

Car Crashes, the Social Turn, and Glorious Glitches in David Hoyle's Performances

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David Hoyle is a post-drag performance artist and avant-garde anti-hero of the UK's LGBTQ club-cabaret scene. In this writing I will be paying particular attention to his publically engaged film work, created in collaboration with writer and director Nathan Evans. Before discussing two moments from these films in detail, it is necessary to give a clear definition of the metaphorical term 'car-crash' and provide a brief outline of his wider practice. The term 'car-crash' encapsulates the relevance of this writing to the concept of accidents, and is central to my discussion of the socio-political efficacy of Hoyle's occasional recklessness. It is often used in journalistic and academic descriptions of his performances, referring both to his appearance, described by Dominic Johnson as a "maquillage car-crash,"¹ and his words and actions, described by Nancy Durrant in *The Times* as "car crash, rage-fuelled, issue-based comedy".² Durrant, going some way to defining her own use of the term, concludes that even "when it goes horribly wrong, which it occasionally does, it's always horribly funny."³ Here the term car-crash is used in a manner similar to phrases such as 'train-wreck', referring to collisions and violent mishaps that unwittingly encourage spectators to gather in order to gawp, gaze and guiltily enjoy. For the sake of clarity, I have listed below the four most important references in my own use of the term:

- 1) A collision resulting from reckless behaviour.
- 2) An incident, and its aftermath, that both seduces and repels our gaze.
- 3) An incident that encourages us to dwell on the slippery border between the intentional and the accidental.
- 4) A sudden shift from reassuring order to disturbing messiness.

Examples of 'car-crashes' in Hoyle's performances include brutal verbal altercations with audience members, participants or guest performers, outbursts of ruthless politically incorrect observations and opinions, and alcohol-fuelled agitprop rants that insistently trouble his position as an entertainer. I should clarify that, for me, these moments make up an integral and essential part of Hoyle's practice, and my aim is to develop ways of positively accounting for their socio-political efficacy (and their enjoyableness), as opposed to criticising them as moments of artistic or ethical failure. It is also important to note that in Hoyle's performances these 'horribly wrong' and 'horribly funny' car-crash moments almost always occur in the midst of wonderfully timed improvised comedy and a euphoric celebration of the excluded and the exploited. They are, for me, the glorious glitches in his uncanny ability to flicker between hilarity and horror, clarity and chaos, and brutal reality and psychotically imaginative fiction as an improvising performance artist.

The major context for Hoyle's performance work is the self-defined 'avant-garde' strand of the LGBTQ club-cabaret scene that plays out at venues such as the

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¹ Dominic Johnson, 'It Only Hurts Because It's True: Recent Live Art and Performance in the UK', *Western European Stages*, 19.1 (Winter 2007), 9-14 (12)

² Nancy Durrant, 'Comedian David Hoyle is no drag', *The Times*, (April 21, 2009), <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/arts/stage/comedy/article1870110.ece> (accessed 26/05/2011)

³ *ibid.*

Royal Vauxhall Tavern (RVT), in London. He is also known for his forays into experimental theatre and performance programmes such as Chelsea Theatre's 'Sacred', directing and starring in his own late-night television shows, and recently working as a film director and actor in *Uncle David*.⁴ In 1986 Hoyle arrived in London (from Manchester) along with his anarchically transgender, acerbic and attention-grabbing alter ego 'The Divine David'. From this time until 2000 he developed a reputation for performances that would see him 'lacerating the shallowness of the gay scene and cutting up his own skin'⁵ Although he reached a level of success which led to him having two television series on the UK's Channel 4, *The Divine David Heals*,⁶ and *The Divine David Presents*,⁷ in 2000 he killed off his alter ego in a show at Streatham Ice-Rink entitled *The Divine David on-ice*. The title irreverently entwined references to Disney On Ice family shows, a method for keeping bodies or body-parts fresh, and the act of postponing something. After the performance Hoyle took a six-year hiatus from performance. He explains the reasons for this as follows:

I got on the ride and I ended up on the telly. I felt out of my depth. I became quite frightened and felt it was time to dare to live my life without the *raison d'être* of the previous ten years. I had to kill off The Divine David, who had given me so much but at an inestimable cost. I learned to live with deep trauma while bouncing on the trampoline of humour in stilettos.⁸

Eleven years later, he now performs mildly less lacerating, anarchically transgender, acerbic and attention-grabbing shows under his own name. In a 2011 interview with myself he implied that a further shift away from trauma and stilettos was approaching: "I am fast approaching fifty and I just think, "I've enjoyed it, loved it, but I don't just want the rest of my life to be screaming and shouting and being drunk, you know what I mean, dressed in mini-skirts and that""⁹

'Screaming, shouting and being drunk dressed in mini-skirts' serves as a pretty close description of one of the moments I wish to discuss. The scene occurred two years before my interview, during the making of the 2009 short documentary film *Manchester (So Much To Answer For)*. The film followed Hoyle as he meandered through Canal Street and the area of Manchester, UK, described as the 'Gay Village'.¹⁰ Along the way he interviewed the partygoers, pub clients, club-managers and publicans that he met.¹¹ His outfit for this outing was a black tie with a large anarchy sign on the bottom, a black jacket and knee-length skirt, and a pair of very long black and white socks. He was, as usual, decorated with thick layers of make up and a reddish-black wig, all applied and adorned with the anarchic imprecision that occurs throughout his performance attitude and style. The general tone of his encounters with the public was dominated by an unnervingly volatile conviviality and a deceptive and sinisterly insistent enthusiasm. It is, ironically, through a relentless optimism that Hoyle managed to pluck at some of the murkier consumerist and exploitative agendas of what might at first appear as a site for the liberating celebration of life outside the heteronormative hegemony.¹² At one point, for example, he chats with a bar-owner who revels in his ability to 'rip-off' (i.e. charge too much to) tourists 'morning, noon

⁴ *Uncle David*, dir. by David Hoyle, Mike Nicholls, and Gary Reich (Peccadillo Pictures, 2011 [on DVD]).

⁵ Paul Burston, 'David Hoyle stripped down', *Time Out London*, October 2010, <http://www.timeout.com/london/gay-lesbian/article/1658/david-hoyle-stripped-down> (accessed 12/01/2011).

⁶ *The Divine David Heals*, dir. by Bernadette O'Brien, pres. by David Hoyle and Jay Cloth (Allied Forces) [broadcast on Channel 4, 2000].

⁷ *The Divine David Presents*, dir. by Lucian James, pres. by David Hoyle (World of Wonder) [broadcast on Channel 4, 1999].

⁸ David Hoyle, in Burston.

⁹ David Hoyle, Interview with the Author, London, 03/08/2011.

¹⁰ 'Manchester (So Much To Answer For)', on *Dave's Drop in Centre*, dir. by Nathan Evans, perf. by David Hoyle, (Arts Council England, 2009 [on DVD]); cf. "Gay Village", *Canal-St*, <<http://www.canal-st.co.uk/?Gay-village>> (accessed 03/07/2012)

¹¹ For relevant clips from the film see "Manchester, (So Much to Answer For)", *Dave's Drop in Centre Videos* <http://www.myspace.com/davesdropincentre/videos> (accessed 09/07/2012)

¹² For more on the shifting agendas of Manchester's gay village see "They're Only Here for the Queers", *The Independent*, 06 April 2000, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/this-britain/theyre-only-here-for-the-queers-721341.html> (accessed 09/09/2011).

and night' and gleefully acknowledges the fact that 'gays will pay through the nose' (i.e. pay too much).¹³ Thus Hoyle displays a crafty ability to lead the interviewee into the hidden underside of his business and his capacity to draw out the darker sides of individual's motivations and opinions. At this point Hoyle's interviewing strategy might seem similar to Sacha Baron Cohen, who uses the characters 'Borat' and 'Brüno' to reveal underlying prejudices and ignorance in his own interviewees.¹⁴ However, with Hoyle, there is never the clear distinction between actor and character that Cohen indulges. The precarious and ambiguous border between Hoyle the performer and Hoyle the character is essential for my identification of car-crash moments that trouble our reading of the intentional and the accidental in his performance. This precarity is clear in the scene I would like to discuss in detail.

The car-crash section of the film began in the doorway of a nightclub, and then abruptly spilled out onto the pavement. It began with Hoyle, holding a suspicious glass of clear liquid in his hand, chatting with a young clubber who frequents the area in order to get "pissed every night".¹⁵ All seemed warmly convivial at first, though Hoyle's response that the young man's alcohol drenched experience of the 'village' "sounds like a dream come true" is entwined with the strategic display of enthusiasm for destructive behaviour that runs throughout these encounters and his wider performance practice. The tone then takes a significantly uncomfortable turn when an employee of the nightclub asks the pair to move away from the club's doorway. I have written out the sections of Hoyle's hyperbolic response to her request in full here. This is in order to show how quickly it developed into an all out personal and political attack and clarify the relentless nature of his outburst:

Well we're allowed to film where we want. You don't own the pavement. You're a mere business. And we're not homing in, we're not interested in Baa Bar. We're not interested in you one bit.¹⁶

After this initial snap, and as the young man who Hoyle was originally interviewing stares determinedly ahead, grinning nervously as if it's not happening, Hoyle continues his bombardment:

I know it's your world love, but, you know, you work within the corporate structure. Some of us don't, and therefore we don't have that neurosis. Get me? You're working on behalf of capitalism. It's making you very vigilant and very, like, ugh ugh ugh ugh ugh. Relax. You know the world will keep on turning. The world will keep on turning irrespective of the filming that's going on at this street corner.¹⁷

At this point the interviewee skulks off, despite Hoyle's plea for him to come back, and we get our first view of the recipient of Hoyle's acerbic rage as the camera pans round to the door-lady, who is halfway through the club's doorway with a takeaway. As she attempts to interject, explaining, as far as I can hear,¹⁸ that all she is asking them to do is move away from the door, Hoyle cuts her off, stating "We've lost the interview now. Forget it". Then Hoyle turns to direct his sardonic stream of outrage and irritation to the camera:

You know, there's too much in this country, where people are making decisions on behalf of their employers. Your employer doesn't give a shit about you. You are but a living unit. That's all you can ever hope to be. And should you die, your employer will replace you with another living unit. End of. So those of you who are like 'don't film, don't do this, don't do that, my employer won't like it', I curse you, I hope you die, I hope you're HIV, you deserve to be. You're cunts. Anybody who speaks on behalf of their employer, to me, is a stupid cunt. And you have negated yourself and allowed somebody to be more powerful than you.¹⁹

¹³ 'Manchester'

¹⁴ *Borat: Cultural Leanings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan*, dir. by Larry Charles, (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment, 2007 [on DVD]); *Brüno*, dir. by Larry Charles, (Universal Pictures UK, 2009 [on DVD])

¹⁵ 'Manchester'

¹⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ At this point Hoyle and his microphone have moved slightly away from the club's entrance and its gatekeeper.

¹⁹ 'Manchester'

In the next scene, which looks like it takes place in a different location, Hoyle continues on in a similar manner. The reason I have described the details of this section, which takes up about four minutes of this fifteen minute film, is firstly, because it offers a clear example of the kind of awkward and eye-watering car-crash moments that Hoyle is infamous for, and to which this writing responds. Secondly, this personal and public collision can be reasonably framed as an accident. This is because it acts as an abrupt and potentially unintended shift away from the far more subtly interrogative and humorously revealing tone of his words and actions in the rest of the film. Here we are confronted with a project that carefully sways between celebration, conviviality and subtle criticality before suddenly crashing into a destructive outburst of antagonism.

It is important to state, at this point, that my interest here is not so much in the particular socio-political details of this documentary and the space in which it is filmed, even though important and cutting insights are portrayed. I also set aside the context-specific ethics, motivations and culpabilities of the abrasive and distressing encounter. Finally, I am sidestepping addressing any potential connections between Hoyle's outbursts and crashes and his self-described dealings with "a lot of emotional problems, maybe mental health problems".²⁰ I am neither qualified to discuss Hoyle's emotional and mental health, and wouldn't want to risk reducing these moments to being solely emotional or pathological 'symptoms'. My interest lies in the initial agenda of this film, which appears to be an efficacious confrontation and engagement with a series of localized social issues (LGBTQ identities and consumerism), investigated through a participatory methodology (conversations with participants). Thus I argue that it exemplifies a strand of Hoyle's practice that can be usefully framed as an intervention into what art theorist Claire Bishop describes, somewhat derogatively, as the "social turn".²¹ The questions I am engaging with here are as follows: how might we account for the efficacy of Hoyle's reckless and unpredictable brand of social engagement within the context of recent debates and discussions around social engagement, responsibility and accountability? In other words, what is the efficacy of Hoyle's unnerving, accidental antagonism within the context of the 'social turn'? What and who might such a 'turn' exclude?

In my understanding, the term 'social turn' refers to the increased critical, curatorial and cultural attention given to socially engaged, participatory and relational practices since the late 1990s. Theatre scholar Shannon Jackson usefully defines the practices that make up the social turn as "activist art, social work, protest performance, performance ethnography, community art, relational aesthetics, conversation pieces and other terms that signal a social turn in art".²² Bishop's critique of these practices arose partly as a response to Nicolas Bourriaud's *Relational Aesthetics*,²³ in which he collects together "a set of artistic practices, which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space".²⁴ These practices are exemplified most famously by the work of Rirkrit Tirivanija, who is well known for works in which he cooks meals with and for gallery visitors.²⁵ Bishop also refers, though to a lesser extent, to Grant Kester's *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art*,²⁶ in which "dialogic practice" is celebrated "through its function as a more or less open space within contemporary culture: a space in which certain questions can be asked, certain critical analysis articulated, that would not be

²⁰ David Hoyle, Interview with the Author, London, 03/08/2011. For more details on Hoyle's relationship with emotional and mental health issues see: David Hoyle and Rupert Smith, "Face to Face – An Audience with David Hoyle" Thursday November 10th, 2011, Homotopia 2011 (festival), Unity Theatre Liverpool, in partnership with Liverpool Mental Health Awareness, available online at <http://vimeo.com/32191999> (accessed 17/11/2011)

²¹ Claire Bishop, 'The Social Turn: Collaboration and its Discontents', *ArtForum*, (February 2006) <http://www.artforum.com/inprint/id=10274> (accessed 1 February 2009); Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics, *October*, 110, (Autumn 2004), 51-79.

²² Shannon Jackson, 'Social Practice', in 'P-S', *Performance Research*, 11:3, (2006) 87-126, (114).

²³ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (France: Les presses du reel, 2002).

²⁴ *ibid.*, 113.

²⁵ *ibid.*, 25.

²⁶ Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community + Communication in Modern Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

accepted or tolerated elsewhere”.²⁷ Austrian collective WochenKlausur exemplify this approach with their unequivocally results based approach to art as social work. Their projects, such as the 1994 piece *Shelter for Drug-Addicted Women*, which occurred at Shedhalle, Zurich, aim to achieve precisely what their titles suggest.²⁸ Bishop’s critique of these practices, and the curatorship, criticism and ideologies that support and perpetuate them, can be broken down into three strands:

1. The problematic delegation of social work away from the government and onto the artist. Bishop states that, in the UK, “New Labour have for the last nine years instrumentalised art to fulfill policies of social inclusion – a cost-effective way of justifying public spending on the arts while diverting attention away from the structural causes of decreased social participation, which are political and economic (welfare, transport, education, healthcare, etc)”.²⁹ This leads her to suggest that, given the choice, she would prefer for art to be instrumentalised by the art market as opposed to the state.
2. The potential privileging of social work over aesthetics outlined in Bishop’s accusatory suggestion that ‘there can be no failed, unsuccessful, unresolved, or boring works of collaborative art because all are equally essential to the task of strengthening the social bond’.³⁰
3. A skepticism about the politics of work that has a ‘feel-good’, ‘love-thy-neighbour’ attitude towards community building, social relations and relationality.³¹ Bishop’s politics here are openly indebted to the work of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and their move towards “radical democracy”, in which any stabilization or resolution is problematically entwined with the quilting effect of one decision being made “at the detriment of another one”.³² Thus for Bishop, “a democratic society is one in which relations of conflict are *sustained*, not erased.”³³ Chantal Mouffe usefully summarizes this position as follows: “What is specific of democratic politics is not the overcoming of the we/them opposition but the different way in which it is drawn. This is why grasping the nature of democratic politics requires a coming to terms with the dimension of antagonism that is present in social relations.”³⁴

It is perhaps due to the final of these three positions that Bishop favours socially engaged projects that she describes as “relational antagonism”.³⁵ However, an antagonistic approach to social engagement might also signal an active resistance of the instrumentalisation of art for social good. Bishop attributes the term ‘relational antagonism’ to artists such as Santiago Sierra, who, like WochenKlausur, has a concretely descriptive approach to titling, as demonstrated in the piece ‘10 Inch Line Shaved on the heads of two Junkies who received a shot of Heroin’ which occurred in San Juan de Puerto Rico in the year 2000.³⁶

Bishop’s critique of aesthetic and socio-political validity within the social turn is

²⁷ *ibid.*, 68

²⁸ See WochenKlausur, <http://www.wochenklausur.at/index1.php?lang=en> (accessed 09/11/2011).

²⁹ Bishop in Jennifer Roche, ‘Socially Engaged Art, Critics and Discontents: An Interview with Claire Bishop’, *Community Arts Network*, July 2006, http://www.communityarts.net/readingroom/archivefiles/2006/07/socially_engage.php (accessed 02/02/2009).

³⁰ Bishop 2006, 1.

³¹ Bishop, in Roche.

³² Chantal Mouffe, ‘Deconstruction, Pragmatism and the Politics of Democracy’, in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. by Chantal Mouffe (London: Routledge 1996), 1-12 (9).

³³ Bishop 2004, 55-56.

³⁴ Mouffe, 9.

³⁵ Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (London: Tate Publishing, 2005), 120-127.

³⁶ See Santiago Sierra, http://www.santiago-sierra.com/200011_1024.php (accessed 05/05/2011).

examined and challenged usefully by Shannon Jackson.³⁷ Particularly important for me here is Jackson's plotting of the ways Bishop's favouritism for a "rather clichéd masculinist, edgy, can't-pin-me-down vision of the unintelligible artist as individual author"³⁸ relies on a reductive reliance on oppositional polarizations such as "1) social incorporation versus social antagonism; 2) legibility versus illegibility; 3) radically functional versus radically nonfunctional; 4) artistic heteronomy versus artistic autonomy".³⁹ Jackson works meticulously and cannily to trouble the aesthetic work vs. social work polemic that underlies Bishop's critique. However, for me, it is Bishop's pitting of social conviviality against social antagonism, of 'feel good' art against 'feel bad' art that is reductive and exclusionary.⁴⁰ Jackson alludes to this when she points out that "certain artists – such as Rirkrit Tirivaniya and Liam Gillick – end up on the "bad" feel-good side of [Bishop's] critical equation while others – such as Santiago Sierra and Thomas Hirschhorn – end up on her "good" antagonistic side."⁴¹ She furthers her undermining of Bishop's position by noting that "sometimes Bishop doesn't like art that is feeling good, and sometimes she doesn't like art that is doing good"⁴² It is this tenuous area of feel-good and feel-bad, conviviality and antagonism that I believe can be shaken up through the accident-prone approach to these tones in Hoyle's practice. Bishop's polarisation of conviviality and antagonism seems too entwined with intentionality. For me, she ignores the potential of accidental slippages into bad-feeling in feel-good art, and the unwanted conviviality that might unexpectedly blossom in a project that strives for antagonism. My response to these exclusions is to relate Hoyle's accidentally antagonistic participatory work to the fluffy and under-examined notion of 'feel-good'. 'Feel-good' refers loosely to an overtly convivial approach to social engagement and participation and which Bishop describes as a Christian, 'love-thy-neighbour' attitude on behalf of the artist.⁴³

An unexpected blossoming of such conviviality occurred in another short documentary entitled *A Village Stroll with David Hoyle*.⁴⁴ In the second part of the film Hoyle is shown around Vauxhall City Farm, Vauxhall, South London, by a small group of young children.⁴⁵ The film follows much the same premise as *Manchester (So Much To Answer For)*, Vauxhall being an area of London with a lot of LGBTQ bars, clubs and saunas. The premise for Hoyle visiting the farm is his mischievous declaration that once homosexuality has been fully accepted then the taboo of interspecies love should also be tackled. This is an important place in which to note that, as is often the case, this reasoning is delivered in an ambiguous manner described by Gavin Butt as "queer sincerity".⁴⁶ Here Butt is identifying a kind of serious non-seriousness that opens up the space for a wider spectrum of voices to speak on the political, social and ethical. For Butt, these are topics dominated by speakers and speech acts that constantly re-iterate the fact that what is being said is 'really meant'. With Hoyle, it is often difficult to ascertain how sincere his statements are. Even when he does appear to 'really mean' what he says, his rampant didacticism is often undermined by what Butt describes elsewhere as "a glorious and

³⁷ Shannon Jackson, 'What is the "Social" in Social Practice?: comparing experiments in performance' in *The Cambridge Companion to Performance Studies*, ed. by Tracy C. Davis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 136-150; *Social Works: performing arts, supporting publics* (Oxon and NY: Routledge, 2011).

³⁸ Jackson, 'Social Practice', 116.

³⁹ *ibid.*, 115.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Bishop, in Roche.

⁴⁴ 'A Village Stroll with David Hoyle', on *Dave's Drop in Centre*, dir. by Nathan Evans, perf. by David Hoyle, (Arts Council England, 2009 [on DVD])

⁴⁵ For relevant clips from the film see "A village stroll with David Hoyle part 2", *Dave's Drop in Centre Video*, <http://www.myspace.com/davesdropincentre/videos/a-village-stroll-with-david-hoyle-part-2/59887276> (accessed 09/07/2012)

⁴⁶ Gavin Butt, *Just a Camp laugh? David Hoyle's 'Magazine'*, Tate Channel, <http://channel.tate.org.uk/#media:/media/37756242001/24881444001&list:/media/7756242001&context:/channel/playlists> (accessed 21/02/2010).

unpredictable performance of contradictions”.⁴⁷ This presumably accounts for the questionable acceptance of some of his politically incorrect positions, the ambiguity of their delivery allowing us to position them as ironic. Therefore we might read them as performative comments about unsavoury attitudes towards others, as opposed to just *being* unsavoury attitudes towards others. In *A Village Stroll*, what starts as a discussion of the various merits of taking animals for lovers (“think of the colour and texture of a budgie”⁴⁸), as Hoyle totters amongst the pigs, ducks, goats and other livestock of a city farm, ends with him being emotionally overwhelmed by the non-judgemental nature of a group of young volunteers. Having enthusiastically shown him to the pumpkins, discussed the merits of animal faeces for growing flowers, and detailed the activities of their summer holidays at the farm, these children bring out the following response from Hoyle:

Can I just say that I've loved my time with you and I'm also... you know... You don't seem to have a problem with my look or the way I am, and it's so sweet of you. Because some adults, they can be really funny, and a bit odd and a bit weird, but you've been beautiful and you've made me feel very, very comfortable and I thank you very much for that. Thank you.⁴⁹

Next, he gives away his necklace to a young girl, then they have a group hug, initiated by the children, and finally an emotional and overwhelmingly grateful goodbye. As in *Manchester (so much to answer for)* the encounter is followed by a speech to camera. However, this time Hoyle is celebrating how refreshing it was to be with children who accepted someone who “doesn't believe in gender”, and ends with him declaring that he hasn't been spoken to with such “courtesy and kindness for a very long time”.⁵⁰ In a sense, this second incident is also a kind of car-crash, unexpectedly knocking the titillating risk of confrontation and the hilarious trajectory of increasing provocation wildly off course. The incidents I have described in these two documentaries clearly act as the antithesis of each other, one starting in strategically convivial conversation and ending in appalling antagonism, the other starting out with an antagonistically provocative motivation (exploring and promoting bestiality) and ending with heart warming conviviality. I argue that these moments, when framed as ‘car-crashes’, might allow us to find a valuable approach to both the accidental antagonisms of straightforward feel-good participatory work and the awkwardly arising moments of unintended good-feeling in confrontational, antagonistic practices. An essential component of this argument is Slavoj Žižek's development and supplementation of the concept of over-identification.⁵¹ This concept crucially entwines with Butt's observation of Hoyle's queered relationship with sincerity. In employing this concept I read Hoyle's car-crash moments as resulting from his performance of an unsettling over-identification with the rules and demands of the social turn.

Žižek clarifies the strategy of over-identification in relation to dissidents under socialism, who would “take the ruling ideology more seriously/literally than it took itself by way of ignoring its virtual unwritten shadow: “You want us to practice socialist democracy? OK, here you have it!”⁵² To briefly summarise, this strategy relies on the splitting of the law into the explicitly stated rules of a situation and the sinister and shadowy implicit injunctions and strategies that support them. Whilst these implicit injunctions must be followed in order for the ruling ideology to be perpetuated, they also must remain unspoken. It is in the ‘unspoken’ position of the rules that their power lies. Once the ‘unwritten’ rules, and their unethical nature, are publically acknowledged, they can no longer be taken for granted. One of Žižek's own unsettling examples of these unspoken rules is connected to the apparent hushing up and consequent perpetuation of acts of paedophilia in the Catholic Church.⁵³ He hints that the continual following of these immoral rules is entwined with the perpetuation

⁴⁷ Gavin Butt, ‘Hoyle's Humility’, (interview with David Hoyle), in *Dance Theatre Journal*, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2008 (34).

⁴⁸ Hoyle, ‘A Village Stroll’.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

⁵¹ Cf. Slavoj Žižek, ‘Move the Underground! What's Wrong with Fundamentalism? - Part II’ *Lacan Dot Com*. <http://www.lacan.com/zizunder.htm> (accessed 01/07/2010).

⁵² *ibid.*

⁵³ *ibid.*

of the church itself. Here the explicit rule is 'be celibate' whilst the sinister, implied rule which supports that celibacy is 'indulge in paedophilia'. Over-identification consists either of ignoring the implicit rules until someone has to point them out and make their sinister nature public, or, identifying too enthusiastically and publically with those sinister implicit rules. Hoyle's practice suggests that the implicit injunction of the rule 'be socially engaged' is 'be socially acceptable and perpetuate normativity'. Hoyle wilfully ignores the underlying injunction here. Thus his vitriolic attack on a door-lady might be described by Žižek as stating, "You want us to practice social engagement? Ok, here you have it!" Bishop, on the other hand, exemplifies a demand for titillating, antagonistic work that relies on an unspoken demand that, when necessary, one should manipulate and exploit participants in order to engineer bad feeling. In other words, if things start to get convivial, if heart-warming tolerance and camaraderie accidentally creeps in, find a way to shut it down and ensure the perpetuation of conflict and antagonism. Hoyle's refusal to ignore the generosity and openness of the children he met at Vauxhall City Farm again suggests a refusal to acknowledge such injunctions.

Hoyle's awkwardly fragile, volatile outbursts in 'feel-good' participatory projects, and his heart-melting moments of good feeling in titillating, antagonistic interventions, demonstrates what is ignored in the on-going discussions of the social turn and Bishop's loose and presumptive categorization of work into feel-good and feel-bad. It is these over-simplified categorizations of conviviality and antagonism that have the potential to ignore and undermine the potential retort that practices and identities such as Hoyle's offer to our understanding of what it means to be social engaged. I suggest we avoid only looking to those artists for whom social antagonism seems to be their subject and pursuit in order to trouble our presumptions about what it means to be socially accountable and valuably efficacious. Instead, we should look to performers like David Hoyle. When Hoyle's socially engaged practice seems to strive for a sense of 'feel-good' or 'feel-bad' it simultaneously allows itself to fail, sometimes gobsmackingly, to reach it. He displays magnificent accidents and personal crashes in public because he knows we can't help but look. If we look hard enough, maybe we will see that he is troubling both normative notions of social and artistic responsibility and accountability and underlying demands for anti-social antagonism in experimental art practices.

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