

Alan Dunn Alistair Kaye

***Parallel Universities***

It is fascinating to be a fly on the wall watching the unfolding stories of individuals fighting time, traffic and washing up so that all could eventually be in one place at the same time. As stories roll out side-by-side we see real life landmarks along the way, from flipping pancakes to brushing teeth, from making porridge to de-icing a motor vehicle. Seen side-by-side, six separate journeys converge towards one act of worship.

Can we be in more than one place at once? How can we cope with the guilt of choosing Situation A over Situation B? Where are the parallel universes? Where are the parallel universities? Where will it stop when we can sit with Macbook, headphones, iPhone, paperwork and the TV in the background? What makes Mike Figgis' 2000 film Timecode so difficult to watch?

Bruce Davies and my fellow artist lecturer Marion Harrison first talk about a collaborative project in 2012. My own experience as a student in the Environmental Art Department at Glasgow School of Art is of being placed in social situations and invited to develop

models for non-gallery practice. You feel small and insignificant but also hugely significant amidst people who seem unable to influence their surrounds, no matter how fleeting. In retrospect, it makes you grow up quickly and teaches you not to shut off the outside world when it comes time to create. We are taught to be alert even before stepping through the doors of the art school. The spaces between become crucial, between home and work or between Friday and Monday. It is perhaps less about Situation A or Situation B and more about the spaces between A and B.

We want to introduce this to the Fine Art course at Leeds Beckett University and to create a project for six of our students to work with residents from south Leeds, primarily centred around St. Luke's church. The project runs parallel to their own studies, rather as a stand-alone module. After further developmental work, informal meetings are arranged during 2014 and the six students - Annabel Crosby, Cressida Barrett, Leah O'Connell, Rhianna Mayhew, Rebecca Dyson and Kirsty Doyle – begin meeting with some of the congregation. We need a model for

the project that allows the students to learn and allows some L11 residents to collaborate and visit the university. Having established a degree of trust, Remembrance Sunday really brings the group together and the students report back on some of the little rituals and routines that people go through just prior to and upon arrival. This becomes the core idea of our '30: six short films about ritual' project. We think about capturing a small slice of time at different locations across the area. We want to celebrate this notion of preparation, routine and ritual and the journey from A to B. On the cold morning of Sunday 18th January 2015, the six students film between 9.30am and 10.00am at six different locations, with ten different community members, some of whom do their own filming.

It is wonderful to track the journeys of friends and members of our congregation as each one faces the challenge of a cold winter morning and make their separate and sometimes chaotic journeys to church.

We then invite all participants into Leeds Beckett for a day of editing, overseen

by Jimi Lund of Cut and Splice who offers technical support. On the day we set up in a central table in our Mac Lab on the third floor and begin sharing and reviewing the footage. Julian, Leah and Clare sit and discuss faith and the role of the church. We order in a fantastic lunch but the delivery company goes to our A Building rather than B Building and on such little moments does a project fuse. By the end of the day, five of the six short edits include footage of the journeys to church, the same routes, the routine of routes and the comfort of familiarity. Days later I also enjoy spending time in the editing suite watching each student weave their magic, bringing a different creative slant to each story. It is a privilege to be part of this project and we are so grateful to the team for investing their times and talents in documenting so brilliantly thirty minutes in the life of our unique, crazy and wonderful inner city community.

It is important to find time to watch these films and they are available here - <http://alandunn67.co.uk/basementartspjproject.html>. Each film is a very genuine and open document, a half-hour slice of time in South Leeds one

Sunday, edited down to three or four minutes. Teeth are brushed, car windscreens scraped, children dressed and fed, stories shared and days begin. Full of humour, humanity and perceptive detail, it is wonderful to see how each student picks up a different part of the narrative and brings six separate journeys to life.

We see close-ups of hands, backwards dogs and hear repeated phrases and Gospel music. Rhianna experiments with Figgis-esque split screens and Annabel focuses on close-up details. On Saturday 6th June 2015 we premiere the films in a tent as part of the Beeston Festival, amidst wrestling, high winds, power cuts and live bands. In this manner do we add six more short films to the digital realm and a whole array, bunch or school of experiences and memories to those involved.

What then is the downside of such projects these days? Hyper-acceleration. The digital zoom of instant fixes and images uploaded onto Facebook taking only 23 milliseconds to reach their huge servers in Sweden. Impatience. Not enough time to truly reflect on what we do. On

to the next project, the next assessment, the next .... Sunday. How to combat this?

These students may have finished their BA studies but the project, through websites, this text and the ongoing work of BasementArtsProject, lives on. In the late 1960s, a series of Fluxus artists including George Brecht and Robin Page teach part-time in Leeds. They take their students out into the streets and parks and plan and improvise performances and happenings. We know this through photographs, texts and stories passed on. As a city, Leeds must treasure such projects, both from then and now and all stops inbetween. It must document, archive, celebrate and share them. Together they form a parallel world to the digital zoom and hyper acceleration. Together they form a longer and slower narrative. It is what helps form identity and perhaps even allows us to be in more than one place at once.

Alan Dunn is an artist and Senior Lecturer at Leeds Beckett University on the BA Fine Art and MA Art & Design courses. Alistair Kaye is Vicar at St. Luke's Church in Beeston, Leeds.

[http://alandunn67.co.uk/  
basementartsproject.html](http://alandunn67.co.uk/basementartsproject.html)



30: six films about ritual - Rhianna Mayhew









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# Community film will see locals behind the camera

## CHARLOTTE SCOTLAND

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A NEW arts project will see people in a Leeds community try their hand at producing a documentary film alongside university students.

The film will be set in and around Beeston with plans to showcase the finished piece at an open air location.

The non-profit arts organisation BasementArtsProject has teamed up with Leeds Beckett University to create a project led by local residents in collaboration with the University's students.

Alan Dunn, Leeds Beckett University Fine Arts professor,

said: "The best way to learn and develop your skills is to get into the field and this project gives our students a chance to achieve just that.

"It gets them out of the classroom and provides them with a richer and broader experience whilst studying with us."

The documentary will be filmed in and around Beeston and workshops will later take place at the University to involve community members in the editing process.

Bruce Davies, curator and chair of BasementArtsProject, said: "I am keen that people being educated in art subjects see Leeds as a place they may want to base themselves in the future. "I also see the value in present-



**COMMUNITY CONNECTION:** Bruce Davies with students Rebecca Dyson, Kirsty Doyle, Cressida Barrett, Leah O'Connell, Annabel Crosby, Rhianna Mayhew at Leeds Beckett University. (PICTURE: STEVE BEEDON)

ing to members of the community the idea that an education in art is a viable route in life too and that is where this project comes from, a merging of the two."

For the project, BasementArtsProject secured funding from government funded initiative Community First.

The programme provides small grants that help commu-

nities come together and build towards more resilient futures.

Mr Davies added: "It's given us a different direction to go than we've previously been and a community inspired project is something we've wanted to do for a while now. Tackling projects from a different angle and working with a new circle of people is always going to be a slow burn to

start off with but it's something that we're excited about and I really think it's going to get bigger over time."

The project will end this Easter and the team plan to air the film at several Leeds venues, including an outdoor screening in Beeston during the summer.

Email: basementartsproject@gmail.com.

## NEWSFILE

\*\*\* Twitter: @LeadsNews \*\*\*

### DELVE INTO THE HISTORY BOOKS

**HORSFORTH:** Historian Stephen Brown will host a talk called *Researching the Horsforth War Dead of World War One* in the Stables block, behind Horsforth Museum on Tuesday, November 18, at 7.30pm. Admission £2.

### PUTTING FUN IN FUNDRAISING

**LEEDS:** Abselling, talent shows and a selfie contest are just some of the activities students from the University of Leeds RAG society took part in last week, in a bid to raise thousands of pounds for small charities across the city.

### KERSTEN SIGNS UP WITH STORE

**CITY:** Local author Kersten Hall will be signing copies of her book, *The Man in the Monkeynut Coat*, at the Waterstone's store in Leeds city centre from 1.30pm to 3.30pm on Saturday, November 22.

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