

Interview 7 – Anon. - 55 minutes (# hr. transcription)

(In all transcripts I have edited out ums, likes, ahhs and stutters from both the interviewer and interviewee unless it was deemed they added to the context of the response.)

Alex: When did you view the exhibition?

Anon: This afternoon.

Alex: For how long do you think you were there?

Anon: I was there let's say about 35 minutes. It was at least half an hour.

Alex: Did you view the exhibition with anyone?

Anon: No, I was there by myself, but while I was there there were a few other people also milling around by themselves, but I went alone to look at it.

Alex: Did you have any conversations...

Anon: with anyone at the exhibit? Um, there was another guy looking at one of the comics and we kind of, it wasn't quite a conversation, but we both kind of nodded at each other and smiled. And he kinda like referenced one of them with a thumb like "oh look at that one" and I was like (head nod) "yeahyeah, good". It littlething.

Alex: Do you remember which comic that was?

Anon: That was the Wild Child one. Yeah. Which was my favourite one, as well.

Alex: Why would you say that one was your favourite?

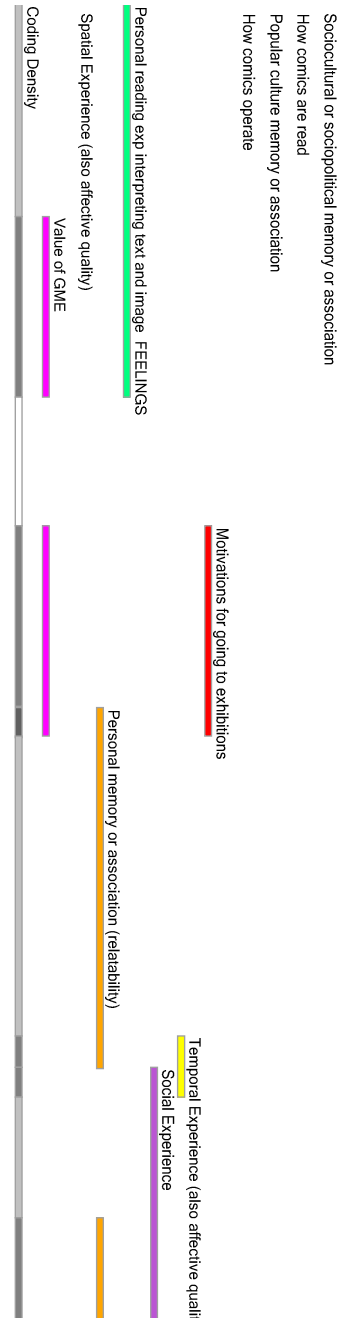
Anon: um, well, I think it was the one that visually drew me in the most. I thought it was drawn stunningly as well. Visually it was really, like, clean and really, it was quite sinister. I really liked the way they used the grids of like the window and the cage and everything. But also it was the topic itself. It was kind of focusing on this girl being trapped and, I think she was tied to a chair, and a man rescued her, I think he was a policeman, I really liked that when people were speaking in it you could see a speech bubble, but it wasn't words it was scribbles to show that there was something, like either she didn't understand it or I didn't really matter what they were saying. It could be anything. I supposed as well it kinda helps cause whatever language you'd have written it in you have cut off anyone who can't read that. And I really liked that when the lady was teaching her to speak, because the girl didn't have a mouth, so you know she didn't have a voice to speak with, and she was trying to say door and she could say until she thought about what had happened at the house and then she couldn't say it, and then, if I understood this right, she was

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shown sign language and then it all seemed to, all the darkness that had been around here before visually on the page disappeared, so it was almost like she'd found her way of coping, because I think a lot of things, whether it is a severe abuse situation like that, or a kind of personal anxiety or disorder it is, we think that if we give them tools then they will be able to manage, that we'll treat them or teach them to do it the right way or teach how to do things, whereas this was saying "okay we tired teaching her to speak, but that didn't work for her. That didn't make her comfortable. Whereas we showed her another way and that worked for her," so, I really liked that because sometimes I think, just in general, in stories not particularly this exhibit, we kinda, there's always this arc of someone with a problem, someone solves the problem, their fine and now their normal, and their doing things the way they are supposed to be doing them, whereas for her if sign language works best then no problems, and yeah I just thought it was really really stunning comic. Sorry that was a very long answer to your question.

Alex: That's alright. And this might be a big one, can you describe your experience viewing the exhibition?

Anon: Um, I was surprised but, not because, because I haven't seen something like that before. I had heard about it at the university, someone had mentioned it to me and I wanted to have a look. But I didn't, I thought the artwork might be inaccessible to me. Not that the work would be inaccessible but sometimes I've got some artworks and it just feels like you need a certain amount of training to fully get the nuisance, whereas this was a combination of things. Where I really like the comics in particular. Cause some of the works I really liked and some of them I liked but didn't speak to me in the same way. And those tended to be the more abstract ones, which is really interesting because as school I only did abstract painting and art, because I am not a very skilled drawer. So I'm kinda (laugh), I was pushed heavily into doing abstract work because my teacher decided it was the only way we were going to pass GCSE art, um, and I have a real love for abstract art so it was kind of really interesting that those weren't the ones that spoke to me, which is making me think, because actually its been ten years since I did my GCSEs, uh, that's the qualifications you do when you're sixteen in the UK, like "oh, maybe I've changed as well," cause I was like I wouldn't, back then I wouldn't have been drawn to comics in the same way, but I was much more drawn to those ones, but my overall experience was that I really really enjoyed it. I say I spent thirty- thirty-five minutes looking at it and I could easily have spent a lot longer. And, I wished someone'd been with me because I would have liked to have spoken about them with someone. And, seen what they thought as well. Cause I got quite a few arty friends and I think it is just really powerful, as well. You know, with kind of, self-care and empowering people to speak about how they are feeling, especially with boys, it's the kinda thing, there are a few of the comics I really want my partner to look at, because some of them are about, especially the one about anxiety, and I think it was adult ADD (Raised on Ritalin). I was looking at that and I was like some of the thoughts this person was



having seemed to resonate with some of the things I've heard him say before. So, I just thought that would kinda be really interesting to have someone else look at it and see if it like sparked anything from them. Even if just a sense of "oh, its not just me," and I think that's what I liked about the Wild Child one because I kinda resonated with some of the feelings she was having. And it was, it was not nice to see that someone had a similar experience or similar thoughts but it normalises your thoughts, and it makes you see that the situation is what's bad, not you or the thoughts.

Alex: Do you remember what order you viewed things in?

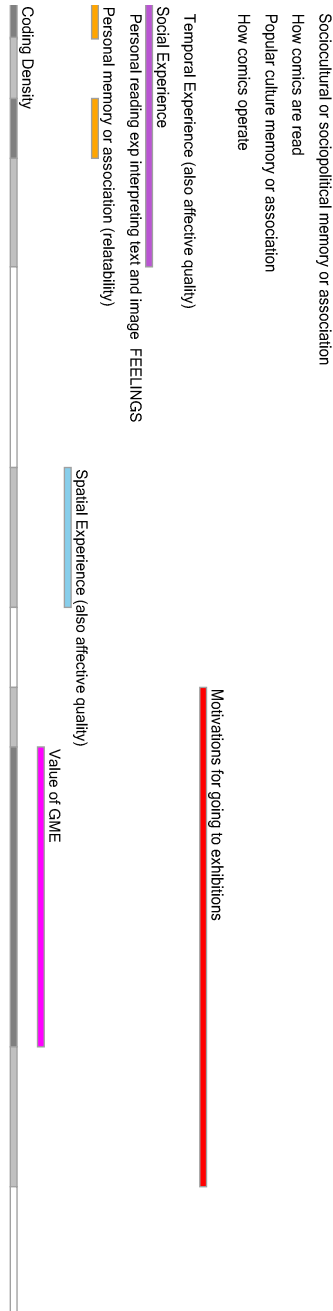
Anon: I do, cause I'd been to the café right next to the exhibit and bought a drink first and got myself an iced lemonade cause their my favourite. And, so I started in what I assume might be the back, so it was the comic zine (Panic Zine), that one, and worked along that way and then I kind of went down the other side, like in a Z shape, down that side towards where the visual exhibit was, like with the tv scene, and kinda snaked my way around the other wall. So I think I looked at it backwards. I realised that because one of the panels around the other way, and I was like oh! I am looking at this the wrong way around (giggling tone). But, ah, I think the start was clear, I just wandered into it the wrong way around.

Alex: Beyond you had heard about it, what peaked your interest when you heard about the exhibit?

Anon: Mostly, well two things, mostly because it was artwork and I don't think there is anything near enough of that either at the university of in general, like I am someone who really likes looking at those sorts of things, and it's a free exhibit, and its open to everyone, and I like that because I am always put off by things that are, that feel as though they are only aimed at a certain type of person or you have to pay to go in and look at something, you know in theory anyone could have walked through that building today and seen that, it doesn't matter what background their from, even if they work at the university, or if they have some affiliation to it, what position they have, it could have been the vice chancellor, could have been someone on an open day, you know, I liked that and I also liked that I knew it was about, kinda like, mental health, and agoraphobia and claustrophobia and that kind of thing. And I just think it is really important to talk about these things. And also, I am really interested to see how they were going to be drawn or like represented because I had thought about that and I couldn't image how it was going to be done, so I was quite interested to see how people would show those, you know, what are essentially inner thoughts. I thought it was all done really well.

Alex: Was there any particular representation that really resonated with you?

Anon: Um, I really liked the Wild Child one. That one really resonated with me. Sorry I made notes so I can get this right (taking out notes). What was the other one. Um



the one that was Like Glass, that, it didn't resonate with me feelings wise, but there were some words that said like glass and another panel next to it said looking, and that made me think Alice Through the Looking Glass, like Alice in Wonderland, I don't think that is what it was supposed to be, but my brain always finds book titles, and I, I felt that was really powerful, cause that was one I kept coming back to look at it, even if it wasn't my favourite one, if that makes sense, cause I'm the kind of person that I like narrative and that to me didn't have as much narrative, but I kept coming back to.

So I really like the Wild Child one, I really liked the Raised on Ritalin one. I think for the same sort of reason for the Wild Child, I like a sense of a story, and I, turns out I also like black and white comics, ah who knew (pointed towards very colourful outfit). There was, oh, and the other one I really liked was Two Windows, Same Reality, and that was the one where there was like the photographs and then like a pastel drawing next to it kind of showing two views of the same thing, but one kind of on Earth and on from space, it was really cool. It was, I've not seen something like that before and I thought it was really interesting, um, I didn't really understand what it meant, but I liked looking at it. and it was kind of making me think about how there are always different ways of looking at things and perspectives. But if I'm honest I was trying to read into that one, because I wanted to understand, whereas the Wild Child and the Raised on Ritalin, I just got and they made sense for me.

Alex: And was there, was there something about the comics medium because of those two works, in space, that you gave you any different experience?

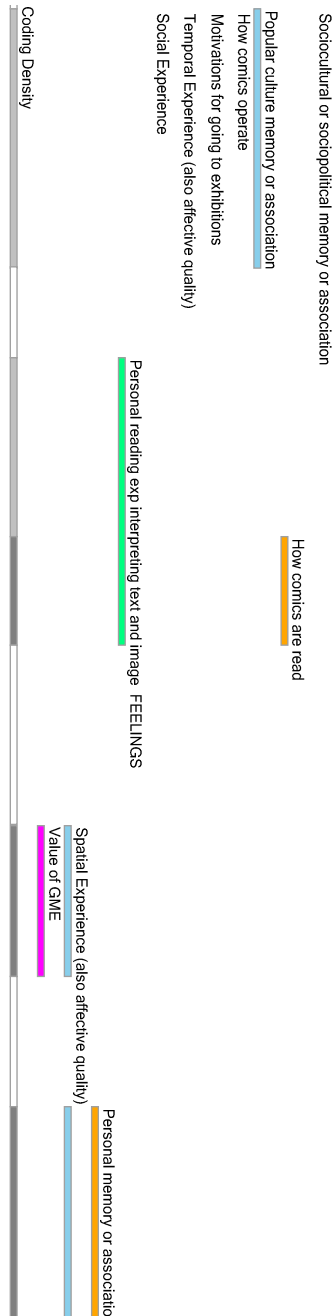
Anon: The way they were physically set out, do you mean?

Alex: That too, yes...

Anon: I am not sure. I think the way they were, I think if they'd been like a comics book, in the traditional kind of format, I don't think I would have spent as long looking at it, and I don't think as many people would be looking, because there were a lot of people looking at the exhibit, and I don't, and that's kind of interesting the idea that if something is on a wall it must be worthy of being on the wall somehow, sorry I don't know if I've answered your question there.

Alex: I think, in part, yes, and also if it was just, yeah to rephrase that, if it was the fact that it was a comic...

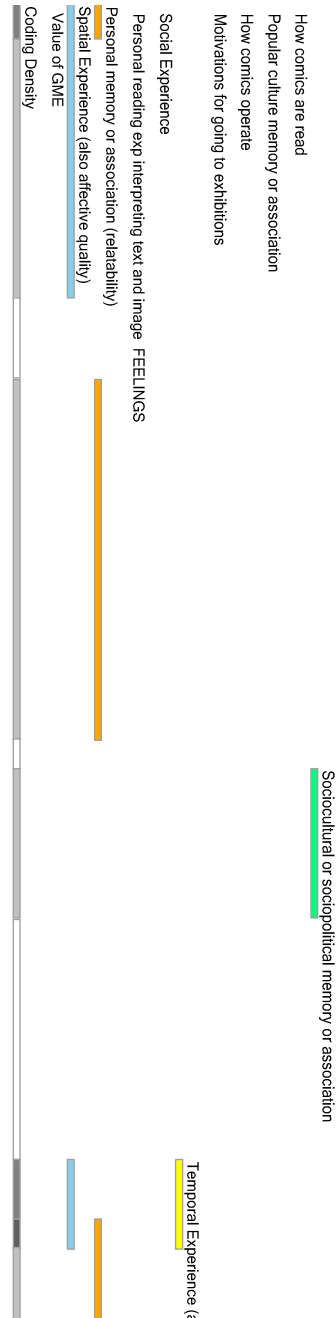
Anon: Oh I see! Yes, I think so, and as I say ten years ago those would have been the ones that I probably wouldn't have spent as long looking at. Not at all because I had any problem with the medium but I just wasn't exposed to it. so to me, again, it felt like something that was, ah, oh if you are a comic artist, almost you had a have a kind of almost specialization, not a qualification, but you needed to have experience in that, whereas my abstract Picasso ripe-offs, which were actually very good, they were very good (giggly tone), Picasso should be worried, but yeah I was really drawn



to it, but I am not really sure why. But, I liked the way that everything was, the mediums were kind of mixed so it wasn't like comics on one side and more abstract visual things on the other side, or um, virtual reality or something, I liked that it was all mixed because it meant that I looked at everything, whereas if there'd been a virtual reality bit I might, possibly, stepped passed that, just kinda on a bias that tends to confuse me and I am not good on my phone using QR codes and that tends to slightly put me off. But, I am pleased it didn't put me off, because of the layout, because I would have missed seeing those things and they were actually really interesting.

Alex: Did anything come to mind when you viewed the exhibition beyond what you've discussed?

Anon: I wrote it on my notes, actually, and I have written *agoraphobia* in really big letters, because I experienced that when growing up, so a lot of, particularly the Wild Child exhibit, I'm sorry the comic, but the overall feeling of the whole thing was this sense of people being trapped inside themselves. This kinda of sense that we are our own cages. I think there was a few times that words was used or kinda drawn in some ways as well. And, its almost that we put ourselves there, and with agoraphobia that very much is the case, you know, it develops slowly over time until you are afraid of almost everything and don't want to do anything, so the only way to deal with that is to keep yourself in the house because you've decided that this room is controllable and manageable but beyond that isn't. So it was kinda bringing up a lot of those thoughts, but not in a negative way, I wouldn't say I was upset, more just kinda makes you think about them. And it makes you really appreciate the difference between bars that someone puts you in and bars you put yourself in. which is not to say *atoll* that the person doing it is trying to do it or at blame or anything, but you know it is making me think about all the stuff with the refugee crisis and all of these detention centres that the western countries hold people in for processing and separate out children and that's putting people in bars, where mental illness we do to ourselves, or can be – can be with those sorts of things, or as I was in my experience it was something that, my phobia developed and only I was able to, not reverse it, but learn to cope with it. Cause there are days that it kinda resurges and day I just don't want to leave the house because it doesn't feel like a safe day and I kinda got to a stage where its like as long as I don't have any more of two days like that in a row, unless of course of some particular reason, then I have kinda of learned to accept that, because its like you know, some people never recover from agoraphobia, I've done very well to get to the stage where I am at, so I kinda, I'm kind to myself, I don't beat myself up when there is a day I just don't want to do today as long as its not everyday, so yeah, I've been thinking a lot about that after I was looking at the exhibit, and I kinda just wanted to give these people who drew these comics a hug, cause I think we can all relate, and I think, I wrote this down as well, so I would like to read it to make sure I get it right, if I can actually read my scrawl, its, "that almost everyone has these thoughts (and by that I mean anxiety or



feelings of not being good enough or something), and that only some people are able to express them, but its not about bravery (and I've underlined that), its about having the right tools, and the right support, and the right environment to say it," because I think often people talk about someone being brave enough to say something or whether that's brave enough to come out as gay or whether its brave enough to talk about domestic abuse they are experiencing or brave enough to talk about a suicide attempt or anorexia, and I don't think its bravery. I think it takes a huge amount of determination and a huge amount of something close to courage, I appreciate that two are very similar words, to say it I don't like, because the implication therefore that those who aren't saying it aren't brave and that really annoys me, because I think that those people that put themselves out there, especially their names are on that so their at least in some way tying themselves to these thoughts, at least in some way they are saying this is my experience or this is someone very close to me or kind of this is not abstract, this means something to me, and I think that takes a lot of something but I don't like the sense, the word, when people talk about bravery, because there is a lot of people that, like the girl that didn't have a mouth, they don't have the right tools or if you've been surrounded your whole life in an environment where speaking up, either literally or about your problems, makes a huge amount worse, you know, it almost takes more courage in those senses in those situations to keep staying silent for, in case it cases more damage to somebody else, like it was something I was thinking about as well with something like domestic abuse survivors. It always annoys me when I hear people say of women with children, ah I don't understand how they stay with them and why don't they just leave, when it is normally the husband as well, when the husband beats her and the kids and what kind of mother would stay with them, and I'm like you have no idea. And that's not something I have experienced, I can't in anyway own that, but it takes a huge amount of courage to get up every day when you are experiencing these sorts of lives, and I think, I just don't like this whole narrative of bravery, non-bravery, speaking up, fighting back, its all very military as well, so this is really off-topic, but it reminded me of something we did in school where analysed a whole load of speeches, and so many speeches have got like war imagery and metaphors, and so much of what we say about fighting back and standing up, making a stand, their all like military euphuisms, and I don't like any of those because it, I mean first of all it creates an us- them, an aggressor-a victim, you know, good-evil, you could never have peace with those sorts of things, someone has to win, and I hear people talk about beating mental illness or the same beating cancer or something, and you know, all power to people that that speaks to them, its great for them, but for me those aren't the right sort of metaphors, because again it means that if you don't win, if you don't beat the disease, did you not fight hard enough? Like my agoraphobia, I am now, I would say, no longer in a position where I suffer from it the way I did, but it is something I still have, it, for many years it affected me strongly and it was very disheartening to hear people talk about how they had overcome something when I wasn't overcoming it, I was like well am I not

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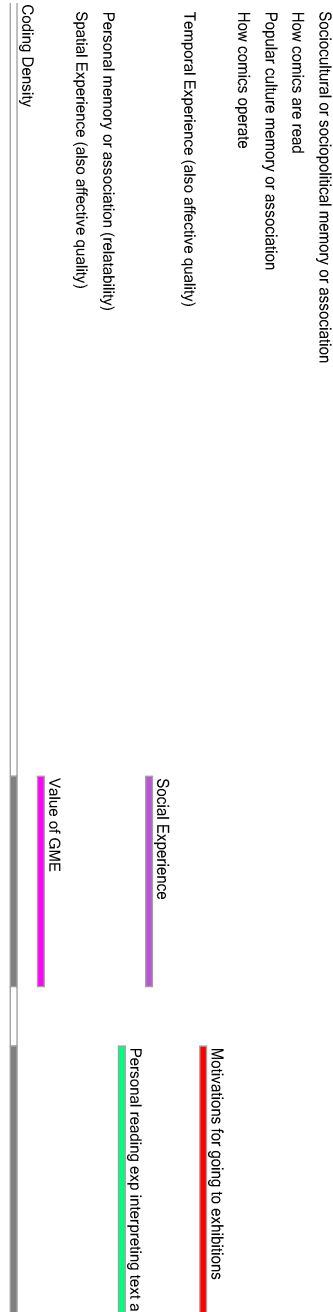
trying hard enough? Am I not fighting hard enough? Also, what do you fight, like I think I said in the beginning, the phobia was me inside my own head, telling me that it wasn't safe, so how do you beat yourself? And, I think for me a lot of the turmoil was this idea that for me, oh and I drew this as well, for you, I draw like a cage and I said "we try to put our bad thoughts in a cage, but that just traps us" all the thoughts get trapped in there so its kinda like you can't, its not like in Harry Potter with the horcrux, you can't take part of yourself and put it somewhere else and continue to function. It doesn't work that way. And I imagine people who have experienced serious grief probably resonate with that or I don't know, they kind of. You are always you no matter how hard you try. And for a long time I was putting thoughts in a cage, but then it meant that you were locking life experiences in there as well and some of those are very positive, but even if they are not positive they are a part of you. Your then put in a stage where your locked in whole years in a cage and saying we won't look at those years and you can't function like that, and to me that's not recovery. Recovery is learning to cope in your own way, that works for you, that doesn't damage you or doesn't damage anybody else. As long as you can get to that point, to me, that's recovery. Um, yeah, sorry that was very long winded.

Alex: No that's great, because my next question was if you'd done any drawing and if...

Anon: Yes.

Alex: if you remembered perhaps where you were in viewing the exhibition or the works the resonated with that [drawing]?

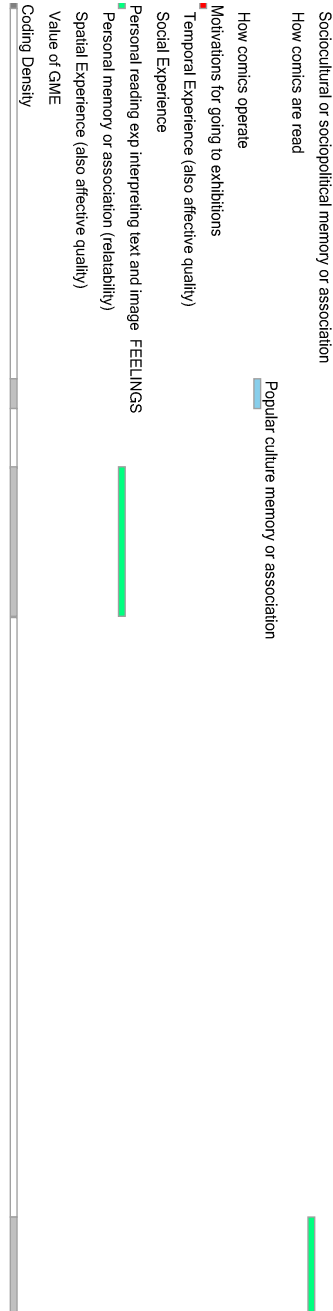
Anon: Ah, I kinda, I made notes on each one as I went, but I am a prolific note taker, so, but I drew the cage after I'd looked at them all leaning back against the Starbucks, I don't know, where people make their tea, but kinda getting in the way, because I had to move in the end, and just thinking about it all, because it's a very powerful exhibition, you know it makes you think a lot, and I do admire the people who have put their works there, because it's a powerful thing to do, it is, it is a very emotive thing to do and I really appreciated them doing that, because a lot of people wouldn't want to but yeah, other than kind of making notes on each one, and I took some photos as well, but I mostly took photos and notes on the ones that spoke more to me, so there were a few that didn't speak to me as much and they were the more kinda virtual reality ones. But as I say its cause I like a narrative and I don't, if I can't see a story myself, I'm not the kind of person that tries to create it or interpret it, which made me wonder if I am really lazy when I viewed art (laugh), its not like I wanted it there written for me, but I was like "I think I should be trying harder," ah, (laugh), like "I think I am supposed to look into this," but because there were so many good ones, or so many that resonated with me, it was easy to then not try so hard on the others. But, I have all those notes which you are very welcome to have.



Alex: thank you. So you talked about metaphors not always being appropriate and I was wondering if there were any visual metaphors in the works, or even written in the text that came along with the exhibit...

Anon: There was, I mean, assuming that the Wild Child story isn't the story of an artist, actually being held against her will being tied against a chair, obviously if that is the case then not a metaphor, assuming that isn't the case, that sensation of trapped, caged, that was definitely a strong metaphor coming through, and I have no problem with that because that is what people feel.

I wasn't as keen on the, I wrote this down, Inner Voices, wasn't as keen isn't the right word, I thought it was really interesting, but there was something about it that made them look like demons, that like kinda, like a skull kind of drawn over, and again it actually made me think of Lucifer the tv show when he shows his devil face, cause I'm really strong on religious allegory and metaphors, Catholic background, you can't help it, you never really escape the Catholic church, ahhhh I was just put in the sin drawer, um, I don't like the metaphors of good and evil and having demons and angels inside us, again that very much ties back to these things I was saying before of bad thoughts, a bad part of us, I believe that we are all a mixture of, like, its really difficult because we use these terms good and bad so often it is difficult to find a language that doesn't work in that false dichotomy sort of way, but if we think about it on a scale there are parts of my personality or parts that I'm more proud of or parts I look to improve, but I don't think any of me is good or bad, I am not a good or bad person, and I think that this idea of demons inside us, I don't think it helps, because if you are someone suffering with that, what do you do with that, okay I have demons inside of my head, and this is, I have had a few family members that have suffered with schizophrenia, and they have this idea that they have demons or voices inside their head, because they are convinced there are demons and voices and they are real and that they are bad it leads these people often to self-harm, because if there is something bad in you then you must be bad, if you are bad you should be punished, these are all the metaphors and things that we are told our whole live and I don't think that's helpful because that's a situation where my cousin and my grandma both trying to take their own lives and, I'm not saying that's because of these metaphors, they had serious mental health problems, but I think that part of it when we use metaphors we don't think about the underly...what we are saying, like when we say to kids, you know, "go on the naughty step", or this kind of thing, and don't get me wrong you got to do something with them, it, I don't think we think about what we are really saying when we are saying that, the idea that there is something bad in you, especially when we talk about, like my little brother, everyone says he's naughty, but I wonder what impact that has on someone being told that all the time, you know, that somehow you are not as good as the rest of us, almost that we expect bad behaviour from you, so yeah anything that has those kind of, but I



thought the actual piece itself was really cool, I really liked it but I just don't like that sort of demon skull thing, which is weird given that I am a goth at heart.

Alex: So you have kind of touch on this one, but how did you experience the topic of spatial anxieties in the exhibit?

Anon: Spatial anxieties as in being scared in certain places?

Alex: yeah, so like claustrophobia and...

Anon: I don't know if this is intentional but the exhibit is laid out in a way that creates small spaces, especially the Wild Child one was set back into the alcove and in the Z shape of it, so it did create almost, ah, in a way that is still very much open a lot of corners, and that was quite interesting because a lot of these works talked about feelings of being trapped or anxious and when you are viewing them you tended to be feeling slightly enclosed.

In terms of what they were saying in the actual works themselves, I think there was a very strong message coming through, one of them, I think, the Body is a Place, I wrote that down somewhere, I can't find it now, but I thought that was really interesting and there was some question at the end, like, "Why doesn't the body recognize a place it knows?", or something similar to that, and I definitely agree with that because I think, both in terms of literally having a place in the world and in terms of, like you know, metaphorically, emotionally, I think we all struggle with this, I think that in the age we live in everyone is struggling to feel that they have a right to be heard and they have the ability, especially online or in person, but also for a lot of people in the world a right to exist, a literally right to these freedoms and liberties, and there was a piece that talked about the hierarchy of needs (Journey to Wellness), what was that called, I can't think of what that was called, but that, you know, there are some things on that triangle, like safety, food, shelter, that some of these comics, ah artworks, were basically saying people didn't have those, they didn't have those basic needs, so how were they ever gonna be happy. Although, I wasn't overly keen on that artwork, not because there was anything wrong with it, I thought it was very well drawn, I think it felt more like an informational thing, more like something you would have in a doctor surgery, compared to the others which felt more like honest, almost like ripping out your own heart and saying, this is my, this is how I feel, but again I am the kind of person that likes that, I always identify more with a book or a song or a piece of art if I feel like someone is saying "this is how I feel, ugly or not, this is how I feel and you can make of it what you want," whereas I am not as keen on stuff that feels like "oh, you..." just a bit more glossed up. I like things that are raw, but raw in a sense that they are actually raw, not trying to be deep. And I liked that about the Raised on Ritalin one, he was saying about the fear of answering the phone, some people might look at this and go "okay it is the fear of answering the phone it's not going to destroy your life is it", you know, "you're not tied to a chair like that girl," but for that person that's huge. You know that will stop

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you doing your job. And it was the same with the one, the new zine one (Panic zine), walking a certain way to cross the road and I really resonated with that because, it's like, mental affects every little choice that people make and that kind of anxiety and fear, whereas the constant awareness of the space you are in, for people who suffer from it, people always say "oh it's a fear of walking home late at night," yes that definitely will feature in your top ten fears if you have those thoughts, but I am someone who likes to sit where there is always a door quite close to me that I can get out of, if I am in a busy room I like to sit with my back against the wall so no one is behind me, so I don't feel threatened. And its those kind of thoughts, every room I go into I am looking for what I think is the optimum seat and its frustrating because it is clear that so many people, or its not clear, it appears that so many people don't have those thoughts, and don't have those concerns, and I was in a meeting once, which ended up a heated meeting anyways, but the layout of the room was kind of a big rectangle of chairs around the outside and a few in the middle, and it was, it was not intended this way, but it felt like a panel situation and because the meeting got a bit heated it felt very much like I was on trial, but also, not like I am expecting someone to say, "is everyone sat in a chair or in a part of the room they feel comfortable?", but where I was sat there was men all around me and they weren't doing anything in any way to be threatening, but because of my experiences I felt threatened, so the whole time I am having that meeting, even if it is just to talk about the most mundane day-to-day things, I can't fully participate because I am already feeling anxious and sweating. And yeah, so that comic really resonated with me, it's the same when I sit on the bus, I don't like sitting in the back because I like sitting somewhere where the driver can see but I don't like to sit right at the front either, because if someone is going to get on and they are drunk or something and they are going to have a problem with someone that is the first seat they are going to stumble on to, you also want to be near the bell so you can press it quickly, so it is that kind of like constant awareness of the space you are in, and I am sure this is the same for anyone you has some sort of physical disability, but, then you watch people go through life and they don't seem to have any of these concerns, especially working in a place that prides itself on, you know, being inclusive. Being inclusive is so much more than making sure there is a lift in the building, of course that is hugely important and it is shocking that that something that in 2019 we are like "oh we put a lift in for people in wheelchairs" like "you didn't already have that? Great, well done you.", but it means so much more than that, it means that there are people who will be sat in a room, in a seat that makes them feel anxious, and no one has thought what does that do the bargaining power in a conversation, what does that do to a person's experience, might they stop coming to lectures because of it, because my agoraphobia was bad if I couldn't sit in a certain seat I wouldn't go into the room because it was the only seat that I had deemed safe. So, occasionally I do a little bit of teaching at the uni and when I have done some teaching anytime I have not seen a student its, its easy to think, "ah, student's probably in bed," maybe, maybe not, but I always think what if one of them is having that same thought as me, or what if

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one of them has a weak leg and you know so many things, I think when we talk about being inclusive, and spaces and making them accessible, its so important that we look at the physical limitations people have and it is great that we are moving towards making that accessible, but no one thinks about the mental and emotional limitations. And the worst thing is if I were to bring this up in a meeting a feel that people would, this is just my feeling, not saying that this would happen, but I feel as though men would roll their eyes and I feel this would be deemed to be a very snowflake, millennial, female thing to say, so then what do I do, do I then have to say in the meeting “well as someone who has been sexually assaulted, from someone who has suffered from agoraphobia,” then I have to disclose to make my point worthwhile and then everyone in the room will go awkward and someone will mutter something and say “okay we will make a note of that,” and then everyone will just feeling awkward, and why, I shouldn’t even have to do that, like, but I just know that if I said it in a meeting people would be like, which just look at me like “come on, come on,” and I’m like “oh so when we talk about inclusivity we mean so we can put it in a prospectus, we mean that we are going to say if someone says something homophobic or racist they are in trouble,” and of course they 100% should be, but it needs to go so much further than that, and I think that was kinda my overall thoughts from today looking at the exhibit. Which I think was great and I think there should be much more of them, is that people’s mental health illnesses, anxieties, especially agoraphobia and claustrophobia, they are so much more pervasive and stretch out so much further than people realize. Even the toilets in the cinema in Odeon in town, one of the toilets you have to go down a long corridor to get to the, passed the sinks, I don’t feel comfortable in that one, I prefer the one that is more open, but it is that kinda, you would seem crazy with a friend saying “Can we use the toilets that are much more inconveniently further away from the screen so I don’t worry that there is a monster in here,” and that’s the sort of thing, those are barriers that I think are still there for people. To use a metaphor that I said I don’t like (laugh). I think that we are at a stage now where it is okay to say you suffer from mental health, and by okay I mean like socially accepted, its okay to say that you are any sexuality of course, you know, but getting more into it than that makes people feel awkward. And anything to do with sexual assault people don’t want to hear. People aren’t interested. It’s the same with the toilets on one of the new floors of the university, its kind of a corridor situation, its gender neutral, I have no problem with gender neutral, because they are individual cubicles, I have a problem with the fact that it is enclosed space with no window and it is completely blocked from the outside. That is what makes me nervous, but no one asks that. And yes I can make a big thing of it in a meeting, but again to make my point valid I would have to say “as a sexual assault survivor,” and I hate that term anyway, I don’t like the idea of survivor, or somehow I have survived something that others failed, but you know that’s the term that people understand and I would have to disclose that to make my point valid, and that really irritates me, or you say nothing and you get to a point where you don’t feel comfortable using the toilets, and I don’t feel comfortable about where my desk is in the university,

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because I can't see the door, so I won't use my desk, and when people say to you "oh is everything okay with your work set up?", they mean do you need a stool because your legs are short, do you need an ergonomic keyboard, they don't mean "do you actually feel safe here", but also they don't give you options, they don't say "if you don't feel safe here or comfortable, for any reason, why don't we show you some other desks," like you're the problem if you raise these things. So I don't know if that answers what I was saying but yeah, in terms of, I am very aware of the space I am in and I am very aware of the spaces I feel comfortable in and the spaces I don't, and more often than not I don't feel comfortable in spaces, so it was really powerful to have that resonated in artwork, to see that other people, and other people cross the road and do the same thing of, "that's a safer way home," what I liked about that artwork (Panic Zine) was that it was the daytime, I thought that was really good, because everyone is scared of walking home in the dark, pretty much, most people aren't afraid of walking home from the high street at two o'clock in the afternoon on a Saturday with mums walking past with their kids and people eating ice creams and that's a thing that people need to understand is that mental illness isn't just in the evenings, it isn't just on a dark night in a forest, its when you are in the bath by yourself in the middle of the day, or for people that do that (giggly tone), or that kind of thing, of your in a bookshop and you really want to go look at some certain books but its in an enclosed area where you feel trapped so you won't go look at those books, and then you are annoyed at yourself all day because you didn't go look at the books you wanted to in a shop in the middle of the day with plenty of people in, but no one thinks of these things when they do the designs which makes you think isolated because you think "well the people designing these buildings mustn't have these problems or thoughts or these experiences, so is it just me? Am I the problem? I'll just stop using these spaces," so it is really powerful to see other people feel the same.

Alex: And I want to touch back on a couple things you said in there, one being the comic, Journey to Wellness, the one you said felt more informative and glossed up, I think were the words, could you speak a bit more to your experience of a clinical aesthetic.

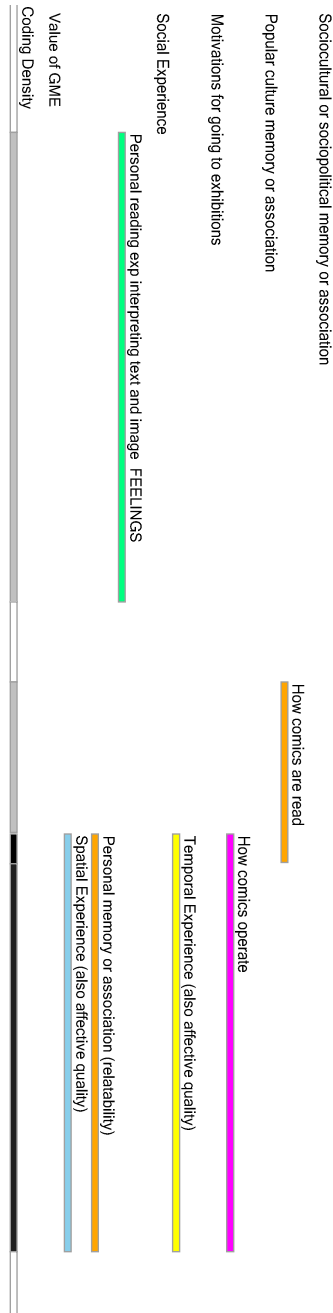
Anon: Yeah, its interesting, its only now that you ask the question I know now why I have a problem with it, because it is the sort of ones I would see when I was in the councillor's office. Steps to Wellness, and they are so important, you do need to give people information, and there was absolutely nothing wrong with this artwork, it was very nice, but to me it just felt like someone saying "oh yeah, just have these things in this triangle and you'll be fine," I think that's my problem with it, even though it is in no way saying "oh you just get these things and your fine" to me a triangle like that is like well you have these things and you are absolutely fine and for some people aren't, even with all those things, and kinda where does that leave them? As someone who didn't grow up feeling safe, or whatever, or having those low down basic needs its like well what am I supposed to do if I don't, I didn't make my life so I

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don't fit to the triangle, yeah so sorry, it was probably just a knee jerk reaction to seeing those things, like "oh you want to stop drinking? Just bin all your alcohol." Yes, that would help but its not, its just so much more than that, so yes, I wasn't trying to have a dig at that artwork as such, I also the breathing techniques recommended, again really nice ideas and I think for many people would be helpful, but I think someone with, like a severe anxiety disorder, it kind of, not undermines the seriousness or severity of their feelings, but it, and again it is all a spectrum thing, for some people that is so helpful, and I'd loved it if someone say that in the exhibit and it actually made a positive impact on their lives, and I am sure someone will, but for a lot of other their anxiety to so much beyond that that its not about imagining your holding a cup of hot chocolate, you might feel unsafe because, you are actually unsafe, and again I just got sick of seeing these comics and these like doctor offices and psychiatry offices and whatever, because it felt like the people drawing these came from a place of priviledge and security and that they had never understood that it wasn't a choice to not feel safe, that it wasn't a choice to not feel safe, or not have a proper shelter or bedding or whatever, and, so maybe that is just a working class chip on my shoulder, I don't know, but it feels very much like a, "okay let's say I can't manage tier one of the basic needs, I'll just pretend I have some hot chocolate," I think that is more my problem than the artwork.

Alex: So, I just have a couple more questions, one, and so these are more medium question, how did you experience the comics medium, what did you think of that?

Anon: The actual it being in a comic itself, I really like it I think its really clean, they were all really clean cut. Its attractive. Particularly the one that didn't use English or any language or words. Anyone would be able to read that from any language that has an understanding of linear and that kind of thing, and would understand that, it wouldn't matter if I spoke Polish or Japanese or anything, so I really liked that. And I liked that it carries a narrative. And it reminded me of an art class I went to once where a little girl, she was only about five, and she drew a comic and she understood the idea of panels and she'd done all these panels and she told a story in the time it had taken the rest of us to do one comic, like one single panel, and she'd done like fifteen and understood these concepts, so it's a concept of moving through time, or moving through thought, or some sort of movement forwards, or backwards, but there's almost this tempor-spatial movement that we get, that makes sense to us and I think that that sometimes what attracts me less about other mediums, because they feel very static, they are stuck in the one place in time and space and I like the ones that feel like they are moving. Because I don't know why, I think I am always just drawn to the idea of we're reaching something, we're going towards some sort of climax or conclusion, whereas one static image, even if its beautiful, I don't know what to do with, because I'm like that's lovely, it looks lovely, but it doesn't say anything to me. whereas a story does. Does that answer your question?

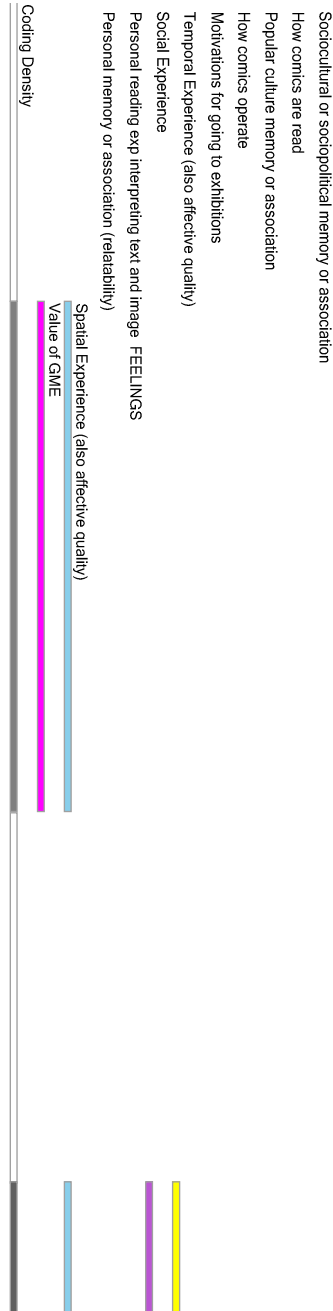


Alex: And then another is, in the context of the comics medium and the topic at hand, how do you think the exhibition and curation as a medium operated?

Anon: So just to check I understand your question, is it how did the overall curation of the exhibit and the medium work together to communicate the messages? I thought the message was really good. I really liked the way the different mediums were mixed in. I really liked the layout. I liked that if you'd actually gone in it the right end, there was clearly, clearly a right end, there was a sense of following it, cause I've been in some spaces before, or galleries, where there is just stuff everywhere and you don't know if you are mean to be looking at, it overwhelming, whereas it didn't feel overwhelming. And it liked that there was a seat to sit and watch the tv, but also for people who maybe want to sit or have mobility issues, because again I think that is important because so many of these galleries can sometimes be like, "as long as you are someone who can stand for a period of time please come and enjoy our artworks," and maybe not, may you are nine months pregnant and you just sit down, but that kind of thing always means a lot to me because it says "when we say we are open to everyone, we actually mean that," and it was in a space that people can walk through and it wasn't like in a library, which some people don't think is open to them or they don't feel they are part of that, it wasn't in the faculty areas, you know, this was something that was open to everyone, and I think that is really powerful, and that always means, that puts some meaning into the artworks themselves as well, because this is saying that anyone could relate to this not just anyone – as long as you are a fully employed member of staff at a privileged university – can enjoy this, or as long as you are able to stand, especially I liked the height, this might sound strange, but I could see everything, as someone who's short I have been to so many places where I can only see the bottom third of that, which I think is important as well, so in terms of the actual space I think it really worked. I liked it a lot.

Alex: And then if you had any, I think looking through my list you have answered all the questions I had, but I was wondering if there was anything else that you wanted to mention that you didn't get that chance to say.

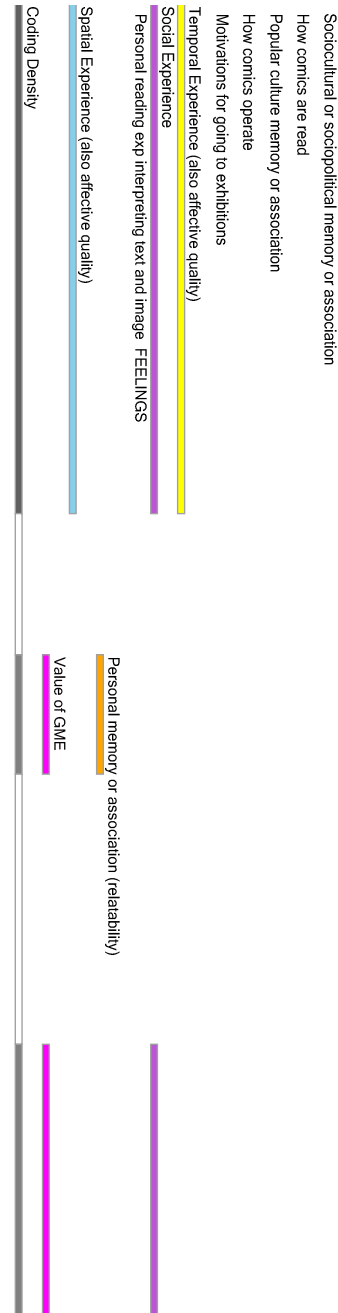
Anon: I don't, I think I did mention this but, just to reiterate, I think there should be a lot more of these things, I also think it is a shame that this is happened after the students have gone, for the most part, because a lot of the students would have really liked it and engaged with it, just from the point of view why can't we just keep that up, I think it is a shame that we have exhibits at the university that go up for a month or something and then they go down and for a lot of people they didn't get the chance to go there, and a lot of people are on annual leave and, just, you know it's a really important thing, and if were taking about being inclusive and being accessible to everyone and open and sharing your experience than I think its powerful if every single day some peole walk passed, or have the option to walk passed, artworks that are doing that, whereas otherwise when that goes back to being a blank space, it



kinda closes down those conversations that might have just started, if that makes sense, you know, cause I read this somewhere and I don't know if this is true so please don't base it on that, but I read that if you see a brand or an advert 8 times its on the eighth time that you start to trust it. now it is familiar to you, kinda the same if you ride the same bus every day and you see, there was this woman near my house going up that always wore pink, called the pink lady, and you know you'd get used to seeing the pink lady, its kinda like that, so its almost if you walked passed this exhibit for multiple times it might be on the eighth or ninth time that you feel "oh, I'll go have a little look at that," whereas for a lot time for a lot of people its either "oh that's not my sort of thing", because people are told they are not arty or that's not for them, or feeling somehow that people will think if looking at it "oh, do they have something wrong with them, why are they looking at that," especially boys, but I think if you had an artwork there for permanently that would give everyone the chance to look at it, cause some people won't want to look in a group, like I prefer it, but some people would rather look quietly themselves, yeah so if I'd say anything I think it should stay there.

Alex: And that actually brought up a little follow up question that I have, as you said once it goes down that closes conversations, and I was wondering if you wanted to expand on this idea of conversation and exhibition.

Anon: Yeah, okay so, my agoraphobia was brought about by a sexual assault situation, and I disclosed that after watching East Enders, and there was a character in which one of the girls was being sexually abused, so A it kinda of made me aware that this was a thing that you could kinda talk ab....but also it gave me the tools, it kinda showed me what is it you even say, and especially when you're dealing with issues maybe when they are younger, its like, often you feel like it is just you, like something shameful, but if you watch something in East Enders or Holly Oakes you see that, someone's told their parents their gay and on Holly Oakes the parents have reacted really positively and been like "we love you no matter what," it might give someone watching that the sense of that could be me too, so in the same way that we, people very much relate to what they see on TV and see in films, I'm the same with art and books, even if most people don't feel the same about books, it makes you feel not alone but also kinda gives you the words and tells you how to say it, and especially if you strongly identify with a character, if they've said something, it kinda makes you feel empowered to do the same, you know "they did it, I can do it," like if you have seen someone jump over a gap you feel as though you can as well, whereas being the first one to jump is really difficult, and with those artworks, its one thing to kinda have strange ethereal concept of inclusivity always talked about, its another to actually have, I suppose its taking something imaginary and ethereal its something physical and real, something intangible to tangible, and I think we need to make things tangible for people in order to have these



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conversations, cause otherwise it feels like a lot of words, but not a lot of action.

Yeah so.

[End]