

Miscellaneous documents

Interview project, May – July 2004

in conjunction with multiple MISCELLANEOUSalliances (mMa)

Edited transcript of a conversation between April Phillips and Elizabeth Boyce regarding April's participation in mMa

Elizabeth Boyce
April Phillips

How's your project going?

It's going well, I guess. It hasn't started yet.

I'm trying to interview people before their projects have started because I'm not interested so much in the progress of people's ideas or their development but the failure of ideas.

At the start, when you are excited about something, you think big and you think so far with it. Then it comes down to mapping out all the different little things that you're going to do and the order in which you're going to do things.

Even writing that thing that I sent it you was really hard. Often I find with ideas [that] to me they're really simple but they're quite complicated to explain, especially in words rather than in person. It's so different, talking to some one, than writing things down. So, that's been really, really hard, to try and make myself clear because it's kind of serious but it's also silly and playful. I'm trying to get that across in the writing as well.

Another thing that I find really challenging is that, because all of the subjects of the files are processes or materials, I'm trying to think about what is a process and what is a material. I'll think up a word and then I have to decide. Sometimes it's sort of neither but it's kind of both.

Then I've also thought, "If I picked this one out of a lucky dip would I be disappointed?" Regardless of what work you've made before and what your interests are [it should be] something that can stimulate many pathways once you see it and straight away there's that excitement and motivation to make the file.

I was thinking about the failure of plans. I think this kind of project, or a lot of the projects involved in mMa, have a lot of potential for that because they involve the participation of other people and they're really contingent on what happens when other people get involved.

It's such a leap of faith. I think that you're relying on other people.

Should I talk about how the idea started? I work in a call centre some of the time. One day my boss asked me if I could go upstairs and file in payroll for a whole day. I spent from 9 to 5.30 just filing. I'll probably never do it again; it was only for that day.

It was strange in the way that people looked at me, being a filing girl. It was strange that all day I was just working with the alphabet and that was it, people's names, going through the files. It was really, really strange but I really enjoyed it as well.

I actually own a filing cabinet and I really quite like them. I like the formality of it and, when you approach a filing cabinet, that it's a resource of information. Just things that are in order as well - I kind of like that.

But at the same time my practice is centred around materials and processes and how they work, ways to test them.

By materials and processes, what do you mean?

You could say wood is a material but you could also say sugar or flour or paper are materials. A process could be walking or digging. But then a process could also be welding or something. They're really close together in the way that they work. They need one another to produce. If you bring them together, you get a product from that.

I'm interested in even really unusual materials and processes and ways of bringing them together to get something really strange. Sugar's really familiar to us but if you did something strange with it you'd still look at it and see sugar. It's familiar to you straight away so you're not isolated from it, but it's used in such a different way from its day job.

I thought that I could make a library [of materials and processes], some sort of resource, out of the filing cabinet, and then [add] another process of the lucky dip, just the random pulling out of the subject.

It's also about different modes of thinking and different ways in which people can see the same word and think of different things. I find that really interesting as well. If one person picked out 'Digging', they might not know how to start but it's on their mind. They could take photos of people digging in the street and copy that out of a dictionary and write something about it themselves so that they can build a file that's also about the way that they think and the way that they pick something apart.

How will the files be organised?

In alphabetical order. All of the files will have a cover sheet as well with your name and what the subject is. Then there's also room for you to invite other people to add something that you didn't have time to add or you didn't have. If some one came and viewed the filing cabinet and thought, "Oh, I've got something at home that I'd like to put in there", or if they see something later and remember it then they can bring it in and just slip it into the file. I'll visit the filing cabinet almost everyday just to organise and make sure they're all in their place. Hopefully, there'll be a photocopier next to it so people can just photocopy from the cabinet as they want to. There'll be a 'File of the day' that might be presented in some way outside the cabinet as well.

It seems that you've invented a formal structure, and what happens to your project from now on will change within that structure. You've got a cover sheet that requires people to give you particular information so that people's other contributions happen within that structure. Is that fair to say?

Yes, I guess the only real restriction it that it has to be able to be filed. Arguably this spoon could be filed because it's not too big, but this cup couldn't be filed because it wouldn't fit.

So, the history of the idea began recently in your workplace, or has it a longer [history]?

I've always liked filing cabinets and I've always liked the idea of lucky dips and that kind of thing.

I feel like there's both a safety and bravery in my work. It's really safe in that whatever happens I

can never be disappointed in it. Nothing could ever go wrong. It's not like constructing something from a mould where it could go really, really wrong. It's just got that chance and that random path I can't see yet. It's almost like I set it all up on the little springboard then pull it back and it just goes.

It's just so fun, filing. It feels like it's easy but it still uses a piece of your brain. It just feels so organised and neat.

Rhythmic?

Yes. I was doing some filing yesterday of personnel files, and quite enjoying it.

There's a really excellent coil system. I don't know if you've seen those. They're two metal coils but they're quite soft and flexible. They stand up and go through the two holes and then you have a plate that goes over the top and they thread through the two little notches. You have to hold it down. They're kind of nice. You know, those other ones get under your fingernails and cut you.

I got so many paper cuts that day. It was so strange. I looked at my hands and there was a little green on my finger tips as well, like little cuts and I thought, "Oh, no. Oh, dear."

They gave me this K with a red string. It was for the termination room in payroll. And because it was a room that was locked up and I had to go and put files in it, of course I couldn't resist going through them. I just loved the way, with those kind of files, there's the start of the file and then they're in order of what happened... [like] police reports. It was great.

My very first job in an office was at a casting agency. It was in my holidays when I was about sixteen. They had a whole room of filing cabinets and they were all organised into different colours. They had different coloured folders and acronyms on the spines. They were basically organised into actors, lead actors, character actors and then a whole group of models: models who could say a line, models who could be trusted with more than one line, models who look like the girl and boy next door, and then people who were extras. If you understood the codes they were really quite blunt. But the interesting thing was that there were basically two drawers of male actors and the rest were different degrees of bodies with different looks.

It's so funny to be categorised, isn't it?

The [cabinets] that I went to are those big ones that move across. You push them across - they're quite

heavy - and you get inside that little space. Some of them are so small and so hard to reach.

What I love about it is that there's one world and then there's layers of reaching inside. There's the whole filing cabinet and then you've got the files and then you've got inside the files.

In terms of the participation of other people in the project, how does it work? Is it by invitation or is it voluntary? Does it happen in the space of Clubs or does it happen prior to the presentation of the work at Clubs? Are you conducting the lucky dip as part of the public presentation of the work or is that something that happens prior to the public presentation of the work?

I can do it either way. I'd rather people have more time. I've thought about it and I don't think that it's unfair that some people have more time than others because it doesn't really matter.

It's not really by invitation. It's also voluntary.

Instead of one letter form A-Z, A might have five files but every letter has at least one file. I wouldn't knock anybody back. If somebody said, "Can I be involved?" and I've run out of them, I'm just going to have to write more because one day it would be absolutely fantastic to have this massive filing system.

Do you anticipate that it will go on after the project time?

Yes.

Will [the cabinet] fill while the files are at Clubs? Will it be filled when it arrives and no more will be added to it during that period or will it fill up while it's there?

I think that when it's in there the files will be in place. Obviously the people that have begun a file, if they've got more to add, actually have to come in to add to the file so that it's growing as it's going on. So, they could just drop in and go away, rather than having the file, building it until it's complete, and then put putting it in the space.

I also really want people who aren't necessarily in Clubs space or who haven't studied art to be part of to as well.

Are you going to seek those people?

I've spoken about it with a few people and they've been interested even though they don't have an art background at all, [including] quite a few people who have a writing background or a music background or that sort of thing, which is really exciting too.

I had a project that was called *Can you make my art for me?*, and that too about inviting lots of artists and also people who tend to be intimidated by art or feel that they can't make art, just to include a wider span of the public. It's really exciting.

So are you going to be present in the space as if it's an office and you're looking after it?

No. Not for the whole time. I'll probably visit for about an hour a day, or something, just to see what's new in the files and that kind of thing. I want to add to each of the files so that's going to be quite good as well, for me.

What will you add?

I guess it just depends on the file.

I wonder if you'll be like a teacher, going through everyone's project and red marking in the margins.

And [adding] stickers and stuff! That would be a good idea. That would be funny actually.

I couldn't find my little cards that I'm writing my files on but I thought of another way that I could give you your file.

I've written [the materials and processes] down randomly as I've thought of them. I'll give them all a number and you pick a number between 1 and 32.

Um... 16.

Ok. You got 'Rubber Band'. So I'll just send you the file and the little end bit. Or I might leave the file in the cabinet and I'll just send you the little sticker and the cover sheet.

Thank you so much for doing it.

Oh, my pleasure. I'd love to.

I didn't want you to feel pressured. You know, "If you do my project, I'll do yours."

No, not at all. Some one actually did that. He said, "You know, I'm really busy doing this particular project but maybe if you came and did it with me, then we could talk while we do it".

It's pragmatic. I'm glad to be part of your project. It will probably contribute to my own [project].

Yes, absolutely. That's really exciting too. We can be dorks together.