

THE CARDIFF TAPES (2019)

1ST MAN: I'm on my way to the train station right now.

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2ND MAN: Uh, don't really have a view, to be honest. What—is it, uh, is it, uh, art, or something, or—[pause]. I've nothing to say, I'm afraid. I—[laughs]. Okay, sor—

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3RD MAN: About what? I just noticed it. I haven't been—I don't live here, so—why, what is it? You don't know what it is? It's a sculpture of sorts, but, uh—yeah, what's this for, anyhow?

3RD MAN: Yeah, it's difficult to kind of interpret this one. I don't—I haven't really looked at it. [Pause] I say,

it'd be a good place to get sun, at a certain time you could lay on it. But yeah, if it's a sculpture, I don't know what the purpose is. Geometry, of sorts? Um, yeah. Triangles, cylinders, you know?

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4TH MAN: What is it?

5TH MAN: I have no idea what it is.

5TH MAN: Right. No, but what—what is it? [Pause] Well, I can't be more help, I don't really know what it is.

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1ST WOMAN: Sorry, I'm—I don't—[laughs]

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2ND WOMAN: What is it? What is it? A wall?

6TH MAN: No, I—I didn't see it here yesterday.

2ND WOMAN: [Laughs]

6TH MAN: Um, yeah, I don't know.

2ND WOMAN: It looks like a black wall. And that's it. [Pause] Come on, mate. [Laughs]



Garth Evans (right) next to *Untitled* on the Hayes in Cardiff, Wales, 1972.

9TH WOMAN: What is it? It's a, it's und—I, I don't know what it's supposed to be. What do you—do you have an explanation of what it's supposed to be? No? All right, it just looks like a, an iron girder, no, I don't think it belongs in High Street. Okay.

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10TH WOMAN: Um, I don't know. I don't even know what it is. What's it meant to be? What?

11TH WOMAN: I think it looks very pretty. I think it attracts a lot of people. It's nice.

10TH WOMAN: It does—

11TH WOMAN: Nice for photography, as well.

10TH WOMAN: —it looks industrial. It looks industrial. Um, but I suppose it's a talking point, isn't it?

11TH WOMAN: Yeah.

10TH WOMAN: Um, putting modern art in—

11TH WOMAN: Yeah, very nice.

10TH WOMAN: —out in the public view. It's a good idea.

11TH WOMAN: Very contemporary.

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26TH WOMAN: Um, do you know what it, it is? Is it like an art installation, maybe? You can't really tell me anything, can you? No? Um, well, I have no idea [laughs]. I think it's, um, I think it's like an arrow, but in a certain way, maybe, pointing you in a certain direction? Um, or it could be a piece that you look down, sort of like a, like if you were flying over it and you could see what it actually is. Um, it definitely makes you think [laughs]. Um, it was really nice chatting to you, but I've got to head off to the—

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27TH WOMAN: —build rubbish.

41ST MAN: —clue what it is.

27TH WOMAN: Um, I don't even know what it is. No.

41ST MAN: No, but what is it?

27TH WOMAN: What is it?

41ST MAN: What is it?

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42ND MAN: Um.



THE SECOND RECORDING | GARTH EVANS

I returned to the Hayes at eight-thirty in the morning. Although the rain had stopped, it remained chilly and wet. I was tired and felt disheveled. After seeing my sculpture returned the previous night, I had gone to bed at two-thirty. I had slept poorly, my sleep filled with monstrous dark forms and images of lights flashing in the rain.

I was there to make a second recording. I had wanted, as much as possible, for the circumstances in which I made the second recording to replicate those in which I had, so many years before, made the first recording. But now, finally there beside the sculpture, microphone in hand, I felt foolish. The entire enterprise suddenly seemed absurd. I was not the same person I had been in 1972, the surroundings were not the same, and the people on the street in the Hayes passing by the sculpture were not the same. The only thing that was the same as it had been forty-seven years ago was the sculpture. Although, in some ways, even that was not quite true.

When the sculpture was placed in the Hayes in 1972, it had stood out like a sore thumb. The work did not fit with its surroundings. It was huge, stark, bold, clean, and assertive in contrast to the setting, which was scruffy, nondescript, and a bit run down. In 2019, the surroundings and the sculpture shared a similar vocabulary: everything was orderly, controlled, designed, and measured. Even so, the sculpture still did not fit. It was cramped, boxed in—it no longer felt like the massive object it had been in 1972. You could not see the whole work; there were too many obstructions—large potted trees, seats, benches, lampposts—preventing one from grasping the total form of the sculpture from any distance. Yet, because it was so large, getting close enough to have an unobstructed view left one able to see only part of the sculpture. In 1972, I had thought the sculpture was “out of place” in a good and important way; in 2019, I felt it was simply in the wrong place.

In 1972, the people I approached were not afraid to speak to me, to speak right to my microphone. In fact, many of them were eager to do so, they wanted to tell me what they thought. In 2019, however, it quickly became clear that people were responding differently. They did not want to be interrupted, they did not have the time or desire to look at the sculpture or to speak to me about it. Time after time, my offered microphone was waved away with a grunt or a brief apology. One obvious explanation for the difference I experienced is that contemporary sculpture in an urban setting is no longer unfamiliar and people were not disturbed by the presence of the work. It was not alien to them and they were neither awakened nor annoyed; they appeared to be simply indifferent.





Garth Evans next to *Untitled* on the Hayes in Cardiff, Wales, 2019.