4.0 An Analytical Explanation of Participatory Action

4.1 Introduction

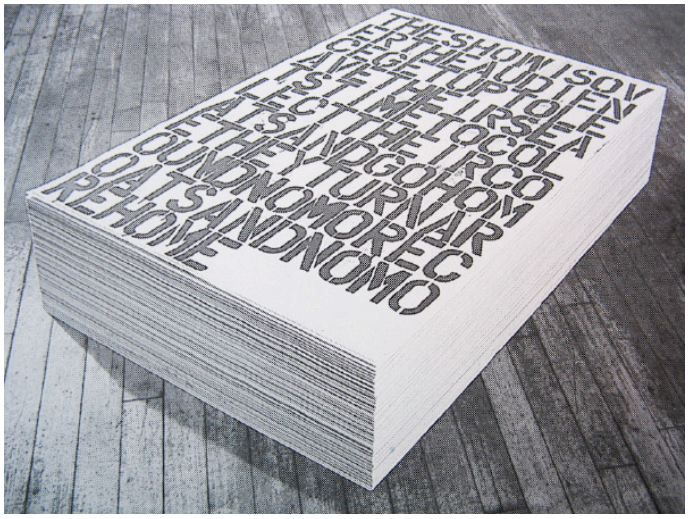

Fig. 1

Context

When I initially experienced 'Untitled', 1993 (Fig. 1), I treated it in the same way I would treat any other artwork. I looked at it from a distance and gradually got closer to it all the while wondering what it was made of and considering if I could place it in my memory. Had I seen something like this before in a magazine? When arriving at a reasonable distance I realised that it was a pile of posters and had a vague recollection from an article I had read that in these kinds of artworks you were allowed to actually take one of the posters from the pile. I was not entirely certain of this, but I was in the mood to give it a go and take the consequences from the gallery attendants. On lifting a poster from the pile I was extremely surprised by the brief feeling of excitement I got in this simple action. While I rolled the poster up in a manner that was unexpectedly clumsy, I turned to look at a gallery attendant to check for possible signs of disapproval. There were none, my actions had passed without comment. They were an accepted part of the routine of the exhibition.

Problem

I participated in this work and my behaviour was considered to be relatively unexceptional. From one point of view my actions were the norm and no one stopped me, the conventions of the work permitted the taking of a poster. However from another point of view I was not sure about the conventions of the work and this caused a degree of personal ferment because I thought I was potentially breaking a convention. I was drawn

towards the work, lifted and rolled up a poster and left the work all the time looking and moving. I was aware of numerous contradictory thoughts and emotions. I was trying to remember if participation was allowed so I was not sure how free I was to act. This uncertainty was overcome by a quick estimation that there were few risks involved. I was also aiming towards a goal but was driven by an impetus to act. Once my participatory action was achieved I then placed my behaviour in the wider context of the gallery to check for any problems. I would say that these conditions highlight how participatory action is comprised of a puzzling group of diverse elements. It is proposed that an explanation of the diverse elements that produce a human action will help artists and participants to understand what might trigger participatory action.

Resolution

It is proposed that an explanation of these diverse elements may be found if human action is explained from an analytical perspective. The analytical philosophy of action explains human action in rational terms. This means that action is described as intentional and when it is described as intentional it means that a reason is given for it. The presupposition that is made in a rational account of action is that when a reason is given for an action a bit of extra information is provided about what is being done. This has been described as a "*rationalization*" (Davidson, D. 1963: 3). A rationalization explains an action, "by revealing something that the agent was aiming at in performing it, and, therefore, something that makes the action "reasonable" or "agreeable", to some extent." (Mele, A.R. 2003: 71). It is suggested that this viewpoint will explain participatory action to participants and artists as a deliberate and conscious procedure.

Qualifications

This account of human action has a broad application but it must be accepted that actions do not necessarily have any goal in mind and that actions can occur simply to produce the experience of action. You may act without any thought, in anger or fear. You may engage in an action because you 'feel like it': You may feel like whistling. All of these actions may be intentional but can they be described in the terms of a rationalization? This is where the analytical philosophy of action runs into difficulties. It also becomes problematic because it is suggested that participatory art involves actions that are equally resistant to a rationalization. Participatory action can arise because you simply feel like participating, without any goal in mind and for the sake of action.

Summary
This chapter will introduce some of the topics associated with the analytical philosophy of action. It will look at how an action can be distinguished from what is not an action and how actions are distinguished from other actions. This chapter will also explore the widely accepted causal explanation of action. Its origins in Aristotle's thought and its relationship to natural science will also be considered. Arguments against the causal explanation made by Ludwig Wittgenstein will also be taken into account and the central category of intentional action will also be explored. On the basis of this general exploration of action the work on intention and action theory by the prominent philosophers Gertrude Elizabeth Margaret Anscombe and Donald Davidson will then be investigated in more detail. Anscombe's work 'Intention' has been described as, "the founding document of contemporary philosophy of action." (Thompson, M. 1998: 280). Her views on action develop on Wittgenstein's idea of the will and action and are also influenced by Aristotle. Davidson's action theory develops Anscombe's ideas and provides arguments that support causal explanations of action. His work also reveals the extent to which actions can be explained in human terms or if they are complicated physical behaviour. These accounts will provide a rational perspective on action and throughout the chapter these findings will be compared to aspects of 'Untitled', 1993 by Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Christopher Wool. These comparisons will provide a rational explanation of how action is embodied in the participatory artwork. In these comparisons the discourse on action will be used as a means to reach a fuller understanding of participatory art rather than a means to discuss the philosophy of action per se. Therefore these comparisons will place accounts of action at the service of explanations of 'Untitled', 1993. This will contribute to the main question of this chapter: To what extent can participatory action be rationally explained?

4.2 General Issues

When I took part in 'Untitled', 1993 alongside the action of taking a poster I also walked toward and away from the work. As well as directing my thoughts towards my actions I was also considering other things like the work's possible meaning and working out if it was practical to take a poster away. I would therefore suggest that it is useful to understand how significant actions and thoughts can be differentiated from less significant actions and thoughts in a work like 'Untitled', 1993.

4.2.1 Basic questions

When action is thought about the simplest question to be asked is: What is an action? It could be said that an action is something that a person does. It is the carrying out of an act. Normally it would also be said that a person moves their body or a part of their body when they carry out an act. Additionally, when a person carries out an act it is usually said that they do it because they have a reason to act. So I could describe one of my actions as something that I do that involves moving my body for a reason.

This initial description of action is adequate for most day-to-day practicalities. Human action is so central to human affairs that it seems impractical to consider action in any way other than as something that is necessary if things are going to get done. Nevertheless because human action is such a deeply embedded and universal aspect of life many philosophers have attempted to capture and describe what human action may be. When contemporary philosophers look more closely at the common sense view of action they engage in 'Action theory'.

Alfred Mele suggests that a more detailed look at action stems from the simple kind of question asked at the start of this section. When action is looked at it should be asked: *(a) What is an action? (b) How are actions to be explained?* For Mele the first question causes you to ask a further two related questions: "How are actions different from events that are not actions? How do actions differ from one another?" (Mele, A.R. 2003: 65)

4.2.2 Action and non-action

In his examination of Aristotle's philosophy of action David Charles provides a helpful description of how Aristotle created distinct groups of human action from the general diversity of all human action. This helps in a reply to the question: 'How are actions different from events that are not actions?' According to Charles, Aristotle emphasised that you should always consider a wide range of human action and not narrowly focus your attention on rational action. In this sense this scheme could be treated as a spectrum of human action. It could be said that just as parts of a colour spectrum can be more visible and less visible then it can be said that at certain times it may be more appropriate to embrace a broad range rather than a narrow range of actions. The following scheme is developed from Charles' treatment of Aristotle's system (Charles, D. 1984: 104):

Falling asleep, waking up and moving during sleep are not actions.

a. Involuntary Processes: Birth, Breathing, Pulse of blood, Similar bodily processes, Growing old, Death.

b. Intermediate processes: Coughing, Sneezing, Blinking, Blushing, Sighing, Frowning, Sneering, Sexual arousal, Biting one's lip, Raising eyebrows, Raising heartbeat.

c. Intentional processes not supported by practical reason (*Central case of agency*): Sensual desires (Impetus to look, listen, taste, smell and touch), 'Instinctive' behaviour.

d. Intentional processes supported by practical reason (*Central case of agency*): All other actions.

e. Intentional states: Remaining at one's post, Refraining from action, Being at rest.

George Wilson offers a similar though less detailed account of what may be called an action. He suggests considering the intuitive sense you have of what action may be. When you are passive then this is not an action, when you are more controlled then this is an action. There are, "[…] the things that merely *happen* to people – the events they undergo – and the various things that they generally *do*." (Wilson, G. 2002: 2).

4.2.3 Differences between actions

In attempting to formulate a reply to the question: 'How do actions differ from one another?' Jennifer Hornsby's suggests that it is useful to distinguish between the *action* and what you *do*. For example I may take a sweet and you may take a sweet from one of Torres 'Candy Spills'. (Fig. 2)

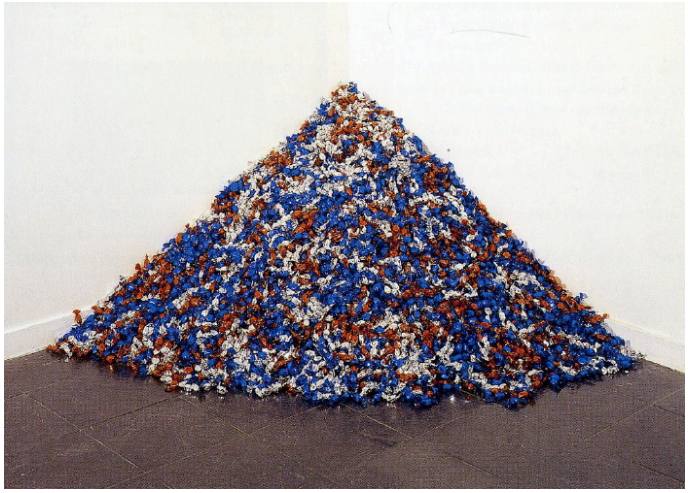

Fig. 2

When it is said that you *do* things you are not being so specific, so in this case you would tend to say that we have done the same thing. For Hornsby action captures things more precisely: "'action' is given a definite meaning when actions are taken to be a species of events: it denotes particulars of a certain sort – concrete items in the spatiotemporal world" (Hornsby, J. 1998: 37). Therefore the two instances of taking a sweet are two distinct actions. I took a sweet and this was a distinct event in time and space and you took a sweet and this was also a distinct event in time and space.

When considering how actions are distinguished from what is done, a break occurs with the way action is usually thought about. It feels as though there must be an increase in the refinement of the account of action and an almost forensic attitude to the nuances of human action has to be adopted. This is definitely a tendency in action theory and it can be clearly presented in the different approaches that can be taken to 'individuate' straightforward actions. The main approaches to action 'individuation' are the "fine-grained" account and the "coarse-grained" account (Hornsby, J. 1998: 37). There is also a way of looking at action in terms of increasingly basic actions. Jennifer Hornsby (Hornsby, J. 1998: 37) describes a situation where an aeroplane pilot presses a lever and this causes the engines of the plane to shut down. In a *fine-grained* account of this situation two actions occur. The first action is the pilot pressing the lever and the second action is the engines shutting down. In a fine-grained account the pressing of the lever happened at one point in time and the shutting down of the engines happened at a point in time afterwards. There are two distinct events and therefore two distinct actions. In the *coarse-grained* account of the situation only one action occurs. The pressing down of the lever and the engines shutting off happen at the same point in time. When you describe them as happening at the same point in time then there is only one event and if there is only on

event then there is only one action. However in the coarse-grained account this single action is *describable* in two different ways. It can be described as 'The pilot pressed the lever' or as 'The engines shut down'. When the situation is looked at in terms of *basic actions* it is said that moving an arm is more basic than pressing the lever and this is more basic than shutting down the engines. At the start there is a primitive sort of action and at the end a more complex action and each action depends on the preceding action.

In asking what is an action the differences between action and a non-action have to be considered. When action is looked at in more detail there are three main explanations: the fine-grained, coarse-grained and the basic action account. In what way does this contribute to a rational explanation of how action is embodied in the participatory artwork? It is suggested that the participatory artwork focuses on the central cases of agency proposed by Charles. 'Untitled', 1993 invites an action that is supported by a practical reason or supported by a more intuitive or sensual reason. You would take a poster because you reason that they are free or because you like the way it looks. In 'Untitled', 1993 you may weigh up the options or you simply reach out and take. In my experience I thought about what I was doing and was relieved that my actions were tolerated. Hornsby differentiates between action and doing. From this perspective participants could be described as doing the same thing. Everyone takes a poster. However as *actions* the participation of each individual is particular to the moment of its occurrence. I would say that this is the most appropriate method to differentiate participation because it highlights the uniqueness of each participant. When considering action individuation it is suggested that the coarse grained account is adopted. The other accounts may be useful in a legal context where these kinds of minutiae can be relevant but in the context of the artworks that are under discussion here this kind of refinement is not strictly necessary. It seems more appropriate to rely on descriptions of action rather than sharp distinctions between events and times.

4.2.4 The causal explanation of action

In my encounter with 'Untitled', 1993, I briefly deliberated on my actions but I did not articulate my thoughts or have to argue in favour of my actions. Neither did I have to concentrate on my actions in any special way because they did not require any expertise. However my action was not a purely impulsive either. I had a rough awareness of my motives and the consequences of my actions. I wanted a poster and if I took one I could put it on my wall.

The previous section has helped in a partial reply to the question *'What is an action?'* When the question, *'How are actions to be explained?'* is asked you are travelling over far more difficult terrain. Intuitively most people would agree that when you try to explain an action you tend to give a reason for the action. If asked 'Why you are wearing a hat?' you would give the reason, 'It is cold and I want to stay warm.' You want to be warm and you work out that a hat will keep you warm.

The dominant explanation of action that can help in an understanding of this state of affairs is the *causal explanation.* Aristotle developed the most widely accepted causal explanation of action. In 'The Nichomachean Ethics' he states: "The origin of action – its efficient, not its final cause – is choice, and of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end." (Aristotle. 1980: 139). Aristotle suggests that action is caused by a combination of psychological states like desire and reason.

There is a central account of action in Aristotle's theories that is most relevant in the current explanation of action. An action may be analysed as an event that is an, "Intentional process supported by practical reason" (Charles, D. 1984: 104). Here action may be identified as the acceptance of a desire to act on a conclusion arrived at through thought and inference. In this account the desire to act is *rational.*

Aristotle compares desire to assertion. When you assert something you affirm or deny a proposition. When you desire something you pursue or avoid it. So in having a rational desire, you are active towards the intellect. You pursue what is reasonable and true and avoid what is unreasonable and false. Nevertheless Aristotle objects that rational desire cannot adequately explain all your actions. He warns that, "Intellect itself, however, moves nothing […]" (Aristotle. 1980: 139). The intellect may be involved in an action but for Aristotle it must be activated in some way. In this sense desire becomes the trigger for action. It is desire that has the job of, "rendering the syllogism valid" (Charles, D. 1984: 90). In this work by Jurgen Bey the chair is supplied with on extremely short leg (Fig. 3). Other actions are therefore necessary before you can sit on the chair. You reason that it is better to have a stable rather than an unstable chair and your desire to have a stable chair turns your thought into an action. By acknowledging the links between *intellect* and *desire* in action Aristotle provides a prototype explanation of the causes of rational human action.

Fig. 3

When a causal explanation of action is given then your reasons are described as being the cause of action. Your reasons are also considered to be a psychological state and it is claimed that these states cause actions. Alfred Mele describes the causal explanation: "It typically is embraced as part of a naturalistic stand on agency, according to which mental items that play causal/explanatory roles in action bear some important relation to physical states and events." (Mele, A.R. 1997a: 4). When a causal explanation of action is adopted then the claim that psychological states are in some way realized as physical events or states in the brain is accepted. [1.]

In such discussions about action, references have traditionally been made to *acts of will* or acts of *volition* to bridge the gap between the mental and the physical. However terms like this caused difficulties for Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein, L. 1953, 1958). He argued against the causal explanation of action where mental states are used as a basis for the reasons that cause action. Wittgenstein presented numerous arguments that cast doubt on explanations where action is seen as being caused by 'internal' experiences such as volition or acts of will. Two of his arguments will reveal some of the assumptions that are made in the causal explanation of action.

In the first argument Wittgenstein describes a practical situation: "I deliberate whether to lift a certain heavyish weight, decide to do it, I then apply my force to it and lift it." (Wittgenstein, L. 1958: 150). He compares this situation with other situations like speaking. The former situation tends to be thought of as a, "full-fledged case of willing" (Wittgenstein, L. 1958: 150) however he suggests that it is a mistake to think that the former situation is representative of all action. He points out that a 'full-fledged' description of speaking can be given but this kind of description is very specific and does not usually apply to speaking. I could say I pondered on what to say, weighed up the arguments and said something, but this is too special. Speaking usually happens in an

impromptu manner with little planning. It is assumed that in the lifting case, because the various features of the action such as deliberation, decision and exertion can be differentiated that this should be done generally whenever action is explained. The impression is created that the force of the action is distinguishable from all the psychological states that occur prior to the action. This gives a sense that when you engage in action, you engage in a separate state of willing. It suggests that before acting you always think it over.

In the second argument Wittgenstein describes another practical situation. A mirror is used to guide the drawing of a geometric shape. He advises attempting to draw the shape by only looking at the mirror. Naturally this gives a sense of detachment from what are normally considered to be your actions. Natural action becomes more difficult and you begin to focus on the correct movements of your muscles in more self-conscious way. This is instructive because it exposes the way that you are inclined to picture your will as being somehow prior to your actions. The experience of drawing in the mirror shows that, "one is inclined to say that our real *actions*, the ones to which volition *immediately* applies, are not the movements of our hand but somehow further back, say the actions of our muscles." (Wittgenstein, L. 1958: 153). [2.] Wittgenstein proposes that you do not decide by an act of will which muscles to move in order to make your hands move in order to successfully complete the drawing. The idea of will has to be flexible enough to accommodate a more direct willing where you do not consider an intermediate series of events. A false impression of action is given if it is seen as willing and *then* action.

As an alternative to these images of a preceding will that causes a subsequent action Wittgenstein claims that willing *is* action, "Willing, if it is not to be a sort of wishing, must be the action itself. It cannot be allowed to stop anywhere short of the action." (Wittgenstein, L. 1953: 160). Wittgenstein refers to numerous occasions such a speaking, writing or walking when you could ordinarily say that you do not deliberate or think of yourself as acting on the basis of a separate will. Speaking, writing and walking are central examples of action and on these kinds of occasions there is often an absence of pre-meditation. It could be said that by saying willing is action in this way Wittgenstein is doing two things. Firstly he is bringing willing 'to the surface'. He does this with the reminder that when action is explained you should not forget that actions are ordinarily understood as bodily movements that are observable. By suggesting that the will does not 'stop short' of action he is arguing that an underlying psychological explanation of action should not always be pursued. He is suggesting that actions can also be explained within the context of known patterns of ordinarily observable human behaviour. Secondly he is

trying to explain what it means to be active because when he says that willing is 'the action itself' he does not turn willing into a mechanical physical event. Rather he is saying that the experience of the will in action is not necessarily something deliberate that mulls things over. He is saying that it also resembles a transitory instant of attention: "*Doing* itself seems to not have any volume of experience. It seems like an extensionless point, the point of a needle. This point seems to be the real agent." (Wittgenstein, L. 1953: 161). To demonstrate the oddness of treating all action as though it is premeditated Bruce Nauman produced a series of videos where he meticulously choreographed walks around his studio (Fig. 4). He planned his movements in a grid-like diagram that showed that he was to take a step at right angles to his last step and that he had to move his legs to be a right angles to his other leg so that his body would always form a 'T' shape. By carefully scripting a casual action that is not exactly a dance move Nauman highlights the absurdity of describing all actions in their 'full-fledged' sense.

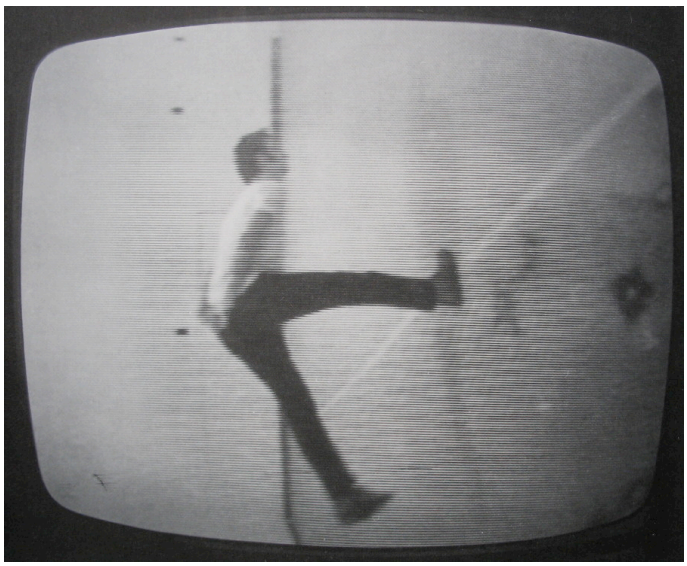

Fig. 4

Aristotle provides the blueprint for the causal explanation of action. Action is an outcome of a combination of reasoned thought and felt desire. The modern account of this explanation describes thought and desire in term of physical states in the brain. On this account these physical states cause physical actions. Wittgenstein argues against this mechanical explanation but also argues against the conventional anti-mechanical explanation that involves volition. He argues that action should not always be thought of in terms of willing and that action does not simply follow after willing. Things like walking can be thought of as an embodiment of willing. On this basis he reconsiders action as the fleeting experience of an agent. In what way does this discourse contribute to a rational explanation of how action is embodied in the participatory artwork? If

'Untitled', 1993 is considered from Aristotle's perspective then this kind of structure might describe the state of affairs:

I reason that I can take a poster. (It is allowed)
I am in a state where I want to take a poster. (I like their appearance)
Therefore I will take a poster.

This is a useful guide to participatory action but it cannot be assumed that all participatory actions occur like this. What about a participant who takes a poster absentmindedly or without any reasoning? It is suggested that Aristotle offers a basic though imprecise template for explaining participatory action from a rational perspective. When the modern perspective on the causal explanation of action is considered it is acknowledged that the explanations of human action given by natural science are extremely fruitful and valuable in terms of empirical research into human motility. However these explanations will not be employed in an explanation of participatory action because a detailed causal explanation of participatory action is not necessary. I would say that it is more appropriate to draw attention to observable participatory actions. When 'Untitled', 1993 is considered from Wittgenstein's perspective an account of participatory action is provided that does not need to be 'full-fledged'. Wittgenstein accounts for participatory actions that are not thought about, decided on and then carried out. From his standpoint taking a poster could be like walking. It is observable behaviour that does not necessarily need a finely graded psychological explanation that includes an account of the human will. In this sense the will becomes embodied in the action of taking and rolling up a poster.

4.3 Intention

Some rough guidelines have been established to explain how participatory action can be distinguished from other actions and to explain what the causes of participatory action may be. Another way of considering participatory action is to take into account that it can be an action where you have an intention in mind. When I participated in 'Untitled', 1993, I didn't take a poster by accident, by chance or without knowing that I was taking part. I was aware of my actions and purposefully took part. I would suggest that intention explains a central category of action and for this reason should be considered in an account of participatory action.

4.3.1 Intentional action

When looking at intentional action an action is being taken into account that is connected to a state of mind that steers current action or is primed to look forward. According to Mele it can be described as, "executive attitudes towards plans" (Mele, A.R. 1997: 19). Intentions can guide simple planned actions or can co-ordinate groups of planned actions. They are described as being linked to a practical state of mind and they are also described as having a, "settledness" (Mele, A.R. 1997: 19). When you intend to do something you are inwardly confirming your course of action in a way that is absent when you entertain a wish or contemplate the possibility of carrying out a future action. Another issue associated with explanations of intentional action is the connection between intending to act and giving reasons for acting. Usually it can be said that an action is intentional when an act was intended. I shout intentionally when I intend to shout. I didn't shout involuntarily in pain for example. It can also be said that in acting intentionally you act for a reason: I shout intentionally because the music is so loud. On this basis Mele suggests that, "acting for a reason is often *identified* with acting intentionally" (Mele, A.R. 1997: 19). When presented with the Gonzalez-Torres work 'Untitled', 1993 (Fig. 5) you may take a poster because it appeals to you. You intentionally take a poster and this coincides with your attraction or your reason for taking it.

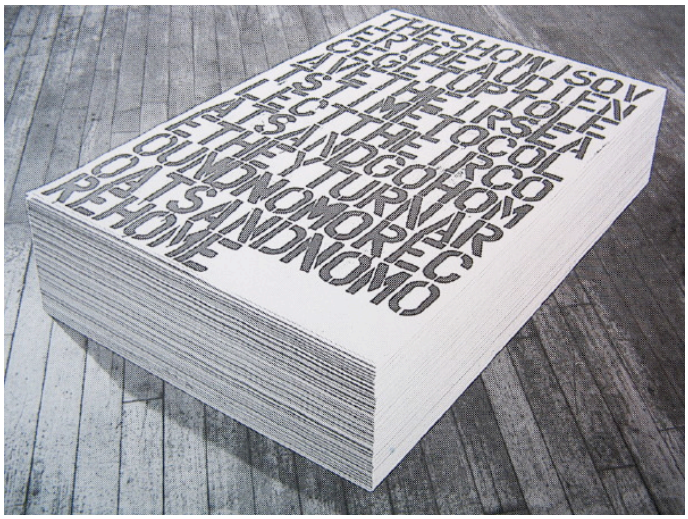

Fig. 5

4.3.2 The psychology and physiology of intention

In her enquiry into the concept of intention Anscombe states that there are a number of senses of intention. She describes a situation where someone might ask you, 'What was your intention in doing that?' In offering an answer to this kind of question you are

making a statement about intentional actions as an explanation of past events. You might explain your current actions as corresponding to a presently held intention that fills out the meaning of your actions. This is an, "intention *with which*" you act (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 25). You may also hold something in your mind as intention for the future. This intention may or may not be realised and so is an, "expression of intention" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 1).

Anscombe suggests that a natural understanding of these kinds of statements is misleading. Intention is not simply viewed as an inner state of mind like an emotion or a psychological desire. The key to this misunderstanding is in the fact that you engage in 'expressions of intention'. You say what you are doing or going to do. This points to the suggestion that intention is to an extent a public thing like language and in this sense it is, "conventional" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 5). In her criticism of a physiological explanation of action she considers the merits of imagining intention as something that occurs in *addition* to an action. From this perspective an intentional action is depicted in such a way that intention becomes separate from the movement. This view separates an action into a series: something that starts at a source of inner intention, a muscle stimulus, a bodily movement, a known action, an object acted on and the external effect of the action on the object. If this perspective is adopted then there seems to be no justification why you should stop at muscle movement as *the* origin of an action. What about electrical impulses or chemical changes that precede the muscle movement? Additionally she asks how the separate 'forces' of action and intention relate to one another. Anscombe concludes that if this kind of logic is pursued you end up in, "inextricable confusions" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 29). Intention is not something "*in* the action, or *in* the man […]" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 29 Italics mine). For Anscombe describing an action as intentional is more like a process of designation. It is, "to assign it to the class of intentional actions" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 28). Intention occurs as part of communication and as such is conventional in the way that communication is.

In setting aside psychological and physiological explanations of intentional action Anscombe identifies its conventional nature. Could it be said that participatory action is like intentional action and has a conventional nature? When you describe your intentions as conventional it is like describing intention in terms of a contract. You are naming your actions. In this sense intention is not something like an emotion that appears 'naturally' but something you rationally articulate like language. Intention is conventional in the same way that language is conventional because others ask you about your intentions and you tell others about your intentions. If this sense of intentional action is applied to a

participatory action then it can be said that it underlines the rule-based features of participatory action. From this perspective the participatory action of taking a poster from 'Untitled', 1993 becomes linked to language. The intentional act of taking a poster is placed in the context of communication. You may say that you are going to take a poster, are currently taking a poster or that you have taken a poster. This could take the form of an obvious statement like 'I plan to take a poster'. It could also take the form of something more inward like, "addressing a command to oneself" (Davidson, D. 1978: 91) although it should also be acknowledged that you don't always articulate your intentions in such clear terms. In this sense intending is more like forming a pact with the self. This casts doubt on the view that the intentional act of taking a poster primarily takes place in the context of bodily movement. Anscombe cautions against viewing intention as a natural phenomenon that is somehow 'in' an action. As though it is the first psychological event in a series of subsequent physical events. If this warning is observed for a participatory artwork then further reasons are given to avoid describing participatory action in simple physical or psychological terms. An intention to take a poster is not 'in' the taking of a poster. The taking of the poster falls into the category of being intentional.

4.3.3 Single action under many descriptions

There were no unintended consequences from my participation in 'Untitled', 1993, however when I was briefly uncertain about the legitimacy of my actions I imagined how others might see me. I thought: If this is not a participatory artwork then my actions could inadvertently be seen as theft or vandalism.

An important feature of an intentional action is that you must be aware of what you are doing. Anscombe uses the example of a man sawing a plank of wood that is an historical artefact. He may not have noticed that its underside displays ancient carvings. Therefore this action can be described as a man intentionally sawing a plank of wood. It can also be described as a man unintentionally destroying a historical artefact. Additionally the sawing may be causing a lot of noise, which he doesn't notice or he may be creating a pile of sawdust on the floor, which he doesn't notice. This example is used to highlight that a single action may have various aspects. One may know one of the aspects and in knowing this, one is acting intentionally, but there may be numerous other aspects, none of which can be said to be intentional even though they outline the same act. Therefore to act intentionally is, "to give a description of what he is doing *under which* he knows it" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 12). All these descriptions of sawing apply to ordinarily

observable aspects of the obvious action, but the sawing can also be described as the firing of multiple nerve ends and the flexing of muscles in the man's arm. In these kinds of description a very specialised way of looking at action is focused on and ordinarily these descriptions would not be linked to the man's act of sawing the wood. In this sense it can be said that these kinds of action description are also unintentional because the man may acknowledge that nerves and muscles are involved but he would not usually say that he intends to stimulate his muscles with his nerves. In this context this is not a description of an intentional action. It is not a description *under which* he knows his action of sawing.

Anscombe accounts for an intentional action as being an action under a description. Considered in this light can participatory action only be known under a description? I would suggest that there are situations where participants engage with a work without fully knowing all that they are doing. Your participation may take place under one description that you are aware of, but the artist may capture your participation under another description that you are not aware of. It is also suggested that there are situations where artists present a participatory artwork and unintended effects take place while people participate. Your description may not be the one anticipated by the artist. This highlights the discrepancies that occur in the participatory artwork like 'Untitled', 1993. A participant may think that by taking a poster they are receiving a free gift. A child may think that it is being mischievous and its mother may think that too. In my experience of the work I was not certain how to describe my actions. I was concerned that I may cause some trouble but was also willing to take that risk. On the other hand the gallery staff were indifferent because they were operating under a description that permitted the act of taking a poster. The artist, gallery staff and the participant can put the intention under different descriptions. Therefore participatory action can be known under numerous descriptions.

4.3.4 Public and private intention

In a conventional encounter with art you would not usually consider your intentions unless you were talking about a work. Your contemplation of an artwork is typically a personal matter. You would only worry about your intentions if something you said about the work had an unintentional effect. Based on what you say someone might think that you are being critical when in fact you admire the work. When you take part in a work like 'Untitled', 1993 you are in a similar position. You no longer privately reflect on the work; your participation is 'in the open' but what do your actions indicate about your intentions?

To get near to describing someone's intentions you have to refer to what they are up to and this description has to, "coincide with what he could say he was doing" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 8). So you have to describe what an action looks like from the outside and this description has to match what the person knows within himself or herself. Immediately you see that there is a tension between what is observable and what is private. Anscombe acknowledges this by describing various circumstances where it could be said that you must rely on the other's report to settle what they are doing. If a person's intentions are clear you don't ask, if they are unclear you usually ask. In these cases intention seems to surface first of all in the mind and action comes afterwards. Anscombe wants to resist this temptation and instead places the emphasis on the action: "what physically takes place, i.e. what a man actually does" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 9).

Anscombe looks at intentional action from an external perspective. She describes how intention provides a more complete picture of action. For example if you were standing up to leave a room and someone asked: 'What are you doing?' it would be facetious to say 'Standing up'. It would be more appropriate to say 'I have to leave'. Anscombe describes a sense where you say an intention, "*with which*" something is done (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 34). What is important during such situations is the appropriateness of the answer. As is stated in the example of standing-up-to-leave if your answer is overly obvious then it is provocative. If your answer clearly corresponds with a potential future state of affairs then your intention is evident, however if your answer leapfrogs over a logical chain of events it appears absurd. [3.] Anscombe refers to such situations to indicate that an intentional action is not always something that *only* an agent can describe adequately. She demonstrates that an intentional action must sometimes be described with an external perspective in mind. "A man's intention in acting is not so private and interior a thing that he has absolute authority in saying *what* it is – as he has absolute authority in saying *what* he dreamt" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 36).

Anscombe also contemplates an internal perspective on intentional action. To summarise a classic example, Anscombe describes a situation where a man is pumping water from a reservoir into a cistern that is the main water supply to a house. In the house are a group of evil party chiefs. While he is doing this someone appears to tell him that some poison has been put in the reservoir and that he is in the process of poisoning the evil party chiefs. On this occasion, in asking the man doing the pumping: 'What are you doing?' Anscombe states, "'*In the end* only you can know if that is your intention or not'" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 48). If he was doing what he normally did prior to being told about the poison only

the man can know the truth of his intentions. He may say ‘I don’t care’, ‘I was just doing what I normally do’, ‘I am glad to have helped’ or he may just grunt and not give anything away, scheming that none of his actions prove with certainty that he collaborated or not. It appears that there is no definitive test for intention. It seems to boil down to a convincing match between exterior appearance and a trust in what an agent can only know privately. In the series ‘Objects for human use’ (Fig. 6) Marina Abramovic chose to use ‘spiritual’ materials in order to encourage participatory actions from her audience. In this work participants could press their bodies against blocks of crystal. It could be said that your actions in this work demonstrate the public and private nature of your intention. You could participate in the work and externally it may appear that you are having a special kind of experience. You could also declare that the work had a psychological affect but there is no certainty about the match between these two views of your participation.

Fig. 6

In her account of what is observable and what is private in an intentional act Anscombe stresses the external action rather than the internal mind. Could this characterisation coincide with a way of understanding the participatory action? An explicit and observable physical act is invited as part of the interpretation of participatory art. However this work also exhibits the problem that Anscombe points out, namely that there may not be an agreement between what you do and what someone else says you are doing. For example you could participate in ‘Untitled’, 1993 with the intention of stealing a poster, but anyone around you who knew about the conventions of the work would accept your action. So in

a sense your participatory action presents the ambiguity between your private intention and public appearance. It could be argued that the action that is invited in a participatory artwork isn't a straightforward external sign of an inner intention. The doing of the act places the participant on the threshold between a personal goal and a shared goal.

For Anscombe intention is publicly observable. It can also be asked to what extent participatory action should also be publicly declared. It seems to be true that in participating with an artwork you cannot have absolute authority in saying what you are doing. You haven't decided to act privately. You are following the conventions of the participatory artwork. The primary convention of this kind of artwork is that the artist gives you authority to act on the work. If an onlooker who was not aware of the conventions of a participatory artwork challenged you to explain what you were doing you would have to provide an appropriate answer. You may be with a friend who is unaware of the conventions of 'Untitled', 1993 who is aghast that you should take and begin to roll up a poster. You would have to adopt an external perspective to describe your actions. It could be said that a participatory artwork supports the view that a part of intention when challenged must be publicly declared. A participatory artwork diffuses the authority of the artist who produces the work by allowing participation but this does not mean that participants then adopt absolute authority about their own intentions. In this sense if someone attempted to set fire to Torres' pile of posters and claimed that this was a legitimate participation and not an act of vandalism, it could be said that this is not a participatory act but is instead an attempt to enforce a personal authoritative action on the participatory artwork. Just as the artist sacrifices his authority in a participatory artwork the authority of the participant is also diffused because participatory action can be *described by others* or may need to be *explained to others*. A student raises this point during the 'Renascent Scission' pilot study when he discusses the potential for, "sabotage" and, "destruction" in participatory art (Appendix II: Audio V).

When participation is considered along with Anscombe's argument in favour of the privacy of intention it may be that here the private interpretative element that accompanies any participatory action is being considered. It can be accepted that an individual's participation may be public but it must also be accepted that in discussing art there may be a contemplative aspect that perhaps can only be embodied in privacy. In Anscombe's example of the man pumping the poisoned water she talks about the ambiguity of his role. He may be indifferent to the poisoning, a collaborator in the poisoning or feigning neutrality about the poisoning. In a participatory artwork it could be said that a similar degree of ambiguity is present. An artist will often withhold a full

declaration of their intention in a work, not because they are trying to deceive anyone but because they are aware of their influential position in interpreting their work. He or she doesn't want to overemphasise a preferred meaning. It follows that in a participatory artwork participants would be encouraged by the artist to follow a similar approach. One needn't fully declare in what sense one's participations are to be taken. When one of the posters in 'Untitled', 1993 is taken there is no clear way of establishing if participants think of themselves as taking what they are entitled to, as stealing from Torres or conspiring with him. Participatory action is ambiguous because it has an aspect that is known only to the participant.

4.3.5 Causes, reasons and appropriate reasons

When I took a poster from 'Untitled', 1993 I worked out that this was an appropriate thing to do based on a vague memory I had of a description of the work, on my observation that there were multiple posters and also based on a measure of self-assurance. I was motivated by a number of factors and was not simply prompted to take part. I was not told to take a poster by an attendant and I did not read any instructions.

A feature that distinguishes intentional action is your response to the question 'Why?' if it is asked of your actions. For Anscombe a reply to this question can provide a reason for acting and in providing a reason you provide an intention. However the reply does not always lead to reason. Anscombe recognises that there are differing senses of reply to the question why; some providing reasons, some providing causes. While acknowledging that the two senses are not sharply defined, she points to instances when there is an extreme separation to clarify the difference. A 'cause' is a simple response to an event like being surprised by a car alarm as you walk down the street. This may give you a fright and you may collide with another pedestrian. The car alarm is not a reason for your action; it is a cause of your action. A 'reason' is a response, "surrounded with thoughts and questions" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 23). To have a reason your reply to the question 'why?' has a, "place among reasons" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 24). For example if the question is: 'Why did you take a poster?' the answer that is presented as part of a group of reasons may be: 'Because it was free.' Or, 'I liked the image'.

In her explanation of causes and reasons Anscombe reveals an important distinction to be made in an explanation of the participatory artwork. In what sense can it be said that a participant is caused to participate in a work and in what sense could it be said that a participant has a reason to participate in it? In Anscombe's terms if your action is caused

then it is a simple event. If you have a reason to act then there is a complex of thoughts and ideas. It could be said that an attempt to cause a participatory action may be too close to a command or instruction. On the other hand if reasons are provided for a participatory action then this may add to the works subtlety. It could also be suggested that the simplicity of being caused to act is necessary in order to provide a suitable degree of accessibility for the greatest amount of participants or it could be claimed that if too many reasons are sought for why you should participate then this inhibits the spontaneity of the participation. This perspective explains why it is so difficult to satisfactorily create a participatory artwork. An artist has to conciliate between an audience's ability to participate and its tolerance for demands that may be made on it. This issue is raised during the 'Renascent Scission' pilot study when the importance of the, "everyday" nature of a participatory action is discussed (Appendix II: Audio III). I would say that Torres' work succeeds because he chose the simple action of taking a poster that requires no skill, instruction or explanation. Christian Marclay involved an equally simple action when he produced 'Footsteps' (Fig. 7). In this work hundreds of vinyl recordings of tap dancing were placed on the floor of the gallery and visitors, simply by walking around the space, contributed to the work. Marclay then repackaged the scratched recordings and sold them as individual works.

Fig. 7

The correct senses of the responses that give reasons for intentional action can now be summarised. Appropriate responses may be a description of past history, an interpretation that provides the, "intention *with which*" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 25) and a declaration about the future. I could say that I took poster because it was free; I am taking a poster

now because I want to participate in a work by Torres and Wool or I plan to take poster because it will look good on my wall. You may know what you are doing and describe it as intentional but you have to be aware that you, the artist, attendants and other participants can all have different views of your actions. The artist may see you as an accomplice but you may feel like a consumer. Your intentional action is also 'in the open' and in this situation you give up the final authority you have to describe your actions. You cannot say that vandalising 'Untitled', 1993 is a valid participation because you are not the only person who has a say. Consideration has also been given to how answers that provide *causes* are sometimes not considered to be sufficient to suggest an action is intentional. If a loudspeaker or bright lights somehow triggered your participation then it may not be intentional. However you could take a poster without being fully aware of your actions. Your action may descend without warning.

This is the commonly reported reply to the question 'Why?' that occurs outside of the summary. This is the kind of reply where neither a cause nor reason is clearly revealed. Anscombe lists answers like: 'It was an impulse'. These kinds of answers allow you to speculate about involuntary behaviour and are sometimes adequate replies. Anscombe states that such replies could be explained as, "the answer is that there is no answer" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 26). She also describes odd replies like, 'I found myself doing it'. Again in such cases this can be fine but it can often just seem garbled. Anscombe accounts for these replies by describing a situation where there may be a permitted scope of replies. When you ask what your reasons were by asking 'Why?' you may limit the scope of the answers. 'I felt like it' may not be permitted. In this situation the scope of the answers you allow is restricts the scope of potential answers to the question 'Why?' Anscombe suggests that in order to explain an action as intentional you must have a fix on the scope of replies that are permitted. She describes replies to the question 'Why?' as being, "more extensive in range" (Anscombe, G.E.M. 1957: 28) therefore answers like 'I found myself doing it' generally fall outside of intentional action. Anscombe reflects on the consequences of allowing 'I just did it' into range. If such answers are legitimate then she can't find a clear way of distinguishing an intentional action from any other kind of action. All actions, voluntary or involuntary can potentially be relegated to this undifferentiated retort.

How does Anscombe's concern with prohibiting the acceptance of the 'non-answer' help in a description of the participatory artwork? She describes the need to regulate the scope of replies to the question 'Why?' when asked of an action. It could be said that this kind of control is acceptable in everyday situations. You want a comprehensible reason when someone explains his or her action. However it could be said that in the context of art and

the context of participatory artworks it has to be admitted that you would frequently get the 'non-answer' from a participant. It could be suggested that there has to be an extension to the scope of satisfactory responses when you are dealing with art. The 'non-answer' moves from the marginal position it occupies in daily life to become a more central reason. 'I felt like doing it' becomes legitimate in this context. I would say that an intuitive impetus to participate in 'Untitled', 1993 doesn't necessarily need to be plainly articulated. I would suggest that many participants probably participated in 'Untitled', 1993 without fully knowing why but where simply curious.

4.4 Action Theory

If it is accepted that your participation can often be explained as something you 'feel like' then it has to be acknowledged that an analytical philosophy of action can only offer a partial explanation of participatory action. However Donald Davidson claims that if rationality is given a chance it can help to convincingly describe instantaneous actions and more deliberate actions, (Davidson, D. 1978: 85). He accepts that every time you act you don't necessarily go through a demanding process of deliberation. He acknowledges that your acts often escape you 'straightaway', nonetheless he assumes that there is some kind of sequence that can explain these kinds of actions. Davidson's point is that a *rationalization* is valuable because, if it is called upon, it can be applied to any type of action.

4.4.1 Actions, Reasons and Causes

When I took part in 'Untitled', 1993, there was an element of spontaneity to my actions however I would not say that I simply took part because 'I felt like it'. I did have a straightforward desire to simply participate but there was also an incentive to participate in order to take possession of a poster. I would say that a diverse set of motives was at the starting point of my participatory action.

In Donald Davidson's analytical treatment of action he describes the link between a reason and an action. This is described as a *rationalization* which is composed of a, "pro-attitude" (desire or duty etc.) and a, "believing" (knowing or perceiving etc.), (Davidson, D. 1963: 3). For example you may act because you want to. In acting you may believe, judge or sense that what you are doing is what you want. For Davidson this forms the, "*primary reason*" for action (Davidson, D. 1963: 4). He also emphasises that an action is a physical event that

is given a fuller description when you give your reasons for acting. You may describe an action as 'I moved the books' or 'I *wanted* to move the books'. For Davidson the specific event of the movement of the books must happen for the first description to have any certainty. The event is fastened to the first description in a way that wanting is not. The second description gives additional information, a reason for the moving of the books. The wanting that occurred in the action could have been other attitudes like 'I *had* to …' or 'I *remembered* to …'. In this example it could be said that Davidson is underlining that the natural or causal relation in the event of action has a place alongside any rational explanation of an action. [4.]

When Davidson links causality to actions and reasons he points out that the 'pro-attitudes' and beliefs that make up the reasons for an action do not cause action in any coarse way. They are not best described as simple events. Instead he describes attitudes and beliefs as, "states, dispositions or conditions" (Davidson, D. 1963: 12) and he describes the way you become aware of your states. "States or dispositions are not events, but the onslaught of a state or disposition is" (Davidson, D. 1963: 12). The mental event that causes an action is not always a singular instant, "like a stab" (Davidson, D. 1963: 12). It is the change in conditions that you undergo. It is the coming into awareness. This *can* happen in an instant. Like the way you can suddenly realise you're late by looking at your watch. It can also happen in other ways and there are numerous metaphors that accompany such transitional states. "A wish *floods* into your mind" (Davidson, D. & Hornsby, J. 1997). An emotion can *reveal* itself, a thought can *dawn* on you or an idea can *spring* to mind. In this image of people taking posters from the Gonzalez-Torres work 'Untitled, (Republican Years)' (Fig. 8) it is clear that participation in this work is not as instant as glancing at your watch. It is an involved action that may involve a variety of immediate and more deliberate actions. One of the participants appears to building a paper boat with his poster.

Fig. 8

Before I took a poster from the pile that made up 'Untitled', 1993 there was a gradual realisation that this kind of action was permitted and after I carried out my action any doubts I had swiftly dissipated upon realising that I had done nothing wrong. The action itself surfaced from this complex or reasons like a sudden event. This seems to support the view that causality should be ruled out of explanations of action. It suggests that actions emerge from more complex patterns of reasoning. Davidson accepts that the mental event such as the spike of awareness you get when you look at your watch should not be upheld as the universal explanation of the way that action is caused. However this does not rule out causal explanations of action, he argues that a gradual coming to awareness of a mental state that is also associated with action can equally be explained causally.

Nonetheless Davidson stresses the difficulty in associating natural causal laws to your reasons for action. Causal laws can be confidently used to explain a solitary event so in this case the, "singular causal connection" is acceptable (Davidson, D. 1963: 16). However when it comes to reasons for action you have to deal with more of a narrative. Someone may respond to a situation in one way and another respond to the same situation in a different way, depending on their beliefs, attitudes, character, history etc. In Martí Quixé's participatory design work 'Do scratch' you are supplied with a light-box that has been painted black (Fig. 9). You are invited to scratch into the surface to 'complete' the object. In one sense you can predict that the nature of the work will probably cause its owner to act on the work in some way. They will probably scratch something onto it but in another sense you cannot easily predict what, why and how they may scratch onto it. These decisions involve a complex group of reasons.

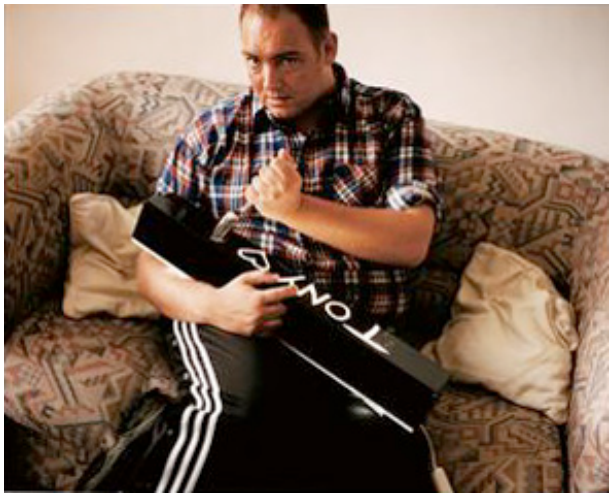

Fig. 9

So there does seem to be a mismatch between causal explanation and reason explanation. Overly rational explanations of action only deal with singular events of decision, as though there is no milieu of competing reasons out of which decisions are reached. In hindsight reasons for action become streamlined. The confusing influences that make up the process seem to fall away to reveal a core of rationality. "What emerges […] as *the* reason frequently was, to the agent at the time of action, one consideration among many, *a* reason" (Davidson, D. 1963: 16). Davidson holds that casual explanation has a place in his descriptions but also acknowledges that there are difficulties in the relationship between causal and rational explanations.

Davidson splits his description of the primary reasons for an action into a 'pro-attitude' and a 'believing'. If the participatory artwork is considered from this perspective then it could be asked what kind of primary reasons best describe participatory action in such works. While engaged in participation do participants *want* to take part, *feel obliged* to take part, *remember* to take part, have an *expectation* that they will take part or that they *must* take part? Do participants *know, believe, judge* or *perceive* that what they are doing is what they want or feel obliged to do? If 'Untitled', 1993 is considered from this perspective then it could be suggested that the 'pro-attitude' I experienced when I took a poster was primarily that I wanted to take a poster. There was an element of expectation in my action because I was unsure of its legitimacy but I did not feel obliged to act, that I was remembering to act or that I must act. If my action is considered from the perspective of belief then my action was not something that I knew about or perceived as something to do. I judged that I could take a poster if I wanted one.

Davidson suggests that in hindsight explanations of action are often oversimplified in order to bring them closer to a simple causal explanation. Could it be said that this account can also describe the way participatory action is oversimplified to a simple causal explanation. Following Davidson it is not so easy to view participatory actions as being simply caused. From this perspective if the range of causal conditions that generate action is recognised then it could be said that this enriches an explanation of participatory action. Participatory action can be explained as being caused by a broad spectrum of mental states ranging from sudden events of attentiveness to states that unfold little by little over an extended period.

In Anscombe's explanation of causes and reasons it was claimed that the simplicity of being caused to act by a single reason may be necessary in order to provide a suitable degree of accessibility for the greatest amount of participants although this could reduce the work to a series of instructions. It was also argued that if too many reasons are sought for why you should participate then this perhaps inhibits the spontaneity of the participation although a number of reasons to participate may add sensitivity to the work. It could also be claimed that the more a participatory work dictates only one possible reason for action the less participatory it may be. It could even be that a potential participant would tend to look more sceptically at the participatory claims of such an artwork.

It could be said that a stronger sense of participation surfaces when there is one reason for participatory action considered among many reasons because this more accurately resembles the variable ways that you ordinarily make decisions. It may lead to a participatory action that feels less contrived. I would say that this again highlights the fine balance required in order to successfully encourage participation. Torres presents a situation with a set of reasons for participation that allows for a free response in the midst of the 'narrative' of the situation. It is a manageable situation but not so regulated that you may feel coerced into action. You may take a poster on the basis of a group of reasons not because you are compelled by a single cause.

4.4.2 Agency

While I took a poster from 'Untitled', 1993, I did not have any special need to co-ordinate my actions. I took a poster, rolled it up and secured it with an elastic band. I did not stand at a distance from my actions and observe their causes and consequences. I was involved

in my participatory action in the way I am ordinarily involved in any action where it makes no sense to try to tease apart actions from their results.

Davidson uses agency to describe acts that you *do* rather as opposed to acts that you *undergo* or which *happen* to you. He wants to know about agency and causality and asks: "Can we then say that to be the author or agent of an event is to cause it?" (Davidson, D. 1971: 47).

In considering causality Davidson grants that *natural* or *event* causality is adequate for explaining most events with an agent. It can show how actions have consequences, how they expand into the world and how one natural event may cause another. However, it is unable to explain, "[…] the first attribute of agency on which the rest depend." (Davidson, D. 1971: 49). This first thing in agency is the basic movement of a limb. Davidson doubts that explanations of primitive actions occurring prior to a bodily movement should be included in an explanation of action. Things like muscle contractions and brain events, "Doing something that causes my finger to move does not cause me to move my finger; it *is* moving my finger" (Davidson, D. 1971: 50). He isn't denying that these things occur, but he is asserting that they can't be described as the most primitive actions. Following Anscombe, (§ 4.3.3) Davidson would say that: under one description you can be an agent and be unaware of the physiological constituents of an action; under another description you can know that messages are sent from the brain to the muscles.

Davidson extends causal explanations of agency further. If it is accepted that natural or event causality can only account for natural events in the world and it can't really help to understand primitive actions like bodily movements, he suggests that the term "*agent causality*" (Davidson, D. 1971: 52) is used to describe how bodily movements come about. [5.] Agent causality is a special kind of causing that is distinct from natural or event causality. He uses agent causality to avoid describing mental states like reason, belief and desire as physical events in the way that natural causality does.
Nonetheless natural or event causality retains its relevance when the *effects* of an action are taken into account. For Davidson agency is used to connect events that *are not* bodily movements with those that *are* bodily movements. You may cause your computer to shutdown by pressing the off button or you may cause it to shut down by accidentally dropping a book on the off button. There is the same outcome in each event but you are an agent in only the first example. Agency allows human action to be treated differently from ordinary events, but there is a point during agency where *event* causality takes over from *agent* causality. For Davidson it is an error to confuse actions with outcomes and this is

particularly clear in his example of closing a door. You cannot confuse moving the hand with what it causes – the movement of the door closing. The closing of the door and the *action* of closing the door are different: "Events that cover different stretches cannot be identical" (Davidson, D. 1971: 57). My action is raising my arm and pushing the door. The door swinging on its hinges and clicking shut is the closing of the door. I am being misled by depictions of action that treat consequences as the same event as the action. In this way Davidson maintains a clear picture of what events cover an action and what events cover its effect: "[…] our primitive actions, the ones we do not do by doing something else, mere movements of the body – these are all the actions there are. We never do more than move our bodies: the rest is up to nature." (Davidson, D. 1971: 59). In a work like Marijn van der Poll's 'Do Hit' chair this principle is especially clear (Fig. 10) Prior to any participatory action the work is a simple metal cube and only becomes a chair after a period of hammering by the owner. The agency of the owner's hammering leads to the event of the metal being shaped

Fig. 10

Davidson describes agency as what you *do* rather than something you *undergo*. He also suggests that an act of doing has two discrete components: an agent's actions and natural events. An agent's actions are explicable in terms of agent causality and the consequences are explicable in terms of event causality. This contributes to an explanation of participatory action because it underlines the plain sense in which you cause things to happen in a participatory artwork. However when discussing participation a new kind of overlapping region is often imagined where an agent's actions are somehow mixed up with another kind of action. When this region is described actions and their consequences tend to be grouped together under the banner 'participation' or 'interaction'. Davidson shows how to avoid unnecessarily complications by looking more closely at which

constituents are action and which are consequences. He helps to show the fulcrum on which a participatory event may balance, making a clear division at the point where an agent's action stops and natural causality takes over. There are a number of events that may have such proximity to the act of taking a poster that they somehow seem to be mixed in with it. If 'Untitled', 1993 is considered from the perspective of natural causality then these events can legitimately be excluded as part of participation. The pile of posters may become disordered as a result of people taking them; they may skid over the floor or you may get a paper cut while trying to roll up a poster. These events occur in the realm of natural causality and as such are a consequence of participatory action. When 'Untitled', 1993 is considered from the perspective of 'agent causality' I would say that it is operating under a description where it is inappropriate to consider the physiology of the situation. Nothing more primitive in the action such as muscle movement should be considered. In this sense the observable act of taking a poster from a pile is a demonstration of action as willing. There may be states of decision-making or speculation prior to taking a poster but following Davidson, 'agent causality' rather than acts of will explain the actual participatory action.

4.4.3 Free action

'Untitled', 1993 like all participatory artworks is exposed to an unstable situation. There may be participants who want to test the limits of what is an acceptable participation. Someone could attempt to take away more than one or two posters. In theory you could return to the gallery every day and take away as many posters as you could carry away knowing that the stack would always be renewed. In a sense this is part of the question that 'Untitled', 1993 asks. There are unspoken constraints in place in works like 'Untitled', 1993 but to what extent are they publicly negotiable and to what extent do such works offer genuinely free participation.

Davidson is interested in a causal analysis of the freedom to act. He investigates the extent to which your behaviour is caused by your surroundings or the extent to which your actions influence your surroundings. [6.] He disregards explanations of human action where belief and desire are portrayed as being absolutely governed by, "events outside the agent" (Davidson, D. 1973: 63). Instead he favours accounts that identify free action as a, "*causal power* of the actor" (Davidson, D. 1973: 63). Davidson suggests that there is neither an active nor passive sense in which you can describe your free actions. You may think that you instigate your own desires but there could be evidence to show that someone or something else has caused these desires. Equally events happen to you and determine

your actions but often it is valid to represent free action as an inner transformation that leads you to cause changes in the world.

Davidson remains doubtful about the possibility of achieving a clear causal law that could say what should be in place in order for an action to be described as intentional or free. He points to the idea that for something to be described as intentional there must be some kind of conformity between the practical reasoning behind it and the action. Davidson is responding here to cases of 'causal deviance' that create problems for causal explanations. An action is usually said to be deliberate because you formed a plan in your mind before carrying it out, but there are occasions when an unexpected sequence of events still provides you with the planned result. Following Mele (Mele, A.R. 1997: 7) 'I may try to shoot you and miss, but the shot stampedes a herd of cattle and they trample you to death'. This kind of 'causal deviance' raises problems concerning *intentional* action and leads to a consideration of whether your death can be described as an intentional action. In terms of causality Davidson says the link between the reason and the act, "[…] must follow the right sort of route" (Davidson, D. 1973: 78. This kind of example shows the multiplicity of potential causes that may link a reason with an action. The effect may be what is wanted but this is achievable in more than one way. Thomas Hirschorn's work 'Altar to Raymond Carver' demonstrates the kinds of deviance that can appear in participatory art (Fig. 11). Hirschorn has produced numerous public alter-pieces and likens then to the shrines that often spontaneously appear at the sites of fatal car accidents or crime scenes. In this work he installed photographs, mementoes and texts associated with Raymond Carver in a site in Glasgow's Gorbals area. Typically Hirshhorn finds that his work is respected and sometimes people may add their own token of respect. On this occasion he found that residents began to steal elements of the work and was obliged to adapt to this situation.

Fig. 11

In using the phrase 'causal power of the actor' Davidson emphasises the freedom of individuals in choosing their own actions rather than more deterministic accounts of freedom. This contributes to an explanation of participatory action because in being invited to participate in an artwork, to an extent, you relinquish your own freewill. You are free to choose to participate, but to an extent the range of the participation is limited and only has legitimacy under the auspices of the artwork. From this perspective it could be said that the controlled participation that is invited by 'Untitled', 1993 reveals the contingency of freewill. It could be said that 'Untitled', 1993 does not present unconditional freedom but demonstrates a viable freedom within prevailing conditions. 'Untitled', 1993 demonstrates that a participant is both *compelled to act* and *free to act* in conditions that are not within their control; an individual acts on the ratio between the phrases: 'events happen to you' and 'you cause changes'. For example you may attempt to write or draw on a poster by Torres and return this to the pile of posters. Similar incidents have been reported to happen in other examples of Torres' work and members of the gallery staff have not permitted these actions. From this perspective Torres permits a degree of freedom but also insists on a level of control.

When Davidson describes the 'right route' in explaining an intentional action he draws attention to how a desirable outcome is achievable in more than one way. If this condition is applied in an explanation of participatory action then a counter argument is presented that suggests that participatory action should be as free as possible. If it is accepted that artists are often unwilling to control the range of interpretations that their work may produce, then it could be said that they may be equally unwilling to strictly control any approaches to participation in with their work. In this sense it could be said that an artist would have to accept that participation might not follow the 'right route'. It is easy to imagine participation occurring in divergent ways, so in making a participatory artwork no artist can absolutely prescribe how participation comes about. In this way it could be said that a participatory artwork should have an inbuilt flexibility and openness in order to accomodate a broad range of potential approaches to participation. From this perspective 'Untitled', 1993 avoids being overtly prescriptive. Gonzalez-Torres does not instruct or announce warnings to participants. The work presents a tolerably free exchange for participants to the extent that he is confident that audience response will follow the general 'right route' to participation.

4.5 Conclusions

The aim of this chapter has been to understand participatory action from an analytical perspective. When participatory action is understood from this point of view it is recognised that a categorisation and explanation of action is required and it is assumed that a participatory action involves reason and intention. The main question of this chapter was: Can participatory action be rationally explained? I suggest that participatory action can be rationally explained. However it should be recognised that rationality should not be applied to rigidly explain participatory action as a deliberate process or physical event. Rather it should be employed to ensure that participatory action is explained in terms of the reasonableness of communication.

When an analytical perspective is taken on participatory action then an appropriate measure of thoroughness has to be considered. How rational can accounts of participatory art be? I suggest that participatory action can be generally categorised as a central case of agency. Participatory action is something you do because your senses draw you towards it or because you have thought about it. It can also be adequately summed up by a 'coarse-grained' description. Therefore a finely detailed psychological or physical representation of participatory action is not required. However it is suggested that a measure of precision is used to differentiate between actions. In this way the temporal and spatial particularity of each person's participation is preserved.
An analytical explanation takes into account how language is used to describe action and criticises explanations of action that overlook the role of language. A naturalistic or volitional description where the series - neural activity or act of will/muscle movement/action is used to explain action is considered to be inappropriate. Consequently it is unsuitable to think that some kind of primitive occurrence sparks off a sequence that leads to the final physical event each time participatory action takes place. Rather participatory action arises in artworks that are described and discussed. Participants, onlookers and artists offer questions and descriptions about their participatory actions. In the context of communication participatory action operates on a threshold where the private authority of the artist and participant is surrendered. You privately know in what sense you participate but you must also openly explain yourself if asked. It is suggested that participatory action may also occur in different ways. Participation may be 'triggered' in a direct way but this can feel too much like coercion. Instead I would say that participation is most successful when you feel like you are freely taking part or when you feel like you don't have to explain why you took part.

It is additionally suggested that analytical explanations of action theory offer the possibility of a participatory action theory. In line with Davidson's action theory I would say that the explanation of participatory action as being caused by a 'pro-attitude' and a 'believing' is appropriate. In correspondence with this action theory I would say that participatory action may arise from complex combinations of possible motives and can be caused by a sudden awareness or the gradual realisation of the possibility of action. I would also say that it is useful to demarcate where participatory action is set apart from its consequences rather than describe participation as an indistinct zone where events blend into one another. An agent's participatory actions are separate from the events they cause. Finally I would say that a participant's right to test the limits of a participatory artwork should always be taken into account. In an artwork you may not have unhindered freedom to participate in any way you feel but it should present a satisfactorily open situation that accommodates rather than regulates participatory action.

Notes.

[1.] This means that they can be more or less explained from the viewpoint of the natural sciences in terms of the biology or chemistry of the brain. This neural activity is then able to cause an appropriate nerve firing that causes an appropriate muscle movement that causes an appropriate action. In these kinds of causal explanations of action it is suggested that the discussion is once more breaking away from how action is ordinarily considered. Actions are usually thought of as involving some kind of observable bodily movement but the causal explanation seems to be diverting attention to other kinds of issues. A 'chain' of spatially extended movement inside the body is now being considered. Where is the event of action located now? At muscle movement or the firing of nerve ends? In a description of an arm movement George Wilson summarises the situation, "Some philosophers have favoured the overt arm movement the agent performs, some favour the extended causal process he initiates and some prefer the relevant event of trying that precedes and 'generates' the rest." (Wilson, G. 2002: 5). The bodily movement, the intermediate causal chain of nerve firings and the early brain activity of 'trying' in the action of moving an arm can be causally explained as physical events. However when the natural sciences are entirely relied on to explain actions it can be argued that the natural scientist is turning his or her back on the person who may be experiencing all this brain activity, firing of nerves and bodily movement. There is a sense in which an analysis of the physical events that constitute an action is being focused on too closely at the expense of the human subject who may be directly experiencing these actions. How does the inner self who is generating the reason for the action fit into this explanation?

[2.] He compares this detached sense of action with an imaginary situation. He conceives of a drawing machine that you control by a series of levers. You may sit behind the machine and pull its levers and these cause a pencil to move across the paper. He asks whether this is perhaps an appropriate metaphor for describing your actions. Do you sit behind your actions in this way and decide which levers to pull in order to bring about the desired effect? Wittgenstein argues that the drawing machine metaphor is false and suggests that the conception of a will that operates separately from an action is also false. If it is accepted that actions do function like the drawing machine then it has to be accepted that behind the drawing machine choices have to be made, "there is such a thing as deciding which one we were going to pull before pulling it" (Wittgenstein, L. 1958: 153).

[3.] If it starts raining and you start to go upstairs. Someone may ask 'Why are you going upstairs?' You may reply, 'It's raining'. You may be the only one who knows about the open skylight upstairs that will let in the rain. There are unexplained gaps in this reply because the other doesn't know about the open skylight.

[4.] Davidson defends the usefulness of including causal relations in explanations of action. He focuses on the use of the word 'because' when it is used to explain a reason for an action. It is the bond between reason and action. In a similar way to Anscombe he describes the way you use reason to explain your actions as something more diffuse than the way you use causality to explain events. Reason offers a, "pattern of justification" (Davidson, D. 1963: 9) whereas causality gives a harsh 'cause and effect'. In giving the reasons for actions you re-describe events and include other factors like beliefs, history, social situations etc. However Davidson is not so willing to surrender the clarity of cause and effect to a vague configuration with an uncertain outline. A main argument against the causal explanation claims that if causality is used to explain action then attention has to be paid to the rule of cause and effect and this means that there should be a clear cut distinction between cause and effect, "Causation: The relationship between two events or states of affairs such as the first brings about the second" (Flew, A. 1984: 58). This means that if a reason is described as the cause of an action then the reason must be separate from the action. It can be argued that a re-description of an action is not a separation of reason from action. In explanations of action a link is usually made between reasons for doing an action and the action itself so the distinction is not so evident. In this way it can be argued that a reason is not a cause. Nevertheless if it is accepted that in a re-description of action, a reason becomes mixed up with the action in some uncertain manner and in unscrambling this relation a pattern is produced that is different from cause and effect then Davidson declares, "that pattern must be identified" (Davidson, D. 1963: 10). If a reason does not cause an action he wants to know in what other manner are reason and action related. Davidson questions the use of terms like 'pattern' and suggests that cause and effect remains the most convincing explanation there is so far of the connection between reason and action.

[5.] In this sense he is able to say that there are two ways of describing how a primitive act like lifting a cup comes about. Lifting a cup can be described as being made up of two events or as being made up of just one event. If lifting the cup is described as being made up of two events then you are saying that the action is preceded by an act of will. This act of will is either a physical event that is a more basic action or it is a mental event that is not an action but nevertheless generates the action. If there is only one event then you are suggesting that the action is not the effect of a preceding cause. The action *is* the willing. There is no episode that causes the primitive act. Agency and action are the same. Describing an action in terms of a single event is what Davidson means by 'agent causality'. 'Agent causality' is not a form of causality that finally reveals agency to be a sequence of events: "no expansion into a tale of two events is possible, and no law lurks" (Davidson, D. 1971: 53). This is Davidson's way of answering an argument against the causal explanation of action. This is outlined by Mele in the following way: "Causal explanations are lawlike; reasons-explanations are not; so reasons-explanations are not causal explanations, and when we explain actions in terms of reasons we are not explaining them in terms of causes." (Mele, A.R. 1997: 4). The gist of this argument is that actions are linked to psychological states like reason, belief and desire and these states cannot be reduced, as they are in causal explanations, to a series of physical events.

[6.] Davidson is responding here to the argument described by Mele, (Mele, A.R. 1997: 14). Mele claims that a causal explanation of action contradicts a widely held view of freewill. If you describe your actions as being caused by reasons then there is sense in which it appears that as a free individual you seem to be determined by reasons. There seems to be

some state of affairs that is simply part of you or some state of affairs outside of you that causes you to act. So it seems that you are not an individual engaged in fully realised free action.