

Session 3 Knowing From the Inside

William Titley

Art as reverie for reverie

Amanda Ravetz (AR): Our next speaker is William Titley, who is a senior lecturer at UCLAN, and doing a PhD at Manchester School of Art.

William Titley (WT): By focusing on a project where I worked with a handful of men who cared for a loved one at home, we might just catch a glimpse of the creative processes of socially engaged art practice, including some moments where the artist, that's me and participants grapple with the potential of themselves and of physical materials through a process that might be one of collective reverie.

Looking back at my socially engaged art practice, some kind of collective reverie seems to be present in most of the projects. Sometimes, it's hidden away in the process of engagement such as learning Northern Soul dance moves and dreaming of the World Champions at Blackpool Tower Ballroom.

In our conscious attempts to make specific dance moves unconscious, we were encouraged to feel the music deep within our heart and within our soul. And sometimes, projects directly provoked the appearance of reverie through recollection and tacit understanding of place, like the Time Machine project, where audiences can choose someone else's memory from a selection panel to play the song that triggered the memory, which in turn merges with their own new imaginings of people and place.

So onto the project: Men Who Care. I was introduced to the group as they took a trip on a barge along the Leeds and Liverpool Canal in Burnley, after that first meeting, I jotted down some notes to remind me of the conversations that had taken place and titled them, "First Impressions".

I wrote this:

It's always a little unsettling going to meet a new group of people and I guess that's just the nature of the unknown, however, with a decent supply of tea and nibbles, we each chatted about our interests, hobbies, careers and space, a shed space, not shared space but it could be, a space now occupied by life essentials for absent companions, absent and yet present, connected electronically and emotionally to the passengers on this journey via mobile technology, a superfast, super highway on this very super slow way. Football banter and the cost of playing these days soon led to the decoration of cakes in a time when life in miniature lied down well-trodden tracks, from sheds to houses and back again, to the sound of ten years' worth of Scottish Highland bagpipes, cutting across golden carpets flecked with fisherman blues, we emerged from deep within tunnels into the rushes of forward motion, gently pressing ripples at a pace of approximately five miles per hour.

"Where to next", we wondered? Well, we spent most of our time just hanging out and chatting over breakfast, many times dreaming of many futures with other likeminded men who cared. We shared pastimes, sometimes in single file and sometimes in competition and often, in play.

You see, we had bought a pair of antique gentlemen's wardrobes one morning while browsing a local auction house, not really knowing what we could use them for but we just liked their functionality with well organised and clearly labelled shelves, for socks, ties, shirts and pyjamas. In a way, they offered us a glimpse of being a man in another time. An artwork emerged from the playful process and we called it "The gentleman's wardrobe".

The den-like construction provides the audience with sound recordings of everyday chores of the men who care, it also includes a poem about caring for a loved one

with dementia, so the next slide is a little video that I made of the wardrobe which is on show at the Harris Museum at the moment, and it shows one of the men going into the wardrobe and I've tried to make it so that you can experience being in the wardrobe. It doesn't work, you need to be in the wardrobe really but you'll get to hear the audio.

So the audio were brought in by the men, one day one of them just came in and said, "I've recorded all the stuff that I have to do to care for my wife, just making tea, washing up, making meals and stuff like that and getting tablets out of many bottles and cases" and then this alarm thing, which every time he hears this alarm, it makes him really jump up and start doing things without even thinking.

And then after that, there's the poem of the guy who's looking after his wife with dementia and it's about some things that they used to buy when they used to travel round the world and before they ever came home, they always used to buy a little bell and now he uses the bells as like an alarm system in the house, to let him know where his wife is in the house at any one time.

Seven sets of bells hanging from seven different door handles, some large, some small, some in a bunch and some on their own but all disturb the peace, 'clanging again, which one?' It's the back door, it's the Swale Liberty bell we picked up during happier times whilst on one of our many adventures in America. It's okay, [inaudible 00:06:01] the gentle tone of the prayer bell ringing we haggled for in a small mountain village in Baglio, tells me Emily is coming back through the kitchen.

As I help Emily to bed, we pass the front door wind chimes, a last minute impulse buy in Manila, past the two bells on the bathroom door from Hong Kong, which don't really ring anymore due to old age. And now the bedroom bells, cow bells from Austria, from way back, adventures whilst living in Germany, made up of four bells on a leather strap, the bastard bells as I call them, the destroyer of my dreams, my own personal sleep deprivation, a necessarily evil. When the handle is turned, like a sprung trap, the bastard drops, boom it screams, rattling on its restraints, seems desperate to escape, 'get up now, don't think, don't focus, get to the stairs before Emily', another dream bubble burst, remain calm, remain calm, remain calm. A rub of the back, a few reassuring words and another goodnight kiss. At last, back to the sanctuary of the spare bedroom, into bed, still warm, brilliant. As dreams take over, peace again. Boom!

Okay, thank you.