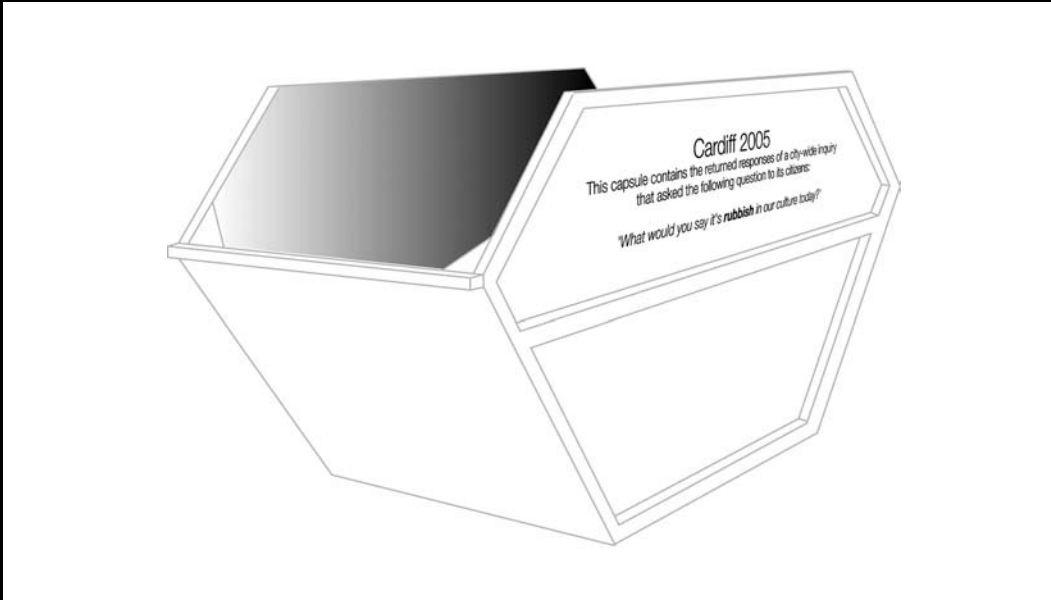


## THE LAMBY WAY TIME CAPSULE PROJECT:

*Inclusion as a given, participation as an optional.*



## Prologue

The Lamby Way Time Capsule project arises from a three-year practice-based research project still active under the title:

*'Public Art and Landfills: in between questioning values and cleaning consciences'* lodged at the Centre for research in Art and Design at UWIC, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff.

This research project, following the fragmented histories of its main subjects (art & waste), explores interdisciplinary areas of knowledge to study the instances of public art activity within or around landfill sites, identified here as *Municipal Waste landfills*, and therefore employing a restricted definition of landfill which excludes more generalised notions of wasteland, unofficial dumps, mining and industrial spoil heaps and related landscapes.

Because of this distinction, the specific meeting between a contested practice (public art) and a contested site (municipal waste landfill) generates a unique paradigm in which the notion of *inclusion* arises from the *contribution* that all citizens of a defined geographic area perform daily towards the actual *making of a landscape* (their landfill) *through their waste*.

Interregional or even international trading of wastes and more recently tropes of recycling have both added layers of complexity to such statement but at present, modes of waste disposal through local landfills still remain largely in use, particularly in UK, even if it is predictable as well as auspicious that such methods will be phased out in near future, mostly through the application of EU legislation.

The municipal waste landfill, understood as a physical, topographic embodiment of a constituency/collective cutting across all social groups living in a defined geographic area, instigates the possibility of new insights within the long-running debate around the legitimacy of public art practice, its relation to the social context and the precise identification of the *public* or *community* it might address.

The following statement by Mierle Laderman Ukeles, the unsalaried artist in residence in the Department of Sanitation of New York since 1977, and unquestionably the conceptual precursor of the themes studied in the PhD, perfectly encapsulates such insights:

*"Sanitation is the working out of the human design to accept, confront, manage even use decay in urban life. Sanitation is the city's first cultural system, not its displaced-housekeeper caste system.*

*To do sanitation is to husband the city as home.*

*I think it can serve as a model for democratic imagination as follows: sanitation serves everyone, it starts from that premise; it accepts that everyone must be served in a democracy and the city must be maintained in working works everywhere, no matter what socio-economic culture.*

*Sanitation works all the time through seasons, no matter what the weather conditions.*

*Sanitation is totally inter-dependent with its public; locked in – the server with the served-.*

*Sanitation, in democracy, implies the possibility of a public-social-contract operating laterally, not upstairs-downstairs, but equally between the servers and the served.*

*This is accomplished at totality of scale, yet it deals on an incremental basis (house to house, bag to bag) and it cuts across all differences.*

*Out of these humble circumstances, we can begin to erect a symbol of communality."*

### **Mierle Laderman Ukeles.**

"Sanitation manifesto! Why Sanitation can be used as a model for Public Art."

The Act, vol.2, N.1, 1990, p. 84-5



Three case studies were evaluated<sup>1</sup>, one of them sited at Lamby Way landfill site, the only remaining open disposal location for the whole of Cardiff.

The proximity of the landfill site with UWIC, and the familiarity I have acquired with the specific situation of the city of Cardiff across the three years of research, have generated the context for the Lamby Way Time Capsule project which also fulfils the practice element of the research project, intending to *embody, articulate and evaluate key findings and propositions arising from the research.*

The emerging evidence of my PhD studies is that a 'history of failures' can be traced in the attempts by several practitioners (Helen Mayer and Newton Harrison<sup>2</sup>, Agnes Denes<sup>3</sup>, Nancy Holt<sup>4</sup>, Mierle Laderman Ukeles<sup>5</sup>) to fruitfully engage in ideas of artistic practice that involve *transformative* but equally *revealing* operations on landfills as unique landscapes

If that is so, how else can artists enact such transformative powers without taking on either the challenge of treating the whole of the landfill's physical landmass into account (land art approach), thereby incurring into lengthy political negotiation, or otherwise simply accepting to limit their actions in *placing* their sculptural work atop a landscaped post-closure landfill?

The Lamby Way Time Capsule project, currently in development for the Lamby Way landfill in Cardiff, Wales, attempts to circumvent the problematic of such approaches and their remarked problems, by affecting the *story of the landscape within a longer time scale, the way it is discussed, remembered, described.*

The attempt of inserting within the last open cell of the landfill a time capsule containing what are deemed precious historical data of popular culture, -a relatively small object within the mass of the whole landfill- acts as a device to divert the *story of the place* towards another direction, away from the predictable reactions of indifference or disgust, and towards more participatory means of understanding the landfill as socially constructed.

By calling attention upon itself, or rather by distracting the attention from the inchoate mass that surrounds it, *it sets in motion the narrative of an unexpected pouch of preservation right in the middle of what we all rather not see.* By taking literally the notion of a landfill itself as a time capsule -a site of cultural memory in an ethnographic sense- it invests into a social significance of its data projecting them towards a future political agency whilst involving the social context in the present.

The Time Capsule, by acting as a rumour (a virus?) in the popular account of the landfill, might in the end -through its invisibility- enact more effectively such ambitions than symbolic or sculptural gestures on the landscape have managed to do in the past.

1 These are:

Jeroen Van Westen and CBAT project: 'Breathing In, Time Out', Lamby Way, Cardiff, Wales.

Mierle Laderman Ukeles, involvement in the long-term project: 'Fresh Kills: from landfill to landscape', Fresh Kills landfill, Staten Island, New York, US.

Maurizio Cattelan's project 'Hollywood', Bellolampo landfill site, Palermo, Italy.

2 Our Landfill, (1992) a proposal with architects Cutri & Martines for the San Diego Landfill. *Unrealised*

3 North Waterfront Park Master Plan, Berkeley (1989-1991), proposal for the conversion of a 97-acre landfill. *Unrealised*

4 Sky Mounds, (1987-1990), Nancy Holt with the New Jersey Meadowlands Development Corporation. *Unrealised*

5 Fresh Kills: from Landfill to Landscape (2003-ongoing), Mierle Laderman Ukeles is currently part of a team commissioned to phase the post-closure development of the Fresh Kills landfill, Staten Island, NY, within the next 30 years. She has also managed to realise a project in Boston, at Danehy Park, in 1996

The means of production of the project are also worthwhile a mention here.

The Lamby Way Time Capsule project is a project conceived, fundraised for and managed by the artist who initiated it. By setting the terms of the project not in response to a commission brief or a curatorial framework, but instead by articulating all partnerships needed in response to an individual contact, all elements of the project are rendered visible and allowing various degrees of manipulation by the artist.

From the initial research to the organisation of every practical detail, all aspects of the project are transparent to its initiator and negotiated on that basis.

Such level of involvement allows the project to reveal its latent social and political tropes and render them manifest rather than being clouded or otherwise exalted into various degrees of curatorship, administration or other type of representation so particularly common to public art productions.

If the 'author as producer' question dear to Marxist aesthetics comes to mind here, it is not to address it, reformulate it or even confront it; furthermore it might seem anachronistic to press on the notion of the individual artist in a contemporary artistic climate in which collaborative, collective or fluid modes of production are much in vogue.

There exists however, within this attempt of confronting the social context essential to produce this type of work on one's own terms, the chance to instigate a revision or a closer investigation of some of the identities and strategies of artistic production which appear to embody much of contemporary cultural production with ambitions to affect the social context, but also suffer certain degrees of complacency in their current success.

The social context does not exist a priori; the imaginary projections we hold as true materialize only when confronted directly and its limits tested by actions, rather than symbolic gestures.

The current emphasis on collective modes of productions as a preferred critical engagement with the problematic of autonomy of the work of art and the artist as individual is plainly stated by Okwui Enwezor when he says: '*Collectivity performs an operation of irruption and transformation on traditional mechanisms and activities of artistic production which locates the sole figure of the individual artist at the center of authorship.*'<sup>6</sup>

This is a position I contest.

The presupposition that modes of collective production, in order to enact an effective criticism of the status of art to its social context, acquire a somewhat privileged position is debatable. It would seem instead that such modes enact a kind of mimesis, a process of identification across ideas of *community* and *collective*, with the ambition of rendering more legitimate the production of artistic activities in social contexts only on that basis.

The notion that if it is 'we' who talk rather than 'I', the pronunciation uttered instantly acquires a broader consensus that is far from substantiated, and betrays instead some ideological trappings into which artistic production has fallen long before, at least from the Russian Constructivists onwards.

6 Okwui Enwezor: The Artist as Producer in Times of Crisis, lecture delivered at 16 Beaver Street, NYC on 15.4.2004. Full text available at <http://16beavergroup.org/mtarchive/>

I would instead sustain that it is the work produced that is the core issue, disregarding whether it is produced by an individual or by a collective. The insistence towards understanding a collective as a more legitimate outfit to employ notions of collective imaginary in the production of artistic activity in social contexts sounds hollow. The idea of a collective or a partnership often appears merely as an antidote to the fact that if other forms of community do not seem to materialize in times of crisis, then the *image of a community* reverses onto itself by curling into its own group, and attempts to resemble the subject it wants to address.

The creation of such microcosms, rather than the naked individuality of the body vis-à-vis the social context, might create the temporary illusion of extended powers of artistic activity and its reach, but more than often it merely simulates such power by mirroring it from within.

In the experience gathered through the development of the Lamby Way Time Capsule project I have had some glimpses of a collective imaginary at work simply through personal relationships with landfill managers, engineers, planners, museum curators, workers at various levels in the waste department of Cardiff as well as other artists, mostly because such relationships were not mediated by other parties, but built on a one-to-one basis, often unsolicited and spontaneous.

The idea that in order to address questions of *autonomy* within contemporary artistic production the first step must be that of *dismembering the individual* rather than recognizing the options of questioning through a singular perspective (the artist) the very modes of contemporary production and their attitude to general relation of production of their time, particularly when some highly praised forms of paraded dissent become so quickly the norm and traits of institutional snobbery, should not be left unchallenged.

The shielding that the collective might provide in times of fragmentation and undoubtedly the logistic relief it offers in all practical matters, might be comfortable indeed but does not at any level guarantee a more effective understanding or a more fruitful interaction with social contexts.

The result in the end has to be understood as collective in any case; for a project built on partnership such as the Lamby Way Time Capsule there is hardly any ground for claims of authorship anyway.

If the partners are not with it, there is no project.

Most of all, the fear of instrumentalisation which grips the artist in search of a place in the social context does not have to paralyze his/her actions.

Indeed, the legwork to be done from an individual basis to realize projects such as the Lamby Way Time Capsule is enough to put even the most energetic person into rehab after their completion.

But equally, the tenet of hyperactivity which appears to be at the centre of all the trafficking taking place in contemporary artistic production and distribution, **does not seem a healthy option to me.**



## The project

### 1

#### **Lamby Way TIME CAPSULE is a public art project.**

It chooses to focus its attention on one of the most 'public' sites in the city of Cardiff, its own landfill, its own 'social sculpture': the Lamby Way landfill waste management site.

Things end up in Lamby Way because we consider them spent, used, wasted.

As a consequence, we attach no value to the places where such debris of our actions ends up, as they develop like huge sweeping piles of our cities.

Landfills are liabilities for citizens, in terms of pollution control, property values and traffic management, but also they are still an essential part of the maintenance structure that keeps the city alive for all other activities to take place.

Paradoxically, the further our activities increase, the further maintenance is required, and the more other types of activities disappear from sight and enter in a parasitical relationship with the organism/city. Waste systems in particular have a special relationship to cities and their development.

Lamby Way is at present the only operative landfill in the city.

Its full capacity will be reached in a period of time between 3 to 5 years.

As we write, no alternative site has been found within the city limits, mostly due to the fact that within the growth pattern now established in Cardiff, rising land values make it increasingly difficult to locate operational structures that are not considered revenue-generating, no matter how essential they might be.

Once Lamby Way closes, it is likely that the visibility of waste disposal operations will move further away from the city itself.

Furthermore, the current council plans for the post-closure of the Lamby Way landfill site are aimed at a rapid and radical transformation of its identity and land value, since in planning terms the eastern side of the City, and therefore the Rumney estuary area, is considered the next expansion zone for Cardiff.

Plans for a 'world-class pay-and-play golf course with hotel and leisure facilities' are currently being developed, with the intention of having the whole site built, run and managed by a private developer on the ex-landfill.

The future transition from public to private management of the land also provides an interesting aspect for the Time Capsule project, since the invisible character of its presence, buried underneath the development, will act both as a reminder of the site's previous identity and of its public service.

The timing seems to be appropriate to memorialise from within a place of such importance for the city, through a unique collective contribution of its constituents.

The TIME CAPSULE sets itself the task of outliving both its contributors and its very place of burial.

As the organic matter decomposes under the protective geotextile layer, generating methane to be extracted from the site, the TIME CAPSULE will await the next land reorganization effort.

## **2 The project addresses the collective cultural determination of any society's own semantic to be tested and reaffirmed. It asks the largest possible number of citizens in Cardiff to respond to a simple question:**

*'What would you say is rubbish in our world today?'*

If the landfill is the place where things go when we define them 'rubbish' by our very act of disposal, so the question as posed, demands from those who are willing (or able) to engage with it, to contribute to the exercise of the power of 'naming things' which culture grants us all.

Such exercises however, because of their social resonance, are rarely conducted openly or in a consciously collective fashion. These utterances are more likely to be private affairs, conducted in a relaxed and informal atmosphere that subdues and renders more innocuous their social significance and the possibly penalising effects of those statements.

The vow of secrecy and the rule of anonymity that the TIME CAPSULE project implement, suggests and even invokes the deliveries of such responses as evidences. A specific period of data gathering (return of the question cards) will be determined at the outset.

It is interesting to notice how such power of 'naming things', is also, in an individual form, that of the post-Duchampian artist who has the power of 'labelling' what 'art' is.

Nowadays, demands for information and opinions ranging from market research to social studies are omnipresent and instrumental in their use, and mostly utilise the idea of focus groups in order to sample the population in their most salient characteristics.

They assume a quality to their data, which arises from the selection of subjects taking place prior to the questions asked. The questions then are narrow and often based on multiple choices.

Several artistic activities (most notably that of Jochen Gerz), have used or use such forms of content-generation as the basis of their work.

The TIME CAPSULE project method operates under different conditions.

First of all there is only one question and a broad one. Then the questions is asked to all the households of Cardiff by inserting the question cards into the regular door-to-door council's distribution chain of bin liners, and finally the specific answers are not made public until the TIME CAPSULE is found and opened.

In this way, the TIME CAPSULE acts like a book with an unknown publication date, of which each answer forms an individual's chapter.

The use of the word *rubbish* here is given its broadest significance of 'low or no value' enlarged to actions, people, institutions, and individuals.

Using a notion of time capsule defined as *the result of deliberately setting aside what a hypothetical future finder is anticipated to regard as evidence of the present*<sup>7</sup>, the LAMBY WAY TIME CAPSULE project overlaps such intentions of preserving items considered of value (our opinions as citizens), with a location (the landfill) considered the low end of values within a consumptive parameter.

Notions of *conservation* and *disposal* become reconciled in a dialectic of land use which acknowledges the dilemmas often posed by the conflictual relationships between ethical and pragmatic positions.

As conservation areas and sustainable land planning principles are constantly battling for their survival with the unstoppable logic of capital and growth, it seems plausible that single-use off-limits areas such as landfill sites would emerge as unnatural sites of conservation of precious objects.

The accumulative logic of waste (much like that of capital, as Bataille reminds us in *The Accursed Share*) sets temporary boundaries to the mires of development expansion precisely because of its purpose and toxicity, whilst it mirrors the sites of accumulative consumption often placed right next to them.<sup>8</sup>

Understood in these terms, the landfill site becomes a unique example of heterotopia<sup>9</sup>, in that its status is both an embodiment and a rejection of the logic that produces it.

Through the set up of such deliberate contrivance, the project attempts to shift both the significance of the landfill and its content, and to create a framework for an alternative contribution to its growth by its constituency: *the disposal of 'cultural waste' as symbolic refuse*.

The fact that the question alludes to the 'world' at large rather than the immanent cultural and geographic context is an allusion to a reality of waste disposal; whilst this takes place in specific locality, the origin of its composition are to be found all over the world, such is the amount of imported goods which is available to us as consumers these days.

Made all over the world, traded from all over the world, but dumped in a specific location.

7 This and other attempts of definitions can be found in: Durrans, B., 'Posterity and paradox, some uses of time capsules', p.51-67 in Wallman, S. 'Contemporary futures: perspectives from social anthropology', Routledge, 1992

8 This is both the case of Lamby Way, where a Tesco superstore overlooks the landfill site, or Fresh Kills in Staten Island, New York, which borders with the largest shopping mall in the New York area. Only a landscaped berm specifically erected to visually obfuscate their proximity divides the two sites.

9 From 'of other spaces' a posthumously published paper of 1967, printed in Mirzoeff, N. "Visual Culture Reader", London, Routledge, 2002.

It is the multifaceted casting of public opinions on what such cultural waste consists of, that will make up the content of the time capsule.

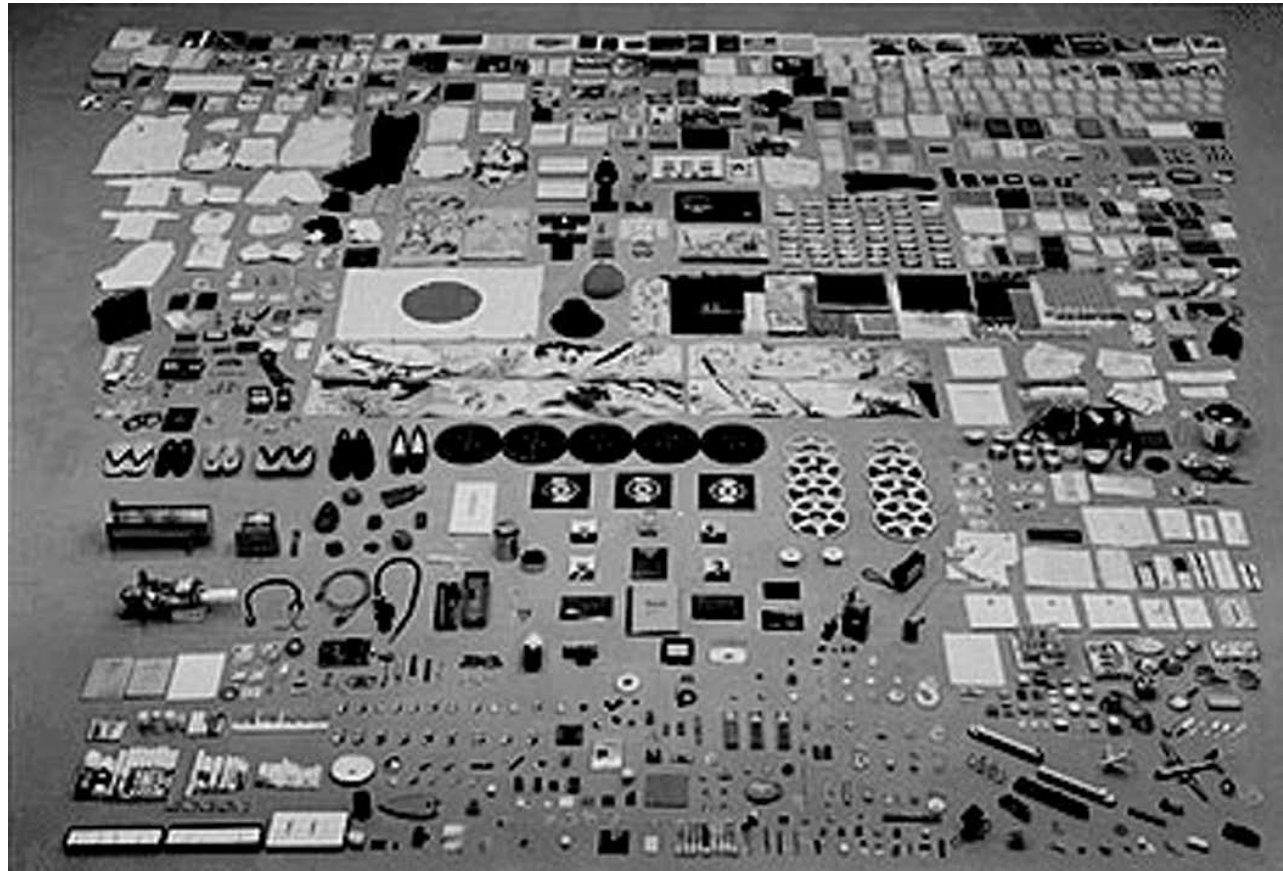
A temporary public access permit to coincide with the scheduled burial of the capsule will be granted for the landfill site, briefly opening up its spaces to those who created its mass.

Unlike institutional time capsules though, which often contain objects or deliberate messages 'to the future' intended to construct an image of ourselves as a whole, the LAMBY WAY TIME CAPSULE collection of opinions will present an unedited, fragmented, alternative set of individual evidences linked only by their originating question.

It is precisely this character which makes them into precious evidence for the compilation of a possible future 'alternative history'.

Any further analysis of such data will be left for the future finder to propose. It is hoped that these fragments will provide, in due course, a powerful punctuation to other, more mainstream processes of historicisation of the present.

There is not a scheduled retrieval and opening time frame for the LAMBY WAY TIME CAPSULE. It will be found whenever the landfill ceases to be biologically active and the land becomes once more subjected to reorganization.



Contents of the Expo '70 time capsule, buried in Osaka, Japan



Contents of the Expo '70 time capsule, buried in Osaka, Japan

# 3

What follows is a schematic visualisation of the project in its main stages.

**FREEPOST  
THE LAMBY WAY  
TIME CAPSULE PROJECT  
PO BOX 123  
Cardiff**

first name \_\_\_\_\_  
gender \_\_\_\_\_ age \_\_\_\_\_

Mr & Mrs  
Duman  
290 Cathedral Road  
Cardiff  
CF 24 0SP

THE CARD IS DISTRIBUTED THROUGH THE DOOR-TO-DOOR DELIVERY OF RECYCLING BAGS IN ALL CARDIFF HOUSEHOLDS

*What would you say it's rubbish in our culture today?*

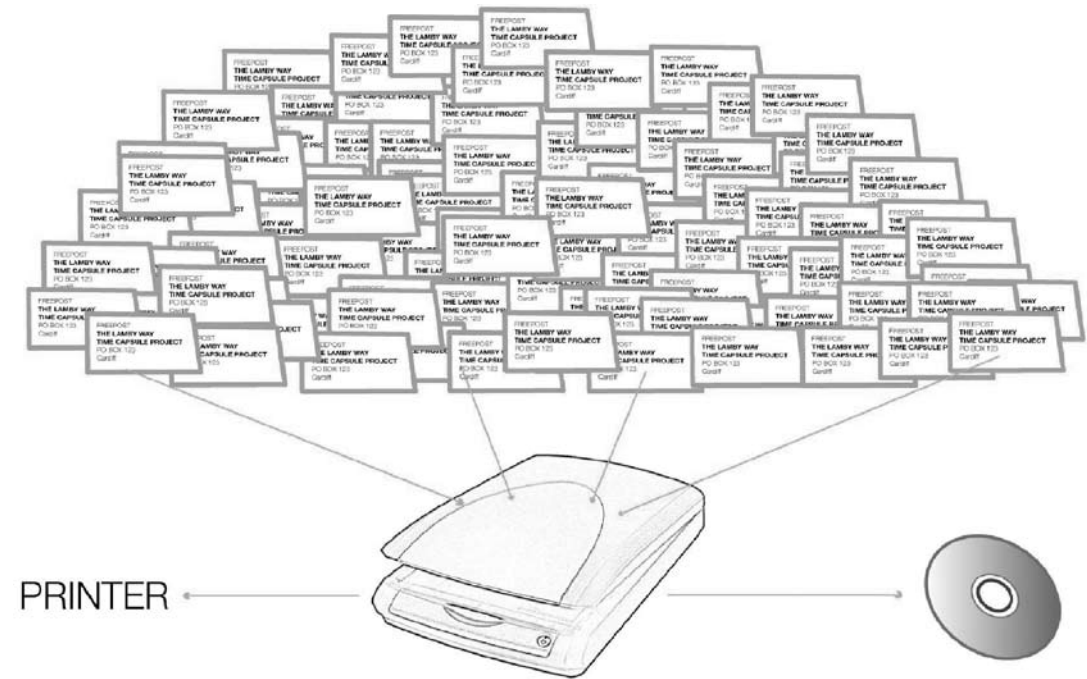
War in Iraq  
Fuel prices  
Pollution  
Not enough shops  
The idea of revolution  
Big brother  
Young peoples morality  
The Severn bridge - fore your bloody art project

lick and seal postcard's edge

first name \_\_\_\_\_  
gender \_\_\_\_\_ age \_\_\_\_\_

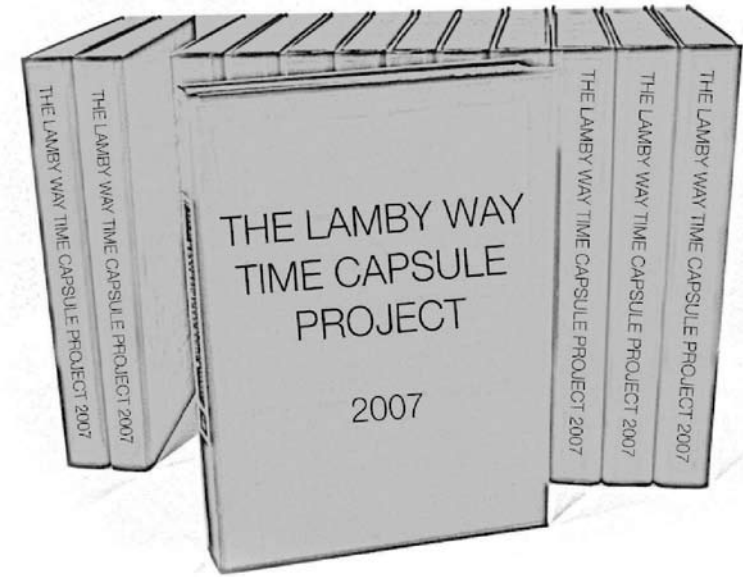
**FREEPOST  
THE LAMBY WAY  
TIME CAPSULE PROJECT  
PO BOX 123  
Cardiff**

FILL THE CARD WITH YOUR OPINIONS AND SEND IT OFF FREE OF CHARGE

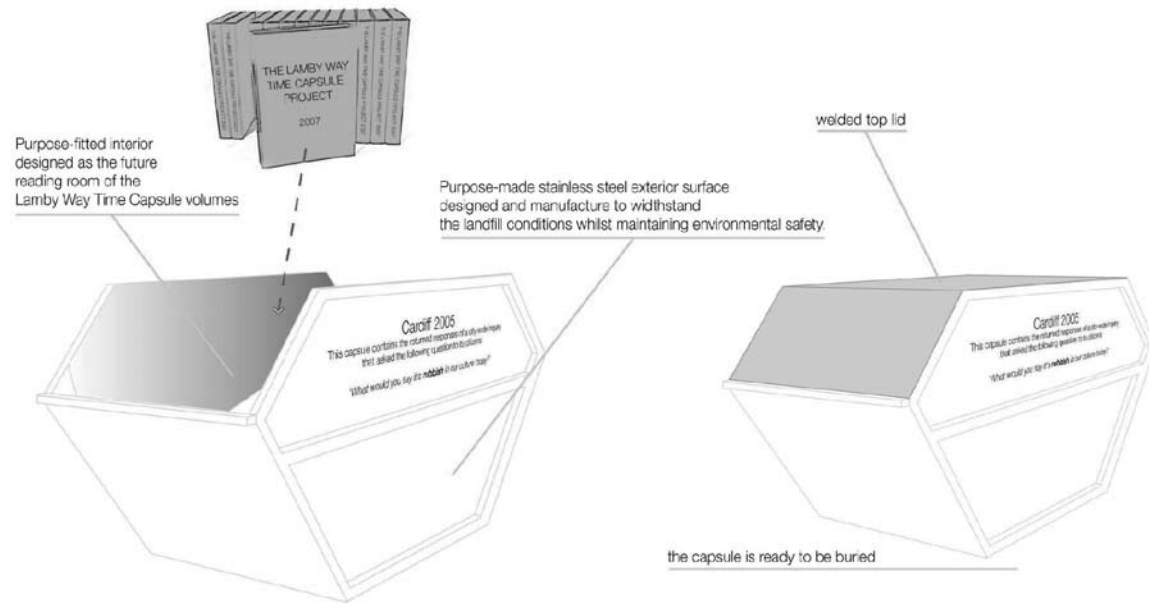


PRINTER

ALL CARDS FILLED AND RETURNED ARE SCANNED; ALL DATA ARE COMPILED INTO A DATABASE



ALL RECORDS ARE PRINTED IN A SERIES OF HARD-BOUND VOLUMES IN ARCHIVAL QUALITY



THE CAPSULE IS FITTED, SEALED AND FILLED WITH INERT GAS



A PUBLICATION WILL MARK THE PROJECT.  
IT WILL CONTAIN IMAGES, STATISTICS, INFORMATION AND TEXTS ON ART, WASTE AND TIME CAPSULE  
THESE WILL BE WRITTEN BY VARIOUS ACADEMIC AND NON-ACADEMIC PARTIES SPECIFICALLY FOR THE PUB



A PUBLIC CEREMONY/PARADE INVITES PEOPLE INTO THE LANDFILL TO WITNESS THE BURIAL OF THE TIME CAPSULE

