

## Where can work play?

A work is an object overflowing its frame. Work is an event in which the human participates; the human is an organism that works. A work works when it becomes an event of work. A work works when it becomes human. This becoming occurs when we realise it. Specifically, it occurs when we realise it *where* it occurs. It occurs inside. We do not need to find a way into a work, since the work is already inside. Instead we realise a work and its harmony with our point of view. Then it and we begin to work, and the play of work begins.

*Matthew Goulish, 39 Microlectures*

It is August 2006 and I have been invited to Braziers International Artists Workshop as a Visitor. The undertones the word has of alien landings, of the quiet and frightened voices of cinematic villagers anxious not to offend a being of uncertain power, makes me smile at its inappropriateness. I have heard of Braziers from artist friends who have taken part in the workshop, and through my bill-paying job as an artist career advisor in London. Still, I try to have no expectations. I resist the urge to check out its Strawberry Gothic spires on Wikipedia or read about the community permanently resident there and their social experiment in communal living, trying instead for an experience unmediated by anything but my own experience. I seek freshness in a world of neon-packed salad. But this isn't an essay about me.

Walking around the various outbuildings temporarily converted into artist studios for the sixteen days of the workshop, something happens; or rather, I realise that something has happened before I arrived, probably very soon after the workshop began. Despite all my careful attempts to shield myself from expectation, I still knew what Braziers was supposed to do – provide free space and time for visual artists of all disciplines to work uninterrupted on their practice. But somewhere in the week or so before my Visit, the accepted notion of practice had been upset, evolved, changed. Although what I see looks like a collection of artists working in their studios, the description is too simple for the texture of the experience I encounter. I can see people talking to one another and sharing ideas, sitting, joking, laughing, thinking. I can talk to people in a way I'm quite unused to in London, sociable and rigorous, friendly and inquisitive, open and critical. Most sentences I hear begin, 'I don't really know what it will do...' or 'I've been thinking about this for ages...' I get access to work in progress with an excitement I've only felt in myself when developing work, without the foot-shuffling uncertainty prevalent amongst artists while work is happening.

Braziers, if it is anything at all, is a meta-frame for practice. It works above and around the work that takes place. It holds together the disparate practices of its resident artists, encouraging sociability into a usually solitary activity and a generosity rare in the visual arts that I know and work within. If an artist works on their work, Braziers works on the artist. Indeed, its only emphasis is work, if work can be thought of in opposition to a concept of theory prevalent in the visual arts as an activity of explanation and mechanism of safety, creating a place for artwork to lie in aspic, shorn of its powers to disturb and question. The work Braziers encourages, *demands*, is the kind of work all people excel at but have precious little time to take part in – play. By working at play, artists at Braziers extend thoughts in directions they did not know interested them. While work is best done alone, seriously applying oneself to one's solitary task, play is much more fun – and much more use – when done with other people. I had found a space where the real *work* of art could take place: a space for play and development where the obvious questions surrounding one's practice could be laid aside, still urgent but suspended while other enquiries, usually kept in the shade, can come out into the Oxfordshire sunshine. A time to refocus and remember the other parts of one's practice that are important, that while you can be an artist you must be a person as well.

So what, then, is Braziers? It is not an 'it', not a solid thing that I can touch or even describe. Braziers is a proposition. An invitation. An invitation for a group of artists to be more than the sum of their parts while remaining parts. To let your work spill out of its containment area; the objects you create may seem alien, like Visitors. To allow your practice to rub against the practice of other, twining around while remaining separable from the practices of artists you have not yet met, to play with concepts not your own but without the anxiety of losing your identity. Work at Braziers happens before theory, an opportunity to work at the coalface of artistic practice, an invitation to make something happen. This is a demand you have been waiting to be made of you, one that you need. My Visit made me think about my own artistic practice. Since I graduated in 1998 in sculpture I have not made any physical objects but still practice as an artist, working on event-objects involving the creative and spontaneous dialogue of invited guests, peers, friends, people I don't know, in parks, houses, lectures. Many artists I meet do not consider my practice to be that of an artist, but at Braziers there is the space to work without theory, without the urge to kill potentially embarrassing ideas before they have a chance to develop, without the need to have answers to questions you're still formulating.

It will soon be August 2007 and I have been invited to Braziers International Artists Workshop as a Resident. I still don't know what to expect, but how could I play if I did?