

offers a subtle provocation. I am interested in how we relate to objects, in what we know about objects, and how detached we have become from the process of making. I think your toaster project addresses those concerns.

TT: The discussion went towards capitalism and economics. I wanted to talk about the provocation in my work, as a designer making stuff, and I didn't emphasise that enough perhaps. There is value in going back to the source. The project was interesting for me. I got to talk to miners, a plastics recycling guy, and many different people at all levels, academics, blokes on the ground, those who set up the business then to go to conferences run by the Institute of Business – completely different places for a person like me to be.

JH: Your interest in making was revealed in the video. There was a real engagement with materials and when you were lying on top of the mould, that was a very beautiful image. One of the final questions was 'What is the end product, is it the toaster or is it everything else?' The toaster is an excuse for talking to these people.

KB: If you had to give your lecture again would you do it differently?

TT: I would talk about making more. How did you think it went, Jerome?

JH: It was an interesting talk but some of the questions were tough. I wanted to jump in and sort things out.

TT: Audiences may be used to thinking in a particular context, using language which isn't part of my daily dialogue (which I felt very awkward about). But I wanted to try to take the flak.

JH: There is something about your work that translates for an art audience but at the same time it's maybe not totally for that audience.

TT: Maybe for a wider audience? Having talked to students and as a student, I know there is an interest in the making. I don't have all the answers.

Sheffield - 10/11/2010



Transmission

Provocation

Guest: Thomas Thwaites

Host: Jerome Harrington

Interviewer: Keith Barley

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KB: We are interested how guest and host have experienced the lecture and discussion. This is an invitation to review the event. How do you feel it went?

TT: The questions were good questions. Usually the questions make my project seem to be just a funny story. It was nice to have a more challenging audience here, wanting a bit more ...

JH: Yes, they really wanted to know.

KB: Good questions?

TT: Rather pointed questions ... I was being forced to declare my

position (and I do have a position). I guess that's one of the outcomes of any project that is meant to produce a debate. You're going to be asked what you think and it would be churlish to say I don't have an opinion.

KB: It's always difficult territory when you're doing something both developmental and cutting edge.

TT: That was why I spoke about the libertarian blogger who commented on the project, assuming that because I was from art school I had a particular stereotypical view.

JH: The toaster project ... we should talk about that. Did you want it to have a definite position or are you more interested in it operating in terms of an unresolved element?

TT: I'm more interested in that. It might sound floppy or weak but as I was trying to say, the issues around it – capitalism, globalisation, poverty, environmentalism – are so complicated. If there were easy answers, then it would make sense. If there was a definite solution, then it would make sense if we could

attack whoever was standing in the way of that solution. The fact is that in terms of development and globalisation we're talking about enabling a billion Asian people. Suddenly because of their economic power the West has to take notice of countries occupied by most of the people on the planet. To argue that globalisation is destroying the planet, well, maybe it is, but it's also helping people. There is no easy answer and by forcing a project to come down on either side of that question simply because you want to take a position, what is the point of doing that. We need a more complex and intelligent approach because the problems are not simple. It's not enough to declare that globalisation is bad.

KB: You don't seem any stranger to provocation and yet you were both provoked this afternoon.

JH & TT: Yes!

KB: That seems strange, particularly from the point of view that your work is full of antagonism.

TT: It's slightly disguised in my work, I think. The humour disguises it a bit but that's why

a long question session is good. Provocative questioning is good.

JH: It is a critical audience. Last week the questions were equally challenging to Mark McGowan.

KB: After the talk two people walked out, then there was some laughing and constant chatter coming from part of the audience and I wonder what affect that had on you.

TT: I noticed a few walked out. I couldn't hear the chatting but I didn't take it personally because I'm sure it happens all the time.

KB: But the audience was engaged?

TT: Yes, there is always that horrible moment when 'Any questions?' is asked and no one puts up their hand. Oh God, that can be embarrassing.

KB: The question time was unusually long. I've noticed that when there is a lot of time and many questions, it can put the speaker under more pressure.

TT: One person asked three or four questions and I didn't understand him. I attempted to answer what I

thought were his questions. I don't mind looking stupid *[laughs]*. You get it on every kind of course; there is always somebody who wants to ask something that no one else understands. It's also about the legibility of questions.... some people compose their questions in a way that you can pick them up. But that one I couldn't grasp, which seemed to be about what it is like to make an object that isn't art. I never did all that art stuff.

KB: You came from a different background.

TT: I'm not interested in going over that kind of question. I'm more interested in looking out from my discipline as opposed to looking into it.

KB: Did you feel you had to defend your discipline position in a fine art environment today?

TT: I was forced to be more rigorous – as Sharon said at the end 'You really need to brush up on your Marxist critique.' She's probably right *[laughs]*.

JH: It's OK! Sharon told me the same thing the other day *[all laugh]*.

TT: You are forced to be more rigorous, which is good, because it's easy to swan along.

JH: It's quite difficult coming in as a designer to another environment though there is something about your practise that is quite familiar to an art audience. At the same time you've got different concerns.

KB: How did you react when asked to talk about provocation?

TT: It was interesting to think about my work and provocation. I was talking to a curator yesterday who is opening a gallery. The subject of art versus design raised its head and they said they were not interested. I don't know how the commercial art world works. We were talking about where work sits in history and culture, so maybe that's where the provocation lies. Why did you invite me, Jerome?

JH: I knew about your toaster project. It raises interesting questions about how we relate to objects. My PhD is looking at how making processes are described and how that influences our relations with things. So I was interested in your project, which