



[Turning FACT Inside Out](#)

at the [FACT](#), Liverpool until 15th September 2013

Reviewed by [Denis Joe](#) July 2013

**FACT** (*Foundation for Art and Creative Technology*) in Liverpool celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. The centre houses three galleries, three cinemas, including the most uncomfortable cinema I have ever been in: ***The Box***, where they show the more interesting films. Over the decade the galleries have housed some interesting and provocative exhibits including the excellent [Nam June Paik](#) exhibition, which was the subject of my first review for the Manchester Salon web site.

To celebrate, FACT have put on an exhibition which they describe as turning FACT '**inside out**', testing the way in '*which the cultural centre will extend beyond the walls of the physical container, moving outside and online*'.

The first work that one encounters is **Nina Edge's *Ten Intentions***. The work is a communications experiment that attempts to discover what people will say to a robot that turns talking into writing. The work uses

**Apple**

's voice recognition technology,

**Siri**

, which allows writing to be produced at the speed of speech. It also 'mishears' speech, producing misunderstandings.

Throughout the 13 week experiment, conversations and ideas on what the future will look like will develop [online](#), at venues across Liverpool, and in a special tent at FACT created by visitors. The tent that provides a place to discuss the subjects covered in the work and points to a future where "*tent dwelling will increase as climate and political change force people out of solid structures and into temporary shelters*".

The idea of **temporariness** suggests that the artist has already made up their mind about the future; and it doesn't look good. As Edge has [stated](#): "*But in a context of dwindling resources everyone is forced to re-imagine the future and be prepared for change. Political, economic and climate change are already forcing some people out of solid walled structures and into tents*

." I couldn't help imagining that the inspiration for this piece came from

**Cormac McCarthy**

's novel

***The Road***

and there seemed to me to be an irony (intended or not) of using the latest technology to paint a future that has civilisation in retreat.

***Diminished City***, a work by **Mark Skwarek**, allows viewers to erase the Liverpool cityscape surrounding FACT. Using what he terms *diminished reality*

(similar to augmented reality) viewers can delete things from the scene of the area on the tablet. To erase their surroundings, participants simply touch objects they wish to remove on the mobile device. As they touch and erase buildings, trees, etc., the city ceases to exist, leaving an empty landscape. The point of this escapes me. I can see a use for this technology for, say, architects, but as an installation it does nothing beyond, perhaps reinforce a feeling of pessimism about the future (and, I suppose, the present as well).

***Diminished City*** is part of the collective **Manifest. AR**, an 'international artists' collective working with emergent forms of augmented reality as interventionist public art. The works cannot really be called 'Art'. In fact Manifest. AR describe the pieces as 'games'. One work, ***I Must Be Seeing THINGS***

, by

**John Cleater**

, uses a book with outlines of objects on the pages and an iPad Mini viewer. When the viewer turns a page a picture appears and fills in the outline. As a game it is pretty dull, as are all the exhibits by Manifest. AR.

The exhibits themselves are works in progress. "Working with **Stephen Fairclough** (Professor of Psychophysiology) and

**Kiel Gilead**

(Researcher in Physiological Computing) at Liverpool John Moores University, Manifest.AR is exploring artworks that link augmented virtual objects with audience responses translated

through compact wearable bio sensing devices”. The displays seem to be concerning themselves with finding neurological explanations for our reaction to art, with the viewer acting as a guinea pig. Whilst the technology may well be ‘cutting edge’

***the thinking behind the works is conservative***

, falling in line with the current fashion of try to explain our behaviour through biology.



At least **Uncoded Collective** doesn't seem to see themselves as artists. As they say, they are “*a transdisciplinary team that works creating realtime interactive technologies. Masters of rapid prototyping tools and big believers of open source technologies and knowledge*”.

The piece on show called

***TransEurope Slow Route***

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is basically a virtual bike ride. A screen has a video of a route where you pedal to make the video move. Whilst the piece is quite clever I have to wonder “What is the point?”

It is rather depressing to think that new technology is being utilised, not just to make things easier, but to take away from us our ability for decision making. It is rather like the depressing trend for universities to create mobile phone apps which allow the student to know if a computer is available on the campus, or when the buses run and even if a washing machine is free in the

laundry. Likewise with *TransEurope Slow Route 1*; which is nothing more than a simulation game; we are encouraged to ***travel without leaving the confines of our home*** (or in this case the FACT building). This pre-programming of our lives reduces human activity and interaction, to the mundane.

We are told: “*TransEurope Slow* negotiates modern cities and finds places that tell contemporary stories which move beyond tourist attractions, stereotypes, and city brands. Your journey will seamlessly switch from Liverpool to Rotterdam and Madrid, linking the cities and highlighting their differences, and similarities”. But the attempt to make this piece meaningful does not convince. I could imagine something like this being given to a child as a present which they would play with for half-an-hour and then get bored.

