

David Cotterrell: Searchlight

Venue: Sunderland (Multiple sites)

Curators: Dan Dubowitz, Ben Hall

Date: 27th March 2007

A commissioned series of temporary public installations. Curated by Dan Dubowitz, CivicWorks and produced with the support of Sunderland Arc.

Why did a group of people end up inflating a US Military spec balloon in the middle of a ravine at 3am on a cold and wet Thursday morning in March 2005? What possible relevance was there to the 15 year regeneration vision involving over 1 billion of private investment?

The billowing jellyfish form of a US military balloon clinging to the sky over Sunderland does not signify a highlight within the special relationship between Britain and America. Rather, it marks the first phase of a cultural plan to make visible a political struggle of a more local kind. This elaborate mode of surveillance turns the notion of intelligence gathering on its head. Many of those that congregate to witness this curious event are simultaneously present on both sides of a contentious territorial division: standing to watch footage of their shadow selves beamed from the balloon like the Bat-Signal, not across the sky, but a formerly no-go area of public land.

The area surrounding the River Wear is no longer public territory and was abandoned after the collapse of glass, coal and shipbuilding industries forced many people to relocate. In 2005, Sunderland Arc commissioned Cotterrell to develop a project that would engage with disused sites in the area. Cotterrell worked with Dan Dubowitz and Ben Hall in the creation of a series of interventions that could project subtle interventions into the landscape. Instead of creating the permanent presence of a physical artwork, Cotterrell opted to leave local communities with the experience and memory of the project: the odd presence of the moon-like balloon in the sky, the shadows occupying the square space and, with this, a new found imagination for the possibilities of deserted spaces.

Searchlight is an experimental journey through technology, contested territories and fragmented communities, offering a public art model in direct contradiction to the monumental sculpture iconically aligned with inner-city regeneration.



Early Projections at Galley's Gill (2005)