



A BUNDLE OF STICKS

a reflective process towards cultural ecologic empowerment

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ABOUT FOLKLORE.	ABOUT MARRIAGE . ABOUT FINE	ABOUT POLITICS
ABOUT NATURE	ABOUT PRACTICALITY . ABOUT LAW	ABOUT SCULPTURE
ABOUT COMMUNICATION	A BUNDLE OF STICKS	ABOUT SKINNING
	ABOUT MUNDANEITY	ABOUT FORM AND
	IS A PROJECT - ABOUT	
ABOUT FOLKLORE .	PROCESS . ABOUT GATHERING	ABOUT
ABOUT NATURE .	ABOUT VITCHRAFT . ABOUT INDIGENOUS CULTURE	ABOUT PARTICIPATION
ABOUT COMMUNICATION .	ABOUT MAKING . ABOUT METAPHOR	
ABOUT AESTHETICS .	ABOUT COMPOSITION . ABOUT Juxtaposition	
ABOUT HISTORY	ABOUT CATALYSTS . ABOUT ENERGY	
ABOUT NATURE	ABOUT KNOWLEDGE . ABOUT LEARNING	
ABOUT AESTHETICS	ABOUT GIFT . ABOUT PLACE	
ABOUT HISTORY	ABOUT COLOUR . ABOUT CONTINUATION	
ABOUT HISTORY	ABOUT FUEL . ABOUT VALUE	
ABOUT SYMBOLISM	ABOUT LANGUAGE . ABOUT DEFIANCE	
ABOUT MATERIALS	ABOUT INTENTION . ABOUT BINDING	
ABOUT HISTORY	ABOUT INSTRUCTIONS . ABOUT CHOICE	
ABOUT HISTORY	ABOUT EMPOWERMENT . ABOUT CONTEXT	
ABOUT HISTORY	ABOUT FOOD . ABOUT SHELTER	
ABOUT HISTORY	ABOUT TECHNOLOGY . ABOUT ART	
ABOUT HISTORY	ABOUT TIME . ABOUT SPACE	
ABOUT HISTORY	ABOUT TOUCH . ABOUT SUBSTANCE	
ABOUT HISTORY	ABOUT PHENOMENOLOGY . ABOUT SCIENCE	

Δ a bundle of sticks is a project about... – page from notebook (pward 2011)

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acknowledgements

Many thanks to friends, family, tutors and fellow artists and students for their support and encouragement throughout A BUNDLE OF STICKS.

And thanks to the sticks and stones, winds, trees and tides that have ultimately inspired my actions.



A BUNDLE OF STICKS

a reflective process towards cultural ecologic empowerment



“Art does not reproduce the visible but makes visible” Paul Klee¹

“At the heart of today’s ecological crisis lies a terrible failure to understand the essence of our relationship with the natural world. One can of course address that failure rationally and empirically; but the arts (particularly the visual arts) offer different insights into that relationship, and touch people in ways that conventional education and advocacy can rarely do.” Jonathon Porritt, Director, Forum for the Future, UK²

As an ecological artist³ my practice is rooted in a sense of our evolving relationships within the animate earth. Art, as a holistic interdisciplinary process, is the means through which I investigate and share these relationships. It is an intimate response to the social and ecological conditions of our age.

Inspired and informed predominantly by the principles of Social Sculpture and *instruments of consciousness* developed by Joseph Beuys and Shelley Sacks⁴, and by an appreciation of traditional indigenous cultures and practices, A BUNDLE OF STICKS as a simple process, has provided a rich emergent structure through which to examine and develop my work and its potential to enrich and transform our lives.

This essay is a document of that process, outlining some of the aesthetic and ecological issues an active and reflective engagement with A BUNDLE OF STICKS has revealed.

¹ From Paul Klee, Creative Credo [Schöpferische Konfession] (1920)

² From <http://www.universityofthetrees.org/>

³ *“Ecological Art or “Eco Art” is a contemporary form of environmental art created by artists who are concerned about local and global environmental situations, and who take art making to a functional format.”* Cynthia Robinson, from <http://www.cynthiarobinson.net/ecoart.html>. See also *an introduction to ecological art* <http://intim8ecology.wordpress.com/2012/06/29/1067/>

⁴ Through participation in workshops and conversations with Shelley Sacks, a student of Joseph Beuys and Director of the Social Sculpture Research Unit in Oxford, I became aware of the potential of reflective process as a means towards perceptive and behavioural transformation. The concept of Social Sculpture was developed by Joseph Beuys as an interdisciplinary means to promote participation in the democratic process. Beuys’ work, based predominantly in a wartime experience with nomadic Tartar tribes-people of Northern Europe, ranged from drawing and sculpture, to performance and dialogical participation. He was a founding member of the Green Party in Germany and saw no division between his political work and his art.

my first BUNDLE OF STICKS
a sense of time, a sense of place, a sense of being

Before I begin to describe the incident that gave rise to A BUNDLE OF STICKS, its *moment of creative departure*, I will place the event in a personal environmental context.

It occurred within walking distance of my home on the North Devon coast. At the time I was seeking a conceptual shift in my work, exploring the natural materials and processes evident in the area, having *relocated* my visual arts practice out of the studio into the environment...



Δ my first bundle of sticks, Northam Burrows, North Devon (pward 2011)

On Beltane eve, the Celtic festival celebrating the beginning of summer⁵, I set off to my local beach to return some driftwood sticks that I had previously collected. The sticks were each about one metre long, of different thicknesses and from various species of tree. Each had its own shape, colour, texture and individual character determined by degrees of organic disintegration.

⁵ Traditionally, the first day of May

While the sticks were not heavy, their loose form made them awkward to carry. I had decided on a particular place among the dunes to put them – a site identified as ‘special’, through a previous art action⁶. I had to walk some distance with the sticks, and rather than simply throwing them down at the first opportunity (they were *just* sticks after all) I determined to carry them. My hands didn’t quite reach around so I put them under my arm, held them against my chest, balanced them on my shoulders and head to carry them more comfortably. To make things easier, I tied them together. The only suitable material to hand was the marram grass growing plentifully across the dunes. I pulled up a clump of stems and roots and bound the sticks as securely as I could. I twisted the grass into a knot. Many of the drier stems snapped but left enough to hold the bundle together.

Walking on the significance of my simple actions began to occur to me - to be revealed. A whole rush of implications, of complex connotations and interconnections, sang in my ears, bubbling playfully through my imagination, bells going off left, right and centre, drawing connections between abstract thoughts and ideas – of art and craft, ecology, anthropology and philosophy, of politics and power...

I reached my destination. Placed the bundle on the ground and studied it from a number of angles. I positioned it within the beach, the dunes, the sea and stones and other sticks and stuff strewn about, and in relation to the town I had travelled from and any local history and geomorphology I knew. Again the implications, metaphorical and practical, bombarded me, triggered by many of the questions and assumptions I had been exploring in my work. It was fire, it was sculpture, it was learning and it was technology. Despite the utter simplicity of the process, and the object that it produced, it held a wealth of material for further scrutiny – it had *potential*.

I left the bundle of sticks to its fate, to the wind and rain, to the meddling hands and feet and minds of any passer-by, to the birds and beasts that know this place as home. I could only wonder at how it would be received, how it would be altered over time. Would it be picked up and carried away on another journey of its own, contemplated in material form and implied process as art or happily added to a woodpile ready for a fire? Or would it simply remain ignored among the dunes, slowly decomposing, providing food and shelter for the ‘others’, part of life’s rich cycle? I would return to check at regular intervals but carried away a wealth of memories and realizations, a desire to share them and questions of how that may be achieved...

⁶ During the previous summer I had painted a large driftwood log with earth pigments. The sea had subsequently taken the log back. After a number of months and an indeterminable voyage the log ‘magically’ returned to the beach at this site still showing evidence of the painting.

expressions of an intimate ecology *an aesthetic and ecological context*

Can a single action be creatively catalytic in effort and effect?

May we truly listen to the wind and waves and utter her words for all the world?

Is a prayer from the heart as large as a shout in a crowd?

Only with a relationship and understanding of the natural world can we realistically engage with the challenges, both environmental and social, we are presently facing. My contemporary practice hopefully enables a sense of connection and compassion through the use of appropriately derived materials, and cross-disciplinary actions and events.⁷



Δ ecological crisis (industrial mining; fossil fuel power stations; displacement of indigenous people and deforestation; plastic waste)

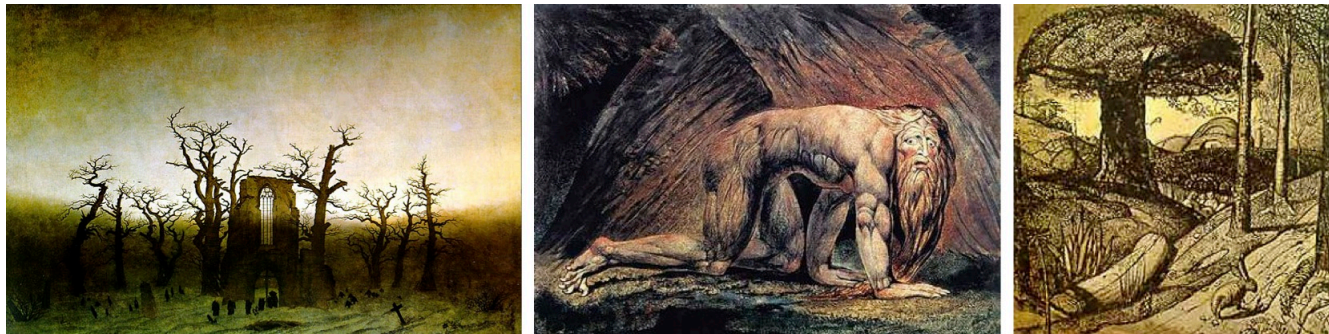
Since the Industrial Revolution⁸, artists, scientists and philosophers have increasingly recognized the damage being done to both environment and society through our gradual disassociation from nature, our overconsumption of natural resources and the pollution caused by their untested use. While Blake, Wordsworth and the Romantics⁹ nostalgically lamented the demise of the rural idyll, the wheels of capital marched on, fuelled by both a desire for power and a need for comfort, security and respite from the hardships of life. Since the Reformation and the systematic dissemination of rationalist and

⁷ Personal statement for RANE website, written early in the MA Art & Environment 2010 (www.rane-research.org)

⁸ E J Hobsbawm, *Industry and Empire: From 1750 to the Present Day* (London; Penguin, 1969)

⁹ A discussion on the foundation of ecological art in the Romantic movement is discussed by Jan van Boeckel, in *Angels talking back and new organs of perception: Art making and intentionality in nature experience* (School of Art and Design, Aalto University, 2011).

Cartesian¹⁰ thought the *escalation*¹¹ of civilization has continued virtually unabated leading to the critical situation we are experiencing today¹². Climate change, mass extinction, water pollution on a global scale, peak oil, economic collapse and inequality, escalating material and spiritual poverty, the displacement and oppression of indigenous peoples, unprecedented deforestation and soil depletion, genetically modified foods, physical and mental health problems, continued social injustice, sexual violence and abuse, and the unnecessary proliferation of war and famine may all reasonably be attributed to our attitude of superiority and ambivalence towards Nature.¹³



Δ romantics (Caspar David Friedrich; William Blake; Samuel Palmer)

In 1962 biologist Rachel Carson's controversial book, *Silent Spring*, exposed the damage caused by chemical fertilizers alerting humanity to the alarming ecological implications of our industrial behaviour.¹⁴ Despite the often violent and covert resistance of the cynics and champions of unbridled

¹⁰ French philosopher, mathematician, and writer René Descartes (1596 – 1650) has been dubbed the 'Father of Modern Western Philosophy'. His philosophy rejected the analysis of corporeal substance into matter and form, and any appeal to ends—divine or natural—in explaining natural phenomena. It is considered that Cartesian philosophy has set the basis for 'modernity'.

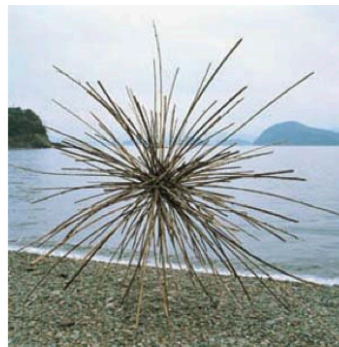
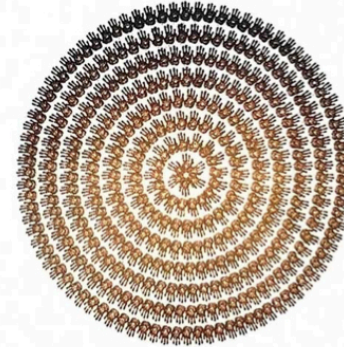
¹¹ Environmentalist philosopher Derrick Jensen uses the term 'escalation' to describe the progress of modern civilization. His radical approach to environmental politics based in indigenous understanding (discussed in Derek Jensen, *Endgame: The Problem of Civilization v. 1*(USA; Seven Stories Press, US, 2006) questions the efficacy of a non-violent struggle to protect Nature from ourselves.

¹² "As Copernican and Newtonian insights took hold, sensory perception was increasingly derided as deceptive; only that which could be measured and analyzed mathematically could be taken as true. The spreading cultural detachment from bodily experience enabled a new audacity in our human researches, empowering a wondrous range of discoveries and technological innovations. But it also left us curiously adrift, bereft of our most immediate source of contact and rapport with the surrounding terrain. Dismissing our felt experience, we sacrificed much of our animal empathy with the animate earth, forfeiting the implicit sustenance we'd always drawn from that empathy. While amassing our analytic truths and deploying our technologies, we became more and more impervious to the needs of the living land, oddly inured to the suffering of other animals and to the fate of the more-than-human-world." David Abram, *Becoming Animal - An Earthly Cosmology* (New York; Random House Books, 2010) p307

¹³ In *Ecological Literacy: Education and the Transition to a Postmodern World*, David Orr writes, "The crisis of sustainability, the fit between humanity and its habitat, is manifest in varying ways and degrees everywhere on earth. It is not only a feature on the public agenda; for all practical purposes it is the agenda . . . Sustainability is about the terms and conditions of human survival, and yet we still educate at all levels as if no such crisis existed." p83

¹⁴ Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (New York; Houghton Mifflin Books, 1962) - It is often argued that the book heralded the start of the environmental movement. However, it may be equally true that the publication simply marked a tipping point in awareness demonstrated by the many issues of social, economic, sexual and racial justice championed at the time of which ecological awareness was just one. Ironically, such awareness could well have been

economic growth, people throughout society have set their bodies and minds to discovering and implementing the ways and means we may redress the damage we have done and begin to survive within the limitations of this finite but wondrous world.



△ environmental art - Richard Long (above); Andy Goldsworthy (below)

With a background in graphic design and illustration I have been constantly aware of the power and responsibility of art within society. However, I had gradually realized the limitations of a purely visual art practice regarding my more political aspirations¹⁵. My earliest experiences of the power of art were through popular music and literature and I have continually aspired to a sense of universal accessibility throughout my work. More recently, after a project researching locally sourced earth pigments, my

promoted through the technological and communicative advances facilitated by those industries the environmental and social justice movements condemned. In spite of such dichotomies it was imperative that humanity took responsibility for its actions.

¹⁵ "A literal restatement of how things are and an emphasis on external action alone will not help us to end the great suffering of nature, or the dangerous contradictions inherent in our view of progress. It will also not help us develop more reverential perspectives toward other living beings, or deal with the complex questions of our supposed stewardship. The way we inhabit the world will not be transformed simply by information. As the coordinator of a UK climate change organisation has said: "We have enough information to have caused us to change our lifestyle decades ago. What is holding us back?" Deeper levels of connectedness are vital if we are to find the energy and commitment needed to make such enormous changes." Shelley Sacks, Social Sculpture Research Unit, Oxford Brookes University.

practice moved into my local environment, both through materials and action, becoming aligned with the work of Richard Long, Andy Goldsworthy and herman de vries. While appreciating the inspiration and relevance of Land Art, Arte Povera, Minimalism and Conceptual Art to take art out of its conventional settings, it is through the ideas of Social Sculpture developed by Joseph Beuys and the relational art practices discussed by Grant H Kester¹⁶ that the intentions behind my practice have emerged.



Δ ecological art - herman de vries (above); Joseph Beuys; Wochenklausur (below)

"Every human being is an artist, a freedom being, called to participate in transforming and reshaping the conditions, thinking and structures that shape and inform our lives" Joseph Beuys

My work is no longer simply *about* the environment - it is more an implicit function *of* that environment. Such a fundamental conceptual shift has identified it within the growing ecological art movement, inhabited by such as Sam Bower, Aviva Rahmani, Jan van Boeckel and Shelley Sacks.

¹⁶ Grant H Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, California; University of California Press, 2004)

Rooted in the concept of socially-engaged practice¹⁷ developed by artists and theorists such as Stephan Willats and Adrian Piper, the pedagogical insights of Paulo Freire and Neil Postman and the radical, relational and site-specific theories of Suzi Gablik, Nicolas Bourriaud, Lucy R Lippard and Mikon Kwon, ecological art aims to utilize a creative and functional dynamic in response to a specific community. It aspires to act for and with a community as a whole within a local and global context. Such an approach requires a degree of altruistic sensitivity, of reciprocity and responsibility towards the planet previously neglected by modern civilization, but often displayed by more traditional indigenous cultures around the world.

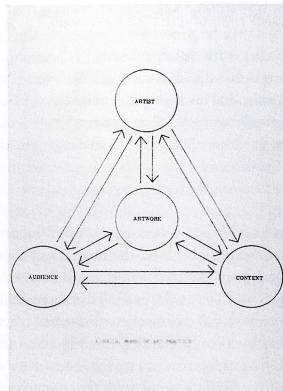


FIGURE 16. Stephen Willats, "A Socially Interactive Model of Art Practice" (c. 1970). Courtesy of the artist.

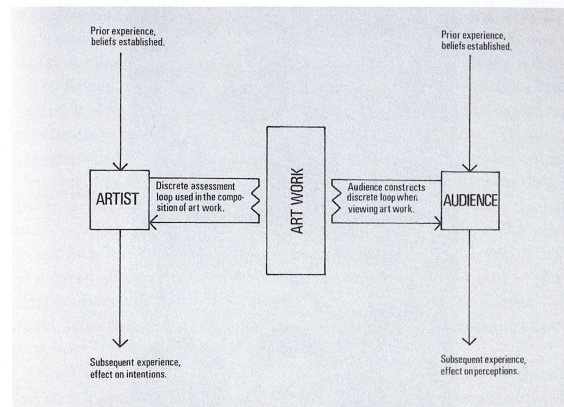
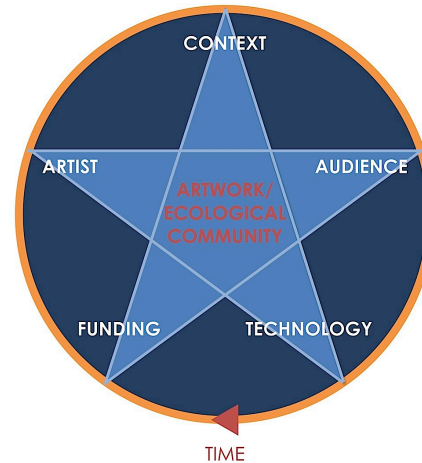


FIGURE 17. Stephen Willats, "Conventional Relationship of an Artwork between Artist and Audience" (c. 1970). Courtesy of the artist.



Δ socially/ecologically engaged practice (diagrams – Stephen Willats 1970¹⁸; pward 2010¹⁹)

My own relationship with Nature was fostered by a deep respect within my upbringing – through time spent in wild and remote places fishing, playing, bird watching and exploring the world around me²⁰. I am presently working with Australian Aboriginal Elder Noel Butler whose generosity has allowed me to embrace a more creative, cultural relationship with the earth rooted in practicality. On seeing a chain I had fashioned from locally gathered Cordyline leaves Noel commented how such tactile exploration

¹⁷ "These projects mark the emergence of a body of contemporary art practice concerned with collaborative, and potentially emancipatory, forms of dialogue and conversation. While it is common for a work of art to provoke dialogue among viewers this typically occurs in response to a finished object. In these projects conversation becomes an integral part of the work itself." (Kester, 2005)

¹⁸ From Grant H Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, California; University of California Press, 2004)

¹⁹ From 'ecologically engaged art practice revisited' - <http://intim8ecology.files.wordpress.com/2011/04/c3a6-the-ash-tree-18.pdf>

²⁰ In his book *Last Child in the Woods - Saving our Children from Nature-deficit Disorder* (London; Atlantic Books, 2005), Richard Louv exhaustively examines the benefits of an upbringing in contact with nature. Such principles are the basis for *ecopsychology* that studies the relationship between human beings and the natural world through ecological and psychological principles. The field seeks to develop and understand ways of expanding the emotional connection between individuals and the natural world, thereby assisting individuals with developing sustainable lifestyles and remedying alienation from nature. Theodore Roszak is credited with coining the term in his 1992 book, *The Voice of the Earth*.

echoed his own education about the materials utilized in his native environment. On walking in Nature with him he saw not only the intrinsic beauty of the materials we encountered but also their potential application.



Δ indigenous culture – Siberian shaman; animistic cave drawing; omo tribe, Ethiopia (image Hans Sivester); Noel Butler

My work has been further informed by eastern philosophies such as Taoism and Buddhism, as well as the animistic practices employed by shamanism and pre-Christian traditions in the West, all of which are rooted within a deep respect and observance of Natural laws. More recently such philosophies have reappeared in the principles of Deep Ecology proposed by Arne Naess and Gary Snyder as a response to the growing awareness of escalating environmental abuse, and in the works of David Abrams who explores the possibilities of Phenomenology in relation to our place within Nature²¹.

Deep Ecology observes interconnectivity within an animate universe and the responsibility that implies, its premise being that the human species is no more essential to the planet's wellbeing than any other. Phenomenology, forwarded by Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty²², proposes truth as a collective perception of our place within the world determined by a mutating arena of subjective and reciprocal sensory experience. Maintaining such *ecocentric*, rather than anthropocentric, policy hopefully inspires a sense of humility towards all existence and an ability to respond accordingly. Aesthetically we may simply present a number of subjective statements simultaneously to embody such perception.

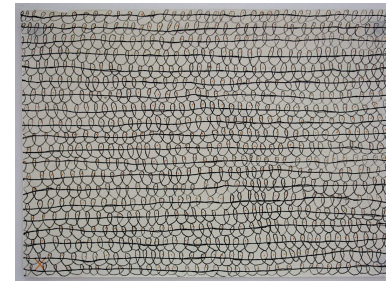
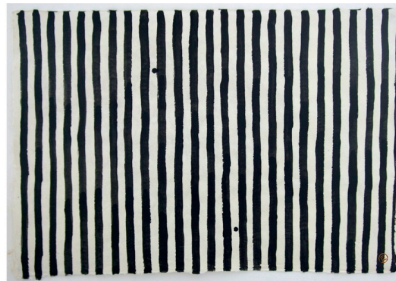
²¹ " The simple act of perception is experienced as an interchange between oneself and that which one perceives – as a meeting, a participation, a communion between beings. For each thing that we sense is assumed to be sensitive in its own right, able to feel and respond to the beings around it, and to us." David Abram, *Becoming Animal - An Earthly Cosmology* (New York; Random House Books, 2010) p268

²² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London; Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962)



Δ phenomenology - seaweed alphabet, saunton sands, north devon (pward 2011)

My final contextual explanation is that of ‘process’ and process thinking. *“Alfred North Whitehead (1861 – 1947) departed from traditional philosophy by conceiving of individual entities as series of moments of experience instead of as masses of static substance. Within each moment, an entity is influenced by others, creates its own identity and propels itself into further experiences.”*²³ I had previously appreciated practical process through my research with earth pigments, but not its conceptual relationship to our energetic nature. What follows will examine how such thinking has become evident in my evolving practice – of how imaginative participation in interlinked events and interactions may provide meaningful aesthetic ecological experience.



Δ process (pward 2011)

²³ From Sheela Pawar, *A Synopsis of Process Thought* (copyright: Center For Process Studies, www.ctr4process.org)

3

a phoenix a rising ***catalyzing ecological and political debate through aesthetic engagement***

The archaic and universally recognizable symbolism within A BUNDLE OF STICKS allows us to access stories and emotional associations from our pasts rendering it a useful process for dialogical engagement²⁴. Whether through gathering wood for fuel, making dens, throwing sticks for our dogs or using them as swords or spears in childhood battles, sticks are a familiar element in our lives.²⁵ The nature of A BUNDLE OF STICKS provides reference to a number of historical, ecological, technological and social issues. Within relational processes, like those facilitated by Joseph Beuys, Suzanne Lacy and WochenKlausur, these metaphorical implications may be utilized to promote creative ‘conversations’ regarding such issues, inspiring further creative expression and providing an informed interdisciplinary interpretation and narrative background to the project as a whole²⁶.

"What the world needs is a good housekeeper," Aviva Rahmani



Δ bundles of sticks around the world

²⁴ Dialogical Art has been studied by Nicolas Bourriaud in his seminal work *Relational Aesthetics* (France; Les Presse Du Reel, 1998) and by Grant H Kester in *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley, California; University of California Press, 2004)

²⁵ Stories and associations shared through workshops. For more things to do with sticks see Fiona Danks and Jo Schofield, *The Stick Book: Loads of things you can make or do with a stick* (London; Frances Lincoln, 2011)

²⁶ In a contemporary art context ‘conversations’ may be understood as any exchange, from words to immersive experiences around a particular topic, process or material. I have recently facilitated two such ‘conversations’. One, an interdisciplinary experience based on the evolution and formation of a living landmark – PEBBLE RIDGE (<http://intim8ecology.wordpress.com/2012/06/10/pebble-ridge-a-mini-expedition-to-explore-the-evolution-of-a-living-landmark-2/>)– and the other focused on the process of transforming a conifer plantation to a sustainably managed mixed woodland smallholding based its previous incarnation as an ancient woodland site – A BUNDLE OF STICKS @ COURAGE COPSE CREATIVES (<http://intim8ecology.wordpress.com/2012/07/24/a-bundle-of-sticks-courage-copse-creatives/>). Such events utilize a range of artistic activities and concepts to provoke creative dialogue.

The mundane process of gathering and binding sticks acknowledges and celebrates a simple action that has provided the basis of our existence and survival. Within contemporary society such fundamental actions have been scorned and trivialised as somehow *dirty* and beneath us, while simultaneously there has been an increase in ill health and discontent. In line with both Feminism and Buddhist practice the acceptance and re-evaluation of such intrinsic and necessary acts is both political and life affirming. Feminist artists such as Mierle Laderman Ukeles in her 1970 performance *Maintenance Art—Proposal for an Exhibition* have celebrated ‘menial’ work, or work as service to society, by publicly cleaning an art gallery.



△ bundles of sticks in social realist art (Gustav Courbet; Vincent van Gogh; Louisa Anne; Julio Gonzalez)

19th Century Social Realist artists such as Gustav Courbet and Vincent van Gogh similarly acknowledge and celebrate the workings and hardships of rural, peasant life that support the often decadent and indulgent lifestyles that occur elsewhere. The exhibition of social conscience and the recognition of art’s power to raise awareness of such issues may be seen as the forerunner of today’s socially engaged art practices. It is this aspect of the project that I feel gives it the most power as both an action and a symbol in an ecological and aesthetic context – it is function and form in positive response to our universal condition.

faggots, bavins and bundles in history, ecology, technology and politics

Discussing this project with older friends and acquaintances many had memories of making ‘faggots’, or bundles of sticks, for fires in their homes. It was part of a forester’s craft²⁷ - to gather and bundle sticks to provide instant heat sources for cooking, for weaving and fencing, or to simply make them easier to carry. Further research established instances of faggots and bundles throughout history.

²⁷ ‘Since it is done up with only one string it is technically a bavin rather than a fagot (which has two strings)’
<http://bredehighwoods.blogspot.co.uk/2009/05/mystery-bavin.html>

“The Ashen Faggot is a West Country Christmas Eve custom – it’s a large log with withies bound around it to make a bundle which is burned indoors in the hearth. Drinks are consumed as each withy breaks in the flames, which sounds like an excuse for a good drink! The practice still survives in country pubs notably the Lutrell Arms in Dunster, Somerset – their faggot consists of twelve thick sticks bound in a bundle using ash withies and the Dunster Carol is sung while it burns in the vast fireplace. It’s a revived custom dating back to the 1930s but with much older roots.”²⁸



Δ faggots through history – roman justice; aesop’s fables; witch burning; ashen faggot

A BUNDLE OF STICKS is used in property law to negotiate different legal aspects²⁹. The faggot was a Roman symbol of capital punishment, of *unity as strength* used by fascists and socialists and illustrated in Aesop’s Fables. They were used to burn witches and heretics during the European Reformation, as secular rationalism was adopted by the rich and powerful to subjugate the masses³⁰. Despite the derogatory inference between heretics and homosexuals, the links between the disempowerment of indigenous peoples in 16th Century Europe and its continuation today through corporate intervention and dispossession of tribal lands cannot be ignored. The symbolic connotations of A BUNDLE OF STICKS for empowerment - quite literally to reclaim one’s power, to collect energy or fuel - has great potential. Most recently the symbol of the broomstick (a bundle of sticks on another stick) ridden by Harry Potter, provides a reminder of our pagan past rooted in indigenous wisdom and animistic tradition.

As previously mentioned, laws that prohibit the collection of firewood³¹ not only undermine our common rights for subsistence, but also bring into question conservation laws set up to protect

²⁸ <http://calendarcustoms.com/articles/ashen-faggot/>

²⁹ Robert J. Goldstein, *Green Wood in the Bundle of Sticks: Fitting Environmental Ethics and Ecology into Real Property Law* (Boston College Environmental Affairs Law Review, Vol 25, Issue 2, 1998)

³⁰ Appendix A: The Burning Times, Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark - Magic, Sex and Politics* (London; Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1990)

³¹ Gathering firewood in environmentally sensitive areas - <http://www.dec.wa.gov.au/content/view/3065/1830/>

wildlife and habitats, without consideration for either our intrinsic role within nature, the constant evolution of the global ecosystem or simply the value of clearing woodland floors to promote diversity of flora and fauna³². Today government subsidies and intensive farming methods encourage extensive stripping of hedgerows and the utilization of brash to support heavy machinery, undermining the potential of ancient sustainable practices and wildlife habitats in a matter of hours. In an age of diminishing fuel supplies and threats to biodiversity there seems little sense in such thoughtless actions³³.



△ firewood and timber (pward 2012)

Living *off grid* for a number of years, relying on wood I could gather for heat, raised a set of questions, especially regarding the romantic notion of ‘getting back to nature’, about time and work, comfort and hardship, the division of labour, and the tools and technology developed to facilitate such basic requirements³⁴. It brought home the extent to which our civilization is removed from the practical means of its survival. While wood and sticks are a feasible fuel source³⁵ its is not without fault, both in terms of its carbon output and its supply³⁶. Around the world people burn whatever is at hand to heat their homes and cook – dung and rubbish being as useful as wood or sticks. Before the discovery of fossil fuels, there was a period of ‘peak wood’³⁷ akin to today’s ‘peak oil’³⁸ crisis. The demands of

³² Since working on this project I have also often questioned the sense of not utilizing for fuel ‘brash’ or upper branches and twigs cut from our hedges and woodlands, rather than the widespread practice of ‘chipping’ for garden paths or mulch, raising further questions about our wastefulness. A recent conversation with an old farmer in North Devon recalled the traditional practice of cutting hedges in rotation to maintain a supply of firewood over the years.

³³ From a conversation with a gardener from a traditional farming family in North Devon, 18th June 2011.

³⁴ Such a discussion could be engendered within a workshop situation by asking people to gather and prepare by hand enough wood to fuel their home for a week and then sharing thoughts raised by their experience.

³⁵ Lorna Howarth, WOOD FUELS ASHDEN AWARD, Climate-friendly energy for UK homes (Resurgence Magazine, Issue 269). Further information can be obtained from the Forestry Commission website (<http://www.forestry.gov.uk>)

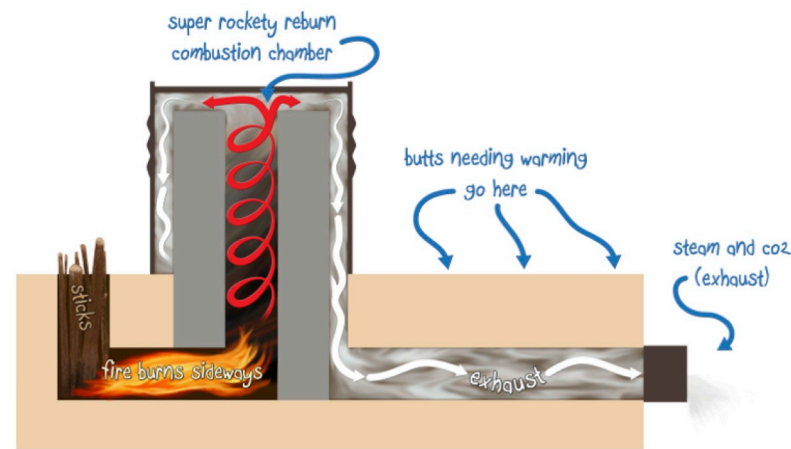
³⁶ <http://rogerhelmermep.wordpress.com/2012/04/20/doing-more-harm-than-good/>

³⁷ This time in European history was discussed on a recent BBC television programme but I have had no luck locating a reference to it elsewhere.

³⁸ Peak oil is a phrase often used to describe the situation when global oil supplies reach a peak. Following this peak, oil supplies decrease and never rise again. Leading geophysicists predict that peak is either currently occurring, or will have occurred by 2015. Meanwhile, demand for oil continues to increase at an extraordinary rate. (<http://peakoil.org.uk/>)

industry and population virtually exhausted wood supplies threatening societal collapse. While intimate contact with Nature may provide solace through connection to an archaic dimension of our own nature its resources are by no means infinite, nor is Nature a self-regulating system in our favour³⁹. Likewise, by no means does immersion in Nature guarantee compassion or empathy⁴⁰.

Through technology⁴¹ we have begun to address issues of pollution and waste with devices such as the rocket mass heater⁴². Through a series of combustion chambers and pipes, conducting and retaining heat, it burns sticks so efficiently and completely that all is left is ash and water vapour. But while technology provides solutions to some of our ecological difficulties its role in creating them should not be ignored. Ecopsychology and mainstream medicine agree that increasing physical and mental ill health may be caused through an overdependence on technology, including the foods and products it provides⁴³, promoting disconnection from our innate sensibilities and place within Nature. Our tendency towards convenience, comfort and security has been met by technology. Their consequences are now being exposed.



Δ technology – getting our hands dirty; rocket mass heater⁴⁴

³⁹ Popular scientist James Lovelock formulated such ideas in the Gaia Hypothesis, in the 1970's. The theory maintains that the global ecosystem as a whole, called Gaia, seeks a physical and chemical environment optimal for contemporary life.

⁴⁰ Such dichotomies within ecological thinking were discussed in an email conversation I had with Jan van Boeckel in response to his RANE Lecture, A Point of No Return, in June 2010.

⁴¹ Most simply 'Technology' may be understood as the application of research. However it is more readily perceived as the use of tools and machinery.

⁴² <http://www.ernieandERICA.info/rocketstoves>

⁴³ Modern life and technology causing loneliness and ill health (<http://www.onmedica.com/newsArticle.aspx?id=e3a8af61-d3be-4777-9dd7-ee5a8f9a1d29>)

⁴⁴ <http://www.richsoil.com/rocket-stove-mass-heater.jsp>

The progress of civilization has foundered amid escalating atrocities of its own making. As stated by Albert Borgmann, “*Countering technology through a practice is to take account of our susceptibility to technological distraction, and it is also to engage the peculiarly human strength of comprehension, i.e. the power to take in the world in its extent and significance and to respond through an enduring commitment.*”⁴⁵ The challenge for contemporary designers is to assimilate ethical and ecological principles into their work as well as aesthetic, economic and functional ones.

Such principles need to be integrated and applied in all our work to encourage more fulfilled lives and to survive. We must be willing to re-evaluate the consequences of our actions and the stories we are creating based not on aloof disassociation but in an intimate experience of each other within nature. A BUNDLE OF STICKS has brought me in touch with a primary notion of technology, of learning about the materials of the world through making, about decision making and problem solving according to function, resource and environment, of applying the knowledge accrued through interdisciplinary research. As an art practice it has provided acceptance and pleasure in the mundane tasks that have supported our evolution and revealed an appropriate aesthetic and ecological structure through which such meaning may be experienced.



Δ bundles of sticks everywhere (pward 2012)

⁴⁵ from Albert Borgmann, *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (Chicago; The University of Chicago Press, 1984) p210

4

five, six, pick up STICKS

process and participation : the development of indigenous intelligence



Δ gathering sticks – Ireland, North Devon, Cornwall (pward 2011-12)

“Perception of the inner substance of things may only be acquired through practice.” Joseph Beuys⁴⁶

A BUNDLE OF STICKS as a simple process and sculptural form provides a number of opportunities through which we may experience, reflect upon and understand our place within the world. It offers a structure for the organization of events and workshops and a means to explore various historical, social and ecological issues through its metaphorical and material implications. The process, inspired and informed by specific personal and environmental circumstances, began by making the decision to act⁴⁷; then walking, gathering, carrying and binding using materials to hand⁴⁸; responding to those materials practically⁴⁹ and imaginatively⁵⁰; and finally *positioning* and evaluating my actions⁵¹.

⁴⁶ From *What is Art? Conversations with Joseph Beuys*, Edited with Essays by Volker Harlan (Forest Row; Clairview, 2004)

⁴⁷ This may be described as my intention or creative response.

⁴⁸ Walking, gathering, carrying and binding and the more ritually or ceremonially orientated actions they suggest, have been explored by artists such as Hamish Fulton, Francis Alys, Dominique Mazeaud and Rebecca Solnit, both as a means to explore the world, to map or orientate oneself within it, and as statements of political and aesthetic intent. The choices made through these actions may be seen as aesthetic or political, determined by context and purpose. For example, choosing to use whatever is at hand rather than specially manufactured products or gather firewood rather than using electricity, oil or coal supplied by multinational corporations to cook and heat our homes has political and ecological connotations.

⁴⁹ Upon experiencing difficulties performing my activity, I made a decision to remedy it using what was at hand; namely tying the sticks together using marram grass. Such a decision displayed and celebrated our ecology, our innate ability for adaptation and problem solving and suggested a very primitive



Δ drawing, Westward Ho! North Devon (pward 2012)

'Drawing is a mode of description that has not yet broken away from observation' Tim Ingold⁵²

All elements of the process may be considered worthwhile artistic activities – as ways to explore and express our place within the world, as drawing, as means to develop our indigenous intelligence. However it is only when placed within a reflective and contextual framework that their true value may be realized. An artist's task is to apply whatever knowledge and skill is available in order to achieve their objective. Likewise our ability and willingness to critically engage with anything we encounter, or that is presented to us, both imaginatively and physically, is enhanced through both a pertinent education and constant re-examination of the social conditions that determine our attitudes and

form of technological thinking, of how we may apply the things we learn through experience. Through a cursory investigative process of trial and error - the grass was not ideal and broke if pulled too hard - I bound together the individual elements I was carrying, creating a new object. This composite form had specific connotations of its own, different although not disconnected from its individual parts revealing both the primitive nature of sculpture and the technological exploration that informed it. The decisions made were according to the nature of the materials used and its intended practical applications, form following function, whether for imaginative or purely utilitarian purposes.

⁵⁰ All materials and actions may be said to carry their own potential narrative threads. Joseph Beuys' extreme restorative wartime experiences with Tartar tribes-people in Northern Europe (Beuys in Caroline Tisdall: Joseph Beuys (Guggenheim, 1979), p.16-7) allowed him to gain an appreciation of the intrinsic practical and symbolic nature of substances, such as felt and fat, which he subsequently used in his work. Such ideas of our ecologic relation to and intrinsic quality or voice of animate materials may also be seen in the work of anthropologists Tim Ingold (*Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London; Routledge, 2011), Paul Carter (*Material Thinking: The Theory and Practice of Creative Research* (Melbourne; Melbourne University Press, 2004) and Gregory Bateson (*Steps to an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution and Epistemology* (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 2000).

⁵¹ Eventually I placed the object in a specific situation and assessed and evaluated it through critical reflection. Very broadly speaking this may be seen as the utilization of the process, its purpose. Whether the resultant or residual object is placed within a gallery, left in its environment or simply burnt or dismantled, its value may at this point be assessed in relation to predefined or arbitrary criteria established through the process itself. Through such assessment we are able to determine how or if the process may be better performed in future.)

⁵² Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description* (London; Routledge, 2011)

aptitudes. While many are deterred by the hands-on nature of 'engaged' or 'performative' art, it is often ignorance of how we may interact with the visual arts, and the contrived contextual aura within which they are housed, that creates such *affective* barriers. It may therefore be assumed that the artist's responsibility is to be aware of such dilemmas⁵³, and suggest and encourage the means through which meaningful engagement may be maintained.



Δ attention seeking device, Lough Grainey, Co Clare, Ireland, June 2011 (pward)

⁵³ See *SITUATION*, edited by Claire Doherty (LONDON; Whitechapel Gallery, 2009) and *PARTICIPATION*, edited by Claire Bishop (LONDON; Whitechapel Gallery, 2006)

A BUNDLE OF STICKS *in practice* ...

The following actions have been performed as part of my research for A BUNDLE OF STICKS. I will briefly discuss their connotations and derivations and the practical insights gained...

... as instrument of consciousness



△ The University of the Trees (images courtesy of CCANW 2011)

*Instrument of consciousness*⁵⁴ is a concept developed by Shelley Sacks as part of the University of the Trees project⁵⁵ to describe *processes and objects that engender imaginative and transformative action through their implicit application and nature*. Such actions are strongly informed by ideas of participatory, holistic seeing proposed by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Rudolph Steiner, as well as the social processes of Allan Kaplan⁵⁶. Aesthetically the concept is informed by Joseph Beuys, Bertolt Brecht and Jungian psychologist James Hillman, maintaining that art must ‘*scratch upon the imagination*’ (Beuys), ‘*make strange*’ (Brecht) and ‘*avoid literalness*’ (Hillman) to ‘*disrupt our taken for granted way of seeing things in order to mobilize us internally*’⁵⁷. Essentially, to provide real or

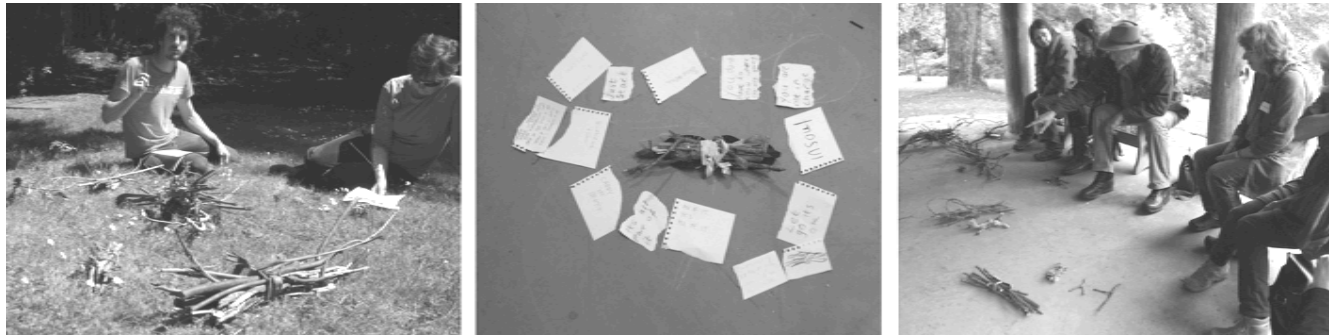
⁵⁴ “Once, when asked by a forest ranger what kind of art we would be making to put in the forest, I said that instead of making ‘objects of attention’ we were developing ‘instruments of consciousness’. This seemed to answer many of his questions. We then began to try this phrase out on others, including passersby. And it worked. I now use it as one way of describing some of the expanded practices that are key to the field of social sculpture and our transformative work. But the ‘consciousness’ referred to in this phrase is not only the rational, linear consciousness of our practical, literal and intellectual lives. It is also about another mode of consciousness that enters and inhabits the things perceived; a mode of consciousness that scientists like Henri Bortoft and Arthur Zajonc describe as ‘participatory consciousness’ as opposed to ‘on-looker consciousness’. Shelley Sacks, <http://www.universityofthetrees.org/about/instruments-of-consciousness.html>

⁵⁵ www.universityofthetrees.org

⁵⁶ Allan Kaplan is a personal associate of Shelley Sacks. His book, *Development Practitioners and Social Process - Artists of the Invisible* (London; Pluto Press, 2002) describes how art techniques may be utilized to facilitate social process within a range of organizations and situations.

⁵⁷ <http://www.universityofthetrees.org/about/instruments-of-consciousness.html>

*imaginal*⁵⁸ participatory experience that challenges our conditioned preconceptions through which holistic transformative experience may occur.



△ a bundle of sticks workshops (pward 2011-12)

The process starts by consciously creating space for new perception by bringing oneself into the present⁵⁹; performing an action of some sort; reflecting upon this action within a supportive environment; and finally affirming one's new/resulting position before moving on. Through the identification of such a basic process I have established a more structured and meaningful approach in my practice. Mindfully gathering and binding sticks within a specific environment amply fulfils the criteria for 'instruments of consciousness'⁶⁰. In contemporary society the opportunity and meaning of gathering sticks for fuel or building material has been lost amidst the present climate of technological convenience.⁶¹ While it is somehow 'strange' or at odds with our present circumstance it also connects us imaginatively, creatively and materially with processes elemental to our survival and evolution, triggering archaic associations through the collective subconscious⁶². The process similarly provokes

⁵⁸ "Beuys, Goethe, Rudolf Steiner and James Hillman emphasize the importance of perceptual or *imaginal* thought so that we can 'hear the soul of the world speaking', so that the invisible is made visible through the body of things, so that we can become imaginatively active." from <http://www.universityofthetrees.org/about/instruments-of-consciousness.html>

⁵⁹ This may be achieved through establishing one's present position (and means of reaching it) through recalling or bringing to mind, physically (by writing it down), mentally or verbally past memories or associations with the subject in hand. Shelley likened this process to clearing space or organizing or becoming familiar with our imaginative space (or mind) to allow recognition of any new perceptions that may arise. She likened the mind to a vast world within which anything is possible... (Conversations with Shelley Sacks 2011)

⁶⁰ I have been fortunate to have a number of conversations with Shelley regarding A BUNDLE OF STICKS and her work with the University of the Trees. These conversations and participation in a number of workshops have provided an understanding of the processes involved and their practical application.

⁶¹ Albert Borgmann has examined the implications of such ethical and philosophical relationships with technology in contemporary society in his book *Technology and the Character of Contemporary Life* (Chicago; The University of Chicago Press, 1984), expressing how despite the 'natural' desire for technology to support our disposition for comfort and security, such an impulse has created a society bereft of meaning and plagued by health problems. We must now find ways to restore a sense of equilibrium to our technological choices.

⁶² The collective unconscious collects and organizes personal experiences in a similar way with each member of a particular species. "...This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the *archetypes*, which can only become conscious secondarily and which give definite form to certain psychic contents." from C. G. Jung, *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (London 1996) p. 43

reevaluation of historical and contemporary issues of power and accessibility towards natural resources, particularly wood, woodland, fuel and associated technologies (to be discussed in the next chapter).

I have performed A BUNDLE OF STICKS as an instrument of consciousness a number of times with various groups, each event providing diverse and surprising results. On suggesting the process in one workshop I was confronted with a question of the 'sexist' implications of both the initial instruction and the nature of binding anything together at all!? Despite such a reaction it was performed and provoked rich insights through storytelling and various creative responses. I have also explored providing remote instructions for the process, not unlike the conceptual multiples of Sol LeWit, but the need to share and discuss individual findings was too great and *a bundle of people* consequently ensued⁶³.

... as indigenous intelligence

"We can receive only what we already have! We can become only what we already are! We can learn only what we already know! It is a matter of realizing potentialities. It is not a matter of "adding to" but of "developing," of "evolving." We contain within ourselves a world of capacities, of possibilities, which the outer world summons forth, speaks to, releases. Perhaps this is why we learn most about ourselves through devotion to others; why we become joyful and active as we respond to the formative forces in the materials in our crafts: their potentialities call forth our own, and in the dialogue of which I have spoken, we discover our own inner vision by bodying them forth." M C Richards⁶⁴

A BUNDLE OF STICKS may inspire intimate learning about any of its implied or intrinsic elemental properties, and a means to investigate a specific environment⁶⁵. Embodied learning experience, similarly employed by indigenous cultures, may develop profound insights into our intrinsic relationships, especially important in relation to our sense of *disassociation*⁶⁶ within the civilized

⁶³ See APPENDIX – 'A BUNDLE OF STICKS - Remote Questionnaires for The Home and The World Summit'

⁶⁴ From Dominique Mazeaud's website, www.earthheartist.com

⁶⁵ "The ability of each thing or entity to influence the space around it may be viewed as the expressive power of that being. All things, in this sense, are potentially expressive; all things have the power of speech. Most, of course, do not speak in words. But this is also true of ourselves: our own verbal eloquence is but one form of human expression among many others. For our body, in its silence, is already expressive. The body, itself, speaks." David Abram, *Becoming Animal - An Earthly Cosmology* (New York; Random House Books, 2010) p269

⁶⁶ Richard Louv and other ecopsychologists have used the term 'Nature Deficit Disorder' to express the mental and physical dis-ease we may experience through a lack of meaningful engagement with the natural world. Others more simply say that a great many ills of society are caused through a disconnection from Nature.

world. It is through intelligent tactile engagement with such primary aspects of our behaviour that we may truly understand our present ecological situation and respond accordingly⁶⁷.



Δ environmental art workshops, Beaford Arts, North Devon (pward 2011-12)

Another aspect of aboriginal experience discussed with Noel Butler, was the open ended or non-prescriptive nature of such learning and the subsequent identification and determination of each individual's aptitudes and skills. Children are not channelled into fulfilling an arbitrary or inappropriate role within society, as is often the case in western industrial society, but encouraged to discover their own skills and purpose through which to serve it. Such an outlook evokes a sense of self-respect and personal fulfilment towards one's culture, rather than the resentment and apathy so prevalent today.

In the 1970's Brazilian educationalist Paulo Freire explored how people living under oppressive regimes might learn skills through which they may empower themselves. The complex psychological dynamic that Freire discovered⁶⁸ has provided the foundation for many educational techniques employed by ecoartists such as Jan van Boeckel⁶⁹. Essentially such methods aim to provide experiences to (re)discover our true nature and inherent power in relation to nature and society, and hence inspire and enable *good work* in the face of the present global crisis. The Center for Ecozoic Studies⁷⁰, Cape Farewell⁷¹, Joseph Beuys⁷² and The Dark Mountain Project⁷³ have likewise proposed

⁶⁷ "If the aesthetic is seen in contrast to the 'anaesthetic' – or numbness, it can be understood more correctly as 'enlivened being'. Reclaiming the aesthetic in this way enables us to understand the link between the aesthetic and responsibility: response-ability not as a moral imperative, but as the ability to respond." Shelley Sacks, UN Summit on Culture and Development, Stockholm 1998

"...because of their close traditional relationship with the environment, Indigenous Peoples are uniquely positioned to adapt to climate change. Through their culture of intergenerational transmission of knowledge over thousands of years, Indigenous Peoples are unique repositories of learning and knowledge on successfully coping with local-level climate change and effectively responding to major environmental changes such as natural disasters. Historically and currently, Indigenous Peoples play a fundamental role in the conservation of biological diversity, protection of forests and other natural resources, and their traditional knowledge on climate change can also substantively enrich scientific knowledge and adaptation activities of others." Kirsty Galloway McLean, Advance Guard - Climate Change Impacts, Adaptation, Mitigation and Indigenous Peoples, (United Nations University – Institute of Advanced Studies Traditional Knowledge Initiative; 2010)

⁶⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (London; Penguin, 1970)

⁶⁹ See *Learning for Sustainability in Times of Accelerating Change*, edited by Arjen E.J. Wals and Peter Blaze Corcoran (The Netherlands; Wageningen Academic Publishers, 2012)

⁷⁰ The "Ecozoic Era" is a time of mutually enhancing relationships among humans and the larger community of life. www.ecozoicstudies.org/

the need for education to move beyond the corporate institution to allow for such open-ended ecologically determined work to be achieved.

“Yet the power we sense in a seed, in the growth of a child, the power we feel writing, weaving, working, creating, making choices, has nothing to do with annihilation. It has more to do with the root meaning of the word power, from the (late popular) Latin, podere (“to be able”). It is power that comes from within.” STARHAWK⁷⁴



Δ a bundle of sticks @ Courage Copse, North Devon (residency with Katy Lee, 2012)

... as ritual

As a process A BUNDLE OF STICKS lends itself readily to ritual and ceremony, its nature suggesting a more animistic spiritual intent, bringing to mind primitive fetishes. As a collective symbol individual sticks may be bound together to embody the intentions of a group within communal situations. In Navajo culture sticks have been gathered in relation to feelings or thoughts, and then bound and burnt to promote emotional release and healing⁷⁵. Ritual has been employed by ecoartists such as

⁷¹ Cape Farewell is an interdisciplinary project set up to research ‘a cultural response to climate change’. In 2011 I was selected to participate in a series of mini-expeditions in Cornwall. My experience inspired a structural format for the exploration of ecological process and development.

⁷² Joseph Beuys founded the Free International University in 1972 as an "organizational place of research, work, and communication" to ponder the future of society.

⁷³ Paul Kingsnorth and Dougald Hine initiated the Dark Mountain Project as a manifesto and literary community to question the escalation of civilization. <http://dark-mountain.net/about/manifesto/>

⁷⁴ From Starhawk, *Dreaming the Dark* (London; Unwin Hyman Ltd, 1990) p3

⁷⁵ Information shared through a conversation during A BUNDLE OF STICKS workshop at Dartington Hall, June 2012.

Dominique Mazeaud and Shelley Sacks, using stones and soil, to facilitate focus for reconciliatory actions within areas of conflict⁷⁶.

One experience of A BUNDLE OF STICKS as ritual was a rather whimsical but ultimately sincere birthday wish. Fellow students were invited to collect a stick as a gift. The sticks were gathered together and bound to a rendition of 'Happy Birthday' and then offered as a gift. Despite its simplicity the ceremony demonstrated the potential of such an act, raising practical issues regarding the original instruction given and the decisions and sentiments engaged when choosing the stick.



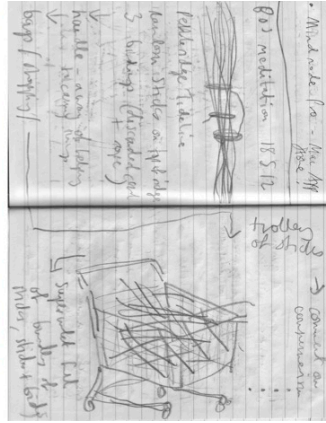
△ sticks and stones ritual, Falmouth⁷⁷; memorial bundle, North Devon (pward 2011)

... as personal meditation

Since the *revelation* of my first BUNDLE OF STICKS, I have repeated the process as a personal meditation. This style of active reflection, often adopted by Buddhist and yogic practitioners, has evoked insights including the nature of materials, its potential as a mapping and story telling device, connections between indigenous gathering and contemporary consumerism, and connections between fuel and personal empowerment.

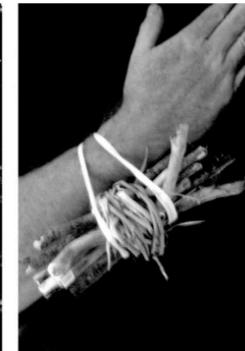
⁷⁶ During conversation Shelley Sacks described a process called 'Earth Forum' that she has conducted in various situations whereby participants gather handfuls of soil that are then placed on a communal circular cloth. Participants are then asked to describe their individual relationship to a particular situation. The sharing of such information within a ritualized setting enables recognition of the value of each point of view, providing an opportunity for social reconciliation.

⁷⁷ Sticks and stones – a process: <http://intim8ecology.wordpress.com/2011/05/10/sticks-and-stones-a-process/>



Δ trolley meditation – i consume (pward 2012)

How often have we heard the phrase ‘to listen to nature’, or been puzzled by an intuitive resonance of substance or place? In one vain attempt to appreciate the essential nature of the project further I decided to *wear* bundles so they may better intimate their meaning. The resulting ‘regalia’ brought to mind the costumes of Mummers⁷⁸ and other traditional ceremonial attire, linking the project again to indigenous cultures.



Δ intuiting a bundle of sticks, North Devon (pward 2011-12)

“The gross and net result of it is that people who spent most of their natural lives riding iron bicycles over the rocky roadsteads of this parish get their personalities mixed up with the personalities of their bicycle as a result of the interchanging of the atoms of each of them and you would be surprised at the number of people in these parts who are nearly half people and half bicycles.” Flann O’Brien⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Feenish Productions, *Mummers, Masks and Mischief* (Ireland; Feenish Productions, 2005)

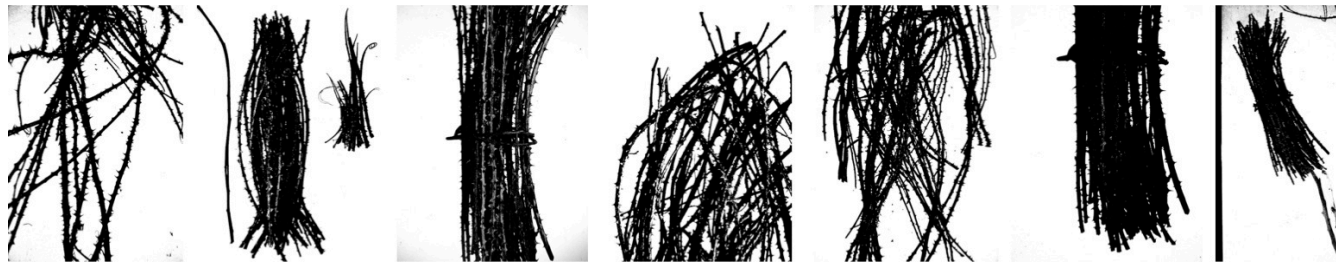
⁷⁹ From Flann O’Brien, *The Third Policeman* (London; Flamingo, 1993)

... as activism

"The opinion that art should have nothing to do with politics is itself a political attitude..." George Orwell⁸⁰

Through further conversation with Noel Butler I became aware of laws in Australia, the UK and around the world, restricting the freedom of people to collect firewood, particularly from National Parks, Sites of Special Scientific Interest and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty. While it is necessary to protect endangered species that depend on dead wood for their survival, National Parks are often on traditional tribal lands and such laws perceived as a continuation of the oppressive measures imposed by colonisers to disempower tribal people through disconnection from their land, their cultural heritage and their means of indigenous survival.

While conservation is essential to protect the environment, it is often represented by and implemented in the interests of small sections of society, and founded in a sense of separation and guilt engendered by disembodied secular thought denying the intrinsic and potential place of humanity within ecology. Writers, artists and philosophers such as Derrick Jensen, Timothy Morton⁸¹, Cathy Fitzgerald⁸² and Alex Murdin⁸³ are currently raising such questions within their work in relation to indigenous cultural values and emerging ecological understanding.



Δ briar bundles – Northam Burrows, North Devon (pward 2011)

"Some Speak of a return to Nature. I wonder where they could have been?" Frederick Sommer

⁸⁰ From "Why I Write" an essay by George Orwell (1946)

⁸¹ Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (USA: Harvard University Press, 31 Mar 2007)

⁸² <http://ecoartfilm.com/>

⁸³ <http://www.ruralrecreation.org.uk/>

Noel and I discussed a possible mass trespass/stick collection in the State of Victoria to highlight and question such laws. Creative activism is enjoyed by many groups, including the London-based art collective Platform, who devise novel, humorous and spectacular ways to confront and raise awareness about political and environmental issues. Such gentle but provocative actions are further explored in the work of quantum physicist F David Peat, who recognises the potential of intimately informed, well placed interventions to initiate social and ecological change⁸⁴.

“When I thought about steering the course of the ‘Spaceship Earth’ and all of humanity, I saw most people trying to turn the boat by pushing the bow around. I saw that by being all the way at the tail of the ship, by just kicking my foot to one side or the other, I could create the ‘low pressure’ which would turn the whole ship. If ever someone wanted to write my epitaph, I would want it to say ‘Call me Trimtab’.” Buckminster Fuller⁸⁵

... as spectacle

“It is not a question of knowing whether this interests you but rather of whether you yourself could become interesting under new conditions of cultural creation.” Guy Debord, Towards a Situationist International 1957.



Δ Michael Watts' timber lorry for *the value of trees*, North Devon (pward 2011)

In 2011 I developed an event in association with North Devon's Biosphere Reserve to engage the public with issues around our relationship with trees - ***the value of trees***⁸⁶. Fellow MA students and staff (*were gathered together* and) generously provided (a *bundle of*) workshop activities and installations in Barnstaple Town Square around a 35-ton timber lorry – a most spectacular BUNDLE OF

⁸⁴ F David Peat, *Gentle Actions - Bringing Creative Change to a Turbulent World* (Italy; Pari Publishing, 2008)

⁸⁵ from *What's a Trimtab?* by Buckminster Fuller, explored further in <http://thoughtmedicine.com/2010/07/the-power-of-trim-tabs-how-small-changes-create-big-results/>

⁸⁶ <http://peterwardearth.carbonmade.com/projects/3915674#1>

STICKS indeed! The event's success was achieved through its attempt to *bring the forest* to people who might not ordinarily have immediate access. Activities involved forest fruits, biochar⁸⁷, woodland dyes, storytelling, mask making, bird song, a small cinema showing films about trees and plenty of free cake. The use of *spectacle*, and creation of 'situations' or 'encounters'⁸⁸, to engage audiences in public places to raise awareness about issues or to simply entertain is another response to the perceived limitations and political implications of traditional art spaces. It has been explored by Guy Debord, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari and well documented through the work of Claire Doherty in her book *Situation*.



△ *the value of trees*, Barnstaple Town Square, North Devon (images courtesy of Bryony Stokes, Saffron Orrell, Francesca Owen and James Towillis, 2011)

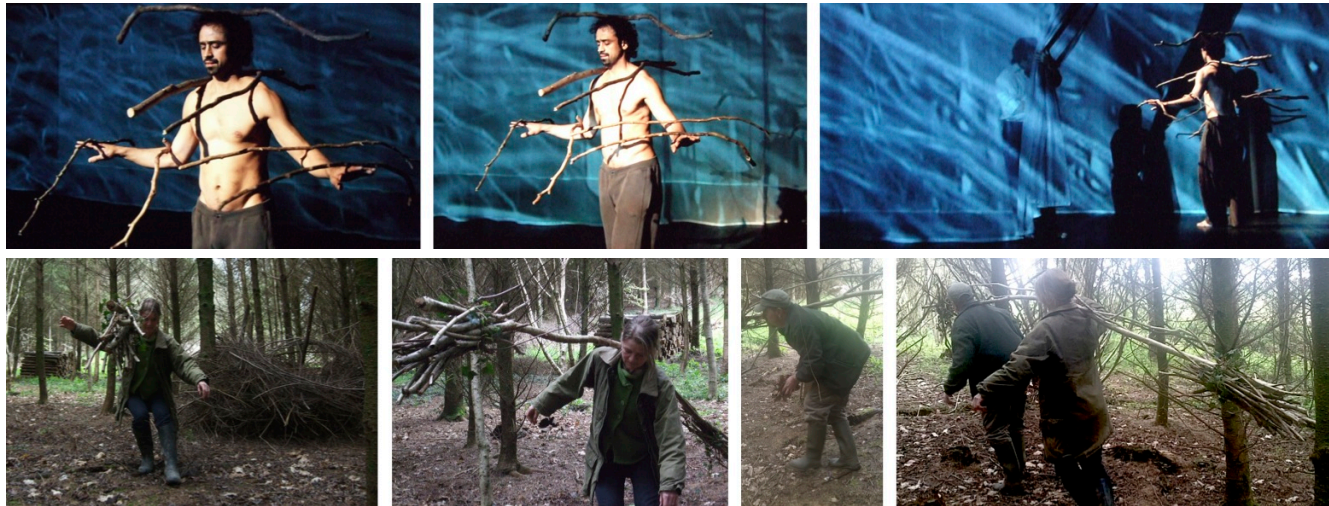
⁸⁷ 'biochar' is charcoal buried in the soil as a simple method of carbon capture – a majority of earth's carbon is held within the soil but degradation through intensive farming techniques is seriously reducing this.

⁸⁸ Dr Simon O'Sullivan, *Art Encounters Deleuze and Guattari: Thought Beyond Representation (Renewing Philosophy)* (London; Palgrave Macmillan, 2005)

... as performance

“The ability of each thing or entity to influence the space around it may be viewed as the expressive power of that being. All things, in this sense, are potentially expressive; all things have the power of speech. Most, of course, do not speak in words. But this is also true of ourselves: our own verbal eloquence is but one form of human expression among many others. For our body, in its silence, is already expressive. The body, itself, speaks.” David Abram⁸⁹

As an embodied act within the environment A BUNDLE OF STICKS provides performative possibilities. I am presently collaborating with site artist Katy Lee and Royal Opera House choreographer Freddie Opoku-Addaie to develop a community based dance piece around this project. It is allowing me to further appreciate the implications of my actions in relation to materials and spatial environments focusing attention on physicality and a heightened empathic awareness. To simply walk balancing a stick may engender a profound response as seen by a short sequence in the film PINA by Wim Wenders⁹⁰. Coming from a visual arts background I am intrigued by the project’s development.



△ screen shots from PINA (above); *moving* with a bundle of sticks (with Katy Lee, Devon Dance Compass; pward 2012)

⁸⁹ David Abram, *Becoming Animal - An Earthly Cosmology* (New York; Random House Books, 2010) p269

⁹⁰ Wim Wenders, *PINA a film for Pina Bausch* (ARTIFICIAL EYE; 2011)

... as 'object of attention'

'Object of attention' is used by Shelley Sacks to describe the material products of artistic activity and a more disembodied engagement with them. Contemporary art maintains a theoretical division between *art as process* and *art as object*. Whether this division is politics or fashion, or is actually a critical dialogue of the appropriately and socially inspired reciprocal intentions of the artists/communities themselves, it provides an intriguing counterpoint regarding the way we interact with art and has implications for art that seeks to provoke ecological transformation⁹¹.



Δ a bundle of sticks in art around the world (Ron Mueck; 'Kim Jong-Un looking at things'; wargaming figures; Bollywood bundle)

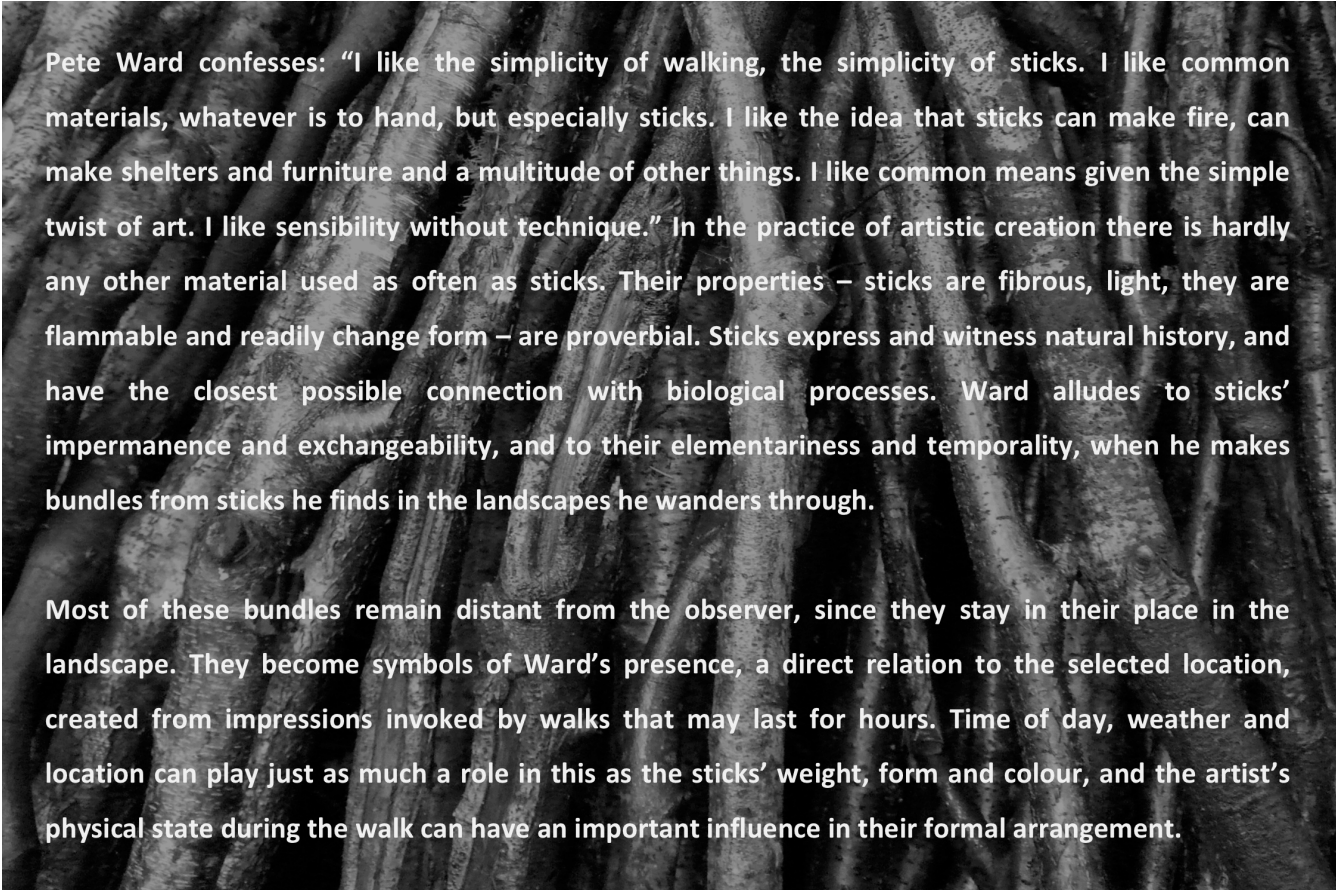
I personally admire the sensitivity and intelligence with which Dutch ecological artist herman de vries has utilized 'art objects', in a variety of forms, to express his work. From a pure scientific research background, de vries began to explore the world through minimalism, conceptual art and Zen Buddhism as a means to embody his spiritual and ethical concerns. For him to promote the wonder of Nature as 'itself' is enough.⁹² Similarly the work of Cornelia Parker, Richard Long and Mark Dion engenders ample opportunity for reflective and contextual engagement.

⁹¹ An excellent discussion of this dichotomy in contemporary art practice may be found in this article by Morgan Quaintance, Private Moments; Art Monthly, Issue 354, March 2012, p7 (www.artmonthly.co.uk)

⁹² However when embedded within an artistic context, such purity is hard to achieve as the following passage shows...

"... Any reflection must thus be that of the spectator confronted by the work, contemplating this portion of 'actuality'. It is, without question, a constrained actuality: these objects have been selected, collected, mounted, framed, placed in juxtaposition with other things in galleries and rooms. They are not scientific samples, and their purpose within the culture into which they have been transported is not that of science, whether 'pure' or 'applied' [...]"

... In providing 'not ideas about the thing but the thing itself' [...], de vries is meeting his self-imposed restriction to present the work, without any personal additions.' But he is an artist, and even when he uses the grid to place items in an array, either within a single work [...] or in serial works [...], it is not for scientific purposes. It is rather to eliminate aesthetic subjectivity: 'the grid is not determined by my aesthetic thoughts and feelings, it is determined by the shape of the biggest leaf. in this way, every (object in the array) occupies the same-sized space so that you can compare the leaves ranged together.' By eliminating, as an artist, the exercise of subjective feelings he leaves the spectator free to exercise his own aesthetic. de vries, however, has no doubt of the power of the objects themselves, thus presented, to move the spirit of anyone who encounters them, including the artist himself: 'this (array of objects) does not exclude their beauty. i love their beauty. i feel the poetry of the things i work with, and i cannot explain it, but do not add myself to this.'" Mel Gooding⁹²



Pete Ward confesses: “I like the simplicity of walking, the simplicity of sticks. I like common materials, whatever is to hand, but especially sticks. I like the idea that sticks can make fire, can make shelters and furniture and a multitude of other things. I like common means given the simple twist of art. I like sensibility without technique.” In the practice of artistic creation there is hardly any other material used as often as sticks. Their properties – sticks are fibrous, light, they are flammable and readily change form – are proverbial. Sticks express and witness natural history, and have the closest possible connection with biological processes. Ward alludes to sticks’ impermanence and exchangeability, and to their elementariness and temporality, when he makes bundles from sticks he finds in the landscapes he wanders through.

Most of these bundles remain distant from the observer, since they stay in their place in the landscape. They become symbols of Ward’s presence, a direct relation to the selected location, created from impressions invoked by walks that may last for hours. Time of day, weather and location can play just as much a role in this as the sticks’ weight, form and colour, and the artist’s physical state during the walk can have an important influence in their formal arrangement.

△ pete ward confesses...⁹³

I have ‘exhibited’ A BUNDLE OF STICKS in various situations - within traditional art contexts, as ephemeral objects in the environment and as personal gifts. Left unattended A BUNDLE OF STICKS readily becomes home for insects and invertebrates, echoing the work of British artists Bruce Gilchrist

⁹³ Adulterated passage from Michael Lailach, *Land Art*, edited by Uta Grosenick (Cologne; Taschen GmbH, 2007) (p72), to describe A BUNDLE OF STICKS in relation to the working practices of Land Artist Richard Long. The original passage read, “Richard Long confesses: ‘I like the simplicity of walking, the simplicity of stones. I like common materials, whatever is to hand, but especially stones. I like the idea that stones are what the world is made of. I like common means given the simple twist of art. I like sensibility without technique.’ In the practice of artistic creation there is hardly any other material used as often as stone. Its properties – a stone is solid, heavy, and retains its form – are proverbial. Stone expresses and witnesses natural history, and has the closest possible connection to geological processes. Long alludes precisely to stone’s permanence and unchangeability, to its elementariness and temporality, when he forms lines, crosses or circles from stones that he finds in the landscapes he wanders through. Most of these sculptures’ stones remain distanced from the observer, since they stay in their place in the landscape. They become symbols of Long’s presence, a direct reaction to the selected location, created from the impressions invoked by walks that often last for days. Time of day, weather and location can play just as much a role in this as the stones’ weight, form and colour, and the artist’s physical state during the hike can have an important influence in their formal arrangement.”

and Jo Joelson and Canadian habitat sculptor Lynne Hull. As a metaphor A BUNDLE OF STICKS holds rich imaginative connotations. It is a symbol of indigenous re-empowerment, a bound *narrative* of twigs, and an indexical trace of time and place. Through its connection to the natural environment and resources it may gesture towards or be observed regularly beyond the world of art, surreptitiously reinforcing its symbolic ecological power.



△ objects of attention: bundles of sticks in Devon, Cornwall, and Somerset (pward 2011-12)

Displayed with 'sensibility without technique'⁹⁴ it may provoke questions about the intrinsic value of art within contemporary society⁹⁵. A BUNDLE OF STICKS has value as fuel, irrespective of aesthetic consideration and could reasonably be used as a universal gift or basic unit of exchange. Sam Bower has explored ideas of *Giftism*⁹⁶ and systems of barter and exchange from an ecological perspective, raising further questions about the place of art in the West in respect of cultures whose art is embedded within society.

⁹⁴ Richard Long, from Michael Lailach, *Land Art*, edited by Uta Grosenick (Cologne; Taschen GmbH, 2007) (p72)

⁹⁵ See 'What Place has Painting within this Ecological Conversation?' <http://intim8ecology.wordpress.com/2011/06/25/what-place-has-painting/>

⁹⁶ <http://artheals.libsyn.com/green-museum-giftivism-and-generosity-interview-with-sam-bower-and-anne-veh>

*"... too much as they are
To be anything else in the sunlight of the room,*

*Too much as they are to be changed by metaphor,
Too actual, things that in being real
Make any imaginings of them lesser things.*

*And yet this effect is a consequence of the way
We feel and, therefore, is not real, except
In our sense of it ...*

*Our sense of these things changes and they change,
Not as in metaphor, but in our sense
Of them. So sense exceeds all metaphor ...*

*It is like a flow of meanings with no speech
And of as many meanings as of men."*

Wallace Stevens⁹⁷



Δ objects of attention 2: carn de batai – a bundle of sticks in irish (pward 2011)

⁹⁷ From MEL GOODING; herman de vries – chance and change (London: Thames and Hudson, 2009) p72

... as narrative form

To bind sticks is akin to the construction of narrative and alphabetic form, of books and messages⁹⁸. *the ash tree*⁹⁹ was published for six months as a weekly, illustrated online newsletter of *Thoughts, Actions and Events Pertaining to an Eco-sensitive World-view* with reference to the MA Art & Environment Programme. It adopted a gradually evolving format and design. Originally conceived as an opportunity for the members of the course to raise topics for debate and share thoughts and feelings *the ash tree* became a space to explore and share the graphic and literary aspect of my practice and has since evolved into an online blog¹⁰⁰. In hindsight it has implications within A BUNDLE OF STICKS both through name and its exploration of an evolving ‘phenomenological’ structure.



Δ narrative form: a bundle of pens; kingfisher tale; *the ash tree* newsletter covers (pward 2011)

⁹⁸ Early Celtic and Norse cultures used sticks to form letters and runes for divination and communication – for example Ogham script and the Elder Futhark. On a recent trip to Ireland A BUNDLE OF STICKS quickly became a subversive messenger implied by the recent struggle against British rule.

⁹⁹ <http://intim8ecology.wordpress.com/ashtree/>

¹⁰⁰ <http://intim8ecology.wordpress.com/>

moments of creative departure *a statement of practical intent*

With its emphasis on environmental and political issues this work may resemble propaganda and to a certain extent it is – propaganda being ‘information used to promote a political cause or point of view’¹⁰¹. A general perception of propaganda is of its power to undermine individuality and personal power, through misinformation and fear, preying on our innate insecurities for political and material gain. However, as already discussed, the ethos behind ecological art requires that we develop an attitude of *respons-ability*¹⁰² towards the issues we are facing engendered through an embodied sense of our personal aptitude and place within the world. Through this dissertation I have hopefully shown how interdisciplinary art practice, including my own project A BUNDLE OF STICKS, may provide a means to establishing and affirming such aspirations.

“Of course, actual experience, not the limited abstractions of science, matters most in the conduct of our lives. It is our entire experience, including our cultural heritage, that links us to the world in which we live, not just the artificially limited aspects of experience that constitute an experiment or a scientific observation. If we are not to live double lives, split between an ‘objective’, impersonal, mechanistic reality and the ‘subjective’ world of personal experience, we need to find a way of bridging these two realms.” Rupert Sheldrake¹⁰³



Δ a bundles of sticks @ courage copse (pward 2012)

¹⁰¹ Oxford English dictionary definition

¹⁰² Shelley Sacks, <http://www.universityofthetrees.org/about/instruments-of-consciousness.html>

¹⁰³ From ‘The Rebirth of Nature – The Greening of Science and God’ by Rupert Sheldrake (London, UK; RANDOM CENTURY GROUP LTD; 1990)

It is about how we may listen to nature with all our senses, how we may *draw* upon that information within a historical, ecological and political context and then sensitively determine our response¹⁰⁴. There is a tendency to impose our 'superior knowledge' on every aspect of society and nature without fully appreciating the complexity or intrinsic values within specific situations. Ecologically engaged art practice provides models for rigorous interdisciplinary consultation to determine appropriate resolutions before we intervene. According to process thinking there are no ultimate answers, no final solutions – the process *is* the work. The tentative and gentle actions suggested are communal investigations and healing interventions. Our way of learning about the world, our indigenous intelligence, is also our way of being in the world.

“A fundamental aspect of this developing practice was exploring the possibility of making things happen rather than making things.” Mary-Lou Barratt¹⁰⁵



Δ a bundles of sticks @ courage copse 2 (pward 2012)

But art also amplifies *good work* through the aesthetic qualities it employs. It grabs our attention, makes us listen, changes our ways of seeing, and enriches our lives. It is not necessarily about ego or even originality, but about utility and service to all. As a *moment of creative departure* A BUNDLE OF STICKS has enriched my participation within the environment and shown how interdisciplinary art practice may catalyze ecological thought and action. In the words of Paul Klee *art has the potential to reveal the world rather than merely represent it*. Likewise the processes of ecological art allow us to reveal our own nature, to allow our inherent beauty and wisdom to emerge through the miraculous

¹⁰⁴ Within ecological art practice this is demonstrated by 'Trigger Point Theory', an interdisciplinary art concept developed by American ecoartist Aviva Rahmani to assimilate and interpret data in relation to specific ecosystems. Interventions are then made at specifically determined points to catalyze ecological 'healing', in a similar process to acupuncture and other holistic therapies (www.ghostnets.com)

¹⁰⁵ Mary-Lou Barratt received a doctorate from the Social Sculpture Research Unit in 2010 (www.social-sculpture.org)

and sublime world in which we are entwined. By encouraging a deliberate and mindful immersion in Nature we may begin to (re)learn our place and the behaviour that will enable our survival.

“After all, anybody is as their land and air is. Anybody is as the sky is low or high, the air heavy or clear and anybody is as there is wind or no wind there. It is that which makes them and the arts they make and the work they do and the way they eat and the way they drink and the way they learn and everything” Gertrude Stein¹⁰⁶

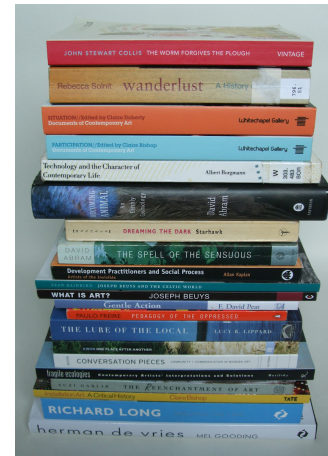
Peter Ward 2012



¹⁰⁶ from BECOMING ANIMAL an earthly cosmology – David Abram (New York; RANDOM HOUSE BOOKS; 2010) p 131



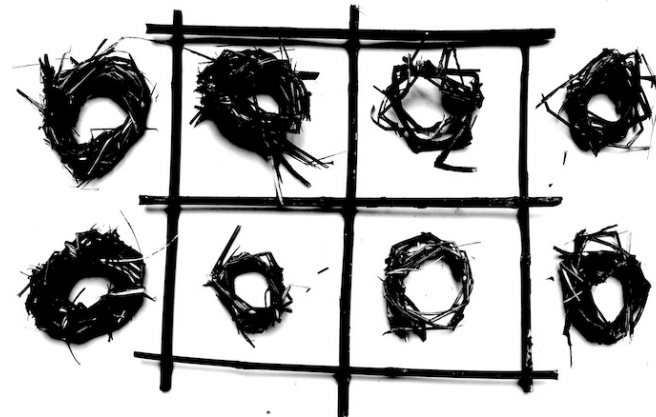
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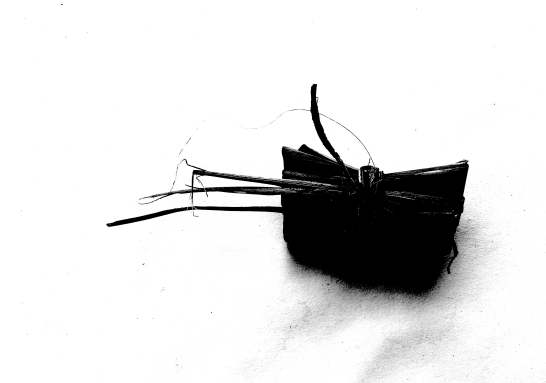
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links

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conversations, workshops and conferences

- ART AS A SOURCE OF LEARNING FOR SUSTAINABILITY Workshop by Natalia Ernstmann – Falmouth 2011
- The University of the Trees Workshops with Shelley Sacks – CCANW, Devon 2011
- WIDE OPEN SPACE Conference (Public Art) - Sturminster Newton, Dorset 2011
- DEEP ECOLOGY – a lecture by Arne Naess at Resurgence Conference - Bristol 1988
- Conversations with Noel Butler, Australian Aboriginal Elder, and Trish Roberts - North Devon 2009-11
- Painting with the Earth – Environmental Art Workshops by Peter Ward – North Devon 2008-12
- A BUNDLE OF STICKS @ COURAGE COPSE – residency and workshops with Katy Lee for ART TREK 2012 – North Devon
- THE HOME AND THE WORLD Summit – Dartington Hall, Devon, June 2012
- Conversations as part of North Devon Biosphere Reserve ARTS STRATEGY COMMITTEE, 2011-12

APPENDIX



Seeing the World through A BUNDLE OF STICKS by peter ward

remote workshop/reflective space @ THE HOME & THE WORLD summit 2012

A BUNDLE OF STICKS is the basis for my MA ART & ENVIRONMENT project. Through participation in a *University of the Trees* workshop at CCANW in 2011, and subsequent conversations with Shelley Sacks, its primary developer, I began to appreciate both the potential of A BUNDLE OF STICKS as an *Instrument of Consciousness* and the value of a reflective structure within which to evaluate our actions, artistic or otherwise. My own engagement with A BUNDLE OF STICKS has provided a rich emergent aesthetic, practical and metaphorical framework to study elements of our intrinsic ecological relationship. I am currently researching how A BUNDLE OF STICKS may be employed to catalyze such creative and imaginative response in others and the nature and purpose of such communications.

Below are some suggestions to facilitate an active meditation upon the process of A BUNDLE OF STICKS. I would genuinely appreciate your participation and any feedback you may be able to give.¹¹ The meditation is structured around a set of actions and questions – please respond to the questions and ‘instructions’ however you see fit, and leave any written responses in the tray below. It is hoped that A BUNDLE OF STICKS will provide a gentle but pertinent reflective space within the more intellectually and emotionally demanding aspects of the summit.

the action



Before proceeding ...

What is your present understanding of A BUNDLE OF STICKS, both as an object and a concept?
 What has been your personal relationship to BUNDLES OF STICKS throughout your life?

Could you now please quietly gather (dead) sticks and bind them using materials in the local environment. Please take time to think about what you are doing (for example, the type of sticks you are choosing and why, and where you are).

Now find a suitable spot and place your bundle in front of you. Spend some time quietly studying it and reflecting upon the action you have just performed, recalling any thoughts that may have occurred during its process. (It may help at this point to tie the bundle to yourself to engage more fully it ☺)

To help this process you may spend some time considering these questions ...

2. What is the nature of your **BUNDLE OF STICKS**, what is it made of and how was it made?

3. What is the meaning of your **BUNDLE OF STICKS**, what does it make you think?

4. What is the value of your **BUNDLE OF STICKS** both to yourself and to others?

To enable development of A BUNDLE OF STICKS please leave any further comments you have here ...

www.informbeology.wordpress.com

To complete the meditation please place (or dispose of) your bundle in an appropriate fashion.

If you would like to receive further information about **A BUNDLE OF STICKS** and its development please contact pete-ward@live.co.uk


Many thanks ...

(PW2012)

¹ "Joseph Beuys emphasized that art, including expanded art practice, needed to 'scratch on the imagination'. He described social sculpture as a vehicle, or instrument for perceptual thought, but emphasized that this was not to be confused with the illustrating of ideas. This is similar to the importance that James Hillman places on 'imaginal thought' and the image as 'metaphoric insight'." from www.universityofthetrees.org

² Responses and documentation of the event may be presented as part of my ongoing research.



A photograph of a forest scene. In the foreground on the left, a large, dark tree trunk is heavily covered in a dense network of thin, light-colored roots. To the right, a structure made of many vertical sticks or branches is visible, partially covered in green ferns. The background shows a dense forest of trees with thin trunks. The ground is covered with brown leaves and green ferns. The lighting is bright, suggesting a sunny day.

www.intim8ecology.wordpress.com