

Spectator T Symposium

Transcript of papers

Speakers:

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Steve Dutton
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Gavin Wade on Spectator T

GW: Hi, I'm Gavin Wade, and I just thought I should actually thank SCAF and the city of Sheffield for inviting me along and come and mess with their heads a little bit I suppose. I'm just going to try and run through some of the processes that led to coming up with Spectator T, which is a convoluted process, in many ways and has a number of different off shoots, angles and references, some of which have been hidden, some of which might not be that very interesting, or necessary for you or any other people to know in looking at Spectator T works, but I'll tell you none the less, certain things, and you can make up your own minds. When I was invited to come up with a curatorial concept for the Art Sheffield. I suspected that it was in relation to an experience that I'd had, in Sheffield, back in 2002, making a public artwork, which was an unresolved project which in many ways failed, but had a brief moment of, kind of, notoriety, and impact, I hope.

On a certain area of Sheffield, on Devonshire Green. It was actually an open submission competition that I was invited to put forward for and I put in a very simple proposal, which was to provide an artwork that somehow delved into the minds of people aged between 16 -24, who hung out, I decided hung out, on a patch of grass on the edge of the centre of city. I was hope that's what the young people of Sheffield who were commissioning me to make art, it seemed like that's what they wanted somebody to deal with the lack of knowledge of art or the dumbness of the kids of Sheffield, or the fact that they never really got involved as much in certain cultural aspects of the city, as people might want them to. So there was an element of engineering about the project, about how to approach a group of people and make an artwork for them. I thought I would be really specific and do a project where there's empty boxes where you can put in your personal top five and I would ask people, aged 16-24 on the green to tell me their favourite three songs, films, books, world political issues, artworks or exhibitions, and there were five all together. And I thought that I would compile a local top five. So you are actually looking at the local top five world political issues in the first week. We tended to canvas between 30-60 people a week and I proposed that it would run over an eight week period and we would pick up a very specific set of opinions that were not really visible in any other way and I would compare them to an official opinion, to institutionalised or other opinion than that which might preside over Devonshire Green which was particularly inhabited by skateboarders and other kind of muso kids. Some of the guys I hung out with, they called them

'slipknots' and various titles of the types of people I hung out with there and there was a lot of drunks hanging out on that patch. So it was a lively dynamic and interesting little spot. We had quite a few interesting conversations with people there. This is the official top five world political issues which I took from the headlines of national newspapers. And actually, that became the most interesting site in a way, the art one, did reveal the lack of knowledge or interest in art, in some ways, it began to bring out some local graffiti artists, shows that had happened at Sumo or the fact that David Shrigley had done a show in Sheffield and had impact and he, for one week he was number two, just below Pablo Picasso, or Claude Monet or Dali, or one of the other... Warhol was always in there as well. I actually made it to number two one week, my project, so I sort of thought that was success in a way although it was slightly embarrassing to put my own name on my own public artwork as if I was in the minds of all these kids that were hanging out.

The projects were really abruptly ended by quite a destructive tour de force of er, the middle of the night, taking the entire structure apart, very rigorously. Your actually looking at the second time it was destroyed here, but it's the best picture, so we can imagine this is what it looked like. But I never saw it, I tried to get up to kind of see what it looked like, to photograph it. I thought, fantastic, something's happened and I'm going to photograph that and then I'm going to work out what to do next and see where it leads me, and before I could get there the council had cleaned it all up and taken it all away. I located them with another artist who was working with me, James Brown was helping me out, at the time and we went and found this little fenced area behind a shed somewhere in the outskirts of Sheffield where they all were, we found them all smashed up, so at least they'd kept them, so it took me a day to find them basically. This one I think this is the one that has a secret message on it, which freaked me out at the time, someone had scratched into it, something like, 'Gavin, who's laughing now'. I know I've got a slide of it somewhere, and I can't find the slide and I wanted to bring that along cos that sort of impressed on me that it felt personal, it didn't feel impersonal. I actually did suspect that it was McDonalds who did it and I thought that because the week after this was put out again it was saying no to McDonalds on Ecclesall Road, and I thought it was just so easy for them to just pay someone fifty quid to go down and smash them all up and why not? You know, get rid of the negative situation. When I spoke to the council workers who cleaned it up, they said, 'I don't think McDonalds did it', they actually thought it was the Somalian community in Sheffield because of the immigration issues that were coming up on there and so everyone has an opinion about the work and where it was leading to.

But nothing was really resolved and I was kind of thrown into a situation where I didn't quite know what to do. It kind of pushed me into an area where I thought, I want to fictionalise what's going to happen next and I actually proposed to make a book and I put something in to Yorkshire Arts, which actually got rebuffed and I never, I kind of lost a bit of motivation on it, and it's kind of completely my own fault that I didn't kind of bother pushing that through and it became an unresolved thing that was just there and when I was invited to come and work for Art Sheffield, it felt like a weird destiny that this was an offer to make something good out of a failed project which I thought still had a lot of potential and dealt with site and a group of people, hopefully in an interesting way, and in an honest way, I suppose I did come to a dead end because I was trying to be honest, and I couldn't quite work out what to do next somehow, and this was a way, beyond that. It had troubled me so much that I had been writing a novel, for the year before I was asked, about a socially engaged art series of symposiums, that the Arts Council, England, had organised, and in the novel, it came back to me when I met this kid on the first day

that it opened, that he came up to me and confronted me, and shouted this question, 'why are you trying to educate us' and he came right up to my face and he really wanted a fight, his mates were hanging around, and it came back to me, because this symposium, the first one was about 'artist as educator' and it suddenly came back to me that this horrible idea of me trying to educate the youth there. So I put it in the novel, an unidentified youth in Sheffield, then the second part of the chapter, the second symposium was 'artist as engineer', and I thought, maybe the kid could have come up to me accused me of 'why are trying to engineer us?', and I had him saying that in the novel. Then the third chapter was 'artist as researcher', and he switched it again, to saying 'why are you trying to research us? Why, what are you trying to get out of us? Leave us alone and get lost.' But in a bit harsher tones, and it developed where I thought, this character is, now I'm not really in control of him anymore. Every time I'm writing the next chapter, he is there in my mind and he's affecting how I'm trying to deal with the idea of being a socially engaged artist. Or why Arts Council, England would want to support and encourage and try to understand, make sense of socially engaged art. So in the final chapter he became an active participant in the symposium, a lot of the novel is a kind of me imagining what I really wanted to hear, what I wished the speakers weren't saying and they were boring me to tears, the agenda was terrible and nothing was getting through and this character was actually saying the things that I thought were important that I thought weren't being said and I'm going to read you a little snippet of the fifth chapter of the book. We're at the Baltic and we're in a circle of course, and we're about to introduce ourselves to each other. I am the author, in the book.

The Facilitator says "ok, let's begin with you, the Artist-Activist". "I am artist as political animal". The Artist: "jack of all, master of none. That's me". The Artist-Collaborator 1: "definitely an anti-social artist in the public realm". The Artist-Collaborator 2: "ditto". The Artist-Poet: "I'm a 24 hour magician, I'm going to be pursuing a 24 hour session of shared consciousness, where we produce a thousand year old form of collaborative poetry, I'm going to be thinking of the next two days as also aspiring to achieve something similar to this, thirty four people existing as one shared consciousness, that would be something". The Organiser: "Um, I trained as a photographer then worked in community arts and gallery education and now I work for ACE. I want to map and personally understand what beach art is."

Beach art is the phrase that I use instead of socially engage art practice, or littoral art, the beach is where its at.

The Artist-Writer: "you don't write to stop things, you write to show people there are things that need to be stopped". The Curator: "I'm a curator and I have a question for John, if context is half the work, what is the other half?". John Latham: "Um, I can see that someone would write down a question like that, well let me put it like this, context is people behaving badly, the other half, that's people the other half thinks behave badly". Barbara Steveny: "I guess I'm a risk taker, and that doesn't mean that I behave badly". The Cyber-Artist: "I've always been an artist, helping to support social change, I only recently moved to cyber space". The Author: "hello, I'm the author and I'm writing everything down in an entirely different way, than this man over here"

And you have to imagine a palan-typist sitting there, and he's typing up instantly everything that's being said and it's projected on the wall over here.

"I've decided to cut to the chase and edit this part as there are far too many introduction here, there are about 34 people in this room, for God's sake. Look this is the one that caught my attention and popped right out of the deja vu sector of my mind". Unidentified youth: "Hello, I'm, er, Tony T, and I er, skate. How did I get here? Well, what happened to my skate domain, your not here to collaborate with me are ya? Ah man, I had this weird dream the other week about my granddad telling me a prophecy that I'd be called upon to help a bunch of fucking geeks to save the world or something. I woke up with the biggest stiffy and then the dream kept popping back into my head every time I went out skating. You people, what are you people doing, huh? This isn't another dream is it, you're just sitting in these galleries trying to educate us kids, engineer us, even research us and then finally forcefully activate us into service. I thought National Service had been outlawed in this country, what do you want from me? I know we had a couple of scraps and stuff, but come on, alright, I could still kick your arse, but I might just collaborate with you if you do some stuff for me, ok? What do you say?" The Facilitator: "Well, Tony T, can that wait just a minute as we have to move on now, when we get to the next phase of whatever you're all going to do in open space, then Tony, you can er, what does the T stand for?" Tony T: "well er, my T, yeah, my grandfather's surname began with T, I thought it was funny when I was little and it kinda, well it just stuck, when I was looking for a good tagging name. Well, my granddad was an unusual man, I only met him once but he wrote lots of stories that you lot would probably like or at least could learn a thing or two from. As I was saying,"

And he gets cut off there and he goes and supplies us with a substance that allows us all to reach a higher level of art production and we achieve level 4 art production by the end of the novel. I was really hoping to have copies of the novel here to sell to the city of Sheffield. But unfortunately I can only take orders because it's not going to be out until the end of November now. It keeps on dragging on so.

He was there and at the end of the book, he disappears and with the Goddess, the Interrogator and the other characters we achieve some sort of resolution and come up with the 10 commandments for socially engaged art, and all these other things and. But I wanted to write another story, and straight out of this, um, at the end of the book, I have to get some sleep, and I think that I'll arise again some other day, and that kind of thought, that's the next thing that would be the short story of Tony, arising and I would try and get even more into his head, and that that would be this form for an answer to the question of the project that I put forward before, that John Latham says is really a fascinating thing that you can't answer a question in the medium in which you state it. And in a way I was hoping that the fiction of me writing this Tony T character would be some kind of answer to the question of what is socially engaged art for? And what are biennial projects for? Or why do we have art in the cities? The fiction of this character was the answer by changing the medium somehow.

I had a brilliant coincidence after though, the novel is called *The Interrupters* and a number of people kept saying to me, had I read *The Destructors*, and I kept seeing it around and I thought I've got to read that, its got a great title and its really just like my title and I should go and hunt that down. And when I read it, another kind of weird destiny thing, the main character in *The Destructors* is called T. It never says what T stands for. He is just T. So what happens with these kids, destroying this old guy's house for the reason of destroying it, for something to do, to prove a point and to spend some time hanging out with each other and do this thing in a very kind of urgent but elusive kind of way. Really fuelled and connected with the character I wanted to write. The little tiny bit where at the end of, they've almost

smashed old misery's house down, and T's friends Mike and Blackie are around him and Blackie says,

"you hate him a lot" and T says, "of course I don't hate him, they'd be no fun if I hated him". The last burning note illuminated his brooding face "all this hate and love", he said " its soft, its hoey, there's only things Blackie and he looked around the room, crowded with the unfamiliar shadows of half things, broken things, former things, "I'll race you home, Blackie", he said.

And Ts off, whoosh, like that. And I changed the words, so its like, its not love and hate that doesn't its exist, Tony says, its art that doesn't exist. There's just things, so I managed to change that around. And I can see that I've used my time up now, but I'll end on, which is good because now I don't have to give all the secrets of the character. For me, he is a character I've created who is aware of being a character. And he is the grandchild of another fictional character, who is a character created by a science fiction writer, who says that this character, is the only time, and he had been writing for 60 years, that he wrote a character who knew he was a character, and he absolutely no control over at all. And in a sense I can wonder does everyone have the possibility to write a character who is alive, who is totally out of your control and who is aware of being a character, and then I thought there's an idea of the space of art, within that somehow, so that's how I see this character and wanted a very specific type of person, a main character to become the central notion for a biennial project, or an across the city project. It's not elusive in a way, but hopefully it is still as complex and varied and open to all the different ways of approaching it, from artist, to spectator to passer-by, so that it becomes completely integral and opens up the reason why we have art in our society, in a way, that without it, we are lacking, without it we aren't civilised, without the idea of the unknowable, and unpredictable then we are back to before caves, kind of thing, so I'll end there for now.

Why Art Sheffield 05 is not a Biennial.

Steve Dutton

I've been unsure, ever since agreeing to do this talk quite how to approach this and when pushed realised that to speak as a Director of SCAF, which is the loose coalition, or company, of artists and institutions responsible for developing the programme, and as an artist who clearly has an interest in the experimental aspect of the programme as a method of rethinking certain practices, particularly in terms of my adopted city would be the only way to do it.

There are two aspects of Art Sheffield 05 that keep coming back to so, I'm going to touch on both and suggest that they meet somewhere along the way.

The first concerns the status and aura which surround and feed on the idea of the biennial, whether it is Venice, Istanbul, Liverpool, Sao Paulo, et al, what it means in relation to this programme, effectively now on its third cycle, a two yearly art event which does NOT define itself as a biennial, and thus how this programme might define itself in relation to or up against the biennial. (The odd thing is that though we were aware that, amongst other things we were keen to develop a city wide programme which took place every second year, we all agreed that we didn't want it to be a Biennial, whatever that might mean.)

The second concerns the manner or the method by which SCAF approached the programme, particularly the very specific approach Gavin Wade in his introduction of the character Tony T.

The answer as to why Art Sheffield 05 is not a biennial and what that might signify is probably addressed somewhere between these two concerns...

Throughout I will be making use of a strategy used at by Michael Phillipson in his 1995 text, "Managing 'tradition'. The plight of Aesthetic practices and their analysis in a techno scientific culture" in which he articulates a difference between art and "art" as, that which, on the one hand is fully assimilated, and that on the hand which is taking place at the edges of assimilation, or within which the process of assimilation is taking place but not yet complete and /or within which the very forms which assimilation takes are dependent upon the art itself for definition.

In a review of Art Sheffield 03 the Guardian writer Alfred Hickling made the ironic comparison between Sheffield, London, Paris and New York with the implication that Sheffield might be struggling to reach the giddy heights of such "Art Capitals", despite its abundance of artists, studios and galleries/project spaces.

Hickling commented, using a piece of my own work as his metaphor, that there was no audience for art in Sheffield. But my thinking here isn't so much that Sheffield does or doesn't have an indigenous audience, one could easily argue the same case for Venice whose population rests at around 60,000. The issue, which typifies some of the thinking around this event, is that Hickling goes onto say that ArtSheffield 03 was an "admirable profile raising event, which the organisers hope to develop into a biennial."

Thus, there's something being said in Hickling's comments which implies more about his ideas of what constitutes a Biennial than mere visitor numbers.

The Biennial is more than a two year event, the biennial is now the "Biennial" and it confers on the city a sort of state of cultural grace. It tells us that the city is knowing, global, grown up enough to appreciate art, the subtext of which is that it knows how to handle difference and dissent, risk and dare I say it, dreams and conflict.

As Julian Stallabrass points out in *Art Incorporated* the biennial is powerfully ideologically grounded. Stallabrass argues,

"One example would be the Istanbul Biennial, which is part of the Turkish government's effort to assure the European Union that the nation conforms closely enough to secular and neoliberal standards to warrant membership. Another, the Havana Biennial serves to give the Cuban government a more lenient and culturally open-minded image by sanctioning dissent within this narrow and delimited frame"

Stallabrass goes on to state that the biennial does for a city what a Picasso above the fireplace does for a tobacco executive and that "it not only embodies but actively propagandises the virtues of globalisation"

What may have been at stake in Hickling's comments and what is a key issue as far as Art Sheffield 05 is concerned is this relationship to the "biennial" culture. The issue is something akin to a membership of a club, and more importantly the desire to be seen to be a member of it. This assumption that Sheffield aspires to become a member of a club of elite global players, in which the principles of "art", that is Phillipson's fully assimilated version, may be profoundly mistaken, and if taken as read would certainly colour the work and aspirations of Art Sheffield 05 and the artists who are part of it.

We will be aware that this club is made of cities whose guiding principles are being mapped onto the global consciousness via the biennial networks as principles and icons of universality, openness, transformative potential, secular tolerance and creative risk. A club whose aspirations are so decidedly utopian that you have to share the vision and the resources, physical, intellectual and financial, in order to join, and to share the vision you have to be visionary, and to be able to be visionary you have to be blessed. A club, where in short, the benefits of membership amount to an image of advancing and brilliant humanist neo-liberal luminosity contained within the secure hands of steady economic growth.

In short it is this membership, which Alfred Hickling eludes, and suggests that Sheffield may be struggling to join. He is probably right. But the fact is, we never wanted to.

According to Rosa Martinez, curator of this year's "always a little further" at the Venice Biennial, the "ideal biennial is a profoundly political and spiritual event. It contemplates the present with a desire to transform it. As Arthur Danto says, in a definition I love, a biennial is a glimpse of a transnational utopia" ⁱ

Well we knew weren't doing THAT. This is Sheffield after all, and we also know we were not naïve enough to think we could, at this point in the development of SCAF, suggest that Sheffield Art 05 was some kind of alternative biennial, or should that be, to use Phillipson's strategy, the "alternative" "biennial".

This issue of an alternative becomes even more complex when we consider the relation of fringe or alternative events, which are sanctioned by the Biennial and thus quickly become "Fringe" or "Alternative" events.

An issue which in itself is particularly thorny as of course most Biennials wouldn't be the genuine article, that is, they wouldn't encompass the biennial principles of openness and dialogue unless they somehow sustained some fringe activity which, to quote this year's Istanbul Biennial's official blurb in relation to its own fringe activities which could "voice all that was suppressed".

Martin Herbert's recent observations in Art Monthly in "What is the alternative?" come to mind, where he makes the acute observation that the "alternative" artspace listings within the pages of Time Out were re-classified in the mid- nineties to the status of "upcoming"ⁱⁱ. The observation being that where once the alternative had been counter to, or other than, or strategically across, in becoming upcoming it became the same as, but not fully developed yet, but bound to the same linear forces, a kind of child and natural inheritor of the precious capital of the established spaces.

The situation this year in Prague was also interesting in which allegedly acrimonious relationships between Flash art's Giancarlo Politi and Milan Knizak the General Director of the National gallery In Prague. The details of the fall out were bewildering to the spectator and I genuinely don't feel I can comment on what was happening behind the scenes. Eventually though, relationships soured to such an extent that it led to the simultaneous development of TWO Biennials running at the same time, a sort of bi-biennial, both claiming the rights to the real original biennial and the other was a sort of hanger-on and neither having the nerve to call themselves the alternative. Quite where the fringe or alternative events of either of those Biennials felt they should go is hard to imagine, unless both fringes were to meet in a kind of cultural centre parting or alternatively kind of contemporary art version of a mullet.

Obviously any such claims Art Sheffield 05 might make towards alternativeness would be fraudulent. But I would make the claim that, the attempt by SCAF and Gavin Wade in particular to address something other than the usual processes, and to a large extent the absence of the usual suspects, and the strategies many of the artists have adopted, gives Spectator T an interesting edge.

If Spectator T makes no such claims as to its alternative nature it might occupy a kind of hinterland, albeit a fairly foggy one and it might be bit of a mess, but then that's what hinterlands tend to be, because Spectator T does emerge, or attempt to emerge, from an image of locality, that is, almost by definition hostile to take over bids by even the faintest whiff of any patronising global take-over.

Those of you who have read Gavin Wade's text will note that his intention was precisely this; to work from a different position than the typically universalistic and utopian Biennial premise, but even here, while Gavin bravely attempts to articulate and generate new thinking through his text and the factional construction of Tony T we can see within his introduction even he inadvertently aligns us to an "upcoming" biennial potential rather than something other than a biennial, when he says.

"Imagine a biennial with a personality, with a strong position, clearly stated and relating to the locality but dealing with a universal concern! Or if that just sounds like every other biennial event, just imagine a biennial with a personality".

Perhaps it this issue of the global which lies at the heart of Spectator T and Gavin Wade's approach to it. This assumption which lies so powerfully at the centre of art practice that ultimately all our aims are indeed the same and are aimed at this international practice is under question here.

Whatever one makes of Gavin Wade's text and its literary qualities, and whatever one makes of his slip into Biennial think, what it does successfully signal is a genuine attempt to place specific location and sensibility at the heart of the curatorial process. An attempt of working from the inside out. An inside which is defiantly of this city and, at the absolute polar opposite end of the universal and global biennial transnational utopian aspirations.

Effectively, along with SCAF knowing what they didn't want, and Gavin's attempt to locate something within or without an act of destruction, an incident particular and specific to a time and place, it could be said that the motif, if there really one, for the programme was one of wilful refusal.

Where the "biennials" tend to offer the loudest, most positivist claims for an inclusive, all-encompassing and hyperventilating YES! (Liverpool Trace, Venice's dreams and conflicts etc) Artsheffield05 timidly begins with a no sitting alongside a yes. A sort of YES, we don't have to do it that way.

The abiding image, of the trashed art work, for Art Sheffield 05 is entropic and joyfully negative. As Neil Webb and James Brown put it in the Spectator T website, the broken remains of 'Here are the Young Persons' scattered across the yard of a bowling green on the outskirts of Sheffield (where they had been taken by the local council after they had been destroyed) is a valid articulation and a potent image. It's as though the biennial is already in ruins.

As Liam Gillick has noted, the problems of art are significant only when one thinks of art as something different than anything else. Interestingly, the dubious claims of art to be something other or more important than anything else come most to the fore when something goes wrong. Gavin's trashed boards for one and his surprise at the fact, or the Gregor Schneider experience in Venice, in which the artist was refused permission by the Venetian authorities to build a replica of the Ka Ba. Schneider's proposal was to build a version of the Ka Ba; the most holy structure of Islam which stands at the heart of Mecca in the vast expanses of St. Marks Sq. Schneider was refused, unsurprisingly. What was surprising, at least to me, was the level of outraged indignation expressed by Schneider at the intolerance of the authorities and their fascistic stamping on the principles of free speech.

I don't know, what did Schneider really expect? To then go on to make work which concerns the intractability of the authorities and the lack of free speech seems at best naive, and at worst opportunistic.

One of the doubts I initially felt about the way Art Sheffield 05 was moving was echoed by and articulated much better than I was able in the comments of Heather and Ivan Morrison's comments on the website.

"We liked the idea of an alphabet of spectators and Gavin Wade's anecdote of meeting Spectator T. However we found his long text from T's point of view unconvincing and the task of positioning our work in relation to this fictional character seems pointless. If T is the creation of Gavin Wade then we are reacting to Wade, and not to any real spectator. We are therefore presenting our proposal with a whole alphabet of possible actual spectators in mind."

Ironically, the effect of Gavin Wade's text is to colonise a voice by the voice of the artist in attempt to locate the vision of a spectator. But Gavin isn't locating a spectator; because Spectator T doesn't exist. The idea of Spectators A, B, C or T is a strong theoretical model but when it is applied to the individual being limited to a single and unshakeable spectator position, it is deeply flawed. By definition, it sets a limit upon the subject as

governed by a series of universalising principles and an authorial voice. Despite good intentions, the local is inevitably invaded by the universal, by theory.

Spectators A, B, C and T, I would make a guess exist in parts in all of us, and what might be seen as critical to our own Spectators A and B may simply be irritating to the Spectator T in all of us. Indeed, it may be the very rational sense of irritation which brings out the Spectator T within us.

..and I'd qualify this by making the case that while criticality is often felt as an irritant, as pointed out by JJ Charlesworth in his "dysfunction of criticism", I could add that if something is irritating it doesn't necessarily mean its critical.

In the end, though Tony T is a shibboleth, a fiction, an assumption, a vague and shadowy figure, part value judgment, distanced from sociological research, subjective and patronizing, he may have been only way forward for artsheffield05. His trashing of Gavin's work may not be so much about hating art. Indeed, there may well be a potential audience out there who appear to hate art, but in fact are not anti-art at all but anti the patronization of what might be seen, rightly or wrongly, as homogeneity of a global practices descending on a local context. Precisely the point at which it becomes "art".

It is the overall strategies and the artists' works of Art Sheffield 05 that is the sign of its intent rather than the idea of Spectator T alone. The point at which the various strategies come together. Gavin's brave text, the disruption of the standard curatorial practice, the call for nominations from artists applying, the successfully nominated artists then selecting from open submission and the way the artists have made the work.

If the Istanbul Biennial laid claims to addressing locality by attempting to refuse the grand spaces and insinuate itself into the fabric of the city, perhaps, through its processes SCAF attempted to force a change within itself by disrupting the flow of its production and representations, including its assumed "upcoming status as a Biennial".

Certainly in its ambiguous methods and in its developing intentions, in its sense of combined purpose and purposelessness and doubt, in Gavin's text whether I like it or not, and in its attempt to change the curatorial processes Sheffield Art 05 is making slow moves towards JJ Charlesworth's definition of criticality, in that, as an agency responsible for an attempting to foster an understanding and distribution of contemporary art within this city, it could be said in this instance that it "attempts to implicitly try to assess its own value within the realms of its own production and context".

Or at least, it's starting to.

Finally, I'd just like to quote from Tirdad Zolghadr review of the Venice Biennial in respect of what I won't think you will find here.

"Taking at face value the biennial paradigm forcing spectators to make active choices, I set up a strict viewing criteria to help manage the awesome flow of matter. For example, every film which might have been the doing of a myopic vacationer with Parkinson's disease I immediately disregarded. Every queue of more than 5 people I passed discretely by. And projects catering to the notion of artists as shamanic bohemians making dickheads out of themselves in public spaces, slinking about with no clothes on, hugging strange objects in subways, plopping their feet in ketchup red metaphors of misfortune, all of these I tactfully ignored."

Becky Shaw

BS: My timescale's been slightly different, because I've had four weeks before now, and I've got another four weeks, so I hope you excuse me, for delivering something to you that's quite speculative, because I've still got lots of uncertainty about what I'm doing, and at the moment I either work in two halves, in two places. In response to Tony T's statement, 'Real life's somewhere else', I applied to Spectator T with a plan to spend time in forensic engineering course, at Sheffield Hallam, at the university, as their prospectus describes, this is a course you can do an HND, a Bsc, an Msc and basically forensic engineers in particular, cause that's what interested me most, find out the cause of accidents, or crimes, or material failure, by investigating material evidence. It's very straight forward. And the clients, if you are a forensic engineer, your client might be the police force, the legal profession, insurance adjusters or manufacturing with material problems.

It interested me because like Tony T, as it seemed to me, they seem concerned with finding out what reality was, but unlike Tony T, their aim is to utterly remove the individual to gain an objective truth, and without here this description of objective truth, people worry about it a lot, in lots of different areas, but forensic engineering really does have a sense of objective truth, because they have the stuff, they have the evidence. But, so they are looking at the evidence material world, not pitching one person's reality against another, so I spent some time with the Msc; you can do forensic science, forensic accountancy and forensic psychology, and all of them have different types of evidence and I'm yet to find out what constitutes evidence in forensic psychology, unfortunately, that course turned out to be distance learning, so it wasn't quite of as interesting to me as I thought it was going to be. But I did find out a few things, I found out that forensic means in service of the law, therefore, kind of the state to, some extent.

I found out that the word forensic originally means in the interests of the marketplace, and I found out that if there wasn't any uncertainty they'd be no law, which I thought was quite interesting, but I also visited the Bsc, which is specifically forensic engineering, and this was extraordinary to me, this dense, warm, space, with 1970s looking equipment, with loads of buttons, students are taught here principles of materials analysis. They learnt to count grain sizes as large grains in materials are a key factor in something called dislocation, when grains in materials pass through material and the material comes apart of its own accord. They have to learn how to calibrate microscopes; you never trust your instrument. The tutor in this particular case gave each of the students an object to study and he set them a project. They each have an object that the tutors found on the street, literally, or he found in his pocket. One of them's his own pen knife that broke, he's given them examples of material failure, and they must spend 3 or 4 weeks analysing them, to find out why they failed. To begin with they take photographs, and they have to work out the correct techniques to analyse the things that they are analysing. And these are the objects; they got a light bulb, they got a broken bolt, and they got this broken commercial bottle mould.

As I was in there it felt so comfortable, because it was all about getting real, it was so real, it was solids and photographs, and unlike Tony who kind of posited his own reality against the consensus of Gavin's project, say, or even against Gavin himself. There was this sense of absolute reality, and this sense of filling a gap between different subjective stories. So, I asked the lecturer, who's actually part of the university's very wealthy commercial unit, it does lots of failure analysis for lots of big

companies, if there's ever been an object that they've failed to unpick. And he says the only time this ever happens is when evidence has been damaged or sometimes when you know that something's happened but you'll never find out who did it. Or it remains always denied such as when someone on the factory floor, this is my favourite story, left the door open when something was being cast and it wrecked a huge amount of components and of course no-ones ever going to admit to leaving the door open. But it interests me because the reality of objects are always inseparable from the lives of people.

The thing that I got most out is this, what a wonderful experience it was, and you'll see why in a minute, because reality was always confirmed, there are definite things to learn, there are ways to get good grades, ways to be a good forensic engineer, and there's this man who's a bit like my dad, its very homely, and now the students are busy analysing their object, and it dawned on me, what would Tony do in this situation? Well, really, what would I do? Because, automatically you realise, you start to think maybe that you're a bit like Tony T yourself, and I think Tony would work counter forensically, in this situation, when he's been told how you analyse this type of reality, I think Tony would enter engineering, not forensic engineering, he'd go counter forensic, and he would enter engineering and he would ask them to make an exact replica of this object, this broken object, he'd ask them to make an exact copy, and then I anticipate that they'd have to use a process that was nothing like the process to make this original one, 'cos this would have been made in mass and the one I'm talking about would be made in one. And then he'd give it back to the students for analysis at their assessment and using their techniques in their repertoire, the students might actually very easily determine that the edges were not in fact torn, and the copy was not in fact damaged but absolutely perfect, but then it might not be perfect because then it might have other faults in it and perhaps, what they'd never have understood is why someone might have done it, although of course, they could ask the forensic psychologist, it dawned on me. But perhaps also, I'm underestimating them, and perhaps they've had the very same impulse themselves, and feel very much the same way I might feel by going onto that course, so these are the things I'm considering undertaking for the rest of my residency.

But in the mean time, I want to just speculate on a few others things, because ideas sound really great on paper, and when I wrote this idea of spending time with forensic engineering, you know it as a text, as a thing that answered Gavin's interest it kind of worked really well, but you know, realities aren't like that, you know in a perfect world the university would have welcomed me in with open arms, you know, I like to work in situations where I am asked in, you know like a vampire in a sense. You know, its uncomfortable to do it if they haven't asked you in, that interests me.

So it's not easy to work there, but there's another issue because actually although the project is taking place under Spectator T, I actually have a residency at Yorkshire ArtSpace, and that has a different time frame and almost a different set of commissioners so what do you make of that space in between? Especially when it's this space. Now, just the contrast between the two spaces is so overwhelming and I wondered what Tony, fresh from thinking backwards through events in forensic engineering, what happened to get us here, would make of this space? I think, Tony would think, what on earth is this space for? It borrows from the lofty proportions of what we recognise from converted industrial warehouse art galleries like MassMOCA, if anyone has ever been to Massachusetts, designed to house abstract expressionism. Its strange because being in this room for a month I

did notice something strange which makes you very self conscious, cause you see yourself, only in the space, you become a very physical little nut in this huge space and you do a hell of a lot of navel gazing, I'm ashamed to admit, but I think maybe its to do with the abstract expressionism, (*laughter from audience*) erm, I'm not going to go any further on that. But there's a sort of sense of implosion, I even began to wonder if the space could induce agoraphobia which kind of interested me because the forensic engineering was actually very claustrophobic. But at the same time, this isn't a gallery; it's not a place of display, apart from me, as people look through the window and its supposed to be a space for the public, but the ceilings are actually too high, and the room too echoing to work with people in there, it's a new building and yet it borrows from an industrial language of the factory and the warehouse, why is that? Is that nostalgia for Sheffield's glorious past, is it an anachronism, is it a fictional recreation of an industrial looking artist led space? It is because it's the only model we have of production, is it due to finance? Or does it reveal our expectations for the creative industries of Sheffield? And all this has sort of going through my mind and thinking, it also feels really unreal, this space, that really contrast with the real life of forensic engineering. But there is something in there, there's this whole lot of expectations and conventions of what art is and what is placed in the world is, and maybe that is a question of a type of reality that Tony didn't want around.

And it dawned on me, well, somebody said to me, that perhaps forensics is based, there's this sort of urge to fill this room because its so big, and friend flippantly said to me, perhaps forensics is based on a similar impulse to fill gaps when we don't know what's happened in the middle of some information, and basically you are reminded that in contrast of forensic engineering, being an artist is really uncertain, and the empty space of a residency really compounds this. So basically, I think Tony would hate this space, and with all due respect, I hate this space! So what do you do with it? I've got sort four fairly flippant meandering thoughts about with this, you might try and get warm, which is a bit unfair because we worked out how to get the heating on after a few weeks, there was some problem, someone said you might draw a draught excluder and fluffy slippers on it, or you might sort of bring in the warm feted air from the Spearmint Rhino opposite, a bit of real life, a bit of thrust and grind into the cleanliness and clarity, and austerity of an artspace. Or you can just get your head down and just think about it. As I've been there I've kept a diary, it's a very navel gazing diary, as JJ discovered when I tried to take it out of his hands yesterday, I didn't want him to read bits of it! Erm, it dawned on me that in the midst of trying to write this diary, that I was trying to squeeze together fact, fact which seems objective and fiction that seems to come out of my head, and perhaps some things I might act on, so I started colour coding my diary, and I colour coded it according to sort of engineering, and there's blue for live, no, green for live, no blue for, er, oh I can't remember how it works, er, live, neutral and er whatever the other one is in a plug...

Members of the Audience: Earth!

BS: Earth! Thank you! Or the other option is that you can flee, and residencies make you flee, there's no question, you wanna get away from art, you really well, that's my impulse, I go shopping, as much as I can on residencies, so I started to wonder what that's about, and I think again it's a kind of search for some kind of real life, all though, of course, you won't necessarily find it there either. I became interested in the density of things I looked, the density of fabrics, like I could escape from the kind of openness of the space I was in, and then, my final answer, for the time being came more from Tony T's thoughts than mine and some of you kind of

sampled it last night, and that's just get out of the building, by any means possible, and seeing as the space was a bit drafty to begin with, I became really interested in the heating system, and I thought I thought, what if Tony used his new forensic techniques and interests to follow the heating out of the building, in the hope of finding warmth, or real life, so in following it, he would pass through the studios, of artists, because that's where the heating directly runs from my studio, down the corridor, down the dry riser, into the basement, down through the next floor, past the office, down into the basement, through the room from the artspace into the boiler room, through the boiler room, down into the heat transfer unit but then what happens here because Sheffield uses something called 'Sheffield Heat and Power', which means that masses of the buildings in Sheffield are heated from one source. Onyx takes all your rubbish, and it burns it, and it gives heat, hot water, which it transfers to vast numbers of industrial and manufacturing premises all over Sheffield and it transfers the heat into the buildings through something in *there*. So perhaps even if Tony was to follow this system out of the building, he may not find real life then, because he might find a whole lot of other spaces, that may look just like Yorkshire ArtSpace, and in fact that's where it ends up, and that's where you, if you came last night, where you ended up.

Joanne Tatham & Tom O'Sullivan

TO: Hello everybody, I'm Tom, and this is Joanne and we got one of the large commissions for Spectator T, and we are based in Glasgow, so we've come down to Sheffield from Glasgow, which we could talk about...

JT: I think one of the things which is different from well, listening to Gavin, in particular talking and Steve as well, is they are talking very much about a curatorial strategy and also listening to Becky talk about a response to Spectator T, and we're in this very different situation in a way, where, we were kind of invited to kind of make a work without having heard of Spectator T or, we were sent the text so it wasn't like, 'oh do you want to come and be in it'? But in a sense the kind of dynamic of that was just very different so it was very different to everyone saying, oh yes, we identify with Spectator T, we want to make a work in relation to Spectator T, we were a little bit, in a sense, kind of like bemused, as to quite where we fitted in, as quite how we were going to fit in, but we thought, oh, well let's give it a go, let's see what happens, because sometimes that's kind of interesting as an artist, to kind of take that.

TO: And we were also invited to be part of the commission process, we were invited to sit in to help select the other artist nominations, who had nominated us, and that was again quite a curious time we had, it was me and Joanne, Ryan, Gavin, obviously various members of SCAF, and I have to say it was a very sort of lively debate we had because to be quite frank, me and Joanne have very different opinions to Gavin and a lot of the works...

JT: And we felt no responsibility that what people proposed should have anything to do with the Spectator T kind of premise, the curatorial premise that Gavin had set up, was his idea, and we were like, you know in a sense, a bit like he was saying he didn't feel there was any responsibility to follow through what was set up in terms of the application process and then he felt if he needed more people putting in because it made sense, I mean, our responsibilities was similarly sort of broken down by feeling that if we wanted work to be in we could sort of suggest that and the whole thing, was for us, the whole experience of how the show came together is very, was just very kind of curious really, not necessarily, um, not a bad thing, I'm not saying it was a bad thing...

TO: And we can talk more about this later on if people want to talk about this, but for us, when we were looking at the proposals, we were interested in interesting practices. As artists we are interested in interesting practices. Full stop.

JT: We wanted to see a good show, we wanted to see works that we just wanted to see, you know, there were a few things we thought, we like that, it would be great to see that, we haven't seen that before, you know, and those were the things where we kind of went for, we were fairly sort of...

TO: And I think in a way our understanding is if we see an interesting practice and the work that comes out of that by, that is necessarily going to be interesting socially. That's a piece of work that is going to be engaging, or has a complex, or a kind of interesting relationship to its context, to itself, to its past, to any spectators. So I think for me and Joanne we personally felt the Spectator T thing was a bit of a kind of

clunk on at least how we think about, how we think about our work and how we think about other work that we find interesting.

JT: Yeah, I don't think we'd ever call, I mean, I know the show, the exhibition is not, wouldn't call itself an exhibition of socially engaged practice and I know its trying to think much more kind of critically about the idea of social engagement and I think that's why we were kind of asked to be in it, but I think our relationship to, you know, those kind of practices is quite oblique in a way. Any way, it wasn't kind of top of our list in terms of what we were concerned with, we felt, the work we made was in a sense about the only thing we could do in this show; we felt it was the only possible opportunity we felt there were so many other things that would just really be ridiculous for us to do in terms of other kinds of projects we've been involved in, yeah, and I'm not sure if. I kind of think about it now, and I think maybe we should've been more perverse and put something in which would have been like 'huh'? Kind of like that it came from another kind of section of what we did...

TO: So um, we could also talk about, because there's lots of sort of interesting things we would love to talk about because we did take part in the Venice Biennale, representing Scotland, which was a very interesting experience...

JT: Twice.

TO: And not a particularly pleasant experience.

JT: So we've got a lot of thoughts about biennales. And we also took part in the Prague Biennale, so it's interesting to hear Steve talk about that and the experiences of what it's trying to do, and what that's trying to stand for...

SD: Which one was it?

JT: The first one.

TO: I don't know, I think there was only one then I think...

JT: I think it was the first one yeah...

TO: So we could talk about that as well, before we came here we thought what we'd do is if we went through a few images and we thought that it might be interesting for people who haven't seen the work that we did in the unit over there, the object, we thought it might be interested to show you a few images that show the kind of lineage of that object. Some of the other .. we work in a number of different ways but we'll show the lineage of that particular way of working and also, because we often talk about our work as 'what happens to it'. The meaning of our work is often when it happens.

JT: Again, one the ways in which we talk about it, when we do talk about our work is to describe other people's responses to it. So maybe it is un, in some sense, trying to pull back and acknowledge some of the other things or issues that this show is kind of concerned with so I'm not being completely contrary. I'm going to try and hit the right button Yes.

TO: So this is the first time we did one of these large, figurative, banal looking structures. We did this in Switzerland in Kunsthaus Glarus and we did it .. how many years ago ..?

JT: 2 years ago

TO: 2 years ago, similar kind of scale to the thing up the road, slightly bigger, completely black, cut out face again, similar kind of face

JT: And in the back, it is a giant speech bubble, you can't quite see the curly bit which would show it is a speech bubble, its behind the pyramid. But I suppose in a way its telling you it's a sign for something in a way, its kind of a sort of dead end, its kind of goes round in a circle it goes 'here is a pyramid, and here is a speech bubble telling you it's a pyramid .. what a shock' .. you know. To me that seems to suggest a disturbing literal mindedness One of these things again, with these pyramids and the shades we use is the potential we have to kind of open up quite different encounters or situations for the viewer.

TO: I'm just interested to say, in this situation, as Joanne said, that there was another component to this show but it was in a way a set of ciphers, a set of motives, almost like a kind of conundrum to wander round, and that is how we very much saw it. Although using a certain theatrical spectacle, theatrical devices to hook you in, but we had, for example, on the opening night we had an elderly Swiss-German lady who was the mother of one of the artists in the show and she was incredibly passionate about this work we'd done ...

JT: In Swiss-German ..

TO: In Swiss-German, but we could follow certain things. Glarus is up in the mountains in Switzerland, above Zurich and the mountains are very, very pointed and she kept making reference to the mountains and reference to the pyramid we understood that she was talking about astrology, astronomy, magic and ...

JT: On and On ...

JT: she kept dragging us back to it and pointing, you know I think that perhaps one of these is in the mountains, above Glarus That is you know, well, we'll have to go back and get confirmation. But really, we're hamming it up a bit, but I think the point was, we're very .. you know as artists, what we do what we're involved ourselves in is art, and we make art and we're interested in the history of art and we're interested in the images of art and the myths of art. But she was interested in completely different narrative or space for this and what it meant to her is not something I'm not going to take away from anybody and it is very inspiring, and also, I suppose I like to think of this woman because she is not, you know, if you have a Spectator T this elderly Swiss-German woman was not anywhere within that kind of alphabet. You know, when you make art for audiences, you know it is just sometimes those specific instances for people that are kind of, that are important but she is not somebody I would have thought of had I not met her And it is really great not to rule anybody out in your presumptions about audiences.

TO: Do you want to onto go to the next ...

JT: Oh yeah .. that is just a close up,

TO: So this motive appeared again. We were asked to do a project in Cardiff. CBAT, Cardiff Biennial Art Trust did a project curated by Gordon Dalton called 'there aint no love in the heart of the city' and Gordon had seen previous works of ours and he actually had an idea, he came to us with the idea 'how about doing one of

our structures' and not only had he the idea, he actually had a waste ground to show the work in. so we just thought, well, that all clicks, so that is great, so let's go along with that ...

JT: So, as you can see, things go beyond us as regards the making of the work as well. The audience, the existing audience, were kind of taking it and doing something else and that continued with this project.

TO: So one of the things we are very interesting in is 'how work exists as an image'. This idea of showing this kind of structure, this kind of motive in this waste ground. We thought, this is great, this is a very interesting thing for us to do, to set it up so we planned the whole process of taking the work down, set it all up in a day and then photograph it. And for us, in a way, we now have this image of this work – but what is interesting is, whilst we were putting it all up, just next door is the local school and , a lot of the local kids came over and were very antagonistic towards this. ...

JT: Well, some were, some of the older children were, the younger children were actually kind, quite amazed to see something like this appearing just outside their play ground ..

TO: So there were a few stones thrown ...

JT: We got a bit of abuse. And so we knew, before it was finished, not only its days were numbered but we knew that its hours were numbered and I think, this is always to be expected I suppose because the Cardiff Bay Area is an area which is developing into a lot of gates, private, luxury developments and it also still has the original housing which is quite a poor area and there is a real visible, sort of, discomfort there. It just doesn't make sense as an area and a lot of public sculpture such as big metal water features, have been imposed on that area so, everyone who lives there will kind of think 'Oh, is that another sculpture' and has every right to be kind of slightly irritated. And two nights later, one of these gated developments was actually burned down and we had expected that to be the fate for this work but actually, when we came back the following morning, it only suffered quite a small amount of damage. The mouth had been slightly ripped off to widen the aperture. And then, what was actually really interesting, about five minutes up the road another sculpture had been sited outdoors and part of that, a fence, had been taken off and had been screwed on the top of the lip, obviously an adult had assisted, and then a little ladder had been placed inside with cardboard box and a football and it had kind of become, you know, just even that short amount of time, somebody had thought, you know, 'this will make a good den' you can actually lift it up so it's a little door to go and out. And ... we were actually quite amazed, it was kind of happier outcome than we could have hoped for in a way. And I think that the work did actually continue to exist in that form ... I don't think it finally disintegrated for maybe several months and it was only made out of MDF so it wasn't really designed to withstand the weather so, it was a very interesting situation.

TO: So, it ultimately found another function

TO: So, we are just showing you this one , which is one of the most recent ones we've done, obviously, in the piece that were showing in Spectator T we've used the pattern, this kind of particular pattern on one of the surfaces of the object. This is one we did in Studio Voltaire, which is an artists' run space in London and it is a similar sort of scale, with the cut out mouth and nose and eyes but this one is kind of

stuff on the surface of it. Again, talking about spectators and who saw this we thought this is kind of interesting. It got reviewed in Untitled magazine, and ... somewhere we got it ... by a writer called Robert Garnett and, again, this is another kind of audience, other artists are also your audience, art writers are your audience so we thought we just read out a bit of the way this particular spectator responded ..

JT: 'What might this head say if it could speak, well, probably nothing at all. The mouth of the work has been cut out of the surface of a minimal form and opens into a black hole. The work is not concerned with representing anything, or allegorically, doing one thing and meaning another ..' and it carries on .. 'the artists have taken a cipher of high art, in this case, a minimalist modular form, and inscribed a face upon it which simultaneously defaces it. What defacing constitutes is not a primitive head but rather, what Deleuze and Guattari refer to, as probe heads that project forward into the primitive. The probe head penetrates the surface image of art that exist in order to create new sensations, the effect that is produced by this process is a-signifying, pre-subjective and corporeal. It is less one of a primal traumatic shock than it is of preposterous confounding humour'.

TO: So, there you go, that's another spectator, using a particular kind of language and a particular way of approaching and a particular way of thinking about it. At the same time, Studio Voltaire is part of project which run a series of workshops and one particular workshop was interesting, it was a workshop with Albanian teenagers who are based in London. Unfortunately, we don't have the images of what they did, but they interpreted it in a very different way and they started to use this pyramid to create their own structures and their own sculptures, using very much the motives that we had used as part of their kind of work. Also bringing in various motives of their own sense of identity and put them onto the objects as well. I just want to mention that as an anecdote, again, to sort of ... well, when we starting thinking about talking this thing slightly making it more complex by this relationship with different spectators of different discourses you can have around these works ..

JT: Shall we go on to the next one ..

TO: We're just finishing with ...

JT: This actually part of the project that we did for the Scottish Pavilion, although it can't be called the Scottish Pavilion because Scotland is not a country. This is part of a work called 'a routine sequence of external actions' and this was a six metre high wooden stick man, kneeling, crawling across the grass in an area which is actually just behind the British Pavilion but outside the Giardini. So it is actually an area which is quite unpopulated by art, it is quite interesting how very few of the art crowd actually escape from the Giardini into this area. ... so we are kind of minimising the art audience, in quite a foolish way.

TO: This thing was crawling as if crawling away from the Giardini and it was great fun, we put it up, we had it all shipped over and then spend a couple of days, putting the whole thing up. And whilst we were putting it up over the next few days it felt ... we had a kind of expectation, having had this experience in Cardiff, we thought 'this will stay up for maybe a few hours, it will get destroyed immediately'. But we found that, as we were putting it up, a lot of people were engaging with the work and, that particular park, as Joanne said, it is not part of so much of the kind of Biennale run-around, so people were kind of jogging by, we had people coming

up to us and talking about it, we had kids playing football, using the back legs as goal posts and, all in all, we felt like kind of, well this is great this fits in with this kind of community here ..

JT: As much as you can tell from being around in a space for a few days and we returned to visit and watched people watching it. We didn't feel that we had done something especially antagonistic and I think a lot of it was kind of 'well, they are used to a bit of art in Venice obviously , it comes and goes, it is good business for the city . But I think, for me that it felt like that is it was quite large but it wasn't particularly .. what is the word .. it fitted in actually really quite well into the area that it was in, with the trees around that it was kind of, partially hidden so it didn't kind of really infringe on the space, you could ignore it quite easily if you wanted to and this is something that we are always interested in, that possibility that art is something that you can ignore 99% of the time and then, occasionally one moment, it can serve a purpose and it has a function.

TO: However, two weeks into the Biennale this thing was systematically destroyed, it was unscrewed, the back was broken and that was the end of the project. But for us it was always an event, and even though these are kind of very physical structures that we make, it is very much an event based piece of work, hence this was the response to the work, the work came down, unfortunately, like in Cardiff, we had to take it away because we couldn't leave it there for Health & Safety reasons, so it disappeared. We just wanted to end with that, just to emphasise that, for us, the idea of experimental nature of Spectator T and for us very much these kind of projects are very much live experiments: 'you set something up and something else happens'. You don't always know what that is going to be but that is part of what you are doing, it is part of the reason of what you're doing. That's it.

JJ Charlesworth

JJ: I guess there are two approaches that I want to quickly take, one is to look at the general proposal of Spectator T which I find very interesting and which I think I'm going to make some comment on mostly but then also to comment on about how it seems to have realised itself or not realised itself in the actual event, in the actual set of exhibition. I think that part is going to be more trivial and probably more about opening that discussion up to everybody because there is only so much I know about how much the curatorial process actually affected itself, realised itself in practice. There are always compromises, there are always ad hoc decisions to me made and of course, good ideas are not always materialised in the way people expected and that is often a good thing and tests those ideas to their limits I suspect if people are fairly honest and fairly straightforward about realising that there are going to be problems and obstacles and contradictions and conflicts along the way.

The one thing that struck me on my way here and thinking about what I was going to say in terms of the proposal on paper or on the web that Gavin put together and also something which happily I think has slightly been confirmed already by speakers in some of the presentations is that I noticed, that is a pre-occupation of mine, that in these discussions about socially engaged art practice there is a lot of artists and critics and practitioners, actually, when they talk about socially engaged art practice and what it means and what it should be for and who it should be for, peculiarly a lot of these discussions are a lot about the artists and practitioners themselves, even though they are not actually saying it. Well that is to say that the sense of the pre-occupation is actually a more personal one and often more kind of almost narcissistic one that people often make out. The reason I say this is that of course, Spectator T is posited on Gavin's response to a situation, that he is kind of working between fact and fiction, between what actually happened with a person or with a situation in which another person was involved but kind of generalising or abstracting it slightly into an idea of basically theorising a relationship or theorising a set of relationships between not just individuals as real people, as concrete serious material real living individuals but also the way in which institutions and ways of thinking about relationships affect the way those relationships actually occur. And it hit me because, having read the Spectator T brief a while ago, there are a couple of other things that I noted connected to it and of course, it is not surprising that socially engaged art practice and discussion around it feeds in and out of other areas of kind of recent debate which are not the same as it but are kind of associated with it, or they kind of intermix, and particularly the two that are relevant here are two specific examples in recent texts that I noted recently.

One of them is a text written by Andrea Fraser in Art Forum about institutional critique, it is in the current one, and she is kind of making a case for trying to reclaim the radical or critical power of art practice which is often bracketed or put under the definition of situational critique practice, people like Hans Haacke and Daniel Buren and all these kind of characters. And in this piece which she has written for Art Forum, she talks about art that internally criticises the art institution and its limits and exposes the power relations that exist in the presentation of art. It is now so institutional that everybody is safe and happy with it. Everybody in the art world gets it, institutions are quite happy to put on shows of institutional critique which criticise institutions so there is a slight sort of feeling of melancholy to this article where she is kind of trying to say, well, we need to get back to the radical moment of this kind of practice.

Another piece was a recent essay in October by Claire Bishop where she is making quite a fierce attack on relational aesthetics, the kinds of art practice that kind of groups around the presence of the critic and curator Nicholas Bourriaud so institutional critique, relational aesthetics, and socially engaged art practice are sort of in kind of play between each other a little bit. In that piece, and coming later to these critical discussions being really about the artist and practitioner individuals and their pre-occupation with their sense of their place in the system, when reading Claire Bishop's essay where she is having a good solid go at a lot of relational aesthetics art, she gets to the point where she likes the work of Santiago Sierra more than some of the more comfortable types of artists like Rirkrit Tiravanija and people like Liam Gillick and so on, she points to the piece by Sierra where he, referring to a piece that he did for a biennial, where he invited street vendors who were all kind of immigrant, marginal types who occupy the space of the city during the biennial to have their hair bleached blond and then to set themselves up as vendors, I think, within the circuit and within the spaces of the biennial and of course her conclusion in that piece is rather curious because it is actually all about her, it's all about me, about the fact that I want to feel guilty about my status in the art world because making these people visible, or by having these marginal members who are excluded from this kind of art jamboree that is going on, I like it because it makes me feel uncomfortable.

And a similar point is made by Fraser in the Art Forum piece where really her conclusion at the end is that institutional critique still has a role to play in as much as it makes the art world self-conscious about itself. Right, so, and this is my interpretation, but there are some fairly clear concluding paragraphs which, if you bother to dig them up, kind of are fairly explicit about what these practices are about, about making me comfortable, or rather, happy, happier about my place in the art world and all its perceived failings and limits and constraints by making myself feel uncomfortable, effectively operating some kind of 'guilt therapy' towards the fact that I feel that my position is privileged and that one's position as a professional allows for a great deal of opportunities but at the cost of others' exclusions.

So, but this weirded me out because I thought that things like institutional critique and relational aesthetics were about a bit more than art world professionals feeling kind of righteous by sort of beating themselves, self flagellation, give me stick to beat myself with, mea culpa. I think that the way in which they poses these things was rather unconscious and rather crass and certainly not as thinking as the way it is set up in Spectator T. However, there is a similar kind of question about precisely who it is who is talking about whom for what purposes and it revolves around a very interesting thing which is coming out of these kinds of comments and discussions about 'does Tony, does Spectator T really exist' and so we touch on this idea that really that this subject position, which is really what we are talking about when we are talking about all these different types of spectators, and it goes back to this article by Art and Language and then, subsequently, by another artist's reference by Dave Beech and then by Gavin is referring further on to this alphabet of possible spectator subject positions down to Spectator T who actively hates art and it bothers him and gets in his way and he doesn't like it but, there seems to be for me a kind of confusion, or an interesting confusion between the fact that, although we know that certain people actually exist and don't like artworks enough and go and smash them up, it is more about a pre-occupation about the difficult, the anxiety that art practitioners about their separation from what they perceive to be an authentic social scene, or a space that they might find themselves harmoniously

integrated into, I think, so, not only Spectator T but in general the number of positions that work around the idea that there is a separate art world from the rest of society and that this has to be worked through, or has to be dealt with somehow, generates this thing where we project ideal subjects elsewhere, we project others basically.

I'm not trying to use a cod-psychoanalytical model but the idea of projection is interesting in as much as, what it suggests is that the business of actual engagement, of the actual real relations to people is in trouble and is at stake. So we invent certain problem characters, or problem situations in which we dramatise the split between professionalised or institutionalised artistic practice or the way in which artistic practice becomes part of a specialist institution on the fact that we like it actually to do it a bit more or that art practitioners would like to do something to get beyond that. I guess that, as an aside, this idea of the inspectoral or fictional subject that is used as a counterweight to art practices' own sense of separation, for example, I don't know if everybody is familiar with the so called philistine controversy that Dave Beech and John Roberts initiated with a set of essays in the mid-nineties, it is interesting there for example that, in their initial deliberation and expression of the idea of 'the philistine' this supposed subject that is excluded from art, they had to correct themselves, or they had to correct their interpretation of the philistine in a second essay later on when they had a lot of response to the first essay called 'Spectres of the Aesthetic' in which they tried to point out and clarify that really there isn't a philistine, a real one that you can go and talk to, or that rather they are not talking about that, they are talking about the fact that art world produces an art world subject which relies on a kind of other, the philistine to support and validate itself. So, it's interesting that this business of subjective projection or the projection of a fictional subject as part of the need to work out where we are and who we are as practitioners is a kind of perennial and ongoing debate which perhaps can't be resolved and maybe, and I say quickly why, or rather it might be resolved in a particular way socially engaged art always strikes me a quite peculiar at the moment because it is obviously not as engaged as art but is closer to direct engagement with society.

That is to say that socially engaged art always talks about itself as wanting to operate a model of closeness to one that identifies itself with as outside the art world and the social. But the problem is that, at the moment, and I think that people tend to miss this a lot, it is something to do with the way in which socially engaged art practice relies on the institution of art to mediate it with a broader public and this is where the very interesting kind of point about Spectator T comes into the picture which is that, in order to have the possibility to operate project of socially engaged art practice, one still relies on kind of bureaucracy of art funding and arts management and art institutions in order to mediate between the artist and the community. Although it is not evidently apparent because often artists operate directly with the groups and audiences that they wish to there is nevertheless a business of having to negotiate the fact that this can happen, socially engaged art practice which is independent and does it off its own back and goes into whatever community it wishes to work with is one thing socially engaged art practice which needs support of an existing institutional infrastructure in order to do the same thing is a different thing, it is not the same thing. So, that is why, whilst I was kind of sitting here, I was kind of day dreaming a little bit about what a more romantic, or a more rugged and independent and individualistic idea of socially engaged art might be and I was wondering about how the futurists might have gone to an opening in pre first world war Italy and gone and beaten people up or hit people with their umbrellas and it struck me

that this is quite socially engaged too or that modernist painters who were patronised by rich collectors would be engaging with the whole house and the cabaret and salons of the aristocracy and that this was also a kind of socially engaged kind of form of behaviour but the point being that the form of social engagement is quite haphazard or spontaneous to the those given situations, but as far as I'm concerned, and I might be a bit of a lumpen philistine in assuming these things, these things seem to me in a context which are equally deserving of the definition of socially engaged practice, in form or another.

So the point about that though, and that is where the idea of conflict comes into it, and actually comes into it as an idea of 'free speech' and an idea of what it means to be integrated into a society and what we should expect about being practitioners and being artists within a broader society and having a local community and having a local audience and group to work with also, it strikes me that often what goes on and where the tension comes out of these engagements between artists who assume that there is something to be engaged with out there is that we often misunderstand by what we mean by 'ordinary people'. I think that is a key thing, and I wonder whether in the kind of narrative of Spectator T I wonder if the conflict and violence comes out of someone knowing that someone else is assigning them the place of the subject position of the 'ordinary person'. Now of course that is a bit suspect because I always tend to think of us as ordinary people just ordinary people who do something that we associate with each other to do and in that sense the idea that we have these distinct separations between art is supposed to be and what it is supposed to exclude and the fact that there is another group of people who are supposedly excluded by that is something of a black and white distinction which isn't so helpful often when it comes to understanding that often people move in and out of these subject positions all the time and that in a sense that, referring back the original text of Art and Language where Spectator A goes straight to work and Spectator B goes for the notes on the wall looks for the catalogue essays and all this kind of stuff and these are different positions, I find myself doing both and sometimes there is art that I really would like to kick in because it offends me and I find it disgusting to my sensibilities. There have been good enough moments with the Chapman brothers' work where I would have happily found an axe if there was one to hand because, of course, art is not something which we always take lying down and culture isn't, it is something that we want to make value out of, we want to value and we want to believe what is important and that we have some stake in what the importance should be.

So, in short I guess the point of mis-identification, which is what I'm talking about I suspect, is that we have to be very cautious about who it is we think we are not and the dilemma in there, and it comes back to the institution and something which I might call the liberal institution and especially a public art institution but art institutions in general, public and private, now tend to work on a very open model, an open ideology, a liberal one where everything should be permitted and everybody should have their moment to try out what they want to do, in the sense that, and again we noticed that there have been comments this afternoon about there being no alternative or rather the disappearance of the alternative scene is seen as a curious phenomenon, that partly has to do with the fact that, of course, it is impossible to be an alternative to an institution that wishes to say that everybody is right.

The trouble about that, I think and that is not the fault of artists actually, it is the fault of that particular mentality of, particularly, a public art institution thinking, is that if everybody is right and everybody has equal rights to the time and the resources

available, then, unfortunately, the institutions (public funding, galleries and so on) tend to have to side with artists when the public doesn't like what artists do, it is quite simple. So, because you have to defend everybody equally, because everybody has equal rights to this liberal institution, when the actual real, ordinary, normal society made up of all kinds of different people gets up and says 'we really don't like this' there is always the sense that artists are being paid to be these stooges for this thing called 'contemporary art, whereas at the same time all kinds of old fashioned art get support too, because people tend to like it and don't have any problems with it and because it gets on with itself without too much trouble. The interesting thing is the conflict that emerges when the public, when they feel that they don't have any stake in the way in which things are assessed, the violence kind of emerges, or the conflict emerges because people don't realise that their opinions are not involved, or the business of evaluating and having an opinion and thinking about and responding to art culture, that kind of conflict comes about when people realise that in effect, it is none of their business. So there are tensions about how the institution of art wishes to provide for a pluralist and open spectrum and it runs into the buffers when actually, people do want to have a say and actually, funnily enough, do want to be involved in a peculiar way.

So it strikes me that one of the problems of Spectator T is that it comes from the unresolved projection of the institution, knowing that it both wants to make art culture integrated into a more broader and more exciting kind of general lived culture, but then can't actually struggle through, organisationally, the fact that it still pulls the shots about who gets to say what about which thing or which art. So in a way, the problem about socially engaged art practice kind of dramatises the distinction of different groups but doesn't actually allow them free play to sort it out amongst themselves. And this is where it comes down to, for me, questions of free expression do need to be supported by ideas and questioned of free organisation and free access to resources and to the institution itself. And in short, and maybe to kind of step over to the actual show, what is interesting about Spectator T is that there few vulgar examples of deliberate obvious engagement with 'the public', which is actually quite refreshing and helpful. What is also interesting is that a lot of the work, and I don't know how it has been selected, a lot of the work has a certain kind of attitude to it which is a little bit difficult, a little bit unpleasant and a little bit raucous and stupid and good looking and at the same time being a bit crude. You notice of course that, or my kind of take on this is that, weirdly enough, a lot of the work seems to be selected because it sort of internalises this difficulty of who we are and what we want to work to be and who we want it to be for.

So, it seems to me interesting that we can have a non-biennial biennial, a large festival, which really on one level wants to address the spectators that want to be addressed, alright, that is the same people who are interested in art, there is no art audience in Sheffield is bizarre when there are obviously a lot of people who are interested in art in Sheffield. It is just not everybody, but, quite why you want everybody to be interested in art is peculiar because, one of the principles I stick by, is that it should make its own case to who-ever, and people should come to a work and find out about it and respond to it, in a free and open way. And if the work is actually interested in opening its audience, or creating a more broader culture to who it addresses or addresses a broader set of people through artworks, then it has to happen in a fairly loose and improvised and organic way. And something that does tend to close these things down is when too many specifics and too many demands, too many obvious operational and totalitarian demands on what it is that the works are supposed to do.

So, in that sense Spectator T is always going to be not wholly realised. I think Gavin is right in saying that maybe its is good that it doesn't quite work or that it is trying to work but that it is going to run into real people somewhere along the line. I think that is a good thing, it is a good thing to flag up an idea of that problem to an audience that reads the idea into the way in which they approach the work and it also good that the selection and the range of work that is there doesn't necessarily demand and pretend to be entirely the realisation of that project, which, of course, by definition can only address the people who can see it, who read that text and understand what is at stake. Hopefully Spectator T moves from being Spectator T to S or whatever and moves backwards and forwards, in the ideal circumstances that people are not always fixed in how they understand and how they appreciate what it is that they are witnessing or encountering. As Gavin noted that, earlier, Tony is now doing a foundation in art, this is kind of funny but is also a hopeful point to make and I'm going to leave it there because that is enough, actually ...

Sally O'Reilly

SO'R:

Gavin read a piece from Graham Green's story of 'The Destructors', which makes great sense of where I wanted to start which is with this idea of love and hate and Graham Green, the characters in there say that 'love and hate are soft and hooley, there's only things' and my allegory about love and hate is that, well, we know as we're not as sceptical as these young boys in 'The Destructors', we know that love and hate possibly do exist, we certainly experience them but there is a great difference between their materiality. I characterise love as being quite flighty and hate as very, very solid. If someone says to you that they 'hate' you, you believe them forever and no amount of their insistence with ever change your mind, you think 'God, that's it forever, they just hate me', but if somebody says they love you, you check every single day, 'Do you still love me, I love you, do you still love me?'. And it is this ongoing exchange and curiosity and they are two..., they're distinctly related but they're violently different in their materiality. So Tony T, he hates art, that is a very solid position and I love and am very curious about art and so I keep back and checking, I have this ongoing relationship with art, we have our ups and downs, we are not getting on very well at the moment, I have to admit, after Frieze ... it is a bit of an overload. I can't see them every minute of every day, I need some time to myself... but Tony hates it and, as far as I can see, that is a closed door and any sensible person would just move onto the next relationship, I know that there are these kinds of people that stalk and bash down doors, but a sensible person would move on and I think that most of the artists in Spectator T have moved on from this idea of a Spectator who isn't interested in art or actively dislikes it.

There is a lot of work that exists, especially for this exhibition that perhaps wouldn't have existed in a particularly different form. I think Tony T may have some fictional presence somewhere admit has been used as a tool for putting together a show, but I think it is like writing, whenever I start writing. I just plunge in and the first paragraph it doesn't matter what it is, it could be on ferrets, it doesn't matter because I know that it's just about starting and I chuck it out of the window. So, that is kind of what I'm going to do here, I'm going to ... not chuck Tony T and Gavin's curatorial approach out of the window but perhaps just treat it like another piece if you like, because it does make sense of the some of the works that is in the show, or it chimes with some of the work that is in the show. ... but having said I think that there is some work that does seem to tantalise or, I think the word 'irritate' came up earlier on, does seem to irritate this notional Tony and I thought that it might be interesting, because I know that it has all been quite abstract and about critiquing institutions and stuff like that but I'm going to walk around the work a bit now because we've all seen it by now so it is quite nice have some tangible and common images.

So, I think it might be quite interesting to talk about Joanne and Tom's truncated pyramid, because you've heard them talk about it and I thought I'd bring my own take to it, I mean so we can have a compare and contrast.. I find that, they said earlier, they could have been doing something really quite perverse but they didn't, well I think they did. I think the pyramid is quite perverse and it is built into it. It is this bonkers truncated thing and also the title is quite important, forgive me if I have misremembered it but I think it is something like 'you've forgotton why you asked me here and I've forgotton why I came' ... Is that nearly ..

T&J: Yes

SO'R: That sort of thing. I know a little bit about their previous work and, again ... I haven't completely remembered the title .. what is it 'Slapstick mystics slapsticks thing' ...

T&J: 'Slapstick mystics with sticks'

SO'R: 'Slapstick mystics with sticks', which was a script for a kind of slapsticky play, that I always found related somewhat to 'Comedia dell'arte' which was a 17th Century Italian dramatic genre which was a precursor to pantomime .. there would be a company and they would travel round Europe with just like a trestle, or not Europe, because they were just on horses or on foot, not in a tour bus so, maybe just a few counties. And they'd have a trestle and Comedia dell'arte has some stock characters, maybe I think, a couple of dozen and there are some 3 to 400 scenarios and each company will just improvise and extemporise upon certain combinations of these things ... but the idea is that it is bringing entertainment to the people, where the people exist in their everyday life. Some of the characters include 'harlequin' and 'punchinello' and they have really entered to vernacular of folk dramatic genre now, and part of that patterning is used on the side of the pyramid, the harlequin's diamonds, which is what made me make this connection between Comedia dell'arte and their past work, and this piece they seem to be referring to this idea of entertainment for all, and yet, it is an extremely confounded object, the pyramid is truncated and somehow the meaning is twisted and compacted. It is, as someone said earlier, this minimalist shape referring to solid formalist sculpture but then it has this convivial face that is cut out of it and this jolly patterning, and they work against one another and it becomes this sort of very confounded object that is pretending to be friendly because it has this smiley face, but is actually much more difficult to unravel than that. So, they seem to be setting up some kind of crisis of readership, it is very difficult to know what to do with this object.

And then I started thinking about the work that was at Site, those three, nice big videos there. And there it seems to be more a crisis of authorship, so all those 3 films, Christian Jankowski, Antoine Prum and Daman Packard, in different ways, are working with film as medium and content and subject matter, they are films about films and they are all fucking up with their own strategies or the strategies of accepted ideas of narrative and progression and staging. So in Jankowski there is this interpenetration of another film with a documentary level you know, the actors stop and they turn to camera and they answer questions about their art. And with Antoine Prum, there is the appropriation of a set from another film and then the characters are reading out texts appropriated from other sources on notions about curation. And Damon Packard is sort of extending making ludicrous the vernacular of sci-fi horror film and it is interesting that those 3 pieces ended up at the Site Gallery together cos they are the artists from big fandango-y places abroad doing quite high end stuff but they are all working with layers of representation and reality, they're all fracturing the artifice of their own work and of the idea of film as a medium and eh.. I have been talking and writing quite a bit lately about post modern meta-fiction, which is work that is aware of its own status as artefact, so fiction that is always drawing attention to its own fictionality, which is really great that Gavin read that bit out earlier on where he talked about the character, Tony T, that is the only character of being aware of his own status as character.

So, again, some of the work may not have been made specifically for this idea of someone who isn't into art. The other aspect of this character Tony T, which is this meta-fictional status of a commentator, actually is starting to come through in single pieces in the show and in fact I can't help thinking that there is a self-consciousness and a sort of paranoia and psychotic ness that is coming out throughout the show, in various different ways as well. There is this ongoing criticism of an artwork accepting its own position as artwork, there is all this intervention work interleaving the art and life, you know, all that business, we don't have to have that conversation right now, but critiquing whether or not there is a differentiation and also critiquing historiography I think, there are lots of instances of that.

The Simon and Tom Bloor stickers for instance and Jim Medway's painted Swan Lighter are there out in the city, sort of finding their way into other modes of exchange, hopefully. The problem is that this always finds itself represented in the gallery somehow, and so there we have the photograph of the painted tin, and what are we supposed to do with that, are we supposed to question its veracity, are we supposed to enjoy it as a painterly object, it is very difficult to know, it has an anthropological precariousness, it is not entirely sure what it is or maybe its just me. But anyway, JJ and I got talking last night about this whole idea of the event and the image or object and I was reiterating this, now very old-fashioned, idea coming from performance commentary, which is that any photograph objectifies an event and is a falsification, so this is a real bug bear which is that all these wonderful historic black and white photographs of women having things hanging out of their bits and being dragged around are a gross patriarchal moment of making static something which is subjective and immaterial and unknowable. JJ made this point that well, actually, which is just fetishising the event which is exactly the same possibly as fetishising the object so insisting on the event remaining ephemeral well .. why? It then becomes this infinite regression or should an event be recognised as existing in time only, or is a photographic representation a legitimate tool for reproduction and moving on and becoming an object in its own right and not an artefact that is just simply referring to something else over there? This is happening throughout Spectator T, I think, this show, this unsure-ness.

Another trope that I have seen throughout Spectator T is there is a slight confusion about, if people were reacting to this Spectator, about the confusion of scale. Some people were reacting to the idea of Sheffield 'the city' and taking on architecture as a metonym, if you like, for the people of the city, so I'm wondering if that is a legitimate way of dealing with this problem of art's relationship to the individual and two instances I can think off are Camilla Lyons 'Norfolk Park Flats' which is a representation of flats being pulled down which is a very political pointer and there is Ivan and Heather Morrison's proposed planting for some scrub land which is projected idea onto a place for a possible future. There is a past and a future, but they are both modes of critiquing, I think, this idea of the present.

But for me the pieces in the show that are perhaps more symbolic of what is going on here in Sheffield, after talking to a few people last night are these gifts to the city of Sheffield, the hot dog that is left on the bike and that giant pimp medallion that then got put around people's necks and that 'you are dead' floating about down the river. When I first read about it on the train on the way up it said that 'the works would be dumped somewhere and left to atrophy and then eventually cleared up, and I thought well, what is the difference between that and the rest of the works but then coming here I realised that the rest was held in gallery spaces mainly so I was a bit confused about the brief to begin with. But I think what is interesting about this is that all the artists are from London. And I was talking to somebody last

night who said that they had a *real* difficulty up here when they were studying on their MA with artists coming up from London and giving lectures on professional practice and them all saying 'get the hell out of here .. , just go to London, there is no point being here' .. and they are fed up with hearing this. And it is actually rather shocking.

So I just wanted to end up on a kind of slightly saccharine upbeat note which is that it is great that this is in Sheffield because never in London would you have, say Christian Jankowski and Josephine Flynn's two films on the same programme, that is such a bonkers gap between those two in terms of level of production and also status of the artist. Jankowski is about to have a mid-career retrospective at FACT in Liverpool and he is a real big deal and doesn't get out of bed for less than 20 grand and Josie Flynn graduated last year, which I think is a fantastic contrast and so, although the show might be schizophrenic in that it is pulling against one another, it is not in any way near as psychotic as the last week has been down at Frieze, so that is a real good plus, I think, so, thank you for having me.

ⁱ "Art incorporated" Julian Stallabrass, p34 quoting Rosa Martinez I think from an issue of artforum vol 7 no 10 summer 1999 pp39-40,42 in which she quotes Danto but I'm not sure from where.

ⁱⁱ "What is the alternative?" Martin Herbert. Oct 05. No 290. P13