THE INDIRECT EXCHANGE OF UNCERTAIN VALUE
At least two titles frame *The indirect exchange of uncertain value*. Most immediately and with highest billing, the headline described the public presentation of a site-specific installation during a three-week period in August 2011 at Fettes College. As such, barely visible on the esplanade commanding the aristocratic sweep to Learmouth Gardens, a shed-sized *Cat* and *Boot* painted in heavy camouflage flanked the school’s front door — part heraldry, part dazzle, gross. Respectively, the *Cat* housed a sculpture (bronze) and the *Boot*, a video (choral). Daily tours ran from a temporary plywood booth stationed at the college gates, neatly hung with colourful posters like a campaign office or Christian bookstall. Shorter on the bill, a subtitle — *The performance of public art* — was given to a day-long symposium held on 5th August. Ostensibly a launch event, the symposium brought to conclusion a week-long Summer School and a month-long wider participation programme for pupils and staff at both Fettes, and its close neighbour, Broughton High School.

*The performance of public art* finds itself couched inside *The indirect exchange of uncertain value*: an explanation qualifying a declaration.

Titles are specifically designated proper nouns — ‘names’. As for any designated event, place or thing, the names brought into play by *The indirect exchange of uncertain value* are numerous, if covert and couched. They include the individuated names of artists, exhibits, locations, enabling organisations, workshop participants, subscribers, delegates, dates and so on, each of which is a fractal, mobile social construct. Jacques Derrida’s formula ‘3 + n’ describes authoring as a corporate operation that is multiple and indeterminate. Those lodging a claim to be recognized as authors may try to direct the origins and ends of a ‘work’, but according to logic, the determination of origins and ends is essentially an arbitrary excision, an excuse for authoring or asserting
an authorial credit. Authoring is, in these terms, a proprietorial process concerned with defining or owning ‘work’. The creative manipulation of material or the reconstitution of narrative responses is secondary to the power of the force channeled in order that credit (for work) may be taken. To entitle or name is to gather activities and information under a pseudo-singular point of convenience (e.g., a title, the name of an author, the name of an event etc.), which acquires density (materiality), territory and power through use. The allocation of a title is, then, an authorial act that designates something at the same time as investing in it the capacity to author and be authored. Titles acquire substance, morph and become more or less visible through perpetual motion — they preface work and they organise its archival presence, conducting at all times the power and threat of resurrection. Titles take shape as topos. They are architectural structures endowed with the capacity to be distinctively recognised and inhabited. The linguistic transactions which construct them are incessant variably accelerated processes of rationalising, acquiring, modifying, reinvesting and downgrading. They illustrate the becoming of any proper noun; of complex, idiosyncratic things. When does authoring begin and when does it end? What are its shapes? Where are the boundaries of a project like The indirect exchange of uncertain value to be drawn? Who do we leave out and what do we include? These are, of course, political questions.

Early in the 20th century, Duchamp cast a prescient light on the overriding importance of naming and signature to art. In this, he also anticipated the structuring of an information based economy. Arguably, the disconnect between art and idiom which characterises the contemporary field is permitted by signature, the statement and restatement of an authorial name. Signature is a claim to credit that becomes simultaneously a point of marketable reduction, a tactic for cultural colonisation and palpable material for creative practice. In Kant After Duchamp, Thierry De Duve reflects on Duchamp’s readymade Fountain as a nexus; a live circuit of endorsements, enactments and mediations.1 The ‘R. Mutt’ signature Duchamp applied to the surface of a urinal brought focus on the operative conditions that perform and

the indirect exchange of uncertain value.

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thereby construct art. It is instructive that the loss of an ‘original’ has not prevented Fountain from registering as the most significant work of the last century. The indirect exchange of uncertain value self-consciously implicated itself as a series of nodes —as a nexus— using the spectacular setting at Fettes to bring focus on the processes of instituting. Fettes is a grand edifice made grander by the distinctions of its alumni and network of Old Fettesians, How was it reconfigured by the temporary intrusion of a bellyful pair, an agit-prop Cat and Boot? To what extent was its detritus, (the excess of meaning), absorbed and reworked by The indirect exchange of uncertain value? As titles crust over, the process of picking scabs is the (by now classic) process of deconstruction, So much is unseen.
Les Freres Barres: Tatham and O’Sullivan’s ‘Cat and Boot’

Tom O’Sullivan

The Fettes school song makes much of the school’s exotic and famously coloured uniform:

Let them be a bit dearer and fade if they will/The original colours have charms for us still/And in spite of the schemes of the cunning inventa/Let’s stick to our Brown and our faded Magenta.¹

School songs, like uniforms, are designed to sublimate individuals and engender loyalty to the institution (the living fundament — the history — that streams through an architectural shell). Decorated in newly mutated variations of a pseudo-naive stripe and ball pattern that has evolved as signature or uniform in the work of Joanne Tatham and Tom O’Sullivan over the last decade, Cat and Boot were shipped to Fettes along the M8 by truck, Built in Glasgow, where Tom and Joanne lived and worked for nearly twenty years, (during that period associated with the visions and reports which gave rise to ‘the miracle’), the journey was noted in the national press,

Flanking Fettes’ front door, Cat and Boot were a pair of mismatched monuments to anti-monumentality. Prosailly truncated, at odds with the stone amalgamations rising behind, they looked shocked to find themselves on Fettes Rise, a mile or two out of kilter, Their affinities appeared to lie with the Festival, the Fringe and the streets of the Old Town, long home to hawking and entertainment, In 1915, recalling the attractions that sprawled around the west end of the vanished Nor Loch in the 19th century, Lord Justice Clerk John MacDonald, Lord Kingsburgh gave a sense of its jerry-built pleasures:

‘In the middle stood a great circular booth, of cheese-like proportions, all black with pitch, except where, in enormous white letters, It was announced to Princes Street that this abomination was the Royal Rotunda...Farther up the slope was a building even more disgraceful, a penny or twopenny gaff theatre, which had the distinguished name of the Victoria Temple, of which it is needless to say that I was never permitted to see the interior, The outside I remember — brown woodwork, and wooden flat pillars, painted to imitate — and imitating very badly — the beauties of Aberdeen red granite.’²

The critical murder in James Hogg’s Confessions of a Justified Sinner, a touchstone for the self-defined, neo-conceptualist ‘Scotia Nostra’ (erstwhile fabricants of ‘the miracle’) takes place in the Old Town, at the foot of the Royal Mile, not far from Canongate Kirk, in a wynd beside the long lost loch. In the specific history of Tom and Joanne’s practice, The indirect exchange of uncertain value germinated further east in the fertile soils of East Lothian as a result of Rhetoric Works & Vanity Works & Other Works (2006), a presentation of work in historic rooms at Newhailes, a stately home in Musselburgh.

On the 28th of July, as Cat and Boot arrived on the crunching gravel in front of the school, M,C,B. Spens, Headmaster at Fettes, is reported to have given a short, public statement:

‘The collaboration between Collective and Fettes College is unique, the first time that any independent school in Scotland has been the site of such an influential and high profile collection of public art, This is a fact of which we are very proud, The pieces are large scale and will certainly be a surprising, some may even say shocking, addition to the Fettes campus, The juxtaposition between our iconic College and these new works will hopefully enthuse the public and generate a great deal of debate.’³

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Cat and Boot may have been the most visible tokens of Tom and Joanne’s involvement with *The indirect exchange of uncertain value*, but in partnership with Collective, they were deeply involved with the successful negotiations that resulted in the ‘surprising…shocking addition to the Fettes campus’. In effect, these negotiations were protracted instruments of production, the sculptors’ new tools. In an algebra derived from Duchamp, ‘access’ has the status of ‘sculpture’ and ‘contracts’ are equivalent to ‘timber’.
Outdoor Girl:
Elizabeth Price’s ‘Choir part 1’

Elizabeth Price

HRH Zara Phillips and Mike Tindall Esq. were married on 30th July 2011 at the Canongate Kirk in Edinburgh’s Old Town, a full week before the artworks for The indirect exchange of uncertain value were opened to public view. In terms of securing such a public site for the ceremony, the High Street setting presented ‘unique challenges’ to Lothian and Borders Police (since 2013 no longer headquartered at Fettes Avenue), Zara and Mike’s wedding came perilously close to the opening of the Festival Fringe on 5th of August. In any given year since 1947, August in Edinburgh — and August acquires enough density in the Old Town to persist there all year round — has been ransomed to the Festival and Fringe. Count term-time, on the airy slopes of Comely Bank, a cosmopolitan bunch of recruits to Fettes’ student body overlook Broughton High, a state-funded secondary school located in grounds ceded by Fettes in 1963, Tour guides talked about this and the other ‘land-grabs’ that affected Fettes in the 1960s, Land for the aforementioned Lothian and Borders Police HQ (empty, a target for developers itself) was acquired by compulsory purchase at this time, Fettes is located a safe distance from the Festival and the Old Town which, as Muriel Spark intimates in The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, has been considered (by Edinburghers) ‘a reeking network of slums...a misty region of crime and desperation.’1 Spilling between Castle, Palace and Parliament, the Royal Mile is variously a twisting midden, a spitton heart and a tartan mantrap as yet ‘unspoiled’ enough to host a lower league wedding: he wore a suit; she wore an ivory dress of silk faille and duchess satin, featuring a corset bodice, an empire waist detail and chevron pleats. The full skirt concealed pockets.

Lined with foam sound-proofing, the Boot on Fettes esplanade housed


Elizabeth Price’s film, Choir, Developed during residencies in Rome and Oxford, it previewed at Chisenhale, London on 21st July, a fortnight before it featured in The indirect exchange of uncertain value, In two parts, it was resolved as an auditorium constructed from the common histories of the words ‘choir’ and ‘chorus’. In front of the college, it worked through the mutually determined intersection between edifice and social function, As ‘the area of a church designated for the group of people appointed to sing’ — an architectural feature — ‘choir’ also constitutes that group of people who sing: the group and the space form and reform each other, overlapping like sets in a Venn diagram, ‘Chorus’ underscores and precedes ‘choir’ as an ensemble singing together, facets of one voice: In popular discourse, it has come to mean that repeated section of songs between solo verses — the chorus is the bit everyone can join in with; it is a bit with a rhetorical or phatic function rather than a narrative drive. Conceptually, ‘chorus’ expresses itself always as ‘body’ rather than ‘head’, ‘corporate’ rather than ‘capital’.

Choir staked out territory in the semantic region between singing groups and the fixed forms those groups give rise to in language, wood and stone, Having previously associated the narration in Elizabeth’s video The Tent (2010) with the ‘typing ghost’ that manifests itself in Spark’s first novel, The Comforters, I read Choir as a work which reinforced connections to such Sparkian motifs as the construction of narration in the intersection between style and subject.

The versicles and responses came from her lips and tongue through the din of demolition. ‘Yea, the Lord hath done great things for us already: whereof, we rejoice. /Turn our captivity, O Lord: as the rivers in the south. /They that sow in tears: shall reap in joy.’…The other girls, automatically listening to Joanna’s voice as they had always done, were possibly less frantic, and trembled less...²
Donaldson’s School for the Deaf is (at the time of writing) subject to plans for a development of luxury apartments; at one time, it seemed as though the Royal High School at the foot of Calton Hill would be developed as a six star hotel. In *Private Eye*, ‘Piloti’ viewed the Royal High scheme as:

‘... cynical plutocratic capitalism acquiescing in a gratuitously excessive scheme which will require the spoiling and demeaning of a supreme piece of architectural and landscape art, a symbolic monument that represents the ideals of the Scottish Enlightenment.’

Councillors supporting the plan were branded ‘Philistines’, completing a track back to the Book of Judges and Samson, who was responsible for killing the lion suppurating honey on the syrup tin. When history is reduced to heritage, structures lose the ability to transmogrify.

In the back leg of the big *Cat*, sat a sculpture on a white plinth in a white cube, (geometrical determinations of such a ‘white cube’ gallery space are made from the inside out), it bore the title *Portrait of a Recipient as a Door Handle, After a Drawing Produced by an Anonymous Philanthropist*. Bronze Maquette, Scale 3:2. A Doolittle, a vertical rod with finials in the form of spoon-shaped heads, it was produced by Chris Evans. In 2014, a version of this work was employed as a handle fixed to the door of the Rabobank, Rotterdam, acquiring contextual patina. At Fettes, it was physically separated from a partner piece, *New Rules*, which took the form of a circular bronze plaque in Callovery Hall, Fettes’ reception room and de facto portrait gallery. *New Rules* was inaccessible except on the day of the symposium. As an alternative, guides provided a verbal description:

‘The two words of the title are asymmetrically typeset over two horizontal lines, in serified roman capitals. The words are seen in outline, whereby two amorphous black forms that resemble a mountainous landscape behind them — and extending to either side of the form — are visible through the letters.’

1. Quoted from the script provided for *The indirect exchange of uncertain value* tour guides.


3. Email correspondence with the artist, May 2015.
The ‘L’ of ‘RULES’ extends to form the stem of a wineglass, refracting the black background to become its contents.³

Chris’s use of the gallery space within the Cat’s leg asserted contemporary art’s ‘new rules’, (fractured as they are by the bloated success of the post-millennial art market), over the Victorian, quasi-domestic site of display in Callover Hall. His use of bronze, a traditional medium for art, in a figurative form, on a plinth (essential to the proper presentation of sculpture and statuary) drew attention to the shaft-like proportions and shift-like behavior of the Cat’s leg. As a portal activated by a bronze fetish, the Cat’s leg mongered a link to Chris’s work and the philanthropic history of Fettes School; as something latent — understood and ungraspable.
Excerpts
from the presentations and performances of Tom Leonard, Owen Hatherley and Vito Acconci.

Vito Acconci
‘...I hated the notion of performance, I hated performance because it was a theatrical word...but there was one definition of the word that really attracted me, Perform in the sense of “perform a contract”. So you sign something saying you are going to do it, then you have to bring that contract to completion, You have to perform that...

I hated the fact that everybody who knew a piece of mine knew what I looked like...am I doing art, or am I developing a kind of personality cult?...

How do I get rid of myself? How do I get rid of myself being seen? So I felt...so maybe this was the first time I started using for myself words like “space”, words like “architecture”...

The notion of “fact” was really important to me...I didn’t mean that abstract ideas weren’t important, but I wanted facts to be presented in work, because I wanted people who came into contact with the work to think of themselves...’

Tom Leonard
‘I’ll read a poem, a sequence called An Ayrshire Mother...About two to three years ago, I was asked to contribute to a book called New Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect which is a variation, obviously on Burns 1786 Poems Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect...I still don’t know what the hell Scots means, It’s usually people like the Minister of Culture talking posh English, men swearing in glottal stops, you know, But I mean for someone like me who comes from Glasgow, or with a working class background, I still have an old sound system full of vowels, which these characters long went to places like this to get rid of them, You know if you get rid of them, you might become a Prime Minister,’

Owen Hatherley
‘The Tories have cancelled various publicly funded policies, usually with specific reference to architects and architecture and how they are a bad thing, The Education Secretary Michael Gove has repeatedly said we will not get Richard Rogers to design your school,...Instead, they got a panel led by the CEO of Tesco and the CEO of Dixons,...Let’s hear from Tesco, Let’s be educated in buildings that work like supermarkets,...’
Conclusion

This chapter opened with a discussion about titles and entitlement; the accumulation of credit and the fabrication of material in an information economy; the role of networks and the configuration of a nexus within that. It is uncontested that through the largely invisible operation of alumni as a corps of like-minded, properly-produced, correctly-socialised individuals, schools like Fettes advantage many of those who pass through their portals. In what Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello term ‘The New Spirit of Capitalism’, the importance of an effective social nexus is seen to be paramount; the ability of an individual to reconstitute social and financial capital in their favour increasingly depends on it. Social nexus operate genealogically, threatening always to revert to privileged lines of inheritance. We can plainly see that today, lines of privilege are ossifying. Inheritance, benefaction and philanthropy are once again the organising principles for what to do with accumulations and accretions of wealth. The will to enclose, build, occupy is as linguistic as it is architectural.

Implicated by the creation of its own nexus, The indirect exchange of uncertain value was orchestrated to bring to light some of the issues that exist around privilege and privacy and their relationship to ‘public’; to build a common sensibility linking parts as disparate as a bronze statue, posters produced by participants in a letterpress workshop, a choral video and a guided tour; to connect the distant, commanding hauteur of one of Edinburgh’s most famous buildings with the sprawling rabble that tumbles around the Festival City, nowhere have I spoken of the videos generated for Festival Square from the Summer School’s collaborative workshop, Nor of the ancillary tours of the commemorative statuary peppered about the New Town; some permanently sited 20th century public commissions, including Martin Creed’s re-worked Scotsman Steps (aka Work No. 1059), itself a Festival project; a famous sculpture garden in the Pentland Hills, With Fettes as a foil and façade, The indirect exchange of uncertain value accounts for itself as something more than the sum of its parts, as something inextricable from its context, from the spiralling historical and physical backdrop suggested by its location. If the individuals involved in the principal installation have thematics within their practice; if the outward forms of the work they showed constituted themselves elsewhere before and after

The indirect exchange of uncertain value, acting in concert at Fettes, they alluded to the operations of hidden power structures and force fields.

As you will be aware from texts in the rest of this book, the occupancy of historically sensitive buildings has particular resonance for Collective — recently moved to the City Observatory on Calton Hill, Now a near neighbour of the aforementioned Royal High School, the organisation (having lost a definite article, a genitive and a noun from its early incarnation as ‘The Artist’s Collective Gallery’), was located on Cockburn Street, in shop-front premises surrounded by a mix of independent retailers, pubs and cafes and so on. In fact, Cockburn Street was constructed according to its own improvement plan in the 19th century. In 1856, the time-immemorial Scots Baronial buildings cut a swathe through the heaped tenements of the Old Town in order to reduce congestion on the Bridges and convenience the railway station. In the early 1990s, as Collective continued to establish its programme, rather like the defunct and disappeared Virginia Galleries in Glasgow, Cockburn Street’s self-seeded, low-margin trade was a mangy haven for teenagers buying records and joss-sticks: tourists on the slipway to the Castle were largely under-exploited. At the same time, a new breed of culturally-led urban regeneration schemes was deployed in the West — Glasgow’s tenure as European City of Culture in 1990, its Garden Festival of 1988 making contributions to its contemporary art ‘miracle’.

In his presentation at The Performance of Public Art, Owen Hatherley spoke of the value that landmark buildings and culturally-led regeneration strategies have as ‘Trojan Horses’ which break ground for property developers and speculators. It is difficult not to see Cat and Boot on the Fettes esplanade manifesting this metaphor literally and in doing so, recasting the function of art — what do these Trojan Horses deliver to the seat of privilege? Owen spoke forcefully about the class dimension to culturally-led regeneration schemes and it would seem that a place like Fettes is beyond reach, never targeted... .

In the essay that follows, Richard Williams considers certain panoptic features of Collective’s move to Calton Hill, through the lens of his own previous engagement with Tom and Joanne’s work as a ‘phallic tower’ on Skye, and his complex relationship with the City of Edinburgh.
Towards A City Observatory

Richard J. Williams

Calton and Cockburn
What might a 'city observatory' be? Collective started to ask itself this question in 2013 when it moved from its home on Cockburn Street in Edinburgh's Old Town to the former City Observatory, founded in 1776 on the top of Calton Hill. Although its purpose was scientific, its official name, and its location, framing several of the city's iconic views, suggested a new kind of institution focused on the city rather than the stars.

It was a curious move. The Cockburn Street site had the gallery at the heart of a network of independent businesses and galleries, a classically bohemian strip in which Collective had played a part in forming. It was the obvious place for a small gallery, Calton Hill had a different logic entirely: a picturesque wilderness two hundred feet above Princes Street, it looks across to Arthur's Seat and beyond, out of the city to the Firth of Forth. Its place in the city's imagination is perverse in many ways, it is a part of the city, but aloof from it, an escape.

That view was probably first put into words by Lord Henry Cockburn, the nineteenth century Solicitor General of Scotland (he coincidentally gives his name to Collective's old home, Cockburn Street). Cockburn was the author of a famously misanthropic letter to the Lord Provost, 'The Best Ways of Spoiling the Beauties of Edinburgh', of which there were many, mostly involving other people.1 Cockburn, in common with latter-day preservationists, wanted Calton Hill kept as free of human activity as possible. That is, apart from the author's solitary wanderings, which were, of course, allowed.

The present day Cockburn Association, who take his name and spirit forward, follow suit, as do many others; the place is commonly thought of as respite from the city.2 But Calton Hill is also one of the places from which you can perceive the city as a whole, so its place in relation to the city is an important one. And the function of the original Observatory was instrumental in relation to it. Its telescopes were trained on the stars, but in the service of timekeeping; they were there to measure the transit of stars through the local meridian, in order to provide accurate time, relayed to the city and the shipping in Leith harbour by means of a timeball on the Nelson Monument, dropped every day at one o'clock (the One O'Clock Gun was a later invention). This Observatory was about regulating the city more than it was about the discovery of celestial objects, so when now we read its engraved name City Observatory, we're not far off the mark to read it as an observatory of the city.

'The Best Ways of Spoiling the Beauties of Edinburgh' was a letter by Cockburn, Lord H. (1849) to the Lord Provost on the Best Ways of Spoiling the Beauties of Edinburgh. It was written to protest against the development of the city and the loss of its natural beauty.

This attitude corresponds with the development of Enlightenment viewing cultures more generally. The Spectator and Observer newspapers were founded in eighteenth century City of London coffee houses, affecting a similar sensibility: an ironic disdain for the everyday world that masks an essential commitment to it.4 It's the quintessential...

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2. For more on the Cockburn Association, see http://www.cockburnassociation.org.uk/
3. A brief official history of the Royal Observatory, Edinburgh can be found here: http://www.roe.ac.uk/roe/history.html
bourgeois sensibility, whether expressed in the sharply ironic commentaries of Mr. Spectator (the Spectator’s fictional narrator in the early days), or, less formally, in the commentary on the city by the bourgeois from his lofty viewpoint. In each case, the ‘observer’ is a figure whose superficial ambiguity is actually a pose. Unlike the later flâneur, the proto-bohemian who appears in Baudelaire’s novels, the Observer affects distance, but is actually committed to what he observes. The criticism that stems from what he sees only serves (in his mind) to improve the whole. Observatories, whatever their form, were disciplining places.

Edinburgh’s viewing culture was replicated throughout the world. Suffice to say, the nineteenth century bourgeois city, wherever it appears from Boston to Barcelona, is a city of observatories of one kind or another, monuments real or natural from which the city can be observed, and from which an agreeable view can be produced. In the twentieth century, the bourgeois cult of viewing arguably got transposed to the skyscraper; the new towers that appeared in the USA from the 1930s onwards were celebrated as much for the views that could be had from their summits as their revolutionary forms. The tradition continues: at the time of writing, the One World Observatory at the peak of SOM’s World Trade Center tower was scheduled to open, imbued with the same positivistic outlook on the world. From the summit of this one-hundred-and-two floor tower, raised above the confusion of the city streets, you view the city as ordered, disciplined, and essentially good.5

I could say more, but it should be clear by now that this concept of the observatory as a disciplining force is not exactly what Collective have in mind. In recent years, the word ‘observatory’ has found some new uses, especially in liberal/left academic thinking where it is suggestive of critical engagement with an object, without necessarily commitment to it. In that frame of reference, it’s a helpful way of dealing with cities, which have, after all, for as long as leftist politics has existed been an object of anxiety. Cities have invariably been the places that have cultivated radical politics (the very nomenclature, right and left, refers to Paris) but as H. G. Wells put it once on leaving a socialist meeting in London and gesturing all around, the city was the measure of what had to be changed.6 So the observatory is perhaps a way of dealing with this fundamental ambiguity.

What do I mean? Well, in the baroque world of the UN and in the EU, and in international relations more generally, an ‘observatory’ is a research organisation — such as the European Union Democracy Observatory. On the fringes of these supra-national bodies, there are other ‘observatories’ which have broadly liberal political agendas, such as ‘the Observatory of Human Rights’ 8, or the International Observatory on Participatory Democracy.9 In the academic sphere there are now any number of observatories doing research into culture, for example Harvard’s Cultural Observatory.10 And urban research, whether commercially or academically funded has produced its own breed of observatories, such as UN’s Global Urban Observatory.11 An ‘observatory’ these days might even be a web application: the Urban Observatory is one, providing an endlessly variable set of data visualisations.12 Well, whatever the value of these expanded definitions of ‘observatory’, it does mean we can think about the Calton Hill complex more broadly than before.

Are You Locationialized?
The ‘observatory’ has long been an intriguing concept for artists. An important part of Collective’s recent history is the work of the artists Joanne Tatham and Tom O’Sullivan, a duo who have worked collaboratively since 1995. My first proper contact with them came through Are you LOCATIONIALIZED?, a 2014 project they did for Atlas, a Skye-based contemporary arts agency in collaboration with Taigh Chearsabhagh, their counterparts in North Uist.13 Comprising two related large-scale

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5. The One World Observatory opened on 29 May 2015, https://oneworldobservatory.com/
13. The official record of the project can be found here: http://www.taighchearsabhagh.org/ and http://atlasarts.org.uk/
public interventions, to see the work involved travelling between the two venues, separated by twenty miles of sea, and hearing reflections on the sites and the relationships between the two.

The Skye portion was a temporary remodelling of a Portree landmark known as the Apothecary’s Tower,Standing just thirty feet in height, its location, plus the diminutive scale of Portree, means that it’s more prominent than its height would suggest, Built in the 1830s by Alexander MacLeod, a local worthy, the name referred to a putative public role. Here, the tower declared to passing mariners, is as one where medical treatment could be found, A stone-built octagon, it has a gently curving staircase to the summit from where you have fine views of Portree harbour, the Trotternish peninsula to the north, and Ben Tianavaig to the east. Its physical elevation is matched by a moral one; this is a place, like the monuments of Edinburgh, that exists to affirm the goodness of the world.

However, as Tatham and O’Sullivan noted in conversation with me, the moral tone decays — perhaps inevitably — by the uses Portree youth has found for the tower, Set apart from the town, in a somewhat secluded and bushy landscape, in reality it’s a place for bad behaviour, the things that can’t happen either in the relative order of the town, or in the controlled space of the home. That feeling of estrangement and the need for release is typically felt by teenagers, so this is — pretty clearly, judging by the graffiti and reports of locals — a place for illicit sex and boozing, just as it is in countless similar places in the world (Calton Hill is no exception, but more of that later). So what Tatham and O’Sullivan did, typically for them, was draw attention to the unsayable. They turned the Apothecary’s Tower into a great pink phallus, making this high object into something ridiculous, but in the process, doing, again typically, a job of truth telling. Not everyone liked it, of course. Behind the criticisms, as ever, was the sense that something uncomfortable had been revealed, it was a classic desublimatory tactic, and an equally classic response.


which has become something else. Most of the official parts fell into disuse or moved elsewhere, and it has become better known in recent years as a site of protest; the incomplete monument, an unintentional memorial to political hubris has been more often than not the televisual backdrop to political events, claimed by all sides at different times as a symbol of the city and by extension Scotland but in reality belonging to no-one — a ‘contested’ site to deploy an overused, but in this case accurate, academic term.

And more furtively, Calton Hill has a well-known history as a place for al fresco gay sex, close to the centre of the city but far enough away from the forces of authority and order to offer a bit of seclusion. That culture has declined somewhat with the relative normalisation of homosexuality in recent years, but it’s still important as a memory, Calton Hill and the Observatory therefore play a more complex role in the city than might first appear, The monuments of the Enlightenment suggest a place that simply affirms the host city, and places the viewer in a situation of moral and physical elevation. However, the evolution of the Hill suggests another, more complex history.

The indirect exchange of uncertain value
Well, something of that complex understanding appears in the 2011 project Tatham and O’Sullivan did at Fettes College, The indirect exchange of uncertain value, Commissioned by Collective it ran as a three-week event in August, and took the form of two monumental sculptures outside Fettes, which themselves housed works by Chris Evans and Elizabeth Price, An accompanying event had interventions on the theme of public and private realms by Vito Acconci, the veteran American performance artist, the Glasgow poet Tom Leonard, and a radical architecture critic, Owen Hatherley. The sculptures, located for the duration of the exhibition on the gravel outside the main public entrance to the College were a large cat, and a boot, both schematic, flat and cartoon-like, they took down any of the College’s pretensions, What they put in their place isn’t clear — if it ever is with art — but they certainly made for a pause in normal business, which was the point, You can’t carry on as usual with a giant pink tabby occupying your gaze.

The project wasn’t an ‘observatory’ as such — those weren’t sculptures on which you could climb to get a view of the city or anything else, But they constituted a pause in everyday life, an invitation to reflect, and (incorporating the public event) a chance to consider the city afresh as an object. This concept of observatory, as it were, had a good deal in common with the expanded, humanistic observatories mentioned above. It sprang from a discussion between the artists and Kate Gray at Collective in which the city, and Edinburgh in particular was at stake. Looking down at the city from Calton Hill, there are plentiful monuments that draw attention, some already mentioned. One rich typology is the school, of which there are many, Edinburgh is as defined by its schools, architecturally and socially, as it is by anything else, and Its defining schools lie exclusively in the private sector, the most spectacular being Heriot’s (Old Town), Edinburgh Academy in the New Town, Stewarts Melville (‘Smellies’ in the local argot) in the West End, and Fettes, whose grounds are so extensive, and its architecture so vast, it defines an entire city quarter to the north.

So extensive and prominent are these schools, they dominate bourgeois life. No other city in the UK has such a proportion of children in private education (20% overall, well over 30% at secondary level). In no other UK city, with the possible exception of Belfast, for different, sectarian reasons, is the topic of education so fraught. Yet these schools remain, for the most part, objects that most city residents observe from a distance. We skirt their peripheries, aware of their bulk and importance, but they remain, like black holes, to most of us, impenetrable and enigmatic. This phenomenon, along with other related phenomena such as Queen Street Gardens, and other great swathes of privately owned parkland in the city, defines the city, ‘Public space city’, the architect Richard Rogers once said of Edinburgh, The reality is anything but. Fettes, Owen Hatherley noted acerbically, was a ‘den of deepest, darkest privilege’.

The indirect exchange of uncertain value explored these palpable tensions. More generally, something a City Observatory might explore in the longer term. From the vantage point of Calton Hill, It’s possible to subject the city to a special kind of scrutiny. The quality of affirmation in much viewing is still present, but the retrofitting of the Observatory as a

18. Rogers, Lord R., conversation with the author (8 May 2001),
contemporary art space is suggestive of another, potentially more critical viewing. One might come up the hill to affirm the beauties of the city, much as nineteenth century observers did, but — like Tatham and O'Sullivan — one might also be permitted to affirm its inequalities, its squalor, and the sheer ugliness of a good chunk of it. A true observatory might make all of these things possible — and the city, and us, its citizens might be the better for it.
Chris Evans lives and works in London. His work is characterised by the realisation of unsolicited assignments and evolves through conversations with people from a broad range of professions — people selected in relation to their symbolic or public role. Recently this has included the directors of a luxury jewellery company, the editors of Morning Star newspaper, and members of the International diplomatic community.

Recent exhibitions include solo presentations at Hat, Hat, Hat, Uniform, Proxex, Berlin (2015); Markus Luetten, Cologne (2015); Clerk of Mind, Project Arts Centre (2014); Untitled (Drippy Etiquette), Piper Keys (2014); CLODS, Diplomatic Letters, The Gardens, Vilnius, (2014); and Goofy Audit, Luettgenmeijer, Berlin (2011). In 2016 he was the recipient of the Bryan Robertson Trust Award.

Fiona Jardine lives and works in Glasgow and the Scottish Borders. Having studied Law and Fine Art, she pursued PhD research in the Social & Critical Theory cluster at the University of Wolverhampton, looking at artists’ signatures as modes of production. She teaches Design History and Theory at Glasgow School of Art and in the School of Textiles & Design, Heriot-Watt University, where she is concerned with theories of authenticity and authorship in art, fashion and textile histories.


Joanne Tatham & Tom O’Sullivan began working together whilst completing the MFA programme at Glasgow School of Art, exhibiting their first collaborative work at Glasgow’s Transmission Gallery in 1995. They have exhibited works in many group shows, including at Cricoteka, Krakow (2014), GoMA, Glasgow (2011), Frankfurter Kunstverein (2006), Tate Britain (2006) and in 2005 represented Scotland at the Venice Biennale. Their most recent solo exhibition A petition for an enquiry into a state of anxiety was at The Modern Institute for Glasgow International (2016) and was accompanied by a publication of their writing, An Anthology (I’m sorry, I’m sorry, I’m so, so, so sorry). Other recent solo projects include Are you LOCATIONALIZED with ATLAS arts, Isle of Skye (2014); Is your tesserae really necessary, Tramway, Glasgow (2014); and DOES THE IT STICK, Bloomberg SPACE, London (2014).