

Miscellaneous documents

Interview project, May – July 2004

in conjunction with multiple MISCELLANEOUS alliances (mMa)

Edited transcript of a conversation between Katherine Houston and Elizabeth Boyce regarding Katherine's participation in mMa

Elizabeth Boyce

Katherine Houston

What I want to ask is, "What are you thinking of doing?"

Ah, well. That's probably the hardest question of them all, I think, because at this stage I'm really not that sure. I haven't had that much time to really sit down and think about it. I'm right in the middle of all my assessment for uni at the moment. I'm doing my DipEd out at Monash, which is fantastic.

But I couldn't turn this down because it's so related to my art practice, the themes the event's looking at. I really wanted to do something, whether it's incorporating documentation from previous works or creating a new project.

I've been looking into ideas to do with the sociology of gift giving. I'm really interested in forms of creating interaction between strangers. So I'm thinking about gifts and I'm thinking about doing some kind of postage thing, where I'd make a gift, randomly find addresses in the phone book and just send that gift away. I'd leave a corresponding address and if people wanted to reply, they could. I wanted to look at some kind of gift that didn't require a response.

A lot of my previous projects have ended up with wads and wads of documentation. I was thinking it would be interesting if the artwork was the process and the idea rather than what actually happens.

So, I'm really not sure exactly how it's going to pan out or what it's doing. It's just an idea to explore and, hopefully in the next week, I'll start to have a bit more time to sit down and focus on ideas. I usually do really long-term projects so it's a bit of a challenge for me to come up with something quite quickly.

Do your projects normally entail an exchange with others?

Yes, a lot of the things that I've done in the past have been things in public spaces using a theory called triangulation. Say, in a public space there might be two people sitting down and nearby something unusual or odd happens and it instigates a conversation between those two people.

I'm interested in creating that. It might be an event or an object or something like.

A lot of my projects have been creating that object that tries to spark some kind of communication in public spaces. I'm really interested in conversation between strangers in public spaces and how public spaces are defined.

It's really interesting. It's quite a stressful way to work, though, because you're really dependent on other people and what happens in the moment.

For your work to occur, do you need that interaction to take place? Do you need to witness it?

Yes, it's that interaction that's actually the work rather than whatever the object or things might be. I worked for nearly three years in one little square in the city, which was on the corner of Elizabeth Street and Little Bourke Street, just behind the GPO.

I worked in that space for quite a long time and now that it's being built on, I've sort of been dislocated. I'm trying to find another site for working.

As you said, there's a number of options you're thinking about for mMa. One might be including documentation from a past project and presenting it in some way?

Yes, I'd like to. Rather than it being documentation that you just read, in a book, I think of it as a more active process. I'd be there to talk through the ideas and the things that happened and just make it a bit more alive.

Also, because my project is about conversations and interaction, it's much more related if I'm present too, if I'm talking about things.

Do you find that easy, making conversation in an art space?

In an art space... I don't know because I haven't really done it before.

It's always been in public spaces?

Yes, which I find extremely challenging, because I'm actually really shy. It's a really unnatural thing to do, to go up to some one and to start talking to them. You're sort of perceived as if there's something wrong with you, or there's something not quite right about talking with strangers in public spaces. I used to be so stressed before I did each of the processes that I went through but something would always happen that was really personal and interesting that always made it seem worthwhile.

I know that I want to work with something to do with gift giving and do that in a short amount of time and also relate it to the Clubs space and what goes on around there.

Last year, or it might have been the year before last, I had an exhibition at Seventh Gallery. Part of the show was just setting up a couple of deck chairs out the front of the gallery for a day or so before the exhibition opened and giving away some of the art works that I'd made, just to people going past. I would like to do something like that again, but [I don't know] whether or not I've got enough time to make objects that are actually of value to other people.

How do you determine that objects have value to other people? I suppose you can't control your audience. If it's a fine art audience you would know what the values are.

I suppose it's a broader appeal with things that are more accessible that don't require that higher knowledge they might do in a gallery space.

That project was just little models for public sculptures. In all of them I tried to really make beautiful objects as well, which is something that I hadn't done in the past, just so there'd be that aspect of appeal for other people.

Do you envisage your interaction all being within Clubs or spilling out into the open space?

I think spilling but I'm not sure whether that might be through mail outs or whether it might be through doing something like an informal discussion.

I like working with people from a non-art context too. It's amazing when you talk to people and you see how many people would really like to make art works and don't.

And who value it as an activity?

Yes, definitely, especially since there's been so much dialogue in the media about public art and money.

[Break in dialogue]

So you're doing a project for *mMa* that is going to be a collation of people's ideas?

No, it will be a distribution. I've been thinking about it. The documents might not be discrete documents for each individual. They might intermix but they'll be distributed and then people can use them or not as they wish.

So have you been working on projects and things in the last few years?

Yeah, but its pretty recent that I've started making things that involve conversation and exchange so I'm really fascinated, of course, to hear about other people's [projects].

It is really intimidating, hopefully not so much with people in the art world because they're probably more open to talking about things.