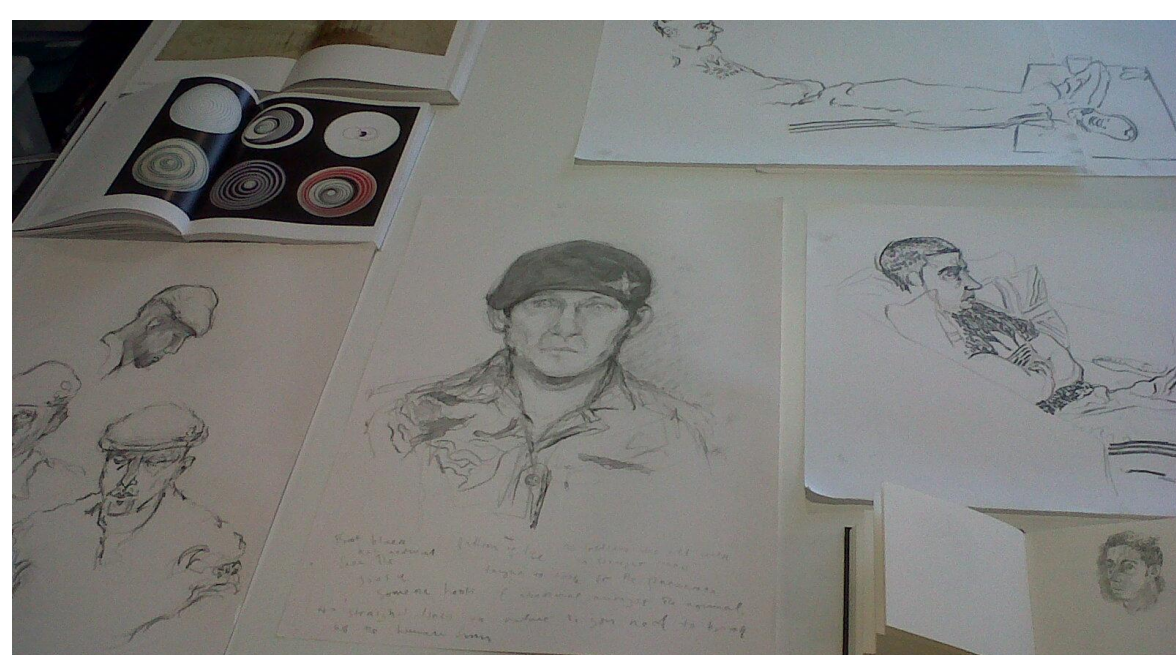
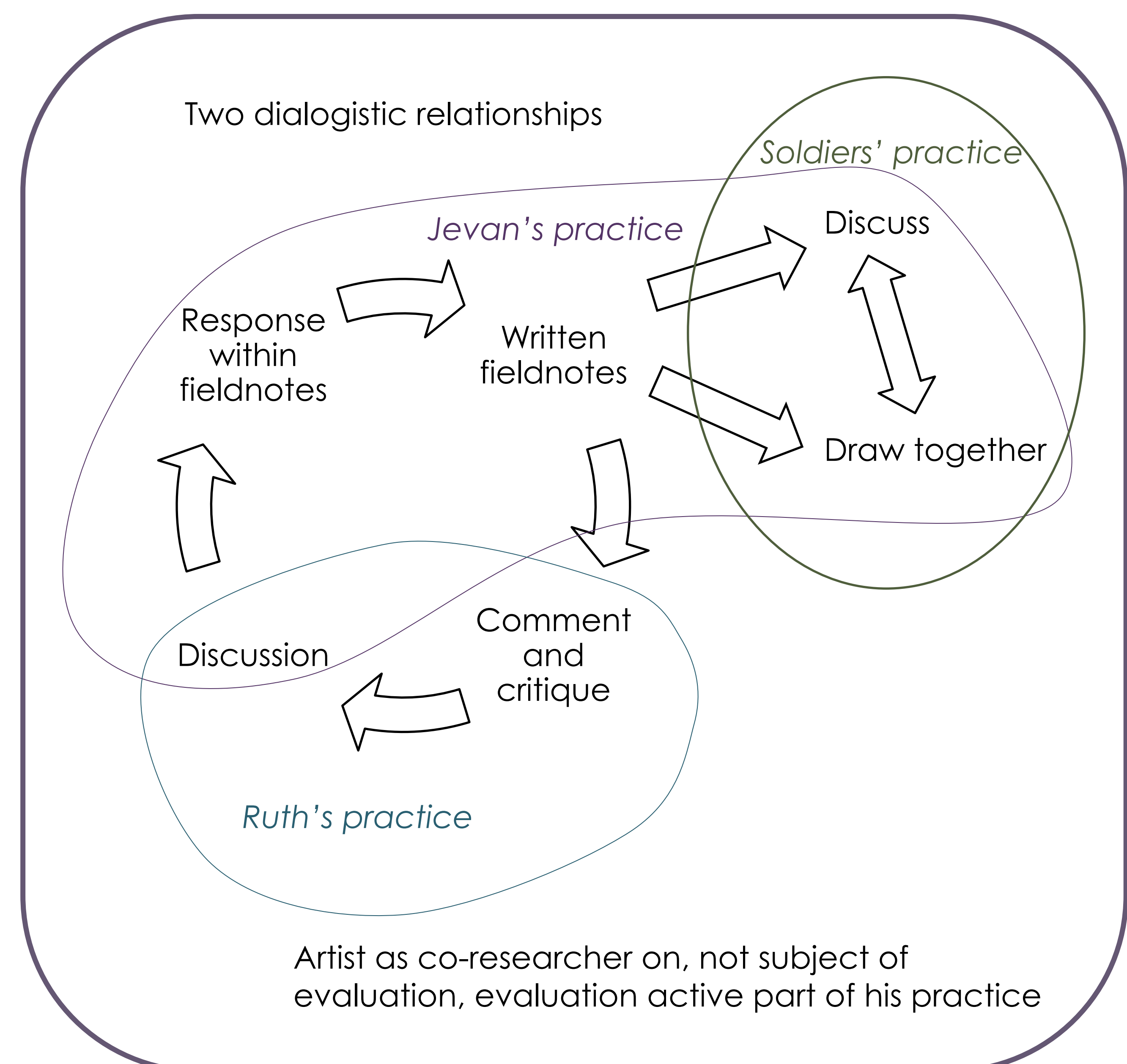
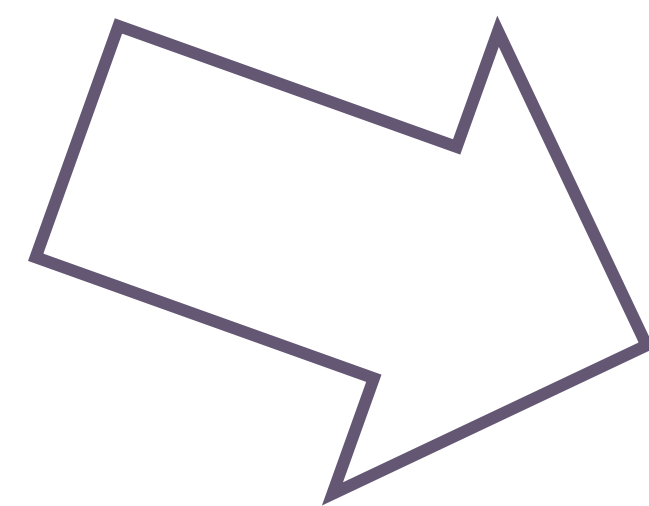


Accounting For Drawing (with) Soldiers: Exploring the Liminal Zone between Artistic Practice, Evaluation and Ethnography

Ruth Melville and Jevan Watkins Jones

rmelvil@essex.ac.uk and jevanwatkinsjones@hotmail.com

This poster reports on a project that combined ethnographic research methods with an attempt to use the insights thus generated to create new approaches to evaluating the arts. It builds on the evaluation of the Garrison strand of the Paul Hamlyn Foundation funded Experimental Communities programme at firstsite, which involved working with recovering injured servicemen (henceforth soldiers) in a recovery centre in the Colchester barracks. The evaluation of the project was both an integral part of the project, and an explicit focus of the research. The evaluator Ruth Melville and the artist Jevan Watkins Jones, worked together using a dialogic and observational process which became part of the practice of the project. The effect was to reposition evaluation from being a laborious and time-hungry obligation, performed only to appease external agents, to an active agent of creative reflection and development, integrated within a broader understanding of professional practice.



"He just sits and chats with us really. He doesn't make us draw" Soldier



Drawing out words

I made myself available within that structure but offered no set task to carry out: I sat, observed at close quarters, I drew, I set pictures out for those passing, chatted, listened and wrote notes – built up a picture of daily rhythms and individual roles in the mix.

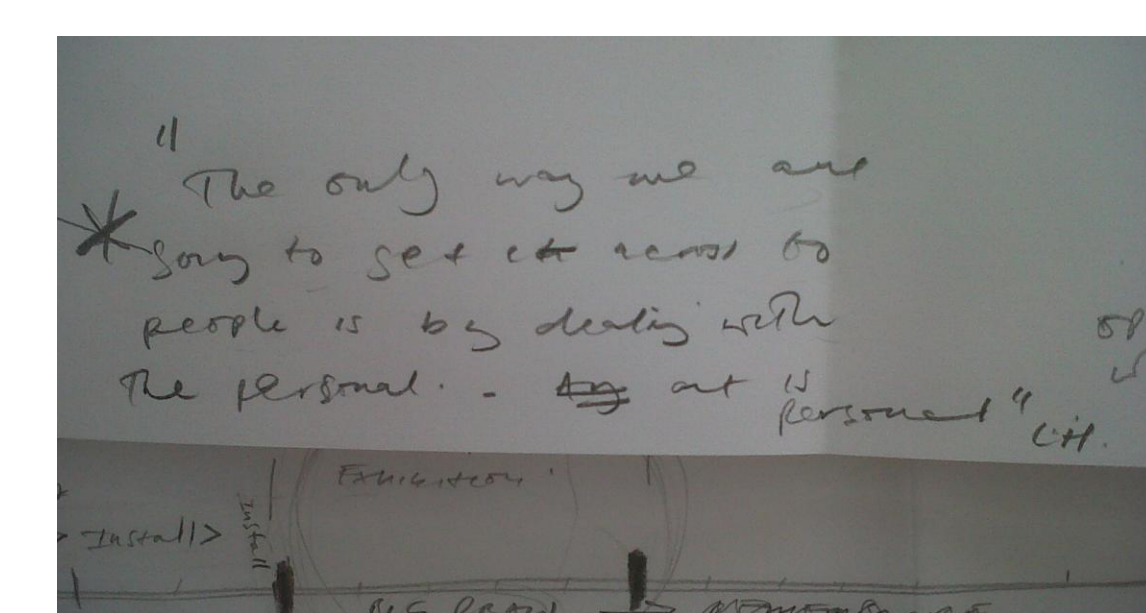
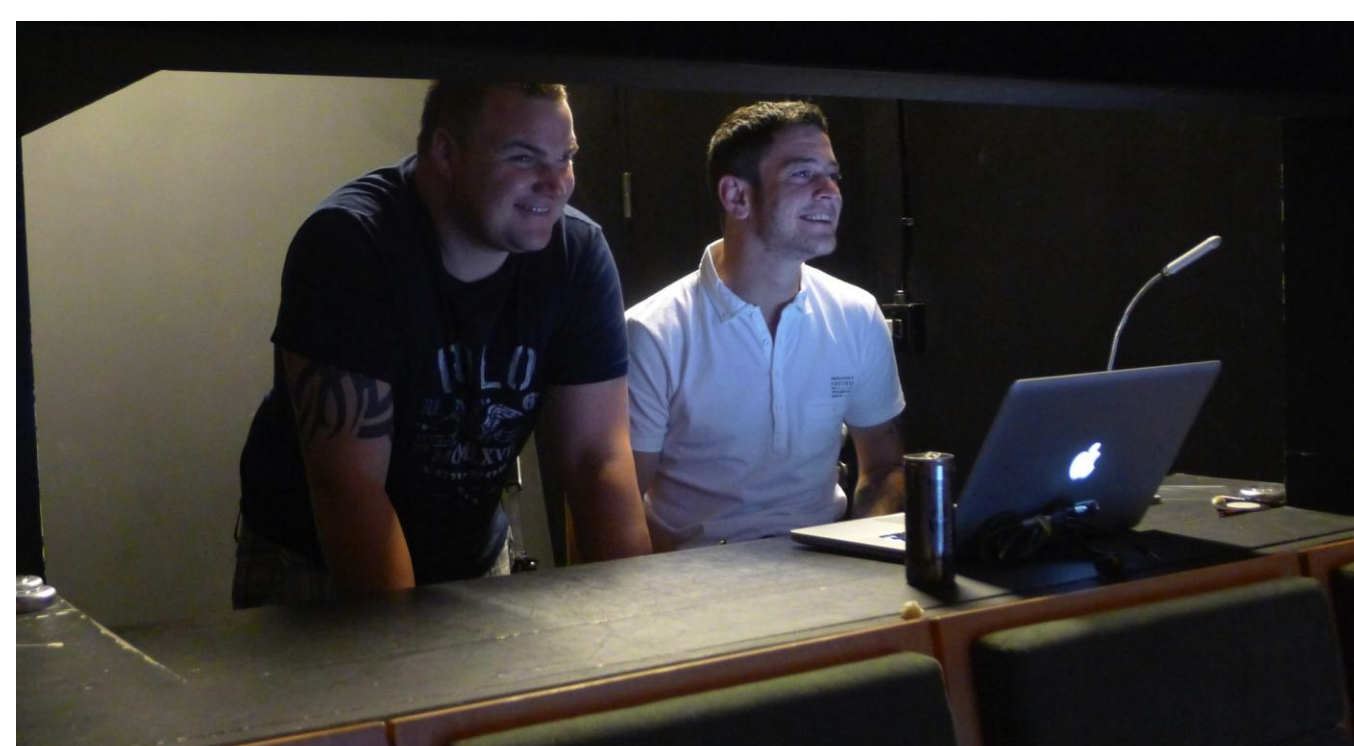
Constancy of contact gave rise to a depth of experience in which I was a conduit for the cultural identity of the this small group of injured soldiers having voice in the space of the project and what evolved to become the exhibition. We were involved in a 'Community of Practice' where the perceived success of the project depended on finding a common ground.

Words became drawing and drawing became words - interwoven. Talking about soldiering and art and liminally the human relationship between these. The talking was prevalent, but it was the offer of 'Drawing with Jevan' that instigated that space and my job to draw the visual out in a relational way.

Soldiers reported extremely positive outcomes from the project – changes in ability to engage with civilian life, significant mental health improvements and value gained from the final exhibition. All attributed it to the type of approach taken. Most remain in touch with Jevan and wish to continue to work together in some way.



"...just trying to draw something that explains it, you know, maybe you draw why you feel down. You know, you've got people pushing you all over the place, you've got someone pulling your strings and you're fed up with it. You're drawing that and then ... all you've got to do when you feel like that again, is just think about that picture." Soldier



Re-evaluating evaluation

Evaluation within the arts can tend to be a 'bolt-on' addition, done at the end and/or by an outsider. Yet the changes experienced by project participants are often subtle and longer-term much better explored using a rich, engaged approach, carried out by those who know them and told through narrative and imagery

Re-constructing evaluation to so that it was embedded to become an active and relevant agent of change in the project in a practice based methodology – a creative lever in the project's duration and not one imposed and dutifully fulfilled after the event added richness to the project but also the evaluation's findings.



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