

Mark Gubb and Angela Kennedy: the money problem, or, how artists could be paid more than £10,000 a year

This is an edited transcript of the talk which took place on Wednesday 18 November 2015 at Block 336, as part of System Failure, a series of conversations about the art world's responsibilities and relationships between artists, galleries, funders, regeneration, education, and families. This talk was programmed in partnership with a-n the artists information company. This conversation was between Mark Gubb, artist and writer based in Cardiff and regional advocate of the Paying Artists Campaign, and Angela Kennedy, multi-disciplinary artist and activist and a founding member and Executive Committee member for Artists Union England, and was chaired by Russell Martin, Director of Artquest.

Russell Martin (RM): The main premise for System Failure as a series is that the art world is run by human beings and is therefore imperfect and can be improved (which I don't think many people have too much problem with): particularly about how it can be improved for artists. Without artists, of course, there is no art, and therefore there is no art world, so it's about trying to have a slightly more artist-centred art world.

Also most of us, I think, as artists spend some of our time in the pub setting the world to rights and we wanted to make that a slightly more public process and more solutions-focused process. Although we will spend some time identifying what the issues are, what I'm going to be pushing for is that we're also considering how we might practically help to change things, even if it's in quite broad-brush ways or even if it's quite idealistic. At least it's a starting point.

We also want artists to be more familiar with the issues and how to overcome them, to learn more about the different parts of the art world that might be able to help them to work towards collective action and solidarity in different ways, and to understand what our responsibilities as artists are in the art world. I'm not sure if I mentioned that my name is Russell, now I think of it: I'm the Director of Artquest and also an artist. Artquest is part-time and I'm an artist the rest of the time, and Nick who is on the decks at the back is also an artist and also works at Artquest.

These are in-conversation events; they tend to be quite informal. We're going to hear for a few minutes from each of the speakers, then we'll talk a little bit amongst ourselves, and then I'll chair more open discussion amongst everyone in the room.

Obviously there'll be a lot of crossover between this and the other bits, because we are talking about the art world as a system. Even though the main focus is around money and income, there will obviously be other things that come into that as well.

The reasoning behind wanting to talk about money (and it might seem strange even to have to go over why we want to talk about money) is it's a perennial issue; it's

been an issue for artists since time immemorial. It's not a particularly recent phenomenon, but it's one that we're really struggling with as a sector and as a group within that sector. I think there's also been a recent kind of professionalisation within the arts and amongst artists. The business model of artists has changed over the last fifteen to twenty years. There's more of a focus on viewing an artist as being a job, as being something that you can have professional development in, that you can have career development in, whereas before artists would often quite openly be supporting their practice through different things. There's more of a questioning attitude around that, which I think would be quite interesting to talk about this evening, if it comes up.

Within that professionalised career, there's basically no progression, no increase in wages; you earn the same when you start as you do after twenty years. So if it is a business, I would argue we're very bad at it, even though, of course, legally we are small businesses as individual artists.

There are also the mechanisms behind money; what it does for people as they work around motivations; the validation that earning money gives you, the self-esteem, the non-financial rewards. It's an absolutely enormous topic. We're not going to reach all of this, but this is hopefully a good starting point.

We want to explore, in sum: what is the place of money for artists, what could it be or what might it be in the future. What we can change in our behaviours around money; how we can help other people change their behaviours: people that we interact and work with around money. And to emphasise and to explore the idea of the art world being something that we take part in: that it's not something that just happens to us and that we can negotiate with people; we can communicate with people to try to change things.

This is Mark Gubb who is Regional Advocate for Paying Artists Campaign, which is of course at the moment being run by a-n.

Mark Gubb (MG): Thank you very much, cheers. I guess I am here with two hats on tonight. As was said, I started working with a-n on this campaign earlier this year as one of the regional advocates (I'll explain a bit more about what that means in a second). But I'm also here as an artist of nearly twenty years' practice now. To pick up on something you coincidentally said right away: this idea of being paid the same now as twenty years ago is almost uncannily true, in that we've lived for a long time now with the a-n day rates that have been extremely useful. Although they're a varied scale, there seems to be this figure of £150 a day, that is the most anyone will ever consider paying anyone. So yes, it's absolutely right.

I'm sure everyone here knows what the Paying Artists Campaign was, but I thought I should lend some context to that and set out where it came from and what's some of the key purposes of it were. It was borne out of some research that flagged up that

System Failure: the Money Problem

71% of artists aren't receiving a fee from publicly funded galleries when they exhibit with them. It's important to say that at this point the particular focus of the campaign was artists' fees for exhibiting at publicly funded galleries. As the project has developed now, it will, of course, become much broader, but it's not yet dealing with the research and development and the material side of things. It's very much that: here's some money for letting us show your work in a publicly funded space.

Of the 110,000 full-time equivalent employees within our industry, the average income is still only £9,000 a year, and only 16% of artists have a pension. The campaign was in some ways a mass voice that can be used for lobbying but also, in people signing up to be part of the campaign and support the campaign, it provided an excellent body of people in which we could gather the research that we needed to take the project forwards.

The research and consultation part of the campaign ran for around a year (I'm going to keep looking at Jeanie at certain points to make sure I get my stats correct) from May 2014 to May 2015. Its intention is ultimately to develop a framework and set of tools that artists and galleries can use to develop what an artist's fee should be. It's not just about handing this to artists and saying, now get on with it. It's very much about creating something that is a conversation that can happen between galleries or commissioners, at the points when these sometimes slightly awkward conversations need to happen.

The draft framework has been written and is currently being looked at and tweaked by people. So I'm actually not going to talk about the content of the framework yet, because it's not ready to be born into the world quite yet, but it is imminent. What I can tell you is, it's not a grid of figures; it's not a version of the day rates; it's not just, this is what we think artists' fees should be if you're at this point in your career. It's way more nuanced than that. It's very specifically been developed to deal with the reality of the situation, meaning that of course we know that there are benefits from coming into projects, but they have to be tangible. They have to have a cash value and they have to be genuinely beneficial to artists. By that, I'm talking about things like a catalogue that might be produced alongside your show, or mentoring and those kinds of things.

It's been structured so that they can still factor into these negotiations and the calculations of what a fee might be. So when it does eventually appear into the world, it will still be a live project as well. It's not something that's just going to be dropped out and given as a *fait accompli*, now this is what you should use as a gallery or as an artist. For significant period yet, it's going to be being reviewed and tweaked, so that it has credibility and is actually something which is genuinely useful to the art world, and therefore adopted by the art world. Because it's all well and good putting something like this out in the world, but if people don't want to use it, they just won't, it's as simple as that, and so it has to be something which is felt official to all parties.

Some really significant and positive things have come out of it already. The very idea of it was adopted very quickly by Arts Council England and written into the National Portfolio Organisation agreements, so that when the framework does appear, they have to use it, essentially. And there are currently statements of support from Arts Council Wales, Creative Scotland and Arts Council Northern Ireland. They've not quite taken the full step of saying, we'll definitely tell everyone they have to implement it, but they are very supportive of it.

In terms of what we did as advocates: there were pairings of advocates invited to be involved with the project in Cardiff, Liverpool, Bristol, Birmingham and Glasgow. Our role was largely to get out amongst our arts communities and make people aware of the campaign, so that they would sign up to the campaign, but it was also to be very proactive in lobbying MPs and things like that. There was a particular focus; we were in the run-up to the General Election at the time and so it was felt that this was a particularly good moment to be bombarding our MPs with emails saying, this is important, this is happening, you should support this. And that was interesting. There's of course been a report written on how this activity panned out, and what it did actually transpire is that General Elections are not a great time to try to get any response out of an MP whatsoever, because they're all too busy trying to get elected, if that makes any sense.

In Cardiff, I worked with Sean Edwards –we were the Cardiff advocates– and we contacted absolutely everyone who was already elected and everyone who was running, several times via several channels. I think I had maybe five or six responses from a lot of people, all of which were in support of the campaign, so that was really, really good. But it was really noticeable how reticent they were about actually coming forward at that particular moment.

Mine and Sean's experience was slightly different to the other advocates in that --I don't know if any of you are from Wales or know it well-- it's a small country; there're only 3 million people and so we personally know most of the organisations that function within Wales. Different to the advocates in Liverpool and Birmingham and elsewhere, we felt that it was of more use for us to talk to Wales rather than to Cardiff and so that's what we did. So, we spent a lot of time having face to face meetings with the directors and curators of the RFOs in Wales, and it was a very, very interesting experience. Unsurprisingly, almost across the board, everyone would sit there and say yes, of course we support the Paying Artists Campaign. But the advantage of being a small nation and knowing a lot of artists that work within that nation, is that you actually know the reality of the situations and the experiences that people are having with those organisations as well, which didn't necessarily tally up with the overwhelming support that they were vocally offering the campaign.

What I wanted to do in the last couple of minutes is to raise a couple of the things that came out of our experience, which I thought were particularly interesting. These

System Failure: the Money Problem

are all anonymised (obviously I'm not going to point any fingers at any people or organisations), but hopefully they're points of interest.

I received an email from one artist and I'll read you a little bit from it. It said: "I am interested in the a-n Paying Artists Campaign, mainly, as I don't get it. Of course we all want more money, and we would all like a living wage or fair price for our work, but I'm not sure we're in a position to achieve this. Surely if you had the time, you could measure the amount of money that individuals and governments put into the arts, then isn't this total all we can expect to get. So by paying artists a fair wage, you're actually trying to shift from paying lots of artists a little, to paying a few artists more. In the arts, we produce way more artists than the economy can carry, therefore we are all complicit in accepting lower wages. It seems daft to want more money from a system that has shrinking capital and increasing demand."

And I don't read that out to mock this guy; he's a nice chap. I think there's an economic logic behind what he's saying, but I was genuinely surprised to receive that email from an artist. The position of resignation that is within that, of 'this is our lot, isn't it; isn't it just going to make things worse for everybody else if we somehow re-jig how this money is put together?' – that was really interesting. We weren't alone in getting an email like that. I know other advocates had similar conversations or emails from people, from artists.

Here's the reality of the situation. We had a conversation with a director of one organisation, who was upfront and honest enough to tell us what their core funding was that they receive from the Arts Council every year – and it was a good chunk of money, we're talking a few hundred thousand pounds here. She then went on to tell us that the running costs of the building and the staff came to exactly that, and looked at us slightly exasperated and said "If I pay artists, what am I supposed to do: let a member of staff go?" And it's kind of yes, that's exactly what you should be doing.

So that's a position that genuinely exists. An artist I know had a solo project happen at a very well-funded gallery: a small solo project space but a show that was going to run for a number of months. He was offered £800 to do the project in the space, and that was to cover all of his travel, all of his accommodation, all of his materials. Then quite far into the process, it was cut to £600. That of course didn't even cover the cost of what he needed to produce the work, which was forming a core part of this gallery's programme.

So, yes, there're some really interesting and slightly nightmarish scenarios out there. That was really what I wanted to say; hopefully there's some meat there that we can digest at some point.

RM: I think there's a lot. I'm going to bite my tongue at the moment and hand us over...

MG: It's not terrible in Wales, can I just say... I'm flagging up hopefully points of interest for discussion; it's a pretty good place to live and work.

RM: Thank you very much, Mark. We'll go now to Angela Kennedy who is an artist and an Executive Member of Artists Union of England and one of the founder members as well.

Angela Kennedy (AK): Yes, I think the last two examples you've given is the crux of where we're at. I'll give you a tiny bit of background and I must not ramble. It was in January 2013, and it was a very particular time, when we (myself, Katriona Beales and Sally Sheinman) thought we need something, so that artists are really going to do something about their own circumstances, and how we're going to do it collectively. I knew all about a-n, but whatever organisation you are, you're limited. A trade union is limited in what we can do, as well.

Having a-n there as well, it's a good complement because then we can support each other. But because we're independent and just one member, one vote, we can be more bolshy, that's the point. We want a separate union because there is nobody to give that independent collective democratic voice. Performers have Equity; crew and technicians have BECTU; Musicians' Union, musicians have that; there's NUJ for journalists and documentary photographers. Yet visual artists – there's an absolute gaping hole. A-n has done some great work around research the last few years and around guidelines, but they haven't had that floor to push from, of actually saying there's somebody else out there and the whole body of artists that are willing to come out and do something about it.

We started skypeing and talking to each other about how could we create a union. We didn't have a clue and we're still learning as we go along, but you can do whatever you want to do. If you feel passionate about something, you've just got to do something about it. It's as simple as that, but you've got to be willing to put your head above the parapet. And if you don't know – there's loads of stuff I don't know about trade unions – that's OK.

So, we set this union up; we launched in 2014. We had a launch in London, a launch in Newcastle, and people have joined. We can't offer very much yet, because we have to have a certificate of independence, we discovered. The certificate of independence is part of a quango of the Thatcher set-up, funnily enough, to make it very difficult for unions to actually exist, and we have to pay a fee to become independent of £4,066. Now, we've got no money because we don't get money from anywhere apart from our members and donations. We're not allowed to take any money from employers (or possible employers) in case that sways our ideas and stuff.

We desperately want people to join. Then you as members can tell us what you want us to do and we will campaign on those things. Some of the things we've been

campaigning on are things that Mark has been talking about. It is about paying artists: it's a job like anything else. As theatre workers will know, if you audition or you put out commissioning for a piece of work, and if you do that as a performance piece in a theatre, then usually you have about between four to six weeks to make a piece of work in the theatre space. The people who have organised that will have fundraised for that. Some of that money might come from the Arts Council, but everybody will be expected to get paid and Equity have rates.

They're not massive. Just like we've put out a 'rates of pay' document earlier this year: it's not massively different from a-n's rate of pay because we wanted to be fair. It's not about getting only the best rate of pay. When we put that out, we actually had an artist who was very, very angry that the rate of pay we recommended (which we kept in line with Scottish Artists Union, so as not to undermine them), was £230 a day – and that's already gone up.

I've been a practitioner for nearly thirty years, and it's only gone up about £30 in nearly thirty years. That's absolutely appalling and we should not be just sitting here thinking, well, there's not much we can do about it. There is something we can do about it, particularly a lot of our artists. We represent visual applied artists and socially engaged practitioners, those who work with schools, with deprived communities, with anybody who isn't a professional artist. There are a lot of us who are doing that kind of ground core work. And that's because, for example, that's part of my practice: I want to do that work; I believe that part of having a trade union is an issue of social justice. It's about artists: I worked hard at my training and I want to be paid for what I do. I know I do it well and I want to get paid for that.

I don't want to get astronomical pay. It would be great if I did one day like an Antony Gormley; there's time to go for that yet; I'm sure he gets really well paid for what he does; that's great. But I think £230 a day is not astronomical.

So, I think we've got to stand up for each other and if you get offered a piece of work, make sure that you look around at the guidelines and ask for that. And if you don't get offered that, just have a conversation. I got offered a piece of work a few weeks ago: it was a workshop in the middle of the day, 12 till 2. By the time I prepped before and cleaned up afterwards, I couldn't do anything else that day and they only wanted to offer me a half-day's fee. That's £100: I'm sorry, that's not on. So I went back and I thought I can only ask. Yes, there was that I get a lot of work from this big national organisation and I thought, does this mean they're never going to offer me work again. But you just have to do it. You just have to stand up and do it, because if everybody –every artist– does that, then they wouldn't be able to undercut any of us. So I went and asked and we compromised: they wouldn't give me a full day, but I got time and a half. And they said: actually, that's quite fair, because it is in the middle of the day.

It is about being brave. And I think artists are brave, or you wouldn't be putting your practice out there (that sometimes looks like, what the hell is that); you can articulate about a practice that no-one's ever seen before. Do it for others as well. So, for me, that is what I set the trade union up for. I've been working as a volunteer for two years and I'm really tired. Please become a member and please have your voice heard, because you can change things, but you have to do something about it. You can't rely on ACE listening to you; they haven't even recognised us as a trade union yet because we haven't got a certificate of independence. All the other unions are on their website (you go and have a look at it), and that is morally wrong.

We're applying for certification now; we should have it in a couple of months. Then we'll be able to get free training from the TUC once we're affiliated. It's limited what a trade union does, but one of the great things that a union does is if, for example, you go into a gallery, you're promised all sorts of things paper-wise or over the phone, and they have great guidelines, but in the end, they can put those guidelines in the bin. If you're part of the union, once we're certificated and have legal backing, you can ring us up and we'll come and represent you at that gallery and say, actually, that's not on. So you don't have to sit there on your own; you've got somebody else that will represent you; you've got a union behind you.

Have I gone over my ten minutes?!

RM: That's great, thank you very much, Angela. There's lots to be getting on with amongst all of that. Where I'd like to start is this idea of being brave and of negotiation. We like to call ourselves professional artists and be professional, and the overwhelming majority of artists do act very professionally, but where they don't often act professionally is around things like negotiating pay, talking about money with each other or with their prospective employers. So there's that. The other side of it is if you meet an artist socially and you say, what have you been up to? They'll tell you all the amazing stuff they're doing: I've got this exhibition and I'm talking about this residency and I'm exhibiting at an international thing. Almost none of that will probably be bringing in very much money, and they don't talk about the other things that they have to do to earn money.

I'm just wondering if we can talk a little bit around that: what you think some of the reasons are. How might we be able to combat some of that, to encourage artists to be quite upfront – at least at the first stage with each other – about where their money comes from or doesn't come from?

MG: I would say, I talk about that kind of stuff a lot, actually. It's not to contradict you: you're absolutely spot on. It's partly because when I was at university, one of my lecturers was a writer and an artist. Very early on I spotted that as a model that I thought looked quite desirable. I genuinely see the lecturing and writing that I do as part of my practice, and so I'm keen to talk about those things to people. But yes, you're absolutely right, and I think it comes down to almost an embarrassment on

System Failure: the Money Problem

some levels. If someone's working their job in Asda, it feels like they're failing. There's just that –not societal pressure or industrial– pressure. It's not like the industry really does look down on people. But until we get over that, get to where it's all right to have a portfolio career (to use the correct term), people don't want to talk about that stuff, do they? But I don't know how we get over that, so that's just completely not answered your question.

AK: People just have to be active about their professional life and about their practice, I think. You just have to talk about it, and there's no shame in doing what you need to do to survive. Artists are very, very good at that. The whole universal credit that's coming in, which you've been campaigning on: that's going to be horrendous for people who've got kids. They're going to make you do an accountancy every month, and if you are not earning enough, 37 hours a week and the equivalent to an hourly rate of the minimum wage, you're going to be cut off.

So even though you might get two or three workshops that are well paid, if that's not enough, you're going to be hauled into the Job Centre and have these horrendous humiliating interviews. They are there to humiliate you and to scare you so that you don't sign on. For me that's political; that is what this government is about. They're not interested in supporting people who are really at the bottom. Most artists are core workers working in communities on very little money. And yes they do it for the love of it, but it's a job. It's a job.

RM: It's this thing about it being a job that I want to try and drill into a little bit. Someone said to me a long time ago: who goes to art school to get a job? It's almost structural, at least traditionally in artists' training... Of course it's very patchy and changing a lot, but it's often not talked about what happens after art school, how you're going to earn money. My professional development at art school was about a week at the end of the course, which was 'ironically' sub-titled "so you really want to be poor". It was basically about: you're going to be an artist, you are going to be poor. It was presented as a lifestyle choice rather than as a job. I wonder if the motivations for people to become artists are to get a job and if not, then maybe that's one of these structural systemic issues that we're facing in trying to combat some of this.

AK: You see, I think it's OK to be idealistic. I think if you can't be really idealistic, you're not going to become an artist, because you have to think completely in the way that no-one else has ever thought before. One of the great things about British art schools is that last year when you're completely abandoned, left on your own. Some would think that's terrible but I think it's a really good preparation for when you come out. That's exactly what you've got to be able to have, to make work about something.

There's going to be nobody holding your hand with a budget, not that you have a budget in art school anyway. You've got to be a bit more politically open-minded.

Since the whole occupy movement, which is what the Artists Union England came out of actually, there was a realisation that we don't have to put up with the status quo. It doesn't mean that we can't be idealistic and be really ambitious, but I think we should be more mouthy and be more bolshy, and say what we need, and demand it.

MG: I do think there's a change happening within that thinking, as well, which is problematic for different reasons. I came out of an art school set-up that was very much along the lines you described. You were an idealist; you wanted to be an artist; you didn't really know what that meant, you just did it; and then you stepped out into the world and tried to get on with it. I lecture within HE, have done for more than ten years now, and I've seen a huge shift within the students: a total stepping away from the position that I had and most of my peers had when I was going through art school. They are on the courses now thinking: how am I going to get a job at the end of this?

In this context, it's good that those thoughts are happening, but it's also massively problematic: the kind of ambition, how the course is run, and what students believe they can and should get out of those courses. Tuition fees are a massive problem and part of the idea that, now I'm paying £9,000 for it, what do you mean I won't have a good job at the end of this? So that's awful, but then the idea that there should be a job at the end of it is shifting in students' minds, which can only be a positive thing on some level.

AK: I suppose I'd look at it more that, you want to work and you want paid work. When I did my original degree in London and I decided where I was going to live, I went to Newcastle and I went to the Old Northern Arts. Then I used to be a dancer, and I went and saw the performing arts officer. She gave me two bits of advice. I said, is there enough work here (twenty-five and clueless)? She said: there's loads of work but you've got to find it. The second piece of advice she gave me was, never undercut another professional, and that's always stayed with me.

I knew very clearly that if I didn't make it work and make it pay... and I had to find work that would pay. Those first two or three years were really hard, loads of things failed, but you're an artist; you're a creative.

RM: It's how those things match up: that idealism, which is absolutely vital about being an artist, and having this really broad horizon, versus a job.

AK: Is there a role for academia then? I went to a talk in Leeds in the summer and there were great academics there, all talking about their PhDs. There's loads of money in PhDs now, a lot of artists managing to survive on those; when that money runs out, I don't know what's going to happen to them. But, the gentrification that's going on as well: this is so much politics. Art is politics, whether you want to see it like that or not. If you decide to be an artist, you are a very political person, because you're taking your life in your hands.

System Failure: the Money Problem

So therefore, take your life in your hands, take control of it as much as you can. Get together with other artists, don't sit and moan on your own. If you're moaning about something, say right, what are we going to do about it? Join a campaign, write to your MP, join the union, have a little branch meeting: what do you want to happen? You've just got to do something about it, honestly.

MG: There absolutely is a role for academia in this as well. I had a similar experience to you on my degree. I had one day of professional practice in three years. They gathered us in the final term of our third year, sat us in a room, and we had a presentation by someone from the Arts Council, a presentation by someone who ran a residency somewhere, and I forget what the other two presentations were, but that was it. One day, three years: now go off and be an artist.

So I've personally made it a bit of a mission in what I do as an artist and an educator to engage with professional practice and to demystify how you can go about even attempting to build a career. I've worked at a number of different HE institutions, some of which really get it and do it really well, some of which are still dreadful. There's definitely a role for HE to be addressing this stuff. I would say it's a responsibility that they have. But only a handful are really properly getting hold of it and doing it.

It does come down a lot to the staff on the course. If you have a good course, where most people are still practicing, you'll get good professional practice advice. If you happen to be on a course where for the majority of the lecturers, their practice has fallen away (for whatever reason) and they are now just academics, it tends to be awful.

RM: Artquest is a higher education institution; we work with students and with tutors. We've also heard that professional development taught to a bunch of students at the same time can, in some circumstances, make those students feel that this is the one way to be an artist; it can serve to flatten what people think their options might be. I'm not saying this is for everyone; I do genuinely believe that we absolutely need to be addressing it. I think it's more a particular issue about how we address it.

But I also wanted to talk about that incredibly depressing email you read out, about 'should there be fewer artists being paid'. In the context of shrinking public funding budgets, and the idea that public funding is replaced by private philanthropy (whatever that means): this money is not only shrinking but the intention is that it's replaced. On the other hand, you look at things like Tate taking money from BP. If we were in a circumstance of some of that public funding being replaced by private money, which artists ethically have a problem with, we might be in a circumstance where artists are being offered fees because there's more money around, but it's funded through organisations that they don't want to be associated with. So, it's where those kind of ethical lines are as well.

System Failure: the Money Problem

MG: It's really problematic, it really, really is. I, thankfully, have never found myself in the position where I've had to make a call on one of those things, but I have a bunch of friends and colleagues who have not sold work to a particular collector for ethical reasons. It's really a problem. Also an unfortunate conflict can then arise, when someone does take what someone else deems unethical money, and that can cause problems in a peer respect sense.

AK: Maybe, again: academia, that's one of the routes that it could be looked at. One of the workshops we started running at Artists Union England is about what's a trade union. At the end of it, we did this little thing where we printed off lots of opportunities and jobs from one of the job websites, and we looked at them as a group. We put them on the wall and we sussed out, as groups: is it a good opportunity? Or is it, actually, that they're just offering free space? For this guy, who's got a bit of a profile, it's like: I could hire that space and do it myself – do I really need to go down to London and spend four weeks spending money staying there?

So I think you just have to be a bit more savvy about the opportunities that come up. As you look at them, you can see some that are very exploitative. Personally, I wouldn't take those. Look between the lines; look really carefully. I've written to certain residencies I've applied for. I've really looked at the amount and then I've written: what's your rate of pay, how are you paying people, how can you do that much? Then they suddenly go off on a long-winded explanation and it's like: oh, actually, the pay is just shit. Just say it: you've got no money to pay the artist, that's what it's about; you're just trying to glorify it and say, yes, we'll give you some nice photographs. You wouldn't ask a cleaner to clean a building for a month and say, by the way, we're not going to pay you, but we'll do some nice photographs of your work. What? That's just outrageous. No.

MG: I was just going to say: the point you make is exactly where the campaign comes in. It's often the case, isn't it, that when you first look at an opportunity, the figure that you might see coming off the page, you kind of think: oh, that looks alright. Then once you start doing that maths, suddenly it's disappeared and there's literally nothing left for the artist. Actually, the transparency is something that the campaign talks about a lot, because there are a lot of organisations that are guilty of 'let's chuck everything into this one big number and then it looks much better than it really is'.

A responsibility for the organisation, to pull that apart and state where your bit sits within this big number, is really important in terms of what the campaign is aiming to bring out.

RM: It's also around who we're talking to; who this is aimed at. You talked about galleries; you talked about politicians; we've all been talking about artists as well. I wonder where the role for things like the media is. I think artists' representation in the media is often that we're kind of wasters and we sort of waste huge amounts of

public money, making a puddle because it's public artwork and it's worth £40,000. There's a huge disconnect between the amount of time and effort that goes into actually doing something, and how it's presented more broadly in the media, to other audiences.

I'm reminded of a report many years ago, Taste Buds, on the contemporary art market. It found that an enormous proportion of the general public would like to buy contemporary art, but they don't know how to. And they don't know that they can trust that what they're spending their money on is worth it, because it has been so de-valued. So I think there are lots of other potential routes to an income through sales, through the art market, in a different way –not through Gagosian or some enormous commercial gallery– but it's really difficult to overcome a lot of these blocks through the media and how artists are represented.

AK: Maybe it is about just getting ourselves out there more, and explaining to people what it is we do, and just not being embarrassed about it. This is what we do and we love it, but it's actually really hard work. So it's not just the Tracey Emms out there that get the media coverage.

If we don't fight for our rights... Look at the trade union bill that they're trying to push through –anti trade union bill. Everybody had to wear a black armband on a protest and you had to give them two weeks' notice. Absolutely ridiculous. Those are fundamental rights. We've got the strongest legal rules against trade unions in England compared to anywhere else in Europe, and it's outrageous.

We've got to be careful, because artists like to protest. Often their work is about challenging and making questions. Look at what happened at the National Gallery; and the PCS won, and the Ritzy workers won. I don't know whether you know about those campaigns. Get yourself out there and read the papers. You probably do already, but don't feel disheartened: there is something we can do about it. I feel very positive about things, because I feel like we've got nothing to lose.

MG: The media question is a huge one, isn't it, because the media will do what the media does.

RM: They're selling advertising; they're selling newspapers.

MG: Yes, and we serve a role within the media currently as something to be ridiculed. How any shift or change comes about in that: I don't even know where to begin. It's really a problem.

AK: You've just got to hold to your own work. If you believe your own work and have integrity with your work, then that's it. Your work is you, isn't it, as an artist.

RM: But it's also how that's presented: these are real barriers to finding an audience. There are social networks and social media, but people have to still want to follow you and find out.

AK: I agree. I do a lot of freelance work for BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art. The last Turner Prize that was there, there was a lot of negativity around that show but I think they had the biggest visitor numbers ever of any Turner Prize in Newcastle. That was because all of the crew at that fantastic building knew all about the artworks and sat and had cups of tea outside, in the piazza and all the floors, and talked to people who came. It doesn't mean you have to like the work, but they engaged with everybody and they talked about it. That is, I think, the way forward. If you're proud of piece of work, whatever it is, you've got to learn to articulate somehow. I'm not a great speaker, I just do my best: that's all you can do.

RM: In the first discussion that we did, John Kiefer, he's an Arts Council consultant, was saying that when all the public funding disappeared in Greece during the crisis, two things happened: no-one in the general public cared at all and artists started self-organising. They started self-organising in terms of putting themselves in dental surgeries and in shoe shine shops and in the local corner shop, to make themselves visible in exactly that kind of way.

At this stage, I'd like to hear from other people who have anything they'd like to contribute: questions, comments...

Audience Member: I'm just wondering about the model of how one earns money as an artist in the wider context of what's going on in the cultural economy. If we look at music streams – Apple – people don't buy the product anymore. The cost of a CD twenty years ago was £15; it's now £3. Streaming music is practically free. And talking about never undercutting yourself: you have economies of other industries; look at black taxi drivers. They were a very solid thing; suddenly Uber appears and undercuts that and gives that service. And living in the deflation context: the deflation economy is about trying to give what the public wants; the customer is always right. He or she is looking for the most affordable and cheapest experience or product, and occasionally there'll be luxury. So I think artists are in a strange dilemma. It is luxury goods. It's a luxury high-value vocation, but also it's having to work within a wider economy, where it's going to be undercut by other aspects of cultural consumption or experiences.

Television, for example, where suddenly you've got streaming. That is creating very, very high quality drama – Game of Thrones – which is an accessible good quality experience. And with artists: you get a few high value artists, but what's going to happen to the rest? It is about having to hold two or three jobs in that situation. With the Bloomberg New Contemporaries and thanks to Artquest, I'm mentoring some of the artists that have been selected for that. All of the advice they're looking at is

actually about how they want to sustain their practice by having a day job and what's the best day job to go for: retail, PR, other kind of creative and traditional jobs.

So, isn't art and artists always going to be juggling those...

AK: I think they are. And I can see all of those arguments and I know about the music business and how they have to... all the money now comes from live performance. I think we just have to be more cunning, I really do. The Musicians Union, if you look at their website, they're the most similar to fine artists in the variety. All I can speak is from the trade union perspective and trade unions are there to regular relationships with both employees and engagers. The Musicians Union have managed to do that. If you record in a studio, there's a certain right, and they can go and look at that. There's loads of different contracts and yes, you might not get it, but surely that's what you aim for. There's a certain rate, if you play in an orchestra, if you've got certain kinds of experience, if you work in a school.

So we still have to aim high. There are the luxury goods out there as well. I was painting when I did my Visual Arts degree. I had somebody who didn't buy some stuff from my show, but he came to my studio afterwards and he was just pulling rolls of money out of his pocket, he wanted to give me cash on demand. The money is there, it's just not trickling down. On the one hand, yes, you should be idealistic about your practice. You might not get paid depending on what that is, so you might have to do something else, but it doesn't mean that you can't support others to fight for actually raising the bar for artists. I was hoping that the Arts Council would be in tonight, I don't know whether they are.

RM: I don't think there's anyone.

AK: That's a shame because, for me, that's what we should be doing. I want more artists out there. I want a society where we're only working part-time. There's enough money in the richest countries; we shouldn't all be working forty hours a week. I'm sorry, I don't accept that argument.

MG: There's a fantastic article that David Graeber wrote about bullshit jobs (his term), which you should read on the Strike magazine website. He talks exactly about that. Where we should be and what the economic projection was for where we are now: most of us shouldn't be working at all, because it's not needed to keep the world functioning. It's a really short but really beautiful summation of how it's all gone wrong and there's been this need for more and more needless jobs to be created so that people are just working unnecessarily.

AK: I do a lot of volunteering, but just being savvy about it: be very savvy about what you use and be strategic about how you do that volunteering. If it's something you feel very passionate about that you want to do for yourself, that's important for you.

System Failure: the Money Problem

But don't do, and make sure you're looking out for, the opportunities that they're putting out as volunteering opportunities, that actually should be paid.

RM: I really want to try to stick to this socially focused thing. I think you're right that in any freelance role, there's always going to be cross-subsidy, whether you're an artist or a lawyer or whatever. But at the same time, I was talking to Alex Gough, the Gallery Manager of Block336, about this idea that artists seem to be unique in some ways. They ultimately have to pay to go to work; they have to pay for their studios; they have to pay for the time to give themselves to do their stuff. So, there's got to be some kind of middle ground. What you're talking about, these new models of music and the high earners and the low earners, artists do have a lot to learn from that.

It doesn't translate directly, but thinking about the music industry: the EMIs and Sonys producing the enormously expensive albums and then a lot of people busking. The equivalent might be Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst versus a lot of us sitting in this room. The music industry has things like Spotify that have flipped that in a lot of ways, or are starting to address it. The difference, of course, is about how people experience music versus how they experience art. That is where a lot of auction companies or online galleries haven't quite been able to find the right business model for doing that. It's something that's obviously much bigger than this conversation, but there's a lot that we can start to try to move towards, or explore, different models.

MG: I constantly find myself making music analogies as an artist, because it's an industry and language that people understand, even if they're not interested in art. To pick up very particularly on that, the one thing that hasn't got cheaper are gig tickets. If you take the CDs as the reproduction, the actual experience of the music is still something you pay a significant amount of money for. That's the equivalent of our object or our performance, and we need to really take hold of that. That's why we need to be getting paid by galleries when we show there.

But the art market also has a big role to play in this, in that it is that kind of unknown bubble, isn't it. I've been represented by two commercial galleries. One of them was brilliant at going out and finding that money that no-one really knows exists. There are a lot of people who are very, very wealthy, who don't know how to buy art and don't know what they should buy; she was really good at going out and talking to these people and bringing the money in in that way. So, there's a responsibility of the market to be better at helping artists out.

Audience Member: Just to pick up on a few points as an artist. I just want to show what level it's coming to. In Brixton two weeks ago, we had open studios. We were asked to be there from 10 o'clock to 6 to host the people looking at the paintings, to give them something to drink. The artists needed to pay money to be able to have your open studio in an advertisement. And this is Lambeth, Brixton; it's not Chelsea.

System Failure: the Money Problem

So I decided not to participate. I didn't get anything from that. I'm not even talking about being paid. In another case, open event, live painting which I wanted to participate in. No money so I didn't buy paints, I decided to paint with paint stripper... What I'm trying to say is, I don't think, unfortunately, that as artists, we have much leeway. You have the unions, but the unions voted to strike...

AK: I disagree with that point, but anyway...

Audience Member: A few weeks ago there was a conference about community in Liverpool. There was a really heated discussion between artists and art institutions; in this case it was represented by the Tate. It was difficult, because these institutions are also under pressure, just as artists are, but I think the option in this case, especially with Tate, is close your gates, simple as that. I mean, this is one of the prides of the UK: it's getting a lot of people, a lot of tourists, a lot of money into the UK and to London. So there are some institutions here that have a lot of power. As an artist, I have no idea, but is an institution the only one who can perform a strike?

RM: It's an interesting point. Was it in the late seventies, there was an art strike, for about two or three years and hardly anyone noticed. It was a bit of an art project.

AK: I heard of one in Iceland and I don't know whether it's gone down in myth now. During the whole global crisis, they covered all the art up for a day. Everybody was asked to cover up their books, their designer goods, photographs, no music, no radio, no television and probably no clothes as well – and see what life is like. Because everybody takes it for granted that all those things have to be designed and often they're designed very, very well.

RM: And also those designers originally come from the visual arts or other arts areas; the arts do feed a huge number of those.

AK: Yes, and back to what you said, I suppose trade unions have had a bad reputation in relation to striking. But what we can do collectively: we can have a strong voice. If you find a big institution that you feel is advertising a job that you think is exploitative: if you join the union, we can write to them. Especially if they're getting public money, which that means they should be accountable, and they're offering to pay an artist something like minimum wage, then we can do something about that. We can insist that actually, this is not on: you're getting so much money and you're only offering minimum wage. But if you're on your own, how would you do that?

Audience Member: But if they're not getting enough money, we need to demand from them: if you're not getting enough money, you do something to get more money.

AK: The gallery should be speaking up, absolutely, which is why the Paying Artists Campaign... The galleries need to up their game if they really want great art. As you

System Failure: the Money Problem

say, Britain is really known for that. I just feel like in fine art, we really need to catch up with theatre and music; we're really poor cousins.

RM: Last week in the regeneration talk, Kirsten Dunne from the Greater London Authority said that four out of five people who visit London specifically come for the culture, so it would be a clearly powerful thing to do.

MG: I would have been you in that situation, I wouldn't have paid to go on that map. I'm sure if you spoke to most people who are on that map, they were probably feeling a bit disgruntled, a bit annoyed that they'd had to pay to go on it. Actually the power of the masked voice is that: if everyone who was annoyed about the fact that they'd had to pay to go on that map had just said 'no, we're not doing it', there would have been no event and so something would have shifted and changed.

Audience Member: I'm just wondering whether there's a problem with the term artists because, actually, it doesn't mean anything. It's not a currency that warrants paying, because the connotation of an artist is a bum who gets up at midday, does what he likes and is very naive and stupid. If you move into different industries, you get certain reactions. People don't realise about the professionalisation of artists, that artists have PhDs. If you scrap that term hypothetically and you think, what is your actual job. There are huge amounts of skills involved: you're a fundraiser, curate and so on. There are different words that actually are currency in other industries and that have money associated with them. If I stepped in as a consultant and say, I want £600 today: yes, sure, no problem. But I'm an artist and I'm here to advise you: £150.

So, I think there's a problem with the term; it doesn't mean anything. Let's break down what the skills are: you're a PhD, you're a lecturer, you're a writer. Let's look at what you can do. You've got amazing skills at making things that in other industries are recognised, and maybe do a self-assessment in terms of them. Then through that self-assessment, there could be an equalisation of pay.

RM: I think that's a good point, unpacking what the term artist means, because it doesn't mean a lot to most people. It's often quite negative, so there could well be something in that.

Audience Member: Just to go back to the point about the strong voice, I'm really interested in how we can unify different organisations around these messages. I work for the University of the Arts London, the largest arts and design institution in Europe, and we are dependent on art being recognised as valuable within the curriculum. That feeds into the university attracting creative talent, and we're dependent on it being recognised. I think there's huge untapped potential for us to work together more. My question is for Mark and Angela: have you been approached by arts institutions, or universities with large art courses and programmes, to discuss how we can collaborate and build more of the joined voice, and maybe a strategy to

engage the media in more open, fair dialogue around the challenges that artists are facing?

AK: I think it is difficult around academia, because they're feeling so pressurised, and the problem with the cuts and austerity is that it's a pervasive fear. Everybody is terrified that they're going to lose their job. People are scared, but that's how they win, because the people feel intimidated. My natural reaction is to come out fighting, because that's the way I am. You've just got to stand up for what you believe, and working together is much more powerful. But you're only going to get those people along that are not intimidated or scared. It is a scary thing to do, to put your head above the parapet.

Audience Member: I think universities are meant to be brave.

AK: Yes, I agree, absolutely.

Audience Member: I appreciate what you're saying about individual lecturers, tutors and researchers. It's difficult to be brave, particularly if living in a life of uncertainty, and institutions need to step up.

AK: Absolutely, and I think some commercial galleries really take advantage, particularly with the amount of artists that live in London. Some members came to us last year (but because we're not certified yet, there's very little we can do; we passed them on to BECTU). It's a commercial gallery, very, very well known in London. Technicians have worked there for years – most of them have MAs and PhDs – on minimum wage. They're expected, with three or four changes a year, to come along and do training for free for four or five days, and they use them as experts, professionals, to talk about the work. They're not employing just Joe Bloggs off the street, they're employing artists: that's not a coincidence. It's just appalling, being on the same minimum wage and they're just living in poverty. So they went to BECTU and I think they're getting representation from BECTU now, because they've got the strength in numbers; they've got 25,000 members.

How many artists: you need to join a union and do something about it.

MG: You're absolutely right, it would be great if institutions could do something about it. I've never heard of an institution doing that, discussing how media interpretation could be taken head-on. I don't know if it's connected at all, but I had a meeting this morning with a director of a very successful, very large development company, who's gone back to study fine art in university. He's set up a new business. He's got all of this business knowledge, all of this business nous and he's training to be an artist, and so has knowledge and sympathy to the arts. Suddenly he's found himself in this amazing position, where he's got lots of contacts within a very rich world, he understands how that world works, and he is increasingly understanding art.

System Failure: the Money Problem

It was a brilliant conversation and it's just that: knowledge exchange and linked up thinking, the power that exists within that, it's kind of wrapped up in this one guy currently. In terms of your direct question, there is absolutely power in shared knowledge in how we can address some of these things and how we go about bringing those elements together.

Audience Member: A lady over there talking about the term 'artist' and this is something that has come up in the last year in conversations, particularly in trying to engage the public with the Paying Artists Campaign and thinking about how we make it something urgent for the public to get behind. One of the issues is that people don't really know or understand what an artist actually does. They understand what a nurse does, what a policeman does or what a teacher does, and why they should be standing up and making a fuss about pay, but they don't really understand what an artist does. There is something there from an artist's point of view, about how we can better communicate what it is that we do, what we bring. What we, a-n, do as an organisation and other organisations that we work with, how do you value the role of the artist within organisations.

So it's not always a conversation about money, about pay; it's about trying to articulate what the value is that we bring. One other point that I thought would be interesting to discuss is this comparison with other sectoral models and other business models. The music industry is one interesting one to look at, but it always come back to the fact that the visual arts world is unique in all sorts of ways. It is unregulated and it's also free when it comes to exhibitions, so there is no box office or ticket price going back into the organisations that make the opportunities for artists. There is funding coming in; there are also limits on capacity and the number of artists that they can create opportunities for. There is a really important question about how artists make opportunities for themselves now, particularly where we're looking at situations where some councils are completely losing their cultural departments. There isn't going to be a gallery or a museum over time; there isn't going to be a library; that's something that is definitely happening.

So, the opportunities for artists to do what is important: which is making work. How do you do that, what is the business model? But it is also about finding that opportunity for artists and I think that's something that artists could really make for themselves, there's opportunities for them to do that.

MG: I will highlight really good examples of that as well. Bristol is quite a forward thinking city anyway, but they have now a world class set of public artworks still growing around the city because there's an arts council officer there who is very strong-willed in how he deals with the council. He is only interested in working with really interesting contemporary artists. Over time now, the council has paid for all of these artworks that have often come about through an acknowledgement that a particular area needs some regeneration, and so money has been found for projects to happen.

System Failure: the Money Problem

I did a project with him, which was on one level a very practical solution to lighting in one of those awful motorway underpasses. He spotted an opportunity to commission an artist to do something interesting. So suddenly, there is an amazing collection of artworks around the city, free for everyone to access, and a really strong case within the council that this guy should be there and carry on getting paid to be part of this and being allowed to commission these artworks. There are other councils where 100% of everything is being cut. Those are the things that need to be shouted about and made really visible.

AK: I think there is a real contradiction with the cuts. Newcastle City Council have one Arts Officer left and they have six residencies a year. They've focused on residencies in really deprived areas. I do work for a small project working with children and families who have got special needs. Art is really valued with people who are ignored in society and who are failed by the education system. Art can really help people to have access to society and that's how we're being used now, to actually enable people to have access to society.

We should be really blowing our trumpet about that, because they're not asking engineers, they're not asking people who make roads. We can highlight we do very functional things; it's what artists do. So there is this contradiction that we have to be aware of: on the one hand, they're trying to sell it as a business model, but on the other hand, art is a really deep part of society. Don't let go of that, because it is, and they want us, and they need us. Sometimes you have to create things that are not there. For me it's always around social justice, so I find what is there and I'll go and approach somebody and say, why aren't you doing this? And more often than not, they say, well, actually, it's a good idea, will you do it?

But you have to look for those opportunities. It depends what you want to do. Say no to the really bad opportunities, and get together and create your own. Make such a fuss about it that you and your work gets the publicity. If you're going to work for free, you might as well get the right publicity for you.

RM: Two things I just want to wrap up with. On this idea that came up about media: I don't know if anyone saw the BBC series 'What do artists do all day?'. It was a recent attempt to show what artists possibly do all day. I don't think I know any artists who do any of those things all day. Sitting in enormous multi-million studios, looking at walls and thinking about what they're next project would be, is not really what artists do all day. It is about media representation, but it's media representation of artist workers, the kind of worker bees who make all of that other stuff possible. 'What does Anthony Gormley's assistant do all day?' – that's what the next series should be.

Also, it strikes me from a lot of what we've been talking about, that money is actually a symptom for a lot of this stuff, of the systemic problems and issues that are going

System Failure: the Money Problem

on. If we can address things like the status of the artist, then money will start to not be a problem as much, because the value of artists will be more likely understood.

So, I do want to thank you all very much for coming, I want to thank Mark for your contribution, Angela as well, thank you very much. Also, our partners in this talk, who are a-n, Artists Union England. I want to thank Block336 as well for hosting us. The next talk will be around families; artists who have families and the issues that they face.