



WHAT - ONE - CALLS LEISURE

An extract of an ongoing conversation between freelance writer and journalist Natalie Bradbury and Daniel Fogarty that took 'place' via email exchange in January 2012, during the lead up to *Totem* at Bureau, Manchester.

NB: To digress slightly, I came across some notes by chance yesterday that I took during a walk down Oxford Road we both went on, when dance professor Valerie Preston-Dunlop visited Manchester during the Merz Man Festival of all things Kurt Schwitters and related last year. She reminisced about running away from home to study under Rudolf Laban, who developed a new form of dance notation called Labanotation, which she described as being like a 'grammar' for dance¹. She recounted how Laban helped factories apply his theories of movement to mass production – an example of how the arts can overlap with and be useful to industry. By teaching workers how to co-ordinate themselves in the most effective ways, and making the most of their repeated movements, he could help maximise production in the factories and enable the workers to be productive for longer, at the same time as humanising their labour. She said that workers could also be taught to move in a certain way to do things they might not be used to doing – for example, women could unload heavy goods from containers on the ship canal.

To bring this back to your work, you seem to be preoccupied with repetition and prolonging production. You rework and apply multiple processes in the creation of one work, carrying on adding layers until what started as one thing becomes something else and takes on an entirely new medium and existence. *Cottage Industry* is a photographic print of an unfocused computer screen displaying a digital drawing. *And...And...And...* is a print of a photograph of a set of pinned up photocopies of a blown up digital drawing. Your *Stammer* series, which is inspired by digestive systems, comprises sculptures made of unfired clay, which has been photographed and then painted over. Any one of the series could be seen as three works in one – it has elements of sculpture, but also photography and painting. In a way you've been creating more work for yourself, by keeping going after what could have been taken as a finished product has been created – and this reworking could keep on going indefinitely, just like the constant, efficient churning di-

gestive system itself. However many times you repeat something, there are endless variations.

DF: I think that the images need this labour to reveal, develop and wrap themselves in their preoccupation. I wanted the works to be between things, as the title suggests. The stammer is like the voice, between the body and language. It's caught and corrupted by both and it's what connects them both. The images show variants of imagined digestive systems, from convoluted processing to a fast tracking and function as a series of drawings. I think that the process of creating the work sits astride functioning to develop a graphical language. The clay is pinched and the brush strokes are jarred because this is what needed implying. I think that this relates to Laban's ideas, but in reverse. Laban's gestures were developed because they reduced stress and strain on the workers performing repetitive work and it increased productivity. The movement was not seen in the final outcome but traversed the production of the product, skillfully developing something to fit unnoticed by the consumer, whereas a lot of the works in the show are laboured over because this finish is desired. It's a cultivated roughness.

NB: Sometimes, roughness or a lack of precision is seen as a mark of a product being under-finished or carelessly made, whereas in your work it's the opposite: it's the result of a work of being over-finished, or laboured over beyond the call of duty. There are several works in *Totem* for which you have used moulds and worked with concrete, which is commonly associated with building work undertaken on an industrial scale. Concrete is generally a material that is valued more for its usefulness – its ability to be hard wearing for use outdoors and situating in public places – than its decorative properties or suitability for craftsmanship on a small scale. One of my favourites is a concrete plant pot (*Helmet/Shelter*) that was produced during your residency at Bureau in Summer 2011. It's an object that is both beautiful and useful and has a function within and outside the gallery.

Laban was trying to standardise ways of moving, or find a way to teach a common way of performing certain movements, even though movements are highly individual and differ naturally between each person. Even though your works are created using moulds, or repetition of movements, actions and labour – methods typically used for mass production – you’ve corrupted any standardisation that might be expected to result from these processes and the marks of the artist have slipped through, visible in the finish of the artworks (just as the stammer is a highly individual movement, an involuntary utterance that slips into controlled movements of speech and language). Whatever material you use, whether its paint or clay, there’s always some kind of human presence visible, from the artist’s brushstrokes to the pinching of clay. Unlike mass production, in which the efforts of the individual are subservient to the whole and are not visible in the final outcome seen by the consumer, the gestures and actions which have led up to your artworks are a part of the finished product.

DF: The series of sculptures *Plant Plant Plant Plant* are between this mode of mass production. They are created by a simple method of casting in the ground, which has been around for years (but was popularised in more recent times by the BBC gardener Geoff Hamilton as a way of creating rockeries). Standard house bricks are pushed into the ground and then concrete is poured into the impression they have made. The sculptures mimic the simple and cost effective method used in suburban gardens, where bricks are utilised to contain flowerbeds/vegetable patches. The outcome sits awkwardly between sizes, somewhere close to the length of a flower bed and a showroom or sample product. The inaccurate impression that the sculptures bear is not that of concrete or of the house brick, but seems to describe something stranded halfway between the two.

Slippages are an important part of the works throughout the exhibition, whether it is a possibly vague use of language or a to-and-fro of mediums (language also refers the graphical kind). The works imply an opposing view of mass production, not because they are opposed to it, but because they are created in mediums of the amateur: the weekend gardener, the self-publisher. They all suggest a notion of production where I am as interested in their aesthetic as much as I am in their desire to pursue such interests.

NB: Typically, gardening is an activity associated with those who tend to spend a lot of time at home, for example retired people, as they have the time to devote to what can be quite a labour-intensive hobby, or weekend gardeners keeping busy on their days off. At what point does a gardener’s labour cross over the fine line between work and leisure and start to become pleasure rather than toil? Production such as gardening is only defined as ‘work’ or ‘leisure’ depending on its context. The term ‘gardening leave’ is used to refer to a time of not-quite employment (it usually means an employee has left their employment but is still being paid by the previous employers for a period to prohibit the former employee taking up new employment), implying that gardening is the next most productive way of keeping busy to employment. Perhaps this is also why gardening appeals to retired people – it must be hard going from being productive eight hours a day, five days a week, for most of your working life, to not being expected to be useful for the best part of the day and not being watched over to ensure a certain level of production is maintained.

The theme of work (explicitly referred to in the title of *Cottage Industry*), and utility and usefulness, recurs throughout *Totem*, along with the tension between work and leisure (in cottage industries, this would have been the fact that production took place in people’s homes, thereby blurring the distinction between leisure/living spaces and places of work and labour). Similarly, in the series of concrete sculptures *Plant Plant Plant Plant*, inspired by edging in

gardens, there’s a clear crossover between work/utility and leisure (as well as an overlap between the decorative and the useful).

DF: Yes gardening is a really rich area of interest and comparisons can be drawn to the production of art, writing and general DIY. It is portrayed as a rewarding production and one where there is an infrastructure to keep this in place. Take for example the BBC gardeners or Radio 4’s Gardeners’ Question Time I think that it is telling that it was first broadcast from the Singing Room of a hotel in Ashton-under-Lyne. I am really interested in fodder that is generated by gardening: road shows, fetes, call-ins and gardeners’ columns that discuss and keep to a discourse that is both regional and national. A chance to talk to your neighbours. I see gardening as the joy of informality, an activity where one can produce and get little yield without concern. Crops are somewhat of a surprise or plants that occur naturally. When one does not garden, weeds take over and another kind of gardening takes place. I suppose it is all relative to what one calls leisure. I like the idea that the activity washes over as somewhere to pass time or where one goes to write and watch the borders grow. It’s a constant like the model T Ford in the garage that never gets fixed; it is cared for every weekend, outdated parts replaced or remade on the lathe. Once it is up and running the car is taken to the road and another type of leisure replaces it, the parts are eventually worn, the engine runs too loud or it is taken on weekend excursions to vintage car fairs where faithful representations and wonderfully designed details are king. Work and leisure is a looped spectrum like you say.

NB: I really like what you say about gardening being a kind of self-supporting industry – it is quite a self-contained endeavour that works well on a small scale (as in the home), although it’s also part of something far bigger, a cultural tradition. It seems that there’s almost a language of planting which gardeners have in common regionally, nationally and even internationally (allowing for certain differences such as climate and topography).

DF: The plant protruding from the plant pot in the series *Helmet Shelter* is a common houseplant. Its common name is the Polka Dot Plant. To my knowledge it is completely self-contained in that the grower or the person who tends to the plant is responsible for making cuttings so it will grow, more leaves will sprout and more vague patterns will appear on the leaves. It will sit in the pot being stared at, a plant created for the house. As patterns emerge it becomes a fascinating plant to examine yet it is also completely banal and ordinary; it does nothing and will do very little but slowly grow in the corner (considering it has a little attention).

NB: We’ve already talked about moulds and standardisation, and patterns are another interesting spin off. I know that something else you’re interested in is graphical languages which are subtle and unnoticeable rather than overt, for example, motorway planting (before standardisation was imposed through road signage, silver birch trees were planted near junctions as a psychological reminder to the car driver that they were approaching a turning point in the road). This is another kind of pattern, albeit a (mostly) hidden one that’s not obvious to the casual viewer. Your reference to the seeming banality of the Polka Dot Plant brings us back again to how the everyday and, on the surface, decorative, can in fact be useful (just as the Polka Dot Plant, you say, does nothing but sit there and grow slowly, these trees appear to sit by the side of the motorway being decorative but are in fact giving a message to drivers).

¹ Laban and Schwitters were both refugees from the Nazis and, in the 1940s, discussed collaborating on a Modern Dance Opera.