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□ So we're gathered here today under the auspices of Lara's project. I was given a choice of about 50 key words, all very contemporary buzz words, to choose from and then invited to ask three or four people to come and talk about and around that word. So I chose standard and my suggestion is – I'll spend the first 5 or 10 minutes explaining why I chose that word and as there isn't any standard format for these conversations as far as I understand, then I thought what I would like to do is each of us and together talk very specifically about what that word means in terms of what each of us do and approach it sort of from the bottom up rather than the top down at the sort of micro level and hopefully in the meeting point between those four sets of ideas about standard, then we might get on to some sort of bigger social, economic, political ideas.

But I'd rather they were inferred, in a way, rather than being talked about directly. I also wanted to try and get people from different disciplines and in a way that wasn't very successful, in the sense that three of us are from the cultural sector and so Lola is the only wild card. Happily. I guess I really wanted to try and get some contributors from, particularly, education and even maybe the medical industries, just because they are so far from what I'm usually used to dealing with and after the fact I thought well, maybe that's not so important given that two of us at least have children and so have to sort of face education and hospitals and medical industries anyway.

Maybe we'll come on to that later in a more general sense. The reason I chose standard is because I've been actually thinking about it quite a lot in relation to my work. Maybe I should just, even before each of us speak individually, just introduce everybody for the listeners. So my name's Stuart and I work as a graphic designer for the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London. So that means I'm responsible for all the communication that goes out from the Institution and I also work sometimes, I have in the past, as an editor and a writer.

Maybe it's easier for you to do this individually. So Lauren?

/ Sure.

□ Maybe you could just introduce yourself?

/ Yeah, sure. Okay. So I'm Lauren and I am a curator primarily. I came to curating in a little bit of an unconventional way through having been trained as a designer as well, but I'm an independent curator mostly and currently working with an institution in Los Angeles on a bi-annual. I guess I won't talk about what standard means to my practice until you've done that.

□ No.

/ But that's my vantage.

Stuart □
Bertolotti-Bailey
Lauren Mackler /
Ab Rogers *
Lola Tonini ○
Alabiso

* I am Ab Rogers. I run a practice called Ab Rogers design and we work across disciplines, from doing some things in the medical industry – designing spaces for cancer patients, spaces for paediatrics, for children, but also stuff in culture, for museum – Tate Modern or Comme des Garçons and so forth and I have been an educator. I set up the interior design department for the Royal College of Art for four years and discovered that large institutions were somewhat impossible for me to work for. Maybe because of their standards, it became quite complicated and so forth.

□ And just to be clear, it's sort of as much architecture as it is interior design. I mean, it's a sort of holistic practice – isn't it?

* Yeah. I mean it's very much about design, but yeah. Buildings inside and outside. We try and design them from the inside to the outside. I suppose now the thing that defines my position is I'm extremely dyslexic, so I see the world slightly back to front and upside down or have a different perspective, a non-standard one, possibly.

□ Yeah. And Lola?

○ Hi. I'm Lola. I'm Italian but I currently live in Luxembourg and I'm a lawyer and I've been working for more than 8 years for the Court of Justice of the European Union, so an EU institution, as a lawyer in the staff of the President of one of the two jurisdictions. The President of the General Court. So I assist him in his functions. It's quite varied. I don't want to be too boring with you and describe them in too much detail. Anyway, I'm a European and an international lawyer.

□ So is there one area that you specialise in? Like immigration or anything in particular or...

○ My main area of interest is fundamental rights.

/ Hmm.

○ It has always been, but it's not the only area I'm interested in because I'm also very much interested in the functioning of the institution.

□ Yeah.

○ So the general mandate of the institution interests me a lot. As it concerns the development of law, I'm very much interested in fundamental rights and cross-fertilisation between different legal systems. So decision making in fundamental rights, the style of reasoning in this matter, how different legal systems influence each other, and in general in the relation between this matter of law and society and the evolution of society. So how they interact. So I'm very much interested in how case law and courts interact between each other and with society.

- Right.
- Specifically in fundamental rights.
- And regardless of what your interests are, is there any degree to which you can choose the sort of work that you want to do? Or do you just get assigned certain roles and then you're dealing with that?
- I cannot really choose, no. So like most of my colleagues, I can choose a matter I want to study individually, in my free time. We can publish, we can study, we can write, we can participate in conferences, and we can think as well. So we can decide what we think about, but no. So this is specific of the court I'm working in. So the court receives demands and applications from citizens, so we are quite passive in that. We have to react to what we receive from society.
- Yeah.
- So we react more than taking initiative.
- Okay, great. I'm going to describe why I was interested in the word standard and I guess I'm actually more interested in the word as a plural, as standards. Or let's say the sort of meeting point between the two. The idea of what a standard is and how standards are applied and why I've been thinking about it is because about two and a half years ago, I started working for this art institution and it's the first institution in fact I've ever worked for. I've always been a freelance graphic designer and as you can imagine, at the moment or in the past 10, 15 years then, digital media has started to override print media as the main sort of point of focus for the sorts of things that I'm doing.

So that means maybe 70, 80% of the things that I'm designing to go out to the public are email invitations, website, and certain things for other devices but I'm from a generation that was predicated on designing for print. I actually graduated right on the cusp of email coming in, maybe 5 years later was when the internet started to gain traction. So the difference between those two things for me was really when designing for print so that could be in the most obvious sense as posters, leaflets, books, but also signage systems, time tables, and things in physical spaces on physical material. They were always fixed and there was always a kind of one to one correspondence between what I did and how it came back from the printer or how it was painted on to a sign with very little room for manoeuvre in terms of what might be different from what my idea was in the first place.

And since digital media, and particularly websites, have a situation now where you're designing things from the sending end and they're traveling through many different channels to many different devices. Phones, tablets, laptops, desktop computers, et cetera, and they're also being channeled through many different forms of software.

Email browsers, internet browsers, and they're also susceptible to being locally controlled by whoever the recipient is in terms of their settings on that software. Whether they know that or not, depending on how sophisticated they are as users. That means the chance of what is being sent from me or from the institution and it arriving at the other end anything like I intended it to or we intended it to is getting increasingly difficult to...

★ It'll become corrupted in some way.

□ Pollute. To pollute it. They become corrupted and I always had in mind when I was thinking about this, quite a well known diagram in design circles, that is based on something called Information Theory from the middle of the 20th century by a person called Claude Shannon and if you imagine this diagram, it's very simple. There's a message at one end that goes through some sort of format and that gets transmitted and it's received in another kind of format and there's a message on the other end and in that process of translation from one to the other over time and space which could be a split second, it could be a year, and in spatial terms it could be to someone next to you or next door or across an ocean, there is always noise in that system and noise is the essential bit in that diagram.

So here's the message, here's the received message, here's the arrow in between and here's the noise and there is always noise in the system. That's the important part, right? So even as I am speaking to you all now, I might mispronounce a word.

/ We might misunderstand it.

□ You might misunderstand it.

★ Ambiguity.

□ There's ambiguity and part of the point of that diagram is to introduce the idea of building redundancy into the message and redundancy in these terms, in linguistic terms and in design terms, means that you overcompensate in the sending of the message in order that there's more likelihood of something getting through and famously, language has a lot of built in redundancy. Meaning I could construct a sentence of 10 words or I could say "I construct sentence 10 words" and you would still get what I mean in both of those variants. Right

And if you take that back to what I'm talking about in terms of communication and graphic design, what that means is you've got to build in a certain amount of abundance of information to make sure the very minimum gets through at the other end. Right? So let's take a specific example. I'm setting up an email invitation to be sent out to X thousand people on the mailing list of the institution. In the past, if that was to be sent as a printed invitation, the colour, the type face, the paper, the envelope, could all be chosen and fixed and you're pretty sure, unless it gets lost in the mail...

/ Crumpled up.

□ Or crumpled up or torn apart or whatever, that it would-

* Or rained upon.

□ Or rained upon. 99% of those invites would arrive the same as they left the printer or my desk or the institution's mailing room. With a piece of digital software, the colour is liable to drop out. The type faces are liable to change on the way because of those local settings, because of browser settings, because of media settings, and things that are very specific to the details of the sort of work I do to do with, I don't know, the spacing between lines, the way in which the ends of lines break, the way in which images are at a certain resolution or sized a certain way, all that is a complete open field.

* So you have to let go of control.

□ You have to let go of control or try and figure out smart ways for the essential components of that message to get through.

* Can you not celebrate that ambiguity in a way? Design it in a way that encourages elements of misinterpretation?

□ Absolutely and that's what I would say is the main task of someone in my position today, which is very different to how that position was 20 or 30 years ago and the other place where the word standard comes into this thinking is that my job, as I see it, is to establish certain standards. They could be design standards, aesthetic standards, visual standards, but they're also linguistic standards. Standards of language and tone and voice and all the things that amount to the identity of the institution which is what I'm responsible for and it seems to me increasingly difficult to maintain those standards because in order for that communication to get through, you have to increasingly base what you're doing on templates and software that try and guard against things going wrong.

So you're already, if you accept that, working in very, very, very limited parameters and so to do what you're suggesting, Ab, to sort of design in a smart way that celebrates that, is tricky because you're already sort of forced into working within very limited software and in terms of education, I've also been involved in teaching design, 10, 20 years ago, I would have always said to students, "Try and avoid being limited by whatever the conventional ways of doing things are. Not that those conventions aren't useful, but before you even start, just try and get rid of those." That's becoming increasingly difficult because the only ways in which you can send things these days are already controlled by...

/ Mm-hmm (affirmative).

□ By...

/ Platforms.

□ A limited number of software which yeah, can be platforms, can be...

* But before it was print which is also limited in its static-ness in a way.

□ Yeah.

* So aren't we just shifting the rules rather than...

□ I think so, but I would say the limitations are increasingly narrow relative to those of material products, but actually, I mean this is what-

* And now we can have a GIF and it can dance the letters if you wanted them to. Not saying that all letters should dance.

□ Absolutely, but I would then say "but the ways in which you can make a GIF and the limits of the number of images that you can combine into a GIF or the resolution of the pixels is limited." Right? So yes, there are more things on the face of it that you can do or there are equal numbers of things, but I think those things are actually within a tighter parameter. But actually, that's what I wanted to ask you and I was thinking that would be a good thing to lead on to.

Most of those problems or issues that I'm facing are specifically digital and I'm presuming giving that you work in architecture, the equivalent problems are more material. Would that be true to say? I guess I'm thinking of fire regulation, building regulation, materials.

* I think of course the introduction of standards really is, in my industry, about everyone trying to remove responsibility. So everyone sits in a standard. They are not responsible to be sued for the roof falling down because they have followed this and this standard.

□ Yeah.

* Which makes it much harder to do things in the way that you are saying as well, in an unusual way. So everything needs to fit. It becomes about avoidance of responsibility. So everyone wants to make things in the same way and so if you want to do something which is really expressive and very material based, it becomes very complicated. Thomas Heatherwick is always trying to reinvent the building process he created in the *B of the Bang* and a spike fell off and for 5 years it was surrounded by hoardings. Nobody could enter it because it became a legal case and then it became about who was going to sue who and how that would work out.

In the meantime, the sculpture became obsolete and just became this building site and so I think sometimes it feels like design is becoming, through the standards, controlled by insurance and by law rather than by creativity and I suppose that is a threat and like you're saying with your software, we have to find ways to corrupt that process or subvert it, so we can get through the creativity that we want, but often that means as designers having to sign off responsibility for specific details.

Yeah. And has that got markedly worse or more pronounced in the last-

* I think it's been markedly worse. I think everyone is more concerned about law within the industry. We designed at Maggie's Centre recently and we wanted every door handle to be different. So it became like a little sculpture or a pebble that you found and trying to get away from the standard. That took a huge amount of complication. We designed a house for a Russian eccentric, a very interesting, wealthy woman, and we spent more... Where we had beds spinning and platforms moving up and down and slides, and we spent more money on challenging the regulations than we did on producing the interventions.

So it becomes slightly crazy and law becomes more polluting of all our different worlds. Law is very important in law's place, but I think when it starts to make us also frightened of our professions, it becomes difficult. Architects coming out of school now are much more concerned about legalities than they are about creativity often, it feels. So we need to really challenge the educational system and maybe this is coming a bit from the States because I think that's where law and suing is so prevalent.

Of course, law and creativity are not always friends. If you think of the expression "judicial creativity", there's a very negative nuance.

/ Really?

Judicial creativity-

Stuart Bailey: It's a contradiction in terms.

/ No, it's like it's shady. It's shady. It's like-

It's shady, it's a lack of legal certainty. So if there is judicial creativity, me as a citizen, how should I behave? So they are contradictory terms so I already think of a title of a conference. Can judicial be creative? Judicial creativity, are they forcibly opposed? Because the first thing you would think of – they are contradictory. There always is some creativity in building a reasoning, of course. In applying, in letting the society and the needs enter into law, but no. So usually judicial creativity is a negative, you know. So-

Like creative accounting, maybe?

○ Something like that. So that's why it's interesting that we are sitting at the same table because then you ask the standard as in the creative and legal field, it's very different. A standard as in law, a very positive nuance. It conveys certainty, something that can be trusted. Something that can guide people in how to behave or something that can guide the judge in decision making. So it's something that offers a threshold. It's something that settles a rate of protection or a way of analysing, reviewing a decision in order to establish if it's legal or not. So it's something positive. It's a guide. It's something...

* Would you say law is standard?

○ The first thing I would think of is the etymological origin of the word standard. It comes from ensign, how do you say, like a military ensign. Something like that. So it's something that you think of authority, first of all, and..

/ Built authority.

○ Sorry, built authority, and so it's quite a closed rule. If you think of, in French you have the term Norme, and then you have normal. Standard, normal, so they have the same origin. So it's somehow a rule. The meaning is quite general but they come from the same, it's what is generally expected. So yeah, norme, rules, standard. They are expected, certain way for behaviour.

□ Yeah.

○ Normal. Normal can be very negative. "Oh, this is so normal." Or you can say "this is the norm in this field." So this is what, for instance, in health, in a hospital, this is what at least you are allowed to expect.

/ Mm-hmm (affirmative). Your condition is normal.

○ Or your condition is normal. Yes. So of course it doesn't have creativity. Not at all because it ties to certainty, not creativity, but...

/ It's funny because I feel like when I think of standard or when I began to think of standard, re this invitation, my first thought is distrust of what standard is because I guess my perspective and in my field, right? I come and I work with a lot of different institutions. Universities, museums, you know. Currently I'm the managing editor of a literary magazine which has all of its standards in terms of style guides formally and linguistically and all these things. The thing that always comes to mind to me is who made those rules and why? With what agenda and with what context? And for whose benefit and for whose authority to uphold?

And it happens especially for me personally as a curator working in museums and making exhibitions. Especially coming from the outside and being a guest within these larger institutions. Asking myself why are people building these structures?

The systems in one regard help the institution function and help it function faster than a large institution would, help give everybody a role, help-

* Nimbleness...

/ Well, actually I would argue that maybe they're built to create flexibility within them because they are systems, but there's always this cycle I would consider. I don't think of it as linearly or maybe as progressively as you were describing, Stuart, because I'm always thinking people are building these systems in order to make something work. They're building a standard so everybody knows how to behave and then slowly as it progresses, the standards become kind of obsolete and you find yourself left with people being in an institution for 30 years defending the walls more than the content or the people within them, you know?

So standard to me, I mean in my role personally, I'm always thinking, "How do you push up against these walls?" And which ones-

* Or how do you break these standards?

/ Yeah, which ones need to stand and which ones don't and which ones actually still respond to publics? Because I'm also always thinking about publics. So publics are evolving, the institutions are trying to stay the same fortresses and to what extent are they kind of becoming obsolete?

* They want to protect their position, right?

/ And need to be, yeah.

* Their walls.

/ Yeah, and protecting their authority.

□ But in terms of either of those examples, like a magazine or a journal...

/ Yeah.

□ Or a museum or an art gallery, what authorities are they protecting? Or sorry, what authorities are they coming from? What's the ideology behind them? If that's not too big a word.

/ Yeah.

□ That can be obsolete. Is it that the momentum of just an institution, whether a journal or a museum, starts to become sort of self serving in the sense that it's just establishing its own rules for the sake of it? Or is it actually a group of people who are trying to hold on to power that come from a certain ideology?

/ I would argue it's both. I mean, I think it's not always malicious but I think... What would be a good example? I mean I can think of it from either my perspective as an independent curator coming in or I can think of it from the perspective of artists, you know. Recently I started working with an artist whose work is to bring things out from the outdoors into the gallery. Completely unvetted content, right? And to ask everybody to leave, to make sure that there's this kind of social contract that says, "Actually, right now I want this space and I want to configure this thing. You're not going to know what it is until you come back. You're not going to know what it is until the beginning" and in that way, that's kind of an aggressive approach of trying to regain power on the behalf of the artist, but it's also a way of saying to the institution that maybe the structures that it built are not appropriate anymore for the kind of work that needs to be made now in this moment.

I don't know if that actually answered your question, but I think that there's a lot of different stakeholders, but the institution's trying to build standards so that they can, on a three times a year, build an exhibition and open the doors, let people in safely, have them leave, protect the art, send it back home when it's over, and do it all over again. Whereas the artist is coming in and saying, "This is what matters, actually, and I need to have my hands on it the whole time. So while you're trying to protect the art, I'm trying to build something that makes most sense for contemporary publics. Or for wants of an agency." And often, contemporary art concerns can be about responding to the power structures that are above them. I'm not sure if that really answered your questions.

* And challenging.

/ Yeah, challenging them or questioning...

* Therefore, do we need to dissolve the standards? Is the problem that the standards that we are all talking about, which are both so rigid, are standards of an era which has passed and the world is ever evolving? It's interesting times as we're told in the title of the show, yet we're trying to talk about standards which are so opaque and so rigid and we need to create more fluidities. Maybe this is not a period of standards. Except potentially in law, where we need to have this rigidity, but even that is becoming quite complicated as we see in our funny country at the moment. The law has been taken to court or the court is challenging-

○ But what I find super interesting here is that we are all thinking and talking now about rigid and written standards. Like technical standards or industrial standards, standards about buildings, about paper formats.

* British standards.

○ Sorry?

* We call them British standards, which is a-

○ Exactly. Written standards. But standard, I'm not at all an English mother tongue, it's not even my working language, but I have a feeling that standard has a very multiple meaning in the English language and so it just means a certain rate, but the certain rate can be expressed in a very specific, explicit, and precise manner. I don't know, like "this water can only contain 0.001 of this mineral" but standard can also be very vague. I will, of course, give an example and so it can help adding more flexibility. I will give you an example.

For instance, in French law, the word standard was used to allow the judge to consider in a flexible way the facts of the case. Why? Because the standard was for instance, proportionality, or what would a good citizen do or a good family have done in this case? So standard, when it is expressed in such a general, vague way, it's just a level of protection or a certain rate to appreciate the validity of something or the value of something, but then allowing to take into account all the facts of the case.

So of course in law there's this difference between the continent where everything is written down, what is written is so important, and the common law where traditionally the judge can consider a bit more the facts of the case and also where standards are created in cascade style. So standards are not written, standards are created little by little by the judge.

□ It's like a discursive, ad-hoc...

○ Exactly. So by adding, by completing a word or the very few written rules with experience, with examples, so standards, it's a very comprehensive thing.

/ Yeah. In the US-

□ A framework.

○ A framework that gives content to what is certain.

/ I think in the US, in the judicial system, it's called precedent.

○ It is. Yeah, so it's precedence. Precedent based-

/ Which is a series of standards that are accumulated.

○ Exactly! Since not much is written-

/ Yeah.

○ Standard, yes. It's a certain rate, but what? It's a certain rate of protection of the citizens in that situation. A certain rate of protection of a minor in a certain situation or a certain level of clarity of a law for it to be applicable. But then, it is constructed little by little and so in this case, it's not that in itself it is a positive nuance, but it means something you can legitimately expect.

/ But can I just say, I guess the thing that comes to mind for me when you say that is the prejudice involved in building precedent or building standard. That's the thing maybe I'm having a hard time answering when Stuart asks how these standards change institutions, but something that's happening in the United States a lot for example is people are saying, "Well this precedent was set, but it was from the perspective of an era in which people had very different rights." You know what I mean? You're creating a standard, you're creating a precedent based on social conditions that are unequal, you know?

It's like I recently had a conversation with someone who was like, "I don't believe in affirmative action." You know? "Affirmative action is actually a bully's way of fixing a problem that existed," but actually affirmative action, sure, can be gone too far in one direction, but on the other hand it's saying that... You know the word meritocracy that people like to share a lot these days, that "Oh, we believe in meritocracies" You know, it's not about affirmative action, it's about meritocracies, but meritocracy's actually a word that comes from a work of satire. A British work of satire called *The Rise of the Meritocracy* in which the powerful and the privileged defend their positions of power by claiming, by ignoring the fact that it's all built on the institutions that they've been able to capitalise on or use in order to get to those positions, calling it merit, instead of sort of asserting all of those building blocks.

So I think precedence and standards are complicated, especially in the judicial system and perhaps particularly in the American judicial system, because you look at how, and right now in our Supreme Court it's really upsetting to see all these constitutional, as people were saying, we have all this precedent for all these ways of being and you're like, "Yeah, but these precedents are set on racial or misogynistic basis." Does that make sense?

- Yes, I understand. Precedence can become obsolete, of course, but also standards can evolve.
- So I'm curious, given that you've grown up in a written law environment.
- System. Yes.
- System. And you work within that, or is that not true?
- The EU system is a mixed system because precedent has a lot of value in it.
- Yeah.
- So the French system has a very strong influence, a very strong one, but EU law was built in a cascade way on itself. So little by little, it was the court itself that created the law. That created-
- So is it fair to say that that's a third way that is sort of an amalgamation of written law?

○ It's a third-

* The cascade is a third way.

○ It's a third way in between strictly written law system and a common law system, yes.

□ My question was going to be do you have a bias for one or the other systems given your experience and practice? And can you separate that from what you grew up with and what is inherent?

○ Individually, I am very interested in how the judge can take into consideration the needs of the society, yes. So I am quite interested in a system, I am favourable to a system that can absorb the evolution of society, but of course, there need to be also procedures and conditions that avoid the judge to be too creative. I'm sorry, for the negative nuance. So yes, I'm for that. Yes. I think precedence is very important, must be considered, but also then collegiality. We have all this collegiality system where this is this mutual check. So yes, law can evolve, but discussion amongst person from very different backgrounds allow a mutual check. To allow too much creativity, so...

/ When you say creativity...

○ Yes.

/ Yeah, when you say creativity do you mean it in a way, subjectivity?

○ Yes. Yes. Not just subjectivity. It means that the judge should not go too much beyond what the citizen can expect in that moment given what was either written in laws or in decisions up until that moment.

/ Uh-huh (affirmative).

○ So-

* Maintaining a standard.

○ Yes because if you're too creative, how can the citizen know how to behave?

/ Why does the citizen need to be told how to behave?

○ Sorry?

/ Why does the citizen need to be told how to behave?

○ The citizen is allowed to know how to behave in order to avoid consequences.

/ Hmm.

* Right. The citizen is educated. Maybe it doesn't need to be told how to behave.

○ It doesn't mean to be told how to behave in every single moment, but when the citizen needs to take a decision it's allowed to know how they can behave in order to avoid legal consequences. The citizen, of course, any private party, any private subject. So the judge cannot just decide about what she or he thinks the law should go towards in a matter of acts of justice, but needs to respect also the principle of certainty.

/ You're describing a kind of common ground. This is a common ground that we can all work with, work on, be in.

○ Absolutely. So standard can be a written micro-standard or can be a common ground that allow you to more or less expect what will happen to you.

/ And also fight against it in cases of gentle, civil disobedience. Challenge it. Push up against it.

○ Also, yes. Yes. It's, you know the term legitimate expectation? Which is so important in both common and civil law. Legitimate expectation.

/ Hmm.

○ Mm-hmm (affirmative).

/ That is interesting.

○ Quite different points of view, eh?

□ Completely. In terms of talking about, again, the last 5, 10, 15, 20 years of our sort of generation, is the way in which the EU legal system is changing accelerating, slowing down? Like the idea of changing law according to challenging precedent, et cetera, et cetera. Do you feel that there's sort of acceleration or deceleration of change?

○ Well, it's not an easy question to answer but of course EU law is relatively recent and so after the second World War, it had to be built on the basis of national legal traditions, but it had to be built. So in most part, it was built by the court itself on the basis of the treaties, but there was not that much and on the basis of questions by national judges. The court little by little gave content to the little that was written. So there was a huge need of standard settings. I mean, not technical standard settings, but still now, still now of course there are new domains that are included into EU law and so each time a new domain is included, a new regulation or a new matter is regulated, there is more need to create a standard.

So to give a content to maybe the few words that are written on something. So I would say that is this technique. In French it was also *la technique du standard*. So this fact of creating a three step test, for instance, for assessing if something is be respected or not. It's typical of new matters, I would say. Then of course, the more a matter is regulated, the more we go into technical sub-standards. Standard technique is not, for instance, yes, I studied in the Italian system and then studied a lot of public international law which is an infant law and human rights law. So people talk a lot about human rights standards. Why? Because it's easy to say everybody is entitled to a house or everybody is entitled to-

* To a gun.

○ Sorry?

/ To a gun.

* Which is one of the kind of barmy, shifting...

○ Yes. Or-

* Or are people no longer entitled to an abortion or people are...

/ Truly.

* Entitled to earn as much money as they want and do whatever they want to with it which is also happening in many cases.

○ Yes! Or-

□ and not paying taxes on it.

* Or not pay taxes on it.

○ Or inhuman treatment. But what is inhuman treatment? So these charters of rights are very, I don't know, they're not very specific, right? So what are human rights standards? What content do you give to that?

* It feels like standards are shifting at the moment and they're shifting towards the power of the large commercial companies who seem to be able to shift laws and warp them in sort of mysterious ways because they have such huge legal departments and they're more than happy to spend the money on legal departments than they are on taxes to create their own avoidance. Even if it's to decide how they donate the money in the case of someone like Bill Gates. It seems to be that law is not always on the side of the law.

/ Mm-hmm (affirmative).

* So it becomes a technicality which is used to-

○ But it's also because very often, to my knowledge, private actors are creating self-imposed or adopting self-imposed standards to facilitate their work sometimes when the law is too much behind. So of course in this context, like private actors are doing that for their interest, but this is also why there are other actors like sometimes environmental NGOs who try to create their own standards so that other private actors...

* Must abide by them.

○ Must or have interest to abide by them to avoid the naming and shaming for their image. So everybody sets the standards according to their mandate or objective.

/ That seems contradictory, right? The use of standards by-

○ Yeah, probably because-

/ An abortion is a good example.

○ Because standards like a threshold and everybody, the threshold for what? For what you would like to be.

/ Yeah.

□ One of the things.

/ I won't-

* Not right now.

□ I would come on to that but I just wanted to say one of the things that Lara had listed as sort of extra words spinning off standard was "doublethink".

/ Hmm.

□ And I had a real hard time...

/ 1984.

□ Trying to sort of reconcile why she would have done that, but a lot of what we touched on is exactly that sort of two-way meaning of contradictions and exams, right?

/ Yes. I think, I mean this isn't an articulated thought just because it's just coming up, it's such a strong reaction that I have to the notion of abortion in law in the United States, you know?

Because this notion of a standard in that context is such a great illustration of how the citizenry could distrust the institutions and the authorities that build the standards.

○ So what would be the standards?

/ Well, the debate in the United States around abortion, whether or not it's legal.

○ Uh-huh (affirmative.)

/ Period. And then after that, the next layer being whether or not at what level it's legal. Is it legal at 26 weeks?

○ Ah!

/ Is it legal at this many weeks?

○ Okay.

/ To what extent, like when is life-

○ What is a standard time until-

/ When does life become life and is not cells? When is it science? When is it murder? When is it medical? When is it, you know, and these are things that are in such high debate for so many different reasons. People try to say that they're mostly religious but they're certainly not. I mean, if you look at the history of how abortion rights have evolved and gone from one party to another in the United States, you see that it's personal and political agendas that make that happen.

* And control.

/ And control.

○ But the problem is that there is a standard? Or that you don't agree with that standard?

/ Well the question is how is that standard being decided and by whom? That is, I think that's where, because I think I fully understand what you're describing and in many ways I think we benefit from the legal standards that have been built. We learn how to be, we have a social contract that we build together by the knowledge, or hopefully the knowledge, that not only we want to follow these rules but we have also the power to shape them. That's what a citizenry should be and that's what you're describing.

○ Of course!

/ But I think when you start talking about standards that you don't have the power to shift and they affect you, in the case of abortions in the United States, that's when there's a crack in the veneer of the value of these standards. It becomes something where it's like who and why are people deciding to make these decisions?

○ I know, but the problem is that for instance, imagine that a woman wouldn't know at which moment abortion would become illegal and she could incur in criminal sanctions.

/ It's happening.

* Yeah.

○ Ah, so the problem is that there is not a clear standard.

/ No, there is a clear standard but it's a moving target, yeah. It's a moving target right now. It's a debated target. I think it's a standard that's being negotiated. I mean, it's being debated and kind of contentiously.

* On a state level, no?

/ Yeah, on a state level. I mean also, hopefully not yet, but people are anticipating at a Supreme Court level as well. But yeah, women are being and women have been put in jail for having abortions at certain points, you know? But I think that's an interesting example to challenge the notion of the standard as something that sort of gives us a bar. You're kind of describing it as a safety rail that we can all hold on to.

○ I'm not saying that I agree with every standard.

/ No no, I know, but you're describing it legally. Yeah.

○ Sorry?

* With kind of the ownership of the gun and the banning of abortion, these two really crazy, shifting places. The gun being representing liberty in some way and having your own which is the taking of the life of a trespasser or someone. The abortion being saving the life of an unborn child before it is a child and how-

/ There's a contradiction there.

* There's a huge contradiction.

/ In the conservative party in the United States right now.

* And how law can protect these two, for me, really on the wrong side.

I don't understand how we can allow these judges in the states who have now so much power and are so conservative and so rigid and how they can conduct and pull a country in such a crazy direction where people are really losing basic civil rights.

/ And I think what you're describing is, again, the skepticism towards law because it's something that's based on precedent.

* Yeah.

/ So a lot of these decisions based on, "Well, this is how it was done. This is how it's done." The justification based on something from a past moment that had its own reasons for becoming what it was. It's kind of the way these laws are being passed.

□ The other thing that is happening, coming back to your point Ab, is that the bigger the company or the institution is, the more financial power they have in order to employ people solely to lobby for that law or standard.

/ Yeah.

□ To change and once that is in the ascendant, then it just means the division between those interests that can afford that and those that can't are the deciding factor or start to become the deciding factor on how those laws change.

* And whether that is Sackler or whether that is Marlboro or whether it is Apple...

□ Facebook.

* Or yeah.

○ So standard, I mean it's an expression of who has authority. So are we talking about standard? We are talking about authority actually. Yeah. So standard is the military power, right?

/ Yeah.

○ It's the origin of the word, so it's authority.

/ Yeah.

○ Who has it.

* It's becoming a moving target. It is not concrete.

○ It's not. So it is authority so who has it, who should be legitimated to have it, to participate in it. Should it be shared? Should it be monopolised? It's a power.

/ And there's actually something in your list that you added to the words of standard below Lara's. There's something versus democracy and actually that was hard for me to understand until now, you know? That's what I was thinking about.

□ Yeah. It was authority versus democracy.

/ It was authority, yeah.

□ And that comes from, there's a couple of things that I read lately that were to do with language specifically, which is sort of the other thing that, how I work, that sort of gets drawn into the equation and also as a writer and editor, of course, and intermittently there are long articles, essays, about the sort of war between the authority of certain types of language, established languages, standard wide English, versus the democracy of other voices, oppressed groups, et cetera and the argument is usually couched in terms of the decline of language standards which in this sort of aspect that I can support or understand means language is becoming less rich, less definable, less specific, right?

* More standardised, less standardised?

□ Less standardised or less bound to rules, let's say.

/ Or legibility.

□ Or legibility.

/ A common ground and understanding.

□ And from the other side of the argument, the sort of-

* That sort of colloquialism in the past.

□ Absolutely.

* Whereas common grounds is much more localised.

□ Yeah.

* I mean take it here in Italy where you have such a diverse series of languages convening together from Ladino in the mountains to...

□ And on the face of it, I would say to argue against the democracy of languages, against rules, against the sort of prescriptive idea of what language should be rather than a descriptive way of what language should be. So these are two terms, prescriptive and descriptive, that are used. Prescriptive, in terms of the study of language, is laying down a series of rules that should be applied.

Descriptive is more taking a litmus test of what actually goes on in practice and again, this is equivalent to an ad-hoc basis of law based on precedent that you don't particularly have a set of rules because it's a moving target. Language is always changing and always will do and you should accommodate as much of that change as possible.

○ So you're not for that approach to language, a word is how the people use it. You're not-

□ That's a descriptive, democratic idea of how language works and should be discussed and taught.

/ But it is a moving target.

□ And this is sort of where I have faced it in practice is actually again in teaching and I find this quite troubling. So to give a specific example, if I'm teaching art or design or writing students and we're doing sort of written projects, essays, thesis projects, increasingly I have to deal with large numbers of international students, which at least in terms of design courses usually means Asian students for whom English is a second, third, fourth language and the language so different from what they're used to that grammar doesn't apply in sort of any equivalent sense whatsoever.

As a teacher, I'm very confused always to what extent I should be productively correcting or enforcing a standard idea of language which is A, the one that I'm used to and grew up with, B, is probably the majority language that those essays, projects are going to circulate. Certainly within the school among colleagues and peers and whatever, at the higher level within journals. And I guess the main effect that it has on me is just that it takes so much more time to even think about what your position is on that in order to even respond in a way that you would deem correct or not.

Meaning if I have two essays, one by a student who speaks English as a first language, let's say another by a Scandinavian student who speaks English as a second language, and one by a Korean student who maybe speaks English as a third or fourth language. All of those levels as well as the fact that they're all individuals with different abilities of writing have sort of another layer of why they might be difficult or need a certain degree of correcting.

* But maybe they're there, I mean I suppose firstly being dyslexic I have no really understanding of grammar or its use and to me it's something which is quite an abstract sense to it to be, but more in the teaching of art, particularly to Asian students, maybe this essay is not the way we should be doing it. For me, the really exciting thing about teaching Chinese, Korean kids when they come over is their standards are completely different and they come with a completely different toolbox and their speed, they come very knowledgeable about technicalities potentially, and when you start to teach them creativity, the speed of the evolution is extraordinary and they go back with these completely crazy toolkits and make things which are unbelievable and break our standards to go back to the word the way we're using it.

And maybe it's quite imperialistic, this obsession that you have to construct these English essays in this very English-type fashion and we need to find a much more looser way and maybe the biggest problem, I think, in education at the moment is trying to do everything in these fucking standards and making everything so rigid and building these walls and "You do pottery here and you do design there and you do jewellery here." You know, it should be a much more, the world isn't like that any more and a fashion designer can create jewellery and they can design a door handle and a door handle designer can make a wearable hat. I think we need to encourage an evolution away from the rigidity of standards.

□ I think my problem is, in those circumstances, is my sort of brain software isn't fast enough to know how to accommodate what you're saying in a productive way. Meaning to even grasp whether Asian student writing an essay is actually lucid, is saying something of interest and worth, but I can't access it immediately because of the language. My having to translate that into something that, giving them the benefit of the doubt, is actually there if they were speaking in a first language would be absolutely clear and great and fantastic just takes so much time and it's happening so quickly but with no more hours or pay to handle it.

But I think it's more my problem than their problem in terms of teaching and the problem for me is that my software isn't quick enough to know how to deal with it or respond to it.

/ I'm kind of curious about this proposition, Ab, because in a way I think at the table, except for Lola, but though Lola probably in your own way, it's not that we're generalists but we are a field where we're doing many things and that each of the things is informing the other thing and in the way you're describing that as an educational model that I actually think schools are, at least schools in the US, are kind of beginning to really encourage but I wonder at this particular moment if being generalists is the most productive thing to be.

You know, really just a question and I don't mean to say that you're a specialist because you stay in one thing because it does sound like there are many facets that have to be pieced together within law and within the practice of law in general, but I do kind of challenge that because it's not as much about, and believe me, I am not about the kind of conservative mindset of a potter can only make pottery and a painter can only paint and an architect can only make a building and a chef can only cook food. The cross-pollination of these disciplines seems extremely productive but I do wonder what's lost when you start telling everyone they can do everything. This is maybe a-

□ Well you still have to identify quality, that's the difficulty.

/ Yeah, exactly. Maybe you lose your standard.

* I'm not saying I'm advocating generalism. I'm advocating teaching in a much wider way.

/ Oh.

* And after which comes the personal obsession maybe to only cook cakes which are red or it may be to make just pointed shoes but coming at that from a much broader sense. I think the importance to maintain craft is essential, but I'm questioning the way that we teach. It's much too confined and too rigid.

/ Yes.

* And we should encourage a much broader way and also that we are trying to continuously define everything by our own standards and yet we're teaching in Britain on a very international level. It's one of our greatest exports is people coming. So I think we've got to be much more wider in appreciating where people are coming from and we can learn. I teach because I learn from the kids probably more than they learn from me and for me that's what makes it a really exciting dialogue but you've got to stop doing it in boxes.

/ I agree. I think one way in which I think about it often is as a contemporary art curator. Contemporary art curators are usually shaped in the standard. The way you climb up the academic and then institutional ladder is from art history, you know? You get an art history PhD and then you become eventually a minion.

* Unless you're a male journalist and then you just come in as director on the top often.

/ Well actually, that's what I was going to say. I do believe that contemporary art curating would be better suited to coming from a journalistic approach. Kind of identifying what contemporary art publics are thinking about, what are contemporary political and social concerns, what artists are making, why, what are these images being built, what do they create or what do they summon in terms of connotations and from their audiences and sort of putting all of that together rather than always thinking about the precedent.

Artistically, actually that would be the word also, artistically. Building contemporary art exhibitions just based on their lineage throughout the art history context.

○ This is a problem we quite feel in Luxembourg.

/ Oh yeah?

○ Because in Luxembourg there's no modern art museum. There's no Centre Pompidou and there's not an 1800 museum. There's only Mudam, the museum of contemporary art. So you jump directly to the museum of contemporary art where my feeling as a non expert is that works just comment on precedents.

/ Yeah.

○ Those works just comment other colleagues' works and so the feeling is that this beautifully built museum, because I really like, sorry, I really like Pei's work and it is within a business neighbourhood, like La Défense in Paris. It seems like it says not much to us. It seems to be like "Stop thinking only about law or money or EU institutions depending on finance and start thinking about something else" but since it's so...

□ Hermetic.

○ It's hermetic and abstract. It seems just to be for people within that world. For other people, for us, it's just a cafe to go to after work.

□ In what sense, you Lauren, using the model of the journalist as being a, I mean is it to do with a sort of generalist approach or just being outside of the system in which you would propose them curating?

/ Yeah. Well actually to answer your question, I would sort of respond to something Lola said. When you said "I'm not an expert," when you went into the contemporary art and you went "I'm going into the contemporary art museum as a lawyer. I'm not an expert in contemporary art."

○ I mean that I don't recognise quotations.

/ Yeah.

○ I don't recognise references to other people and other works.

/ Exactly. So I think that's the failure of the institution to mediate contemporary art to the contemporary public and so the journalistic approach is the idea that you actually as a contemporary audience should be perfectly equipped. You are perfectly equipped. You should be made to feel perfectly equipped when you walk into that institution to contend with its content because you have all of the same journalistic experiences. As in the experience of the every day, you know?

○ It's like in journals when there are those articles written by journalists who just react to other journalists' articles.

/ Right. Though I mean I guess that's a rabbit hole you can go down if you want.

○ Sorry?

/ That's a rabbit hole one can go down.

○ Exactly. While there are other journalists who talk to the general public and can communicate.

/ Yeah.

* I think this goes back to the thing which you said right at the beginning which is the problem of the institution as a whole and its lack of blurring the boundaries and art is involved in an amazing way maybe the institution hasn't. I mean, you talk of the Centre Pompidou and I think when the Pompidou was originally conceived, it was about these giant platforms for people to show art in any way that they wanted, but the power of the French institution has meant they've actually used those interior spaces as a very, very conservative museological experience and they reconstruct walls inside there as if they were in the moment.

/ Totally.

* And it's this obsession. We can take the horse to the water but we can't make them drink it and institutions are terrified of change. I've worked in the Pompidou a little bit, I know and it's rigid beyond anything and it's trying to find new ways of curating spaces and new ways-

□ Are there any models you can think of or anyone that does that, as institutions?

/ That are not...

□ That are responsive and receptive, yeah.

/ That are responsive?

□ And I'm presuming the ones that are are going to be at the smaller end and the more local end rather than the sort of giant end.

/ Yeah, I don't know if this classifies as an institution but something that I think a lot about personally is this very precious moment between 1968 and 72, when the portable camera was invented and then people started using it and using the platform of television to distribute art and ideas and work towards publics which we talked about in the exhibition that Francesca and I did that we worked on with The Serving Library, this idea that public access as an institution is one that allows art to go directly into larger audiences.

* Into the living room.

/ Yeah.

○ Because people sometimes need so much to have new sources of inspiration.

/ Yeah.

○ People sometimes are so hungry of art.

/ Yeah.

○ Please give me some input, some inspiration. I want to evolve in my way of thinking. So sometimes people go into a museum really hungry so sometimes it's frustrating when you don't have the codes to access.

/ Exactly, but this question of codes is an interesting one and I think it's one that's really highly debated right now and it is really related to standard too. On one hand, what codes do you need to have and what codes do you already have that you don't know you have? Because opacity is also kind of a productive thing in contemporary art. The opacity of looking at something that has not been unpacked for you because everything is not for you is also an interesting thing.

□ Well, we were even talking about this last night.

/ Yeah, we were.

□ About the captions within the bi-annual, right?

/ Yeah.

□ And the fact, that as one of us pointed out, they contain a lot of adjectives that suggest how you're supposed to...

/ Yeah.

□ Feel or respond to this piece of work.

○ You mean the descriptive...

□ Yeah.

○ Next to words that are...

□ Exactly. And/or the general text at the beginning of the exhibition, et cetera.

/ Yeah. A great example of that actually is an artist that I've heard talk about his work a lot. so there's this work *Black News* in the bi-annual that's his two channel video work that's been made by Kahlil Joseph where he's compiling all of, it relates to the journalism thing, he's collecting all of these different clips of contemporary culture. Some of it are extremely important, like the Central Park 5 being released... from being... There's sort of a criminality being erased once they've been proven innocent.

□ Exonerated.

/ Exonerated, thank you, and then other stuff is some cute internet meme that went viral and made everybody laugh and the project in itself is about levelling those things or proposing that there's no high or low or that something that happened 400 years ago that's being presented to you for the first time could be news or could be news to you. So the project is challenging what is the news and also what is news to you and also what are you going to understand out of the thing? You might actually engage with the internet meme that 2 million people have seen for the first time and sort of have your own personal response to it.

Or you might engage with it through the multi-layered experience of knowing this is something that everybody has seen two years ago or something like that, you know. So I think that's a mix of something that you're equipped to understand because you're a part of the world and you know the mechanisms of the news. At the same time you're not equipped to understand because some of it deals with very particularly African-American culture in the United States, you know? And that seems like a very effective kind of relationship to kind of make between contemporary art and the public now.

○ It's quite strange because, for instance, in law there are specialised journals.

/ Yeah.

○ That are just for lawyers that a no lawyer would ever try to read because they're not interested probably. So very specialised journals only addressed to lawyers that can comment on each other and criticise each other or support each other and then you have sometimes, how do you say... then you have situations where lawyers try to explain to the general public in common terms what a judicial decision was, how to apply it. So contexts are totally different. While for artists, the place where they exhibit their work, their final, their work, it is the same place where the general public will see it.

So if I'm a very renowned lawyer, I will write my long articles that only my colleagues will read on a journal and then if interviewed on general TV or if I write on a blog, I will simplify it for other people. So what is strange is that-

It's the only one. So the same work is for your mates, for your peers, and for the general public and so sometimes there's not two versions.

* No, but this is what we're saying. We can't dumb down, it loses any value or any purpose.

/ I kind of think contemporary art, I guess it comes back again to this journalism thing, what I think is that contemporary art should be legible to both at once because it's about raising the bar.

□ And you are giving that example of work as a...

/ As a successful example of that.

As a model for that.

/ Yeah, I think. I mean and it's not the only one.

But that's within the work itself rather than the surrounding material, right? I mean rather than the caption or the...

/ Yes. But I do wonder about this question of codes. I do think it's an interesting one for contemporary art. I think that...

* Codes and unpacking.

/ Well, codes and who should be able to understand and if it's okay to not understand. The equivalent response to that work that we're talking about in the example you just gave with the, why not publish to the general public that article that you would write just for your colleagues in law and why not sort of raise the bar for what the public should and could understand? I don't know. Do you think the public would be really alienated from that law article?

They would just not read it.

It would contain also technical language that you would require...

* That's inaccessible.

It's hard! It's hard sometimes.

Yeah, yeah.

It takes more time probably.

* Sorry.

No no no, go ahead.

/ I wonder about that element of mediation. I wonder about why we need to have these alternative versions of things that people can understand as opposed to just the thing.

* I think it's quite important sometimes not to understand things or to enjoy it. I used to take my dad around a lot of exhibitions that are very contemporary and he would often finish and say, "I don't understand it but I love it" and I think it's that ability to not have to understand everything and I think as Saxons we're really obsessed with so much understanding.

Maybe it goes back to your passion for the correct essay which is easier to comprehend and maybe we need to be a little bit looser about needing everything to fit into shapes.

/ Yeah.

* And enjoy more the confusion of...

□ Yeah. I don't think I would even... I wouldn't describe what I was describing.

* I know, that's-

□ Education is the passion for the correct essay, but-

* I know, but as I said I-

/ They should understand.

□ But it is about some sort of standard that is honest about the degree to which you communicate and in the last few minutes in what you've been talking about, it keeps coming back to me, one of the conversations that I frequently have with art students or sometimes arguments that I have with art students is that to me, there's a process of their making pieces of work which is the sort of artistic, within the studio, within themselves, the sort of impetus of an idea and then trying to realise that idea in form, right?

And then there's a moment where if they're going to present it in a public space, in a museum, in a gallery, in a bi-annual, rather than it remains within their world and mind which is also fine, there's no need to take it to that next step, but of course most people who consider themselves artists do, requires a sort of then second stage of what is that piece of form doing within other contexts? And I simply think, or what we end up discussing, is I don't think a lot of artists or certainly a lot of the students that I deal with give as much time and thought and care and attention to that second part as to the first part and that seems to me to often result in a lot of problems and it's more pronounced with students than with established artists because established artists have a whole support structure of articles, critics.

/ People giving language.

□ Mediating the work already whereas students don't have that.

* The linguists, in a way.

□ Yeah, exactly. Yeah. And we often have that discussion and when they do turn into arguments, they often sort of turn on me and say, "Well, you're saying that because you're a designer. You're not an artist" which I totally accept, but it does make me then wonder what is that design sensibility? Like you're using a journalistic sensibility.

/ Mm-hmm (affirmative).

□ That is making me say that and to what extent is that valid? And I would say and I do argue back I think it's valid to the extent that I'm in the business of communication.

/ Mm-hmm (affirmative). Yes. Sorry, I don't mean to interrupt you but I do think you're in the business of communication as an entry point in the sense of what you're asking of the students, I think because I know your work, what you're asking the students is a point of entry for their publics, not necessarily a full articulation of the experience of the work. It's just something that people can enter and I think there's this kind of balance to be struck between entering the work and then having the room for a little bit of agency as an audience and a little bit of room for opacity on the behalf of the artist or of siloing the read.

□ I think it's just considering that aspect of it and it's nothing to do with shutting down...

* No no, I'm in absolute agreement with that. I think it's imperative that you can open the work up so people can take part in it. Otherwise the work becomes pointless. I'm not saying, but what I'm trying to say is we shouldn't be frightened of not understanding things and I think it's a very healthy part of what art does for me is to create more confusion and I quite thrive on confusion.

○ But what was, I think in the beginning-

* Which is why I'd be a very bad lawyer.

○ Was not that very abstract works are not useful at all also because I think also there are different artists with different functions in the community of artists, right?

* Of course.

○ Those that help the others think on themselves or evolve and those that are more, I don't know, that are more prone to communicate to the general public and use their means to let people think. So we need both. Society needs both. I was criticising this choice of the city I'm living in.

/ Yeah.

○ At the public level, providing the people with both things. A place where they can think of what is currently happening from a different angle through colors, through music, through sounds, but thinking about something they're already thinking but through a different prism and then in addition, also a museum like a more creative place where new things are done and so it was more a criticism not towards that kind of works, but maybe more a critics towards the choices that were made in the city.

/ Yeah, yeah.

○ It's a small city. You cannot have everything, probably. It was just...

/ No, totally, but I do think it's an international problem that contemporary art feels alienated to very intelligent publics that should feel like they're equipped to read it or to have an experience from it. So even though what you're describing is kind of what I was talking about from the very beginning, the idea that institutions are building these kinds of structures that self-support the value, actually value is another really interesting conversation around standards. You know what I mean?

I was recently at the American Academy in Rome where you end up amidst Renaissance scholars and medievalists and classicists and the value of that work is already established by time, but when you're looking at contemporary art it's very, very hard to establish value and it's even harder to establish value to a contemporary public.

* Hence your notion about the journalists rather than the art scholar.

/ Yeah, and I think that a lot of the ways in which contemporary art institutions find a way of giving value to the thing in their position and their roles and their fundraising and their buildings and everything is to assert a value that's self-contained and hermetic within the lineage of other things that have value. Anchoring its own value to other things' value, but that's not actually its value. That's incorrect.

* But just going back a second to the notion of the museum being so important to make the public feel at home, I think it can also go in the opposite direction where something like the Tech Modern has become so populist now that it feels more like going to an amusement park than it does to a museum and it's that border which is quite complicated to define. I'm not trying to be elitist, but it becomes entertainment and how can we create spaces. You know, maybe it's just because it's become so huge and it's become too big and this obsession that the art gallery has to be bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and I think to go back to what Stuart was saying before, where do we see art where the institution is more in parallel to the art.

Surely in more small art spaces which may be more about galleries than the museums, whether it's less of a boundary, but I suppose it is all that area of where we need to try and create new standards. Maybe they are dissolving standards, so maybe we don't need standards. Maybe we need just work without standards.

□ Well yeah, I mean the only example I can immediately think of as a model for the openness and the changing as a moving target is somewhere I recently visited which is a place called Grizedale Arts in the Lake district in the UK which is obviously a small-ish institution. Literally isolated, in the middle of nowhere.

○ I'm sorry, which institution?

□ It's called Grizedale Arts and it was set up as a sort of artist residency program and it's a very sort of self-sufficient space in terms of to the extent that they grow their own food and a lot of the building is done by the people who participate and we went in there recently and had a conversation with the director.

* It's ever growing, isn't it? Each day that...

□ Yeah, absolutely.

* Things are always being added and not taken away.

□ It's a very organic type of place and the director there was discussing in maybe its 20 year history just that every, I think 5 years, they've made a point of totally recalibrating what they should be and you can imagine lots of institutions paying lip service to that idea, but this one just felt...

* Genuine.

□ Absolutely genuine to the point that it's not really a residency in any normal residency sense any more and even the number of artists who would think of themselves as capital A career artists are barely in attendance rather than a more sort of, a much more interesting, strange community of people.

* It's slightly outsider-ish, isn't it?

□ Yeah. Yeah, absolutely, but it doesn't seem to me too hard to imagine that model being applied to a larger scale, but I guess as with all the examples that we were alluding to earlier, sort of bigger corporations...

* Even a place like Pump House, for me it starts to trip on whether the artist really occupies the space and creates something, but the problem is it has variable traction because not that many people go to visit it, but it's where you feel the artists and the space are working together to create something.

□ Yeah.

* Which challenges the norm and challenges the standards.

□ Can I ask to go a bit back to the beginning when we were first talking about being creative with the limitations and the parameters? Ab, in your practice, would you say you make a point of trying to do that as a studio?

* Trying to break standards?

□ Yeah.

* Yes. I might do it as an individual, I think, more and I tend to take my studio with me sometimes because they're more cautious and concerned. But I think partly because my perception is slightly altered to others through dyslexia, through my educational path which is very nonlinear. I don't really understand, as an individual I find law quite a hard thing to understand, or rules maybe more than law which has meant I've been to many different schools because they had perceptions of what standard was and I kind of don't in that direction.

So of course with time, I've learned that I must go within the lines. I find it not instinctive. Anti-instinctive.

□ To what extent does the dyslexia feed into that then? Because I understand how dyslexia sort of can break from the rules of...

* Grammar.

□ Perception and process.

* Well I think whether it's dyslexia or it's just me, but I know it is dyslexia because if you look in prisons they're full of dyslexic people.

□ Right.

* I think I don't see why I need to do things a certain way. It doesn't make sense to me to need to cross the road when the traffic light...

□ Because you can communicate regardless, it might just not be in the standard format.

* Exactly. My logic, I suppose, is different. I can't accept being told, "This is because it is." I need to understand why it is. So obviously, you can't jump off a tall building because you'll die and that is a very clear rule, it doesn't matter, but why you need to go around something in one direction or enter something from one place and why you can't touch something doesn't seem to me to make sense. I have value. I have morals. But for me, things are very un-black and white.

Which becomes peculiar at times and I take that into design. Obviously, I need to make sure that things won't fall over, but I don't understand why I need to do it the same way. Why you need to put dots or glass at certain heights. If you paint the glass in a certain way, then you can see it's there. There's many times to resort and the worry about standards is they make everything homogenised and become the same.

The obsession of the standard tomato that the supermarket had for years when everyone had to grow the tomatoes all in the same size and the tomatoes that weren't the same size got thrown away. I find that to be completely criminal. I think we need to celebrate things being funny shapes and sizes.

I think back to my starting point, I think when standards are pernicious are when they're not noticed, right? When they become taken for granted without actually being seen for what they are and for me, at least, that move from material, physical ways of working to digital ways of working is that in the physical, material versions of things, those standards seem to me far more apparent. So you mentioned paper formats beforehand, right?

* It's concrete, isn't it? This glass is there, it's solid.

You can literally see it. If I'm at the printers-

A4. A4.

Well, A4. The biggest sheet that A4 is cut from, I can see how that works, right? And I can also see how easy it is to break from it and do something else. I understand why it's useful, I understand why it's cheap, why it's not wasteful, and I understand the consequences of if I do change it, what I'm going to be wasting, et cetera, et cetera. With digital templates such as the email software that we use to generate emails or the various pieces of software that most people use to build templates for websites, I think are less apparent as a certainly sort of young design student would not necessarily question that there might be other ways to work outside of those templates.

I was thinking about what is apparent and what's not.

Yeah.

And he was saying that as a child or as an adolescent, he was not standard. He was not totally homologating. He was not the typical maybe guy of his neighbourhood or physical and it was the same for me. I was not very standard. I came from a little city, my family was non-standard, I didn't have any religious education in a small city in the 80s. So I was very non-standard, but that standard was not written. Still, it was so strong and so powerful. I really felt I was not that standard.

* It was instinct.

Sorry?

* Instinct. It was-

Instinctively, you felt there was a standard but then.

* Oh yeah.

Sorry?

- * No no, carry on.
 - No sorry, maybe I didn't get your comment.
 - * No no, I'm so sorry. It made me think, but I think it's with inside. I don't see it as a standard but it is with inside the person, but maybe nobody is standard. The problem is that we treat people in a standard way but I don't think any individual is standard. I think every individual is different.
 - No, but then you can maybe participate. The way I reacted, I invested energy in participating in setting the standards. So...
 - You mean you forced yourself to behave a certain way.
 - No, not in that sense. In the sense, let's say that every individual independently on how he or she's age, sex, religion, is standard and is entitled to standards, is entitled to a standard of protection. Like in law, the word standard in the 20th century. No, until the 20th century, was used a lot for aliens. The minimum standard in the 19th century international law was the standard of protection of aliens. So non-standard people, strange people, were entitled too. So sometimes standard is a standard opposed to another, is an explicit standard recognised, acknowledged to everybody.
- Also when instinctively they are not perceived standard by the community. So I was saying, we are going back to standard is just power. So it's what is admitted and everybody proposes a different standard. So you can have your standards against another standard and try to participate in...
- * And someone's standard is higher, maybe.
 - Sorry, and set the standard higher or more towards here or there, but...
 - * In communist Russia, standard was everything was about the standard.
 - Yes, absolutely. Yes.
 - * The standard issue. The standard...
 - Everything is forbidden what is not imposed, is not standard.
 - * But even the caviar becomes standard, caviar which becomes an irony that we should have something as fine as caveat which is standard. Or the standard for our coats or you have Russian standard vodka which then was very standard, but then become very cult and now is producing higher gold standard which becomes an effect.
 - The gold standard.

- * An elevating standard. Not elevating. Like an elevator. Getting higher.
- / Ever ascendant.
- * Ever, yes. Thank you. Standard.
- / Just jumping right back in.
- * Yeah. We missed you.
- / Yeah. Where are we?
- * De-standardising. Well, no. I've been right back to the beginning of the standard. I think away from the specifics of art and standard, I suppose, for a second.
- We were standardising also on explicit as opposed to untold standards. So Stuart was saying what is also important is that standard, you know what the standard is, because untold standards are probably even more dangerous than told standards.
- / Yeah.
- And so...
- * I think, yeah, and we also said that nobody is standard. There's no such thing as a standard person.
- / Right.
- * And maybe that is the person which goes back to the arts or any type of school that we treat everyone in this very standard format.
- / Standardising.
- * And when you are particularly off the spectrum, then it becomes very hard to fit into the standard.
- / Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- * Potentially.
- / Mm-hmm (affirmative).
- * Because it's a very linear process of pigeon holes.
- / Yeah. It's weird that we came up with this idea that that's how we move better in society. You know what I mean?

Isn't it strange that we've come up with the idea that there needs to be this common ground. Why do we even need common ground when you think about it?

* Remove the boundaries.

/ Yeah.

* And let it all flow together.

/ I mean...

* Jump into the sea.

○ Yeah. It's probably not to decide each, maybe because deciding each time is tiring.

/ Yeah.

○ So because of laziness, I mean...

/ Yeah.

○ Conventions are useful not to do the same for it each time.

/ Right.

* The same mistake each time.

/ Reinventing the wheel.

○ Exactly.

/ What we're doing now.

○ How am I expected to do? Okay.

* Is it not also about control? Because we have these people who are just obsessed with control and so they want to create these standards so they can hold us and they can make us write all in the same way, walk in the same way, dress in the same way.

○ There are people totally frightened of not doing something which is 100% right.

/ Yeah.

○ Then they're not interested at all in what it is for or where they are going to, but...

/ Yeah, and in that sense how is standard related to mediocrity?

○ Mediocrity. Yes, of course.

/ In the middle. Which is kind of the, I guess, that was part of Lara or Stuart's list. The lowest common denominator.

* Yeah, I was going to say let's go on the list where we were talking before about education here, exactly.

/ Yeah.

* So it becomes watered down to a point which is digestible.

○ When you say high standard, I try to pick it up to a very high standard in this sense.

* My standards are higher.

○ Yeah, exactly.

* Than yours. Your kitchen is dirty and my standards are high.

○ You're obsessed. No, my standards are just higher.

* Exactly. Or I have very low standards. It's fine. You can be dirty.

/ I wonder about mediocrity a lot. I just feel like...

* Sorry, yeah. It was a much better point.

/ No no no no. No no, it's super related. It's completely related because I wonder about it in terms of... So we create these standards that we want people to abide to so that we all have a common ground and we can all move more fluidly through systems and institutions and societies and everything, but the problem is that in order to have a standard, you have to kind of ask everyone to quiet their eccentricity and quieting their eccentricity is actually the genius that's flowing through them.

* Oh, it's numbing. It's numbing the person.

/ Yeah.

* It's removing their...

/ And also I think a lot about being kept busy by the institutions. This is something I think about all the time.

○ Like toiling around, working around the clock.

/ Just the bureaucracy. The bureaucracy that is standard. Yeah, exactly. I mean, you know what that is. To me that's wasting time until we die. That's killing minutes, you know? Making sure that we all manage to walk in line, that's saying-

* But it's keeping people employed and it's keeping people in the right place and everything ticks over and...

/ Quiet. I mean, it's-it's actually, it's Audre Lorde, this beautiful thinker and writer, American, who used to say it's...

○ Who, sorry?

/ Audre Lorde. It's the master's prerogative to keep the oppressed busy with the master's concerns. So the institution and those in power keep you busy, you're filling out the form, you're meeting the credentials, you're going through the loopholes and everything, and then you don't have any sort of bandwidth left to challenge. I mean I think that's the great sort of injustice of these systems and these standards. I just see injustice when I see standard. I mean I see...

* Injustice.

/ Injustice. Yeah. I see injustice when I see standards because I see kind of exactly what we're describing a kind of lack of mobility.

* Of initiative.

/ Yeah.

* I think it's removing the need to push and to change because you know, the standard you fit into, which is exactly what the communists were trying to do with the use of everything being standardised.

○ Then it also depends, of course, it depends immensely on how much certainty people needs because of their personality. Like how much certainty you're comfortable with or uncertainty you're comfortable with.

* The arrogance is certainty.

○ I feel certain about something that is horrible. But I mean how much external certainty...

* It can also be very tedious when people are overly certain because then there is no conversation, because it is this, your father tells you, your... Sorry I didn't mean to hit the table.

/ No, no. Yeah, the patriarchy.

* The patriarchy, exactly.

/ Yeah.

* But the mediocrity is what we will want to escape from. The mediocrity is what we are frightened of.

/ I think so. I think so. I mean I wonder, I wonder about like, you know, there was a study recently that said that in America the average household spends six hours watching TV every day.

Every day.

/ Every day, six hours watching TV.

Together? Or...

* I thought TV was dead?

/ Individuals I guess but...

Individuals.

* That means they combine... Is that combined time or per person?

Combined or not?

* Combined or individual?

/ Good question, I guess I don't have the answer to that, but imagine six hours. That wall is surprisingly thin for being in a bunker.

* The average Spanish man spends six months of his life looking for keys.

/ Really?

How much? How much?

* Six months.

Six months that he can't watch TV.

The average person?

* The average Spanish. This, I don't know. My partner is Spanish. That's what she told me the other day.

/ Oh really.

* I think I probably, I only have one key so I spend much longer than six months.

□ Six months a year.

/ 75% of statistics are made up. Right?

* Yeah. Well I thought so.

○ But they love this kind of statistics.

* But yeah...

/ We were talking about mediocrity when you left. We're talking about the standard as trying to keep us all down to mediocrity.

□ Well I was thinking as a sort of last maybe last point to think about is living standards. And at the back of my mind in all of this, I sort of have, you know, the sort of point of view of my parents in their lifetime would be I'm sure a sort of rising in standards of comfort, consumerism access in the West specifically and at the same time a loss of standards in community, in all the positive aspects of space.

/ Oh yeah.

□ Sorry. A lot of loss of standards in terms of the positive aspects of state provision and supply. And that makes me think there's always this sort of tension between what is gained by the enforcement of standards and what is lost at the same time. And I think what is lost is usually specificity, right? Which then tends towards, I guess the average or mediocrity perhaps. And you can see that in obvious examples such as the monoculture of the high street or what I'm saying about software templates for instance. And it's always that specificity and particularity that I feel most passionate for trying to maintain. And in the conversations with students that I alluded to, that's what it's always trying to reach towards. It's like don't accept those standards, not because they're not good or useful.

* Raise the standards.

□ And of course conventions are conventional in many positive aspects, but they always result in some sort of loss. And just maintaining an awareness of that tension is what you, you want to convey. You want to teach in order...

/ Yeah that's interesting, you're talking about like a stripped down... Whatever it is it's stripped down.

* Raw. Naked. Exposed.

□ Whatever, what is, I'm not sure.

/ The standards.

□ Yeah, I guess so. Yeah. Yeah.

/ Don't take them for... What you're saying. Don't take them for...

□ Skeletal. Just see them for what they are.

/ Just see them for what they are, as building blocks to construct over.

□ Yeah, yeah, yeah.

* We'll just jump off if you don't want to break.

□ Hurt yourself yeah.

○ But then I would always try to recall that standards are not just rules imposed by the more powerful or the less powerful, sometimes they are conceived in order to, to limit the behaviour of the more powerful. So never forget sometimes they are made to protect the less powerful. So they're imposed by authority to compensate the excessive power of the too powerful.

/ Oh my goodness. So rarely.

□ Right. But there can definitely be imbalances in that structure.

○ Of course there are imbalances because there are imbalances in power...

/ In everything.

○ In everything but where autonomously those who have a lot of power are of interest to be free. Then there are tentatives to create standards to limitate that freedom. So we are talking most of all of the freedom of artists, of the freedom of the norm of citizen. But then there's also the freedom of the over powerful and then standards...

* The freedom of the oligarch.

○ So standards like environmental standards, human rights standards are used to impose by authority and compensate by authority what otherwise would be too much free was just to recall that that we are talking about only the standards that limit us. That we don't like that are a limitation for us. But sometimes they have the normal citizen to have at least some standard access to some resources.

/ I mean it's so funny that you say that now because it's actually like, I hate this, you know, in times like these is a sentence I'm, I feel adamantly too standard.

□ Which is the title of the Biennale.

/ Which isn't, no, no, no. May you live in interesting times.

□ Oh sorry yeah.

/ But, but I do think an interesting moment to have that aspect of the conversation on standard and maybe it's, I'm certainly not a pessimist, but I think some of the skepticism that's coming out of me is looking at like environmental policies being reversed based on a new administration in the country in which I live. You know what I mean? Standards of living, being standards of human.

* Eroded.

/ Yeah. Of human condition. Remember like there are children in cages on the borders of the United States. Toothbrushes had not been agreed upon in court and so they didn't have toothbrushes that was being debated as like appropriate condition, standard of living, no toothbrushes, no private bathrooms, you know, things like that. Like these were things that were nebulous, I guess, in the contract that had been drawn up and the laws that had been presented for what actually human, a humane condition should and could be. But your point makes sense. It's just, it's interestingly vulnerable, which is, which is not what we expect of our standards and our laws. It's vulnerable to the wind of the... Of one administration or one system...

○ But I wonder if in the jungle without any rules, the vulnerable would be even more vulnerable than they are now because they would be...

* Not on the borders, not if you're on the border to Mexico. And who knows what's going to happen on the borders of the United Kingdom with what's coming our way with Brexit. And suddenly we're going to lose all our standards, which have been based upon European standards. And it is, you know, it is to the benefit of the mighty and the very powerful and to the absolute deficit of the poor and the vulnerable. I think the, you know, the world is going into a really crazy place at the moment and it is going towards supporting the top 1% and that's in both the administration in the US, in the not so United Kingdom. I think what we've seen in Italy also, you know with Berlusconi, and now with Five Stars. It's all going towards the belief in if I live in this administration, it's potential if I could become one of the rich. And so I will believe in that rather than to believe in the common standards of the common people.

/ Yeah. I also wonder how connected, this is kind of full circle back to your original statement about standards and print versus standards and digital realms. I wonder. No, because I wonder about like how new technologies and new ways of communicating and new like privacy like things like that.

Like things that didn't need to have a standard maybe before because they were just much more manageable at a... On a social contract scale. And suddenly you have these like privacy standards needing to be drawn up, which is related because it's kind of these new ways of moving through the world that literally circulating through the world are not circulating through the world. It's not... What I don't like about the sentence 'in times like these' is that I think every time has been complicated and that every transition of time has been complicated for different generations over time. But how is this changing now and how does standards get made now or uphold now? Like new ways of moving.

□ Well it's not really news as a comment, but I think just the speed of the violence of that change is what the acceleration is, is the new thing. I guess...

/ Of creating standards even? The acceleration of creating standards?

□ The acceleration of change, the acceleration of change, the acceleration that digital technology affords just by its very nature and the fact that fewer and fewer people understand it or see it or witness it...

* But they could lead the understanding because they have the power to control it. We go back to the nation of type now everyone could sit on a computer and create a document, but the fact that they don't know how to create the document from a design perspective becomes quite confusing. So you end up with a lot of quite literate documents which make no sense therefore need standardising in some ways.

□ Yeah.

* Do we need rules because there's more ability? Is that in a way what we're saying?

□ Yeah, I guess I mean just at both micro and macro levels. I just think again, the speed of that change, whether it's political change in the last five years, it seems to me totally parallel with, you know, the change of technology in terms of softwares and templates that I'm talking about and just the lack of general understanding because they're sort of done in a black box or in private.

/ And I wonder if it's a lack of understanding or also, and this is where it kind of like all falls apart where it's like for most of what we've been dealing with up until now, there have been existing social contracts for something like privacy for example. What are your two kiddos that are one and some months old, you know, going to think about privacy. Like, you know, do they care even about it? Is that even a thing? Like what are they protecting? What are they not protecting? You know, are these just like really outdated ideas of how bodies move through space or people interact with each other? Cause you look at teenagers now and the social contract is really different, you know, what is that standard? How do you define that standard? Who is defining that standard and who's benefiting from there being a lack of standard?

* Well, things pick up. Yeah, public publicity becomes taken for granted rather than being the want to live inside your own box becomes much more ambiguous. Even if my teenage daughters there is an acceptance of lack of privacy though then there are very bad social results of it and depression and suicide rates going over the top within this generation but maybe this next generation will be more at home with these new standards. Therefore, it will be less of a shock if part of the problem is that we're caught in between. If we didn't worry a need to worry about being naked, then we wouldn't mind being publicised, being naked, it's losing those inhibitions to an extent, which therefore privacy becomes, you can, you're welcome to look at me through the camera.

O This wouldn't be that bad.

* Yeah.

/ Being naked?

O Not being afraid of being seen.

* No, I think it's not, but I think it's the only way to deal with it, you can't... Yeah.

O No it was just an example. Yes but...

/ I think that's an interesting one. I mean I think that that's a really large societal shift that doesn't have standards already. It's a very unspoken agreement what people want and need and I think generationally it's changing rapidly as you've been describing. And I don't know. Edward Snowden was saying, not believing in the right to privacy is like not believing in freedom of speech because saying you have nothing to say, you know, not believing in privacy...

O It's the opposite.

/ No, not believing in laws of privacy because you have nothing to hide is like saying I don't believe in freedom of speech because I have nothing to say. Yeah? Am I saying it wrong?

O It means... okay, it means like... being afraid that what you say is not known because it's...

/ No, I think a lot of people are saying, you know, I don't really care but like agree to the terms and conditions agree, agree, agree.

O I have nothing to hide.

/ I have nothing to hide. I have nothing to hide. And he was saying, saying I have nothing to hide.

It's like saying I don't believe in freedom of speech cause I have nothing to say. You know, and so this question of like why we're defending some of these things are interesting. Do we need to defend privacy or not? We have no standard for that.

○ But that's where the debate about standard is interesting because norms... Sorry.

* I think... Sorry, no, no I was being slow, carry on.

○ Norms are the most interesting when they're forming because when they're written like in a nice book they're so boring. Like when you write in a, as a book, I bought the rights to be, I don't know, 20 centimetres high, books are so boring. But norms or standards are interesting when you see their birth, how they're forming...

□ At the moment of their coming into being.

○ The moment they're coming into being.

/ Yeah.

○ Because what's the standard for privacy? You see all the forces or the different powers, the different actors interacting to create the standard and so it's this price society now, no?

/ Yeah, it's true.

○ It's so interesting. Then when they're written down then they stick and they remain there and fixed, and in 10 years they become only lessons, right?

/ Yes.

* But all the time it's demanding more and more transparency, which therefore is the valid demise of privacy. So I think we need to take to be more open. I think this, we need to dissolve walls and be more happy to be exposed. I think it's completely different but I don't think it is to say to have nothing to hide is a great thing and to talk is also a great thing and we need freedom of speech. Do we need so much privacy because I think within all these private conversations. There's been all the... really sinister shit happens and this is why we're in such a dark, dark place. The dark leaders that we are talking about all do everything behind closed doors.

□ In a bunker.

* In a bunker.

/ In a bunker.

* Like this.

/ I do think it's interesting that this whole conversation is centered around standards, which are these kind of clear like, you know, poles that one can adhere to or one can look to for guidance, when what you're describing as the most interesting thing is the messy unformed space before the standard. That's, that's the meat...

* That ambiguity of law.

/ The pre-standard.

□ I think we should stop.

/ Okay.