

Art & The Political Seminar: Part 2 **Democracy and Its Discontents**

Traveling the Distance

(with the help of Jane Rendell, Stuart Hall and Lucy Cotter)

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When Ross asked me to do this to begin with I thought ‘oh, that’ll be interesting’ and then I went home and I came out in this rash and I think it’s the idea of thinking about anything that has to do with politics and I was trying to think about whenever David was talking and I think it’s to do with growing up in Northern Ireland in the 70s and 80s where the way you pronounce your letter ‘H’, or the length you wore your skirt, or the side of the road that you walked on, was all completely couched and political; you were saying something by something as simple as that. So I had this really kind of odd relationship to what politics is and what it means and what my relationship is to it. So I guess the work, and the way that I make work, has always been an attempt to understand what my relationship is to politics. Maybe that will come through in the work that I’m going to talk about, that I’m going to show you.

Same as David, I’ve just put in a couple of images of previous work just to show a wee bit of contrast of the different kinds of work that I make but also to talk about the idea of it being about objects that relate to place and about journeys to places in particular. So the first images that you seen were maps, road maps that were cut out and kind of re-presented in a different way. And this is a series of works that I made in the border between England and Scotland; this is a series of photographs called *England in Situ* and it was just looking at the signposts and these objects which were signs in these locations and photographing them; it was a series of photographs where the image was mounted onto the back of glass, the glass was sandblasted and the only wee bit that was kind of really visible properly were the road signs and the photo. So this is just a series of all the road signs at that border, and it was kind of going to a place that I had a question about; it was like, well what is a border? what happens there? And trying to find out that, kind of, asking questions and going to the place and trying to find something out. It is as much about a curiosity about it as anything. And then on the other side there was this other series of works which was called *Scotland Welcomes Who?* and it was just all these signs in the Scottish border. This was made at the same time as David Blunkett was kind of going through all this chat about immigration and about the immigrants into the country having to understand, you know, have a grasp of the English language and what it really meant to invite people into your country when there was all these conditions that applied to it and I was thinking about that, just the same time as I was taking these photographs it was like, well who really is it that you’re welcoming in and what does that mean? And it was just observations in these locations... and journey.

So kind of looking at objects in terms of the maps and newspapers, going to places in particular and also then making journeys. This was a work that I made for an exhibition in Japan two years ago and it was called *Via*. I wanted to not use the map directly or a representation of a place but to try and think about some notion of geography in real time. So if I took a symbol from the map and I took it with me on this journey could I come up with some other kind of map that wasn't so easily read? So it was just a green dot and it reads stop at every point where I kind of touched land on that journey from Glasgow to Japan the dot was photographed. And when I came back home or when I got to the exhibition it was just a series of these images being shown of where the dot kind of jumped about all over the place and it was travelling through eleven countries and travelling over borders and through places, just trying to come up with some other alternative notion of what a map could be, I guess, and looking at the representation of the place through the photograph alongside this kind of much more illustrative thing which was the dot.

I'm always really in awe of people who can refer to things that they've read and articles that they've read, I can't do that so through these slides I just put in these things that for me help situate what I'm thinking about when I'm making the work:

*The distances we travel are physical and psychic, emotional and mental. The others we meet en route take the form of places, objects or people. Most often the distant other we encounter in our travels is what we thought to be a familiar part of ourselves.*¹

And I guess that's kind of thinking about how I make work with objects and materials, engage with places; and importantly the work that I'm going to talk about now was very much about a conversation with people. And all of that is to do with some idea of understanding what it means to encounter the other, another.

The Scottish Parliament commissioned me to make an art work, a sculpture in particular that celebrated and documented women's contribution towards Scottish life, culture, democracy and I ended up getting the commission, for whatever reasons I ended up getting the job of doing it. It started in December 2005 and it was a year-long project from when I began thinking about it to when it got installed into the parliament. And this was going to be a permanent work that was going to be there forever, although half way through I realised that forever meant until the end of this parliamentary term, so it meant that actually in April or May, they would have to renegotiate whether it was actually gonna be for the next four years, so really it's a conversation about the idea of permanence. So I had this job and it was to make a work of art that dealt with women's contributions towards Scottish life and culture and I have these two images that I've had in my studio for ages and I just I love them and for lots of different reasons and mostly because they just kind of bring me back to something I think of as being fundamental to things that I'm interested in. This is a photograph of Terry Sherringham: she's a sculptor and a member of the Independent Labour party and was one of the first women who was in the Labour party. And I guess it's just kind of the strength of her doing that, of that woman in that photograph

¹ Jane Rendell, 'Traveling the Distance/Encountering the Other', published in David Blamey (ed.), *Here, There, Elsewhere: Dialogues on Location and Mobility* (London: Open Editions, 2002). Online version www.akad.se/Rendell_TthD.pdf accessed 3 July 2007, np.

at that time has always been really significant and it's kind of about her relationship to a place as well, you get a real sense of her identity but also how she negotiates her place, whether that's a land, or geographic place, or whatever, wherever that is. So this is an image that I kept coming back to at the beginning of the research and right through the whole of the research. And this was the other one, which is an image by Maurizio Cattalan and I guess it's the space between where that line finishes and where the pen starts is what makes me really curious about this image. I just wonder, it's like space of wonder, what kind of happens there? what didn't get written? or what could have been drawn? You know the ink's run out of the pen and your left with this mark, there's an indentation where the pen's made a kind of groove in the paper, but it's not a very visible mark. And this helped me think about a lot, whenever I started doing research for the project, about the lack of visibility of the historicization of women within Scottish culture and life that there was such an absence of information and writing and documentation about it, that it just wasn't there and what was there was so kind of minimal that that space actually became really important because whatever I was going to do was an attempt to try and fill the gap or address an absence. And also, I guess, it was to do with drawing and with writing and with mark making and with lines. Those are the things that come up through a lot of the work I've done. And so the pen and the paper and the mark were also kind of important in thinking about where I was gonna go with this.

So the early research was meeting people, talking to them, visiting museums, meeting people, kind of reading, trying to find out as much information as I could about what the subject was or what it was I was being asked to do. And the People's Palace in Glasgow which is supposed to have the most extensive collection of Scottish Suffragette memorabilia and I was really excited about going to see this massive collection of stuff and it was a book and some crockery and a couple of banners. And it was that kind of continual disappointment about what there was there to be able to refer to, that was a real impetus for what I was gonna do. This was a list of people who had given up their time and services for a Labour party conference in 1938. And when I did kind of find out bits and pieces there were women involved in the Labour party for a long time, but again it was all male voices, it was men's signature and there was no women in that, there was no identification or record of that. So, that was a quick run through some of the things that came up through the research. Again part of what I do or what I enjoy doing is actually engaging with place physically, the process that I have of making work is about a physical engagement either with an object or with people or with the place so that means that it's about being there, it's about moving, it's about physically engaging with things. And again back to two images that I have, this one's a drawing of a tiny man, or there's a man up in the very top of the mountain with a flag and he's kind of got a wee ladder that takes him right up and somebody's at the bottom waving to him about having gone there and this other photograph of consuming the place through a much more passive engagement with it through looking, through being a voyeur, and I always kind of think of my way of making work as being much more akin to the previous one which is about climbing or walking or going to a place to find things out. So in terms of thinking about how I could work through the process of making this work, it was going to involve some engagement with Scotland, with women in Scotland and that had to be done through meeting people and travelling. And also through the research the things that did keep coming up were about women who had moved around. This first quote is from an article:

Jane Taylor from Stranraer traveled all over Scotland from Selkirk in the borders to as far north as Orkney and Shetland, to speak on the reasons why women should be granted the parliamentary vote. (Leah Leneman, Force Feeding & The Vote)

And second one is Jane Rendell:

Postmodern feminism is full of stories of travel. Women who have moved out of their place. Much of their written work speaks of their displacement. There is much at stake in constantly moving out of your place.²

These were just a couple of the things that got thrown up as I was reading and the things that I have kind of got drawn to because it was about movement, it was about travel, it was about leaving the familiar and engaging with another, or with others. So I decided that if I was gonna really deal with the responsibility of making this work it meant that I was gonna have to try and engage with Scotland. And I put this in because it reminds me of the some of the things I think are important:

If the artist begins the creative process with an informed awareness of his/her identity and relationship to her surroundings the critical content of the work will not be in contradiction to it.³

And that was really important and it was kind of interesting I guess in relation to what was being talked about this morning. I'm 34, from Northern Ireland, living in Scotland for 12 years, how could I deal with what this commission was asking me to do? How could I ever understand what it meant to, you know, what a women engaging in Scotland was about? I couldn't ever do that and didn't pretend that I could, but I did think that what I could do was engage a lot of people in the making of the work and extend a conversation about what this work could be. And try and deal with not making something that was about a national identity but was about trying to engage and negotiate multiple identities, which is part of the Scotland I understand and know. So that became important, thinking about who I was and I guess something else that you were saying David about not being interested in the politics of the self, I guess I kind of come at it from the opposite which is, that's where I start, I've got to start from the idea of who I am and the politics of who I am, where I'm from and where I'm at, and that was kind of central to developing this.

One of the things that was significant about the Scottish Executive Commissioning this artwork was that it was the 100th year anniversary of the Scottish Suffragette movement and they wanted to have something that highlighted that and drew attention to it. What I decided to do was to try and speak with a hundred women based all over Scotland and the reason was to try and include as many people in it, have conversations, move over Scotland, travel in the edges of it, at the centre of it, speak to as many people as I could about what the content of this work would be and the form that it might take. So I started with one woman in Edinburgh who was part of the panel that set up the commission in the first place and who had gone through

² Rendell, Ibid.

³ Lucy Cotter, 'Globalisation + Irish Art = ?', *Third Text*, Volume 19, Number 1, Jan 2005, pp. 15-26.

the trade unions in Scotland and was kind of fundamental in negotiating the gender balance in the Scottish parliament. And I asked her if she could send me on to somebody, I asked her two things: I asked every woman that I spoke to two things; first one was that they would write me a sentence maximum, in their own handwriting, at maximum fourteen words, because I'd worked out that that if I was going to fit a hundred sentences into this work in the space that I had, the maximum size it could be was fourteen words long. And so I asked them to write me a sentence about someone who they thought had made an important contribution towards Scotland, their understanding of Scotland, and that could be in whatever kind of local or national or international level that could be. It was up to them to find someone significant for themselves. And also then that they would pass me on to somebody else who could take me on this journey around Scotland. And I also asked them to think about helping me make it as broad as possible; broad in terms of geographically, in terms of background and cultures and professions and occupations of all the women that I wanted to try and reach, I guess trying to be as diverse as possible. So that was the two things they had to do; write a sentence and also pass me on to someone else, it was this kind of daisy-chain process. So, this is some of the examples of the sentences that I got back:

From scary, to friendly old but bold....fun

Nadine Harrison was a doctor and she was talking about a friend of hers who she wanted to acknowledge and write about because obviously she'd had a significant role in her life.

Anne Lorne Gillies who's a singer and a writer er, she wrote a sentence

Strong hands, soothing pain, making music, working night and day.

And through the conversation with Anne, that I had when I visited Anne it kind of caught, keep something that kept coming up as I visited everybody er, was that quite a few people wanted to acknowledge er, someone who wasn't necessarily at the very forefront of whatever field they were working in but they were just sitting behind at the aid of somebody else and becoming really prominent at whatever they were doing and this was Anne Lorne Gillies talking about her mother who had kind of helped her get to where Anne had got to in terms of her profession... Chrissie Dicks the teacher, writer and farmer's wife and she wrote about Marion Oran who's a writer and poet and an activist: '*She fought for rights and justice for the Gaels.*'

We were sharing stories and trying to distil the stories that they had into this one sentence. But when I met with Diane, I met with her and Kelly Annie, Kelly Annie at the same time and Diane had sent me to on to Kelly Annie and they were, they, they met each other through work, through the Citizens Advice Bureau in Scotland and had kind of then gone off to do separate things, but we met anyway for lunch to talk about what sentence it was gonna be and Diane had written it and she passed it over to me and I read it and thought that's fantastic it's a really lovely way to kind of acknowledge somebody who's a good friend of yours and tell them about what it is that they've done. And Kelly Anne hadn't seen what it was she'd written and so she passed it to Kelly Anne and Kelly Anne burst out crying and I was sitting with two women, middle aged, crying over what they were telling each other about the other,

which was kind of awkward but the more the project went on it became more interesting and that was really what it was, you know amongst other things it was an opportunity for one person to tell another person something that they thought about them that they didn't ordinarily tell them in everyday life.... Elaine C. Smith talking about Helena Kennedy 'She makes me continue to believe that the fight for a more just world is the right road to be on'. Eilish Angelini writing about Liz Lohead, '*gutsy challenged and intimate, she said my language is female coloured as well as Scottish coloured*' ... This is one of the first women I've ever met, a woman, she's 86, she's called Helen Crumlie and she lived in Craigmillar estate in Edinburgh and Craigmillar's kind of been really infamous because of being one of Europe's most, er, what is it?...

RS: Crap...

SM: ... Thanks Ross. Eh, difficult, its got lots of social deprivation, real social difficulties but what Helen did along with a group of friends in the 60s was set up a mother's group where they tried to negotiate spaces and time and funds to help the young people of Craigmillar become involved in things outside of drugs and crime and give them alternative ways of spending their time. And she wrote her sentence about - really it was amazing talking - she just lives in this wee tiny, tiny house in Craigmillar and I went and met with her and she was really clear that the person that had to be written about was this woman, child, this girl called Agnes Moffat who was a coal bearer and she was one of the children coal bearers in Niddrie, who gave evidence to the commission that helped outlaw women and children working in the coalmines in the UK. And it was a really interesting conversation about her, this woman, these children were never documented, their names were left out of history but the industrial revolution was built on the backs of these women and children that carried the coal. Things like this were being brought up through the process and making the work; it was just really, really interesting and kind of really important. And she couldn't write properly, well she could write properly but it took her such a long time because her hands were shaking and it was a very long process of getting this down onto paper. I got this off the internet but this is her granddaughter, Aoife, who came along on the opening night and was really excited about seeing her granny's writing on the wall and it was kind of important just kind of bridging those generations in the work and this is a good example of it doing that. And I think part of what the work was also about was about trying to deal with what Stuart Hall says in his essay 'The Local and the Global', 'to try and recover some of the broken histories and invent appropriate narrative forms for them'. So, I was trying to kind of go back to that idea of the pen and the mark and understanding what that space was and how do I fill it. And also addressing an idea or fact and a situation of the history being broken.

And, Jan Macleod who's an activist who lives and works in Glasgow wrote about Janet Horne the last woman who was executed as a witch in 1727: '*She tried to warm her hand on the fire that was to burn her*' and you're kind of getting this and realising that these were the kinds of things that were gonna be written on the walls of the Scottish parliament, was drawing attention back to these individuals who'd been forgotten about. '*A South Indian fun loving-Scot who felt that women worked small daily miracles that were neither seen nor valued.*' '*I'm really very nice inside, it's just*

the presentation that's gone wrong' Molly Parsons is a nurse and she's writing about a good friend. This is quoting Jane Rendell from an essay, 'Travelling the Distance':

For me, the critic(artist/teacher) is a travel writer, always going far from home, invited as a guest into someone else's place. To enter another's space necessitates movement out of one's own territory - it involves trust on both parts. To encounter another requires a willingness to connect but also to let go to take risks.⁴

And something that happened through the process of making the work was that every time I set up a meeting with one of these women, I was drawn straight into this centre of their lives and it was a very small kind of moment or window that I was in there; I met many homes and met in their offices and their workplace and met their family, I listened to really long stories about things I listened to quite short stories about things and it was about conversation it was about asking a question and listening to what was being talked about. And so the year was spent travelling around Scotland and meeting these women and being directed, kind of falling into their..., it was quite organic, but it was also out of my control as to where I was gonna go next, because it was up to the woman who I was speaking to, to lead me on to where the next place would be and that was the really exciting part of it was in just not knowing and giving over to that not knowing about who would be involved and, and dealing with whether I thought that was a good thing or a bad thing. One example of that is that I was passed on to a woman who preaches, but she doesn't preach, she's like a, what is the name of someone that's a kind of erm, they preach...

DB: A lay preacher?

SM: Yeah, but it was more she writes but its kind of an independent religious organisation and they write and they sing and they...

RS: A sort of spiritualist or something?

SM: Kind of. Whatever it was it sat really badly against my politics. And I thought, how the hell can I deal with what this woman might write about God, if I don't believe in what she's saying. And it was kind of interesting because there was a few people that wrote things, that were involved in this, that I thought about my relationship to it and my relationship to it was that it was kind of problematic and difficult. But in the end, she was away working on missionaries in Africa and couldn't be involved. So I didn't have to deal with it.

RS: Oh, it just so happened... When you say that Shauna - if it's not a good time to ask just say so - did you go into this with a feeling that you were gonna be obliged to use everything that people gave you in this way that it was a chain that connected?

SM: Yeah, whoever I was passed onto I would have to involve them in the work, but in terms of what they wrote, it actually worked out that I was worried that there'd be things that would be written that would be really difficult and how would I deal with that? And there are things that I think are kind of difficult, but some of the more

⁴ Rendell, op. cit.

difficult things we were able to kind of talk about and either write it in another way or you know that, just through ask and having a conversation you know with people that were doing it at the time, is that really the best way, and kind of talking about it then.

RS: Is Margaret Thatcher really your hero? (Laughter)

SM: But, yeah, if I was passed on to somebody then I had to go where I was being passed. And I remember reading once - I think Ross [B] it was an essay that you gave, that you had by Tim Stott which talks about maps and cartography – I remember reading it and the part that I remember about it was something to do with that ‘to follow a map is to place yourself under a benign authority and to follow a strategy that’s dictated by a world already thought out by others’. And I thought about this project as an opportunity, similar to the green dot, to negotiate re-mapping or to draw an alternative map and one that was drawn according to a more fluid rationale so that it was about making connections and being sent from person to person with the map. So this is the map of Scotland that after a year I’ve come up with as an alternative suggestion and it just shows the connections between everybody that was involved in the making of the work or contributed to the work. And this for me was kind of the most important thing that I had as I travelled around and met everybody because it became really important for Anne McFarlane to understand how she became to be part of this project and who she was connected to by proxy. This was the tool that allowed me to be able to open up conversation about this work, about what it was, about who the individuals were, about the idea of mapping and connections and remapping.

DB: So this is how, how did you decide who to go to interview, it was a chain reaction?

SM: I started with Yvonne Strachan, then Yvonne sent me on to someone and she sent me on to someone. There was a couple of people who sent me on to two people cos they couldn’t make a decision about one. And it’s clear for me, whenever I look at this, the far left hand side is where I’ve gone up through Raasay, Skye, North Uist, Harris, Lewis, and then come back into the centre and kind of the right hand side is more Central belt and up the east coast. I kind of feel there’s a real, I know it’s not clear for anybody looking at this, but for me this is a very real map of Scotland.

So alongside talking to people and reading and doing the kind of more academic research, I was also just in the studio working with materials and objects and processes trying to work out what kind of form I wanted to give the work and what form it demanded being made in and the porcelain, kind of going back to the crockery I’d seen at the People’s Palace at the beginning, seemed like a really interesting material to think about using because of its early connections to the Scottish Suffragette movement but also as a material that maybe had more allegiances with women as opposed to men; a material that you could think of as being quite fragile... it’s thought of being quite fragile but once it’s fired it’s seriously strong. And it’s kind of trying to find a material that could talk in different levels and so porcelain ended up being the material that I used or decided to work with. But it was how do you use that along with ink or with pen, with text, with language. How could I kind of use it along with the sentences or how could I give a sentence its form in porcelain. So what happened after I collected all the sentences off the women, they were scanned and I

took them to a water-jet cutter who cut them out of slabs of porcelain and then I took them back to the studio and then I worked along with the ceramicist and we glazed and re-fired every individual piece of the work. So this is one sentence and that was what it looked like whenever it was cut, hundreds of wee pieces to each sentence and I had a hundred sentences so there was something like a 150,000 separate elements that had to get cut and also re-glazed and then restructured back into the sentences again.

RS: That is just torture. (Laughter)

RG-N: Are you two having a competition to see who can make the most painstaking work? (Laughter)

SM: And I was also thinking also about the Parliament building, you know, the main material in it is concrete, grey. I quite like it, but what kind of material can you put onto that, that is in relation to it, that doesn't kind of jar against it but that's kind of sympathetic to it but adds something more, so the kind of bright white porcelain against it actually looked really lovely. So this is how the work ended up being in the space: it's three wall panels and they run four meters high and they're just over one meter wide and it's a hundred hand written sentences that have been cut into porcelain and given real weight and made into objects, installed in the space. But on the opening night was really important because 82 of the women involved in the project came to the opening night, out of a 100. And they travelled from Shetland and from Harris and from London and they came together just to see what this was. And it was such an amazing couple of hours because, I kind of sat in the background, they wanted to see and be part of, understand who it was they were related to, who they were connected to, to meet them. And also to kind of see how the work looked in the space and understand where their sentence sat alongside somebody else's. This is Jess Smith, she's a gypsy traveller storyteller; and Kate Burke came along with the daughter of a friend of hers who she wrote the sentence about whose mother had died. And as well as bringing in the different generations into the work, it was also, you know bringing in people from really different places and making connections with this building, you know, the Scottish parliament in Edinburgh, very you know particular in its geography and what it stood for but the work was trying to or attempting to reach out to corners of the grid. And it also gave me an opportunity to write about Sam [Ainsley]. I wrote a sentence and I wrote it about Sam and that's her having just seen her sentence.

I suppose really when I was putting these images together last night and thinking about what this was today that we were doing, I read this essay and I thought it was interesting in terms of how I thought about this work and also position myself. It was written by Lucy Cotter in an article she wrote called 'Globalisation and Irish Art':

"A politicised art practice is to be distinguished from making 'political art'. Rather it involves approaching all forms of art practice with a greater awareness of their relationship to wider concerns - what has been described as 'making art as if the world mattered'. This practice would not start with the political as its subject but rather begin with contemporary situations and address questions to politics about them. One starting point may be to develop

*'a more politicised notion of "the public" as a network of relationships, which we actively participate in constructing.'*⁵

And I guess, you know, as well as wanting to make something beautiful and wanting to work with materials and kind of make a sculpture and continue with my own identity as an artist and someone who enjoys stuff, I was also trying to address what this idea of the public was and what my relationship to it was, and that the work could be about, negotiating relationships and making connections. I think that's it.

Discussion

DB: I really liked your little hand-drawn chain-reaction map. Is there any clue as to location in the final piece? I know you talk about mapping, that seems quite central to the genesis of the procedure and yet I didn't see it in the final thing. Or is that more to do with process?

SM: No I think the examples I showed you of the sentences that were written don't address that, but quite a few of the sentences talk about location, talk about place - Lerwick or Shetland or freedom, fresh air, that sort of thing - so that the place is sort of identified within the sentence.

DB: Sure.

SM: And also probably about 15 or 18 of the sentences are written in Gaelic and some of them are written in Scots, kind of mapping in terms of accent within the sentences which are written.

KJ: I'm also thinking about mapping or names forming your map of Scotland. It's absolutely fascinating but what I was wondering now is this, I might be completely wrong, you know, a lot of the sentences present some very strong local connection you know to somewhere where people think they belong. And then I thought of you as a Northern Irish artist doing something about belonging to a Scottish identity: Is there conflict, is there a contradiction? And also on the other hand thinking, you know, identity, a place, is that still a lasting or sustainable way of identity, with migration growing more and more and more? Or is that something more romantic, you know, or fantastic, actually 'I belong here', 'I'm from the Shetlands', etc. I wonder what your thoughts are on that, have you been working on it?

SM: I think Klaus at the beginning I was talking about that idea of dealing with my own identity at the very beginning of the work and acknowledging that I had chosen to live here for 12 years, I wasn't from here and I was of a certain age, and the kind of fields that I work in and move in understand Scotland as a place that's made up of multiple identities and so the work in some way had to address my specific relationship to Scottish identity and also try and address a much wider relationship to that. And I think, you know, moving around the country to meet with everybody and talk to them, you realise in the conversations that you were having with people that that movement, the conversation was much bigger than Scotland and the women were talking about people, even local people, but also national and international and kind of

⁵ Cotter, op. cit.

European and world wide, and I think some of the sentences look at that and refer to it.

DB: It's a really interesting point because I think we get very possessive of the local in a way. I think one aspect of the local is historical memory, of generations of the people that lived in the place for a long time and another way of thinking of the local is where you are, where you happen to be, where I am right now. And that's a transferable experience, you know, and so I think that one understanding of the local in one situation can be in part, if we think about it as affection for place, can be transposed to other kinds of experience, maybe even transposed to other peoples' experience, to relate and to understand a cultural situation. But I think in this a wider, more allegorical understanding of what that might be comes into play and I like that idea very much.

Rhona Warwick: Can I actually ask a question, which follows on from the lecture this morning? That if we make the assumption that all art is political, then we have to look at where politics resides, the territory of politics and what kind of space politics is manifested in. In my experience, the public space and public arena for making art is hugely influenced by consensus, and I just kind of wanted to ask both of you how you dealt with this culture of consensus working in public space?

SM: Politely... But it's amazing what you can get away with whenever you politely ask for something. But maybe it's a bad way of answering it. But, again, going back to that idea of what is political, my understanding of the political is that it's everything. And I grew up under that assumption that everything we did and said has something political attached to it. So the Scottish Parliament was kind of interesting cos it was a very particular space to make work for. But if you make work under the assumption that whatever you're doing involves some notion of the political then making it in the Scottish Parliament wasn't gonna be any different. And in terms of consensus, I think I was trying to open it out so that there wasn't a consensus within the work in terms of what was being said, everything was very different.

DB: I think that's really key cos I think in Mouffe's argument she quite often sets up this scale - she talks about the concepts of consensus and census, splitting the terms, deliberately trying to set up some opposition situation, a kind of language game - and I find that really intriguing and I think the implication in her argument was that it's all too easy to take some apparent moral consensus to take some neo-liberal line. I think it's quite interesting to set up a situation where you're set apart, or to set something up that's a problematic and I think one of the implications of her thesis is to say 'hey look, why, why don't you set something up that actually maybe feels a little bit uncomfortable in order to set something in motion?'

RW: I mean that there's the commissioning process, there's a kind of consultation stage that the artists has to go through and, you know, this idea of how critically-engaged practice is almost kind of diverted away from questioning dominant ideologies. So did your experience, especially with the Scottish Executive, feel like a consultation, where you had to present the idea, and was that tweaked and was there compromises made?

SM: Well, they asked a man in the first place to do it. They asked Kenny Hunter to make a sculpture about women's contribution towards Scotland. So they wanted a figurative work made by a man and then they ended up with this. So, yes there was a lot of consultation that went on to try and dispel and understand what exactly it was that they were looking for and also the idea that they wanted a permanent piece of work that was going to be in the building for four months. So, yeah there was continual kind of conversation about that and wrangling.

RS: What happened after that? Was it a competition, or were you just invited to do it or?

SM: Kenny said he wouldn't do it and it was wrong. So they opened it up and advertised it.

Erik Sandersson: There's an interesting difference, in Mouffeian terms, between the two of you, because whereas you just put something out and put something in motion and don't propose something different; this alternative map is what she talked about as the offer which that agonist intervention should present. So, in my view, this is the difference between the two of you in the work I have seen today; where your work is much more engaged, telling these stories is the true map of Scotland. And also it's agonistic in the sense that the first thing that one would have thought of as putting in the parliament is a gold leaf map - in the traditional sense - of Scotland. So it's clearly disrupting something. And it's also a sort of consensus thing but weren't people pissed off? weren't they angry about not having this gold leaf sort of thing?

SM: I think the people who commissioned it, because it ticked all the boxes for them in terms of all the things that they wanted it to do, they didn't really care, in all honesty, about what it looked like, I don't think. I think as long as they could say, 'ok, it's done that, it's done that, it's done that, it's done that' then it's fine.

Ken Neil: Is that a description of your anxiety Rhona?

RW: Yeah. It's when the form of production is changed as a result of consensual thinking?

Ken Neil: There's a maybe the beginnings of an irony there. Of all arenas where you might expect to see contestation or civic discourse which is genuinely agonistic, you don't, you see something which has been cleansed by the processes, if necessary, of cooperation with clients, customers, funders, sponsors and so on.

DB: I wriggle out of that by not putting myself in that situation. So in other ways it means that, on a practical and financial level, you opt out, you opt yourself out of certain kinds of opportunities, perhaps. It's not as if I wouldn't do anything that's sanctioned on that level, but I would only take it if I was given licence to do it. If I had the final say.

RW: But that opt out could also be viewed as a cop out.

DB: It could be, I'm accepting that. I mean, partly it's a practical thing, because I've done a few public art things where there have been bodies of money and committees

and it takes so much time, it's a practical thing you know and from personal level I just get bored. In a way, the reason for control isn't about control freakishness, or really even sort of the need to maintain some sort of political hold on things, it's really that it's easier to do things independently than it is to do things institutionally.

KN: The last thing I'll say is the most politically dangerous thing I think we've seen today or heard is Shauna's picture, the montage of all the green dots. And that's a tremendously bold statement that if you care to you can carry with you, literally which is where you made the point, you can carry with you an aesthetic insistence that you impose something unseen onto the world as you go about it and, lo and behold, you have your own kind of join-the-dots kind of personal politics underneath the ordinary. I mean that's a tremendously powerful piece of work, it's fantastic.

Minty Donald: Just going back a bit, David. Both you and Ross were talking about the potential threat of the SNP gaining power and that therefore formed a sort of strong hegemony that we as artists could react against and I was just really quite troubled by that. I know you weren't suggesting that was necessarily a good thing, but I just think the idea that that really creates the most interesting work troubles me, whereas actually dealing with the heavy political structures within an institutions, as Shauna is working, I think we have to find strategies to do that.

DB: Of course, I mean that was a response to a 'What if?' situation, saying if we end up in that extreme circumstance, there's something positive to be gained from it. You know, one could look to other European models from the not so distance past that suggest that cultural production doesn't die when the money's cut off, when the support of the infrastructure is less.

MD: Yet it does raise all these difficult questions. I'm also really interested in one piece, Shauna, you thought you might have to include that you were going to, personally, have problems with: one of the sentences from a woman, the charismatic, religious person. What would have happened if you'd had a sentence that the Executive had trouble with it, say it was racist or sexist or whatever, that they couldn't have as part of a permanent, however permanent it was, work in the Scottish parliament?

SM: Well I had a couple of meetings with them where I would have to show them a sample selection of sentences and I just kept that sample selection really polite and these are the sentences you're getting and so the ones that were more difficult I didn't put them under their noses and also they would have to take quite a bit of time to read through every single one of the sentences and I don't think that they've got the time to do that, so I think I was safe enough.

ES: How controversial were those sentences?

SM: They weren't anything that I thought was overly controversial or difficult. I mean, probably for me the most difficult thing was actually in terms of their proximity to one another; so where one sentence is talking about '*Black, lesbian, poet, mother*' alongside a Free Presbyterian woman who had a quote from a Psalm from The Bible. To have them together I know that both of them were gonna be seriously offended by that and brings up something I didn't want to bring up which was about

the clash of these. It was much more about kind of knitting it into an overall thing so I think maybe the conflict could have arisen in terms of how closely the sentences were connect or rubbed up against each other, rather than what they were saying. I mean the one sentence that is probably my favourite is the one that says '*Still listening for the voice of the Ootlin*'. The 'ootlin' is an east coast term, a word for outsider, and I'd never heard of it before but apparently it's a kind of well used word and I just think, you know, to have that on a wall of the parliament where you're saying 'I'm still listening for this voice to be recognised', I kind of think that's quite, it's not controversial, but it's actually what the work was about.

RS: It's kind of interesting though that, in a sense, that voice is only allowed to be given form because another artist had pointed out to them that the basic structure they were employing was unacceptable, so they had to rethink it in a different way so it's a sort of folding in on that. Can I just quickly respond to what you're saying Minty. When I was saying that I kind of maybe was thinking about it sort of differently that I just thought it was actually somebody from the National Galleries, it was actually the Portrait Gallery, but you know they're all part of the same umbrella. I was kind of amazed that they were so nervous or they would so clearly articulate that the political dimension for them would be having an immediate effect on how they operated. It was kind of interesting to me that they were, not exactly shaking in their boots, but there was a clear articulation that this was a concern.

MD: I don't think it's that this is the right way to work, outside institutions, and this is the wrong way. Most things are equal.

RS: Yeah, I mean I wasn't really proposing that, it was just kind of interesting to me, the almost unarticulated part of the discussion today is what about all the parts of that history that aren't in these sort of places, where the history is collected.

Moira McLean: Can I ask a question? You both seem to have some kind of relationship with truth, you're both talking about work being propositional which define that it's got a truth condition in its proposition, I suppose people will argue as to its truth or falsity, in that you seem to be saying that this map is the true map of Scotland. I think was a fantastic piece of work but I'm not sure whether it's the true map of Scotland. You both seem to have a very close relationship between what it is that you do and the truth. Could you tell me what it is?

DB: I suppose in the case of this piece *Turnout* it was quite a pragmatic thing. I was speaking earlier on about having to avoid the documentary, avoid the literal in a broader sense, but at the same time I was interested in the enormity of 2 million people doing the same thing at roughly the same time. And what can seem like this really futile, pathetic act of going, still in our time - maybe it's the last time we'll ever do it - but putting a cross on a piece of paper and putting it in a metal box. It's something that's being done assertively and actively by a number of people with the shared aim, or, at least one would assume, the shared aim of acting on the licence that's offered by democratic culture. In that sense of making that palpable for someone. One of the things that is often discussed is a kind of apathy towards voting, 'What difference is that going to make?' But once you kind of create some sort of model that suggest actually that the one isn't the insignificant, which is this idea that the cross has the two arms and the two legs, the one is essential to the mass: the mass

doesn't occur - again its going back to this idea of the working class, the masses, you know, the power of the individual within the whole - the whole is nothing without the individual, and that individual action is what accrues into mass action. That was in my mind as a model of something that might be represented and offered as a model.

KN: I think that's where Chantal Mouffe is directly relevant, because for her it would be a shame if that noble act of the individual voting only led again to the same kind of consensual politics in which case the vote becomes semi-unnecessary and politics can just go about its business. So she wants to see an arena return which will see the individual confident that that vote will lead to a variation in political position which I think for me is absolutely spot on.

DB: Yeah I agree with that. I mean in that sense one of the aims of this work is to be a true representation of a body within the absence of it. So it's a metaphoric tool in that sense.

SM: If I said that was the true map then I don't think it is. It is just one of many I'd love to do another. I could do another 100 and they'd all be true.

DB: I think one of the things we can get caught up in, in the current moralistic climate, is that there is one truth. And the idea that there might be plural truths. You know, that there's no way at all you could argue that that isn't a true map of Scotland. It's one of many true maps of Scotland, perhaps, and it has a particular use and in a particular situation and a particular climate. And so I think within the culture that we have there is sometimes a rush towards honesty and truth in a polarised and singular position. I think one of our jobs is to react against that, so, actually, you can have equal truths that offer a breadth of understanding that's better than some rush towards a belief system. You know, a single belief is based on 'this is the truth because it's true' it always enables the faith factor.

RT: Shauna you were going to say something about making other maps. What other maps?

SM: The process of making the work where you go from one person to the next was just thinking about how to draw maps as you've never done before, so that the green dot was one. Rather than cutting the map up and cutting things up, which I've done for a long time, actually you could do another map or work with maps by taking in some notion of real time and by meeting people or I guess it's just throwing up, another way of thinking about how you draw maps.

RT: And in a sense that these maps are very much led by the people that you're meeting and conversations. I keep coming back to this question: what is really the difference between that recognition of multiple abilities of the mind to think and perceive and reflect and project, and all that, what really is the difference between that and somebody making a statement about something that they would like to see changed for example? Because I think one of the dangers in a lot of the conversations that we've been having this afternoon seems to me to lie around the idea that there is only one position being expressed if someone says 'I believe Trident is wrong', for example. I'm not saying that, cos I won't get into that at the moment, but I think all those opinions or beliefs, or whatever you want to call them, are also arrived at by

consideration of many and it seems to me that is the essential thing about democracy that we would like to maintain. So to succumb to the idea that any kind of overt political ideology, or align it, or exploring for the moment is somehow single-mindedly excluding everything else is quite a risky thing.

ES: But Mouffe again today talked about, on the one hand, deliberative consensus that excludes a lot of things, and, on the other hand, she talks about the radical postmodernist, Baudrillardian view about lots of equal truths unrelated to each other. The important point that she makes is that we have different truths but they are ordered into hegemonic power relationships; where one truth dominates the other excludes others all together. And if we go for the liberal consensus or if we go for not equally-valued truths detached from each other, we end up with the same non-political situation that makes criticism meaningless for political change. So the reiteration of different truths, say alternative maps for Scotland, is something that goes on in the 'nation project' of Scotland where they have different kind of values where this map proposed another concept of the 'nation state' project of Scotland than the traditional map proposes.

KN: Absolutely right. I mean that kind of cultural pluralism is fine until you're actually dealing with politics proper and politics proper is a heavyweight business which involves an infinite number of notes or opinion and at some point some of these plural positions will need to be, by consensus, excluded and that's a terrible thing that politics has to contend with. I'm not saying anything different from you but it's a terrible thing that politics has to contend with from time to time and that's why Mouffe says it's not a question between left and right, but between right and wrong. But she still maintains the idea that certain positions of consensus are less impressive than certain others and I would have to buy into that.

RT: She seemed to be differentiating between, for example, the moral stance that a government takes in imposing a certain kind of legislation supposedly for the common good and the individual. She gave an example of a novel, but I wouldn't really agree with her on the impact of that particular novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, but I share the belief that an art object or piece of writing can have a huge impact, can change a nation's thinking or community's thinking in many ways, but I think to say that the moral stance taken by the government is somehow separated from a moral stance or a belief or a move towards democracy from the grassroots, as it were, are two different things isn't always the case because governments don't sit and make up good ideas for the people, they often respond, although albeit rather clumsily sometimes, to a demand from ordinary people.

ES: Well if I understand Mouffe correctly, this moralization of politics is a way of hiding the hegemonic power structures of politics, so if the power structures were open and evident and ideologically based in political propositions that wouldn't be the problem. But when they are substituting real politics, they are hiding these power relations.

DB: I think that idea of the veil or the cloak, something masquerading as something else, is the dangerous aspect.

RT: I suppose I worry about breaking away too much from political action.

ES: I agree, I agree.

KN: I think Shauna has a model of two kinds of revelation of these underlying political momentums, if that can be pluralized; the first one, the parliament work, is on behalf of others: you're brining to the surface these political momentums attached to specific women who would have been otherwise not seen; and the second model is the personal one: you can make the world according to your own map as you go about it taking your green dot. And that is, I think, Mouffean, if you want to put it in those terms, because you're allowing two things which would have been held under by conventional hegemony to come back out. And if the artist doesn't do anything else other than that, that's probably enough.

DB: I think that was absolutely the message of the summing up of her presentation this morning, which was that, you know, watch out, word of caution, the forum is being pulled out from underneath your feet, let's ensure that it's maintained. And that seems like a really important lesson. Whether it's new or not doesn't really matter, but I think it's interesting, as I was saying earlier on about originality, perhaps an originality of thought isn't always that important; what's important is a vital currency of ideas.