 2004). Some of these communities, which often take the network as a metaphor to describe themselves, exist only, or primarily, in the online environment. The community of practitioners and writers around the 7-11 list-serve of the mid 1990's is a good example. This group included a number of key practitioners of what came to be known as net.art, including Vuk Cosic, Alexei Shulgin, Oila Lialina and Heath Bunting, founder of Irrational.org (2010). Some of these artists were also prominent practitioners of a certain kind of approach to electronic literature, often involving the conflation of computer coding and literary practices. The group was also typified by certain geographical congruencies, with many of its associates working in the emerging democracies of the ex-Warsaw pact, but was nevertheless a community that formed and primarily interacted through the virtual space of the list-serve.

7-11 was far from the first such online creative community and was itself one of a number of splinter groups from earlier communities, including many members who had gathered around the Net-Time mailing list (2010) in the early-mid 1990's. The grand-mother of all these communities was probably the Art Com Electronic Network (Kostelanetz 2001), which was founded by Carl Loeffler and Fred Truck in 1985. As part of The Well online community, in San Francisco, Art Com was associated with Stuart Brand's advocacy of new models of communities and social organisation, as espoused in the Whole Earth Catalogue (Brand 1970). Fred Turner has written on how aspects of contemporary cyber-culture can be traced back to the counter cultural experiments of the 1960's (Turner 1987) and this is a history we will explore further, as our research develops, seeking to understand and contextualise the (often idealistic) motivations that underpin the genesis of contemporary creative communities.

Ultimately, 7-11 splintered as the key individuals associated with it evolved their own distinct and sometimes incompatible approaches to practice as artists, activists and theorists. Indeed, the interpersonal dynamics that to some degree determined how these various communities formed, merged and split could form the basis of an interesting narrative which could evoke memories of earlier examples involving strong personalities often coming into conflict (the Impressionists, Dadaists or Surrealists could be prior examples). However, although these earlier communities of artists were international in character they depended largely on the co-location of their primary members, in Paris, Berlin and Zurich. The sort of creative communities

we are seeking to engage are often characterised by their geographical dispersion.

It is important to note here that there are numerous potential examples of creative communities that exist primarily due to the emergence of the Web, some of significant longevity, such as The Thing in New York (Thing 2010), others with more specific socio-cultural remits, such as the Sarai-Reader-List (Sarai 2010), and others that have transformed from informal networks into established organisations, such as Rhizome (Rhizome 2010), now part of New York's New Museum. However, at this stage, we need only identify and discuss one.

Furtherfield

Furtherfield (2010) is an online community that shares a number of characteristics with the communities mentioned above, as well as others. Furtherfield has a short "manifesto" that maps out its raison d'etre and succinctly situates its aims and objectives as being within the immediate focus of our research project:

> "Furtherfield.org believes that through creative and critical engagement with practices in art and technology people are inspired and enabled to become active co-creators of their cultures and societies. Furtherfield.org provides platforms for creating, viewing, discussing and learning about experimental practices at the intersections of art, technology and social change". (ibid)

Based in London, Furtherfield was founded by Ruth Catlow and Marc Garrett and also involves Neil Jenkins and Michael Szpakowski, two of the UK's better known net artists. Mez Breeze, the internationally renowned Australian code-poet and net-artist and a former member of 7-11 and Net-Time, is also a close associate, amongst a web of international artists, theorists and activists, many of whom primarily know one another through the virtual connections established and mediated by network initiatives such as Furtherfield. Whilst Furtherfield is a community with a core of members who are central to its formation and continuity it also exists in other forms, including as a list-serve, with around 1,000 active members, known as Netbehaviour, and the HTTP art gallery, which specializes in presenting networked and new media arts, located in suburban north London.

NetBehaviour exists as "an open email list community" that engages in "the process of sharing and actively evolving critical approaches, methods and ideas focused

around contemporary networked media arts practice". Its diverse membership includes artists working with networked media, researchers, academics, writers, code-geeks, curators, activists and others. It is the stated aim of the Netbehaviour list-serve to encourage "individuals, small groups of mutual interest and representatives of organizations to announce and promote their own projects and events" through the exchange of related concepts, ideas, information and resources. It is a community that situates itself as "a place where creative minds can share contemporary ideas and concepts, without either the censorship or endorsement of a centrally imposed hierarchical canon". Perhaps its most powerful self-defined descriptor, and one that explicitly evokes our core research question, reads:

"We are the medium - the context - the source of networked creativity".

This statement eloquently identifies individuals and communities as the determinants of mediality and situates this collective activity as the source of creativity, unconsciously channeling James Leach's observations on the role of creativity and exchange in the mediation of self and community, as described in his book on the people's of the Rai Coast. (Leach 2003). Further to this, in the book Autopoeisis: Novelty, Meaning and Value (Biggs & Leach 2004), we argue that:

"...such self generating social systems have been described as auto-poetic and mytho-poetic, following Luhmann; that is, systems of relations between persons in reciprocal and dynamic relation with conceptual and discursive schema (Luhmann 1995)."

Aside from its online existence Furtherfield also exists at a physical location, the HTTP gallery (House of Technologically Termed Praxis). The gallery seeks to be a "dedicated space for media art", providing a platform for "creating, viewing, discussing and learning about experimental practices in art, technology and social change". Like most other private art galleries HTTP features a regularly changing exhibition programme and also hosts other events, such as concerts, performances and readings. Well established new media artists that have shown their work at HTTP include Annie Abrahams, Stanza, Susan Collins and Irrational.org. However, unlike commercial private galleries, HTTP is funded by the Arts Council of England and other public bodies and functions as a non-profit artist-run space. It seeks to "initiate and provide infrastructure for commissions, events, exhibitions, internships, networking, participatory projects, peer exchange, publishing, research, residencies

and workshops". These are self-determined responsibilities which would rarely appear in the mission statements of private galleries and, indeed, many public museums and galleries. They are not even activities one usually associates with experimental art spaces, with the clear commitment to and prioritisation of collective and public activities engaging both professional and non-professional communities. Whilst having gained public support for their activities HTTP and Furtherfield remain independent communities and activities that have resisted institutionalization, even at a small scale. They have probably achieved this through retaining and foregrounding their focus on being a community and engaging other communities without recourse to an instrumentalised producer/consumer binary model of culture.

Due to these reasons, as outlined above, we believe that Furtherfield presents an exemplar for the type of creative community our research wishes to engage.

An ethnography of a networked community as emergent creativity

Ethnography is "a decoding operation" (Apgar 1983) where the researcher is required to learn the verbal and symbolic languages of the community under observation and to decipher the codes that underlie its existence, from an insider's perspective. This involves immersion into the community and a methodological toolkit to facilitate decoding through (participant) observation and in-depth interviews with community members. Bate (Bate 1997) suggests ethnography can be considered as a text that "drops the reader into the social setting, reveals the mundane and everyday, and delivers both a point and a punch line". In this context, ethnography may be of particular use in capturing and evaluating community symbols, since both observation and in-depth interviews allow the researcher to probe for meaning and watch symbolic communities interact and evolve (Howard 2002) within territorial boundaries. In support of this argument we could follow the approach of symbolic anthropologists who claim (Cohen 1985) that a community is nothing more than a matter of "boundary construction through identity and shared systems of meaning" (Guimaraes 2005). This definition makes a direct reference to the spatiality of the community and thus to ethnography's role as a methodology to decipher not only symbolic codes and meanings but also to map territoriality and the physical presence of the community.

Obviously, the above discussion is about traditional ethnographic methods used to study spatially-located settings and boundary-defined communities. What happens

however when those communities are aterritorial, or at least not located in physical space? What kind(s) of ethnography could researchers use to describe aspatial communities such as those occurring on the Internet? In her paper "Mediating Ethnography: objectivity, and the making of ethnographies of the Internet", Beaulieu (Beaulieu 2004) poses the question: "how is ethnography being challenged and reinvented in its encounter with [...] the internet in particular?" Looking at the recent (often heated) discussion on the epistemological position of ethnography in the postmodern academy, it is rather obvious that the ethnographic project is in crisis (Wittel 2000). Some of the threads that ethnography is called to disentangle are linked with new communication technologies (including the Internet) and the challenges these raise for researchers when spatially located, territorially specific social interactions are not present in those (non-physical) environments. Going back to Beaulieu's paper, she argues that - in general - technology has been considered as a barrier to the ethnographic project and thus partly responsible for the crisis in ethnography. According to this argument, online communities have been viewed as "illusory" when enacted on the Internet due to the lack of real spatial relationships (Beaulieu 2000 and Calhoun 1991). On the other hand, there are those who foresee the benefit from and support ethnographic research of online communities (Hakken 1999; Pink 1999; Amit 2000; Hine 2000; Wilson and Patterson 2002; Beaulieu 2004). For instance, Hakken (Hakken 1999) claims that online ethnographies can facilitate the discussion about multiple identities and the dynamism of (online) communities while Amit (Amit 2000) notes that the Internet might offer new definitions of community. This last possibility is of particular interest in our project.

Regarding the epistemological position of online ethnography, there are some fundamental questions that need to be taken into consideration, such as: the place of the fieldwork in relation to both participant observation and interviewing; the position of the researcher; the interaction between ethnographer and participant(s); the form of field notes; and the type of data analysis. Hine (Hine 2000) encourages online ethnographers to take an adaptive approach to address the distinctive features of online communities. This approach needs to consider the above questions and particularly the aspatial nature of such communities. The first challenge for the ethnographer, before fieldwork is designed, concerns how they immerse into such a community? Just because a researcher does not have to physically travel to a site, they will still have to:

> "'case the scene', create a strategy for entering and getting access, engage the culture, slowly get to know people, create a strategy for observing and listening via text, create categories, engage in ongoing and even constant comparative analysis over time, than the amount of time taken, minus physical logistics, to do conventional ethnography" (Thomsen et al 1998).

This quote evidences some of the issues that the present study will have to consider throughout its different stages. What follows is both a presentation of the research outline and a discussion of the questions that the researcher will be called to answer during the ethnographic study.

This project uses an ethnographic methodological approach to gather valuable information first on the interpretation and second on the performativity of 'creativity' by electronic literature practitioners – both professional and amateur – within a transnational and multicultural context. The project will follow an ethnographic methodology that is customised to meet the particular character of the case studies under investigation, such as Furtherfield. This will be: a) a multi-sited global ethnography (Marcus 1995, Burawoy 2000, Hendry 2003); and, b) a cyber-ethnography (Ward 1999; Hine 2000; Carter 2005).

The first type of ethnography that this study will adopt is global ethnography or, otherwise, 'globography' (Hendry 2003). Global ethnography allows the description of discourse amongst members of a creative community who communicate through new global forms of technology (e.g. the internet) and exist (primarily) because of these forms of technology. The Furtherfield community, as we have already observed, is characterised by both its physically geo-specific and virtually online and distributed community identities; a duality that appears to be mutually supportive. To acquire an understanding of how such a community interacts, communicates and exchanges knowledge, within a transnational context, the research will adopt unconventional ethnographic methods, involving multiple sites of observation, which are intended to cut across the dichotomies of the 'local' and the 'global'.

The second type of ethnography that this study will use is cyber-ethnography. As virtual communities only exist if their members perceive them to (Hine 2000) then rather than assuming the community as subject, as occurs in conventional ethnography, cyber-ethnography allows the participants to take the lead role in establishing the reality, status and principles of the community. The boundaries of

such communities tend to be flexible and change according to the ways their participants define them. In virtual networks the ethos of community appears more important than a sense of place. Such communities can be based around common interests rather than shared geographic territories. Identity is not entirely a function of location.

The study will initially look at Furtherfield, an internet-based creative community to research the concept of 'creativity' in an online (virtual) environment. Following Marcus's approach (Marcus 1995), the ethnographic research will be constructed in the following stages:

a. Follow the community
b. Follow the artefact (i.e. electronic literature, performances, installations)
c. Follow the metaphor (signs, symbols and metaphors that guide the ethnography)
d. Follow the story/narrative (comparison of stories with fieldwork notes from observation)
e. Follow the life/biography (gather individual stories/experiences)
f. Follow the conflict (if any between transnational communities, e.g. copyright laws)

The ethnographic study will consist of interviews – both on and off line - with members of Furtherfield and (participant) observation in both virtual and real space. In support of this mixed-methods approach, Hine (Hine 2000) and Orgad (Orgad 2005) encourage online ethnographers to use a combination of online and offline methodologies, such as interviews with community members, to triangulate findings and thus increase the validity of interpretation. Likewise, Bruckman (Bruckman 2002) stresses the importance of an "offline component" on online ethnographies to allow not only triangulation of data but also a broader picture of the social context in which the community is embedded.

However, this shift from online to offline and back to online research raises some ethical issues regarding the position of the ethnographer within the fieldwork setting. First, there is an ethical issue when approaching notions of what kind of space online ethnography takes place in as it challenges the invisibility of the researcher. "The online ethnographer faces the issue of 'being there' while also, in a non-trivial sense, 'not being there'" (Rutter & Smith 2005). Once again the idea of visibility proves to be central. Whereas in a physical environment the ethnographer's physical presence can act as a reminder of the presence of an agent, online presence turns out to be a

very "nebulous" thing (Rutter & Smith 2005 and Agre 1994). One way to overcome this problem is to create transparency in the research process by informing the participants about the project's objectives and eventual outcomes during and after fieldwork. In this project this will be achieved through the use of an interactive weblog, a form of community accessible fieldwork diary, where the ethnographer will regularly update notes from observations and communication with research participants who will have access to and input on the weblog. Finally, the weblog will be used as a communication tool between the other researchers in the project and the members of the case studies. However, here there is potential to encounter another ethical dilemma, that of anonymity and the public/private status of the weblog. Therefore, there will be separate weblogs for each case study and password protected access will only be available to the researcher and participants.

Over the past decade the 'blog' has been used by a number of researchers to constitute various aspects of their ethnographies (Beaulieu 2004). The platform has been flexibly used for a range of purposes that were traditionally pursued in different media and which addressed clearly differentiated audiences. Montensen and Walker stress the multiple uses of blogging in online ethnographies that take a hybrid form between journal, fieldwork memo, academic publishing, storage for links and site for academic discourse (Montensen & Walker 2002). In this way, the blog could serve not only as an annotated set of bookmarks, but also to document the research process, demonstrating its complexity, creativity and difficulty. Blogs might facilitate ethnographers to create the object of their investigation and render visible their subjectivity and self-reflexivity, being both a context and a mode of communication, a hybrid tool for making, presenting and reflecting on the object that is furthermore exposed in a new way. Using Mortensen and Walker's own words: "blogs [can] become a workspace for the ethnographer."

As the internet is composed of texts (in the broadest sense) they can be seen as ethnographic material which evidence the creative processes engaged by their authors and their particular community. The positionality of those texts are interesting to the investigation as they are mobile (communicators between participants in creative communities). In other terms, a 'mediated quasi-interaction' (Thompson 1995) is facilitated by the texts. The mobility of such texts, enabled by mediated quasi-interaction, addresses the situated writing and reading practices (and other creative practices) which make those texts (and other artefacts) meaningful. This is something that can be seen as especially self-evident, even reflexive, within the

communities of electronic literature practitioners, such as Furtherfield. This type of ethnography can be called "textography" (Swales 1998) as it combines the analysis of texts with an understanding of their relationship with other texts and the working lives of their authors/creators.

Ethnography is about text and writing so the question for online ethnography is: how can it be adapted to new communications media and concepts of writing? This becomes the primary resource and the location of the research interface, with the participant(s) having access to and a voice within the ethnographic project. That the participants are, in the case of Furtherfield, working as online creative practitioners, with writing central to that, offers a particularly evocative context for such work.

Conclusion

As stated at the outset of this text, this research inquires into how creative communities form and interact within networked media, how these processes affect creative practice, how electronic literature practices materialise in these contexts and how innovation emerges from that.

The text outlines the context within which these questions are addressed, with particular reference to the recent anthropological investigations of James Leach and Tim Ingold and how these relate to the analysis of creativity and community by Bruno Latour. The key objective has been to transcend the quotidian instrumentalisation of creativity in the arts, humanities and sciences, routinely required by government and industry, and to assert that the value of creativity need not to be restricted to material or conceptual outcomes but rather appreciated more fully as a foundation for the performative inter-personal interactions that allow communities to identify themselves and develop their praxis as social groups.

A number of examples of communities which exemplify distributed creative practices working within or in areas sympathetic to the practices of electronic literature were identified and discussed, with a particular focus on Furtherfield, a network of creative practitioners, theorists, curators and activists with a strong presence within both the globalised environment of the internet and the local environment of London. Furtherfield and the other examples were considered in relation the facilitation of community formation and the affects this process of creative becoming has on the creative practices associated with such communities.

Finally, various research methods in ethnography were considered, asking how they might be of value in engaging various specific creative communities, with particular consideration for how various methodologies will be more or less appropriate in contexts where factors such as community and territory, localism and globalism, similarity and difference, often exist in motile forms beyond our usual expectations. A type of cyber-ethnography was identified as most appropriate to engage the technically literate, creative, dispersed and fluid character of the communities the project seeks to engage whilst accepting that at this stage the research project is only being initiated and there are as yet numerous unknown factors to be addressed.

The ELMCIP project is asking subtle questions and has set itself ambitious objectives. The expected outcomes will not manifest as a set of clear answers, as the questions posed are elusive, but rather as a probable set of apprehensions taking multiple forms. Some of these will be more or less conventional research outcomes, such as texts and documentation, but will also include artworks in various media, including digital art, electronic texts, new media performance and sound works. Whilst the members of the research team will all be involved in undertaking research and producing such outcomes we will also engage creative communities through commissioning a number of new artworks, across media and disciplines, and by involving members in a series of workshops and seminars during the period of the project.

The final outcomes of the project will include an international conference, to be held in Edinburgh in late 2012, where research team members, invited presenters and peer reviewed submissions will be presented, including the outcomes of the case studies undertaken by the ELMCIP research project. The conference will be complemented by an exhibition and performance programme of peer reviewed commissioned artworks. Along with this ambitious event the ELMCIP project will produce an accessible searchable online database of all its research resources, including a detailed bibliography concerning electronic literature and related creative practices. This virtual resource will be complemented by a publication incorporating the research outcomes, the conference proceedings, documentation of the artworks included in the exhibition and performance programme and a DVDROM of commissioned digital arts and electronic literature artworks. The intention is that these multifaceted outcomes will allow a non-instrumentalist appreciation of creative practice in networked communities to emerge and a detailed and thorough record of

activity in such communities, especially in the field of electronic literature and the digital arts, to be established. It is hoped that this resource can then function as a platform and repository for further collections of materials and resources concerned with networked and distributed creative practices.

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