

On Wednesday 31 October 2007 a discussion panel event titled, *Critical Art & Pedagogical Practices/Widening Participation*, was held in the Project Space at East Street Arts as an element of the *Showing: Expectations* exhibition process. The panel was chaired by **Andrew Warstat**, (*Artist, researcher, educator and PhD student in fine art practice at the University of Leeds, School of Fine Art, History of Art & Cultural Studies*).

Speakers included:

**Tim Brennan** (*Programme Leader - MA Curating: Art, Design, Media & Culture, The University of Sunderland*)

**Dinah Clarke** (*Leeds City Council & Leeds Initiative*)

**Karen Watson** (*Artistic Director, East Street Arts*)

**Dr Sue Wilks** (*Independent artist, researcher and educator*)

**Leonor da Silva** (*Artist, researcher, educator and PhD student in fine art practice at The University of Leeds, School of Fine Art, History of Art & Cultural Studies*).

**The following text has been transcribed (verbatim) from an audio recording of this event:**

**Andrew Warstat:** *Showing: Expectations* did not start in a vacuum. The project and the work it has created are all part of a complex network of people and ideas, histories and institutions. What I want to suggest is the first thing to consider for debate, is that the project takes identities such as artist, curator and audience as interchangeable. This means that it's difficult to programme outcomes. What might happen when you invite a group of people into a space to create something cannot be entirely pre-programmed. Nothing may happen. No one may turn up to participate, no one may ask questions. The project grew out of a critical response to certain institutional policies and political statements, and you can find this information on the *Showing: Expectations* website. It was an artistic engagement with certain political and institutional positions, and what developed was a project based on the unknowable potential of people working together. What we are looking at around us and on the website, is the work then, not simply of artists or curators or particular groups, but of people who have responded to an invitation. So clearly, when I introduce Sue and Leonor as the artists behind the project, they are not the only artists involved, and they aren't simply identifiable as the artists responsible for this work. The fact that the project came out of an invitation to others, to work together, meant that the results of *Showing: Expectations* could never take just one form. An example would be the website which is clearly more than just the documentation of an event, and cannot be in any way be defined as, as an advert, for example, that Sue and Leonor as artists... (you often find that artists websites are this elaborate... CV). The *Showing: Expectations* website is more complex than that. Equally, this evening's discussion also needs to be considered as part of the project, and not just an extra pedagogic bell or whistle added to an exhibition. So this project has implications... It concerns negotiating how identities are constructed, shown and used. Now, because the project responded to debates about *widening participation* it involved addressing the socio-economic forms from which social and ethnic minorities are excluded. These communities are understood to be excluded from participating in, for example, higher education or certain types of cultural production. The initiatives to encourage participation are, however, invariably presented in contradictory forms. An example would be the drive to increase this country's economic competitiveness via social inclusion in higher education, while simultaneously introducing tuition fees and top up fees for university education... give with the one hand and take with the other. Institutional political policies and strategies have, therefore, been central to this project.

*Showing: Expectations* took these initiatives at face value, by inviting community groups to participate in the creation of their own exhibition. But what we see, from the documentation on the website, is that this invitation immediately generated uncertainty on the part of educators, arts administrators and institutions. One of the problems was that the project was not simply understandable as community art. It was presented as both process and research. It wasn't simply about the production of a different type of object. The difficulty and challenge was, it seems to me, about understanding the production of artwork outside of any simple notion of reception. There's a great deal of theoretical work inviting us to think about how we receive and consume artistic objects, invariably concerned with identifying authors, artists... great artists. But there is not the corresponding engagement with the point of production. One of the debates the project touches on, I think, would be how objects are produced, not just consumed in an exhibition space. Also, because the project had to be about more than just admitting certain marginal groups to play at being artists on certain set terms, the project forces us to re-evaluate the presentation, or the representation of politics and cultural production. The response to this challenge provoked a number of interesting, er... responses, which I think we will get on to discuss. Finally, because *Showing: Expectations* involved collaboration, authorial rights were questioned. An important aspect of the project is, I think, how we invite different conceptions of the way networks of communication, and information, are created through the activity of making art. The website is one example. But this question also arises when we consider how this project might be research, creating new, or different forms of knowledge. The project is then, an invitation. The question is, how will we respond to that invitation, and what are the difficulties and creative resistances we encounter when we try to show our expectations? So it's at this point that I'm going to shut up, and I'm going to ask our participants to take us into something more open-ended.

**Tim Brennan:** My interest in curating has been through my activity as an artist over the last 15-20 years. And, the majority of that practice, has been involved in what we might call performance, or live activities, sometimes in art galleries, sometimes in other spaces, that were in a sense, defined as art spaces for the duration of that time. Uhm... So, how does my interest or engagement with performance arrive at thinking about ideas of curating? Well... I started to work with various institutions that had collections, that's one thing, and... and so, the... the ways in which one might display objects, and how the viewer might begin to approach, or visitor might begin to approach objects, whether they be historic or artifacts or, or, ahm... artistic, ahm... objects... art objects. Ahm... It was of interest to me. Why was it of interest to me? Because the performance work that I'd been making, was involved, or came out of that pretty long tradition of performance art, that aimed to, in some way, or declared itself rightly or wrongly, of being interested in the divisions, if there are any, between art and life, and the divisions between the performer as an object, or a subject, and the audience as an audience, or a gathering of participants, or as an object, or as a subject. So, I was essentially interested in, ahm, how the, the, the gap between the performer and the audience could be narrowed, or in fact, could it become something else through the use of repetitive activity or through the use of, you know, offering of something to somebody who was in the audience, but, you know, perhaps the offering of something becomes an exchange, or a proposition of authority going from somewhere to somewhere else in space. And I became increasingly interested in how the role of the curator has perhaps traditionally been involved with a certain kind of authority, albeit complex, er, ahm, in nature... multi-layered throughout, but nevertheless the kind of authority and responsibility to, look after... take care of, objects or collections that perhaps would be on display, or perhaps would be

locked away, so at times the curator, as the person who selects a number of things that are deemed to be, of value... to be looked at, or consumed, or the curator as somebody who holds the key to the collection in passing, or the display that is not open yet. And, this was arriving at a time for me, when, the, the, there was a wave, another wave of artist/curators, ahm, young British artist/curators, ahm, and, I became, bored really, with the never ending stream of group shows that were happening long after the others by artist/curators in London, for example. And I thought, well, yes okay, this might be interesting to get something into the world, but what is it that's coming into the world? And at the time I was fairly disgruntled that what I felt was coming into the world with these exhibitions, were not what, was not necessarily interesting, that interesting to engage with, but essentially was there to be bought and sold. So for me, the idea of... ahm, the performance of curating, curating as an adjective, or as a verb, and it's only been in the dictionary for, how many years now? I can't remember...three or four years as a verb... ahm, is of interest to me because it brings into possibil..., er, er, it brings into light, the potential for there to be, ahm, activity with ideas of objects. That's really where I am. I'm less interested in the current policy, governmental policy that's called widening participation. I think it's a sham, and I think it's lies, and I think it's actually the tool by which, ultimately, ultimately, ahm, areas of the social fabric of society might be regulated, fall into control, ahm, put under control. I think it has, (because there will be interesting people having to work with it), ahm, certain interesting things will happen from it, but I think that they will happen anyway. So, I'll stop now because this is supposed to be a discussion.

**Dinah Clarke:** I've been working on, er, working with government's definition... so in a sense, I haven't done what Tim's done... I don't quest... I actually accept certain parameters, and er, the parameters I accept, is, is, are, the definition of culture that the Government has decided that we're gonna use. And, and, and so I've said, I've said and the people I work with have said, okay, we accept that definition, and, right, our job here, as the public authority of the City [of Leeds] and its partners, including Education and the Police and the Hospitals and the Opera House... our job is to make sure that our citizens, whoever they are, have equal access if you like, full access to everything that this city offers. And, that really, is the fairly simple line that I've been treading in terms of selling policy, cultural planning or whatever... here in the City. We have a cultural strategy for the City, we have a partnership in place, which ahm, mortars carrots to developing, and tries to take it forward, and it's about partners negotiating with each other and, moving a bit. Ahm, It's not to do with sharing money, it's not to do with a whip-hand, it's to do with persuading people that there might be a better way of doing something, or sharing their resources to make the City, er, a more culturally accessible, er, city. Now, to cut to the quick, when, when I was working on, say, our cultural strategy for Leeds... government told us we had to do this over a two-year process, and we had to have full consultation with the world and their dog, about what their views were, about, umm...the City, er, it's cultural life, whether, whether it was a good life, whether they had access to it. And this, in part of that, I did er, a number of focus sessions with, with groups, such as, y'know it was... it was y'know unashamedly, it was following the equalities line... rulings that government uses, so, I had my workshop with people with disabilities, I had my workshop with women, I had my workshop with children who are, who are disenfranchised in certain ways, but it was very interesting the kinds of stuff that came out from the workshops. Umm, well you know, I was asking questions like, how, y'know, really they were quality of life questions, 'how good is your quality of life, where you live and where you work, if you work, or where you hang out?' and, umm, 'what do you think of this city?' and 'do you feel it's yours?' It was those, those kinds of

questions, and, y'know the results of, of, of th... of all the work that was done really, umm, you just had very interesting responses from people... Peop... I mean I never realised that a place called The 'White Rose Shopping Centre' was an absolute paradise to people who have very difficult mobility problems in Leeds, because it's, it's brilliantly managed... staff, service, good wheelchair access, you've got systems, you've got a vicar in there, it's fantastic. And so, for some people that was one of the best cultural spaces in Leeds. Then, another issue that came up was how utterly crap it is, getting from one part of our city to another if you're in any way vulnerable and you have to use the public transport system. And it came down to things like... if only we were all a bit better mannered... if only we were all a bit better behaved... Now, I went a long way away from galleries, culture, art... but really the barriers that stopped people enjoying everything that there is to offer, that isn't connected with earning a living, work... getting an education, being trained, that kind of thing, umm, the barriers tended to be, uhh, 'there's no bus to get me to that park or that place', er, 'I couldn't afford it anyway', umm, 'there's a, there's a price, an admission price to places', er, which is where, if you like, the local park becomes an amazing space because, er, there's no gates on there. Umm. I, I, I'm loosing my thread a bit, I think what people felt was if this was a safer city, y'know, in all sorts of ways were more accessible, then really I could enjoy everything that there is to offer. And that's about being an audience and an attender, and I haven't even got to the A-side of it, where people, y'know, most people do something, y'know they, they've got their own clubs, they do *stuff*, they do sport, they do art, they do their own thing... a huge amount of people do that. Now, that's where I'm coming from. And I, in a sense the widening participation thing *is* important to me, very important, and I don't feel skeptical. Umm, I just think there are limits to what government can dictate. I think Leeds is a very interesting place at the moment, because we've got initiatives like this, where actually, it's just a bit like... it's like visiting a foreign country isn't it? Y'know you've got people interacting with each other, umm, that you haven't, y'know, nobody really knows anybody, so you're trying to negotiate your way in space. There was something called 'Planet Leeds' a few weeks ago, or a month ago... a festival, which was meant to be for, and by, local people. And, it was just set up, by some group of people in the City, and what they wanted was, they wanted to actually have anybody who lives here, umm, feeling, yeah, er, I can perform in the City, er, I'll have an audience, I'll have a space so I'm going to... And, that worked, and I think, their take on it was, there's a huge number of people, say, who've moved into Leeds... immigrants, asylum seekers, refugees, whatever... you've got this en, enormous amount of talent that is quite hidden, because these tend to be new people struggling with day to day problems here. So I guess... I'm going to shut up as well, but that's where I'm coming from... and I'm struggling to find my way into this, in a way that's relevant to, to people, but that's my take, that's where I'm coming from.

**Andrew Warstat:** Okay. In which case... I feel like I, I'm, I'm not going to manage this debate, I'm going to open it to people to start to ask questions please, there's just one more question before I'm going to withdraw, it's actually for Karen [Artistic Director at East Street Arts] because you have a, a, a specific purpose in this don't you, and it's, umm, when Sue and Leonor and Ignaz approached you with this project, did you expect the exhibition to work the way it does?

**Karen Watson:** No. Umm, no I think it's very interesting, that, we were very interested in the project when we, when we received the proposal, and, just to put some context around it, er, East Street Arts doesn't very often, er, take proposals from people. We, we initiate most of our own programme, and to some extent that's because we, er, know the issues we want, we want to deal with. And we are

very interested in widening the debate about participation though the programme that we run, whether it's in this space or somewhere else. Umm, but when the project did come in, *Showing: Expectations*, from Leonor and Sue, (and Ignaz who was involved at the time), it, it did fit some of the issues that we were dealing with around curation and display and um, we, we had just done a whole thing with a project 'Social Club' which looked at 'Who is the audience?' 'Who is the person that's involved', 'Where is the art?' 'Is the art the object?' 'Is the art the person?' And it was a continuation of, of that kind of project that we wanted to explore, so it was timely, I think, that the project came in, and it was a very well prepared proposal as well, so, it was something that we could respond to quite quickly. What we did make really clear to Sue and Leonor, at the time, was that we don't host projects and we do accept proposals. We want to be a collaborator and we want to be part of that, and we have had a long series of conversations with Sue and Leonor leading up to this. The concept is theirs and the project is theirs, but what East Street Arts wanted to look at, is what can we bring to both support and develop the issues that we are dealing with. And I think one of the things, going back to the original question, that's surprised me, and, we've talked about this, umm, during our own conversations, is that, umm, the Project Space is an experimental platform, it is, it isn't a gallery and we don't programme it like a gallery, we do look at projects, but we try to unpack, er, ways of working, whether you're an artist, a curator, a participant, a visitor... we do try unpack what that can be. But what surprised me is that we are dealing with some display areas, that is a very conventional way of displaying art... So we 'ave retained white wall space, we've got white plinths, we've got very professional looking statements, and I guess because of the nature of the project, I wondered whether it would unpick some of that. And, I still don't know whether I'm disappointed or not that it hasn't. I think that, that kind of debate in my mind, and in the team that work at *East Street*, and probably with Leonor and Sue, probably for quite a long time... because I think, I can see all the benefits and the positives for putting it in a professional framework that we know as... we know the language when we go to galleries, we know the white walls, we know how to read things, so I understand the professional framework of putting around the work, but I may also have just wondered, could we have, could we have done something more to unpick that... The weakest part of the project? I don't know. So anyway I didn't expect... totally to be ...[unintelligible] ... although let's, that's, my expectation did grow obviously as the weeks went on because that's, that's the language we were working at, as objects and people are involved.

**Leonor da Silva:** What, what we didn't want was... that *Showing: Expectations* was gonna look like, umm, a church hall. There's nothing wrong with that but we wanted to challenge the concept, an' so it was already clear to us that we were going to set a very professional set-up, as much as we could. So, that was quite integral to the entire concept.

**Sue Wilks:** Yeah, I'd say that it's, it was certainly never our intention to satisfy people, nor to provide them with a, umm... something that they felt they could get a grip of. The fact that it's problematic is integral to the work. Then I was asking meself the other day, 'so is this an *X Factor*?' Is it like we, umm, we set a professional context, and how people who aren't or wouldn't call themselves professionals... and you dress them up, and, push them forth. Because I'm always questioning what I do, I needed to ask meself this. It was a horrific thought that struck me. And then I thought, 'how on earth can you think that Sue?' I've been, I've learnt so much from sharing with people, who have never, never aspired to want to be artists, or the kind of professional notion of artist... but people who are quite genuinely, in the most incredible way, willing to share themselves, their

stories... to trust us. That's remarkable. So then I ask about context, so-called professional context. An' if big white space is professional context... and statements, then we're willing to take that ride, so that people's work wouldn't be reduced to this default notion of *the amateur*. In doing what we've done, it was important, that we... give value to people's work. Anybody who brings anything to this space, who participates, is valued, whether they bring anything or not... that's quite irrelevant. The fact that they bring themselves and walk through the door is an absolute miracle. Because there is no institutional requirement, umm, there is no financial incentive... the only thing we can do is give them a hand. What we did in this context was, we wanted, from a very genuine perspective, to get people a space that they would never otherwise access. The only means to them accessing it via us was that we should use the language that gains access, which we did. The fact that it's not what, it's not what was expected, is wholly appropriate to that context. So when people come and they bring things... Tony's poem... waving [in the draught] beautifully in the centre [of the room] here. Tony's poem is on A4 paper, pulled from his pocket, and, the person who curated Tony's poem, didn't want it mounted on any wall, professionally, but thought it should be lived, touched... it's real. And when Tony came here and performed his poetry in the space... Tony's here for me now, he's there with his poetry, that's where he stood. So... it's not about us, nor is it about East Street Arts, this is about people... humanity. The very thing that's prevented from accessing institutions, is humanity. It has to be managed, it has to be trained, it has to be made to fit, before it's allowed in. So when we approached institutional art galleries, for example, academic art galleries, and proposed it [the project], it was felt that there are other places that are better than this for this kind of work. And this was, 'No! This work needs to come into a mainstream debate, a so-called professional debate', which is what we sought to do. To bring people who've never been here before [to East Street Arts], didn't know it existed, to make them, hopefully feel comfortable with coming here, and to ask them to be generous with us, to trust us... that we wouldn't appropriate them, that we wouldn't reduce them to sound-bites, but that we would allow their voices to emerge. Hence, the transcripts and the website, unedited, [recorded] verbatim. There's a rhythm to the texts, a rhythm to things that people have spoken, and the crucial thing is that everything is valued. So people [academics and arts professionals] asked us, 'well, how will you get these people to understand criticality?' 'How will you get them to understand a word like *curate*?' When people talk about *these people*, they're asking me about myself. My point of entry to this is wholly genuine. As somebody who has... left home at fifteen, lived in a children's home, kicked out of school with no qualifications whatsoever... never did a degree, and came to all, came to learning from a very genuine position... this is helping me to understand me and my world. I wanted to try and give some of that back. Leonor will tell you herself, but Leonor was involved in human rights work. An' its not as though people don't understand widening participation and how it, how it prevents access for many people, it's not about that. We're all human beings, we all know when somebody's not treating us right, we all know when somebody's not listening to us... they may hear us but do they listen? It's a different thing. So my perspective is entirely... I want to give of myself to other people. And that's what I've sought to do. I'm certain that as somebody who's never had a studio and who has no desire for a space that's designated for the production of art... I have no need for that. I'm certainly somebody who'd never dream of selling work, this is, er, lifelong learning, in what to me is the truest sense of the term. It is lived, every day, in and out, I don't clock in and out of practice, it's part of my world. And I wanted to share, and open a space for other people to use the skills I've gained through higher education, to gain access to a space, that I could then pass over, with Leonor, because it was Leonor's concept that generated this project. So I'll just thank Leonor for inviting

me to be a part of it, and I'm more than willing to give anything and everything I can to help other people feel valued and listened to. Whether that's happened... I don't know. You'd have to ask people. But whether it's happened or not, is irrelevant. The fact, really, that we've tried, and that infinite unknown outcomes might occur is of interest to me. That's my take on what we're doing here.

**Karen Watson:** Can I just ask, umm... I just wanted to go back to a comment you made about space, 'cos I know you, er, mentioned better space... you'd approached other galleries and.... Was it better space, or was it more appropriate space that was the response to you at that time?

**Sue Wilks:** It was a space that thinks of itself as professionally related.

**Karen Watson:** Because, I guess that, for me, this space is, umm, an appropriate space for certain things that happen, but it's not accessible to a whole stream of professional artists or makers in all sorts of different ways, so, I was just wondering about that... that comment about... an' I guess it does, it relates to access... and how people do access or don't access different things, because, for a space to operate and for it to work, how people look at an intent for it to do that... you kind of make decisions... critical, curatorial decisions along the way, of who can access it and of who can't access it, at different times for a programme to work. So, your proposal came, at a time when people say 'it fits what we're doing, if ...[unintelligible]' that's not about not making the space accessible to a wider people or a wider audience, it's just about an appropriate time for everybody that's concerned. I just wanted to go back to that because it could have been that it wasn't worthwhile for the series of people you approached at the time. But for us, it did just fit really well with what we were looking through the programme, and I just wanted to make that point.

**Sue Wilks:** I'm kind of interested, how, East Street Arts when we [initially] approached them said that this fit with their 'Critical Programme', and in Week 2 [of the project] you changed the title to the 'Public Programme'. That interests me, because they are very different I think. They're not different [you say], but, superficially they appear to be.

**Jon Wakeman [East Street Arts]:** That was, that was pure coincidence.

**Sue Wilks:** Would you like to tell us about it?

**Jon Wakeman:** You're joking? You'd like to know about our internal meetings between staff members? But I don't think it's particularly... Umm, well, I don't, maybe it is relevant? I suppose the change in title from 'Critical Programme' to 'Public Programme' was, er, I suppose the organisation realising that, er, what we did, was that we actually are dealing with an audience out there, and we hoped that that particular strand would deal with the public. And, and, it was a big negotiation of some internal strands, organisational strands of the organisation that deal with artists' professional development, artists' support, artists doing work, and it was just, just reshaping it for ourselves... So it became the 'Public Programme'. So in that sense it was completely coincidental to what was happening in the space.

**Paul Digby [St Anne's Open Learning]:** Sorry, I don't want to step in on some internal argument, but did you have consultation with Sue and Leonor, Jon? Because the impression I'm getting here is that you, perhaps, didn't, and you changed that, and that is, is that the grab?

**Jon Wakeman:** Well, no, no, no. Not for us... this is an organisational decision.

**Paul Digby:** Right. Okay.

**Karen Watson:** East Street Arts have been navel gazing for months, and... between ourselves, and that's why Jon said 'you don't wanna go there' because I actually think that if you looked at our documents, we've changed the names of all the things we do, several times over the last twelve months and it was just part and parcel of that. Just that, we're just reshaping, re-growing, reworking some of the forms and things that we left behind when we got so involved with building... it has changed, things have changed.

**Paul Digby:** Has this programme had quite an impact on East Street Arts?

**Karen Watson:** I think all our programmes have impacted on us... definitely.

**Tim Brennan:** I think most people, umm, collect something, or, perhaps, if I could be more ...[unintelligible], or more boring perhaps, most people are involved, er, in some way, or another, every day in, er, gathering, purchasing, selecting, editing, and... perhaps displaying, umm, objects, material, ideas, food, television programmes, newspapers. And, umm, I'm quite excited, by this cultural, if you like, level. This level that people, perhaps all people, are engaged with/in, at a kind of, ultimately at the level of survival. You need certain things if you want to be able to survive. And in order to, umm, survive efficiently, you have to, umm, order those things in some way. And, they need to go in and out in a certain order. There are birds that collect, er, blue things. There's a species of birds that collect blue things and you know, zoologists and ornithologists don't really quite know why, y'know it could be an amazing thing, but then why blue? Y'know. Blue, usually attracted to it, y'know it's not quite clear as to why, and they arrange them in interesting kinds of varying displays these blue things, these birds. So there could be, a lot of science fiction about this, but it could be that collecting and taxonomy, the ordering of things, is a biological function, For me, sitting in here now, it's kind of interesting, 'cos, you also have this idea of objects, or sequences of objects being raised to, er, what we might understand or share as the highest value in art. Which is, you know, the codes for that signifies with the blank walls, the plinths etc. empty space, and the kind of idea of space between things...um, an' I think, I'm kind of all for that, I'm kind of all for what I think you're involved in, but I might be wrong, which is to do, you can tell me you're wrong, right? Umm, which is this idea of access. Access to the means to producing and having a stake-hold in those highest signals of value, or the highest forms of value, that might be available, if, if it widened, if you like, to as many people as possible. Now, it can still be the case then that there's crap art and really good art, that there's absolutely kind of like, y'know, art that might not be very kind of engaging for very long, or engaging at all and art that actually, er, lasts an extremely long time in terms of it's ...[unintelligible] engagement. I would hope to be able to, I mean I'm not being arrogant, I'd just like to be able to make something that lasts a bit longer than my kind, y'know, however long I'm going to be around for. If it's of use to anybody, It's a kind of idea which I find attractive. Just thought I'd pull away from the internal wrangle... dialogue.

**Paul Digby:** I think that is, probably on the wider scale, it's quite symbolic of the nature of this show, the difficulties that arise from something like this, which does, is, tending to step outside, sorry, I sound like a manager, is outside the box, so to

speak, but at the same time I can see ...[unintelligible]. I can see East Street Arts and you more or less on the same idea, I think.

**Moira Innes [Curator, Leeds Met Gallery]:** Can I just ask what the audience has been, I mean has it been an external audience, and what the reaction is? Or is process more... more valid? And, process ...[unintelligible], or more final output?

**Leonor da Silva:** We've 'ad a mixed audience, you know, people who 'ave, er, read the newspaper about it. We've 'ad, er, students who 'ad, you know, come when the walls were empty who 'ad shown up an' asking about it, dialogue... an' we've 'ad people who spent quite a lot of time just looking [at it] on the internet, an' asking questions. And, er, it's kind of, quite interesting, you know, that sometimes in there there's a group of people, just sit there, 'aving coffee and tea ...[unintelligible], some communities that, although they are not submitting any work but they're just curious about the process, and identify a lot, so they are audiences as well as participants. So, I was interested in all these layers, you know, of involvement an' meaning ...[unintelligible]. So, yeah, we've had different...

**Moira Innes:** It's that, I wasn't sure if you may have made internal use of... 'Studio Holders', or, how wide, ...[unintelligible]. That's good.

**Leonor da Silva:** No, it's been mostly from outside.

**Karen Watson:** Project Space is open to the public, every week, from Wednesday to Saturday ...[unintelligible]. I think compared to our [East Street Arts] programme... I think it's really hard to let people down, when maybe there isn't an event taking place, I think compared to our programme it's been ...[unintelligible].

**Moira Innes:** It's quite a hard order for people who don't know... You can ring a bell ...[unintelligible].

**Leonor da Silva:** An' do you know, process, experience ...[unintelligible], dialogue, curate, we are working when people are around. So, yeah, it's been interesting.

**Sue Wilks:** There's so much unseen... things connected with this. So, we've been working for, ...[unintelligible], umm, visiting community groups, meeting people. The very nature of a lot of the groups we've been working with are so transient that somebody that you talked to, say July last year [2006], might 'ave 'ad every intention of being part of this [the project], but, just might not be around when it actually happens. Umm, so when we actually got to Day 1 of Week 1 of the process, we really didn't have a clue who would turn up, whether anybody would turn up, and if they did, what they might bring. So, it was incredibly risky, there was a great deal of trust that this is founded on. We had to take a risk, and trust that people... if they're offered an opportunity/invitation, hopefully, somebody, might work with it... go with it. There were no guarantees at all. And this project has probably been a helpful example, of how to get funding without promising outcomes... without guaranteeing outcomes. And in a sense, it, it's such a huge risk... personally and academically, for so many reasons. So we take a leap of faith, an' then a few people respond. Not in the way that you actually first outlined in your proposal... We had to have a structure that this could sort of hang off, but also had to be willing to let that structure just be so fluid and flexible. Our only, our only hope in this was that people would allow us to help them. To be supportive helpers, that was our ideal position. So, a lot of community groups that we met initially, they... 'yes, community artists will lead the project', and, umm, 'there's certain guaranteed

outcomes associated with that because of the professional aspect linked, an' we're saying, 'no, we don't want to lead'. 'So, [they would ask], are you going to come and teach art groups... work with them?' An' [we say] 'no, we're not going to do that either'. So, all along, we've known what we didn't want to do, rather than what we did want to do. Tim's [Brennan] research, umm, was really important, sort of guiding light for us, in terms of something so important that he's written, which was, 'an I can't quote this out of Tim's website, but, basically it's something like, not everybody is going to be an artist through this, but everybody has valid, important experiences... important for them to share, and talk about, to be listened to, and valued, an' I just added onto that [quote] by the way. An', that was just like, we read it an' we went, 'Yes! Yes! Because like, because that was so useful to us in talking to people. So, some academics... the anxieties again... 'you'll end up with *ten sunsets*' which is perhaps a stereotypical representation of what the amateur artist might produce... landscapes, sunsets. Umm, for certain reasons, obviously. Umm. I asked people to think about what was meaningful in their lives. Some people might have liked to make something for this... some people might just want to look around their lives. An', an' Katherine who made the little dogs... Katherine's from *St. Georges' Crypt*... on the plinth over there... [points to the plinth on which Katherine's sculptures are placed]. She said, 'well, there's so much in me life that's meaningful it's hard to select'. So she selected her *Furry Friends*, which is the title of the dogs. She selected them because she hoped that somebody might smile when they saw them. So, the degrees... it's not about a hierarchy of meaning, there's just very different perceptions of... what's meaningful differs according to individuals. The book that's on the table in the corner, umm, is the treasured possession of Russ again from *St. Georges' Crypt*, umm, Russ' video by the way is outside, an' Russ was homeless for a long time. The book is the only thing he managed to keep safe during those years of homelessness. It's priceless. His, his hope is that, once back in touch with his family (he's now working voluntarily for *St George's Crypt*) he can pass it on then to his kids. Umm, it's this absolute generosity, an' we haven't really *talked art* or what we think of as art.

**Jon Wakeman:** I think that's a problem. An' it's a problem within the context it's sat in here. I... I'm not saying it's a problem within your project, but I think perhaps that it's a problem *here*, within the space we're sat in, and back to the type of space we're sat in, we've talked about the *White Cube*, but that, does the work stand up to the same rigours, and bombardments, and rigour, the work that goes into artists' work, and has to jump through so many hoops, through so many kind of barriers and negotiations for years and years of this practice, to actually reach the level that perhaps an artist would show? Now, I, I wonder whether this work is actually therefore being put under the same scrutiny that professional artists' work is put under. And I don't know if that's a good or a bad thing, but I think it's definitely an issue. But, an' I, I don't know how other artists feel, other professional artists here feel about that, whether there is some conflict here between what's actually being presented, and actually, does that undermine our practices?

**Audience member 1:** I think that, y'know, it's the sort of debate that's fully ...[unintelligible], 'cos Leeds has got a sort of professional artistic activity to other cities anyway, so it's... the same kind of discussion comes up a lot, does the work that comes out of Leeds whether it's from community groups, whether it's from... Do the sort of active practitioners in Leeds stand up to the same kind of, umm, rigorous testing that you know you get in, umm, magazines and in London. It's, it's not... Umm. To me is just to do with the actual presentation and the expectations start to ...[unintelligible], to be quite a good name for the Show anyway, ...[unintelligible] meant to not sort of do loads of research on it but the fact that it

seems like... the kind of the process is a fairly transparent ...[unintelligible], there's a website, and you know there's a six week exhibition that will hopefully change, anyway, means that you're gonna get an informed audience, that are gonna come round and hopefully will be able to work out the criteria they're judging things against. The way, I mean the thing that I've been picking up on while you've been talking about it, and the sort of interest a lot of us have anyway in sort of working with people who aren't professional artists, whether it's kind of, in the marginalised community groups or not, umm, are these kind of recurrent hierarchies that are there. You've talked about trust a bit at the start as well. I think in an idealised situation you want to be as open with everyone as possible. Potentially a space, a very neutral space, for people, *any* people to come into and work with ...[unintelligible], and you've got to kind of offer something to build this trust up at the start, and that's a hierarchical position that you've put yourself in, because you've talked, really, about being a sort of curator for it, an' whereas I think, you know, the softer words that are, obviously used in Leeds for that kind of activity is being a facilitator, instead, which I know is just, I know language games, but it's interesting that it's not been used so far. Umm. An' I wonder if that trust, y'know to build that relationship at the start... whatever you choose to use... you're offering. If, if you're that first gift that you're giving, is well, we're academics or we're curators, an' here's a space, if that's the first step in *the bargain* y'know of gaining some trust for it. And in order to sort of see that bargain through... umm, you're kind of saying there's gonna be some kind of celebratory moment at the end where these distinctions between amateur and professional are blurred. And people come in and maybe see the work. Now, I wondered whether you think that celebratory moment occurred or perhaps you know... In the end that's kind of how we tend to evaluate things at the end you know. Put what you've got to offer on the table, which is... may well be seen as a professional ...[unintelligible], well no, forget the distinctions there, but you are celebrating a moment by being part of it, and did that happen?

**Sue Wilks:** Well... If we'd been, if we'd gone to people as artists, educators, whatever... Say the travellers' site we went to on Monday, we'd 'ave been egged off the site. We've approached people as human beings, and that's always been the approach. It's the only way to get trust. You're not gonna get trust by telling people they should trust you. They have to feel it, an' you have to, not prove it... it's not about words it's about actions an' how you behave. And some groups were just very angry... One group, *The Asian Elders group* we've been working with, they'd worked with an artist-led project before, and, all the boxes 'ad been ticked but they 'adn't been invited [to the opening of their own show]. An' they were not, obviously, they were not happy about that at all. The only approach in this context can be as a human being.

**Audience member 1:** So, I mean, do you feel that's a kinda almost, does it require some sort of covert... activities... going in there and saying this isn't an art project, or, I mean how did you... I think, I think there's different ways of going about it, but if you talk about entering at a purely non-hierarchical human level... I'm just like you, you know, let's go work on something together or actually you can have an art exhibition somewhere as well. There's a kind of discrepancy in how you present yourself to people at the start. Whereas... I do think you also have to have this kind of bargaining tool, which is that there will be, uhh, y'know, to, to, to, that you can offer something as well.

**Sue Wilks:** Page on t'internet... That's what we offered.

**Paul Digby:** Just, just to go back to a point that you we're saying. Historically speaking, this is a debate that been going on for some time, nationally and internationally, This isn't just ...[unintelligible]. I mean you've got the outsider art movement, y'know ...[unintelligible] which, which, really bought this to light, if we, you know fifty or sixty years ago, you go a lot further, you go back to Greek times you go back to ...[unintelligible], an' you see the application of art history...[unintelligible], or craft, you know, it's a similar debate really, so I don't think this is necessarily original ...[unintelligible].

**Audience member 1:** No, not at all, but I mean it's nice to talk about it. It's specific to Leeds so it's nice to talk about what this is.

**Paul Digby:** Yeah. Yes.

**Audience member 2:** In a way, to measure the trust between people, between you and who come here, is umm, a kind of obvious question I would have is, how often have they been here, or how often the same people kind of repeatedly came here, spend time here, how much time was spent, and... are those people here tonight, or is any of them here tonight? ...[unintelligible].

**Leonor da Silva:** That changed from community to community... Tony who was sitting there [points] was part of the project. And, umm, and you know, there are people with different difficulties and people that don't want to travel... at night it is problematic, there are issues. Different communities, as I said before, er, different communities just come differently, not because they were not interested, but there are some communities prefer travelling all together, once a week or once every two weeks. *St. Anne's* is quite a short walk so they were 'ere every week. You know, we start noticing that the participants start arriving on their own without the key-workers, they just come to the gallery, they want to talk to us. They start meeting with each other as well, to diverse. You know, meeting between *St. Anne's* and *Workers' Educational Association*. And from *St. Anne's* people just start showing up. Umm, you asked 'ow long does that take to...?

**Audience member 2:** ...[unintelligible] people come back, coming every week or once a week, the same groups, but what I'm asking is it happening?

**Leonor da Silva:** Yeah. Some groups did and some groups didn't... Just couldn't be, you know, that's just the nature of the project. The travellers didn't, couldn't, didn't want to compromise on [meeting] times so we 'ad to go into the site. For that to happen we 'ad to 'ave meetings before, er, meet outside the site, an' it kind of led to trust us so we could go onto the site. And yeah, it's been varied, you know, depending on the community. But you know as I said, some communities ...[unintelligible].

**Paul Digby:** I work for *St. Anne's Resource Centre*, just over there [points] ...[unintelligible], we were so close we could come every Wednesday afternoon so the geography was great. And, em, after a time there was a real rapport between the students and Leonor and Sue as well ...[unintelligible].

**Tim Brennan:** What really gets my goat is ...[unintelligible], the way in which, the way in which this phrase which has emerged... socially engaged art practice... has become a kind of orthodoxy, to the point where the *Arts Council England* are, they've actually published it, they're going to have to send it back to the printers... are, have published this kind of survey if you like, of, of, of kind of set case-studies...

socially engaged... art... practices. The point is, that, is that in a culture where the Government is using terms... spreading policy, spreading the policy widely in a particular kind of way, an' I can see where a kind of, a kind of sincerity... there might be a sincerity to widening participation, problem is, is when that policy starts to coordinate particular modes of production, to promote particular modes of production, ahm, it essentially kind of dilutes, no what it does is it promotes a kind of, it provides a, a, a, yet another career path, y'know, for artists... here we go, I'm a socially engaged art practitioner. Fantastic.

**Audience member 3:** There are some fundamental problems between the way that that practice functions for artists, and how that's read by commissions... which is that artists engaged in that process, because it gives them an opportunity to have conversations with people... insights that they're responding to, and, commissions interpret that as consultation, and consultation is very much... could see it as ticking boxes, so you go off... you do publicly engaged practice and you come back, and they go, 'oh, how many of them were brown, how many were children?' And you're going, 'I have no idea, I went to have some conversations'.

**Tim Brennan:** Or, you go 'thank you very much... 2.5'. So I think this is an issue.

**Audience member 4:** That socially engaged practice has now become a catch-all ...[unintelligible]?

**Tim Brennan:** It's an ortho, an orthodoxy an' a problem and the problem with orthodoxies is that they not only suggest, but they, kind of form a whole load of possibility into a kind of regulated system of approach, So you can ...[unintelligible].

**Audience member 2:** Well the same thing happened with community art didn't it?

**Tim Brennan:** Exactly, exactly.

**Audience member 2:** I remember when community art and community artist appeared to be quite radical. Well alright, now I'm getting into... but there was a time.

**Paul Digby:** My, my experience is as well that... it seems that there are a lot of requirements put on people, specifically more now, to engage with socially excluded.... and I kinda think that's well, fantastic, you know... I read that report, 2004, you know, some of this is brilliant, if you could implement this in society it would be fantastic. Now, having... as someone who works every day in that environment, I 'ave to say it'd be a real struggle to tune it in, that within the context in which it desires, you know. Funding gets shifted here and there and so ...[unintelligible], the implication of having that, it'd be brilliant, but I'm skeptical as to whether it will actually... I mean it's 2004 before it came out, it's 2007 now, and there's not been a great deal of progress involved, although there has been some without a doubt ...[unintelligible].

**Audience member 3:** There is, there is something else that does happen, which is that you, you start to get professional local people. This is what happened and it's one of the most appalling things that you can be confronted with. You know, that, not only are you expected to go and do consultation, not have conversation, but you're expected to go do that with the professional local people, who are and have been representing very, very specific groups for such a long time that they're in the

paid employ of an organisation, an' actually, aren't part of that community in the same way as they once were.

**Paul Digby:** There is also a further class issue that I keep picking up on, which is the middle classes telling the working classes what to do.

**Audience member 3:** That, that, that's kind of city planning, and that's architectural consultation generally. You can literally just take a list of middle class aspirations, and then say, you know I wanna take a group of nine year old illiterate boys, who you know, umm, are gonna need to go out every ten minutes for a cigarette break, I'm gonna try and take this agenda and see if I can cram it into their heads, and once I've done that, I can tick all of these boxes and that's marvelous. That's consultation. I mean the conclusion is now, before you start, if you can't get applications... very problematic.

**Audience member 5:** Is this, is this now becoming... I mean this, it's very interesting to hear but is there some sort of ...[unintelligible] about funding, or about, you know, state ...[unintelligible], governmental control?

**Audience member 3:** Well, I mean, fun, funding is tied to targets.

**Audience member 5:** Yes, of course, but I mean is that agenda ...[unintelligible] about funding?

**Audience member 3:** There's the people who'll interpret those targets and the people who employ artists. So if you are involved in that process, that's where, y'know a, a beautiful notion becomes, gets, ...[unintelligible].

**Audience member 5:** That doesn't just affect art then, I mean so many things seem to have just been swallowed up. I mean all kinds of actual initiatives ...[unintelligible] get swallowed up partly because of funding.

**Paul Digby:** I suppose partly the concern is that the artists, the more the onus is put on the artist to deliver a more, y'know, professional, umm, persona to be more professional, which in some way conflicts with the artist and how the artist operates. If you're involved with or engaged with the ...[unintelligible] in particular, the kind of raw, rawness of the moment, that kind of, I might be wrong, and I might have interpreted you wrong, sorry, but if that's what you're doing, then that might be, that might be conflicting with the requirements put on you both... put on you by the agencies that are funded and have a particular funding requirement put on them, an' I don't think it's government entirely, I think this goes much wider, I think this goes right to the top really and the people who affect government predominantly, which will be then, very selfish, rich, Capitalists.

**Audience member 5:** Well that's where the money's gotta come from somewhere...

**Paul Digby:** Well, exactly.

**Jon Wakeman:** Is this not really the fault of the artist who should be bloody doing it?

**Tim Brennan:** Doing what?

**Jon Wakeman:** Doing, doing the socially engaged practice?

**Tim Brennan:** No, I just wanna make a really good piece of art. That's all, and whatever means actually.

**Jon Wakeman:** So it's the...

**Tim Brennan:** By whatever means!

**Audience member 3:** Yeah, but I think that what happens is, is the kind of... Umm, people buy into the notion of the autonomous artist, of this individual making this piece of work, and they celebrate this concept, but actually when they get into the realities of it, they get involved in this politics, and then they don't care anymore... and that's a big problem I think for artists, is that, actually most artists don't have the experience, or the political... or they don't have the, er, legal expertise to defend themselves in this contemporary market. Y'know where you're being commissioned with one phrase and something else is happening.

**Tim Brennan:** With me, there are projects that I'm involved in that I could say they're artworks but I won't say they're artworks because they have more, er, er, potential I think, and more scope ah, ah, to openly, develop by not calling them socially engaged artworks. They, they, they're kinda cultural projects, they involve concessions at best and at worst a kind of, you know, conversations that break down... Uhm... and that making art means quite clearly to do with... there are certain traditional and conventional approaches that are ...[unintelligible]. Could be, y'now, could be that involve all kinds of medium, but ultimately I prefer now not to confuse things, but because of the current climate... I don't know, I wouldn't want to suggest that projects that I do, that are, that involve groups of people, I wouldn't want to suggest them necessarily as artworks. There are smaller-scale, performance type events, that, people come along to as kind of, audiences or as participants on one level, but I don't think of them in the same way as these kinds of projects. I mean the interesting thing about this is the process of what those kinds of ingredients, that are perhaps within the idea of curating, and yes okay, it's slightly unfortunate that, er, er, there's not more of them than there is us, although I don't know... what their, er, there could be... eighty percent of the people here... I don't know. Again the idea that it's a particular kind of specialist group ...[unintelligible] to do with art, but what interests me is, is the process but I don't think it's an artwork and so there is a tension there about it being in an art gallery. Umm, but it could be that that tension is kind of interesting because it might reach out to these kinds of questions.

**Jon Wakeman:** And interestingly, an' I suppose the engagement with, an' it's very interesting point that is, that you, it, it's not art, or might not be art, is that my engagement was with the artist's, and so, that being then I see them as the artist's, and somewhere in between them and this is the practice. And that's kind of where I'm interested, and, and, it's often... can't, can't get my hands on it at the moment, where it is, but I know it's there and I know it's here in the space and at the computer. That somewhere between them is the practice. And that's what kind of I think, I've put faith in or I'm interested in.

**Sue Wilks:** To me it resists a grip. It resists your grip. It resists you're desire to know. When I asked who saw [on the website] from the Week One [of the exhibition] when we 'ad sixty students [visiting] and four items [contributions] laying on the table uncurated, I was asking myself 'Where's the art?' an' then later I changed the question I was asking meself to, 'Where might I locate and sanction and validate

aesthetic value within this process?' And, when I think I might recognise it, it darts off, it resists, in many ways, on many levels. It's very resistant.

**Dinah Clarke:** [Question directed to Jon Wakeman] When you said the artist, were you referring to them [nods towards Leonor and Sue]?

**Jon Wakeman:** Yeah, yep.

**Audience member 5:** Oh well that's interesting because you could've been referring to the people who produced this. I mean, you know, actually it's not entirely obvious. And that's not a criticism but that's interesting because...

**Jon Wakeman:** It's because I was sat behind you and I was kind of... [gestures].

**Dinah Clarke:** Yes, I thought you probably meant that but you might not have done. An' I wondering whether, you know, you say where's the art in this, you know, is this an artwork? Well, umm, I mean these actual objects if they were in a gallery and there was a name put to it as the artist, no one would question it because the context is all.

**Audience member 3:** It comes back to curating then.

**Audience member 5:** Yeah, well by deleting that... I mean that's why you've made it so resistant [directed to Sue and Leonor] because you deleted the bit saying 'this is a project curated by us and we are artists' or saying that you could have, say taken away the initial entire ownership, because, I mean there are artists who have not even chosen things but got people to bring things along and then you know they curate at their point of collection. There could have been a case that because you've stepped back from that then, you know, it is interesting, as you say it's elusive, very elusive. Where is the art, where is the artist?

**Andrew Warstat:** Okay, I just have a question to, to Tim... Calling one of these objects *art* does that somehow diminish it that... or that can it be...

**Tim Brennan:** The fact that they're in here, and they're in a sense, y'know, supported in particular ways... on plinths or on shelves or ...[unintelligible] y'know, they become institutionalised as *art* but what I was saying, and where it isn't accommodating is, for me that's the less interesting aspect of this project. What's interesting is the performativity and curating, an' the kinds of conversations and exchanges that have been, I suspect, ha, have occurred. An' in a sense these objects are... on one way, in one sense misleading in relation towards that substance because that substance, those conversations, that kinda collective, er, ongoing activity is really the centre of, is the centre of this project. These are, they're kind of, they're like, they are like trace elements from a performance where there are particular kinds of problems with ...[unintelligible] some of us might be getting hold of... some of us might not... But, the, how do you, you know, what happens to the document of the performance? What does this hold in terms of memory and how can it be unlocked? So I think that this show, yes, *show*, umm... is in a sense removed from... the centre or the drive of what is projected. It is.

**Audience member 5:** But what about the importance of these objects to the people who brought them?

**Tim Brennan:** Well yeah, of course, most objects have some sort of connection, I mean they're important but I mean for us right now, looking at them, umm, that importance is kind of, I don't know whether it's, it's not intrinsically coming out of all the objects.

**Dinah Clarke:** Funnily enough, you could say that Leonor and Sue have ticked the box. Yeah, er, well okay, ticked the box... got the art objects ...[unintelligible] etc. It is the least interesting bit of the work. An' y'know I thoroughly enjoyed the video, and, and, and the accounts of the people that you met, but, I don't really give a toss about this bit [the exhibition]. It's 'orrible, and in a sense you've ticked the box. Which is going back to your point ...[unintelligible]. You know if you play that game then in a sense you're playing the game aren't you? You're ticking the artistic box.

**Audience member 3:** I think there's something that makes, can make these situations kinda slightly nervous in a way, is you know obviously, there's a great value, there's a great experience it seems, like exhibited for the first time in a new context, it makes you view yourself in a different way. Ahm... but then there's the other thing of, you know, these things being kind of judged to a certain extent. You know; chosen, curated, given value, and then kind of examined, an' there's a very long history in curating of, you know, taking a big old ream of paper down to the old mental institute with a load of paints and them hanging them up a few weeks later with some kind of, you know, and making a lot of money out of it. I think that there is some, you know really kind of unpleasant, you know financial history behind the idea of their being, you know, involved in this notion... you know.

**Paul Digby:** I spoke to Sue and Leonor, actually I think it was Leonor, about 'how you *saw* the objects?' I was concerned about pathological fascination... [directed to Leonor] but I think you made that quite clear to me that that was never a reason...