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Matt's Gallery

Matt's Gallery Q3

Q is a series of interviews, conducted to coincide with the programme

Patrick Goddard interviewed by Tim Dixon

Tim Dixon: The new work at Matt's Gallery features an explicitly fictional narrative, whereas with some of your previous works the boundary between fact and fiction has been quite blurry. When I first saw *Greater Fool Theory* (2015) for example I took it completely seriously, not realising there was any fiction involved at all. Could you talk about the role of fiction in your work, and how you play with that?

Patrick Goddard: My past fictions have been real observations or real conversations condensed into a far shorter script. So they're not *not* real. I've probably amalgamated a drunken conversation I've had with my mate's new boyfriend who's a banker, with an interview that I've done with a financial journalist, with some sort of joke my friend said or some wordplay I heard somewhere else that I thought was funny, and crammed them all together. They're fictional scenarios, but not entirely made up. I draw from real life quite a lot. I probably would make 'real' films if reality was interesting enough, but it's so slow. Even a documentary is edited to the point that it becomes somewhat fictional – the director or editor will always pick the storyline, or the shots, or the sentences that construe reality in the way they think will be most interesting to the audience, or that will suit their agenda.

Do you think of your fictions as satire?

Satire's one ingredient. I resist calling the films or works satire in the sense that that definition risks being kind of reductive, but there is satire in there.

I feel like there's an extent to which you're poking fun at yourself in your role and your position within it as well. I think about the bit in *Looking For The Ocean Estate* (2016) when you talk about killing a nest of baby pigeons, or in your piece at Matt's as well, you're kind of sending up your role as an artist. You've talked a lot about authenticity in relation to this show. There's a sort of ironic distance that you set up with yourself, and I'm wondering what that says about your feeling of authenticity in terms of what you do as an artist.

The authentic is a paradox. In *Minima Moralia* (1951) Adorno says that the authentic is the shadow of the commodity form. As soon as something asserts its own authenticity it ceases to be authentic. The authentic is a phantom, but what we perhaps notice more is its shadow, which is the inauthentic, the inauthentic being that which is mass-produced or produced for mass consumption. The authentic has two loose interpretations which seem kind of opposite: either the very old, in that something is so old that it seems authentic, or the very new and original, both of which sit outside of contemporary mass-produced consumer culture. And yet, under capitalism, there's another paradox of profitability. There's a law that says the more unique, the more authentic an item or product is, the bigger its monopoly advantage over its competitors. A wine from Bordeaux can say Bordeaux on it; no other wine from elsewhere can say it. That's its monopoly advantage, that it's unique, and so it can command higher prices. A Jackson Pollock which has Jackson Pollock's signature on it is a lot more expensive than a painting that looks like a Jackson Pollock but is actually by a UWE Bristol BA student. The authentic commands monopoly prices. But to maximise profitability things have to be rolled out, mass-produced. So consumer society is constantly fighting to assert the authenticity of a thing that is simultaneously a mass-produced item. If something can exist under the guise of the authentic whilst being mass-produced, that's the sweet spot for profit extraction.

In *Trip To Eclipse* you reference rave culture and the subcultures around that, with the Eclipse brand trying to emulate that back in the 90s; with the school kids who were wearing it in order to be seen as part of that subculture. Could you talk about the role that musical subcultures have played in your work, and how they relate to questions around authenticity?

In my film *Gone to Croatan* (2014) I parodied this male character trying to opt out of society and living in the woods. It started off as my criticism of Ben Rivers' *Two Years at Sea* (2011) and its romanticisation of drop-out culture, outsiders and wild men, shot on 16mm. I wanted to take the opposite of that, the reality of it being potentially a macho gesture whilst also being thwarted.

My interest in rave culture, in this piece and in a piece I did for Blackrock residency in 2016 as well, which was about techno, is sort of riffing on artists like Jeremy Deller and Mark Leckey. I'm a fan of all these people, I should say, but there's a certain type of work that harks back to the era of subcultures as being an 'authentic time'. We don't really have such clearly defined subcultures as there were in the 90s and before, arguably, and there's a definite romanticisation of these moments, which I find a bit bogus, like it's trying to extract or highlight the cultural capital of these things in order to build its own capital of cool. Like 'I was there, you weren't, it was so cool, and you missed it.' If Mark Leckey or anyone else ever reads this, I do appreciate that their work is more complex than my bullshit synopsis, and I've probably constructed them as various straw men.

Do you think this is something about the authentic existing only in the past; the idea of there being a more authentic bygone time? Do you think that feeling is unique to our contemporary moment, or has the past always seemed more authentic?

The notion of the authenticity of the past is partially nostalgia, which isn't a new thing at all. The Victorians felt that Ancient Rome was more authentic to the point that they would build follies in their gardens, fake ancient ruins. There's often been a sense that the time that we're living in is vacuous, or empty, or somehow less vibrant than that which we've just gone past. Only in hindsight will we go 'oh do you remember the two-thousand-and-teens?'

You mentioned Blackrock before. I remember talking to Robin about that weekend and one of the things he thought was most important was the night with the fire and the camp, that experience that you set up. Did you consider that to be a work; was it about creating some sort of communal space?

I wanted to have a party and take magic mushrooms with my mates round a fire. People were coming from London all the way to Gloucester and I wanted them to have a good time. I hate it when artists throw a party and call it artwork, or I hate it when artists start doing tattoos on people at art fairs and call it art, subsuming, essentially, just being fun into an aesthetic that they package and sell as part of their extended practice. The desire to have that party and the mini rave is coming from a similar place as the work but is less jaded, in that the work takes the piss out of myself, but I did really enjoy throwing a little mini rave in the woods with my mates. It was a lovely night, I still think fondly of it. It was great, but I don't want it to be some kind of experiential relational aesthetics kind of bullshit.

I think it could be an interesting moment, but bad art. With a lot of relational aesthetics I don't understand why it has to be artwork. I appreciate that 'what is art?' is a question that has been farmed out to *The Daily Mail* because people in the art world have ceased bothering to ask it, because it's not important if it is art or if it isn't. But if it is art, I would say it's shit art.

At the moment there seems to be a lot of arts funding being geared towards 'social practice' and artists working with marginalised communities or 'non-art world' communities, which I find really problematic for various reasons. I often get invited to do these things, because I made *Looking for the Ocean Estate*, which was a fictional film about an estate. People think that I make that kind of work, but I don't. I have a problem with using people for my artwork in such a way, and I resent the push of every non-commercial artist into ethically dubious social-practice relationships, to make usually compromised or shit artwork, whilst being a poor version of a day centre or social worker.

I'm interested in the environments you create in your work, and your use of installation. I wanted to ask about the physical awkwardness of what you produce, like the floor at your recent show at Seventeen (*Real Estates*, 2018), or an installation with grass growing in it (*Gone to Croatan*, Outpost Gallery, 2015), or a bouncy castle crammed into a very small room – they can be awkward and physically difficult to negotiate and are sometimes completely enveloping.

There is a kind of antagonism to it, feeling antagonistic towards the audience that I suspect will see my work. In my first show at Matt's in 2014 (part of *Revolver II*), I transformed that space as well: we had a lowered ceiling in the first room and then we constructed corridors, and stuff like that. I think in all of my solo shows I've interrupted the architecture. At Outpost we grew grass and we had to close a week early because the grass started rotting and the smell was unbelievable.

I think art isn't that good at delivering information or a political agenda, but it is quite well suited to delivering *affect*; making us feel something bodily. What could be more bodily than forcing a person to have to physically negotiate a space that might be antagonistic to your presence there? Where you feel the dirt that you're forced to crawl through, or the uneven floor you have to hobble around; to be made to experience first-hand a certain level of architectural violence is conducive to creating a bodily understanding that perhaps more honestly reflects the surface layer political content of the work.

I also want to make things fun as well. There's this weird thing in art when people think that if it's entertaining or funny it's not serious. Subtlety is not my middle name. I'm a maximalist, and I think it's being generous to the audience in the sense that there's a lot of things to get your teeth into. I would love it if children could enjoy my exhibitions as much as an academic or a curator.

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