Tony Heaton interview 8.02.17

Allan: What was your first memory?

Tony: No idea. I've never analysed what my first memory.. would be and I.. My Dad was a photographer

A: Mm-hm

T: Amateur, but very good photographer. So always photographs and so all my memories is this sort of 'Is that a memory? Or is it a memory of a photograph?' So I've no idea whether it's a photographic thing that reminded me of something. So I don't really know.

I remember riding a bike when I was four. And I learnt to walk when I was nine months old, which is quite young. I know in my family there was this standing joke that I learnt to walk at nine months old, then stopped walking when I was sixteen. And I rode a bike really early. My dad was a motorcyclist, so there was always motorbikes and taking stuff to bits and putting things back together going on. So it's probably a fairly straightforward working class existence. I'm the eldest of three kids, so I was always the sort of leader, you know the oldest one, about six years older than my brother, ten years older than my sister.

And yeah, mum and dad working class, bright people, just never had any opportunity. Dad's ex-Royal Navy, signed up when he was fifteen, you know went to war, his elder brother was in the Royal Marines, both from big families, seven kids sort of thing, hard working working-class families. Not strict, disciplinarian strict, but strict rules, rules of engagement, this is what you did, this is what you said, this is how you looked, this is how you behaved. Proper.

I was always a bit, you know, learned to ride a bike when you were four, I don't know, I was always good at athletics, always, you know, you talked about that photograph, that was me doing a headstand over a five-barred gate. Never opened a gate and went through it, ever, just straight over the top of it. Always, you know, always on a bike or, you know, climbing over a wall, walking down the fence. I was good at gymnastics, good at trampolining at school, so I was always, always athletic. I'd be doing that, if I was still around I'd be doing that jumping off walls, whatever it's called, freebasing or..

A: Parkour

T: Yeah, whatever that thing is. It's the only time when I've seen people doing things I've thought shit, I wish I wasn't a crip. I'd really like a crack at that, it looks great. Saw a guy down the Southbank, doing headstands off the, off the wall, took some photographs of him. I thought, that's great, landing in the soft sand, yeah, I liked all that. So I had motorbikes from being really young, cause you'd watch your dad take it to bits, my dad used to take, used to fix people's tellies but we never had a telly. Basically, my old man was, if something broke, you sort of said, he was called Tony as well, somebody'd just bring something along and say can you have a look at this and he'd say yeah what is it, it's a this, alright, start to look at it, take it.. He was interested in electronics, much more scientific than me, he understood how electricity worked, you know fix tellies, fix radios. I think he fixed radios first, keen photographer, did a bit of drawing, you know creative guy, wanted to go to art college but his elder sister's husband who was a businessman said well you're never going to make any money doing that, talked him out of it you know, you need to get a career, you need to get an apprenticeship. So he, he'd be trained to be a coppersmith. That was his trade, coppersmith, and he worked for Leyland Motors, you know straight in the factory making trucks, buses, all that stuff. And my mum was at home looking after kids.

I was a bit wild. We lived on the edge of fields and woods, so I would always get up early, nick a couple of potatoes out of, you know under the stairs, the veggie sort of cupboard. Off with friends, I mean the thing about that estate, it was full of young kids, you know, postwar really, I was born in 1954, so. You forget, it's only nine years after the war, isn't it? I guess when I was young there was still very much that sense of austerity, that things were gonna get better. We'd just go in the woods, collect firewood and make a den, light a fire, stick some spuds in it, you know, we were pretty feral, really. Up and down trees. We were frightened of nobody, you know kids are frightened today, aren't they? You know, eight of us with spears, half naked running through a wood, it's like you wouldn't fuck with us. I remember that, I can't remember his name, a London copper was shot, was terrible crime, I mean it's hard to think now, you think of the audacious and atrocious crimes that happen now, some gangster shot a police officer in London. Tommy Roberts? Somebody. This guy had gone on the run and there was this thing you can't go out, you can't go in the woods in case Tommy Roberts is hanging out in Farrington, you know. And we, Tommy Roberts, fucking stab him. I think we truly believed we would, you know with

these knives and our, everybody wanted Bowie knife, you know the bone handled five, six inch scouty knife thing, I was in the cubs, I was in the scouts. So very much outdoor life, I was hardly ever in the house, I don't remember being in. And I was talking to someone the other day, they said oh you've always been entrepreneurial. And I was telling them about, doing, making money doing paper rounds. And I used to deliver morning newspapers. And because I'd had a motorbike from being eleven, something like that, there's this great period of time where all the guys who worked in the factories, they all had old BSA bantams, or little Villiers motorbikes. And suddenly this Japanese invasion, you know, the 50cc Honda 50s, like a little scootery looking motorbike, little step through motorbike called Honda 50s. And all...

A: What was the one you mentioned previously, the little something?

T: The BSAs and the Villiers.

A: Villiers, yeah.

T: I mean. Basically British motorbikes at that time, the bigger bikes, Nortons, Triumphs, the small bikes, BSA, British Small Arms, made in Birmingham. And they made a 125 and a 150 and a 175cc. And they were called BSA Bantams. And most of the working guys had these to go to work on. And suddenly these Honda 50s came out, plastic mudguards, plastic. 70-80 miles to the gallon, you know. Key starts, dead easy to start. And they were buying these and of course no-one wanted to buy the little BSA bantams. So I think I bought my first BSA bike for about four quid. And the first thing you did was rip off all the big iron mudguards and the leg shie..you know, the huge leg shields. All this crap, little tool box, you just stripped everything off it, junked it, painted it bright red, souped it up, put a pair of scrambling handlebars on it, straight through the woods, you know, tried to get some knobbly tyres. We had very little money. The obsession was to get this little motorbike done up like a scrambling bike really.
And I use to do my paper round when I was eleven, twelve years old. And nobody knew. Six o'clock, five six o'clock in the morning, mum and dad getting up for work you know, I'd just say, I'm off to do me paper round, get the motorbike out, pushed it round the corner, didn't start it till I was at the top of the street. Got to the paper shop, leave it round the corner, go in get your papers, walk back round the corner jump on the bike. And I delivered to the two furthest rounds. They were both rural, one had a caravan site so it was like

you had to drive for three or four miles then deliver at this caravan site. Nobody wanted to do it, and you got extra money, I think you got fifteen shillings. And I think for the regular, I think it was like twelve, thirteen shillings, so it was a substantial difference, because it was such a long way away. I mean who the fuck..

A: Was that a week?

T: Oh Christ, yeah. That was a king's ransom, you know. I did two rounds so I got double, because I could do it on my motorbike.

A: My first ever wage packet was seven quid.

T: Yeah. I can't remember what mine was. Yeah, probably similar. People say they always remember their first wage packet, I've got no idea. I never had a good, never had a good memory for that kind of thing, you know, probably quite important things, you know, it was your first wage packet..memory. No idea.

A: You've probably had more wage packets over the years than I have!

T: Well yeah, on and off I've had wage packets.

A: I'm sorry, I diverted us from..

T: No, no. I mean I did the paper round, so I earned a reasonable amount of money. My mum and dad never took money off me, I never had to pay board or anything, they didn't believe that, It was like, no we brought you up, we'll look after you, you know. A lot of my friends had to, you know, pay to live at home. But I did help out. But mostly in the, you know, my dad probably didn't want any help. Soldering television sets, mending things, making things. And they all had gardens, you know, out in the garden planting the food, big gardens, you know everybody had a veg patch. And you did, you know, money was tight, you did rely on that stuff. I remember mum always had a little red book in her handbag, this really tiny red notebook, everything she spent would go, you know, me dad would just come home, here's the wages, I think she gave him ten bob, you know fifty pence, ten shilling note, that was his spending money, the rest she'd work out what it cost. And that wasn't unusual, I think pretty much everybody did that. Never believed in borrowing money, never. That was

absolutely not done.

A: Yup.

T: Their house was five hundred pounds and it took them twenty-five years to pay it off. It's astonishing, isn't it when you look back at things and you think fuck, how did that.. Five hundred quid. I've spent that on a meal. (Laughter) With drinks, obviously.

..

A: Where were we?

T: I've no idea.

A: Talking about the paper round. I think you were responding to someone having said you were very entrepreneurial, you were explaining that.

T: And I thought, no I'm not. And then I thought, well yeah, I did do paper rounds. Most people just did one. I did two, but they were the two worst rounds as well, because they were the most money. So I think probably I have been entrepreneurial. You just didn't know what that word was. I mean my dad, I don't know what you'd call it, not even ambitious, but industrious I think you'd call it. You know my dad, you know, the factory started at seven thirty , finished at four thirty, he'd come home, have a wash, take his overalls off, put his overalls for his shed on and go in the shed, you know, quarter to five cup of tea, you know he'd be in his shed fixing a telly for somebody. I mean, he didn't charge anybody enough money. Cause it was like everybody's in the same boat. (...) Dad, why don't you charge them a lot more money? Well, because they can't afford it. So he was industrious, but I don't think he was particularly ambitious, because I don't think he wanted to set up in business fixing tellies.

A: Right.

T: You know, he fixed tellies for the guy two or three miles away who had a television and radio shop, you know. And they'd say, look, took this in for repair, can you fix it. He'd stick it in the sidecar, or the guy delivered it actually, the guy used to deliver them. And dad used to fix them. And I'm sure that guy charged him a fortune. You know, my dad's get next to nowt and the guy'd

put really big money on it. That's how it was. So, industrious I suppose rather than entrepreneurial. I've always done two or three jobs, all my life really. I'm greedy. Not for money, to do stuff, you know, interested. I know when I had my record shop I still printed on Friday for a guy I worked for who sold bathroom suites. You know, plumbers merchants really. And his reps used to come in Friday afternoon, Friday afternoon was pretty quiet in a record shop, and I'd just leave my missus in charge, and I'd just go and say knew how to operate the printing press and I'd do drawings of him, like a little cartoon drawing of the guy who owned the, you know the plumbers merchant, I'd do a little cartoon picture of him, some daft quip that related to what we were flogging. You know if we were selling stainless steel sinks, it be like stainless steel sinks in water, and there'd be a sort of stainless steel sink sort of like the Titanic, you know, going down with the sort of distress flag stuck on the corner of it. And Joe Mather, it was his business, I used to call him Genial Joe, so there'd always be this little cartoon of Joe Mather and it'd say Genial Joe says, you know buy your mixer taps now, or some bollocks.

A: So is this before you went to college?

T: I went to art college, alright, chronologically, I was at school and I used to ride to school on my motorbike. Again the school couldn't deal with that, nobody had ever come to school on a motorbike. My mate Dave was the first person, he was, his birthday was the eighth of September, or the sixth of September, mine was the eleventh of October, so he's about a month older than me. So he went to school on his bike about three or four weeks before I did. So we got our, you know as soon as we were sixteen you were able to get a licence. So, they had to deal with him and then a week or two later they had to deal with me turning up on a motor bike. They wouldn't let us leave our bikes in the school, even though there was a car park and all the staff could leave their cars there. They couldn't get their head round the fact that pupils would come on, you could use motorised transport. And then, I had my accident before I left school.

So um, it's kind of an irony, the fact that I'd been riding a motorcycle illegally for five years, you know flying through woods, you know, doing, delivering paper round in the morning with a, no helmet or anything, you just woolly hat, big coat. Police, they were, never seemed to be any police around when I was a kid you know. It never occurred to me that I'd get stopped and someone would say can we see your licence. Of course you can't, I'm fucking eleven. Didn't have any tax, insurance or lights. I'm just a bit wild. So I then finally became legal, I got

this legal bike, had an MOT, I got a driving licence, I got insurance. And fuck me, a couple of months later I had this traumatic accident.

A: So what happened there?

T: I was coming, it was dark, it was December, it was probably quite horrible, greasy road. And I was, well it's classic, some guy in a wagon turned right in front of me, you know he wanted to get on the motorway at Leyland. I was, you know I was coming in this opposite direction, he was parked in the middle of the road here and he started to pull in front of me. He obviously thought he could get in front of me. So in my logical head I thought right, I need to go round the back of him. So I started to go round the back and of course as soon as I started to do that lost the bike, so the bike slid on its side. And instead of carrying on, if the guy had of carried on going, I'd have just slid down the middle of the road, probably been fine. But he , once he saw me, he probably saw the bike flip on its side, the light probably, you know the front light probably did something that really attracted him. He banged his brakes on and I thought shiiit, you know, the next minute I was underneath the wagon. Cause he'd stopped. So, um, I don't remember much about that except that it was dark. And um. I vaguely remember being in the middle of the road, I vaguely remember people being around me. I vaguely remember being in the most intense pain I've ever felt. And then I don't really remember much. I don't remember the ambulance, I don't remember, I guess I must have passed out. And er, they took me to Preston Royal Infirmary.
And I was on a board. Again it's all very hazy cause probably got a shot of morphine, I vaguely remember being on a board and being in there overnight, I vaguely remember me mum coming, me dad was at work and one of the neighbours brought my mum to see me and again it's all very hazy. And the next day they transferred me to Southport, Spinal Unit. Which is about eighteen miles away from Preston, maybe twenty miles, they didn't tell me where I was going. So I just remember being in an ambulance with this small Chinese nurse. And er, and we seemed to be in it hours and hours and hours. And I kept throwing up, mostly blood, pretty horrible, and she was having to clean me up and, must probably have been quite a mess, and we got to Southport, I didn't know I was in Southport, seemed to be in this ambulance for hours and hours. I thought I was on the South coast when I finally got there, because I could hear seagulls and it was bright blue sky, you know and it was December so you didn't (..) a beautiful day, like some of those days you get this fantastic blue sky and I could hear these seagulls. And I thought where the fuck am I? I just thought, oh, I must be on the seaside, down South, I don't know what I'm doing here, I'm obviously down South, because it took hours. Because what you don't realise at the time is the ambulance goes at three miles an hour. It literally goes at three miles an hour because they (..) bounce or vibrate you. They know you've got a spinal injury, so they're trying not to create any, you know, any sharp damage which suddenly broke the bones. I'd shattered, three shattered vertebrae in my lower spine. And again I still didn't even know I was at Southport then. But they transferred me out of the ambulance and em, again it's all very mixed up. But this guy who I now know, who was called Mike and he had a birthmark, really big birthmark all one side of his face down his neck, but I couldn't see it. I was sort of laid in traction on my back, and I could see his left hand side. Big man, and he was very loud, his laughter was really loud. And then he turned round and it's like this purple face and I thought what the fuck's going on here. And I didn't

know whether I was in reality or not, you know is this some weird, am I in hell, you know where am I, what's going on, because you've got no control over anything, this mad guy laughing outrageously with this.. And it was almost like he did that haahaha, you know and it's from this sort of perfect side of his face to this very big birthmark. It's almost like, you know very theatrical. But whether that's morphine or not I don't know.

And the, they told me where I was. And then I was saying will I have to have an operation and they said no you won't have an operation. Then about an hour later they got me ready for theatre and off I went for an operation. So some, apparently some visiting surgeon from Sweden, spinal injuries guy, just happened to be touring round the spinal injuries, just happened to be there. And he said we will do this experimental thing that I've been doing, which is putting springs, that's where, so I got the springs, you know. I don't think they do that any more. So he basically, you know, drilled into the good vertebrae at the top and bottom, put these four springs, two on each side which you can see on the sculpture. Springback is about that, you know it's the X-ray.

A: Have you still got those?

T: I sold that piece.

A: No, I meant the springs.

T: No I never had the springs. They were always just the X-ray of the springs, they're in me.

A: That's what I mean.

T: Yes, they're still in. But they're not connected anymore. You know the X-ray now are just these bits of metal going in different directions. I mean, you think what the fuck are they? In my body, what's happening. I'd say but they're not connected and the hospital would say well that's alright. One of my stitches came out about fifteen years ago, twenty-odd years after the accident. And the, you know the incision on my back used to keep getting inflamed, really red, get really horribly festered. My partner who I was living with at the time, I said what is it, she said it's just like some horrible abscessy thing, I said well it's really sore, you know it was red, and holding the mirror up there's this horrible big red thing, Fuck, squeeze it or something. So she put hot lint on it, you know pop, she said there's like a blackhead in there somewhere. I said well squeeze it. I'm watching through the fucking shaving mirror, you know. It's like an eighth of an inch long. I said, well pull it, she said no I'll just squeeze it. That's quarter of an inch long. Keep going, squeeze it, she said it's like stuck, I said well pull it. Aah, I could feel it, tugging away. It's about an inch and a half long.. She says it's just fucking huge. Well pull it. No, I don't want to, I don't want to. I said well you can't leave it like that. So she pulled it out.

And er, I put it in a matchbox, Took it to the spinal unit. What the fuck's that? Doctor Soni, he's still there, he said that's a stitch. Where did you get that from? Came out the fucking hole in my back. He said when did you have your operation. 1970. Oh that's alright, I wasn't here then, you can't sue me. I kept it in the matchbox, I don't know where it is now, kept it for a long while. It's extraordinary isn't it, how that came from inside. Obviously left it in and it just worked its way out. How does that happen in your body, It's kind of weird

isn't it? I just wonder if the springs'll suddenly work their way to the surface. Bit of metal poking out on the back you know, squeezing, what does it look like?

A: Tearing your clothes each time you put them on.

T: Yeah. So yes, I was in the spinal unit. I did my O levels in hospital, or my CSEs or something, I dunno what the fuck I did, some sort of part of my exams and then I went back to school. To finish them. I couldn't get in my school very well, it wasn't very accessible. So I had to do them in a sort of annexe area (..) It was a bit weird going back to school, you know in a wheelchair. A lot of my mates had come to visit me in hospital. A lot of the teachers came, actually, they were very, there was a lot of people pulled together to keep connected, keep me connected.

And then I got an invalid carriage. You know. I don't know what happened to the motorbike. Off it went. It's really odd, because the invalid carriage got a Villiers engine in it, which was very similar to the motorbike engine. So that was great. Right, okay, let's soup that up, see how fast we can make this thing go.

A: One of those blue things.

T: Yeah. That became Gold Lamé. From lame to lamé, you know. So that's two bits of sculpture out of that. Because Springback, I used the springs off the motorcycle. Sort of reflects the springs in the X-ray. I remember exhibiting it. And, you should never hang around when your work's on exhibition. I foolishly thought I'd hear things that, you know, would massage my ego about how great the work was. And this guy was saying to his wife, obviously a man talking down to his wife, saying well obviously the artist has got some springs, he's leant face down and put the springs on his shirt and then they've X-rayed it. So he's made it look like the springs are in there. Which is quite an interesting idea, isn't it? To fool people. I mean if you'd looked really closely, you would have seen that it was all connected by, I could see where he was going, I didn't, I didn't put him right. Didn't want to get involved in conversation. It's quite interesting. And a woman said, again a different person, she was talking to, she said this has obviously been made by a man. Look at, it's very phallic. And of course, that was not even slightly part of my intention. But actually when you look at it, the springs are big and coil round because they're coming out, at, er where your pelvis is, cause that's where the X-ray ends. So again, I could see where she was going with it but there was no intention. I just thought the interesting thing was the juxtaposition of medical springs that were on a bike with motorbike springs. The idea that I would call it Springback as a way of, it's autobiographical and it's, I often call it a self-portrait. It's part of springing back from a traumatic accident. That's what Springback's about. And I had to nick the X-rays from the hospital because they wouldn't give them me.

There's always like this big orange envelope full of X-rays. And, I don't know why the doctor, they just leave them hanging around, don't they. So I just secreted the two I wanted, rolled them up and stuck them down the back of my chair. Nobody missed them, you know, they were kind of from the year before or something. They're quite interesting, they've got the little tag on it, so its got my name, date of birth, all that, so it's quite autobiographical when you look at it.

A: Yeah, I've got a brain scan, that shows, there's like a little scar on one of the lobes of my brain and that's why I have epileptic fits, probably a birth injury. Unless it's.. They couldn't be quite sure, the scar either was the cause of the fits or it was the result of the fits. That's where they originate. I thought that's extraordinary. When you think of the amount of, of difference epilepsy has made to my life, the fact I've had like a hundred dislocated shoulders, that have led to arthritis of the shoulders, whatever. And all those times, like sort of..

T: We're fragile, aren't we?

A: Yeah. But all of that from this tiny little fucking scar.
T: I don't know how many nerves I've severed in my spinal cord. Not all of them, obviously, because I'm incomplete. But, you know, how big's a spinal cord? It's like a fucking telephone wire, isn't it? How much damage. Milli..,well not even millimetres, you know, you're measuring in thousandths of inches, aren't you? Which is why it's so difficult to fix, you can't fix it, such a complicated bunch of wires. And yeah, I mean slightly more damage, you're completely paralysed, bit like your brain injury, you only have to do a small amount of damage, you're fucked, aren't you?

A: Depending on the location. Other times we do massive damage and carry on.

T: Yeah, half your brain missing and you still function.

A: Or the stuff that jockeys do, breaking this, breaking that. They're mad. Or professional cyclists.

T: Yeah, it's horrific some of those accidents.

A: A few years ago there was a guy had an accident in the Tour de France, in the first week, broke his shoulder blade, I think, strapped it up and he fucking came third.

T: I know, it's mad isn't it?

A: I mean, the amount of work you have to do.

T: But you know what, Allan, I used to ride bikes and again I'd, you know, BMXs were way after me but we did BMXey type things, you know we'd ride through streams and kind of, over set-up things, you know planks of wood that you'd go over and really narrow things. And then of course, once we started riding motor bikes when we were eleven, twelve years old. And we'd get the collective motor-bike, buy a bike between us. You know, we'd all have goes on it and we'd do a..in fact it's amazing, somebody rang me up. A guy that I used to ride motorbikes with when we were fourteen, fifteen, I'd never spoken to him since those days and he rang me up just after Christmas. It's one of those mad coincidences that I, you know because I've moved up to Southport and I sent my cousin a new address and everything, like we're moving to Southport that's where we're gonnna live. And he just happened to be talking to his brother-on-law, um he said oh yeah, my cousin Tony's moving back up North. He said, er, Tony? My cousin's called Chris Heaton, what's his name, is your cousin a Heaton? And Chris said yeah, Tony Heaton. And this guy, how old is he? Sixty-two or whatever. And this guy, God I used to know a Tony Heaton. And it's the guy I used to hang out with,

who now is my cousin's brother in law. Bizarre. And he's been my cousin's brother in law for years, but they'd never actually, he's never connected the two. So he rang me up and said do you remember when we used to ride (f..) them fucking motorbikes round the woods. You were a fucking maniac. Nobody could touch you. And it's true, I knew that track like the back of my hand, we used to do time trials, set off, two three go, cause you couldn't race against each other cause we only had one bike between us. But the great thing, it was the same bike. So, there was no advantage, you set off, you were timed on the same watch, probably only one person had a fucking watch, you know, with a second hand on it. And you went on the same track on the same bike. And nobody ever beat me, I knew like the back of my hand. And I could drive through woods, through streams, you know I was quite competent rider. So it was, I'm slightly scratching my head when I had a road traffic accident. But then you think, it's all the other idiots on the road, isn't it, they're the people who cause all the trouble, it's always somebody else.

So, bit irritated, really. I wasn't like a rookie rider, you know, I felt like I was quite a competent rider. But there you go. There we are.

So that gets me to school. Finishes exams, goes to art college.

A: Did it change much, becoming a disabled person? Did you see yourself as a disabled person?

T: I didn't, really. I never, I always thought I was gonna get better, that it was just taking a long time. And that's probably because I'm incomplete, I started, the doctor said to my parents he'll never walk, he'll never have children. And he'll probably die roundabout, maybe before he's even forty. Prognosis for someone with spinal injury back in 1970 wasn't great, you know. Bladder infections, kidney infections, kidney failure, it wasn't..or you'd get a pressure sore. And the pressure sore'd kill you, well the infection, it's infection. So it's like how do you manage infection?

A: We know a lot about pressure sores in this house.

T: Exactly. And probably urine infections too.

A: Absolutely.

T: So I mean, my early life was, you know urine infection after urine infection, really. And it grinds you down. But I started to get, I could move my big toe, no, can I? No, I could move a muscle in my thigh. I thought , I can move that. And it was, I was still in hospital. And I thought, can I move it? Because then they talk about muscle spasm, it's basically what happen(s/ed), because you're not using your muscles they atrophy, shrink. You'll feel pain because they're shrinking. And they might twitch. And it's a nervous, it's a sort of automatic response, twitch thing. I didn't have much sensation in my legs. But they sent, you know there's a lot of trauma, lot of bruising round that area. So as the bruising and the swelling goes down, we'll have to see what happens. So I just started getting this, I thought I can move that muscle, in my thigh. And that's all I did, I was like a tenacious, I just, all the fucking time twitched the muscle, with the muscle twitch the muscle, did it all the time. And it did get stronger, you know. And then I started to think (...,...) And I was obsessive for years, two

years maybe, all the time, everything I could move, I'd be like a twitching speed freak really, just twitching and moving whatever I could. Young woman in physiotherapy, I had two full-length calipers, she'd get me up. She's a wonderful person, in retrospect. You never thank people do you, for these things, but she'd say, right, I'm knocking off, gonna come and get you, we're going for a walk. I'd say oh fuck off Sue, I don't want to go for a walk, I'm knackered, you know. And, I'd been in hospital a couple of months by then. Get up, I mean the first time I got up, sat up, was awful. They literally threw some clothes at me and said okay, you can get up now. Okay, who'd gonna help me? Nobody. If you can get dressed, you can get up. Can't get dressed, you can't get up. Alright, fuckers. Get half a sock on, knackered. It was really hard, you know. But it was tough love. You had to get dressed. If you couldn't get dressed, you couldn't look after yourself, you couldn't manage,. You weren't going home. It was a mad regime (..) Get fucking dressed, get undressed, then you'd get undressed, then you'd go for a wash, Christ, going down for a wash in this big sluice room, like being in the army, you know, just toilet after toilet. Toilets didn't have doors, just had curtains, you could hear everybody having a shit, smelt awful. But when you were, eventually a guy came and evacuated your bowels. And, er, you could smell him. You know coming down the ward, fucking hell he's getting nearer and nearer. Couldn't see much, because you were in traction. His name was Jack, which was a great name. So we called him Jack the Evac. He'd put a rubber glove on, dip his hand in some Vaseline, stick his finger up your arse, you know. Horrible. Pain, you could feel the pain, horrible. Anyway, we don't want to talk about that.

A: I dunno.

T: But she would come and get me when she knocked off work. And get me up on me sticks, calipers. And she took me up the steps in the hospital. Every step was killer, because you've got two full-length calipers on, couldn't bend your knee, literally got to sort of wobble, wobble, you know flight of stairs, walk all the way along, down the stairs at the other side, all the other way back along. She must have had immense patience, because that took a long time. It was incredibly tiring, you know, it was dragging your body. And she'd just sort of walk along, half a pace at a time. Come on, you lazy bastard. But thanks to her and other people, it was tough but you had to become robust and get on with it. So I was out of there in three months, it was a record time. Nobody'd been out that quickly. So, I'm sure they are now, but back then it was a record.

And I came home, my dad used to carry me upstairs, extraordinary to think about it, you know, literally carry me upstairs. He went in the shed, went in his shed and made a wooden support for the wash-hand basin in the bathroom, said to lean on it to have a wash, so I didn't, basically didn't drag the wash hand basin off the wall, you know. No fucking OT, physio, home visits, none of that, he carried me up to bed and had a wash. Spent a lot of time in my bedroom, mates'd come round, skin up a few joints, get stoned and er that was life. You don't (enquire why?)

Then I went to art college. My mates went to art college, went to interesting art colleges.

A: Can I stop there? Art college.

T: Art college, yeah. That's when I first started to think this disability thing is kind of

restricting me.

A: Tell me about applying to art college first.

T: Yeah. Well, I'd been talking to some of my mates, cause I hung out with a lot of mates who liked Jimi Hendrix and Pink Floyd, so it was music, all that, so they were my mates. And they were wow, we're gonna go to art college and we're gonna go to Lanchester Polytechnic, try and get in the Royal College of Art and all, you know I'd think I can't go to fucking Royal College, I can't go to London. How the fuck am I gonna go to London in an invalid carriage. Where am I gonna live, just impossible to even think you could do that. So I just started to look, I thought I need to be somewhere that's local, because I need to go home, I need help. And, so I need to be able to commute to somewhere. And so I just looked at art colleges around Lancashire. And my friend went to the Harris art college in Preston. It's an old, Grade One listed Victorian art college, just completely inaccessible, thirty steps up the front before you even get in, you know. Little stairs and alleyways, just impossible, really.

So I looked round and the most accessible art college was at Southport. So I just applied to go to Southport, to the art college, really. I just took a folio of drawings and.. Amazing that they accepted me, you know.

A: Why is it amazing?

T: Well, I didn't think my portfolio was particularly good. I drew incessantly, all the time (...) So maybe, you know they just thought well alright you've got a talent that we can develop. It's quite interesting because the um the top guy, what's his name, the principal of the art college, he really hated me because they immediately said, you're going to have to give up your car parking space, because it's right at the entrance. So he's gonna have to have your car parking space, basically. You know, the OT people. They must have done an assessment, will you be able to manage, because there were three or four steps at the front. And what we did is, I had my wheelchair in the invalid carriage and, and I think I used to have to get the chair out, put it back in the invalid carriage, and go up on my sticks and calipers, and there was a chair on the ground floor for, I think the pottery, print making stuff like that was on the ground floor, and then I had to walk up a flight of stairs and I had another wheelchair, these were foldy, Everest and Jennings type wheelchairs. And upstairs was like the drawing studio, and life drawing and um history of art sort of film area, you know the sort of studios. So all the heavy duty printing, printing, photography, pottery all that was downstairs. I did a year's foundation course. Which was great, I loved it. And that's when I discovered that I was really working class. Cause Southport, while it's only twenty miles from Preston, and I knew Southport, cause I was at spinal injuries unit there, so kind of felt like Southport was familiar. And it's interesting that that's where I've ended up living. I did tell you I live in the old spinal unit, didn't I?

A: No.

T: Did I not tell you that? So the old spinal unit, the NHS moved out to a new hospital, let it go to rack and ruin like they do, beautiful building, it's like St Pancras station, you know that red brick, turrets, gargoyles, sandstone.

A: Victorian Gothic

T: Classic Victorian Gothic building. And it was built for cotton workers as a, not rehabilitation, like a sanatorium, but I can't think of the right word. But it was the place where cotton workers went to get better. Sea air, all that sort of thing. I think it was built in about 1820. It's a beautiful old building. And of course these developers get hold of it, turned it into luxury flats. We've ended up buying a flat in the old spinal unit, you know. The estate agent said, do you know this building? I said yes I lived here in the 1970s for a brief period. She said you couldn't have lived here, it's only been flats for the last ten years. I said, yeah, I didn't say I lived in a flat. But it used to be a hospital, I said yeah, I lived in that bay window there for three months. That was intensive care, that was the women's ward, that was the getting better you can fuck off home soon ward. She was like gobsmacked, a bit stunned that you wanna buy a flat in the old spinal unit where you were , you know, you had such a traumatic time. But I think it's quite nice. And it's practical. Good flat in a good area.

So I went to art college in Southport. The principal had to give me his car parking spot. Not only that, he had to give me his bathroom on the first floor. Cause it was the only bathroom I could actually get into. So he had his own, you know, little cloakroom and toilet. So I just got that, because it was like a big accessible toilet. So poor principal lost his car parking space and his private toilet to some oiky crip, long-haired, dope-smoking ne'er-do-well really.

A: You were talking about finding out you were working class.

T: Well of course the thing about Southport, it's very middle class. Lot of Jewish people who've escaped from Liverpool with pots and pots of money. And they all want to go and live at the seaside, nice clean air, nice park, beautiful park, very laid out, lot of rich people, aristocratic type rich people lived at Southport because you got the nice sea, nice laid-out garden, you know the floral gardens and the, they've got a botanical garden, like a mini Kew gardens (..) It's really.., really beautiful. And you know the weather's slightly calmer and that, the North-West bit of that North-West coast. So it was always quite a desirable place. So all my mates that I'd just started to meet, course all my Preston mates had gone, they'd all gone off to art colleges or, you know, gone into work or done whatever, so I'm now making a new bunch of friends at Southport Art college. They all talk a bit posh. And they're all a bit, my Dad's a dentist and my Dad's a captain of industry. And er, you know, I get a coppersmith. But I remember going to, back to this guy who's called Nod, shock of white hair and he said do you think you'd be able to get up a fire escape? Dunno, I've never been up a fire escape, you know. So he said, by this time I had a mini, I had the invalid carriage, did I still have that invalid carriage? Maybe in year one at art college I had an invalid.. Definitely had the invalid carriage, cause I wrote one off, driving out of the art college into oncoming traffic. I was a bit smashed. And, um I kind of went out too far and this old guy, and he'd only just bought this car, and er I just saw all this blue fibreglass going up in front of my windscreen. And then just shot out of his car. So the front of the invalid carriage just disappeared in this , like eggshells, pale blue eggshells floating around. So I took the side of his car out and he took the front of my invalid carriage off. I had a picture, I'd painted a picture of em, I can't remember if it was Black Sabbath, some album cover with some devil's head on the roof inside. And on the door, because we used to call them Noddy cars. So I painted a picture of Noddy and Big Ears on the sliding door. Then Big Ears, who I always saw as quite a malevolent character, and Noddy was always, like, easily led, quite naive, and Big Ears has his arm round Noddy. And

he had his hand down Noddy's trousers, squeezing his balls. And it was like a cartoon, Noddy and Big Ears. You weren't strictly speaking allowed to soup them up or paint them, but they did really. And I used to take it to the guys at Ross Autos who used to fix it and they always thought it was very amusing. Usually all these old guys with their invalid carriages and one of two lunatic ex-motorcyclists who managed to do strange and interesting things to their particular ride. I remember going to the Bickershaw pop festival with about six motorcycle outriders, you know we were all doing forty-five miles an hour because that's about as fast as the invalid carriage went. So I was sort of in the middle at the front, with all these motorcyclists, Hell's Angels, behind, driving down the middle of the road, quite ludicrous, I can imagine it looking like a ludicrous thing to see. So yeah, so I probably still had the invalid carriage at art college.

And um went back to this guy's house with other, you know some other kids. And we went up this fire escape. It's like he owned the top, he had the top floor of this house. So it's a three storey, massive mansion, one of those gentlemens' residences. Massive wide walls, big walls, big gardens and then these imposing entrance doors with steps up the front. But we went round the back and up the stairs, 'cause his mum and dad, basement, ground floor reception, then their bedrooms. And the top floor, would have been the servants quarters I guess. And he had the servants' quarters. But he had it all in one, so you had bedroom, bathroom, you know, lounge, fucking great sound system, you know, bolts on the doors so his parents couldn't get in, it's like put some music on, roll a joint, you know open a bottle of cider. This is all yours? Yeah? You know, oh, right. Everybody seemed to have their own rooms, en suites, you know (..) I shared a bedroom with my kid brother, you know we had bunk beds. And, you know he was ten, he'd probably be eleven, twelve, you know. And I was wanting to have sex with girls, telling him not to look. Can't come in the bedroom. Why not? Cause you can't. So that, yeah, I think that's what you think. If you live a middle class existence, you live a working class existence, on an estate full of people like you, that're all like your dad, they all go to factory, you know at Christmas you go in their houses and their houses are like yours, their kids are like you. The you just go eighteen miles down the road and suddenly different world. There's people with cars and money and *stuff*. Very privileged. So I guess, you know being seventeen, eighteen years old, suddenly realise that people with a lot more privilege.

A: So, when you were applying to college were there any issues about your disability?

T: I don't remember any. I probably didn't deal with any of that, probably just went for an interview on me sticks. I think I probably said I had an accident I'm getting better. They probably thought by the time he gets here, he'll be, walk better. Yeah. So, I don't think there was any intention. But I did think I was getting better, you know. I was getting better, you get more mobility, you move around. I'm sixteen, I'm strong, I'm young, I'm fit, you know lot to be thankful for. If you're going to have a spinal injury, don't have one now, fat fucking sixty-year old knacker, have one when you're strong enough to recover. And mentally able to, to just take what, what's coming at you. Because you don't know what life is, do you really? Tremendously naive when we were young. I dunno about you, kids are so knowing now, aren't they, everybody knows everything, or think they know everything.

You know I did live in a little working class bubble. You know Preston was seven miles away, that was the biggest town. And I remember the first set of traffic lights that they put in

on the outskirts of Preston. You could drive from Farrington, where I was born, to Preston, seven miles away and there wasn't even a traffic light. And everybody was, why have they put this fucking silly traffic light, what's that all about, you know. That's a bit of a novelty that'll wear off. I remember driving from there to Preston last year, there was probably about fifteen sets of traffic lights now, maybe even more. I'm sure you got there a lot faster in the old days as well. Maybe the traffic lights were there to stop eleven year old boys on motorcycles. So you can kind of look and think, he doesn't look old enough to ride that motorbike. But you could drive across the fields when I was young. You know, no fences, just drive through, there's a wasteland, there was bombsites, there was huge amounts of land. Leyland motors had bought huge amounts of farmland up for development and protection. So nobody owned them, they were just wild spaces really, brownfield sites. I mean we used to play in the factories at night, you know, we'd climb over the fences, nick pallets, (..) Tarpaulins to make into dens, anything, a fantastic array of stuff just hanging around. And then some fat old guy in a blue uniform'd come and chase you. There's no way he's going to catch em, you know. One of these security guards, from er, probably been in the second world war, and , you know gassed or injured or whatever, worked for the British Legion. He was no match for, you know whippet thin young guys who were just, could run forever. I walked miles, run forever, cycled, you never thought about frailty or any of those things.

So I guess it dawned on me that I wasn't going to get much better, because the rate of progress stopped, you know. I'd kind of got all the strength, movement back that I was gonna get, really. And so it was always walk with a stick, use your chair, walk with a stick, use your chair, you know it was, I use my chair an awful lot more now. Ann always laughs, she said well, I said fuck I'm getting really bad at walking. She said well it's your own fault, you've spent your life campaigning to get wheelchair access. And now you never have to walk anywhere cause you've got good access, it's your own fault. And it is. In the old days, you could drive places, park right outside, walk on your sticks into a shop, you know, get twenty fags and a newspaper, go back to your car and drive off. You can't do that anymore, can you? Life was different, definitely.

So art college, yeah. It was fun, yeah. I didn't do any art at art college. I remember a tutor calling me a dilettante. I'd no idea what that was. I thought it was like, you're a cunt. Dilettante, alright, if you want to abuse me you can. And I did, I didn't do any, you know I didn't settle to do anything. Abstract expressionism was the thing at that art college. They all loved abstract expressionism. I didn't like it, you know, didn't think it was, it didn't have any meaning, you know. Some American guys painting big canvases with decorators brushes, you know.

A: So what sort of stuff did you like?

T: I liked, I was quite conservative, I liked proper painting, you know, I liked all the things that everybody hated, you know Victorian painting, pre-Raphaelites, I thought it was about technique and skill. You know. I liked some of the pop art. Some of pop art, you know Hockney, Peter Blake, English pop art probably more than American pop art I always found attractive. I think when I started college I was interested in representational art, Victorian art, that.. But that was the stuff you saw in the art galleries, you know if you went to Harris museum in Preston and the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool or Manchester City Art Gallery, that's what you saw. Because all the merchants were, all the industrialists, all the mill owners, the

Industrial Revolution, they went down to the Royal Academy and they bought pre-Raphaelite paintings and Victorian, you know late Victorian paintings. Because they were the, they were the big boys, they were the great paintings, the ones that told stories. And you went back and your mill-owners, your mill workers who couldn't read or write, it's like this is a parable from the Bible, you work hard and everything's fine. The Hireling Shepherd, or Away from the Flock. You know, these sort of stories.

A: You been to the National Museum of Wales?

T: I must have been.

A: There are two places outside London that have an accessible bedroom with a hoist, which is Nottingham and Cardiff. We've stayed in both of those for holidays. National Museum of Wales, there was these two sisters round about the turn of the nineteenth-twentieth century who , like, inherited a lot of money, their father was, like a mine-owner or something. And they built an art collection, and were well advised, and they built this fabulous collection of impressionists. National Museum of Wales in Cardiff. Absolutely stunning collection.

T: I'll go back. Cause now I'm leaving work.

A: I recommend that to your attention.

T: I've got the camper van and I would say, I've never been to Wales much. But, you're right, we should go, camping, going to Cardiff, go to Swansea, yeah I'll do that.

A: Good for birdwatching.

T: Yeah, I'll check that out. We always fancied..

A: My parents ashes are buried at an RSPB reserve just outside Aberystwyth.
T: My tutor at Lancaster, he was at University at Aberystwyth, quite a good university.

A: My grandfather taught there, he was professor of Chemistry.

T: Really?

A: It was then University College of Wales, Aberystwyth.

T: My tutor at university when I went to Lancaster University, he was, he was interested in architectural design. I'm sure that's where he, that was his university.

A: Tell me me about how you first made work.

T: I say art college was no good to me, I didn't fit in. And I think looking back..

A: Tell me about being on Morecambe sands

T: That was at Lancaster University, yeah.

A: Was that later?

T: Yeah. That was quite a bit later. I did nothing at Southport. For the..abstract expressionism, I did pop-arty, you just ripped off other artists, a David Hockney drawing or a Peter Blake painting or whatever. I have nothing from that time, you know silk screen prints of batteries, banal things really. And I think I did graphics in the second year, Christ knows why I decided to do graphics. Again, I think it was an access thing. Drawing board, graphic design, there's a living to be made as a graphic designer. Why do you wanna make sculpture, pottery, it's a bit messy, bit difficult, how are you gonna make sculpture, you're in a wheelchair. Mm yeah fair point. How are you gonna make pots, you can't really get on the potter's wheel very well. Yeah, fair point. So all the time, it was funneling me down into graphics. Which is use your artistic creativity and make a living. So I thought, okay that makes sense, that 's what I'll do. I really hated it. I think in the second or third year they wrote to my parents and said, look, might be better if he doesn't bother coming back, you know.. I was sort of expelled from art school. Quite proud! I kept that letter for quite a long time.

And it was doing me no good. And I was probably quite disruptive, you know, there was a couple of us we were rampant dope smokers and we'd take Pentax cameras, quite expensive camera kit out on the beach. I remember once we drove out to the beach . And, we just used to take photographs of girls on the beach, from a distance, you know. And we left the camera on the beach, just forgot it, we couldn't find it again, I mean obviously, you know, oops never mind. So, not great. I didn't miss it. But I enjoyed the experience but it wasn't any good for me.

So I just started working. I just did a series of meaningless jobs, can't even remember them, working in factories, printing, printing mostly, printing machine manuals for Atkinson vehicles. They had a massive factory, doing (old) things. I got married, had a child, did graphic design, painted signs, made posters, so made a bit of a strange sort of living from doing creative things, commercial creative things. I did that for a few years. I had a printing press in the living room of my house, to print jobs off on. Bit mad, but there you are. God, what happened next?

Yeah, I got married after a few years. I lived out in a place called Hambleton, near Blackpool. And we lived out there and it was middle of nowhere really. So my wife, Christine, got my daughter Nic, she was only small and, this is crazy, we're in the middle of nowhere, Christine didn't drive, in the middle of nowhere. I was working in Liverpool at the time. So I was driving from Hambleton near Blackpool to Liverpool every day in this little yellow mini which I beat the life out of, you know. It's quite a long journey. From Blackpool to Liverpool every day. It's a big commute in the old days. The local butcher had pigeons. He said, you set off really early, where do you work? I said I work in Liverpool. He said, would you mind taking my racing pigeons to Liverpool? What? He said well, if I put some racing pigeons in your car, we never locked our cars in those days, I said what do I have to do, I don't know the first thing about pigeons. He said, ah no, you don't have to do anything. It's just a wicker basket, you open the basket and er off they fly. They fly back to me, job's a good 'un. Yeah, alright. Couldn't think of a reason why I couldn't do it.
So, I completely forgot this discussion. Three or four days later, five o'clock in the morning, staggering to my car in the dark, you know, get in, start the engine. Ooh-ooh. What the fuck's

that noise? Thought it was something to do with the car, you know. Stop the car, turn the engine off. Ooh-ooh. Looked behind, there's a fucking box of pigeons in the back of the car. Oh yeah, I remember now. Butcher. Drove to Liverpool, Exchange Street Station in Liverpool, all these guys with bowler hats, briefcases, brollies. And it was like that in those days, you know, it was very much. And I got this fucking box out, put it on the roof of the car, shaking these pigeons out, they didn't want to get out at all. Eventually they get out and fly back. I did this quite regularly for this guy, but every Saturday morning I'd go to my back door, open the back door, box full of meat, you know, bacon, sausage, chops, the whole lot. Well I never paid for any meat, it was great. That was nice.

I worked at Brunnings, advertising and marketing. And then, my wife said, it's madness, you know. I'm just pushing the baby round the fields. There must be more to life than this, you know. And er, so we sold up, and we moved very close to where her family lived. Yeah. As you do sometimes. Again, different world, really. So I moved back from Hambleton which was very rural and sort of middle class and farming, back to a very working class area which was industrial.

But what it gave me was enough money to buy a small two-bedroomed house, 1930's semi, quite small but quite quite nicely built. And um there was, so I had some money left over and er, a shop came up (...) Which had been a wet fish shop, it was one storey. And it was almost built in a gap, in an alleyway. And it was for sale. And it was something like four grand. And I had four grand. I'd always wanted to have a record shop. So fuck it, I'll buy it. And four grand, it sounds like nothing now, does it. I think my house was eight grand, something like that. So um, you know it was not very much money. It may have been less than four grand. Again, I've no idea, I can't remember.

But the guy who sold it, he literally stuck...

A: My parents bought a three, four bedroom house in Sheffield in the 1960s for three and a half grand.

T: Well this would have been about 197..8?

A:We sold it for somewhere round four hundred thousand.

T: 1979 maybe? Yeah. But he literally taped a paper bag that he put fish in on the window saying 'Shop for Sale. Enquire within.' You know. My sister-in-law saw it, said, hey there's a shop for sale. I went round, what's the deal. He said well, I'm retiring, I'm sick of selling wet fish, I've got three sons, none of them want to sell wet fish, so the best thing to do is sell it, split the money between them, that's it, job done.

So I bought it. And me and my best friend Mark and my dad set to knocking all these blue tiles off. Stunk of fish. It had penetrated the tile and the grouting rounds the tiles. It didn't smell of fish in the shop, but once you started knocking tiles off, it stunk. So we just knocked it, made a counter, I bought this massive Credenza mirror, I bought some second hand records from a guy who had a shop in Preston, who was a disc jockey and he ran a record shop. He wanted to get out the business, he wanted to go into night clubs, so he got a night club. And he had two thousand LPs and some browsers. I bought them off him, I can't remember how much,

stuck them in the back of my van, stuck the browser against the wall, got this massive big mahogany mirror, fantastically wooden, decorat.. massive mirror and we screwed it to the wall, we painted it matt black, so I could see people looking in the, you know, and it made the shop look really big. Painted pretty much everything black. It was called New World records. Tagline, 'A haven for the musically insane'. 'All records guaranteed round.' Some bollocks.

Bryan Talbot is a really well known illustrator of books, comics, Bryan Talbot., he created 'The Adventures of Luther Arkwright'. So, he ended up working for DC Comics. He's quite well known. In the comics world he's one of the gods. But he's a guy from Preston, me and him were mates again, we'd hang out, smoke dope, talk about art. And, I just asked him to draw something as a logo for my record shop. And he said well like what. And he had this weird gonk. And his room was full of bits and pieces, a bit like your room's got bits and pieces, like this crocodile here. And I said 'anything'. And he said, well, what, what. I said, well um, do you remember gonks with the (..) Kind of ugly face, long haired. He had this gonk with a pair of headphones on it. I said, draw the gonk with the headphones on. So he drawn this weird convoluted face with this long hair and these headphones. And that was it. Tagline New World Records. I've still got one of their T-shirts. I wore it for my daughter's fortieth birthday. She said you've gotta come as a character from the 1970s. So I came as meself! I said this is authentic. I got a black wig, cause I used to have long curly hair. So I almost shaved my beard off, down to the wood. I used Anne's mascara pencil on my moustache to make it black. I quite liked it. I kind of thought I might want to keep that. And er, I got this black wig, and I wore my old leather jacket. I got a pair of Levi 501s, which were genuinely from the 1970s, which I used to paint in, almost white. They're as grey as my beard, but they were 501s, button fly, quite good jeans, you know, quite on trend. And this New World Records T-shirt (capped sleeves) stretched so far across my chest that you almost couldn't read it. And it was authentic.

So that was record shop days. I worked as a disc jockey, basically took records out of the shop at night, did disc jockeying, put them back in shop the next day. That should be a criminal offence, selling second-hand records. I kept most of them myself. You had to have them. So I've got a massive record collection. I used to do disc jockeying at the Barracks, Fulwood Barracks, for soldiers. And dress, you know the big dress thing, when the colonels were there, and had all the big dress uniforms, swords and everything. And it was really well paid, the Fulwood Barracks gig. I did it because some guy who had the, who had the gig at Fulwood Barracks, he couldn't make it for some reason, on holiday, whatever it was. I used to sell records quite cheaply to DJs, I gave them a really good discount. So I'd get DJs coming into my shop. And I'd say, when you're working as a DJ, tell people about my record shop. So it seemed like a good thing to do, and to have DJs in the shop again will bring kids in, because it'd be like this famous, when I say famous, you know local famous, a quite well-known DJ would be in the shop and of course all the fifteen year old girls would want to go in and, you know, do a bit of the groupie thing around it. So it was great for bringing kids in and I'd always say oh you know Adrian comes in here on a Friday afternoon. So they'd all bunk off school to see this famous disc jockey. And they'd spend quite a lot of money. And you'd advise them what was going down well, what was happening. So they um.. And I did this gig at Fulwood Barracks.

I thought fuck, what d'you play for squaddies? And he said, any old shit really. And I, one of

the things I've always done is think what does it look like for the other person, what squaddies, and some of them are colonels, so they're old guys, and their wives. You know the thing about disc jockeys, they're always going this is really, you know this has just come in from America, some funk, you know by some person you've never heard of. They wanna dance to Abba, you know. That's what they want, middle of the road. And these guys would be saying you can't get the squaddies to dance, can't get them up to dance. Just play blues records, get your fifty quid, fuck it, you know. I would play Abba, Brotherhood of Man, Elvis. Fuckin love it, you know. All that stuff. And at the end of the night I used to put, I had this album, 'Fifty Pub Favourites'. 'Roll Out the Barrel', you know, 'My Old Man Said Follow the Van', they're all completely pissed, two o'clock in the morning, so all, they have a dinner, so you'd put just quiet background music on. I'd put Grieg or, you know, Vivaldi, or something like that on, down really low while they're having their dinner. And then of course the guys with the swords and the silly hats and their wives, they'd all fuck off after dinner, have a drink with the squaddies and all that, and then they'd all go.

So then you'd get a bit of rock'n roll on. And then when they're really pissed and falling over, you just put 'Roll out the Barrel' on and they'd just sort of arms round each other, 'Roll out the Barrel..' And I don't do no work. And they love it. And they didn't want that guy any more, they'd always book me. And he'd say 'Whadda you do?' Just play some records, you know, bit of banter. But they always ask for you. I never once told him what I did, he wouldn't believe it. You know if you could see that, what are you going to do, you nights when the people there are men, who want to fight and kill people. You don't play em some funk-rock. You know, they're not interested. It's about audience, isn't it? So that was always well paid and again at the end somebody'd just suddenly, some sergeant'd 'You help this boy out with his gear'. You know, and suddenly the back of the van, the speakers fucking big heavy kit, you know, decks are going in, it's almost like a military operation passing it down (..) Brilliant. Drive home, half past two, three o'clock in the morning, fifty quid. Fifty quid was a weeks wage. Decent amount of money, didn't have to work the rest of the week when you've done that. So I had a couple of DJ residencies. Always, I mean I never told you about how I was a drummer. When I was young, I had this drum kit. Which, I kept in the hallway. So, obviously after the accident the drum kit just disappeared. But they were in my mum and dad's hallway, you know your hallway there, just at the bottom of the stairs. Fuck off full-on gold glitter drumkit. Drive mum and dad mad, I just wanted to be a drummer. And I couldn't be a drummer after that. And I used to play with a guy called Keith and he played the Hammond organ, we kept the drums at his house at the end. And we used to play at weekends some seedy nightclubs in Preston. I'd be fourteen, fifteen, this was pre-accident. So I was less than sixteen years old. Again it goes back to the, you know, money. Cause I probably got five quid or something for playing in those nightclubs. The Green Dolphin nightclub in Ashton. And it was a sort of, above a pub, stayed open till one in the morning or whatever, he played the Hammond organ, I bashed the drums. Yeah. Preposterous, you know, playing Frank Sinatra, 'Sleepy Lagoon' or whatever it's called, all those really awful songs. And basically, old guys with quiffs and bad tattoos would dance with other people's wives. You know, it was bit of a knocking shop, I suppose. But I was fifteen, fourteen, fifteen. Seems mad now. I'd wander home at fifteen. He had a minivan, you know. Drum kit in the back of his minivan, off we went. He'd probably be about twenty-eight, thirty.

A: So how did you find your way back to art?

T: I always loved art, so I was always artying and doing art and reading about art, going to exhibitions. So I was more of a consumer of art, rather than a maker of art. I still, I took photographs, did all that sort of thing. I just suddenly thought, d'you know what, I need to connect back into art. And nobody would take the art seriously. So when I made art, nobody took it seriously. My mates were still painting and making art. One of my great friends died when he was twenty-one. He had a heart, something wrong with his heart, nobody knew about it and er, that was a very traumatic time, cause to go to your friend, and we were great mates and you know, hang out in his bedroom, smoke Sovereign fags, and he'd be painting all the time, you know his mum'd bring two cups of tea 'Keith!' Tea at the door, you know, he wouldn't let his mum in the room. I've still got one of his pictures, my daughter's got it in her house., Big, mad paintings. And he was obsessive, he would have been a good painter, he got into the Slade school. And he wandered off to London, oh he's going off to the big Smoke. And then he died. Twenty-one. I can still see his funeral in my mind, in this little church where my daughter went to school. And I can still hear his mum wailing. His mum was quite old, he had an older sister, probably young, you know, mum got caught in a change of life sort of thing, you know. So she always seemed much older than everybody, more like his grandma than his mum. And er, her wailing was just dreadful, that anguish and grief and awful, awful. And, you know guys, girls that knew him just kept to the back of the church. What the fuck's this, first funeral I'd ever been to. Horrific. You can't believe it can you when like your good friend's died. And for no reason. Didn't get wrapped up on a motorbike or anything, it wasn't a proper death. Just fell over. And he had so much talent. So I just decided to go to university. And they didn't want me to go to university, so I ended up doing A levels..

A: Who didn't?

T: The people at the university. Oh, you don't have any qualifications. Of course, I don't have any qualifications, sixteen, had an accident, I've got university of life qualifications, you know. This what I make, this is what my work looks like. Yeah, but we need to know you can write essays. Go away and do an access course. So I spent two years doing A level art access course, communications, I did a lot, I found iust really interesting. So I was incredibly resentful that these toffee-nosed bastards at university had said sorry you working class oik, you're not bright enough for us, you don't know where to put commas and full stops, all these really important things. But I really enjoyed the courses, you know, they were great, access course, writing, and I really got into it. I did a module on communication. And they had the, the Night Train, is it Auden? D'you know this poem?

A: 'Night Mail'. 'Here comes the night mail crossing the border, carrying cheque and postal order'

T: Fucking, wow!

A: They show you the film?

T: Yeah! And it was British, whoever it was, it was an information film, wasn't it? I thought fuck! It's amazing. You know, never really read any poetry. Brilliant, you know. And they're talking about whose news is it? Why does news fit into a thirty minute slot, between ten and ten thirty, who makes decisions about news. It's brilliant, you know. I'd never thought about these things. And they er just, it just opened my eyes to a lot, a lot of things.

And then I went to university, I applied, I got in eventually, I studied psychology, didn't know what psychology was, I just wanted to study art, they said no you can't just study art, you've gotta do two other modules as well. In Year One. Oh, right.

And I'd been doing stuff around disability. I did, I was doing the reader thing with, with um Vic Finkelstein when he was at the Open University. So reading all those modules and commenting on them. And they paid you to do that, send you course material and you'd sort of evaluate it I suppose.

A: How did you get onto that?

T: I'd set up an access group in Lancashire. I mean, I'm kind of lost in all this now, but um.. I basically, what.. What started for me is that I used to go to the Harris museum which is a Grade 2 listed building. And you could get in, you had to go round the back, press the button, some old twat'd suddenly turn up, 'what the fuck d'you want?' you know the sort of jobsworth. And it was, I accepted that you couldn't go in the front door, you know it was not accessible. But then they said, we're gonna build, we're gonna do some work on the gallery and it was closed. And they put a mezzanine floor in. All the way round the galleries, steps at one side, steps down at the other side. So grand opening, what the fuck's going on, you know. How am I gonna get up there. So from being an accessible gallery you went to the wooden lift that .. Had a lift operator in it, wooden doors and everything, beautiful lift. You could go to every floor at all levels. Somebody created, spent a lot of money created inaccessible mezzanine gallery all the way round it. I went apeshit. Who's in charge here? Apeshit, apeshit, you know, the woman who's in charge, got to know each other quite well, she's just retired. And er, I went to the paper. I just said, look I'm waiting. So there's a picture of me in the paper, looking pissed off, long-haired yobbo Heaton can't see the Bill Tidy exhibition, lot of cartoons by Bill Tidy, Liverpool cartoonist. And em, and I started to find out, so why did you do this, Preston Borough Council. Well we did this, and it was quite expensive and we got some money from the Harris Bequest. So I started to look at the Harris Bequest, and the Harris Bequest, he was a lawyer, and he, he left his money for the education and elucidation of the poor of Preston. So I went and said, you're the Harris Committee, you know, the benevolent, you know, the great and the good who decide what they're gonna give Harris's bequest out to. Yeah. I said, well it says here greater good for the education of the poor. Disabled people are the poorest people, you've just given money to create an inaccessible building so that we, the poor of Preston cannot be educated. How are you gonna fucking fix that?

So they took the money away. From Preston Borough Council.

A: Wow!

T: Yeah. Cause they said we can't give you this money cause we are, this man is right, we are in breach of the terms of his bequest. They obviously went, he could fucking sue us. I'm sure I could've, if I could've found a lawyer, I'm sure we could have made a big deal out of it. So they said, we're gonna have to withdraw the grant. So Preston Borough Council had to stump up for the full amount. And then I said, and now you're gonna have to make it accessible, cause we've got this thing called the 1971 Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act, blah blah blah.

So they had to put some shitty lift, you know whatever it, stairlifty sort of crap. And then we got involved in, so we started an access group then. And we modelled the front of the museum. Ian Hamilton Finlay, the brilliant Scottish sculptor and concrete poet did the, he made the front for the Harris, the Wave Rock sculpture, which is brilliant, you know. It was seen as one of the most innovative access solutions. And it was in this little gallery in Preston, nobody'd ever heard of it. And it was in Jayne Earnscliffe's book 'In Through the Front Door'. Do you have a copy of that book?

A: I don't know.

T: D'you know it, an orange front, it's called 'In Through the Front Door'. She really said what a brilliant solution, cause what he did was create a drum, so the steps went up there, the drum was here and the ramp, you went towards the steps and then you went round. But as you went round you got higher and higher and higher. And when you came out the other side to join the steps you sort of did this three quarters of the circle. And he carved in the drum, big stone drum, and it just said, wave rock. And what Findlay said is, the people are the wave, and the museum is the rock. So the rock is changed imperceptibly by the wave, just as a museum is changed imperceptibly by the people who visit it. Beautiful, you know, sentiment for a two word concrete poem. Brilliant! He was a genius, really.

But I didn't know any of this at the time. It was great that it all came together like that. And Lancashire County Council, it's interesting, so I started to do loads of stuff around disability, I went, lay inspector on um homes for disabled people, residential homes, stuff like that. So I had this twin life of being a record shop owner , selling records, being a DJ, running an access group, so very much involved in trying to create better access. And then I started doing more and more work for people like Lancashire County Council. Started paying me, you know. And then I thought, fuck it, I'll go to university, learn a bit more about this. So I thought I'll do social administration. Because that's the sort of administrative work that (...) Disability, local authorities, you know, maybe there's a route into a job as a result of that. So I just had to find something else as my third module. And there was these really good looking young women on the psychology stand so I thought, I'll go and talk to them. And they said, yeah, we're psychologists, what the fuck's that? Oh we're interested in how people think, why people do certain things the way they do, I thought oh yeah, that sounds quite fascinating. I couldn't spell fucking psychology. I thought, yeah, go on, I'll have a piece of that, sign me up. So that's what I did. And again I worked all the way through university. I worked as an artist, sign painter, selling records. The great thing about university, I didn't really get this, is there's three ten week terms. That's thirty weeks at university out of fifty-four weeks. Yeah, just like over half, yep. And then the guy said, yeah but you don't have to come to university every day. Why not? Well, if you've not got a lecture, and you live twenty, twenty-five miles away, just get some books from the library and read. So I don't even have to come every day? Nah. I did fucking two days a week, you know. And of course, once I started doing visual arts, in the second and third year, I dropped social admin after year one, I just did psychology and visual arts, and then in the third year I just did art. So if you've got an art project, I didn't even go into university, cause I'd just be at home in my studio making whatever it was I was gonna have at the end of, you know when we were critiqued at the end of the project. You just get a brief, respond to this statement, how would you react sculpturally to this. Can't remember what any of them were, really. So that's what I did. And my best tutor at college was Paul Hatton, I've just been to his funeral, he's just died, but he was the guy, we went on

Morecambe beach. This has been a long meandering back to why did you get on the beach, isn't it? Sorry. So we just walked on the wet beach, making stuff, you know. Andy Goldsworthy was making interesting work in the environment, he's probably a couple of years older than us. It's like, okay, what would Goldsworthy, rock, pool, leaves, you know, shapes. And er, we'd all get on the beach and walk off in different directions. And Paul Hatton said I always know where you are.. I said, how, what do you mean? He said, well your footprints are different than everybody else's so there are a lot of footprints over there, I know there's ten students, there, there, there, there and there. And I know Heaton's there. Cause your footprints, your feet stick out, your crutches make. And I went ah yeah. He said, It's very distinctive. Perhaps you ought to think about how you can use that in your work. I thought, yeah, alright.

So I did easiest thing in the world, get some plaster, take it down and walk across the beach, get some seawater, get some cardboard and some you know, just paperclips, make a plaster cast, put it over the footprints, fill it with plaster, end up with these plates with footprints in it. And I just exhibited that work in a gallery, with a door, one door there, one door there. And then these footprints and crutch marks just walk, basically meandered from one door to the other. And then I extended that by getting some false legs from the ALAC, the artificial limb and appliance centre, so I'd like false toes, false ankle, false below knee, false. And basically had them, again, walking across a room with a, just getting bigger and bigger and bigger. So the, you know footprint went from artificial toes to, you know just incrementally bigger. So that's the, I was making work like that really. Once got stopped on the motorway by the cops. And the cops said, what's in the boot of your car. I said, seven artificial legs and a wheelchair. They thought I was taking the piss, you know. So I gave him the keys to the car and he went round the back and opened the back and there it was. I could see him in the mirror, you know, what the fuck's going on? Quietly closed the boot, gave me my keys back, thank you sir, off you go. Yeah.

So that, that's how that work started. And then I started making a lot of work externally, you know, stuff on the beach. This piece is from there, that's an early piece from Morecambe Bay landmarked 1987. Basically just got these great lumps of eroded soil that.. When the sea came in it just washed great lumps of this, just started to build this pyramid, that's Grange-over-Sands in the background. But you could see it for miles. Somebody came from miles away, like over the, they said it looks huge. But when you get here it looks really small, which is that thing about distance, if you think fifteen miles across flat Morecambe Bay, that would be a real beacon, it would really stand out. And these are early works, again I started to get thinking about, this is 'Leadline', and again it's, I made 'Springback' round about this time. But this was tree trunks, from the same tree, and how do you re-, how do you re-connect materials. And this is lead. So I was..

A: Describe them for me for the tape.

T: It's a line of tree trunks, probably about nine inches high, probably about fifteen inches in diameter, roughly sawn. And I lined them up, but not in a straight line. And then I carved a channel out of each one. So the channel on this one is roughly in the middle, the channel on the next one is quite close to the edge, so, but it's quite spinal, it's quite, you know, vertebrae, and then this lead is planished, hammered into the groove, which is probably about two inches wide and lapped over the edge. And it's quite hammered into the wood surface. But the

thing that connects the, the um wood together is the lead line. So there's a soft bit of lead, you can see this bit in the middle here, which connected the wood together. So the wood, the tree trunk circles don't touch each other but the lead connects them all up. And I made quite a few works like this. I really enjoyed it. You see more examples of it here. And there's just a long bit of lead. And that's the last one, so quite a long bit of lead.

Lead's an interesting material. It's quite poisonous as well. Melting it down, probably not the best of ideas.

A: What's interesting about it?

T: I just think it's um, I just love the way that you can hammer it and it changes shape, softens out, it's quite soft, malleable, but it's quite, um, it's got great history, you know and guttering, cathedrals, all that. And then, this is a very early work called 'Six Circles'. 1989, carved out of elm trunks. Again, it's about re-connecting. So this is the same tree, these are five quite big, these are probably thirty inches in diameter, may be even more, that's probably four inch, what d'you call that thing, floorboard. I,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9, 18,27,36. Yeah, so probably thirty-six inches across.. The diameter of that. So all these bits of tree belong together as a tree trunk and somebody cut them into slices. So I wanted to reconnect them by carving a circle into the top of each one. And this is 'Squaring the Circle', this is where 'Squaring the Circle' came from, way back in 1989. So it's trying to reunite this broken circle, but the lead connected each one, but this you don't need the lead, you use your brain, cause you, or your eyes and your brain, because you look at the circle and you make a circle out. Can you see that? You look at that and it becomes a circle in your mind.

A: Yeah, I know that piece quite well.

T: And I used to do lots of work, come back to this idea over and over again, this idea of reconnecting things together. I'm sure there's a psychology to it of trying to reunite broken bodies, I'm sure there is something deeply related to the, you know to the psyche of how do you reconnect things, how do you rebuild things. And lots of my work, you know, plays around with that, like 'Split'. Again, that's quite early, I don't know when, can't remember when I made 'Split'. The wood turner was at university. And she said there's a shake in this piece of wood. I can't remember what, it might be ash, yeah ash. There's a great split down it. And I just had it in the studio, probably for two years, what the fuck am I gonna do with that, I didn't want to turn it into smaller bits of wood. I wanted to keep it as one piece. I thought well, how do you, how do you make something with a rend, a great rend down the middle of it, you know?

It's a beautiful thing, you could see, you could see inside the crack the wood, tearing you know, still connected, so as the wood splits, you've still got that, almost like a, like chewing gum stretched inside it somehow. And then I just thought it's a fucking split. Just carve the word 'split' into it. Job done, you know. Got some chisels, three hours later or whatever, you know, just 's' on the side 'p','l','t' and again it's like your, you know you talked about Great Britain From A Wheelchair and like, you see it or you don't see it, Split's exactly the same, people either look at it and go but, but, you know they don't get it, and then suddenly. Or some people just look at straightway and go split yeah, good one. The 'i's the crack isn't it. You either get it or you don't get it, it's funny. Same with Great Britain, you either get it

or you don't get it. Yeah.

You knackered?

A: I am a little.

T: All those drugs you keep taking.

(Both laugh)

T: Am I boring the life out of you with this bollocks? Can we call it a day?

A: Yeah.

T: It's half past three, so I'm thinking if I get a taxi, I might get out before too much traffic.

ENDS

Tony Heaton interview 17.02.2017

A: You were saying you had for breakfast?

T: I'm full of nuts and a tangerine. Fruit and nuts! Bit of variety.

A: That's good.

T: I live off nuts and tangerines. I just keep nuts and tangerines in my desk drawer for when I get hungry, And then I forget to get any lunch. And then I, and then I have a handful of nuts and a couple of tangerines and then I don't want any lunch. (So it's mumble.)

A: Right. Moving on from breakfast.

T: Yes. Onwards!

A: And tangerines. Let's try and move forwards towards the art work.

T: Yes.

A: Those two, the questions I emailed you, which are how did somebody who'd been kicked out of art school 'cause he wasn't interested in it end up actually being committed to art, and how did somebody who didn't think of himself as disabled although he'd become a wheelchair user start to think of himself as disabled?

T: Yeah, I know. Paradoxical things, really, aren't they? Yeah, fascinating, actually, to think about that. Cause I did um I did leave art college. I mean, I was too young to go to art college really. D'you know what, the more I think about it, I think art's an old guy's game, really. I think em, I dunno, maybe that's madness, maybe it's not an old man's game. But it feels like there's a lot to learn to get to a place before you start to really think about and appreciate work, particularly work that's gone before.

I mean I used to skip past the marble carvings, you know to get to twentieth century work, to get to what's now. And it's only when you start carving marble that you realise how fucking difficult it is. And then you start to think, well hang on, this was made in the fifteen, sixteen hundreds. You know, didn't have power tools, no really good steel tools, no light, no electricity, phenomenal really. You wonder how that work got made. Stunning.

So I don't know about getting.. I got kicked out of college cause I wasn't particularly good student and I wasn't really interested in the art that was on offer at that particular place.

A: We'd got to when you were starting at Lancaster.

T: Yeah.

A: How did..

T: Yeah, no I went to Lancaster, d'you know what it was really about people..

A: Were there any issues in getting in? I asked you this about..

T: You did.

A: Were there any issues relating to the impairment?

T: Oh yeah, massively, massively. Assumptions made about my abilities and my stamina. You know, made by people who'd got no rights or understanding of me and my impairment to make the er just massive assumptions. And it seems like people could make those assumptions way back then. You know. And your capability. So I did the, I think we talked about it, you know I did the access courses and the can you write an essay courses and all that carry-on. It was very interesting being a mature student. I didn't realise what a threat mature students could be to the teaching staff, you know. Cause if you're, I mean I was interested in, passionately interested about art, I read about art all the time, I went to exhibitions, I thought about art. And d'you know I remember the fellow in sculpture who said I can spot your footprints in the sand, that's what makes you stand out, and that's when I started thinking about disability as a source of um, not inspiration but a source of something to interrogate within a sculptural practice. And em, and he said, he was only a couple of years older than me, maybe about four, five years older than me. And I'd say are you coming for a beer tonight, Paul. He said, no I've got to do a lecture on modernism or whatever it might have been for you lot tomorrow. And I said, well what have you gotta do? You know, just get up and do it, he said, well I've got to go to the library and get some slides and read about it. I said why, why? He said cause I know fuck all about it. And I've got to know something about it to hold you guys for forty minutes tomorrow. And the penny suddenly dropped that these people, you know, I mean typical working class um naivety, you just think a professor is just crammed full of knowledge. And of course they're not, they've got to go and
figure it all out just like you do. And I know you can, I mean you can ask kind of left-field questions if you know quite a bit about art, but you don't necessarily know the direction of travel that the tutor's taking you in. So I think sometimes the professor was definitely, who was pretty much the same age as me, ..young, bright, but you know different knowledge, you could ask trick questions. Not intentionally trick questions, but you might say well, okay so how does that relate to something that was going on in 1860 in England, for instance, or in Europe if we were talking about um particularly British art.

And they just were terrified of those broader, left-field questions. I remember doing an A level question, again externally, and Steven Sartin, who was the keeper of fine art at the Harris Museum in Preston, and he was the tutor and I was gutted that I got really a bad mark. And he said, it's a brilliant essay, but what you have to remember is the people who mark A level papers don't necessarily know very much about art. So they get a sort of crib sheet that says did you mention full names, did you mention dates, did you mention key pieces of work, you know compare Constable and Turner, you know the classic exam question. You can't deviate, you can't create the unique discussion around Turner and Constable, you've got to, basically you've got to follow a formula, I'd got no fucking idea you had to do that. I thought I'd written a really clever essay. And once he said that I thought, fuck it, then that's what you do. You know it's just a matter of counting the beans..it's cynical really, isn't it?

A: I was always hopeless at..

T: You learn to be cynical.

A: I found that the higher up the education system I went, the better I did, the less I was expected to remember stuff, cause I was never good at that kind of sort of parrot learning, I could never have studied medicine or law, or one of those things, cram your head with all that stuff. I don't know if that was partly to do with the medication I was taking.

T: I thought, for me it was head injury as well, you know. You don't know how injured your head is, do you, like fractured skull, what does that mean, is the damage that they know, did they care, you know. I mean, I had a broken ankle but they never set it because they didn't figure I'd ever use it again, so it was just basically put in a woolly, you know like a sheepskin boot to protect it, but it was never properly set or fixed or anything. Bizarre what they used to do in the old days.

A: So were there ways that the possibility of head injury...

T:Well I..

A: .. affected things?

T: (I had...) My memory's terrible. My brother's got a brilliant memory, I've got a shocking memory. I don't know whether that's, how do you know whether it's like you say chemically damaged or physically damaged or you know, I had a fractured skull, I mean my ear was full of blood, partial hearing loss as a result of it. Nobody actually said, by the way you've got brain damage or it's likely to affect your memory or anything. So, I'm guessing that my bad memory is down to head injury, but it might not be.

But the art, yeah, I think the reason I went to university is I did have a thirst for more knowledge, and I realised that it had to be organised knowledge. And I realised that nobody took you seriously unless you got a degree. So you could talk about being an artist, you could make interesting work, but if you didn't have the qualification to back it up then forget it really, nobody took you seriously.

So it was a means to an end. I really enjoyed it, though. But I was a mature student, I worked through it, I think I said earlier, ten week terms, fucking hell that's a party isn't it. And just going in for key times and just working at home in the studio, making work, you know to take for a crit at the end of term. Pretty easy life.

A: So you had a studio at home?

T: I did, yeah. Yeah. Yeah, I just had a workshop and made stuff, yeah I was quite, I was as a mature student I'd already been, I was already married, I'd got a child, I'd got a house, I'd got a workshop, you know I was set up really. I just opted out of the nine to five grind to go to university. So I painted signs, I did graphic design, painted posters, I made a few quid and had a grant. My grant was great. You know, I had a mature student's grant and a disabled facilities-type grant. And you know as a working class..

A: Did they have those then?

T: Pardon?

A: Did they have those back then?

T: Oh yeah. As a working class bloke, you know, that was, that was reasonable wage. I got a computer off, one of the first computers about 1986. So quite a long time ago. You know the 5¼ inch floppy discs and a big er whatever computer, I can't even remember what I was now, Microsoft stuff, the talk of the neighbourhood, Allan, people used to come in to see the computer. Daisy wheel printer and all that. Yeah.

A: I never got one of those. I remember people in the London Screenwriters' Workshop talking about having a computer or a word processor.

T: Did all my essays on it.

A: But I'd ask what's the, and they'd say things like, well it corrects your spelling. And I'd think well I can spell, I can type you know, I've got an electric typewriter. So it was a while before I got round to all that. But not being an early adopter, then I didn't get stuck with some fucking huge bit of crap.

T: So yeah. I still can't use a fucking computer. After all these years, but I probably had one of the first computers in my neighbourhood or whatever.

A: Coming back, we were talking about, you said about home, the workshop.

T: Yeah:

A: That was just what you had already, was it?

T: Yeah, cause I always made things. And I always made sculpture, but as I say nobody took it seriously, because you didn't have a track record. It's still the same now, isn't it? You know, if you go to Goldsmith's, the Slade or the Royal College of Art, even if you make a bad mistake people are going to take it more seriously if you can talk eloquently about the bag of shit you've just made, you're more likely to be able to sell it to Charles Saatchi. Yeah. And um that's the nature of the, the world, or part of the art world certainly.

A: Making a note of something I want to ask you which isn't part of this interview.

T: So yeah, it's let's get the degree and then you can say you've studied art to degree level and then..

A: Before that, can we backtrack a little and, for the record like a police interview, can you tell me that story about Morecambe sands and the footprints. What you were doing that day..

T: Yeah. So we were um, as I said the fellow in sculpture, I tell you what environmental art was really quite at the forefront, so you had people like Richard Long, taking a line for a walk,

Andy Goldsworthy, who's a Northern artist. And was hanging out around Lancaster at that time. And he was making work on Morecambe Bay, so it was very, this sort of Zen-like idea of going into the natural environment, not imposing monuments, you know not building monuments but building ephemeral works that you might capture on camera, or you might not even capture at all. You know they'd literally be of that particular moment. In that particular environment, in that particular time of day, weather, whatever it might be.

So you just literally, I mean Goldsworthy just engaged with nature as a, as a human being with a creative mind. You know physicalness about it. And then take very beautiful photographs of it. You know the evidence is him within the photograph. So we were very interested in this idea of um environmental art and ephemeral work. Do you remember I showed you the pyramid of um turf that was washed out of Morecambe Bay. We built that big pyramid on the sands. And he just said, we were just walking idly, and he was probably where the hell is everybody, you know, because you'd go off into rock pools and, you know there's lots of places to disappear into. And I think he was probably trying to herd us all together. And he said well I always know where you are, cause I can see your footprints and I can see your stick prints. And I made the piece, I just made the plaster cast piece that went across the room and then I made the false leg pieces that we talked about last time.

So a lot of my work was around my, the way I engage with the world. So an early piece would be Wheelchair Entrance, you know suddenly coming across an art gallery and the only way you could get in it was up four steps. So how do you respond to that as a wheelchair user? Well you build a fairly temporal piece which is a piece of two by one inch wood, you write Wheelchair Entrance and you hang it in the doorway on two bits of string at wheelchair height. And what you try to do is then enter the consciousness of people who walk up the steps and think what the fuck's that? You know and realise, it's slightly inconvenient, they've got to duck under it or move it to one side. And then when curators say we can't show that work in the gallery, oh why not, well it's breaching health and safety and it's, people could hurt themselves on it.. And you think, sorry, is this not an art gallery? Isn't art supposed to be dangerous? Have I completely misunderstood what this art shit's all about? I've made an art piece of work, it's political, it's potentially dangerous. Surely that's good. Not rejected on the grounds of health and safety. A lot of the work played around with that.

A: It wasn't the tutor's suggestion that you make work around...

T: Well, he did, yeah he did. He said your footprints are different than everybody else's. And that might be an interesting area for exploration. So they don't say go and make a work about that, they just say think about that as something that might or might not be interesting, um a, an enquiry as to why you might want to think creatively about the way you move through space. I mean, dance, it's the way you move through space, isn't it?

T: So yeah, if we are looking to make statements as about what concerns us as artists, then it's pretty obvious. You know when you think about the Camden Town painters, you know, where we are now, they just looked out of their windows and painted what they saw, or their friends. And the same for many art forms. This is why I never quite understand why people don't get disability art. You know you look back at great paintings, Picasso, Toulouse-Lautrec, Degas, they painted what was there, you know, they painted the people and the places that they hung out in. And it was contemporary. What was happening right there, right then. And I think

that's what disability art does, it engages with what's happening right here and right now and what's, what it is that creates barriers for us as disabled people. I think that's interesting. But I would, wouldn't I. Just as you do. The trouble is, ninety per cent of the art world comprises of white middle class men who don't really give a fuck about whether we can get in and out of art galleries, or whether the text is too dense for us to understand or, you know whether the work that's created is so elite that we can't access it. Never mind making it accessible. You know for blind people or deaf people or whatever.

A: Let's come back to the period you were talking about , making..

T: Environmental work.

A: Yeah.

T: It's also preposterous, you know, bloke in a wheelchair going out into the landscape. Or dragging your body around on crutches and calipers, making work in the landscape, going in Grizedale Forest and making work. It's pretty ridiculous for somebody with an impairment. And that was part of the interest of it, it was part of the heroic artist thing that, you know Richard Long walks miles and er Tony Heaton walks yards. But is equally as troublesome. We used to make work in Grizedale Forest. Three of us, actually. Rob Williams, Paul Hatton and myself. And we, we literally, we'd go and smoke dope and make sculpture and leave it in the forest. Sometimes we'd sit around and watch people with their hiking boots and their forest trail maps and all the numbered sculptures, you know. And they'd come across something we've made. And they're, what's this, who's made this? And they'd be looking through the map, looking for the number to try and identify the sculpture. Which was there by default, really. I've often thought about whether you could take a painting into an art gallery and just pin it against the wall when nobody was looking and see how long it could stay up for. I take my postcards, I probably shouldn't tell you this, but I always print postcards of my work, and often if I'm going to the Tate or the National or somewhere I stick some postcards in the postcard browsers. People come, the ultimate scenario is that somebody finds it and thinks oh yeah, I'm gonna buy this and takes it to the cash out and of course it's not registered on their computer so they don't, they've got nothing to scan, they don't know what it is. So it's, or they just sit there until somebody goes through the racks and finds them and throws them out. Either way, it's fun. I don't remember where we were.

I dunno where we were. So, making environmental sculpture, that's what I was doing then. It was quite interesting then, a woman from Shape in the North-West called Joyce Morris, who worked for Shape in Manchester and in Lancashire came to one of my exhibitions at Lancaster and said ooh, are you a disabled person, I said yeah, yeah. She said oh, d'you know about Shape? I said, never heard of it. I'd never actually heard about Shape, never about disability arts or the disability arts movement. But I was making work that had a disability context. And she said, oh yeah, there's this, we work with disabled arts. Ooh! And that's when I was thinking, yeah but I'm not really disabled, you know I'm a working class bloke, I had a motorcycle accident, yeah, I use a wheelchair. It was classic denial, that hey, I'm not disabled. Of course, what happens later, when you're more politicised is, you can say in your head as many times as you want, I'm not disabled but the minute you connect with another human being they immediately go, ah you're disabled. First thing anybody ever says to me. I get the taxicab. It's very, very rare, the taxi driver who brought me here today we talked

about all sorts of things but he never, and I was waiting for the 'how long you been in the wheelchair, then' or 'Were you born with a disability or did something, you know..' It's very rare that people don't ask personal questions. They don't think anything of it. And I don't think they mean to be offensive. But it often is offensive.

A: I get the other side of it. Because..

T: Cause of Vicky?

A: No, I wasn't thinking of that. But, because I don't have a visible impairment, it's like if I'm going to some disability arts conference, like that one in Colch.. Not Colchester, in the West Country, or being taken round an exhibition by a caretaker, cause I missed the opening night, like the ICI exhibition, or whatever, I will get this 'It's wonderful what they can do, isn't it?' kind of stuff. Assuming that I'm like another non-disabled person, discussing it from the outside.

It's like when I did standup, and I'd tell people I did standup about disability. And they'd say, what you make fun of disabled people? And I'd say no, I make fun of you.

T: No, but talking about the disability movement, that's, I think that's part of the radical thing, is about disabled comedians telling jokes and it's, I mean you did it twenty odd years ago. But somebody like Francesca Martinez now, is pretty much doing what you did years ago. And it is poking fun at non-disabled people. Um for their worthiness. And you know, and telling truths about disabled people's oppression by non-disabled people. Intentionally and unintentionally. And it's profound, isn't it? I don't know why people don't get it but people are pretty stupid, aren't they?

A: I always wanted to do something, I several times took to Channel Four proposals , I always wanted to write something about disabled people getting fucked up by non-disabled parents. But the first person I took it to turned out to be the mother of a disabled child herself. So she would not listen to the possibility that any parent of a disabled child was less than perfect, anywhere in the known universe.

T: We should get lots of very physically disabled people, congenitally disabled people, young people, reading, 'They fuck you up, your Mum and Dad, they don't mean to but they do'. I think it would look brilliant, you know, because it's a poem, a classic poem and lots of people know it. But to actually have young..

A: Young disabled people.

T: Yeah. I think, you know, that might, might take that away now (...) Film idea. Just as it was, just as it is like that. Me and Anne were talking about, er god, I can't remember where I saw it, it might have been the V and A, it's like the curing of the lame and all that sort of stuff. You know looking at the painting and then sort of, standing up, getting out of the wheelchair and sort of staggering off. You know. Replicate it across all the impairments. This is black and white for most people, isn't it? You're either blind or you're not blind, you're either deaf or you're not deaf, you use a wheelchair, therefore you're wheelchair bound, there's not, no subtlety in most people's world.

Where have we gone from? To?

A: You'd just met somebody from Shape.

T: Yeah, Joyce Morris. So she said disability arts, all this stuff going on. Picked up DAIL magazine, which had literally just started. And um Sian Vasey..

A: So it was reaching the North-West?

T: Yeah, Shape was in the North-West and they, I think maybe DAIL magazine probably got sent to Shape, who pushed it out to other people. And of course you, like there was the Shape Network, so she'd send newsletters for Manchester or South-West Shape or North-East Shape or you know, West Midlands Shape or East Midlands Shape or whatever it was, there were four or five different Shape franchises, for want of a better word.

And um, so I started looking at some of this stuff and reading some of it and some of it was shite and didn't, it didn't resonate with me and some of it I thought woh, fuck me, that's powerful. And other people's voices. Cause I saw disability as, well I didn't even see it as a personal tragedy, I just saw it was something that happened to me, and it was bit of a drag but I just had to get on and get over it and sooner I'd do that, the more I just am assimilated back into the world that I've come from. And, yup, I'm a bit of an oddity but, you know, my sparkling personality and outward-goingness will just get me over that hurdle, you know. I think that's what many people do.

Well you have two choices, don't you? You do that, or you retreat into um, into a desperate world of..death I suppose. So yeah, I was always out and about. And I had the ubiquitous blue invalid carriage to get around in. And even that was like, yeah it's a bit of a joke but fuck it, it gets me around. You know, I remember going to Clitheroe pop festival with a couple of mates. And they're on motorbikes and I'm in an invalid carriage. And we do this, let's do the outriders thing, you know. So fucking invalid carriage is bobbing along at forty-five miles an hour with a Hell's Angel on each corner, you know, like three or four bikes behind it in, it must have looked ludicrous and quite surreal at the same time. And you just got on, your mates were young, strong guys, throw you into places or.. do, you know do whatever had to be done really. I mean, you were mates, they were your mates, you know, you fucked up, could have happened to anybody, some of us died, you know, I mean you just got on with it. It's a good way to be.

So I continued to make art and I came across Sian Vasey and Elspeth Morrison, who said, oh we love your work and why don't you exhibit, we've got an exhibition coming up called 'Out of Ourselves'. And I think that was in 1990, something like that. And it was at Diorama. And I came down to London. And they paid for everything, you know, get a van, chuck your work in it, bring it down, parked outside the Diorama, somebody helping to set the work up. And it was great. I saw er, and I still thought, d'you know what, what the fuck am I doing? On the one hand I wanted to exhibit in London. On the other hand I didn't particularly think it would do me any good to be exhibiting with other crips.

And then I went in, so I was still sceptical and dubious of this, and I remember going in and the

first piece I saw was Adam Reynolds, and was the lead suitcase. And it was in a corner. This beautifully crafted lead suitcase, like one of those nineteen thirties, forties leather suitcases but it was made out of lead. And it was open and it was full of dead leaves, and the leaves spilled out into the space. I was like, fuck! That's a massively powerful piece of work, I couldn't believe it, you know it was really good. And er,. And that was it then, I just thought, yeah, this is alright, this work stands up. Who wouldn't want to exhibit with, I didn't know him, I'd never met him. Then, but I met him there and then. And I thought, yeah, what a nice bloke, what a great guy. And I met loads of nice people, I probably met you, I don't know, had I met you, Allan? I can't actually remember. No. But you just meet, you know, like fuck that was great. And yeah, you don't think, oh yeah he's a blind, he's a deaf, you know, it's just like here's a bunch of nice people, you know, we're having a few beers and they get it, and they're like me, they're young and they want to do things, they're angry about being excluded. And they're doing something about it.

I can identify with this group of people. And they bring me different experiences, cause you know I, I'm still a northern bloke, really, I'm not really escaped from that because as we talked earlier you know, I chose an art college near where I lived, you know, I mean twenty miles away at Southport felt like a long way from Preston. And it was culturally different, as we talked about, you know, middle class kids, you know I shared a bedroom, they had a third of a house to themselves. Probably bigger than my entire house. It, I think in some sort of awakening of the world's much bigger and different than the world you've been occupying for the last eighteen, nineteen years. And, this is suddenly when the penny drops, you just wanna go wow! You know let's go to London, fucking hell yeah, it is amazing, let's check out all this stuff that's going on. But so was Manchester and so was Liverpool. You know, there was interesting things happening. But it was very localised, it was very, you know, I always say it was a bit like abstract expressionism in New York in 1940 or whatever. You know, probably about fifty people were aware of it. Disability arts was the same. You could probably name the fifty people who were fully and truly engaged in it. And some were allies, you know. Some were people like Joyce Morris, she wasn't disabled. I don't know why, I never actually asked Joyce why she wanted to do this. But she was passionate about it, you know.

I remember Rick Gwilt, who was the Director at North West Shape. And he was manic depressive. And he wasn't out about it. Until there was something happened, something happened. And he wrote a very long letter about his black dog, I'd no fucking idea what a black dog was, it's a dog that was black.

A: It's an expression that Churchill used.
T: Yeah, yeah. But I didn't know that then, it was like what the fuck's he on about? And he was saying, yeah I fucked up, but you never think about me as a disabled person. But I am. You know and there was, we didn't fucking know you were a disabled person, you never told us, you're Rick Gwilt, yeah, you're manic, you know you're fast, you're efficient, you write things. But the opposite side of that is you, is desperation, everybody's against you. And well, you know what it's like to work with people like that. But it, and it was that thing well, ah are they part of this, are they really disabled? Is that, you know, going back in time, it was very hierarchical actually, wasn't it? And there were real debates about whether learning disabled people should be part of the movement, mental health was that disability, mental health? It's extraordinary now when you look back at it, cause it was like oppression within oppression.

A: I think disability arts played an important role. Have you read that paper The Other Tradition that I wrote about the Liberation Network and disability arts?

T: No, no.

A: I will send you.

T: I'd love you to send it me.. I mean there are..

A: The thing about, what one of the things that I argued in there, I was talking about the Liberation Network, another organisation of disabled people around at the same time as UPIAS, which came at it from a sort of personal politics angle. And it was a , kind of looser sort of organisation, less academic, less sort of rigid but where UPIAS was determined to sort of really define how stuff works , what are the rules and whatever, the Liberation Network was very fuzzy-edged. And actually, you need those fuzzy edges because you need room for people that you haven't thought of to be able to come and say well actually, this applies to me as well. It's like, when NDAF did that, you remember that project Shelf Life?

T: I do, yes. It came to Holton Lee. We hosted it, part of it.

A: And then all the stuff ended up there.

T: Everybody's what?

A: All the stuff ended up, the writing workshops were done by , I did an evaluation on it, so.

T (...)

A: Yeah, one of Geof's best ideas. But they did a pilot, and it went really well, and then they rolled it out, to the various disability arts organisations. And it didn't happen.. I think people were freaked by the subject matter.

T: It's pretty heavy duty.

A: And NDAF actually , they had to call in Chris Ledger and get her to take it over. You know, people would say we're a disability arts organisation, we don't do medical model stuff. But basically, they couldn't handle the subject matter, I think. But what I was going to say was that one thing that hadn't been, you know doing writing workshops with people who have limited life expectancy, they'd be dealing with people who'd got cancer, that sort of thing..

T: They'd got Adam Reynolds.

A: Yeah!

T: And people like that.

A: One group that like nobody had foreseen who became quite an important part of it, were

mental health survivors who had suicidal thoughts.

T: Oh yeah, yeah.

A: And, you know there were a number of people who came along and said, look I have this voice telling me to kill myself, so far I've resisted it but I'm not sure that I'm always gonna be successful.

T: At a weak moment, yeah. Yeah.
A Which was something that nobody had foreseen. And you need, you need the space for the stuff you haven't foreseen to become part of things. I'm a big believer in fuzzy edges.

T: No, I think I am, too. Yeah, no I think there's a real, that was a very important, I think one of the great things that NDACA is doing is re-evaluating things that just happened, just like oh yeah we did that project. Can we have some money for a project, it's a really good idea, yeah, here's some money, right do the project, right next project. Onwards.

T: And I think there's been lots of things like Shelf Life.

A: Geof was very like that. Let's do this! Let's do this! Partly because he wasn't well managed.

T: No.

A: Nobody in NDAF was doing long-term planning.

T: Yeah. And partly because funding's like that. You are funding driven. Right, where's the next pot of money coming from? Oh right, we want to do something..

A: Anyhow, coming, coming back, did you get involved in Shape at that time? What happened?

T: Yeah. Because, um, so I was exhibiting work. And the 'Out of Ourselves' which again is, I think was probably quite an important exhibition. As far as I can understand it..

A: I've got some pictures from it.

T: Have you? Fuck, I'd love to see them.

A: I discovered them sorting out the LDAF archive. That Sian had actually come in and had somebody photograph it.
T: Bloody Hell! No idea!

A: No, I didn't either.

T: I'd love to see them. But again, I can't..

A: I've got this set of transparencies. Didn't let them go down to Holton Lee because I wasn't

sure..

T: Good on you. Probably just as well. Though we may have been able to claw them back.

T: I can't find any exhibition like that before that. So I think it was probably the first joint show of disabled artists about disability arts. And, and we never thought about that at the time. And it was, I think it was a vanguard moment. And I think it was a unique moment. Be really interesting to see what Sian had to say about it.

And I remember, I remember going for a beer, and maybe even something to eat with her. Afterwards, after the exhibition, you know and I thought, what a.., you know I just really liked her, you know, and then she had, this taxi came with the ramps at the back of whatever.. You know it's like gotta go now and it's like, yeah. And we had a little hug and a kiss and off she went. I thought, that's amazing, you know, a really interesting person. And then they commissioned 'Shaken Not Stirred' from me for some sort of, for the..

A: For the Euroday.

T: For the Block Telethon, I think first.

Well I can't remember whether it was Euroday.

A: It was originally commissioned for Euroday.

T: Was it? Okay.

A By Sarah Scott.

T: Right.

A: This is at the time I was Chair of LDAF.

T: Right, yeah. So I don't know my own history.

A: That's, well that's to do with, there was EUCREA was it.

T: Yeah EUCREA, yeah I remember that.

A: Funding from, from Europe. Where you had to get together, you had to put together projects that Involved at least three member countries of the European Union.

T: Still do it now, or whatever.

A: And you had to do it in a way that, you actually had to commit to doing it before you found out whether you'd got the funding. Which was a bit knife-edged. But that's what it was commissioned for and subsequently when we were doing the Block Telethon, I asked you to repeat the original.

T: Did you, really?

A: That was me. Vicky and I did the, did the press for Block Telethon.

T: I must write that down. You must tell me about it, and I can put it in my website or something. Because I've got no fucking idea about any of that.

(A gives T a Balloon)

A: One of the original balloons from Block Telethon.

T: Well I've got, on some of the cans. Is that for me or is that yours?

A: That's for you, yes.

T: Really. Fucking hell, right. I'll take that. I've got your bowl. I've got a plant in it now. Thank you for that. On some of the cans it's got the Rights Not Charity sticker. And I've exhibited it since, I exhibited it last year at the Attenborough Centre in Leicester. And I said, no, we must keep those stickers stuck on it. Because it gives it a historical significance. They're equally as important as the work. And they're sort of blue and yellow stickers. D'you remember? Rights not Charity, that blue and yellow. Probably see them in the photographs. From that exhibition last year. And all the Sellotape's yellowed. And Sarah Scott's sister and a few other people came up after we did the Block Telethon and said, oh, can you sign a can, we did some sort of joke like, a pound apiece or something. She said, oh can you sign it. And I was signing these charity cans, you know. And er, well you're never going to object to signing something for Sarah Scott or her sister, are you. Beautiful young girls, who's gonna complain about that? I think I was in love with them both. I think probably Sarah, yeah... Happy days.

Generous times! So Joyce Morris, then. Oh you're young. I said, yeah. And we don't have anybody on our board that's young. Why don't you join the Shape Board. And I did that, fuck me what's a board, what, I don't think I really knew what a board was, so she said, okay, they're the people who govern the organisation, by and large. She basically gave me a briefing on what charity board was all about. And I thought, do I wanna sit with these boring old farts, you know from Manchester University and the City Council, you know, all worthy people. And it was the great and the good. Very much. I can't remember who was on that board. And then I thought mm, they keep giving me work, you know, two hundred quid a day to go and do a workshop in the mental institution or a day centre or something, quite useful money. So I thought, yeah alright. Dangled the carrot, Joyce was a very clever operator, you know. So she got me on the board, I don't know how old I'd be. I'd probably be in my early thirties. Mid thirties, so I wasn't that young. But for a board that was, you know, childish. And I ended up being the Chair of the Board before I left. I was actually Chair of Shape in the North-West. And then I got the job at Holton Lee.

And um, it Holton Lee just seemed like, I was working for RADAR and the CAB, so I was very much involved in disability rights and social justice.
A: How had you gone from doing a degree in psychology and art to working for RADAR and Citizens Advice Bureau?

T: I mean, when I left university, um I just thought, ooh, I could get a job now. You know, that might be a good idea. And I applied for, I can't remember, I think somebody just poked it in front of me, said there's this organisation in London called RADAR, they're looking to appoint field workers or development workers in the North-West, you could do that. And I thought, well, yeah, I've just done social administration and psychology, I know a bit about this disability arts malarkey and this sort of burgeoning civil rights idea. Yeah, why don't I. So I applied, came down to London, got an interview, I remember, it's funny what you remember, isn't it? So I turned up and it was in, not Margaret Street, in em I went down it last night and I can't remember what it's called. I went down it and thought about it and now I can't remember it, you know. Less than eighteen hours later. Mortimer Street! So, just off Regent Street, really Mortimer Street there, just down from Portland Place, you know round the back of the BBC, kick in the ass from the BBC really, I thought, fuck me it's amazing.

I got this interview. And I had really long hair, I thought haircut, suit. So I got really quite a respectable haircut, put a suit on. And I went down, and I was met by a guy called Charlie, who was a disabled guy and his PA, both of them ridiculously long hair, down to his arms in a fucking great pony tail. Why did I get my hair cut? Anyway, I got the job. You know. And they said oh we're gonna pay you twelve grand a year and give you a car. Fucking hell, that's alright. That's quite a lot of money. And what do I have to do? Well you've basically got to develop a grass roots disability consciousness in the North-West. Tell em about RADAR. And it was great, I was quite (...) I mean, the, the weird thing about the politics then is the Greater Manchester Coalition of Disabled People suddenly hated me then. Because I'd suddenly got into bed with the enemy. Because they perceived RADAR to be a very conservative, and it was, a conservative organisation. So they were radical disability-led, you know banner waving, hard left, and I'd suddenly jumped ship and had sort of left that hard line to get a cushy job basically. And I remember going in to Manchester Coalition, grrrr. And I said look, do you want some RADAR keys? Oh yeah! Here's an accessible hotels guide to the UK or, all the RADAR publications, you know I'd just fucking give them to people. And RADAR keys, which were ridiculously expensive, in those, I can't remember how much they were, like three quid, I dunno whatever they were. And I'd just give them out to crips whenever I saw one, you know, here's a key.

But I got into places of power. I got into, I remember going to places like Chester and setting up an access group, using allies in building control and planning and saying, you know, and going in, writing a ten point plan for an access group. Say, look, stop complaining that you can't get in the fucking library, do something about it. So we'd, I'd literally organise disparate groups of disabled people, often in day centres, saying, look you've got to self-organise, you need to recruit a chair, and a secretary, you need to keep minutes, you need to meet regularly, you need to be, properly thoughtful and constituted. And then you'll get a dialogue with your local authority. You'll get to see all the plans, and you'll learn about planning, and you'll influence planning decisions. That's exactly what happened. I saw it as a very radical thing to do. And I was going, on RADAR's money, in RADAR's car, with RADAR's resources, and setting up access groups. And some of those access groups are still going, thirty odd years later. So, you know, all over the North West, up in the West coast of Cumbria, you know, Manchester, Liverpool, Chester. I went to the Isle of Man to speak at the Spastics Society, as it was called then, to their um, I've always been self-interested, Allan, it is a terrible admission but it's true, and er the Spastics Society, the Isle of Man, said, could

RADAR send a speaker for their Annual General Meeting? So Bert Massey said, oh d'you wanna go to the Isle of Man rarara, I said yeah, when is it, end of September or whatever. And I was looking at the TTs. The TTs were either the week before or the week after. And I said, I'd love to be your keynote speaker, but I can't make that date, but I'd like to, you know I can make it, whenever the TTs were on.

So they said yeah, alright, we can shift the AGM. So they moved their AGM. So I flew from Blackpool to the Isle of Man. And they hired me a fucking car, which I couldn't drive, because they didn't realise that I was a wheelchair user. That's how, you know..

So I turned up, I slept in this little hotel. And I wandered down to the, where the AGM was going to be in the evening. I got this building, it's like twenty steps at the front, fuck it, back door job. I went all the way round the building. How the fuck am I gonna get in here? And, er, people were wandering, in, well-dressed, suits and dresses and everything. And I said excuse me, are you going to the Spastics Society. Yes. I said can you find this guy, I think his daughter had cerebral palsy, I said can you find this guy, he's an organiser and er, I'm a guest speaker and I can't figure out how to get in.

And he sort of came through the door, and he was totally stressed. Cause they'd obviously said there's a bloke in a wheelchair outside. We didn't know you were a wheelchair, bound to a wheelchair or whatever. And they got me in, in one way or another, must have carried me up, or I must have bummed it up. But it's so typical.

A: Isn't that..

T: But it's so typical..

A: ..of the times. You're coming from fucking RADAR, and it doesn't occur to them to ask is he disabled?

T: D'you know what, that happened over and over and over again. I did some training for the fire service and I had a conversation, I said is the building accessible, they said it doesn't need to be because none of the firemen are disabled, like you stupid bastard. I said no, but I do. Why? I said, well I'm a wheelchair user. Oh, really, what and you're delivering the training. Yup. The inability to walk does not preclude me from being able to deliver you some disability equality training. Happened all the time.

People flabbergasted. So in one way, RADAR was full of crips. I think all outreach team were all crips. And, and, fair enough, no I think three out of four of us were crips. And I think we did a huge amount of good really. Because it was about setting up grassroots activism. And I'm.,. You know I am quite pleased that that happened and I was able to do that, And then, I'd been at RADAR about three or four years, and fax machines came out. You remember, you and I used to communicate by fax often. Sort of mad drawings.

A: Did we really?

T: Yeah. Yeah. We definitely did. And, I went to Bert Massie and said, Bert, I need a fax machine. And he said, what for, young Tony. I said, because it's the future, Bert. You'll

be able to send me things rather than posting me stuff. You'll just be able to send it me and I'll get it straightaway rather than having to wait two or three days. And I'll be able to send you things. And it will be instant. The minute you send it me, I'll receive it. Oh, I'm not sure we can stretch to that, young Tony. I thought, well fuck you then. And again it was, I was just irritated that the organisation didn't move fast enough. And I worked out of the Community Council of Lancashire. I didn't even want the full fax machine for RADAR, it was like everybody who rented a space in the Community Council of Lancashire chipped in fifty quid or whatever it was. Actually, I should have just done it. Now, I would have just chipped in and put in a receipt for fifty quid and expenses would have paid it. I made the mistake of asking the authority figure for permission, you know. Don't fucking do that again. Yeah. So he didn't buy me a fax machine, and I started to look for a job.

And I was doing work in RADAR with the CAB. And they were saying how can you as RADAR help us to make our CABs more accessible. So I was doing things like, I was on a sort of accessy sort of group for the CAB. Um, really it was just about looking at bureaus, how can we make them more accessible, how can we deliver an understanding of disabled people's rights within CABs. So they were looking at me as a RADAR, as an expert from RADAR. And I thought, d'you know what, this is a really interesting organisation, cause it is about rights, social justice, information, information is power. And em, and a job came up, and again it was the same sort of thing, area development officer, it was a couple of thousand quid more money. And em, it was another car, you know, so yeah alright, time to move on, you know. And that's what I did, and again I worked for the CAB, but again a lot of the work was driven around disability. And again I was coming to London every month just like I was at RADAR. And finding out more about the s.., you know the administrative side of managing change. And it was all that purchaser/provider split, stuff that was going on in health and social care. The idea of splitting health and social services apart, you know quite interesting now when you look at that, you know do you push them back together again now argument.

And I was a guest speaker at things like the Directors of Social Services um conferences, you know they'd have two, three day conferences, all the Directors of Social Services would come together to debate issues. And I'd be on the same platform as Directors of Social Services. I used to write articles for Community Care magazine, you know.

So I was doing art and also, you know quite deeply involved in administration and politics.

A: Yeah, I was just about to bring you back. What art were you doing?

T: Well, I was doing all sorts, but I'm doing exactly what I sort of do now, which is sit down, think about art, evaluate what your process is. So what I formulated then and what I still adhere to now is a process that says you're a creative person and you can think about art all the time, because you think about art looking out the window in a boring meeting, or on a train or in a taxi, or having a conversation like this. You know, thinking about 'they fuck you up your mum and dad', you know. Ideas spring from anywhere, you know this, creative person yourself. So you don't have to go and sit in a garret and think okay, I'm gonna be a sculptor now for two hours, it won't work. So always an artist or always creative, bring creative thinking into all you do, you know, that's rule number one for life really.

So um, so I always made sculpture, and actually the process was, I'm working, I get

reasonably well paid, that gives me the freedom to make the work that I wanna make. I'm not forced to do, no disrespect to being an arts worker who you know, community arts worker, going into places to do stuff, I didn't have to do that any more. So I can be selfish and concentrate on what I wanted to do, what I wanted to make.

And the other thing I realised is that the process could be quite slow, I didn't have to rush to make art, so I could just write things down, put things in books, do drawings and store ideas up. So that became, and I'm sure you do this as a writer, you know I remember looking at Will Self's writing studio, and there's fucking Post-it notes, every wall is covered in Post-it notes. And it'll be ideas or comments or whatever, and then start moving stuff about and rationalising things. And it's the same for sculpture really.
The original drawing for Great Britain From a Wheelchair, I think I still have it somewhere. And it was written on the back of a Melolin pad, which is a heel dressing, because, you know I used to get in bed at night and change, you know I had an ulcerated heel which I still have, you know which is my Achilles heel. And it stops me walking as much as I might like to walk, because it breaks down. And so I'd always have a pad and some micropore tape on the bedside table. And every night I'd put fresh dressing on. And, and I woke up in the middle of the night with Great Britain from a Wheelchair idea rolling about in my head. So I drew it, just drew it on the fucking, two inch by two inch square wound dressing. I hope I've got it somewhere, I dunno, I might not have it somewhere, but you know I remember drawing it. And er, that was the drawing of it, that was the sort of idea and I just kept that for ages. Think I just stuck it with the micropore into a drawing pad, you know. And that, probably two years later became Great.. I wish I'd of made it straightaway really. And it, em, and I made it in a flash, took me no time at all.

A: I remember you describing it to me over the phone.

T: Yeah, thought I was mental, didn't you?

A: I just didn't, not having that kind of artist's eye, thought he's lost it this time.

T: Well you wrote an article about it, I read it just the other day when I was, one of the great things about leaving Shape is that I'm having to tidy up my life, you know, and I keep coming across things that I've obviously scanned in. It was an article you wrote about I told you over the phone, you thought he's lost the plot. And then you saw it and you said, you likened it to those 3-D prints at the time. Which was a great analogy, actually.

(...)

Nobody else apart from me and you remembers that, I don't think.

A: I remember being there in a market in Victoria where somebody had got a stall with all these. And there was this couple, and this woman was saying look, you just got to get out of focus a bit.
T: Step back a bit.

A: She was doing all this stuff and then she said, and it'll be three dimensional.. And he says, you silly cow, I've only got one eye.

T: It's not gonna work!

T: You know what, I gave my cousin the um Unfathomable book or whatever it's called, you know the book that they've just done.

A: From DASH.

T: My cousin was talking about art, you know disability arts and all that sort of thing. I said, oh there's a book. And er, she sent me a text, and er she said, tell me about your sculptures, well have a look at this book, it'll tell you about me. She said, ah, your sculptures are really great in the book.. I stuck some postcards in. It's really lovely. And about a week later she sent me a text, she said It's Great Britain! From a Wheelchair! I get it! She said I just looked at it loads of times and I never got it. And then suddenly, it's fuck I've got it. I said well, yeah, that's really what's supposed to happen. That's the idea.

So yeah. So from me it's process. Ideas come. If I think they're worth it I sort of jot them down. It's a bit like squirrels, you know, hide some food, deal with it later. And when I think about it for a while, I think, well okay if I did do, what material would it be and how big would it be, what would it look like. And I sort of just keep pushing the process forward. The great thing about that kind of process is, I don't end up surrounded by millions of failures. I only really make the things that I think I want to make and that might have, you know that might stand, stand up for themselves.

A: Your work, there's always a kind of intellectual process..

T: Yeah, totally

A: ..going on, isn't, more, you're not somebody who just like gets some stuff and messes about with it.
T: No, I never do that.

A: It's doing something, something visually, but there's some, clear thought.

T: I hope there is.

A: Often indicated by the title. It's like the fact that a lot of your titles are kind of word plays, as in 'Springback'.

T: Yeah. Titles are really important to me

A: Which has at least three meanings that I can think of.

T: Yeah. Exactly. And I, I do play around with that, I mean I think about art as um almost the um, as sort of tangible philosophy. So it is how do you wrap thoughts, idea and explanations into form. So that's often the starting point, okay that's an interesting thought. Right, okay, so I've just had the thought about they fuck you up your mum and dad. So the next thought, but wouldn't it be good if you got people who really did get fucked up by their mum and dad.

They didn't mean to but they do. You know. And that's classic, isn't it, we wrapped him up in cotton wool and now he can't do anything. And it's our fault. But if we hadn't done that, and he fell over and broke his arm, you'd be telling us what bad parents we were, and he'd be took off as social services would be sticking him in a fucking institution somewhere. So we can't win. And that becomes part of the dialogue then for the work. So it is layered and, you know, I'm reluctant to admit this but there is a huge intellectual process that goes into thinking about the work, the materials, the title and what I'm going to say about the work.

And that's important, that as a working class northener I'm not comfortable about admitting that, cause it smacks of intellectual namby-pamby middle class pooftery. So um, don't tell anybody!

A: This is all going to be printed!

T: Not that piece! But yeah, all that's important.

A: So how did that come about. Cause all the, like the sort of early life that you told me about is very much about activity, doing stuff and kind of making things and you've told me about how if you hadn't had a motorbike accident you'd be doing parkour.

T: I'd be what?

A: Doing that jumping off walls.

T: Oh yeah, no probably I would. Yeah, well I loved physical. I still feel quite..

A: So what you've just described there isn't something that you'd say oh, right, this is gonna produce somebody who does work with a lot of intellectual content. So where did that come from?

T: Explain that again.

A: It's like, somebody reading that first bit who doesn't know you and doesn't know your work, just this is sort of the beginning of a story.

T: Oily oik, who takes motorbikes to bits.

A: Yeah, they wouldn't get from that, ah this is going to be somebody who makes work with a strong intellectual content. So where did that come from, that process?

T: Right, I'll throw back at you, 'Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance'. I'm sure you've read it. And if you've not, you should. Because that might explain it. Cause, yeah.

A: Roughly four decades since I lost the copy I used to own.

T: I read it, I've probably read it about six times. It's a book you can read again. So I urge you to read it again.. I couldn't lend you my copy because it's so yellow and broken, and it would just fall apart in your hands. But it's battered for a reason. Yeah. I dunno. I mean

I'm a working class person, you take motorbikes to bits, you put them back together, you get covered in oil, you swear. Um. But I devoured books, you know. I, me and my dad never really got on. We were at loggerheads. But the older I get, and of course he's dead now, and I can't have this discussion with him. But he, he was right, always. I was too stubborn to realise, too thick, you know, and too um reluctant. But he didn't present it in a way that was accessible and acceptable to me. He always, he got the message right, he failed to get the delivery of the message right.

A: What was the message?

T: Well, the message was you read books and you learn things. And you apply that to practical things and they will be successful. There are no shortcuts even though you think there are. And you want there to be, and I know this because I, like you, have tried every shortcut, doesn't fucking work. So you do have to follow those rules to achieve what you want to achieve.

But he never had the patience to explain that. So I'd just say yeah. Yeah but fuck that. I'm gonna just go from three to seven to ten. And he'd just say then you're an idiot. Slap you round the back of the head. Yeah, and say what a waste of space you are and I'll say fuck you and I'll show you.. And sometimes you could. And then he'd say, yeah you're a clever idiot. And sometimes it wouldn't and he'd say, there you are, I fucking told you. And he'd win more often than I, you know, over ten rounds he would win seven of em. It's about, you know, it's not just about the message, it's about the delivery of the message as well, isn't it. And I, as I slowly become him, you know I suddenly realise that, that you do things and you can do things intuitively. And you can also read, and learn and apply, and you can do things that way. And having rigour is actually quite important. Whether you're making art or writing, or driving a bus, it doesn't matter what it is does it, you need to apply rigour to it. And I think it's one thing that disabled people actually have a standing start on, or whatever the word is. Because we are great planners and organisers and strategists. We don't apply those terms to it, we just think, fuck, if I'm gonna get through life, I've gotta do x,y,z, better make sure, what's plan B, okay, we're okay, and what's plan C if plan B goes tits-up. And we do that all the time. I do it, I'm sure you do it, I have contingencies for everything. And, and actually you can apply those contingencies to being successful in what you wanna do, whether it's making a piece of sculpture or running an organisation.

So being disabled's taught me huge amounts. Probably taught me a lot of patience as well, you know, and slowed me down. Otherwise I'd just be another motorcycle statistic on a tombstone somewhere. Ride fast, die young.

A: Holton Lee..

T: Holton Lee. Yeah, so I'd been at Citizen's Advice for a few years. And that was all good. And then my partner of the time, we just got settled, we'd built a really nice house in Grange-over-Sands, which you came to. And we had this beautiful view out over Morecambe Bay.

A: You built that house?

T: Well, we built part of it. And then we, it was an old stable and we put the extension on the back and the living room upstairs and we did quite a lot of work to it. And we had settled jobs, and it was a lovely place to live. And life looked great. And she saw this advert, in the Guardian, I think. And said, this'd be a brilliant job for you. Why? She said, well it's running this amazing, this what looks like an amazing place called Holton Lee. And you know, four aspects: the environment, spirituality, disability and the arts. And I said, this is an evangelical Christian hotbed of nonsense, you know. And then we, I applied, I thought fuck it apply, it was probably about ten grand more than I was earning at the time. And again the carrot of the car. But it was in Poole in Dorset, fucking miles away. I mean, I'd been to Poole, I'd been round the coast, we'd been holidaying round there. Beautiful place. Fuck it, applied for the job, got an interview, what's the worst that can happen, we can have an expenses paid weekend in Poole. That's the worst that can happen, you know. The unthinkable thing that could happen is that I'd actually be offered the job. And I distinctly remember saying, look, they're gonna want a retired vicar, or a retired social services person or, you know, somewhere in the senior management team, or a military person, actually, cause it's all public school boys and we know who runs the charities in this country, it's ex-military people, that's often what happens.

You look at the Scopes and the RNIDs and RNIBs and all that, they're all run by ex-military bods. It's the old boys act, isn't it? And I thought the last person they're gonna employ is a long-haired radical sculptor who's, you know, got my track record really. But SirTom Lees was an unorthodox man. And er, and I loved him. He was a brilliant man. And he was the Chair of the Board at that particular time. And the interview process was bizarre. We all went the night before to Tom Lees' house. To a sort of party, you know, sherry in this fucking great house. And er, and we, all the candidates, I think there were seven candidates for the job, were all at the party. And we all had dinner at Tom Lees's house. We all sat round this massive table in his drawing room. And you knew you were competing. And then there were the board in between each person that's competing. And I was sat next to this guy, he had a purple shirt not dissimilar to the shirt, your shirt, he had this massive crucifix on and I thought he was just a middle aged gay bloke, who turned out to be the Bishop of Salisbury. And er, and he said, Tony, what do you do, and I told him about Citizens' Advice and I said, what do you do Graham, and he said, well I'm the bishop of Salisbury. And I thought, I don't know what to say now, I've never met a bishop before. I don't, I don't know what to say, what do bishops do, oh what do you do, Graham? What actually does a bishop do? And I remember ringing my dad, how's it going, son. I said, I met the fucking bishop of Salisbury. He said, well the only thing you need to think about is that he sits on the toilet just like you do.

Yeah, fair enough, he probably does. And er, and the next day we went for the interviews. I was a vegetarian. And the only thing Tom Lees served was roast chicken and vegetables. So we just sat there and ate roast chicken and vegetables. Very nice. End of vegetarianism, really. And we went for interview. And again, all seven of us turned up for interview. So it was like sitting in the doctor's waiting room. You had a little tour round the estate, then you came back for your interview. And I was in me suit, me tie and about fifteen minutes before I thought, mm it's me next, I'll go for a pee. And, you remember Gateway Cottage, pair of cottages, and the toilets were outside at the back door.

A: Right.

T: Like a.. outhouse. So where's the toilet, right, toilet's through here. And I was on the sticks. It wasn't very accessible, I have to say. Um, so I'm on the sticks, go for a pee, one of those little brass lock things, pulled that across, had a pee, zipped up, washed my hands, got hold of the little brass thing to open it, fell off in my hand. Yeah. Trying to screw it back in and it just kept moving. Impossible. I was locked in the bog. And they are, it's like your bathroom, except slightly outside.

A: Yeah.

T: And there's nobody in that room. And the interviews are in this room. Bang, bang, bang, Hello! Let me out! Sweat pouring off me now, white shirt, fuck it, I opened the window and I crawled through the window. So, I like put the stick out of the window, I fucking climbed out, my balls are hanging on the fucking thing that's, you know the bit that you put the window-opening thing on. Dragging meself, it wasn't easy,. Fucking hard work climbing out the window. I didn't actually think I'd be able to do it, I mean you just do what you have to do sometimes, don't you. And I'm like really dishevelled when I went back in, I said, the lock, I explained what had happened. And then it's like, oh, your interview. I didn't have a chance to think, so I was in a state of, of madness really. So I went in, and er what do you do in your first six months. I'd fix the fucking toilet in there. That path needs fixing, this is ridiculous, how can you have this. And I just went on a major rant. A controlled, and relatively polite, I didn't say fix the fucking toilet, but I said there is a huge amount of things that are wrong here. And you know, you've gotta get the foundations right before you can even have these big dreams that you're talking about here. These dreams are rhetoric, we need to get the reality in place and you need to do this and you need to do that. And I remember them saying, well look there's four aspects here, you know look at your CV. I said, look, I'm an artist, I know about art. I did environmental art, I lived in a rural place, I went running around in woods, I've worked on a farm, I went bird-watching, I was in the boy scouts. I know about trees, I know what they're called, I know about nature, I'm not an enviromentalist but I know a huge amount about it. I know about disability, I'm a disabled person, politics of disability, I said I know nothing about spirituality, but you do. And as long as you do, that's all we need. I'll do the three things, you do the bit that you're good at. And er, I fucked off out. And before I, when I got back to Cumbria, Tom Lees had sent me a really long um, fax. So It was on the fax machine when I got in, saying would you like the job.

And I said, I'm not sure. I want to look at the books, I want to see all the job descriptions for all the staff, and I want to see the minutes from the trustee board meetings for the last year. So they all go, and it took ages, and I was hassling, I want the job descriptions, where are the job descriptions? And when I actually got the job and went down, the woman who became my PA said 'I had to type all those job descriptions, because nobody had a job description. We had to find out what a job description was and what person specification was.. I worked for the CAB. It's bureaucracy. You know, but it's done right. What is your equal opportunities policy? Oh, we'll send it you. *Write the fucking equal opportunities policy.*

So they sent me all this stuff. And I read the minutes. And it said, the last minute said, can we bring somebody down from the north when we know we've got three months operating costs. You know, can we justify bringing somebody from a job? And I thought, fuck, they've only got three months' money. And I took the accounts, I'm not very good at money, accountancy. I took it to a guy I knew who was a treasurer for a charity. And he said, it's not

great news, you'd be a nutter to take this on. They've got no fucking money, you know. They're rich. These are middle class people, well connected, you know. There must be enough raw material there, if I can get them focused in on what, on the job in hand, we can do it. And I rang Bert Massie at RADAR and said, Bert, I'm thinking about taking this job at Holton Lee, they've got three months running costs, fucking great, three hundred and fifty acres, it's got, it's a blank slate, I can make it fantastic. I need to go to someone for money. Who can I go to for money?

And he said, ring Peter Attenborough at the Rank Foundation, tell him what you're doing. So I just rang Peter Attenborough, you could do things like this in those days, Peter Attenborough, beautiful guy, lived in Shropshire or somewhere like that, 'I'll come down and see you'. Came down, had a look round, said that's amazing Tony, what you gonna do? I said I'm gonna transform this place, Peter, but I can't do it without money. How much do you need? I said, well I need a salary. And that will, if I can have a salary for twelve months, three years, maybe I can raise enough money to not worry about my own salary but to just get on and build it. He said, yeah, because you can go to such and such for money for that and you can go to such and such for money, they all know each other. He said, well, we're investing in leadership and excellence or something like that. And he got me sixty grand. Just like that. I mean, within weeks. And that was my salary over three years. It was like thirty grand, twenty grand, ten grand over three years, something like that. And I just got my sleeves rolled up and I worked twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week there really. I invested a huge amount in Holton Lee.

And I was forty, something like that. You know, I was in my prime, really. I'd got, I felt like I was, I felt I'd got knowledge, um gravitas is the wrong word, you know I felt I knew shit, you know, working at the RADAR, CAB, I knew to go to Social Services, not mess about, go to the Director. I met the Director at one of these gigs. And the Director of Social Services, I actually knew him before, pure chance, because he was called Robin, he was a young, I think he was the youngest Director of Social Services in the country, you know. So it was, quite euphoric. When did Tony Blair become prime minister?

A: Ninety-seven.

T: Roundabout that time. Would it be? Probably. So I mean, the world felt like a great place. You know, and it was like fuck it, New Labour, let's get on, let's re-invent this place. And er, I think it was quite euphoric. And we did, I think we did great things. I remember talking to the people at the Art House. And I was frustrated because it took me three years to build Faith House. They just said fuck me, we've been fundraising for ten years for the Art House, we're still not there.

I was there twelve years, you know. We built Faith House, the artists' studios, all the paths, tramper wheelchairs, you know we transformed things like the Dutch barn. I mean the artists' studios, they were a fantastic resource. You know, we did up the ceramics place, we did the Barn for the office and the, you know that meeting room at the end, we did the cottages up down, where my office used to be, do you remember at Gateway Cottage, rent them out, we did the old cottage where you stayed with Maggie Woolley one night, do you remember, fell in the fucking ditch and couldn't wake her up to get in. Do you remember that?

A: Was it..? I remember.

T: Cause she was Deaf and you couldn't wake her up. Slept in the fucking porch or something.

A: Nah, that sounds like Julie MacNamara's story.

T: I'm sure you told me,. You fell over on the way back from Faith House.

A: There was one time, I, with that, do you remember Manchester Coalition got some money, they were hoping to do an archive, and there was a Deaf guy who was doing that. It was him. And I, thinking I knew which way we were going said, go over there, and led him into a fucking ditch. But I don't remember any sleeping in the porch.

T: Well that was Holton Lee days. I mean, they were mad days. We did some great things there. And that's where we envisioned the NDACA project. And it was gonna be there, there was gonna be a building and.. When I left, I raised three hundred and fifty grand from the Arts Council to build the er, the archive. And when I left, they recruited a new director eventually. And they decided not to go ahead with that development, sent three hundred and fifty grand back to the Arts Council. Fuck me, that's criminal.

But time moves on. You know, that world changed.

A: She was useless.

T: Yeah, I know. (...) But they messed about, Allan. That board of trustees, re-organised, because it was growing and developing.

A: I remember, Sian Williams told me, I dunno if I've told you this story, one time. You know she does yoga.

T: Yeah.

A: The guy who runs the yoga course, she goes on these weekend, these residential yoga retreats for a week at a time. And the guy who ran them, he was looking for somewhere new to do them. And she suggested Holton Lee 'cause they've got the barn and they've got all that. And they rang up and they said, oh we can't cater for that.

T: What now? That's ridiculous.

A: How fucking difficult is it to ring an agency and get a cook in? Even if you'd fired the people that were working there.

T: I used to run...

A: Somebody is ringing up and offering to pay you money, and you've got a problem balancing the books. Like, for fuck's sake.

T: D'you know what, Allan, I used to run yoga weekends. Sian Williams went to them. And the person who ran them for me was Sarah, who we just talked about?

A: Sarah Scott?

T: Sarah Scott. She ran them for me. And we, we let them cater for themselves, we just said, there's the kitchen. They don't fucking eat anything, they eat nuts. You know, plants and fucking bits of soya. That's it. And they're, yeah, just said there're the keys, get on with it.

We ran loads of really successful. Don't forget I did loads of stuff down there, Allan. They used to call me..

A: I know, that's why..

T: They used to call me Daley, what was that guy called?

A: Arthur Daley.

T: Arthur Daley. Cause I fucking, I had about fifteen different money-making schemes going on. That, you know, just raised money to go into central funds to make things happen. And we took chances on things. You know, we had weddings there. Tanya Raabe got married there, we did all sorts of things.

A: (..) About that.

T: Yeah. It was great actually, I had a great twelve years. When Tom Lees was the Chair, and that board was really dynamic, it changed things, . You know, the Board changed and they wanted to run the organisation in a way that I didn't want it to run. And it's a classic case of parting company, you know. You don't want my vision, I don't want your reality. You know, they wanted to departmentalise it. One of the people that came on to the board was a manager in the Health Service. You know the people who've ruined the Health Service, you know, the middle managers who, you know, everything's about money and nothing's about service. I just thought, I don't want to work for these people any more, no. It's not, they are not the original visionaries, you know the original visionaries were wise, kind and, knew what they wanted and allowed me to get on and do it, you know. They might not have done it how I did it, but they let me get on and do it. And the new, the board that came in because we were successful wanted to um, develop the operation. I said, no, hang on, I'm, me and the staff are responsive for the operational activity, you are responsible for governance, that's what boards do. No, no, we are going to restructure and we're going to do this, and we're going to do .. That's not your job, that's our job. Okay, if you want to run it, fine, you get on with it. I remember saying, you know, fine you pay me for thirty-five hours a week, I'll be working a thirty-five hour week, you know, nine till five. Yeah but who's going to come out and leave keys for people in the cottage on Sunday? Oh, I don't know. Tell me, in your new structure, who's going to do that. Ah well.. Yeah, okay.

So what's gonna happen? Who's going to manage at night when something goes wrong? Oh, I dunno. Well, who would do it? I would. But don't forget, I'm not gonna do it now

because I work from nine till five. So, you are gonna have to sort out who gets the key on Sunday morning. And actually, word of warning, they won't come on Sunday morning, because little Johnny'll have wet his pants. Or there'll be an accident on the M27 and it'll, you'll be sat here at 11 o'clock on Sunday morning, and they may show up at two o'clock. If you're lucky. Happened all the time.

You lose the goodwill, don't you? Organisations like that run on goodwill. Oh well.

I've booked a taxi for three o'clock, so we can have another crack at it if there's a lot to do.

A: Well, we haven't started Shape yet.

T: No, we haven't this is very true. So, are you up for a third...

A: Oh, absolutely.

T: Yeah.. Alright. So that's Holton Lee. We did a load of good stuff, I think. And, if you talk to people who I, whose opinions I value in this sector, who came to Holton Lee. So people like you, Julie McNamara, um, Nancy Willis, Tanya Raabe, I can't think.. But you know, LDAF, you know. Caglar, Colin, all those people.

A: (..) Ju Gosling..

T: Yeah, exactly. And Trish started work there, you know.

A: Yeah, I know.

T: And she runs Disability Arts Online now. She started as a rookie, didn't know the first thing about disability or disability arts. But has become a very good ally.

A: Yeah.

T: So Holton Lee is responsible for, Sue Austin showed her first work there as a student, sent it for the Holton Lee Open, because don't forget I did the Holton Lee Open before we did the Shape Open.

A: Right.

T: Um. And this picture came, wrapped in bubble wrap. And it just appeared. And I could see this weird thing through the bubble wrap. Fuck, that looks like a swimming pool. There's a woman in a wheelchair in, underwater. What the fuck? And all this black hair, come on, get it out, let's have a look at it. I thought wow! That's a surreal image. Brilliant, you know, brilliant image.

A: So she, she got the image.

T: She made the image way back then.

A: Before she actually put it into reality.

T: Well, I think the image has got a reality, personally. You know, as an artwork. But I can see that she'd want to push the idea as far as you could push it. But sometimes you push the idea and it, it goes, I dunno, it gets overused.

A: But actually doing it in real life is what's led to TED talk..

T: Oh yeah, yeah, so in one sense it's been massively..

A: And NASA, and..

T: Yeah, massively successful for her. So it's been a real, a really great spring board moment. But I still think that original image is the powerful image. Cause it just feels like art. That sounds terrible.

A: The decision to go to Shape?

T: Well, I was pretty pissed off at Holton Lee by that time, because I'd been there twelve years. Two things happened to me. I think every five years, I really sit down and work, what's the next plan? What's the next five year plan look like? And what do I need to do to get there? And, what, what's the next five years? When I get to it, what's that gonna look like? So I always do a sort of life and work planning. And for me life and work are one and the same thing. Everything I've done I've wanted to do, I've been really lucky. But I've also been, it's that, the more you practice, the luckier you get sort of argument, that I've been, I've been quite, quite, er thoughtful in setting out a plan of things. So I knew I wasn't gonna be at Holton Lee forever.
And I do get restless. And I think double digits, you know, once you've been somewhere ten years, then you really need to think about it, cause you just end up being stuck in a rut.

A: Yeah.

T: And it might be a comfy, well-paid rut, but it's still a fucking rut. And just not exciting. And I, I, I mean even if the board were brilliant and everything was hunkydory and everything was going as I wanted it to go, I'd still have been getting kind of itchy feet and a bit restless. Because I sort of think, oh well, we've done that before, you know, oh we've built a buil.. I've built three buildings. Do I wanna build more? No, I think that's enough. Apart from the fact that they kill you, you know building buildings is not something to take on lightly, it's massively stressful. And problematical. And most people build one. Fuck me, I don't wanna go there again!

I built three, just at Holton Lee. But I loved it, you know, working with someone like Tony Fretton, the architect. You just learn so much. Just searching for that knowledge and learning stuff, I just thrive on that, you know., that's what I.. And that informs your sculptural practice. You know, when you go back to it. So I was always, you know, getting eight, nine years into it, thinking okay what's next.

And the Shape job came up, you know.. And I just thought, I've always wanted to live in

London, I mean I've worked in London all my life really, in and out, in and out, you know, for RADAR, well started coming down here for exhibitions, then for RADAR, then for the, the Citizen's Advice Bureau. So I wasn't a stranger to London. The idea of living here, immersed in it. And of course, I always thought Shape was a good organisation, had great potential, let's say, as an organisation. You know, I thought, you are in London, you're the centre of the universe, you can do something with Shape if you want to. And you knew about Shape from North-West Shape, you know I never really engaged with Shape, actually while I was at Holton Lee. And I just thought, ah I could do stuff. And I thought, you know..

A: So you didn't have reservations about Shape like some people?

T: I didn't actually. It wasn't about me joining Shape and carrying the torch. It was about me going to Shape and reinventing it. So um, I never go anywhere and think, just carry on doing that, cause, for me there wouldn't be any point in doing that. I don't wanna run anything, this sounds terribly arrogant, I'm sorry if it sounds arrogant, um, but I don't fucking care. Cause it's true, I'm not a runner of things, you know I don't wanna go in and run something, I want to go in and invent something, create something, develop something. I'm a development worker really. So that idea of being a development worker for RADAR, it was a completely open book. Develop whatever you want to do that empowers disabled people. So I thought, okay, whadda I wanna do? Access groups, you know, working with social services, town halls, planners, that will work. So at Shape, it was, what do I want Shape to be under my directorship, you know, this is what I want it to look like. So I had thought what I wanted it to look like, and then I set out to try and achieve that. So things like Adam Reynolds Bursary, Shape Open, these were all.., working with British Council, building a better relationship with the Arts Council, you know, working with mainstream galleries in London. These were all things that I thought I wanted to do when I applied for the job. And they were all things that we've got on and done.

So, yeah. That's my taxi probably. Might be a good place to stop! Sort of why Shape? Why Shape's obviously London, more money and done everything I could do at Holton Lee, I think. I actually thought that they would build the, I was very naive, still, without thinking that was, yeah, without thinking that I was being naive. But I just thought they'd build the archive, thought it was a done deal. We had the architect, we had the plans in place, you know we had everything. *(I dunno that I'm trapped in here Allan.)* I thought everything was in place. And I'd go back. Thanks..

I thought they'd get a really good director, because Holton Lee had got ten years, twelve years track record, I thought it'd be a really juicy job for somebody, I thought somebody interesting'll get the job, and they'd ring me up and say Tony, give us a lift with this archive, and we'd all go down and we'd build the fucking archive. And Shape would be involved in that. And instead they said, d'you know what, we don't wanna do this, it's not part of our agenda any more. And they killed it. And I knew..

A: But we own all the stuff in the Barn, all the same.

T: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah, exactly. And I thought, you know what, okay, it's that old thing about ...

Tony Heaton interview 10.03.2017

A: So you haven't had any breakfast?

T: No, I never do, Allan. Never have any breakfast. Rarely have any lunch. Eat like a pig at night.

A: So, Shape..

T: Yeah, fire away. I'm gonna put this away now. Go on, keep talking.

A: Tell me about..

T: Shape.

A: What it was like when you went in?

T: What was it like?

A: What you felt needed doing, how you went about it.

T: Well it was a bit, Steve had already left, Steve Mannix had already left, he'd gone 2012. There wasn't much of a handover, because Steve was already thrown in at the deep end then at er, at um, I don't remember, what was it called? LOCOG, yeah. So, I mean I did a little bit of catching up with him, did a bit of reading. And it was very much straight in at the deep end for me, really. And um, and I knew, I sort of knew the direction of travel I wanted the organisation to go in. I wanted to bring it much more closely into some of the things that I thought were missing, predominantly visual arts, within our sector. And really it was something that I'd started at Holton Lee, the idea of promoting and developing visual artists' work, partly because that's what I'm interested in, so I think regardless of who you come to see or wherever, they may have an agenda to work to. But most of the people worked to their own agenda and that's, I think that's what you have to do you know, from a leadership point of view you lead the organisation in the direction you think it ought to be travelling in. And I thought visual arts was a niche area that wasn't being addressed by any other organisation. So that's what I started to push towards. Some people on the staff team thought, yeah, that's a good idea, that's where we should be going and some people didn't and they left. And that's what happens, you know.

And you don't, you know you don't get fazed by that. You just recruit people in to do the jobs that you want them to do. And they buy into your vision and off you go. So the first few months were certainly months of change and redirection. And that's, that can be bit rocky, so you've gotta hold your nerve and get on and do that, you're not going to be everybody's best friend, you're not gonna be everybody's flavour of the month, but you know, you know eventually you're going to move the organisation into a better place. Um, and that's I think what we've done over the last nine, ten years. And some good people have been around for a long time as well. On the Shape journey to get us to where we want to be. And of course now we've got David starting. Hopefully, more of the same.

So I think, interestingly, the real catalyst for me was making the Adam Reynolds Bursary work in those early days. Cause Adam had not long died. He was a personal friend. You know all about Adam too, because he was a friend of yours and you knew what had gone on and what his work was about. So I really wanted to establish an annual bursary in his name, because I didn't want, I didn't want his contribution to disability arts to be lost, I don't think it would have been, actually, but I thought the bursary was a really great way of continually reminding ourselves as a disability arts community, movement, whatever we call it, of the value that Adam brought to it. And the fact that he was a huge, huge loss to what we were trying to achieve. And I'm really pleased that the bursary's not only given an opportunity to some artists who we know, but it's also given some real opportunity to artists we'd never ever come across before, were not part of the disability arts movement. So it's been a, it's been a really good vehicle for um bringing in new artists who are good.

And it goes from strength to strength, you know, it's been in some fantastic galleries. We started at the Camden Arts Centre, which is where Adam had exhibited and where he had friends with Jenny Lomax , the director of Camden Arts Centre. So he, they knew Adam and they knew his work, so they were behind it, which was fantastic, you know. And er, and then we took it to some great, surprising places, you know, Spike Island in Bristol, BALTIC, up in the North-East, Victoria and Albert,'kin ell, Victoria and Albert Museum, great. Interesting venue for a bursary. And New Art Gallery, Walsall, you know, Bluecoat Gallery in Liverpool. And now we're at Turner Contemporary down in Margate, you know it's, it's been around. And part of the strategy is to take it to different parts of the country, so it's not always in London and it means that disabled artists in different regions can get a better chance from an access point of view, 'cause not everybody can come and hang out in London, you know, it's important that we offer the bursary to people where, you know if they wanna travel from home because they've got a setup that meets their access needs then it's important that we can do that. I just think it's been really successful. Again, the Shape Open, I think it's gone from strength to strength. Of course, that's something I started at Holton Lee.

I mean it worked really well at Holton Lee, I mean one of the outstanding examples of the Holton Lee Open was Sue Austin, you know, and she, she sent me a piece of work when she was a student. And it was the fucking underwater wheelchair, you know, wrapped in bubble wrap. And as soon as I saw it, through the bubble wrap, you know I couldn't wait to get the bubble wrap off it, it was like what the hell is that? And it was a photographic print on aluminium. And even through the bubble wrap it blew me away. Exciting image! And er, you know, and talking to Sue Austin afterwards, she said oh I hesitated to send it in. You know I didn't think, ooh, you know you would like it. And you think Sue, really interesting artist, lots of confidence and having a bit of a dilemma about whether it would play. Fantastic. And she's gone from strength to strength.

So it, you know if we didn't have the Shape Open, sorry if we didn't have the Holton Lee Open, you know, what would her trajectory be? I don't know.

A: Have Holton Lee continued holding an open?

T: Oh yeah, no, well. I mean, they've.. The problem with our sector Allan is we light candles and build sort of foundations then we don't get the critical mass do we, because Holton Lee's gone off in a different direction. But if there was a Holton Lee and a Shape

doing what we're doing now and somewhere 3 or 4 different places doing what we're doing, if the archive was established in a building, you know, it would strengthen what we're trying to achieve, 'cause you need great artists, you need great work but you also need institutions to sell and promote that work. I'm doing a little talk at Awkward Bastards in a month's, couple of week's, time, whenever. And I just thought, I'm just gonna put disability arts into Tate's website. Thirty-seven items came up, photograph of a one-legged man playing a banjo. Not strictly a disability arts, you know. Nothing really came up.

It's very interesting that you know whilst we, within disability arts, see it as a driver, almost as a life force really, the rest of the world just doesn't even know it's there, does it? It's still..

A: On the other hand, we were in the National Gallery a couple of weeks ago.

T: Yeah

A I was like, sort of wandering around a bit while Vicky's care worker was in the loo. And outside the library there was a glass case, I thought I wonder what that is. It was a display of stuff by Sameena Rana.

T: Really! Bloody hell. Yeah. Where have they got that from then?

A: Dunno.

T: Is it still there now?

A: Quite likely.

T: Was that National Gallery?

A: Yes.

T: I'm just going to send myself a quick email to make sure I go and look at it. Well that's extraordinary, isn't it, that stuff pops up like that.

A: Yeah. You know where the toilets are.

T: Yeah I know exactly

A: On that sort of floor in between the ground floor where you, in the Sainsbury Centre and the first floor where the art is. There's a library there. Outside the library there's a glass case.

T: Right. I'll remember where it is. So it's Sameena. I wonder what that's about , then.

A: That rather what I thought!

T: The National Portrait Gallery?

A: The National Gallery.

T: Bloody hell. Well, I'll have to go and look at that. National Gallery, why?

A: I'm sure it was the..

T: I'll go and check it out. Sent meself an email. I send myself emails all the time simply to remind me what I'm supposed to be doing.

A: Was it Tate?

T: Oh, come on Allan, for fuck's sake. Where was it?

A: I've been getting around a bit!

T: So you think it might be that Tate.

A: Might be Tate Britain.

T: Bollocks, I was in there the other week to see the Hockney. Tate, right, I'll send meself another..

A: Yeah we..
T: I'll find it, don't worry.

A: Yes it was, I think it was Tate Britain.

T: Tate Britain.

A: That's more like..

T: I'll ask Marcus, He'll know. I'll check that out. So um, so I think, from Shape's point of view getting Adam Reynolds up and running, once that was established I wanted to establish a Shape Open, because I felt that Adam Reynolds was going to attract high calibre artists, and what I really needed to do was re-establish Shape's credentials in many ways as a leading disability-led arts organisation. So it was really important to sort of get really good artists doing really good work in really mainstream galleries. Because that would get us a lot of attention. And by getting the attention we could very quickly establish Shape as a leading visual arts disability-led art organisation. So it was a pretty crude strategy, but I mean it worked, you know.

I can't remember that saying, but you know never, never overestimate the intelligence of the average. What is the saying, you know, it's lowest common denominator sometimes isn't it, for ah getting information out to people, you've got to really hammer it home, it's got to be simple, straightforward. So it is, here are good quality artists bidding for a bursary in the memory of a really good disabled artist in a really good contemporary gallery. So you start to put all that together and you sort of got to be able to be on a winner, haven't you? So, just get it established really. And the thing is, once you've done it once or twice, you then start to

build a reputation where you, you know in the early days I had to go and knock on people's doors and say, look, this'll be brilliant, you'll really enjoy it, it'll be great, don't worry it'll all work, nothing'll go horribly wrong. To the point where people are now coming to us and saying we'd love to host the Adam Reynolds Bursary. You know, which is what you want, you want galleries to go 'd'you know what, we should be hosting this, cause it's a really good thing'. So that's fab, you know it's great that that's happening.

And the same with the Shape Open. Again, what I wanted to do with the Shape Open is say, well, we've done, we've done high quality good artists, I mean I always laughingly called um the Adam Reynolds, it's a bit like Turner Prize for disabled artists, you know. And it's kinda, kinda, I think it's up there. But the Shape Open is aimed at a different group of artists, it's opened up, it's really, though good established artists still apply and get in, which is great. I don't want people to think oh it's only for emerging or young artists, I don't want people to think that at all. But it is an opportunity as an open exhibition that, you know there's a fair chance that work'll get in. And we get some good work, you know, the last exhibition, forty-odd, fifty pieces of work, you know all I think pretty strong. And having Yinka..

A: You'd chosen a very, a very strong subject for that one, hadn't you?

T: Yes. It was my swansong, really, going out and we wanted something political and, also we are in a political time, when we are back full circle in many ways to where we were when you and I were a lot younger. Going, you know, fuck them let's get the banners and let's get these politicians to realise what they're doing to us as disabled people. And I think first time round, I think we gave them the benefit of the doubt, that they hadn't quite cottoned on to our oppression. But we can't give them that this time. They know full well what they're doing when they're killing disabled people. Or denying us access to transport or buildings or jobs or benefits or whatever it is, you know, they're doing that knowingly. It's different, different kettle of fish now.

But we still seem fairly powerless to do anything about it. Which is a worry. So yes, politics. The politics of disability was I think an important clarion call as part of Shape Open. And you know, it, it did raise people's awareness. And I think there was some strong works in there. And er it's great to have Yinka as a patron. That works very well. And I think to have attracted Yinka back into Shape, where he can see the value of the organisation and he can see the direction of travel, you know from a visual arts point of view and he can see it giving disabled people opportunities, both on the staff team, within the workforce, within the volunteers and within the generation of art. You know, he sees it as being a good thing. He's a generous guy, Yinka, you know, he's um, he's very time-poor, it's precious. And for him to spend an evening with us at a Private View, everybody wants to talk to him, you know, I mean he is Mr Popular. And everybody knows who he is, everybody wants to have a chat. And I think he likes it, you know. I think he just enjoys hanging out with people, having a chat, you know and just seeing what's going on, we had two hundred people at the private view. Phenomenal, you know. And I know a lot of them come because he's there. I don't care. What we do to put the bums on the seats, you know It works and it's good. And we've just done this thing at the Tate, so again I think. I think in the last ten years we've done some really good work at Shape, we resurrected NDACA, didn't we, you know, which was, that would have been a disaster, if it would have languished at Holton Lee, particularly in the direction of travel that Holton Lee want to take, which is not an arts-based, you know, it's not, it doesn't

lead on arts and it doesn't, and it didn't want to build the archive. So I think we could have just said oh well, lost opportunity but we didn't, we said let's grab it. And hopefully that's well and truly in the right now.

A: Is all the stuff that was in the barn still down at Holton Lee?

T: No, no, we've got most of that work. And um, you know it's in storage, some of it needs repairing, some of it needs, you know, some work doing on it, no I think we've got pretty much all of it. And er, you know the NDACA project is gathering steam and getting on with it. You know, relationship with the New University, Bucks to house the collection, the ephemera, all the stuff there in the library, fantastic building with an exhibition space that we can show the real work in. So, once we get launched a series of exhibitions, you know that really link in to some of the history and some of the..

A: Is the Shelf Life stuff..?

T: Oh yeah, I think the Shelf Life..

A: The books?

T: I don't know where all the books are, but they must be somewhere. But yes, just to resurrect that I think would be a very interesting, you know let's, or to curate something based on that. You know the next iteration of it perhaps. I don't think good ideas just come around once and you say oh, that was a good idea, you know, I'm a big believer in resurrecting and repackaging stuff. And Shelf Life would be a really good, I think a really good opportunity to do something. As part of the archive, you know, to really put a spotlight on it. Good idea. Another email to myself in a minute.

And, of course, Unlimited. You know, pushing for Unlimited, pushing for some thing to come out of 2012.. I think was a really important, to grab that opportunity, you know, right place, right time. You can't, I mean that happens so infrequently in life that you can't just watch stuff like that go past, you've got to go okay, how do we capitalise on this, you know. And um we did, you know we got that and we really capitalised on it. And I think that's been a fantastic success and when I sum up Shape through my tenure, it, it's really been the idea of, it's sort of a three-pronged approach. And the NDACA prong is scooping up all the past and making sense of it, owning it, you know back to the nothing without, nothing about us without us. Um giving life to that material and that history that we were making thirty years ago, but we didn't actually realise we were making history. You know, I mean you were probably the antenna of that, going d'you know what we really need to make sense of this. We may be having a good time, we may be, you know enjoying ourselves and we're young and we're a bit crazy, but at some point we've got to start analysing, thinking about and articulating what it is that we're doing, you know.

A: I think that's to do with, with impairments..

T: Well of history..

A: It's like, different, people with different impairments are kind of conscious of different

stuff. So I think, wheelchair users are going to be very conscious of barriers.

T: Yes.

A: And that stuff. I'm somebody who has epilepsy. Um between the time that I was first diagnosed epileptic and the time that I first met somebody else that I knew to have my impairment was fucking twenty-six years.

T: I know. It's madness that, isn't it?
A: So, I'm really conscious of, of that, that, that thing of how it's possible for people to, to get left out.

T: You need a new T-shirt.

A: You need to..

T: You need an I'm an epileptic, you know, I dunno, think of a punchline for it, you know.

A: I did at one time.

T: Did you? I'm an epileptic, get me out of here, T-shirt.

A: I had a badge saying, oh fuck what did it... Oh, I dunno, proud to be epileptic or something.

T: Yeah. Was it David Hevey who met, who was the other epileptic you came across?

A: Well I, I wrote 'Disabled We Stand'. And I ran into David. David had read 'Disabled We Stand'. It's like, 'Disabled We Stand'. It's funny, 'Disabled We Stand' was a book, didn't sell very well.

T: Have you got any copies of it or not?

A: Yeah.

T: I'd like to buy a copy off you. I don't have a copy of it.

A: It's available online.

T: No seriously.

A: Possibly.

T: If you have, I'll buy one off you now, you know. Because I don't. I left my copy at Holton Lee, or I lent it to somebody or, and again it's one of those things, you know. I've got thousands of books that I've lent people that I've never ever seen again. And it's only as you get older and think, I wish I had that, probably out of print. You know, David Hevey's, can't remember what his book is, I don't have a copy of that any more either. And these are

important sources.

T: Nobody's got any copies of these books any more. Colin Barnes, history of disabled people book, you know, I had loads of copies of that, haven't got a copy anywhere. It's important.

So yeah, so, um, where were we? Shape Open. The other thing is, establishing things like Adam Reynolds and the Shape Open to be annual events, because what it forces us to do is just keep on that central track. So, I was talking about the three strands, so the first strand I talk about is Shape's NDACA project, well we scoop all that history, we own it, it's nothing about us without us, the Unlimited strand is here are disabled artists making the future, right? So they're the future and then we have the third strand, which is what I call the NPO strand, the National Portfolio, Arts Council-funded strand, which is the train-track of all the stuff we just do. And that's things like the Shape Open, the Adam Reynolds, the networking, the things that we do at the Tate Gallery, the things we do in partnership with other people. So all the partnership and project work is the central strand. Then the stuff that comes out of the central strand that makes history, that's valued, we scoop it up in to NDACA and we give people loads of opportunities through Unlimited for them to be brilliant at what they do, it's well-resourced, they get an opportunity to work with producers, they get decent amount of money, they can go ahead and do things, you know. Look at people like Jess Thom. You know, who'd have thought ten years ago somebody with Tourette's, you know would not only be performing to packed houses but be on the TV. And the radio. And you just can't, can you imagine it when we started doing this disability arts stuff all those years ago that somebody with Tourette's would, you know, be out there. I can't..

A: She's so fucking good as well.

T: Yeah. Oh yeah, cause they've gotta be good, you don't get an Unlimited commission unless you're good. You know, Owen Lowery as a poet. Fantastic. Maybe in our day Owen Lowery would be working and writing as a poet. But I don't know whether Jess Thom would. Pretty phenomenal. So, because of prejudice. You know because we had all those discussions, didn't we, you know.. Bloody disabled people, should they be in our gang, you know. Mental health, is that part of our gang? You know there was a lot of weird discussion going on. And that's part of the times, I suppose, isn't it? And some good rational and rationed arguments about why people should be, why disability had to broaden. Because if we were looking at the social model and we were looking at barriers, then of course those people from those groups that were under question, I mean it's hard to think we even questioned it or debated it, so bloody obvious isn't it? You know, course, of course there are, you know, they're facing barriers. Course within the social model, they're discriminated against, oppressed. Yeah. Yeah.

So um, so I think Shape's done some great work, actually. We could have done a lot more work with more money. You know when you think we get less money than the Director of the Royal Opera House gets paid for his salary, then I think we achieve a lot, you know, very limited amount of money that we pull in. But then again, in terms of the arts economy, you know, we generate a lot more money than we get in terms of our support. So we turn every pound into three, four pounds worth of value. So it's not like we're a drain on people. Yeah, I think Shape's in a good place. But I would say that.

A: That's your job!

T: Fortunately I can prove it, I can point to things that prove it, I can point to boring things like, you know the fact that income has gone up, but I can also point to people who've done amazing things because we've supported them. I mean they're always capable of that great work, but they just need the investment. Can you imagine, I mean I just think back to the wasted opportunities sometimes, you know the really interesting artists that were around in those early days when we were first kicking around in this disability arts world that we didn't even really know was a world. There's some really great talent that didn't get the investment to do really interesting work, you know. Some of them are dead now, some of them not around, some of them not doing this kind of work. But you know er, you know..
A: Some of them just moved on.

T: Yes. Yeah. Eddy Hardy.

A: (Making a living..)

T: Yeah, artists like Eddy Hardy doing amazing things. Aidan Shingler, you know, fantastic artist, you know ten years ago, fifteen years ago I'd have said he was right up there, you know top of the pile for me, very interesting case.

A: What do you make of people who, who are disabled people doing excellent work but reject the label of disability artist.

T: It's a prerogative, isn't it? I wouldn't, I'm not evangelical about it, at all. I never really have been. And people used to say this when I, before I was chief Executive of Shape or director at Holton Lee, when I was just making sculpture, you know, I'd just say from my own work's perspective I make work that I think of that's interesting to me. And that resonates with me. And if other people like it, great. If they don't, who cares. And it often has an disability reference or resonance within it. Because it's interesting, you know, it's interesting subject matter.

So um you know do I make disability arts work, well yes. But not entirely. Sometimes I do stuff that just interests me for whatever reason. And it might be work that's trying to get you to another place, it is experimental, like stone carving for instance. Some of my stone carving is definitely not what you would call disability arts, but it's more about exploring the medium. It's experiments. But some of it absolutely is, you know. Um, you know and a couple of marble pieces that I've done, very, you know, they're, 'Serpent Form', very much based around disability arts. Drawn from a conversation with Mike O'Hara, you know the visually impaired painter and sculptor. Who I worked with down in Dorset, down in Holton Lee.

A: Mm, I remember him.

T: Yeah. And it was just a conversation that , that he and I had. And he was talking about losing his sight. And he was, sort of almost describing, I can't remember, almost like watching a snake move. And you can't really see, you can only really watch a snake move when you get it between two axis points. So if you watch a snake moving across a field it's

very, you know, just a flat plane, it's really hard to figure out how it's moving or how fast it's moving, it's only when you, cause of the way it moves, it's not very obvious. And he was sort of saying that losing his sight was this idea of a snake moving, that you knew, you knew it was happening, but you didn't know what the rate of travel was. So you knew you were a bit blinder than you were three months ago but you can't actually remember how blind you were then. But you knew you were getting blinder and it was, I mean that sounds quite crude but it was basically that sort of conversation.

And 'Serpent Form' came entirely out of that. And it was this idea of carving the marble very thinly within the circle of this serpent form. So you got this quite nice twisty form, which is a beautiful thing to carve in marble. So it's quite tactile and, and sensual, you know marble, curved marble that you can stroke is fucking sexy stuff. Um but actually this very thin thing where you can see this opaque light coming through and the veins in the marble is very much like the idea of opaque sight, you know, trying to see things through this, you know, slightly milky material. You can see light and shade through it but very difficult to see, but when you look at the material you can see veins in it. And it's a bit like when you have your eyes tested and that blinding light goes off and you see all those veins somehow. So for me to pack all that into that sculpture is you know, that's what it's about , that's the end product. But if you were looking at it you wouldn't necessarily say oh its disability arts. Unless I told somebody what it was. You wouldn't know, you'd just, you'd think it was either a dull or a.. interesting, moderately interesting piece of carved marble. So it's about the stories as well, disability arts, isn't it? I think often titles and stories are really an important part of the package. I don't know how we got on to this. How did we get on to this?

A: I asked you about..

T: Oh yeah if they reject the label.

T: So I never rejected the label or thought about it too much. I don't feel like I've signed up to the disability arts army or anything. I've not been conscripted in, I'm a willing volunteer. But I do other stuff. But then if people want the label then fine, I think, I think reject all labels really. Best way.

A: Any art movement has to spring from what artists are doing.

T: Yeah. Yeah, you don't come up with a theoretical framework and then try and attract artists to (laughs) come and work. You know pop art was very much of that time wasn't it, it was.

A: Have you read Tom Wolfe's book, The Painted Word?

T: No, I've never.

A: Oh that's funny.

T: The book?

A: Yeah.

T: Yeah. Tom Wolfe, another email to self.

A: He's another..

T: He's a good writer actually, yeah.

A: Great sort of contrarian, really. He argues that, like, twentieth century art is like a series of manifestos, with, with work produced to justify the manifesto rather than the manifesto produced to explain the work.

T: Did he do the Tangerine-coloured, whatever it was

A: The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby.

T: That's a great book.
A: Technicolor!

T: But I've not read this what's it called, painted.

A: The Painted Word.

T: The Painted Word. I'll read that. You have to remind me. You'd better write these down so I can remember at the end of the discussion, to stick them all on one email rather than keep writing myself .. Yeah., So yeah, reject labels, yeah. But disability arts were really interesting.

A: Tell me more about, about your artistic career, your artistic, we'd kinda got up to Great Britain from a Wheelchair. How's your work evolved?

T: Well slowly. Cause I'm not a fast, you know I always say this, and I probably said it early on when we started talking, is that the world's full of stuff. Some of it's good, some of it's rubbish. And I don't particularly want to add more stuff to an already over-cluttered world. But I am compelled to make things. Cause it almost feels like, you can have an idea and think well, that's interesting, toss it to one side and just..carry on drinking. But I sometimes just feel the need to, it's art tenacity I suppose, I feel like, oh that could be something. That idea could be resolved in three dimensional form and I won't settle that until I've done that.

So there is a compulsion to make things and I think in a lot of artists it's more about some sort of compulsion to make stuff. You know, or you with your pottery, there will be a compulsion to make pots, I don't know if it's an addiction of some sort or just a desire, you know. And I suppose my desire, you know, way back to the world of motorcycles and Meccanos and all the rest of it is the fascination of taking things to bits, how are things made, how do you build stuff, you know. Who made that beautiful arch where you drop the keystone in the top and it just all stays in one place? Fucking hell! How satisfying must that have been! You know when we think of Brunelleschi's arch at the Duomo in Florence and, you know, an unsupported span of that size, fifteenth, sixteenth, whatever it was, fifteenth century whatever. Fucking hell.

Imagine being a sort of peasant wandering through Florence in.. And seeing that! How amazing!. You know I think that must have been much more exciting than..

A: There must have been periods where it was almost built but the keystone wasn't in place yet.

T: Yeah, what the hell's going on there and all that stuff inside.

A: With like wooden scaffolding..

T: Exactly, it's just all wooden framework inside, being clad and then slowly you take the framework away. Da daah! Magic. It's not fallen down. You know, brilliant. Double-skinnned bricks, I think it is. Yeah, phenomenal. I mean, you know, you imagine the stuff going up in central London now, you know the City, doesn't hold a candle to that kind of stuff.

A: All done by guys who, they didn't have any computers, they couldn't..

T: No, no.

A: Mostly didn't do any work on paper.

T: I was in Salisbury a couple of days ago and you know, look at Salisbury Cathedral, it's beautiful. It shouldn't even be standing. It's built on a water meadow. The fucking foundations are, probably more foundation in this house than Salisbury Cathedral, you know. It's a miracle that, that it stands, and maybe that's why it started.

So I don't make a lot of stuff, but generally I don't make a lot of stuff that I throw away, because usually it never gets made. So the idea gestates for a long time, I come back to it, you know we talked about Great Britain from a Wheelchair drawn on a Melolin dressing pack.. And it probably kicked around in a, in a drawing book for ages, just sellotaped into the drawing book with a bit of micropore tape. I might even still have it somewhere in a box.

And then you just go through a massive thinking process. It's about what will it look like. Could you make it using bits of wheelchairs? And, you know, big wheel there, you almost assemble it in your brain, somehow, you know you think oh yeah, and I could put the backrest, and the hand.. you know, the pushing handle, that could be like Scotland, because you've got this series of islands, coming down, that could be six backrests or four backrests or whatever. And oh yeah, that could be that, and the little wheel could be Wales, you know maybe a bigger jockey wheel for Wales and you could use the brakes for the bit of Cornwall, the thin bit that goes out, it's got a ball on the end of it, I mean you sort of assemble it in your brain really. I don't know whether I said this at one of your earlier interviews, but I pulled that together in a morning, something like that. I literally ripped the weather map of Britain out of the Guardian newspaper, stuck it on an epidiascope, projected it against an eight foot by four foot sheet of plywood, got fucking great big fat felt pen and just drew round it. Put it on the floor, started to take two wheelchairs, I think to bits, piled the bits up, then it was just a fucking jigsaw puzzle. Two wheelchairs, completely took to bits, a box with nuts, bolts, screws whatever in it and my

rule was that I couldn't use anything that was external from that. So everything had to come from those two wheelchairs.

It was just a matter of putting things in place, you know the lining up holes, bolting things together, cutting the armrest, you know, cutting a bit out the arm rest for this bit. Dead easy, really. I did the same with Great Britain from a Wheelchair Revisited for the lecterns for Seb Coe and Phil Craven. I mean, again, we made them really quickly. And I just got the 2012 people to just bring me lots of old sports wheelchairs from somewhere. Again I had no say whatsoever over, I didn't pick them, I just get some old sports equipment, pile it up in the corner and me and this guy Tom, who was my, you know my assistant, funny story you know. Did I tell you this story or not, Tom, my helper?

A: No.

T: So I, we were pushing for time and everything and they said would you like somebody to help you, I said it's probably a good idea, cause I'm running Shape, I'm taking a bit of time off work, we need to press on, you know 2012's gonna happen on this date, we, we can't fuck up, we don't have a lot of time. So yeah, an assistant would be good. Right we'll get you somebody. So I met this young guy, and I'd got my old box of tools, you know, some of my tools go fifty, sixty years old, piled up in this, boxes of tools and this young guy, you know eager, bushy-tailed, young, you know nice clean lad. Alright, Tom, how are you? Yeah, Tony how are we doing? So I have a bit of a chat. Right, Tom, um I'm a sculptor, I'm gonna make, yeah, yeah. You know, is it making sense what I'm telling you what we're doing? Yeah, no, I've seen Great Britain from a Wheelchair, I know what we're doing, yeah everything's good. I said are you interested in art, Tom? Oh yeah, I'm an arts graduate. Oh, brilliant, that'll help, great. So he gets his tool box out. He's got fucking power tools, you name it, you know, it all clips together. And er, he said er, I said well that's clever . And he's going a hundred miles an hour, you know. I'm trying to unscrew something with some old screwdriver. Let me do that, Tony, you know, being polite, and then he just puts this tool with a battery operated thing and pulls a trigger and there's bzz and it falls apart in two minutes, you know.

And I'm struggling away, trying, some rusty thing. And we get chatting, I say well you're a handy lad , Tom, you know, he said yeah, yeah. I said what d'you do for a job, then. And he said well I'm currently, I'm Anthony Caro's studio assistant.

Sir Anthony Caro is your boss. Well yeah. I'm in the studio with Anthony, well Tony, all the time. And er Tony will just come in and say okay, Tom, just weld that up or you know and I'll put a few bits of steel together and Anthony will wander in and just say yeah, yeah, that's good, Tom, move that and I just get on with it. So I just - would you like a cup of tea, Tom? Yeah, okay. Bacon sandwich? Yeah. I'll get the tea mate, you crack on. So I became the tea boy on that job. And er, but I mean he was very good at sort of making suggestions, putting stuff together. And it was brilliant working with him, but it's, I felt such a tit, really, you know, just thinking he was some young guy out of college. And there he is working away with Anthony Caro. And a good sculptor in his own right, Tom. Good lad.

So yeah, you get into all sorts of scrapes. And that was a nice, that was a project where again it was just like doing Great Britain from a Wheelchair. Again. And again it just came

together really easily. Same thing. Just drew the maps out on to bits of plywood, started putting stuff together. This time we got, Ireland, Northern Ireland to do, because we, I was thinking how do I do this because I've got Seb Coe stood up and I've got Phil Craven, who's a wheelchair user, sitting down.
A: Oh right.

T: So I've gotta rethink this through. So I got Phil Craven stood in front of, well sat in front of Ireland. And er Seb Coe. And then we had to connect them together as lecterns so it sort of worked geographically. And we ended up putting them on clear perspex, so they worked as lecterns, cause they had the sort of bit of perspex glued on the back so they could lean their bits of paper on it. But I think it worked all right in the end, you know. And again, a world wide audience of god knows how many millions. They probably didn't see my lecterns and go d'you know what, that's an interesting lectern Seb Coe's got in front of him. Bur you don't know do you?

And they're knocking about somewhere. They get used by the British Paralympic Association or whatever it is. So they're kicking about somewhere, I've not tracked them down, I meant to track them down and I never did. But they'll probably be around somewhere.

So my own work, and some of it's commissioned work like the Channel Four piece, which was commissioned, I think we talked about that, didn't we?

A: No.

T: Did we not? Okay. So that was the Monument to the Unintended Performer that was outside Channel Four building for 2012. And again, it was commissioned, it was a competition piece. So I pitched a few ideas at them and um, the idea that I thought was the best idea was not the one they went for. And that happens, you know with competitions. You've got to put three or four ideas together. And I pitched something called Raspberry Ripple. Which is good old rhyming slang for cripple. In neon. And I thought that was, I thought that was the strongest piece for it. I wanted to make something that was subversive for Channel Four, but so subversive that they didn't know it was subversive after it was built. And I hope that a lot of my work has got some sort of subversive element going on within it. And some people say humour and sometimes it's yeah, it's got to be humour or subversive in some way. Cause I think art's got to be dangerous again. In some way. Gotta be more than decorative to be proper..disability art. It's gotta be (almost) propagandist or, you know, agitprop sort of edge to it.

So they wanted, they wanted the piece that I made. And it wasn't called.. I hadn't got a title for it when I pitched it to Channel Four. I had a few ideas what it was gonna be called. The strongest contender was 'Monument to the Unintended Performer'. I'd thought if I tell them that, and tell them what that means, they won't like it. So I don't know what we called it. We called it something banal as a working title. And um I don't know whether you, I don't know whether you saw the real piece outside of Channel Four or not, but you may have seen images of it.

A: Yeah I think I went along to look at it.

T: Yeah. And the idea was that it would look quite abstract until you actually saw it right from the front. So we played with this idea that Channel Four had already created, which is there is a, there is a random numbers of, there is a random selection of verticals, horizontals and angles. And that when you bring them into a sort of, a point they become a four. And it's a bit like your 'Great Britain from a Wheelchair' thing, where it doesn't make sense and then suddenly you get a focal point where it makes sense. It's very interesting, I gave my cousin a copy of the 'Incorrigibles' book. And she's looking through it and said, is it you, she said what's your art all about, then. Well look, this book's just been published, couple of images of my work it there, I wrote an article. Have a read of that and then, you know, have look at me website, Disability art dahdahdah and then she's suddenly gone 'It's a map of Great Britain!'. Exclamation mark! And this is about two weeks later, you know. She said I've looked at it loads of times and the penny's only just dropped. I said well it is called 'Great Britain from a Wheelchair'. Yeah, I know, but I didn't really, I didn't connect the work and the title. And she said, god you'll think I'm really thick, won't you. I said no of course not, because that's part of the game.

So it was the same with 'Unintended Performer', it was, um , mixing together this incredibly famous iconic sculpture by, it's 'Discobolus', so it's this greek discus throwing, so it's one of the early Olympians from Greek whenever it is, five BC or something, I can't remember, whenever it is, five hundred yea.. No, I don't know. Whatever it, I've forgotten, I used to know. I don't need to remember it any more. But it's this amazing marble carved figure of a discus thrower. So that becomes a starting point for it. And then, it's, so that's iconic of the Olympics. And the iconic crip image is the bloody stick wheelchair user, isn't it, because that's the, that's the image that is, you know if you ask people about, to identify disability, they'd always say the stick, you know the stick in the wheelchair sort of thing, isn't it? Which interestingly was designed as part of a competition, but designed by a sixteen or seventeen year old female design stu.., I don't even think she was a design student. Schoolgirl, or a design student. And er, her design was selected. And it's been iconic really ever since. It's been around for a long time. Probably forty odd years now. And she just did it as part of a, I don't think she got royalties on it or anything, I think she just won a, you know a, a fee for it.

So I thought well somehow we've got to amalgamate the iconic wheelchair logo and the iconic Greek Olympian. So it was really just a matter of crunching those two things together. But using neon for the wheel and light for the discus. And using steel for the body rather than marble. And stainless steel so that you got lots of nice reflecting light. And the figure was very fragmented. So it wasn't a full figure, it was, you know, a head, an arm, a bit of a chest. So there were various bits of body which were connected by virtue of the fact that they were literally bolted on to the big four. So again these abstracted forms were bolted on to the big four. And again they just looked completely abstract. I've got loads of photographs of it in construction. Some may be on the website. And when you, when it twists round you suddenly see a body rather than a series of abstracted metal shapes.

An um, and er, I liked the idea of using neon in it. And then we just clad the four in board-stuff sprayed bronze silver and gold for obvious reasons. So it was a relatively simple mash-up really. And then, once it was up and done, I wrote the words which they more or less hid in the window round the corner somewhere. Cause it's called 'Monument to the Unintended Performer', it's not about the Olympics at all, not about the Paralympics at all. And it's a monument to all the performers who get stared at every day. You know, I get stared

at all the time. Getting on a bus, everybody stares at me. Somebody walking down the street with a white cane, everybody stares at somebody with a guide dog, everybody stares if you've got any sort of facial disfigurement, impairment, people stare at you.
I remember.

A: I go out with Mike Shamash sometime. He gets..

T: I was about to say that. 'Oh the funny little man.' I was having a conversation, I bumped into Mike Shamash outside M&S in South End Green. Cause I lived in the Panoramic, just right at the bottom of Pond Street there. So I literally got off the bus to go in my apartment and Mike Shamash was there. Mike! How you doing? And we're sat having a conversation. The amount of people that sort of walked into bus stops and into other people. Fuck me look at that, there's a small guy *and* a guy in a wheelchair. And they're more or less the same head height having a conversation with each other. Why that's bizarre I've no idea, but it was, we almost had an audience of people sort of slowing down. What are these guys talking about? Yeah. Yeah, Mike would get stared at all the time, won't he? And that's what it was about, it was about all us disabled people who are performers, who don't actually want to be monuments, who don't want to be performers, just want to go about our, we don't want to be in the Olympics or the Paralympics, you know.

It was partly driven by comments, you know as the build-up to the Olympics. I remember we were working in Gracechurch Street and I was working, we were doing some sort of project with Noemi Lakmaier. Again, wheelchair user. So she and I go for a pint after work. And we're in the pub opposite Gracechurch Street, you know. I'm an old guy, fat, in a wheelchair, she's younger than me, got a fag behind her ear, we're both drinking pints of bitter. This guy came up to us, it's like, hey, how are you doing, yeah, we're fine mate, how are you, alright. Are you in the Paralympics? They're fancy wheelchairs, I bet those wheelchairs go really fast, are you in the Paralympics? No mate, no. And we do this, hang on do we look like we're doing the Paralympics? No, you know. And yet he obviously hadn't connected. We were saying, are you in the Olympics? Don't be ridiculous, you know, I'm forty years old, I'm a bit overweight, you know, well so are we. What makes you think we're in the fucking Paralympics. And it's just that.. Intelligent people. He was a, he was a trader in the City, you know, I mean, he bought us a few beers, he wasn't poor, you know, he'd got a Savile Row suit on. Why he couldn't get the fact that you see somebody in a wheelchair, suddenly they're in the Paralympics, just a mystery to me.
A: And equally how much better that disabled people, oh they're in the Paralympics rather than..

T: Well yes. Poor bastards.

A: Yeah, yeah. Or there are various other..

T: Yes. I mean because it was..

A: On a trip out from the day centre or..

T: Yeah, yeah, no, well yes I guess it's moved on. Yeah, but, he, we, I would never have thought oh there's a bloke he must be in the Olympics. So I'm not sure why he would have

thought oh there's a bloke in a wheelchair I wonder if he's in the Paralympics. We're still seen as phenomena aren't we? We're still viewed as phenomena whether we, whether we like it or not.

So, so um, yeah. So I guess most of my work does start with the idea of if, apart from if it's a competition like that, so you've got to think about what they want from their competition and you've got to deliver what they want haven't you? You know you've got to give em what they want, what the brief says. So you know that's different than just wanted to make a piece of work.

D'you want to ask me anything else about that. I'm gonna find these pictures.

A: No. No.

D'you remember that time we tendered to build a bridge?

T: D'you know what, I do. Fuck!

A: I sometimes think about that and think, I'm so glad we didn't get that.

T: Yes.. I don't remember it in any great detail, but I do remember we did something. Crikey, yeah.

A: While it'd be great for there to be something in the world we could go and stand on and think 'We did this'..

T: Yeah, we made this bridge. 'Kin ell

A: The thought of what could have gone wrong.

(TONY START TO REFER TO PICTURES ON HIS LAPTOP/WEBSITE.)

T: That was it, sort of at night. I wanted it to work so that I thought the neon work, the neon on the discus, and actually I thought the light on the steel worked well.. You see the arm's one bit of steel and the head's over there, the body's just, literally quite an organic form. I might have some photographs. That was the idea I wanted them to do. Tragic/brave. Can you see it?. On the four. You can just see the ghost of the four behind it.

A: Yeah

T: And that's, that's a figure to give it scale, so that's what the four.. And what I wanted to do was run the tragic down the back one and then brave across the four like that. And the 'A' I wanted to be in blue and in red, so you got a double 'A' when you looked through it.

And it's crucifix, you know cruciform really. I thought that would have been a much more powerful work, but they went for this piece. You sort of see it in construction there. Fucking hell it's massive. Can you see that guy?

A: Oh fuck, yeah.

T: I mean, extraordinarily big piece of work. It was fifty-odd foot high. When they took it down, I said I'd like to keep the head. You know I drive a big van. I thought I'll just get the head in the back of the van. D'you know what, it wouldn't go anywhere near the back of the van. I need a big van. But I mean you can see it when you see that f.., when you see that guy there. It's way bigger than a figure. It was pretty amazing watching them putting it together. You see they're quite, the arm and the body are quite abstract. I've got loads more photographs, but not on this website. But again, you know when you see this guy with the cherry-picker, can you see him there?

A: Yes.

T: See how small he is compared to.. That's a fuck-off bit of steel in its own right really.. So I mean when you see these guys up cherry-pickers putting things together you feel christ yeah it was a fucking big piece of work.

And we had twelve weeks to put it together. I mean they were literally working on it right up to the press launch. Which was at something like twelve noon in the afternoon. And they were still painting it in the morning, you know, they were still taking all the stuff down around it. Yeah.

So that was a big piece. So some bits are small, some bits are big. Always generated from the idea. And I usually, I only make the pieces that I really think are worth finishing.

A: Right.

T: And I always feel like, when I've made something, um, I usually can live with it, even if I made it twenty years ago I think, okay that, like Great Britain from a Wheelchair, it still plays in my head, I still think it's okay. This is a big piece I'm making in marble right now, I think you've seen that piece..

A: No, I haven't.

T: So that's Called 'You laugh because I'm different, I laugh because you're all the same'. It's five figures and one figure is looking in the opposite direction. And again it's a bench, you know, they're like Zenmen, five figures, this figure's not quite on the bench. But she wants to be in the club, so she's kind of huddling up to the bench.

A: Yup.

T: So that's some work that I'll be working on, or trying to get finished before I escape from dear old Shape. You see a picture like that sideways on, you get the sense that these are quite random forms hanging in space really. A bit of the strengthener behind it. You know, cause it was curved out. We had to send all the metalwork out to different places to build it, it couldn't all be built in the same place. So I think ...

A: What, 'cause no-one had room?

T: Nobody had room to do it, or couldn't do it within the timescale. So we had to push it out to loads of different manufacturers to get it, you see that curve there, to get it um, to get it all finished and on time.

I mean it was a nail-bite, you know, will it get finished in time? And gawd all the rest of it. Yeah I suppose there you get a sense of the different bits of the cladding going on, what was already there. But again, it worked, having to work with that four that's already there, I was really interested in that. You know, it wasn't just about doing a figurative piece, it was also about the fact that you'd got this, this thing that you had to clad. You know you had to clad it and make it work really, make the figure work within the four, so I'd made a model, made a model of a four so I got it in scale and then scaled it up on CAD design. I mean brilliant for the sculptors, CAD design now. You know. I mean, that Tragic but Brave, you just fit it on a computer and, well I can't, I've got to get a young techie to do it but you know, I'd basically say this is what I want, take some photos of the big four, put it into the computer, whizz it round (..) It really. Am um, Squarinthecircle? again you know that piece outside Portsmouth University, again, very much about disability arts, about how do you square the circle, how do you get power to the centre. And again, to put that outside the school of architecture I felt was quite an important um torch to be a reminder that every potential architect who walks through that door as a student should have. This is why this sculpture is outside our building, it's about access. D'you know that piece or not?

A: Yeah.

T: And whether they do or not, I don't know.

A: I remember all its history and the competition entry and..
T: Oh yeah, dear old whatsherface.

A: Rachel Hurst. Sending the money back.

T: Who would do that? It's bonkers. I think you were probably, I think you were probably visiting my place in Cumbria, Grangeover Sands, when that was at the height of its, you know, what the fuck's going on with this EEC nonsense. (..) To transcribe it into French. You know, the rationale for the sculpture. Rachel Hurst. Oh well.

So it's been an interesting journey when you start thinking of some of the..

A: Yeah.

T: Cause I tend to think, you know, you just tend to think what's on the website, and it reminds what's there, but I, actually some of the, some of the um, could-have-beens, you know the bridge and the Rachel Hurst and the EEC thirty thousand euros or whatever it was. Yeah. Yeah, there's lots of stories attached to them, I suppose.

My cab's coming at three. So.. Time flies doesn't it?

A: Yeah.

T: It's amazing.

A: Yeah.

T: I bore you shitless for two hours. Yeah. Have we got any burning things that we need to tie up with or not.

A: This project's about communities, partly. Do you feel you've moved between different communities.

T: Bloody hell. I'm not sure I recognise communities. No, I don't think so. I mean I'm not, I've never been institutionalised, so I've never felt, you know like, but I don't even keep in touch with many people from school or university or any. You know I'm quite isolated. I'm not isolated, I know fucking thousands of people. You know.. Thousands, honestly! I can't remember half the people I know. Can't remember their names any more. But I'm quite solitary. I'm, I'm not gregarious or, you know I'm not in clubs or anything. So I don't really think about communities. Am I part of the disability community? Is that what you mean?

A: I was just throwing it out as a..

T: Yeah. Well I'd like to feel that I was part of the disability community.

A: Have you been aware of there being times where you've transitioned from , from one community to another, or had to leave things behind to..

T: Not, not really.

A: Like, Mat Fraser was very interesting about the point at which he decided to stop being a punk and become disabled.

T: Oh, interesting. No, but I've never really been into (a flood) like that. I mean I stopped being a motorcyclist. No, I didn't really. I'm still on my trike. I've only recently sold my big yellow three-wheeled trike. Literally, months ago. So I sort of um, but I was never properly in the biker club, never properly in the heavy rock club or the punk club or whatever. I think I've always been, like I ran a record shop, you know, so I was interested in music. So what am I gonna do? I'm interested in music, be part of a band, run a record shop, be a disc jockey, you know it was always doing it rather than being part of it I suppose. So I feel like a part of the disability arts community. But I almost feel like I took that with me, I took it to Holton Lee. From being an artist and saying right, we'll bring some artists into it now. How do we get some life into Holton Lee, we bring creative people in. You know, you come, Julie McNamara comes, Sign Dance Collective come, we have party, you know, we have some thinking and we write some stuff about what you wanna do and we think about how we might make Holton Lee as a, I think you described it as an artistic campus, which basically is what it was.

A: It was Maggie Woolley who first used that term.
T: Was it really?

A: Yes.

T: Okay, right, I thought it was you.

A: No, I picked up on it I thought (that's what ...)

T: Yeah. And it was. So I took all that with me. And then I think probably when I left Holton Lee I sort of tried to reassemble that creative energy at Shape. You know. Get Joe Bidder involved. Cause Joe was very key to, you know he really wanted the archive to happen, so he was very key to it, you know, coalescing.

Then we had to open negotiations with Holton Lee to try and say, we'd like to make it, take it to a reality. It was really down to Joe. And Simon Fulford. Because um I, I don't think it would have been helpful for me to try and do that negotiating because it would have been, either been seen to be too close to it, it's like Heaton wants to nick the assets sort of thing. So I needed to stay..

A: I don't think I would have been an asset to that, either.

T: No. You know, I think I would have been um, it would have been a red rag to a bull, really. But that was a a good strategy, me not being part of it, but obviously part of it from background. So I don't know about communities, and I , I always feel a bit out..

A: Because if they'd not wanted to do it, me and Julie McNamara would go down and..

T: Well there was always plan B. Plan B was just, we're taking our toys home, you know. Just get in touch with every artist. And Colin Hambrook was saying yeah, yeah, we'll just go in a fucking minibus. With a, with a hire van behind, go and say yeah, that's mine I want it, that's mine I want it, put it all in the back of the van and off we go.

A: Or just occupy. Holton Lee would be so easy to occupy.
T: Oh Christ, yeah. Completely.

A: Because it's only got that one approach road, Park a car across the end of it and..

T: Yeah

A: Do what you fucking like!

T: Yeah. I mean, the police would come by helicopter, they would get in there eventually. We could 've er, we could have took our assets back.

T: We got there in the end. That's all you can wanna do, isn't it, get the stuff in the end. So yeah. So I'm gonna make more art, I've got some plans, gonna do some interesting stuff.

A: Good.

T: And er spend more time thinking about making art, without having to drop ideas because

you've got to deal with a staffing crisis or a finance crisis or a building crisis or whatever it is. Or, you know, selfishly, that you've got to spend quite a lot of time putting funding applications together. So that other people can apply for Unlimited commissions to do the fantastic things they've always wanted to do and enhance and build their careers. So I think part of my journey has been about making sculpture in a selfish way. That's my sculpture for me. And part of it has been about being able to administer a series of opportunities and see other disabled people who're very creative and very gifted do great stuff and deliver it. And finally train, you know cut a little hole in that black curtain between us and the rest of the world and the money and the power and the (...) You know, I mean I'll always regret the fact that we've not been able to achieve more and we've not been able to have the influence that I wanted us to have, but we are fighting a sort of faceless minority, aren't we, of people in power who don't want us to be exhibiting in the National Gallery or the National Theatre or the Tate or the Hayward Gallery or wherever it is.

A: (Can we discuss) the way we get there, it just doesn't happen as quickly as...
T: Yeah.

A: Or *nearly* as quickly as we'd like.

T: But you know people might say, well, it's not interesting enough, it's not important enough. If it was important, then people would have heard about it. But I don't agree.

I think it is important, I think it's really interesting. They just don't get it.. And d'you know still delivering disability equality training to people who just don't get the most obvious things around social model, medical model, access, you know people saying well, I don't see why we should have to put ramps in buses, you know, if you can't get on the bus, mate, tough tits. It's your fault. Really? Public transport? Funded by taxpayers. Well. Yeah. You can't use it. Your problem. Still astonishing isn't it? That people still say thing to you like that. Or I don't mind the physically disabled, but I have a real problem around the mentally handicapped. God, people still think in that. But still, people still saying it. Which means, you know, I think we've educated the subtle, you know the white middle classes to not express that prejudice in open court. But I think they probably still think it, a lot of them. They just know they can't say it any more. So we're still fighting that, that um, that wall of power and rank that don't want us in there. Because they instinctively know that it means one of their kind has to give up their seat at the table. And that, and they can't hack that at all.

We were talking this morning about Heritage Lottery projects that don't meet, and it could be Big Lottery that, or it might have been the Big Lottery actually that had got very poor access, they'd just given five hundred thousand pounds to some project that put some crappy lift in that didn't work and they weren't taking scooters. And you just think, if people like me or you or any of the other people we know in our disability arts sector, were on that committee, that money would never have been given, cause we've got a rational argument together about why that architectural solution did not meet our requirements and it would never have got funded.

A: Yeah, I remember having a conversation with Paddy Masefield about how he'd gone to a, a museum of shipping or something of that sort, but it wasn't accessible. And..

T: How could that be?

A: Yeah. Brand new building, it's not fucking accessible.

T: It happens all the time.

A: In the arts, it's like Paddy Masefield and Wendy Harpe..

T: Yes. Yeah real game changer.

A: Fought that war and, and .. Partly because they'd put the background work in, they'd been saying for ages, why the hell are you funding organisations, why should disabled people's tax be going to places that they can't get into?

T: Yep.

A: And the Arts Council's argument was we, we can't demand something of people that we can't afford to fund them to deliver. So when, when this whole new pot of money came onstream, then they were able to say, well you have got the money there now.

T: And make (sure) they ringfence it.

A: They made it a basic condition .

T: But it would never have happened.

A: Every single application, if it's not accessible to disabled people, you can't have it.

T: That's why we need that diversity on those boards. That's why it's really important.

A: Transcribing all the.. Are we done now?
T: Ten minutes. But we can be done whenever you want. You're in charge.

A: Transcribing those, the two previous interviews, on thing I noticed that, a term you used several times is 'allies'.

T: Yeah. Allies.

A: Which is a useful concept.

T: I always think back to in the apartheid struggle, Bishop Trevor Huddlestone?

A: Mm-hm.

T: The real ally and advocate, he wasn't black. You know, he was a white, probably, well I don't really know much about him. But I, but I was moved by him and thinking what a fantastic ally, and it might have been Nelson Mandela saying , we need allies like this, we cannot win this battle alone. And you can't, because in the eyes of the world and within the media, you're a, you're a, you're either a terrorist or a freedom fighter, aren't you?

A: I was wondering whether it'd be possible to set up like an award or, it'd be quite good to have something to actually recognise and say thank you to various..

T Well Marcus Dickie-Horley at the Tate is a good ally because he can try and help get things changed in places.

A: You were talking about Shape, Joyce, whatever her name is

T: Joyce Morris

A: Joyce Morris ,Wendy Harpe..

T: Yeah. Completely. Yeah, perhaps we should, as part of the archive, we should be recognising our allies. Another thing for my email to self. Recognising allies. I think that'd be really valuable. Yeah. You can't do it alone. You need people who speak the same language. That's why, in the political struggle, it was alright for people like Johnny and the Manchester Coalition to say you're a twat, Heaton, cause you work for RADAR. But I would argue that, in retrospect, I got as much done as they did. In a different way. (It's only) Bert Massey, who they hated, but he got more done talking to politicians as a man in a suit, who understood and had those political discussions, just got as much change done as the people out front with banners. You gotta have both, haven't you?

A: Yeah.

T: You've gotta have people who are setting up access groups and giving people people..

A: And, and what brought change in the law was when the radical disability movement actually made common cause with the charities.

T: Yeah

A: D'you remember those red postcards?

T: I do. Yeah. Yeah and the red paint and.. No completely.

A: You left your balloon behind.

T: I did! D'you know what, I was going to remember that as well. Did it drop on the floor or something like that?

A: Yeah.

T: As soon as I got home I thought fuck I forgot to pick my balloon up.

A: Make sure I give you another one before you go.

T: But if you've got a copy of the book, I really would like to buy a copy off you. If you've not,

I'll get one off Amazon., but you should sign me a copy.

A: I don't think I've got a spare one of the British edition.
T: I'll get one off Amazon.

A: Get one off Amazon and I'll sign it for you.

T: I'll get you to sign it, yeah. Cause I'm starting to think now fuck me I need my resources, you know. If you're working at Shape or whatever, you've got resources haven't you, you just kind of put your hand out and it's there.

A: I met somebody at the Disability Studies Conference at Lancaster. I like going up to Lancaster because, it's, it's the only place I go where people really think I've achieved something.

T: My old university.

A: I'm treated as a..

T: Really good!

A: People actually remember 'Disabled We Stand', they have it on their reading lists.

T: That's fucking brilliant. Good. Well maybe we should..

A: I can't persuade them to give me an honorary doctorate on the strength of it but.

T: Work on it. They've just given me an alumni award, an honorary alumni award, which is something they give. Oh, that's nice I get it in July 2018. And it's a recognition of ex-alumni who they think have achieved things. And you just get some sort of honorary bunfight, day out at the uni really, somebody from the alumni office gives a decent lunch and a bottle of wine, takes you on a tour, you get to talk to young students about what you've achieved from your education at Lancaster University. Get to wear your cap and gown, probably get to pay a lot of money for some official photographs that you'll never look at again. But that's, that's nice. It's a good university Lancaster. You weren't there, though, you were at Leeds weren't you?
A: I was at East Anglia.

T: East Anglia.

ENDS