

Transcription of Anna Best's talk at the Royal Edinburgh Hospital
Sept. 24 2003

Anne Elliot (AE): Introduction

We asked Anna Best to come and talk to us because Anna in her work looks for non-artists to take part in the process of making her work. She has involved people in her work just by meeting them on the street, having a conversation with them and integrating that into her work. We thought that approach was quite similar to what we are trying to do in Functionsuite.

Anna Best (AB): I have been working as an artist for 15 years. When I say working as an artist, I haven't always been earning money from it and I have done lots of other things a well. But making art has been my basic aim in life, and I feel that making art has given me a privileged opportunity to learn about the world and to learn about life. I don't feel that art is a kind of craft that I am working with.

'A real pony race for a bridle'

The first thing I want to show is from six years ago and it is called 'A real pony race for a bridle'. I ended up working with people from the horse and pony world in south London. I didn't set out with this intention. The project was sparked off in 1997 when I was invited to make a work for an exhibition in a south London Gallery. I found a poster in a museum collection showing a Victorian pony race and I thought it would be interesting to recreate the event. I organised the event and it was filmed. I didn't film it myself but I worked with other people who filmed it as if it was a professional horse race. I watched footage of the grand national just to see how they film horses.

[Anna shows a video clip of the horse race event, narrated by a woman with a voice typical of 1950s broadcasting]

Anna Best: That is quite a rough edit. I have taken short clips out of a 25 minute video. When I started organising the event, I had never done anything like that before and the process involved meeting people who were experts in organising pony races. They became involved without me really having to ask. And I found that I was unwittingly doing something that this particular group of people really wanted. So in a way they used the energy and time I had to do this thing – well they didn't use it, there was a kind of exchange: they got an event for the kids and young people they were working with and I got to make a film that I wanted to make.

This idea to recreate something from 150 years ago happened without me really having to think about it or plan it. I had originally been thinking about ideas to do with the gallery in south London who invited me to work with them. The gallery had been built by money from philanthropists in the 1850s or around about that time. I was interested in the philanthropic ideals behind the founding of the gallery. The motto of the gallery was something like 'Art for the people' and I was interested in that whole idea. I still am. What is art and what does it mean to bring art to other people? In my work I am trying to be quite critical of the idea of administering art as if it is medicine that can make your life

better, so I started to look at that in this piece of work. Lots of people misunderstood the work. They thought I had made a spoof community art project. I hadn't even thought about it in these terms so that response was really interesting.

Alison Stirling (AS): So what is the difference between you as an events organiser, and you as an artist?

AB: Well for the people involved in the project the only difference was that they came to the gallery and got a copy of the video. For me it is the context that I put myself in and the fact that I wouldn't do it again.

AS: do they want to do it again?

AB: I was trying to pass on all the information I had and say 'Why don't you organise it yourself next year? I don't want to do it and I can't do it. It is not my job.' But I am sure I was perceived as an events organiser by a lot of people.

AS: does the confusion of your role bother you?

AB: I really don't mind. I accept that the way I work is open to misunderstanding because I try to involve an audience at the beginning of making work and then immediately there are misunderstandings and confusion. This is very different from a more traditional approach where you make the work in a studio and then show it to the public. You know all about the work and how you made it so you are in control of your work.

With the type of work I do I often don't know exactly what I am doing and I am working with other people who don't know what I am doing, so that is something I just have to accept.

That work grew out of personal circumstances and that is also a feature of the way I work. I try to connect what is going on in my own life with the place where I live or the city around me. In other cases I am invited to a place to work and I try and make that connection, but it isn't always successful. I was commissioned by Camden Arts Centre to work in a bingo hall in Kilburn, and even though I work in London – I live down the road really – the project didn't work out. I did have connections with the place but something wasn't strong enough. There wasn't a strong enough relationship with any particular person because the staff were constantly leaving and new people coming to work there. It was really difficult to finish anything. People kept leaving because the work was really badly paid and they were all on their way somewhere else.

AS: So do you see the success of the piece of work as a whole lot of people coming together for one event? How do you gauge if the work is a success?

AB: How do I measure success? I can only measure it from my own criteria in a way. It has a lot to do with what I have gained or learnt or how I have expanded my

understanding of things, and I guess it is also to do with feedback from the people who have been involved. Failure perhaps is when people are leaving: you meet someone, have a conversation with them and never see them again – that feeling of things not going anywhere. It is like any a friendship or relationship: in a good one, there is a sense that it is going somewhere even if you are not always together. That is probably how I gauge success. I sense that something, however intangible, has happened – something has changed for me as well as the other people involved. It might mean just getting a letter afterwards that makes me feel that in some way the work has fulfilled my intentions. It is always different. I don't have a formula where I always want to bring people together and I always want to make an event, although often I feel that other people have that expectation of me because that is the kind of work I was doing for a couple of years.

AS: In making a piece of work, does it matter that people walk away? Does it matter how much involvement somebody has? Is it a positive response to involvement you want? I wonder if the fact the people are leaving their jobs because they are fed up is part of the artwork. How could you make it part of the artwork?

AB: I guess I have learnt from that experience and in a way I have included that within the work. Failures of communication and people who never ring back, or who haven't got anything to say, are part of the whole thing that is going on. But that is something I have learnt through experience.

Audience Member 2 (Mrs.Reid): I am still very puzzled as to what you do. When you are commissioned what do people expect?

AB: Well I always want to have a lot of conversations with the person who commissions me in order to answer that question. When I have been commissioned to come up with an idea and carry it out without very much discussion it has usually gone wrong. I will show you more work to explain what I do.

'Anti-Lonely House', 2000

Anna Best with Gemma Nesbitt

This is quite a different piece of work. I was invited to contribute to a show about architecture in Venezuela, where I went a couple of years ago. I felt it was a bit random that I had been asked to contribute to this show because I didn't feel that I knew anything about architecture. I didn't even understand the piece of text that the curator sent me. I felt a bit annoyed by that. I involved my mum in the work. She is not an architect at all. However she had designed a house which would stop her from feeling lonely and made a model and drawings of it, quite a few years ago now. I asked her if I could use her drawings and her model in this exhibition. She agreed and I interviewed her about it.

[Anna shows some of the interview.

'the idea of the communal house or the anti-lonely house essentially is to build it around a big circular room with plenty of light...']

In the interview she goes on talking for half an hour about the design for her ideal house and it is very unrealistic in a way and very naive, and nothing to do with architecture as I understand it. But I liked the fact that she was an example of a person who wasn't an expert and her idea would be in the context of this show that was full of experts. I decided to work with her project as a way of saying that people who don't have the training or specialist education can also have a contribution to make to a subject. That was quite a simple project.

AS: Did you get feedback?

AB: The show didn't come to Britain. The only feedback that I got was that Dan Graham [an American artist whose work involves creating public spaces within art institutions] had liked my work.

AE: What was it like working with your mum?

AB: It was really nice. I feel I have got a lot of inspiration from her over the years. She has always encouraged me and I am very grateful to her for that. She is also someone who has had lots of ideas and never been able to realise any of them. It was really nice to see something partly realised.

It was interesting because if she hadn't been my mum, I would have had a very different relationship with her and there would have been more issues around what it means if I as an artist show someone else's work. That was something I was thinking about at the time: what are the ethics involved, and in a way the architecture project was a little example of that problem.

If I make artwork with other people and then it is shown in an exhibition under the name Anna Best, with no other names credited, that always raises problems about who made the work. Who is the author? I have had lots of conversations about that and it is an ongoing question for me. At the moment I feel that I need to retain a kind of traditional sense of being an author of my work even though I work with other people. I don't really call what I do collaboration for that reason, and when I have collaborated in the sense of working 50/50 with someone else, that is a very different thing.

I want to show you a project which is a collaboration between me and three other artists. It is called 'The Festival of Lying'.

[Anna shows a 4 minute montage of clips from documentation of 'The Festival of Lying' in Grizedale.]

Two artists invited me and Simon Poulter to work together for a year and pool our ideas. We had the opportunity of doing this at Grizedale in the Lake District and had some funding: it was a kind of self-initiated commission. We decided to spend time there and research the lying competition, after finding out about it by chance.

The lying competition takes the form of a story-telling evening held once a year. We met four of the champion liars and thought it was quite an interesting combination: four artists and four liars, or story tellers. We were interested in the differences and similarities between what we do. Each of us commissioned each of the liars to write a story about us. This sounds very egotistical, but it was a way of employing them. We also commissioned the liars to document our processes of research. The stories that they made up were documents of our thoughts and ideas, like albums of images. Once we had these amazing stories we wondered what we should do with them, and the 'Festival of Lying' came out of that question. We didn't want to create an event which would tread on the toes of the existing event, which was the Best Liar in the World competition, so we decided to do something about lying and how it crops up in daily life. We invited an estate agent, a documentary maker, a newsreader, a magician, a crop circle maker, and someone who built a website about a fictitious person, and they all came to a theatre in Grizedale for a one-day festival or presentation.

AE: Who were the audience?

AB: Oh, terrible question. It was the time of the petrol crisis and the theatre was in the middle of the Lake District so in fact the audience was really small.

Audience member 3: Did you find yourself getting into lying?

AB: It was really interesting to find that just doing something about lying meant that all the processes involved raised the possibility that there was lying going on. You can imagine phoning up to find someone who knew about psychic research, and saying we were organising a festival of lying. People would immediately say 'You are doing what? Are you being serious? Are you pulling my leg?' The whole uncertainty that ran all the way through was really interesting. The minute you propose that something isn't true, everything changes. It meant that the whole thing was quite light hearted, in a sense fictional, and it became quite good humoured even though some of the subjects were quite serious, such as newsreaders telling lies. It was unfortunate that we had a small audience but we did webcast it, so there is this other audience, who knows how big, even though their experience will be different. In a way the people who got involved with the project throughout were also a kind of audience.

'Phil'

This really is a commission with a very specific brief. A couple of art organisations in Vauxhall, where I live, had some funding from the local regeneration partnership. There is a building there, the Beaufoy Institute, that the council hold in trust for the community in a really small area called Black Prince Ward. At the time the council were renting the building out to make money to film production companies. Basically a scandal was brewing. The arts organisations wanted an artist to do something that would make people aware that this building existed and that essentially it belonged to the community not the council. They asked me if I would like to work with the London Philharmonic Orchestra. I said yes. I thought it would be a very interesting opportunity to look at philanthropy and the issues it raises.

[Anna shows a 10 minute video from the project called 'Phil'.]

Heather Craig (HC): So the musicians are all watching a screen isolated from the rest of the orchestra?

AB: Each musician went into a different house. We made a video of the conductor, and the musicians had to play while watching the conductor on a TV without any sound. It was really difficult for the musicians to do this because normally they play together and I hadn't realised quite how difficult it would be until we started doing it. That was another layer that I hadn't anticipated at all. It became about what happens when you take people out of a group: everything changes.

Kate Gray (KG): I imagine some people would not do that unless they had 50 sync units to synchronise everything completely.

AB: There was a lot of discussion about that and the orchestra and the musicians didn't really understand why I didn't want to do that. They thought it should be put back together as perfect as it was originally, but I was interested in the disarray and the unsynchronized nature of it, in the fact that it became a mess

HC: It was almost like you get a different type of music. It is like when you play two different pieces of music at the same time, you get like a completely different thing happening. I thought that was really interesting.

AB: People from the classical music world didn't like the final performance with the TVs. They just thought it was a kind of travesty of what they do. They all belong to a union and the work was all done on a very professional basis. As we had to pay for every minute of their time we didn't actually have time to for much discussion. I think they were a bit shocked because I hadn't had time to talk about why I wanted it to be out of sync.

KG: Did the fact that some of the people involved were unhappy about the piece change the way you felt about it in the end?

AB: Well I think that is OK. Some of them individually got really uncomfortable during what they were doing, but no one regretted it, no one complained, I think it would have been different if someone had really just started complaining. So there is a fine line. You don't always have a good time all the time. The experience may be uncomfortable and learning from something you don't know anything about is always quite hard.

HC: I think the musicians are so used to hearing everything working together and they consider that an art form in itself so it might be hard for them that it doesn't sound the way they would want it to sound. They feel it hasn't worked because they are so used to working in harmony.

AB: Yes, compared with the liars for example, whom we also paid. But they were commissioned to do what they are really good at, which is story telling, so they were really open to being re-contextualised.

Caz McIntee (CM) : Did you find it quite easy to get people involved in the pony race project?

AB: Yes it was.

CM: You were phoning people cold and introducing yourself as an artist?

AB: Yes and going round a lot on my bike to different stables. People I met gave me other people's names and numbers. The community around ponies and horses is amazingly open because it is voluntary. It is recreational on a certain level anyway, and people are doing it mainly for their kids and young people. Once they realised I was serious and I was actually going to do something they gave their time and took part for nothing. There was no funding for their participation. I spent 6 months organising it.

CM: From start to finish?

AB: Yes, it was a very long process and if there had been funding possibly I have done it very quickly, like the 'Phil' project where there was money to pay the people involved.

KG: Do you think that the project was different because of the length of time it took? Over 6 months you can build up relationships with people, whereas with the faster projects you don't have time to do this. For example if you had had time to explain to the orchestra exactly what was going to happen and what your intentions were they might have felt differently.

AB: Less alienated?

KG: upset or whatever?

AB: Yes that is a really good point. {but what follows doesn't seem to be a direct response to what goes before} With the Phil project I was very clear about what I wanted at the beginning, which I am not usually. And the reason I was clear is because it was set in the area that I had lived in for 6 or 7 years. I felt I knew what the issues were in that area. I didn't take long to decide what I wanted to do, and I came up with the idea completely on my own. I didn't involve anyone else in that process, whereas with the pony piece I had no idea of how to do what I wanted to do, so I had to involve lots of other people who had done that kind of thing before and they made the event, really. It was just a regular pony race – I didn't create it in any way. In a way I was a facilitator, giving my time. I prefer the process of spending a long time and letting something evolve: it is more interesting, it is more risky, and you have the possibility of

relationships that you get more out of, compared to projects that are completed very quickly.

AE: In the gymkhana piece how did you acknowledge the people who took part in that process? You talked about authorship, and putting your name on something that already exists, like your mum's idea for an ideal home. Could you talk a bit more about your feelings about that, and what your thinking is at the moment?

AB: I suppose it has changed a lot over time. When I did the pony race, 6 or 7 years ago, I was at the beginning of that way of working. What I did was credit everyone in the video for what they had done. And they were a mixture of people: students from the art school who had done the filming, curators who had been involved in the race and people from the pony world. The people from the pony world got a video of something that they had been involved in. I also took lots of photos that were displayed in a big album in the gallery and people could choose the photos they wanted copies of. It was like a kind of documentary exchange, and I guess I felt, and still feel, that the person who has the idea is the artist in a way and when other people are involved they are contributing. That is the point I've reached now.

I have been through a process of thinking about why it has to be my name rather than the names of everyone involved. Basically what happened when I was thinking about that is that the people who commissioned me said no, we asked you, and we want you because of your name, because of what you have done before. I had to make a decision whether to play that game in a way or refuse to work with them because I didn't want to be forced into that way of identifying myself.

I work with a loose network of other artists. We share a lot of ideas; we are friends really. Does that mean that our work is individually authored? When is it individually authored and when isn't it? Basically I don't know. I try to credit people and whenever I do something I try to acknowledge where the original idea came from. For example if it came from a conversation I try to remember who said what and always mention people's names, whether they are artists or not. I have chosen to recognise that my name as an artist in the art world is my kind of currency and I need that to carry on being able to do things. If I just changed my name, it could be a good escape tactic. I feel a bit uncomfortable about it but in the end that is how the system works and in the end it is just a name.

AE: If artists working in the situation of the hospital were to do that on a regular basis they might be considered to be using people in the process of making their own art.

AB: I am using people in the work?

AE: I am not suggesting you are – it is a question we ask ourselves.

AB: It is a really good question. It is a question I have asked myself and one that other people have asked me: when you work with people who maybe don't know about art and

aren't aware of what the significance is, are you using them? I feel maybe you are using them but maybe they can use you too. So perhaps there can be an exchange where you use each other for mutual benefit so that it is not a question of exploitation. And in a way that is what a relationship is where you get something from someone and they get something from you. I would hope that is what is happening. Yes, I think I am using people and I think people are using me, but galleries and institutions also use artists and curators to realise their ideas. We are on that level of using each other. Then there is the question of ethics. I hope that I act ethically all the time, that I take responsibility for myself and that I am clear about where I am coming from. Yes, I am going to work as an artist with my name and it is going to be my work. If I work like that, that is how I say to people I am doing it.

Stewart Murray (SM) : Do you do any paintings?

AB: No.

SM: Just film?

AB: I started a few years ago doing sculpture. What I am doing now – organising events or situations or trying to make happenings in time – has come out of making sculpture. It has slowly evolved.

AS: This isn't a criticism, but the gymkhana is a gymkhana which could have been organised by absolutely anybody. The 'Phil' project is slightly different because you have re-interpreted it, and you have turned it into something else. Where is the art in the gymkhana?

AB: At the time I was thinking about it as a ready-made, the same idea as just taking something as a ready-made and putting it in the art gallery context. So the art is the idea of proposing a piece of art.

AS: Then anybody could have that idea.

AB: Anyone could and they didn't – but maybe they did. Maybe they will. It was much more about the idea in that case.

CM: Have any of the communities come to you so far? Has a specific community come to you and said 'Let's do something' or do you have the idea and then find or create a community? Like with the Phil, which way round did that happen?

AB: Well, in a way, what's the community?

CM: I mean community as the participants or the people that are in it, like the gymkhana people and the Philharmonic Orchestra.

AB: Well no, people that know about me come to me. Probably they know about me because they are in the art world, or if not about me about what I have done.

CM: I wondered because of the project that you said was in your local community. Because you could be straddling two worlds: you are part of the art world and then you are a person in the community who does events. Are you seen in both terms?

AB: Yes, maybe. Half the people who came to see me in the Phil project were from the local heritage centre. It is about social networks and about where I hang out and the people who know about what I do. I am not very strongly implanted geographically in my community. In a way my community consists of the people I work with. I know a few people around where I live but I don't feel very located there with my activity. I would like to be more so.

AE: You said that you were quite clear about your ideas for the Phil piece and that it was informed by the issues to do with that community. What were the issues?

AB: Well the ones that I knew about were to do with the fact that the area has been a recipient of (Single Regeneration Budget) funding. I knew about that because I worked really near by in 1998. So I knew there was this really big area of social housing just opposite parliament, opposite Westminster. Basically developers were going to get their hands on it and there was a battle going on for a very long time between the people who live there on the estate and people who want to knock it down and build private housing. So I was aware of that issue.

AE: How did that come through in the work?

AB: Through Phil?

AE: Yes

AB: Well it didn't really.

AE: Was it connected with going into the space and the homes?

AB: Well it was connected because of the building, the Beaufoy Institute, and what people wanted to do with it. There was a kind of connection through questions about who owns the community, who gets to decide whether something gets pulled down or turned into a school, or into luxury apartments. So it was that issue of making things and hiding what is really going on. You often don't get to know what's happening until it is too late. That is the issue it was about really. I don't think what I did helped people know about what was going on. In the end the people who organised those art commissions were stitched up by the funders, who at the last minute tried to stop the projects from happening. Basically they had already decided what they wanted to do with the building and yet were funding art projects that were supposedly about getting a consultation

process going . So it was a very cynical ending in a way – a depressing ending because the projects were there for a reason but the reason got pulled away beforehand.

KG: I was a bit confused as to whether it was the council that wanted artists to make work there or a mixture of the different groups within the community, who had found out somehow that the space was meant to be for the community, and had wanted to use it?

AB: It was the latter. It wasn't the council but they ultimately decided what to do with the building.

KG: What are they doing with it?

AB: They are using the site for a special needs school. They are knocking the Institute down and rebuilding it.

KG: And the artists knew that before their work was shown?

AB: I found that out when I was doing the work or just afterwards, so it was a bit of a weird feeling really. It just felt a bit pointless.

KG: But nobody could change their work to look at what was happening, to highlight that?

AB: Good question. I don't know; I didn't know until afterwards.

AE: Have you ever thought about revisiting any of the 'communities' or people that you have worked with or who have been part of your previous projects? Have you ever thought about going back to develop the pieces of work? Does that come into things?

AB: That's a really good question. Yes, I have very much so and I have been kind of frustrated because that has never been possible. It has never been on the agenda of the people who funded the work or invited me to do things. As an artist I feel as though I am part of an ongoing menu where you will never have the same dish twice. The institutions and galleries have to keep having new things going on, and for the people that live round that art institution there is no continuity. It feels as if the things I have started up can't be more than a gesture or a statement, and then something new is happening. Yes, it is very frustrating.

AS: That is one of the problems with the galleries, that they seem to force art on the community rather than involve them in it properly.

AB: They are just programming things one after the other.

AS:I am interested in how you involve individuals. You said that the artist has the idea, but can you give me an instance when it wasn't an artist that informed your idea or making of an artwork. Do you ever work that way?

AB: Often. With the Pony Race and Phil, I had a very strong idea of what I wanted to do. But sometimes I work without having an idea as such. In the last few years I have done a project which was very much like that. I can't even remember how it evolved. I got some funding to do a residency on the streets of London. That is how it was framed, but it wasn't really a residency, it was just that I wanted to spend quite a long time (I decided on a year) when I would try to speak to people I didn't know. I would try to meet strangers, and try to delve into what goes on when that happens – trying to ask what it means to think that London, this whole city, might be a kind of community (an impossible thing to get your head around), and also to ask what a community is. That is an on-going question really. How does a community define itself?

I did have an idea of making a guide book about things that aren't always there, a kind of absurd idea where you provide an authoritative thing like a guide book, which paradoxically tells you to go and see something which may not be there. A kind of mixture of definiteness and vagueness, of the ephemeral and instructions, as if you can rely on instructions. I don't believe you can really. I spent a year trying to talk to people I didn't know on the street and in public spaces, and used the guide book as a pretext to have conversations, and to just talk to people. I felt the motivation for that work is that I live in this massive city, and I want to ask why I can't go out and just chat to people. What is that problem, what is going on there, and is it my problem or is it other people's problem? So that was my task, and that process and the people I talked to informed the book.

AS: You talked about the gymkhana, creating a false event, and the Festival of Lying is about something that doesn't really exist, about people pretending it is something that doesn't exist, and the music was about putting something together that happened in parts but didn't happen as a whole. If you think about the streets of London and the housing estates, and you think of the hopelessness and the problems of mental ill health, do you ever want to go deeper and respond to some of the issues? The issues are really, really apparent when you are talking to people on the streets. Do you want to ever respond through your artwork to that, or are you happy to remain on the surface?

CM: It is quite deep though, going to somebody's house, isn't it?

AS: Well you are not asking the questions. You are putting musicians in someone's house,

CM: You are asking them if you can have a musician in their house.

Audience member 6: What I wondered was whether the musician going to the house and the fact that the house was becoming a sort of art space was in itself seen as a philanthropic act, that off their own backs these people had the decency to allow you to come in and use the space of their home.

AB: They were being hosts...

6: And that was a philanthropic act in itself. They were hosting you, and that in itself became part of the piece.

AB Absolutely. We discussed this at one point. Why should someone do that? We are paying musicians. Why can't we pay them as well?

CM: I was going to ask that. Did you pay them?

AB: No, there wasn't enough funding. That was a difficult moment. We either do this or we change it. I mean who is it for? Is it for the musicians? Why is it necessarily for the people in the houses? Why are they the community and why isn't the orchestra the community?

CM: It is like asking who are the experts and who aren't, because you are giving money to people who are performing.

AB: Who always get paid – you don't get paid to have someone round your house

AS: They should have paid to have someone entertain them.

AB: That was on my mind: what is the nature of the exchange and is it a fair exchange? There are also the people who said no: they are not there, they are invisible and that is part of it too. In the book project about London I tried to include all the conversations that fizzled out into dead ends, and people who said 'I don't know what you are talking about' and the ones who said they didn't want anything to do with it, or hadn't got time, or whatever – I tried to include that part of it. To answer the question about going deeper, I think the thing is that I am always moving on somewhere else, but if I stayed in one place and decided only to make work in Vauxhall for five years that would just change like that immediately.

AS: You would have to go deeper if you revisited, to look at it again and change it.

AE: I suppose you are revisiting the common themes in your work about community and what community is.

AB: They are quite general though. I am trying to do that with another project, to do with the ice cream industry. I have been working on it for three years just researching, and I keep going back to it then abandoning it because the funding runs out. I keep trying to get more funding so I can go back to it, but the idea inevitably changes over time and the problem that keeps coming up is that the person who commissioned the idea doesn't want to know. They want something fast. and it is very hard to get the support to go through this process of changing my mind and discussing problems properly in the way it should really be done and to get funding for it.

With the book project I got funding for a few months but I couldn't possibly do what I wanted to do in a few months. I wanted a year and I negotiated that time. There was no more funding so I did the rest of it in my own time: that was a massive compromise in a way. I have done other projects very quickly, so it is a question of choosing when I can spend more time, and when I can do it quickly, just for financial reasons really. That is where I am at the moment, being frustrated, moving around a lot and wondering about how I can be more involved.

AS: Do you ever think what is the point?

AB: Often!

Audience member 7: What do you consider your role to be? Do you think you should be the social commentator that some people expect or just provide things that entertain people? Or are you just fulfilling things in yourself that you want to do?

AB: That is really good question. It's about the role of the artist. I think it is important to fulfil things for myself. It involves a kind of motivation and a kind of energy and desire that goes into the work. I think your role as an artist, whatever social systems or belief systems you are trying to work in, is to ask questions all along if you can, and keep asking questions about them. Try to do things differently and better, or try to aim towards that ultimately, within the way that you work, the way that you practise. Artists in general probably do that. Who else is an artist and would agree with that? I don't think being an artist just involves asking questions and being critical, and it is not just to make things better. It has to be a bit of both really.

AE: {I think working as an artist you are quite working outside a lot and I am trying to work my way back.} Art works within its own systems most of the time.

AS: I saw this very good Preston Sturges film called *Sullivan's Travels*, made in the 1940s. It was about the role of the artist, in this case a film maker who wanted to go into an impoverished American community to make a film about social justice. In the end what he did was make a film that was really funny and it made people laugh. He couldn't actually make the film he originally intended: it would have been patronising in the extreme because he didn't understand, nor would he ever, and the people in the community wanted something entirely different. They didn't want an artist to go in and make comment on their situation. It was quite a good film. Any Preston Sturges film is well worth seeing.

Sarah Galleries (SG): I was wondering if wandering around London talking to people changed your behaviour at all?

AB: It has changed my life actually. I met people who introduced me to things that I didn't know anything about. Now I have got an allotment – one of the places I went by accident – which is fantastic. It has led to lots of other things for me. It has made me less scared. It has taken a level of fear away.

AS: So your art is about your responses to different situations, it is about you and about responses to whatever it is that you see, and that is it.

AB: I don't know if I can answer what my art is about – that is such a big question.