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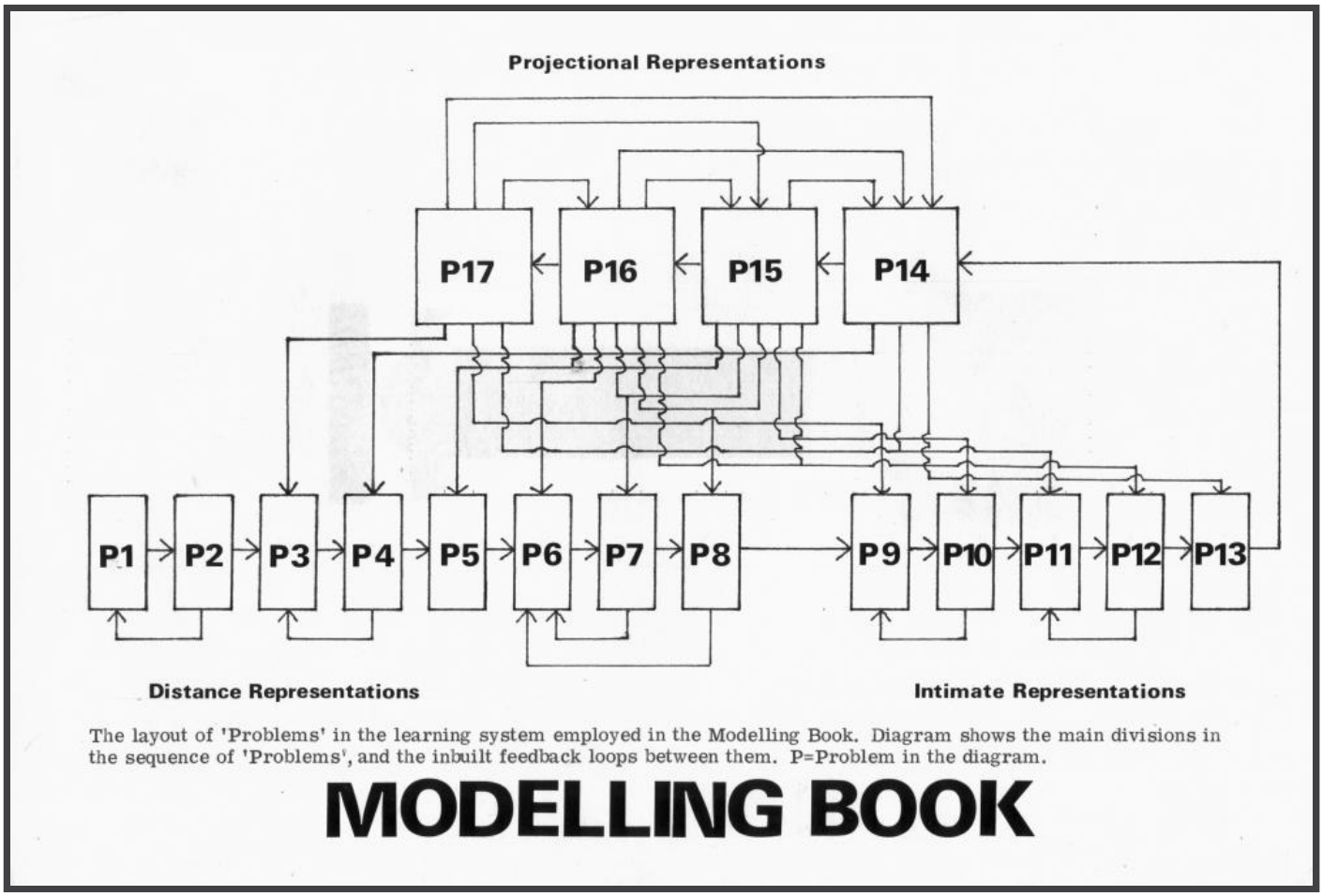
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The Book as Interactive Tool

Modelling Book

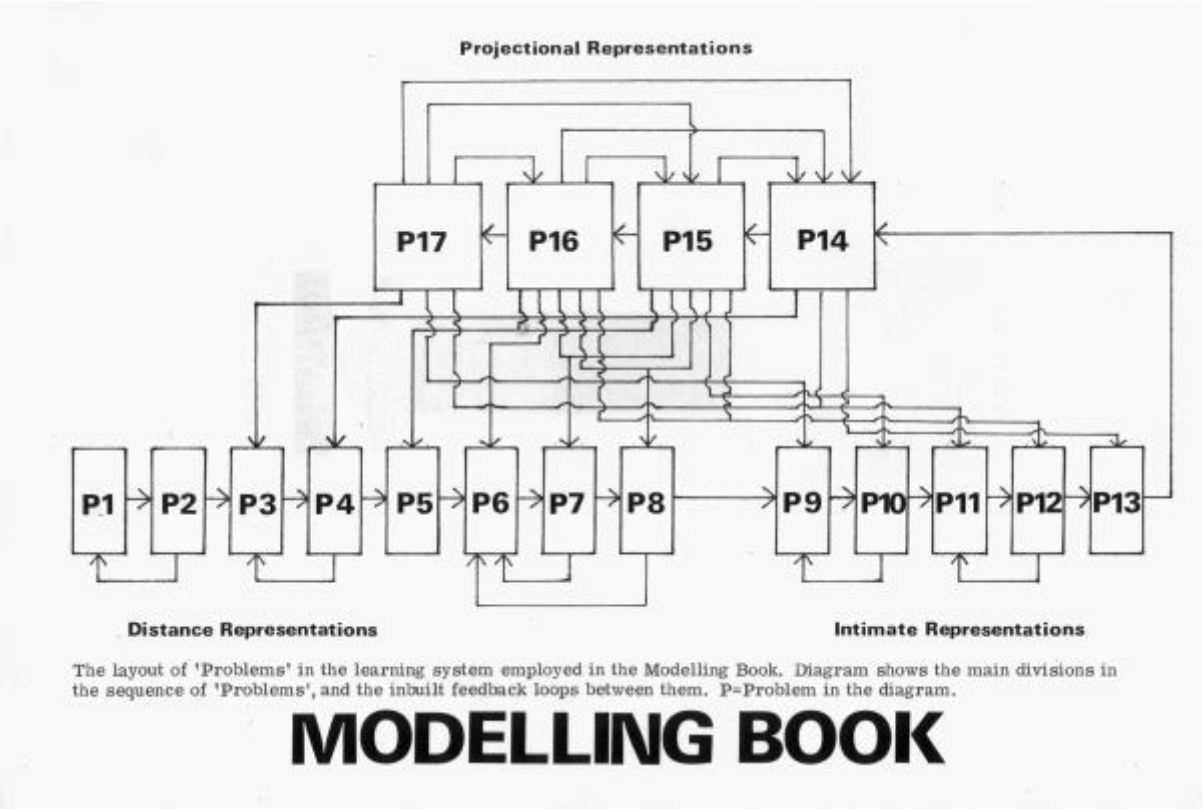
Stephen Willats

Stephen Willats uses books as tools to engage with people, and to create social spaces for relation and interaction in neighborhoods, museums, and bookshops. This republished essay from 1975 gains currency in the context of current discussions on audience and outlines an interactive approach that avoids the demand or authoritarian imperative to respond and redefines the artwork as a network of relationships between artists, audiences and society, framed by participatory action.



The layout of 'Problems' in the learning system employed in the Modelling Book. Diagram shows the main divisions in the sequence of 'Problems', and the inbuilt feedback loops between them. P=Problem in the diagram.

MODELLING BOOK



Stephen Willats, *Modelling Book*, 1975

The relativistic nature of people's cognition is an important methodological problem in art practice, for it brings to the forefront questions concerning the universality of what is held by both the artist and his audience as meaningful or purposeful. The *Modelling Book* has been conceived as the central part of a work that forwards through exemplification the notion of context dependency in the formation of people's implicitly held mental representations. The work forwards this notion within an area of attention that is particularly pertinent to the artist in his formation of intention, and selection of strategies etc, and this concerns the models [1] [/b-n-l/book-as-interactive-tool/pdf#e1] held by people from different social backgrounds of the criteria under which he functions. The work makes the point that the criteria is not only pluralistic, in that there are many models of art operating concurrently in a form of co-existance, but that they are dependent on a contained social, physical context, bound by their own frame work of conventions and rules. The work externalises into explicit models, people's implicitly held mental representations of the criteria, conventions etc, of different art frame works, so that they can be reevaluated by themselves in order to construct their own prescriptive criteria. These models can then be compared and reassessed against those of other people. The area of attention of the work is seen as appropriate to the context within which the book has been specifically designed to function, ie the exhibition of artists' books. Within the context of the exhibition the book also has the function of demonstrating the use of a book as a means of presenting an audience with task orientated methods.[2] [/b-n-l/book-as-interactive-tool/pdf#e2]

Fundamental to the employment of task orientated methodologies in art practice is the completion of tasks by an audience. These methods are used in the *Modelling Book* to relate the concerns of the work to a context that is already seen as meaningful by the audience. This context is specified as the existing frame of reference of the audience. The tasks provide tools for the user of the book to contextualise into their frame of reference the notions forwarded. The tasks presented in the work consist of a sequence of interrelated problems which the audience completes by formulating appropriate solutions. Each problem is directed towards involving a person in a particular aspect of the concerns of the work, but there is no

predetermined correct solution. A person can formulate one in what ever way he or she finds meaningful to themselves.[3] [/b-n-l/book-as-interactive-tool/pdf#e3] While the work points to an area of attention as a prescriptive state, it does not legislate to the audience a value structure etc, to embody it within, but through a process of involving them in its various component parts, enables them to establish its relationship with their own beliefs.



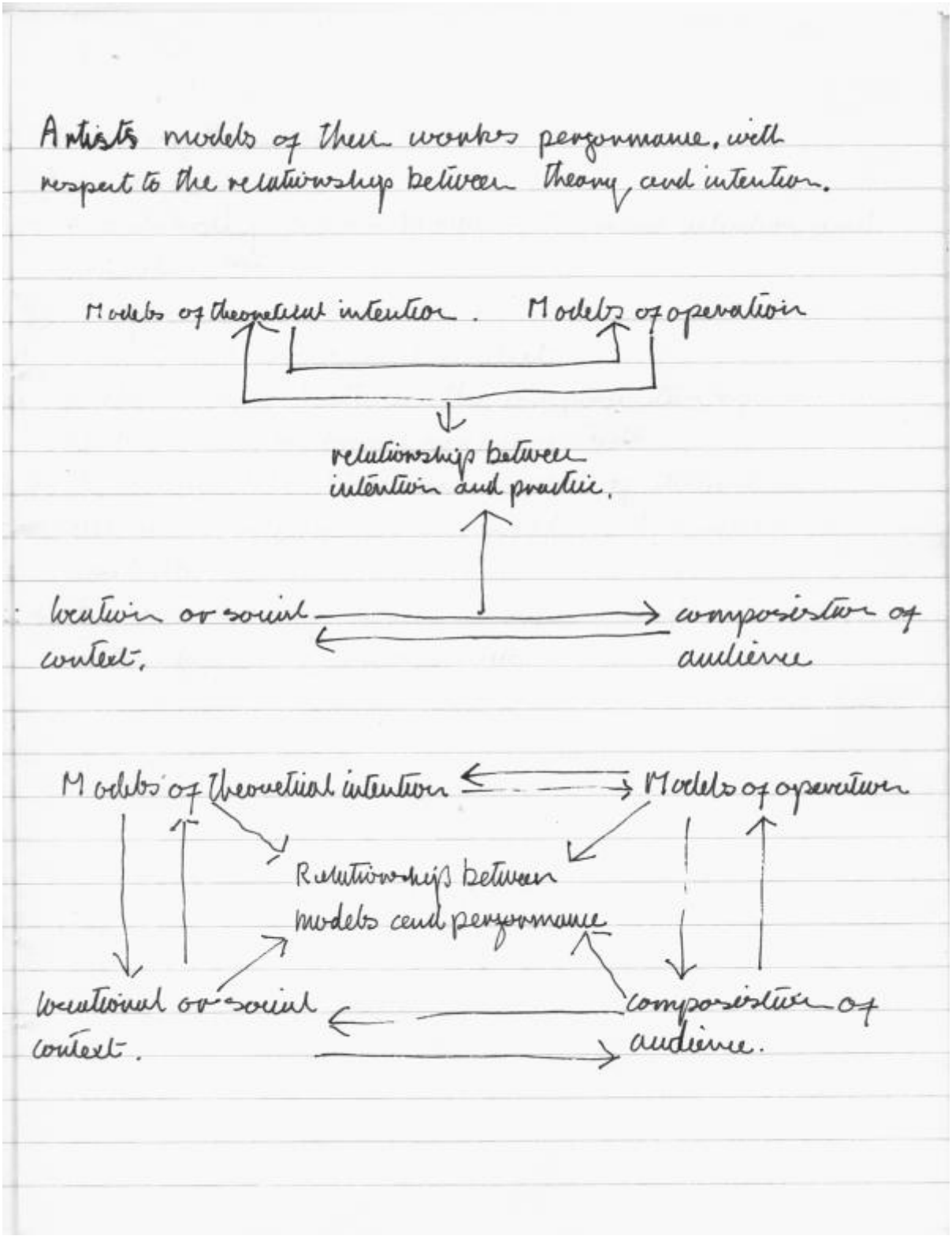
Problems used in the Modelling Book.

Problem One.	Which of the people reproduced in the boxes A, B, C, D, E, above do you consider to represent a typical artist.
Problem Two.	Describe a typical day in the life of the artist you have chosen in answer to Problem One.
Problem Three.	Describe/Draw/Make a plan of an art work that you consider your selected artist would produce.
Problem Four.	What reasons or motives do you think the artist you selected had for producing the work you have outlined in answer to Problem Three.
Problem Five.	How do you think people in general value the social role of the artist you have selected and described.
Problem Six.	Each of the situations depicted in boxes A, B, C, and D, represents a context in which you would encounter a work by an artist. Describe a typical encounter with one of the works shown.
Problem Seven.	Describe what you consider your role to be as an audience in the situations A, B, C, and D, shown in Problem Six.
Problem Eight.	Describe a typical audience for two of the situations A, B, C, D, depicted in Problem Six, and their differences in attitude towards the work shown.
Problem Nine.	In the file marked A there are four works forwarded by different artists, describe your reaction to one of them.
Problem Ten.	What do you consider is the value of the work you have selected as your answer to Problem Nine to other people.
Problem Eleven	In the file marked B there is four statements of theoretical intention by artists for their art works. Describe what kind of art activity you think would be a product of one of these statements.
Problem Twelve.	What do you consider would be the probable social role of the activity you have described in response to Problem Eleven.
Problem Thirteen.	In a file marked C there are four works by different artists, select two of these and describe what you consider were the artists intentions in forwarding them.
Problem Fourteen.	Taking your responses to Problem 4, 11, 13 into account, describe what you ideally would like to see as the intentions and concerns of artists.
Problem Fifteen.	Taking your responses to Problems 5, 7, 8, 10, and 12 into account, describe the composition of the audience that you consider your answer to Problem 14 would ideally be concerned with.
Problem Sixteen.	Taking your responses to Problems 5, 6, 7, 8, and 12 into account, describe/draw/make a plan of the social, physical location in which you would like to see an art work functioning that was a product of your answers to Problems 14, and 15.
Problem Seventeen.	Taking your responses to Problems 3, 9, and 11 into account, describe/draw/make a plan of the ideal art work that was a product of your answers to Problems 14, 15, and 16.

Stephen Willats, *Modelling Book*, 1975

The problems are framed in the form of questions which are structured into a sequence so as to involve the audience in different aspects of the prescriptive state forwarded in the work. A question format is used purposefully to facilitate the explicit externalisation of the user of the book's implicitly held internal representations, when they formulate a solution as a reply. Donald Mc Kay's essay «What makes a question». [4] [/b-n-l/book-as-interactive-tool/pdf#e4] is a useful explanation of the function of a question as a tool between persons for externalising mental representations. Mc Kay points out that in asking a question a person is expressing a state of uncertainty or a state of unreadiness to interact purposefully with the world around him, and more specifically with the person the question is directed towards. In other words the person has an incomplete picture of the world, the question being directed at its area of incompleteness. In answering a question a person is attempting to complete the asker's picture of the aspect of the world it is directed at, which requires him to order his internal representations into a form that can be externalised and conveyed to the other person as «information». Failure to direct the answer towards the area of incompleteness in the asker's picture, will initiate further questions and answers until the picture is adequately completed. Thus questions and answers develop into a sequence which functions as an interactive feedback mechanism with the ideal objective of both parties obtaining the same picture, ie the transportation of one person's model to the other. In this sense the area of attention of the work is used to present and focus in on an incomplete picture, the problems being designed as an interactive sequence which enables a person to gradually complete different parts of it. The essential feature of this process is that in formulating models the user of the book is refering to their own internalised cognitive orderings etc, which in their externalised explicit form they can articulate, re-examine, reorder and combine to construct their own prescriptive criteria. Each problem is intended to elicit an individual model as a solution, which can then act as an analogy for later problems in the sequence. As such the work functions as a learning system; the process of using already formulated models in the construction of new ones is achieved through discriminative generalisation. Fred Keller in his book on reinforcement theory in learning,[5] [/b-n-l/book-as-interactive-tool/pdf#e5] outlines «Discriminative generalization» as occurring when the connections between stimuli and responses that have come about by way of generalisation are broken down. The breaking down of a model into parts that can be used as rules of thumb in the construction of new ones is essentially a heuristic process, and it is as such that the work is intended to operate as a learning system.

The problems in this learning system are structured so that the user of the book externalises their representations into three classes of models. These are as follows: 1) Descriptive Models; The objective of the is class of model is to produce a representation that states the existing behaviour of things. 2) Predictive Models; The objective of this class of model is to produce a representation that states the probable behaviour of things. 3) Prescriptive Models; The objective of this class of model is to produce a representation that states the possible behaviour of things.



Stephen Willats, *Artistis Models*, 1975

The learning system has been divided into three sections, each of which involves the user of the book in one or more of the three classes of models. The first section is directed at the user's existing implicitly held distance representations of the artist, and the rules, conventions under which he functions. The second deals with intimate representations, in the sense that it concerns the users cognitive orderings of actual examples of works forwarded by artists. In the final section problems are directed towards projectional representations, the users constructing their own desirable functional criteria for the artist. The final sequence of problems are laid out so that the user in speculating a desirable criteria constructs what

amounts to an Optimum Model of an art work that takes into consideration three variables. These are: - 1) The intention of the artist. 2) The composition of the artists audience. 3) The social, physical context within which the artist proposes to function. It is as an Optimum Model that this work is seen as operating, being a product of considering the three variables I have just outlined, and as such its methodologies have been conceived with the problem of relativism in mind.

The book functions in conjunction with a Monitor Board that has displayed on it a copy of all the entries people have made in their *Modelling Books*. A copy of an entry in the *Modelling Book* is obtained by each page being reproduced in duplicate. A sheet of carbon paper is supplied with the book to insert between the duplicate pages so that a carbon copy of an entry is produced. After completing the book, the user takes the top copies of their entries out and deposits them in a collecting box. They are then gathered together and displayed on the Monitor Board. The user retains his or her completed copy of the *Modelling Book*, and can then use it to make comparisons between the displayed models by other people on the Monitor Board with those of their own. It is intended that as a result of making comparisons between people's models from the *Modelling Book* a person will reassess those models of their own and illustrate to themselves the nature of relativism in art practice.

[1] [/b-n-l/book-as-interactive-tool/pdf#et1] «The construction of models is central to mans ability to form coherent internal representations of his external world. Indeed model construction can be considered an essential feature of any complex selforganising system's ability to predict its environment, which it is held forms an important part of its search for actions in the form of appropriate behaviours that will ensure its survival. The use of the word ‹model› here concerns the internal ordering by an organisation of coded representations of an external state, which if it is to be of use to the builder functions as an optimum transfer into a state of knowledge of the original.» Taken from «The Externalisation of Models in Art Practice.» by S Willats, Control Magazine No 8.

[2] [/b-n-l/book-as-interactive-tool/pdf#et2] The usage of a book format to contain problems in the manner of the *Modelling Book* was originally conceived in order to overcome a number of methodological issues (including those of relativism) in a number of projects that I instigated. The work that I have developed for this artists' books exhibition is seen as a demonstration of the methodologies used in these projects, which attempted to externalise the implications of an intentional prescriptive model from that of an art bound frame work. It was thought that this would be more meaningful than just talking about the projects. These works were located outside traditional art institutions, being directed at an audience that held art as low on their list of priorities. As a result the projects were designed to operate within the audiences' existing behaviour routines within their residential neighbourhoods. The works consisted of a learning system used to forward a prescriptive model of a life code, which the audience could contextualise through the employment of interactive methodologies. One of these works *The West London Social Resource Project* used two interrelated books; the *West London Manual*, and the *West London Re-Modelling Book*. These two books were used by participants in the project to externalise into models their implicitly held internal representations of their neighbourhood social environment. The *West London Manual* was used to construct descriptive models of their social environment, and the *Re-Modelling Book*

prescriptive models. Monitor Boards which displayed on them participants models, and which were located in the areas in West London where the project took place, enabled people to relate their own models with those of other people. In the case of the models resulting from the *Re-Modelling Book*, participants could vote on their preferences, which then formed a final series of consensus models reproduced in a book. Another work derived from the *West London Social Resource Project*, called the *Edinburgh Social Model Construction Project* concerned interpersonal behaviour conventions between people resident in four communities in Edinburgh. The project forwarded a prescriptive model of interpersonal behaviour conventions based on a homeostat, which participants could contextualise through using it as an analogy in the formulation of solutions to problems. The area of attention of problems within these works was directed towards the social environment of which a participant was a member. A typical problem from the *West London Manual* involved the participant's perception of a photograph of a front gate, the object in question being one in his street with which he was already familar. In the *Edinburgh Project* one of the problems involved a social event at a local sports club which participants, if they were not actually members, would know some one personally who was. The use of interactive task methodologies in these two works, in which the construction of models had a central role, enabled sustained and high levels of involved participation to be obtained from people that had little prior knowledge, or interest in art.

Further information on these projects can be obtained from reference to the following texts:

«Social Resource Project for Tennis Clubs.» Jan 1972. «The Artist as an Instigator of Changes in Social Cognition and Behaviour.» S Willats. Gallery House Press. 1973.
«The West London Social Resource Project.» 1972-73. «The Artist as an Instigator of Changes in Social Cognition and Behaviour.» S Willats. Gallery House Press. 1973.
«Art and Social Function:- Prescriptions.» S Willats. June issue of Art and Artists. 1973.
«The West London Social Resource Project.» S Willats. Jan issue of Studio International. 1973.
«Prescriptions for Task Orientated Methodologies in Constructing Operational Models of Art Practice.» S Willats. Control Magazine No 7.
«The Edinburgh Social Model Construction Project.» Aug 1973. «The Edinburgh Project.» S Willats. January issue of Art and Artists. 1974.
«The Externalisation of Models in Art Practice.» S Willats. Control Magazine No 8.

[3] [/b-n-l/book-as-interactive-tool/pdf#et3] The works methodologies in many ways differ from traditional features in art practice, which might be considered to function as follows:- While recognising the pluralistic nature of art practice a fundamental feature of it has been the embodiment of the artist's intention in an art work that has acted as an intimidatory between his mental representations, some act of cognition, and its subsequent comprehension by an audience. This process has functioned by the artist externalising his internal representations into a coded model in the form of what has come to be called an art work. The audience, in the process of de-coding it, re-order their own internal representations to ideally correspond with the artist's. As a means of communicating intention, which does not mean that a person receives data but understands it as information, the process just described suffers from inherent problems of relativism, which limits access to the artists concerns, to an audience of restricted composition. Two basic observations can be made from which others, concerning social, behavioural context dependency are related to, if not derived: 1) The acts of cognition from which models derive, as far as the audience is concerned, deal with referential experience, which if they are able to attach the same meaning, significance to as the artist, require access into his frame of reference, or that the same acts of cognition are common to both parties. 2) It is incumbent on the audience to have acquired prior knowledge of the language used to code an intentional model in order that it can be de-coded. Taken from

«The Externalisation of Models in Art Practice.» S Willats. Control Magazine No 8.

[4] [/b-n-l/book-as-interactive-tool/pdf#et4] «Information, Mechanism and Meaning.» Donald M MacKay. The M.I.T Press. June 1972.

[5] [/b-n-l/book-as-interactive-tool/pdf#et5] «Learning: reinforcement theory.» Fred S Keller. A Random House Study in Psychology PP13. 1969.

STEPHEN WILLATS

From the early 1960s until today, Stephen Willats has situated his pioneering practice at the intersection between art and other disciplines such as cybernetics, advertising systems research, learning theory, communications theory and computer technology. In so doing, he has constructed and developed a collaborative, interactive and participatory practice grounded in the variables of social relationships, settings and physical realities.