Who Owns the Art World?

An online panel discussion with Hayley Newman, Morgan Quaintance and Richard Parry.

This short panel debate took place during DACS' Annual Strategy Day, as we thought about the context in which artists are currently working and how best DACS could best support artists and artists' estates in the future.

The Panel

Mark Waugh (Chair) is the Business Development Director at DACS.

Hayley Newman, Artist and Reader of Fine Art, Slade School of Fine Art, UCL.

Morgan Quaintance, writer, musician, broadcaster and curator.

Richard Parry, Artist.

Mark Waugh (MW): Welcome, and we're live again at DACS, this time from RIBA, and we're live with a specific question, it's quite a simple question – "Who Owns the Art World?" And to answer that, what we're going to have three presentations, one from Richard Parry, one from Hayley Newman and one from Morgan Quaintance. They come from very particular positions and I think you'll be able to understand what those positions are after the presentations. Essentially, all three of them share a discourtesy of concern with that question of ownership - and not only the ownership of the art world in a conceptual and a material sense - but also in what the role and agency of the artist is, and indeed, art is, in that context.

And we're asking that in the context of DACS as an organisation which has a 30-year history of thinking about what artists can do to empower themselves and support each other. What a network looks like, feels like and acts like. So, with no more chit chat, I'm going to hand over to Hayley.

Hayley Newman (HN): So, thank you very much for inviting me this afternoon. I am speaking as an artist who worked with the collective Liberate Tate to get Tate to drop its sponsor, BP. Liberate Tate is a feminist peer-led led group formed of a core of around 12 people with up to 500 members who took part in performances and disseminated work on social media. Over the time that we worked together, we developed a form of non-binary art activism, one that did not privilege art or activism. We were a group and we were made up of artists, artist historians, designers, hairdressers, NGO workers and food growers. Our collaboration involved letting go of specialist knowledge, working and learning together, as well as using our specialisms when needed.

We argued that there should be no oil sponsorship of museums and galleries in a time of climate change and we were asking Tate to drop BP, the third largest contributor to global warming, and re-draw an ethical line. In 2010, during the Gulf of Mexico oil spill and in advance of the Tate Summer Party and celebration of Tate's 20-year long relationship with BP, a sign-up letter asking Tate to drop BP was circulating. I signed and forwarded it to friends including a Tate Trustee who sent my request on to Nicholas Serota's office. I received a reply from the office and wrote an email to Nick Serota saying I thought it was unethical for Tate to take this money.

Later, I went to speak with the same Trustee at a public event. He was scathing of the performances at the Summer Party. He also said artists had no power to change Tate policy and that what was needed was to change public opinion. From 2010, we began to articulate why it was unethical to take money from oil companies and to engage in a public debate about ethical lines and the conflict between public good and a sponsor's agenda. Between 2010 and 2016, Liberate Tate made 16 unsanctioned performances in the Tate galleries. We used live art methods such as rehearsals and rituals to frame and give our protests a defined start and end. A core element of our argument was that sponsorship gives companies a social licence to operate. A social licence to operate is not about oil companies selling more petrol but gives corporations access to buildings, elite cultural groups and taste makers, cultural commentators, artists and academics who shape wider opinion.

Each performance posited a different argument. In "The Gift", we installed a wind turbine blade, a gift of renewable engine in the Turbine Hall of Tate Modern. In "Hidden Figures", we played the parachute game with a giant black square and drew attention to the redacted minutes we received in response to requests that Tate reveal the amount of money is was receiving from BP. In "Timepiece", we occupied the floor of Tate Modern with words from books on climate change, art and activism.

All of these works were photographed, videoed and disseminated online as they happened. Our unpaid work also included giving talks, running workshops, editing the publication, "Not If But When – Culture Beyond Oil", commissioning a Guerrilla audio tour of the Tate galleries and supporting the organisation Platform in their Tribunal to get Tate to answer a number of Freedom of Information requests that would reveal the amount of money it was given by BP which turned out to be an average of £224,000 per year between 1990 and 2006, less than 1% of Tate's income. To do this, we worked with many others including the Art, Not Oil coalition, sister organisation, Platform, as well as PCS union members within the museum sector.

BP still sponsors the British Museum and National Portrait Gallery and while BP no longer sponsors Tate, the gallery has not formally adopted an ethics policy with regards to oil sponsorship.

We set out to get Tate to drop its sponsor, BP, and to re-draw the line regarding sponsorship and ethics. At the start, I thought it would take six months but it took six years. We felt public opinion starting to change in 2015 when we performed "Timepiece" and a final push with the work "Birthmark", we won in 2016. Ten years ago, this would have been unimaginable.

We undertook a local campaign focused on Tate which was situated within wider cultural and political contexts. Through this process, we explored different modes of protest and combinations of art, activism and campaign work and created a platform from which to raise public consciousness around climate change and the devastating impact of oil companies on human rights, our environment and the climate. Everyone draws a line somewhere and there is huge public concern about climate change and people got behind us.

Liberate Tate currently intends to publish a book on our work provisionally entitled "Insides Outsides". Through the book, we hope to reflect on how along the surface of an imaginary Mobius strip, we took positions both inside and outside the gallery. This was one of the tactics that enabled us to drive a wedge between Tate and BP, and end their relationship.

MW: Thank you very much, Hayley. So, after Hayley, we're going to hear from Richard.

Richard Parry (RP): So, I thought the art world is kind of a boring or fake category and something that I don't really know what we're talking about, so I asked Mark earlier if I could just talk a bit about an essay I wrote recently and then say something about the art I try and do a bit and he said "Yes", so, I'm just going to dive into that.

The essay that I wrote is called "London, London" and explains how property developers linked with tax evasion, tax avoidance, externalising foreign currency, mineral smuggling and human rights violations conflate their private property investment portfolio with a collectively owned art collection in order to operate in London in a more intense or successful way.

The sort of outcomes of these operations that I researched includes things like Arts Council funding being transferred directly to an offshore investment vehicle owned and operated by the same director of an art foundation/real estate company who invoiced herself an unqualified £100,000 premium and successfully submitted the invoice to the Arts Council for payment, and it's funny you mention Nicholas Serota, because when I wrote a sort of letter to the Arts Council asking a bit more about this after the Freedom of Information request, he must have been on his boat or something, because I didn't really get a reply.

The second thing on this list of three is undervalued leases on public buildings being acquired at half their subsequent book value and operated as investment properties by directors of an offshore registered real estate company. And the other outcome on this list which is quite weird is that directors of an offshore registered real estate company are able to advise the Mayor of London on, in their words, protecting artists from the market activities that they themselves are sort of simultaneously undertaking and these activities sort of result in public libraries becoming commercial studio spaces for artists that cost them 370% more than comparable studio provision models in libraries such as Lewisham Art House – big up to them.

The essay uses processes of astroturfing to describe how artists are used to sell the activities of an offshore registered real estate company to the States as appearing to originate from or be supported by a grass roots community when this is not necessarily true. It also uses associated processes of opencast mining in Zimbabwe, Zambia and the Congo to describe institutionalised extraction of cultural capital and have artists in London, these sort of processes abolish any kind of pre-existing context or natural stuff.

So, yes, you can read the article in the current May journal or by going on my website, there's a link from the footer. Yes, that's what I wanted to say about the essay – is that five minutes?

MW: That's a good start, yes?

Morgan Quaintance (MQ): I don't really have a presentation and what I'm going to do, I thought it would be better if I just followed on from what Hayley was saying, what Richard was saying, because obviously Liberate Tate was actually one of the – Platform – all of that stuff was one of the things that really, well, inspired me when I was sort of coming up through the art world as a bit of a puppy and now that I've matured and I've seen some of the cracks, it's sort of informed my approach, I suppose. So, yes, I dunno, to be honest, I'm just going to be honest, I'm just going to say what I'm thinking and I think when Gilane invited me to do this, I was like, I have no interest in having this conversation, we know who owns the art world – it's not me and the people who own it aren't really going to…

OK, so maybe we should qualify things a bit. So, when you say "the art world", people say "That's just a distraction, it doesn't really mean anything" but we all know, right, the art world, we probably can have a good bash at cognitizing [sic] what that might mean. So, for me, the art world is obviously museums, galleries, magazines, journals, markets, so it's these institutions – and it's also the ideologies and the individuals that

animate them – for me, that, the term "art world", is the collective term for that system and obviously I'm not in the position to set the agenda for that system so maybe in terms of ownership, I'm thinking about who can set the agenda, who can control the homogeneity or not of the art world, who decides whether or not the instrumentalisation [sic] of art by government is OK, who also decides – I've got, this is my third point – to capitulate to the real or imagined whims of private finance? It's not me. So, obviously I don't own it...

So, what I really am interested in is like what are you going to do about it? What are you going to do about it? That's the thing and I think Hayley and Richard are showing the way that it works on one level and it involves a lot of personal sacrifice, it involves a lot of time and energy, emotional strain, to get things done and to do all of this work for kind of quite small results. So, it took six years to get Tate to sort this stuff out and then at the end of it, I'm sure people pretend as if the idea of disconnecting art and oil was just this natural concept that was in the air but actually you're the ones who've authored this discourse and I think that's what always happens with political movements or any type of activism is that people do all this groundwork, suddenly the conversation gets some air but then you're not given credit for doing all the work and so everybody who is watching it also thinks "Ah, there's no movement, everything we do is futile, nobody listens".

So, I think that's a myth that I think needs to be busted – effort does pay off but I also feel like there needs to be some work, there needs to be some stuff from you guys, like you guys, no disrespect, I don't really know you, but obviously you're luminaries of some kind, so you know, it's just like what are we going to do? What are we going to do, you know, because all that's happening at the moment is this – I was talking about it in an article I wrote, and I was saying I'm sick of the engage and reform, we're all trying to engage with the institution to reform it with the idea being that if they'd just learn about homophobia, sexism, racism, then maybe they'll turn the corner and not be doing those exploitative behaviours – as if that's going to be the case. We've been doing it for 20-30 years and we're still in this situation. It became exacerbated by the global financial crisis of 2008, obviously, and it's just becoming more hard to ignore and more difficult to sort of pretend that this is a status quo, no, sorry, pretend that this is sort of – that there's no alternative.

So, really, the only reason I was like I'm up for doing this is because I just want a chance to say, yes, what are you going to do about it, what are we going to do about it? And like we need to build some sort of other system, and I don't mean, like OK, how do we club together and buy an institution? I don't mean how do we club together and do a magazine or how do we some night? Obviously, everyone's going to have to think about it and the thing is as well, not everyone's going to want to do it and that's wicked – if you don't want to do that, if you think the best way to do things is to be like no, I'm going to engage with Frieze, the best way to do it is write articles for Frieze because I can change discourse from the inside – you live that dream if you want to in the same way that if people think I'm going to engage with organisations like Create because, do you know what, they've got the resources and access to sociologists who are doing work on social mobility and that's the way I'm going to make a change – yes, you do that, you go for that, but for me, the real thing is going to be elsewhere and that's what I'm interested in.

For example, I just came from a place called Sophia House, it's down the road and at the moment it's being occupied by an organisation called Streets Kitchen and it's full of homeless people and I'm sick, I'm sick of doing this, I'm sick of – like operating in a creative world where I go to somewhere like that and people have no food, no clothes – I drop off some clothes, I come here, I have a discussion in RIBA about this, like this is f****d, and it doesn't need to be this way. All of this food here, no disrespect to you guys, I know it's just a fun thing but why? Why is it there? Hopefully I can just take it afterwards and give it to someone because I just feel like we need to – I don't know, you know, like I don't know. I just want some robust activity to happen and we've all got minds,

we've all got stuff that we can do – I don't have a solution but somehow we need one. What's happening already is this approach – what Hayley's doing, what Richard's doing, what I'm trying to do with research and that – that's covered but we haven't got the energy to keep doing it. We haven't got the energy, we need like other people to help.

It's like there's this case of a guy who was like – I was reading a book about tax evasion, I think it's called – I can't remember what the book was but anyway, they were talking about this guy who was chasing after a pair, two brothers – someone who knows a bit more about tax history would know more about this narrative than me, I might be getting it wrong – I think they're called the Vesties, and they were like the first people who were really taking advantage of the Duke of Westminster ruling and taking liberties and basically this guy pursued them for so long, so doggedly, and eventually nothing happened to them and he killed himself. And I thought yes, that's the price, that is the price that we pay. You just get more and more depressed by it.

So basically, we're up for it, we're going to make the sacrifice – I'm not trying to talk for you but I feel like this is maybe generally acknowledged – phenomenal if you try and do something a bit different, it's a thankless task really and I think it's now time, please, like, just – and if people are watching the stream, whatever, we need to do something other than engaging and reforming. And I'm not saying it's an either or, they're not mutually exclusive, we can do other stuff but we need something else to happen also. So, yes, that's my five-minute provocation.

MW: Thank you very much. So, just before we go towards what actually people might be able to do, I think I'd just like to pedal back a little bit and just talk about what the risk of actually doing things is because I think hearing from both Richard and Hayley, and I guess Morgan, for you to some degree, there is a real risk in being the voice, the person, the body, the organisation, the thought behind that passionate decision to take the risk. And I'm really curious about actually how you feel having come on the other side of that and what kind of real pressures you're put under in order to take that risk.

So, I'm thinking particularly from an artist's point of view, in terms of kind of the sustainability of an artist's career, there are all kind of issues about market sustainability and so how you look at that relationship about your market sustainability and how that converges or otherwise with your ethical and aesthetic concerns and how, having been through a process of making a stand, making an aesthetic stand and making a stand in public about what you think is important, what kind of pressures have you been under, so, maybe Richard you could…

RP: I mean, not really that much. I mean it's like this idea of risk and taking these, it's Indiana Jones or something, it's not really like that. It's actually quite boring, it's quite like clerical, it's like admin work, it's like the stuff I do at Lewisham Art House, it's just incredibly tedious but it's important and I don't have a problem with that. It's not that sort of art world thing that's sort of sexy and cool and transmittable. I mean, the risk that, going back to the essay thing, I wrote the essay then the risk is like these kind of crusty Marxist artists wanting to be friends with you.

MW: It's interesting – I think that from your point of view, I suppose the Lewisham Art House, in terms of the territory it occupies, it's a territory which has come from Spiral Tribe, it comes from all of the stuff that Quaintance's talking about, about people just taking over space, living a life, living a life absolutely outside of the mainstream and just saying this is what we do, and it's a kind of style of dealing with capitalism which is quite, very vibrant and has long-term repercussions. You as someone occupying that space with the kind of capacity to do the research and do the bureaucracy have taken on that mantle in a very different kind of way and I guess that the obvious thing that then comes – I suppose you get pigeon-holed as a troublemaker, someone who is making that happen in public. It doesn't feel like a problem, that's a good thing. I'm not trying to say that everyone

should be frightened of doing it, I'm just kind of conscious about the people, again, what Quaintance says, you've done it and you should, people should be really grateful that you've actually crossed over that line and I'm just interested to hear so maybe from you, Hayley, if there's anything else you want to say

HN: Yes, in relation to my own experience I got poorer and poorer, and I kind of was doing more and more work for Liberate Tate and then kind of when we did talks, the money from the talks was going into Liberate Tate, you're kind of not earning any money from the labour but then no-one would really employ you for anything. So, that was kind of one effect of it. And then there were kind of other things like all these different proximities like when I started it, I was working at Chelsea which is right next to Tate Britain and of course whenever I went over to Tate Britain with my students, kind of to kind of they have a talk there or go for a coffee, I'd be eyeballed by security or like, you know, psychologically like was my website hacked by Bitcoin or was it hacked by BP? You know, when you kind of realise that you've been photographed by the Metropolitan Police and your photograph's been circulated to all the security across the whole of London, all the kind of galleries that are kind of sponsored by BP.

So there was this kind of other kind of psychological kind of thing that happened, there were people – I remember going to a friend's memorial and it felt like I was this kind of electric eel and everyone was sort of turning away from me as I kind of moved through the room because Nicholas Serota was there, so there was these kind of like wider kind of sort of macro and micro kind of ways that, the power of the Tate was kind of this institution was being kind of exerted or transmitted in some way.

So those were all very real and kind of very, kind of happened for a very, very long time. But I think maybe within that kind of sphere it might be worth saying that they were amazing and wonderful things that happened, like, you know, things like the security guards at the Tate, one time we finished and they said thank you to us on the way out. Another time, we were kind of, when we were in the Turbine Hall, when we stayed for 25 hours, one of the members of Liberate Tate said to security, "Thank you for staying up", and he said back, "We did it together". So, you know, and kind of there were these amazing and beautiful, beautiful moments of kind of shared experience, sort of feelings of love after doing – kind of for each other after having done those things and taken those risks.

So, it's a kind of range of experiences and a kind of discovery of other people, of different people, of people that actually were supportive, you know, and weren't the people that turned their backs. So, you know, there is kind of that sort of lived side of it, I think, is something that was very real, for me, in a way.

MW: The other question I really wanted to ask as well is this sense of Who Owns the Art World, who owns the sense of the public art? I think the complexity to try to map who it is who, you know, who may be investing in the various machinations of the market is something quite complex if it could be pursued, but in terms of these public spaces, we kind of do know who owns them because it's a state and it's local councils and it's the institutions that fund them. And I suppose that one of the most obvious issues here, you've raised it, is this question of what is the real policy that these institutions are using in order to fund their activity and to what degree is there any real diligence in terms of due process and obviously Liberate Tate has been fantastic because it's shown what you can do, what victory might look like, but the longer term implication is something much more complex because it does demand the institutions really reimagine the sense of what will fund what they do and this is a massive political car crash because essentially since the Blair government, we've been looking at the creative industries, we've been looking at cultural entrepreneurship, we've been looking at all of these models of partnership funding which actually predefine this space, not as public space but as privatised space.

And it seems to me that there's definitely a lot of work that needs to be done at a government level, at an institutional level to look at the implications of cultural policy. Is that something that you…

MQ: Well, I don't know, maybe, yes – I could speak on it but… I don't know if you want to hear it. I just think, like, we can't be like, yes, it's because of the Labour government, it's been happening since we got enfranchisement. Obviously, the state has been like in 1928 when we could all vote, they were like how are we going to change this? We're just going to vote in a socialist government, so we have to sort out a way of making people think that that's not what they want, they want something else. So, I think if you actually look throughout history, even if you look even at the first instance of the Arts Council, like the best for the most – the motto, that's also like the albatross around them, or the anchor that makes everybody drown afterwards because it's kind of a totally unworkable model and it gets changed subtly time and articulated in a different way but it's still – what's the new Arts Council motto at the moment?

MW: Great art for everyone.

MQ: Yes, it's the same thing, it's the same thing. OK, so basically you can even talk about Thatcher coming in and sort of really kick starting the privatisation of public institutions by doing a lot of business and art sponsorship initiatives that really encourage businesses to give money… but all of this stuff has been sort of been written…

MW: No, but Morgan, you specifically have talked about the Conservatives and there is a creeping conservatism in the kind of programming and activity within the public realm of the galleries and that is a consolidation of a sense of the need to balance the books, as it were. Unless you're balancing the books, what…

MQ: I'll tell you where that comes from, that comes from the need to really make the British art world punch above its weight, that's where that comes from because blatantly you remember a time when England wasn't really, you know, in the world scheme of things, we weren't really that amazing, you know. London wasn't the global financial capital that it now is, it also wasn't the global capital of arts that it now plausibly could feasibly be argued that it is and I think that there was a moment where people, like Nicholas Serota, maybe people like Sandy Nairne as well, had good intentions and they were like "How do we change this?" and I think the Turner Prize is an interesting thing to look at as well because the pre- and post-92 Turner Prize is a real good indication of that shift. Before 92, it was this dusty affair, it was mostly blokes like Matthew Collins got an opportunity – I think that's like Matthew Collins was nominated to some director, it was just a random thing.

And then they got Channel 4 involved and they were like "This needs to be a cultural moment, everybody has to be talking about it, it has to be about British identity". It was like a brand exercise and after 92, Channel 4 funded it every year for about 8 or 9 years, I can't remember exactly, but you can see there's a concerted effort at the beginning of the 1990s to make art into this amazing, yes, this thing of becoming the cultural industry as opposed to like small things like of cultural production.

But the problem is, at the same time that they're doing that, the government is also doing their agenda to make London the global financial capital of the world so it's almost like art is the ornament that's garnishing the, like, I don't know – the turd of like tax avoidance, oligarchy preparing the way for land banking homes, as if this was a random thing that happened, that suddenly we're in a city that costs more than most places in the world to live in, where university fees cost £9,000 a year, where studios cost a ridiculous amount of money and they're closing all the time but we've got more oligarchs than ever living in this country. Why are they here as opposed to Dubai? Well, because we can argue that we've got this amazing infrastructure of cultural initiatives. Not only do we have the Tate Modern, we've got all these other galleries and do you know what else we're doing? London Borough of

Culture – just in case you didn't have enough, and I just think this, like, I totally understand the idea that our galleries are struggling and that but I think there's a larger narrative which is this heroic one which is people trying to sort of reinvigorate the art world but then just keeping going with that strategy...

It's like there might have been a moment where it was really like it was balanced, like we were having more galleries and there was a grass roots plausible grass roots, there was private money and we were sort of on an even keel, but now finance has the whip hand, man. If you're a curator, it's about your collector base, it's about who you can encourage to the institution and I think the reason is because they just went along with that model. That's my thesis, I don't have any stats to back it up but it's a plausible one, I think.

MW: I think again, the other interesting thing in terms of this table and its fantastic decoration which is edible, distributable and available for anyone to take and give away is that we all, we did invite some people I suppose who are more obviously on the monied side of the art world and they declined to come and I think that that again, part of the problem of who owns the art world and how you engage with the anxiety around the ethics of the way it engages, is those people who are responsible for controlling the shift in policy or who have significant capital investment in art washing their profiles, also are very quick to disappear when you actually ask them to articulate what value they think they are bringing to the equation. That's again one of the kind of problems of mediating this question.

So, when Morgan says, "What are we going to do?" it's because I suppose the question here is that certainly as artists, you both feel that the only thing to do is to actually take direct action.

HN: I think it's not that straightforward – sorry, Richard, I saw you...

RP: Well, sometimes it's important to take direct action but sometimes it's important to, like, ignore stuff, like the art world is kind of like whatever, it's like a desperate bunch of lame galleries and desperate curators and desperate collectors, and it's kind of some days feels very irrelevant and unimportant. So, I think it's about picking your battles and working out stuff like that.

HN: I think also there is an argument for withdrawal and for kind of more specific kind of focussed kind of points of engagement and I mean I kind of, like, I think that artists and I think that there is – I kind of feel like there might be the beginning of a kind of different, of a cultural change around kind of, you know, what we want as artists and also kind of what it means to be an artist. I mean, the thing about, you know, going to meet a curator and then going for dinner and then talking about a project, it's so boring.

RP: It's so weird.

HN: It's not – it's just not exciting and there are a kind of really kind of interesting things that we can engage with and do and kind of make and contribute to that are really kind of vital and important. I think that those models are boring and old and kind of deadening to the soul in some way.

MQ: Can I just... just to... I think, yes, I totally agree with you, Hayley, and I think just to go back to that thing I was talking about, like heroic narrative, like reenergising the art world, I think because they were actually battling with a kind of old style conservatism of which you could say Brian Sewell was like a paradigmatic example. Now, he's gone now but we've got other like neo-con type critic type, so Jonathan Jones or XXX [34:36]. We say why don't we have more... YBAs in the Tate, why is it not...

So, anyway, but I think what you were saying about like the cultural change thing is really important because I feel like in some ways art, like, art history is – obviously it exists in the past – but I also feel like more from the – a lot of artists who are sort of emerging or coming up now, or even quite established, are drawing on subculture or drawing on culture production that's happened post-1960 and so in a way, the moulds and forms that we have in the art world, let's say medium moulds and forms, so you've got sculpture, video, discourse, action, relation, whatever – these are all useful but then the subjects, discourses and debates that people are pushing into them are new. And so, there's a disconnect whereby you have cultural capital that comes from somewhere else but then there's this weird discord between an institution that is trying to reference that to art history or is just trying to pull on art history to validate or invalidate what you're doing and I feel like that tension is just going to become more and more pronounced and at some point people are going to be like "What is the point, why do we – or do we want to be associated with this, do we want to be associated with that?"

So, you can look at like new media and like internet art, that still has a vexed relationship to institutions and I feel like, at some point, maybe now we're at that point, people are just like "What does it matter?" But I'm not trying to say we should just totally relinquish them because they're arts. Same as Arts Council England is arts, it's part of the welfare state package.

HN: Yes, but it's about making it the culture different in some way and, you know, I think, and really kind of thinking through kind of who we are. Like, you know, for example, having kind of environmental consciousness – I want to make work kind of with materials that has really low impact, I don't want to kind of like, kind of keep contributing by kind of making stuff with plastic and just things like that, you know, just are kind of little points of resistance that might kind of open up a different culture.

MW: Again, I suppose thinking about the ways in which artists are likely to contest this kind of ownership of the art world, I suppose the things I think about art – it is the question about collectivity and the way that collectivity has been exploited as a notion particularly kind of, yes, I suppose, collective identities of – you were saying this collection, but also I think in relationship to the project such as Artists' Pension Trust, the notion of that, that is collective, I think it's an exploitation of that term. I think that the other way to think about this is about the kinds of disturbances which artists have made which are fundamentally effective. So, apart from the direct political intervention in relationship to the gallery, Bob and Roberta Smith, and I think the campaign around the art and the A-level and about the fundamental question about where, you know, artists sit and art sits within the curriculum I think is a fundamental one because I think, again, the other question is in terms of artists' practice, a whole role with half of them and on strike because the role of artists in education is fundamentally under attack and I think that that's another layer of discourse where artists can actually make a difference because they are always very canny communicators.

MQ: But don't you think this is all about agency, so it's basically the institution has the power, the institution is setting an agenda – like…

RP: I think there's more life in institutions, I think it's a trap to sort of…

MQ: But I'm not saying that, this is the issue, this is the problem talking in these terms because it sounds like I'm just black and white, but I'm saying they set the agenda, like at the moment, who's going to have the voice of people making cultural policy? It's going to be institutions, right? So, what I'm saying is now that if you think about the art world, people will go straight to Tate or they'll go straight to this or straight to that rather than there's

a powerful lobby of artists who are actually – practice is moving at such a high rate, people don't really know what's going on, you know? I feel like there's been a shift in the balance and basically, yes, I'm not sort of saying we have to always look to institutions but I am saying obviously if there's an agenda being set, it's being set by people who occupy those positions because it's going to be, what's her name, Maria Balshaw's the one who's going to the palace and not me.

I mean, it's a fact, she goes – what's the point in having the Director of Tate go to the palace? We can't pretend, though, that this isn't a class-ridden society that at the top of it there's the monarchy, supposed to be ordained by god – these have affects, these have affects, and artists, for some reason, like – and I think it's not just artists as well, is it, but also if you're a curator, it's a debase position now. Like, you know, you're the one who has to go out there and chat to people and shield someone over here who might be wanting to be radical but then you've got to take all of....

So everybody's involved in this like system that's kind of off-key and I think just to go back – you know when you were saying about risk and that, like this might sound a bit random because it's just something I wanted to say earlier and maybe I could shoehorn it in now... but like you know there's a story by Franz Kafka, a short story called "The Starving Artist", I don't know if anyone's familiar with it – is anyone familiar with it?

MW: No.

MQ: OK, so basically it's a story about they go to like a freak show fair, like PT Barnum thing, and there's a guy in a cage and he's a starving artist and people come and watch him starve and like after a while, the starving artist attraction is no longer pulling the crowds in and at the end of the story, just before he was about to die because he's so emaciated, one lone person comes along with their kid and says "I really admire what you're doing, it's so amazing, yours is a lost craft and you're the best". And he walks away and the starving artist has this moment of shame because he's like, well, not a moment of shame but he just feels like – what he doesn't know is "I hate food, I don't want to eat, like it repels me" and I'm like, you know, sometimes people say what you do is heroic if you're trying to oppose a system, right, but it's just like how can you be involved in that system? It's like an aversion to it, like, and I feel like questions about risk and like what might be and what – I feel like maybe they don't even come into it because when you notice the disparity, the hypocrisy and the contradictions that are riddled within this system of like magazines, galleries, markets, you know, blah, blah, blah, it gets harder and harder to not do something. Sorry, that was a digression, sorry.

RP: But it's not a digression because it's about what motivates you, it's about the energy and I think that kind of sense of passion and energy is something that you maybe want to channel and focus or you maybe say to yourself, "No, I cannot channel this any longer because it's going to destroy me". So I think that it's not a risk because to not do it would destroy it.

MQ: But we're in a different phase now, you know. You think about the occupations and everyone always talks about Hornsey, the Hornsey, the art school thing, that's amazing, and Warwick as well, you know, they occupy in Warwick, and they were threatened with appearing in court and it never happened. But it happened to Central Saint Martins' students, I was in court with them, and then I went to interview a collector and a cleaner opened the door in a pinafore – I was like, people actually have people who wear that. And then I went to the ICA and it was a show by XXX [42:48] and there were security guards everywhere. And you just think this isn't just an odd circumstance, it's a world than you can either be complicit in or try to oppose in a productive way. And I'm just like... that's like the thing, I don't want to eat that food, you know?

MW: So, Richard, are you going to eat at the table of art world?

RP: Tuck in... yes, when I'm hungry, I have a bit but, you know, it's on my terms, I think, yes pretty much most of the time. And then sometimes, no. But I just don't want to have this sort of like Oedipal thing about the man or the art world and that like distracts from my mission of doing art.

MW: Hayley?

HN: What was the question?

MW: The question is "are you going to continue eating at the table of the art world?"

HN: I guess so... I'm interested in making art and I want to continue making art and I am – I don't know what the art world is in a way, in this kind of...

RP: I think you can be your own art world, though, sometimes, as well.

HN: Yes, I think, you know, in a way it is my own world that kind of, that is the place that I like to be.

MW: I suppose fundamentally the question is in terms of eating at the table of the art world, means that you understand that the sustenance as an artist is going to be somehow connected with your capacity to, yes, to sustain yourself and sustain your practice, and how do you deal with it if that food is poisoned? And I think that that's, in terms of the ownership of the art world, I don't think that Morgan is alone and I don't think you're alone in thinking that it does feel slightly poisoned and yet sometimes the poison can be, kind of the calmer kind, can be something that takes you to an elsewhere which is transcendent, transgressive and to somewhere where you reimagine where you are, but the fundamental thing is if you then wake up the next day and you're in the same place, it's not a good place.

Now, I'm hoping that there's some questions in the audience and, more fundamentally, that someone sitting at another space entirely may have come online to ask us some questions, so, can I have an immediate question maybe from the audience?

MW: Yes. I mean, I think there's one thing, a kind of basic question, that I think it's important for you to address which is why is it such a bad thing that the art world is owned and dominated by private finance? You haven't really spoken, you've touched on it a little bit, in slightly elliptical ways about what the effects of that is. What is lost, what are the effects of what's happened and kind of what you were speculating about? I think the most graphic example of what's happened is that 10, 15 years ago, the balance of funding for Tate was 70% public, 30% private. That has now entirely flipped to 70% private and 30% public. And I think the question of what the effects are of that, why should we be concerned, why should we act?

RP: Because the Tate will get even worse but maybe it should get worse, maybe it should just be a crèche, right? Sorry!

MW: I mean, it's interesting in terms of thinking about that private investment and what the ethics of it are because, you know, so, for example, one artist group have been doing a lot of work around the Golden Lane Estate, a lot of the activity there was evidently in the estate, banners etc, and then they've gone and done an exhibition in Raven Row which is famously owned by one of the wealthiest families in the country. And so this kind

of sense that, yes, there's always going to be a tension there about what it is you're saying and then how it is framed.

HN: I mean, I think, you know, for me, I would say that art comes from a very kind of private space, a kind of private space that connects to the social and is, you know, kind of, it's very personal but it's also political and public. And I think that there's something in connecting that or kind of allowing that to be framed by a kind of company that has human rights kind of issues, let's say, is really difficult. I don't want that, I don't want my work to be framed in that way and I would rather not be present in that space than have that kind of, have that company kind of over art kind of frame this thing, this kind of thing that I've made. So, for me, that is a kind of very, very kind of personal position but I just can't have, can't, yes, I don't want.

MQ: So, I mean, you'd have to do like a case by case, sorry, it's a really irritating expression, case by case basis, but like a really simple example is like say the Freelands Foundation, for example, is this initiative that happened a few years ago and it was designed to – I think it was to support the female artists but, you know, what if you happened to be critical of like the Murdoch Media empire, and then whoops, his daughter is the one who's funding Freelands Foundation? Could there possibly be a tension explicit or implied for you to maybe not do that or would you even be considered for the opportunity in the first place?

Now, that might have some ramifications if we pull that out and we look at all these different other opportunities that are designed to give somebody a leg up, if they're all similarly funded in similar ways, then what happens is you start to get quite a narrow vector for acceptable practice which then has a knock-on effect on what people are producing and then that has a knock-on effect on what discourse has been discussed and then it has a knock-on effect on who's going to be employed in institutions. So, you have sector homogeneity, homogeneity of discourse and then you have, well, them two things, which are bad enough.

But then I would also say, then it's like – and maybe it's a question, a personal moral question for somebody. So, like I'm not against – this is the other thing – I'm not totally against private finance, like, what, you know, that wouldn't make any sense – someone could have a flat and be like oh, I've got a bit of property from it, I'm going to give you some money. That's kind of private finance, or they could have a plumbing company and they're like, I want to sponsor you, or if anyone's like over 35, you remember like when Khan's Curry House sponsored your local cinema, you know? That's a different thing to BAE Systems sponsoring the Great Exhibition of the North.

Now, people have short memories when it comes to corruption but in the 1980s, there was something called the "Al-Yamamah Deal" which was the biggest arms deal in history, I think. It was between the UK and Saudi Arabia and some people call it the "Who's Your Mama" deal because Mark Thatcher was big in that and anyone who knows Mark Thatcher knows that that guy was so corrupt and it's like it just doesn't stop there. That stuff goes into international arms trade, what was happening with Charles Taylor in Liberia – this stuff is serious and you just think "Who is yoking together creative expression with like destruction of human life?" That's like a basic thing, just that as a concept is questionable, that then when you actually look at what actually happened in these times and start pulling it out and figuring out what's going on, it's crazy.

So, that's why I would have issues with it and those are just like basic off the cuff examples. You can surely pull out loads more but there will be some people out there who are happy to do that and I suppose this is my lobby, in a way. It's like "Go for it" – I'm not going to try and convince you to do different but I'm not doing that. I don't want to do that and I feel like art... you know, the thing that drove the 20th Century was the Avant Gardes.

Now, we can all say, yes, OK, it was racist, sexist and all of that – it was, definitely – but just that initial energy of being iconoclastic and breaking with our history, all through the rest of the century. Now, what are we offering now? That's the issue. What are we giving birth to at this moment for what could possibly be the rest of the 21st Century?

I feel like in some ways I would like to throw myself under the bus, or whatever, to give a shot of something possibly happening in the future. So, that's why I kind of like sometimes I feel like I'm writing something because if I write something, that offers a discourse, right, in a way? So those facts and figures are out there, so a student can talk about them without fear of reprisal because they're just in public circulation. So, that's why I say private finance is not such a great thing when it's linked to companies with questionable moral ethical practices and no qualms about exploiting people through sort of neo-liberal loopholes and all the rest of it.

MW: Another question? Do we have any questions online?

Audience member: I've got a question. I guess it's prompted by there's a few things that all of you guys have said, this idea of as an artist, like, the distraction of this discussion and how your work sits within that frame and this idea of like industry or a kind of art world or a system that you either kind of opt into or opt out of and I think on a day to day basis as an artist you're kind of confronted with those questions and decisions about how you operate and what your kind of ethical stance is and how – like what's your contribution, I suppose, is a bigger question – like what's my contribution in the world and where does that kind of reach out into? And it's really difficult, I think, to navigate through that and I was just wondering if you had any thoughts around that?

MW: Richard?

RP: Around navigating the…

Audience member: Yes, and I think particularly as a sort of new career artist, I don't know if that's even…

RP: Start-up artists…

Audience member: Yes, emerging, whatever – it's sort of strange, arbitrary kind of words that because obviously this idea of agency as well and the value of who you are and what your work is and what you're saying, do you have to say anything, what does it all mean – all of these kind of big questions that I think are really, really important but very confusing especially when you're quite new to it all.

RP: I think that's it though, it's confusing and that's good and that's the way it is. Like, in my experience, I've been pretty much confused all the time and that's OK, but I've been in sort of funny positions to a private finance and public, the opposite of that, and the work I do sort of gets me in and out of this things to a greater and lesser extent, and I've never really – I try not to rely too much on the kind of fictions or the art world myths like when you kind of come out of art school, there's this weird feeling that there's a collector watching you on the internet like 20 feet away wherever you go, it's a weird sort of paranoia that is not helpful, so I just, you know… I like working with other artists as well, so, yes.

MW: And in that sense, I suppose the conversation with other artists is really important, again, going back to that question about DACS and artists for artists, actually the network of artists in a sense of can we do this as a kind of paradoxical intervention – if I do a show at Bloomberg with elephants, you know, is that going to be good or bad and you sit with other people and you can explore the efficacy of your situation

RP: Sometimes, sometimes you just let people slag you off and stuff, and that's good too, yes, equally valid.

HN: I mean, I think in an intergenerational capacity, you know, I have to recognise that I have the privilege of a job, kind of a part time job in an institution, kind of teaching, and I can earn money that way and I can kind of support myself that way, so I think that there is, you know, there are inequalities there, kind of intergenerationally [sic] as artists. I think kind of from kind of my position now, kind of approaching 50, I kind of think that I want to kind of personally challenge ideas of this sort of performed role that we all have, kind of as artists, and like how our behaviour is kind of, I think our behaviour is more and more shaped by the institution actually in terms of kind of questions around professionalisation and those things. And actually maybe there is, having come through that, actually there are other ways of doing it and other ways of kind of making the work that you want to make. So I think that's sort of where I would be in relation to that.

MQ: Is it alright if I...?

MW: Please do...

MQ: So, what's interesting is that, you know, since the 1-2 punch of Brexit and Trump, I can't remember what way round it was, but now politics is the hot topic, you know? You couldn't really get arrested if you were trying to do anything vaguely political before but now it's like – it's almost like you have to have some sort of issue. And so, sometimes when I meet younger artists like doing occasionally go into schools and doing tutorials and that, it's a really, you know, people earnestly, young people are really earnestly saying "What do I do, do I have a responsibility to say something about something?"

You know, I suppose that's an individual decision that each person has to make but one of the things I think it's important to keep in mind is that, you know, you don't have, you know, you're not obliged to make art work about social, cultural, political or economic circumstances – it's OK for you to just live in abstraction too because in a way that's kind of what we're fighting to allow you the freedom to do. So, more often than not, I feel like that's a question about how do I become engaged because I'm concerned and I don't necessarily think you have to do that through practice, you can just do that through action and, you know, that might actually free you up for your own sort of practice and then you figure out...

Because this is the thing as well, isn't it, you're like – I don't like doing research about tax evasion or like reading about arms dealers and all that, like I hate it, like I was saying about the guy who killed himself, it's really depressing. I'd rather be looking at like what happened with minimalism really, you know. But, yes, so I think we shouldn't – there's something amazing and magical about art, isn't there, and I feel like one of the reasons that I stay close to it is because being close to like the imaginations of artists has really opened me up to things that I would have not encountered if I hadn't have had that relation to art works, pieces of music, maybe even clothes and I think that has a kind of subtle political power which is about giving you something, helping you to move through the world.

But then there's another thing which is this system where you have to sit down and sift through data and identify this and what's this group, and sometimes that can be liberating for someone in their practice, but it can also be really a straightjacket and a bind. So, I don't know – I feel like I always say to them students, like it's up to you, choose, see what you like, see what the vibe is because yes, it's not easy and sometimes you'd be more effective just going directly to the thing that you want to address.

For example, rough sleeping, it's increased 120%, this is the new Crisis report, 120% since 2010 to now. I might be slightly off but I'm not off on the percentage, I might be slightly off on the dates I've read, but you can

download the Crisis report now. So, would you make more of a difference doing a piece of work about it or just going and figuring out how you can organise and help someone, and then figuring out what you want to do with your practice. So, yes, that's probably what I'd say.

MW: Which sounds very rational, I think. Unfortunately, that is – oh, hold on... One question...

Audience member: So, we do have one question from Periscope – Jival said what is the panel's view on artists making a sustainable living from creating digital works?

MQ: Sorry to hijack it but there's a question out there as well, what if we just heard that and then address both of them. This is the powerful bit, isn't it, and it always gets cut off.

Audience member: Thank you. My question actually picks up from what you were saying, I want to make a stance for the work of art because the work of art is perhaps separate from the artist and the work of art actually can be disruptive and can be sort of a conduit for a different scenario. So, the work of artists, something we shouldn't forget in all of this.

HN: I agree, I don't think it's an either-or situation, I think it is about a kind of whole of being able to kind of, you know, be in all of these positions actually and I think that's a very rich space to be in.

Audience member: Yes, because the art object can be extremely powerful.

MQ: Yes, but sometimes it's like it doesn't have to be a detrimental description, you know? If you say, like, art can be really powerful but... you see, when you say "but", people think you're like "You're trying to discredit art" – it's not, but it's just saying – yes, yes, because you're just sort of saying that art can be a really powerful – like, for me, things have happened to me because of art works but you know when you're like trying to tackle something specific, it almost – you need a different type of energy but maybe art is the thing that gives you the sustenance to do that.

Audience member: I completely get it but it's just there are different art works, so not just actions for artists but different art works being produced.

MQ: Yes, yes.

Audience member: The other question was what's the panel's view on artists making a sustainable living from creating digital works?

MW: After a very deep breath, probably quite complicated but it's interesting because it also draws in the question of social media, and social media politically in terms of artistic discourses is something which is very, very much alive.

MQ: But it also... is it OK? This is the other issue, isn't it, like what are you doing as a citizen because if you really think – OK, so, you know when people think about slavery and they say "How could people live and be like OK in England or what other colony when they knew elsewhere there were people who were being treated as slaves, basically? How could that happen?" I don't want to be hyperbolic but in a way we've got a similar situation at the moment. Like, I'm happy, I can walk around, but at the same time, my consumption has been fuelled by the production elsewhere that is happening under strained circumstances.

So, I think the thing with digital that I don't think has been grappled with enough is like what's the real-world footprint of like the immaterial thing? So, I think yes, maybe people can make alternative ways of living but the flat screen that you're using, the industrial footprint of the data they're using that's going into some sort of storage centre, you know, these have consequences, some in the Congo, some elsewhere, so I think it's hard because everything has implications. So, I'd be like, yes, make a living but it's not totally free from stuff that's happening.

MW: And at that point unfortunately we're going to depart. Thank you to Richard, Hayley, Morgan and to our questions from outside. Thank you.

MQ: Thank you.