

## **Exchange Values Six Years On**

### ***Shelley Sacks - August 2002***

When I began working on this project in 1992 I had no idea that it would inspire and engage so many people from so many different constituencies and disciplines. The Earth Summit presentation in Johannesburg is the project's ninth venue. After this it will go to Wales, then Birmingham, and hopefully too, back to St. Lucia, in the Windward Islands.

From the outset I have claimed that the work is not simply a catalyst for discussion, an instrument for promoting an issue. Instead I have spoken about the whole project -including the process with the farmers - as a social sculpture and an imaginative space.

Working actively with it in all these different contexts, over such a long period, has borne this out and provided the opportunity to further explore the social sculpture ideas and the relationship between the aesthetic, transformative process and sustainable futures. Many people, including farmers' representatives, have participated in discussions about the way the project works, how one assesses its 'effectiveness', and the value of forms of engagement that do not depend on discursive information alone.

These discussions and responses confirm for me that the aesthetic - as the opposite of numbness, of the anaesthetic - is closely linked to our ability to respond. In this space beyond the linear, literal, discursive, where the social imagination weaves and moves, we can be moved, inwardly. Responsibility, then, is not so much a moral duty, but rather an ability to respond arising from our sense of connectedness with each other and all other forms of existence.

So, although the consumer standing listening to the voice of the invisible producer is not, in that moment, involved in changing the status quo in any concrete way, responses suggest that the experience of absence is so tangible - of a producer whose 'skin' is stretched before us, whose voice is inside us - that it stirs one imaginatively, provoking an inward movement that we carry outwards into the world. People describe how the experience has given them a sense of their power to see things differently, and to explore ways of getting involved in shaping a better world.

Alongside the organisations and policy makers developing new legislation to ensure and enforce sustainable practices, this work takes us into the issues, opening up a space for discussion in a different frame of mind - or is it of heart? Joseph Beuys, James Hillman, David Abram, emphasise the non-literal in the process of redefining value, progress and reshaping our way of life. This work is part of that ongoing exploration towards a system based on interdependence and deep respect.