

Miscellaneous documents

Interview project, May – July 2004

in conjunction with multiple MISCELLANEOUSalliances (mMa)

Edited transcript of a conversation between Lisa Kelly and Elizabeth Boyce regarding Resistance through Ritual's association with mMa

Elizabeth Boyce

Lisa Kelly

Basically, I want to find out about what you're doing, and also about the history of that idea and the projected future of the idea.

I should explain what I'm doing. I'm most interested in the failure of ideas. I'm interested in creating a space within a text for ideas, as they were initially conceived, to persist and continue with all of the different possibilities that they hold rather than the contingencies by which they're closed down.

Yes, I know what you mean. I think about it as the way things evolve and take shape. That will naturally change and things that might have been important in the beginning make way for new development.

Yes, exactly. What's going to happen at Westspace, with Resistance through Ritual, is a record of the progress of that development or change. But I'm interested in the other end of it.

Maybe Resistance through Ritual is at a more formed staged than some of the mMa projects for Clubs at the moment? I guess people are making work and getting ready to exhibit.

There is a more determined number of people that will be in WestSpace, I guess. Well, not exactly because a number of the projects - Cuckoo from New Zealand and also NUCA (Network of Uncollectable Artists) – are going to work really interestingly as umbrella mechanisms, bringing in much larger groups of people involved within their projects. So it becomes about projects within projects as does *mMa*, which I think is working wonderfully to really involve the kind of practice that I'm interested in looking at, and in Melbourne as well. There's a really nice connection and multiplication of people and places.

I guess Resistance through Rituals is more formed by having started out as a more linear process about responding to an invitation to develop a project, writing a proposal and inviting people. I

think the nature of some of the projects do make space for that much more open weave, indeterminate numbers of people and indefinable practices.

Perhaps you could tell me about the premise of Resistance through Rituals as it was proposed.

It had come about as part of an ongoing process from an essay I wrote, a couple of years ago, about artist run spaces and practices. That was a critical perspective on it and this project has kind of developed out of that, trying to locate and catch hold of artists and practices that really activate their working environments through their own generated media and projects, whether in galleries and publications or individual practice, and trying to find within that a sense of criticality of the working environment and also politicised practice.

It's been an interesting process. It's been about a year now since the initial proposal writing. As the project has developed and taken shape I've really enjoyed developing and broadening ideas of the political within practice. It's quite easy when you start out. A proposal's always very sketchy. Quite black and white, the proposal was in the beginning. It's been a learning process and broadening concept of the potential for political practice and thinking within practice, which I think has been really activated and strengthened by the correspondence and relationship I've had with Bianca [Hester] from Clubs and the way that the *mMa* is developing as a companion project.

So, it's at that point of the idea of the political within practice that the projects really meet, as well as the types of practices that you're involving?

Yes. There's quite a diverse range of artists with diverse takes on the political whether it's through direct organising, taking responsibility and being really motivated to enact the working environment, from projects like Cuckoo who are involved in staging exhibitions, publications and

events and NUCA which is organising it's own network of uncollectible artists to practices more politicised in subject matter such as Tony Schwensen's. He really springs a lot from topical, current political events within the Australian context. There's a lot to work on! And then there's someone like Carla Cescon, whose work makes visible a more personal politic of body and emotional spaces and intelligence.

I guess this is part of the point of mMa, that aside from any overt political or private/political content in people's work, the act of liberating your work from the conventional paradigm of involving yourself in the workforce and so forth, is political in itself.

Yes, definitely. That's brought a really exciting dimension to both projects.

I was really interested in what you said about the proposal itself being quite black and white. I suppose, at that stage of a project there's a quite fetching simplicity about it on paper. You just say, "Well, this is what we're doing." One often writes a proposal in a very assured, certain voice, as if this is what will happen.

Yes, it's very much about projection, I think. Proposal writing is a funny process. I even find, doing it for myself, it's almost like you're determining something before it needs to be determined. I think it's quite natural and obvious to move beyond that initial positioning. I think it would be unhealthy if you didn't, actually, because it's about the project development and about it taking shape in its own way, coming to life.

I think that initial phase is enjoyable in itself. It's like indulging in a fantasy about what could happen.

About what you could do, yes. It's almost like creative writing, really, or fiction writing. Then it's like, "Oh! Gotta do it!"

"What are the real parameters?" And once you involve other people, of course it always changes.

It becomes much more a multi-headed organism.

Obviously there's work still being made by people. When does Resistance through Rituals happen at WestSpace?

At the same time as mMa. It opens on the 24th of June.

They've developed out of each other, really, which is really nice, and I like the de-centering that will happen through having things split between Westspace and Clubs. mMa will be present at WestSpace as well, in a small way. Bianca's talking

about perhaps the publication that will be produced or some element of mMa being present. So there'll be a nice connection that throws out to Clubs and links in with a lot of active stuff that will be happening at the time.

It's set up a model of being more like circulation than something happening in the centre and emanating out.

Yes, I hope so. I think it's got the potential to work really well like that.

Are there any contingencies that you're worried about or excited about or about which you completely have no idea what will happen?

I suppose it's always kind of spontaneous. There's always that real kind of alchemy or dynamic that can develop in space as you set up a show that is really about things coming together in that time and space, figuring out the logistics and the dynamics of that. So that's the main part of the work to be done, in terms of realising it as a show. That's something to look forward to.

I guess the catalogue or the publication is something that's still in development. All the written material and imagery has been submitted and it's with the designer now. That's also a really interesting complement to the project. I think it's going to be a really interesting document. That's been the bulk of the most recent work, so far. I've been writing and couple of other people have been writing and I've also developed a collaborative text with Bianca that we put together for the publication. That's played a really strong role in developing and informing the project. Writing is a really good way to find out what you think about something.

It sounds as if the document is positioned quite well as a document of the project itself rather than of the result or the product that is in the public space.

It's very much all the artists participating in projects speaking for themselves of their position and their practice. It doesn't fix it to this time and event. I think it will be an interesting resource and informative document on a range of different active and exciting practices that are going on.

One of the reasons that I've become involved, within my practice, in this type of interviewing is that I've been writing catalogue essays for the public presentation of collaborative studio projects. They've been really odd documents in the past because I'd written about the public presentation of the work before it actually

happened, which I think is the case with a lot of catalogue essays.

I don't think that's what was required of me, there was just a very funny logic to it that made me think that's what should happen. Since then, I've realised it was an extraordinary exercise in fiction, really.

I haven't done that kind of writing myself but I've been around people that have and it's a strange projection. There's an awkwardness which I think is determined by the way that organisation and logistical project management and realisation has to happen these days in terms of the production line of making projects happen. That kind of pre-determination is really difficult and awkward to manage and I think it's nice to come back to more grounded and present practices and to own that space and time around what you're doing. I guess I'm talking about the way that institutions have to manage producing things. It can get quite disembodied from the actual core of the practice or what's supposed to be going on.

I think it's really great that your project, through Westspace, is reasserting the practice as the central part of the project because I think that even artist run spaces and initiatives can, in order to emulate institutions or to adopt a kind of professionalism, easily fall into that type of scenario.

I talked about that a lot in that essay that I spoke about. It's something that I've had experience of myself, running an artist run space and seeing my peers in other spaces around me. At the time I felt a real frustration with that emulation, that professionalism that sets in. It's understandable to some degree because you want to be seen for what you're doing, to get that regard.

You can do both. Professionalism is possible while creating a different and a unique position and perspective and I think there are lots of people doing that, which is really exciting. Clubs especially, I'm really inspired by.

I think there's some really exciting things happening. I'd really love to read your essay.

It was in a publication that was put together by an artist run space that was operational here back in 2000, called *Elastic*. They did a printed project that they assembled last year.

That's a good document too. They did a really good job. It was a very long term project with quite a large organising committee. The way they ran their space was that they had a core committee

of between five and ten people and each of those people invited people to organise shows. That's the way they managed their exhibition program and they did the same within the book. Each person invited other people to develop a chapter in the book. It's quite an interesting mix of visual work and writing.

Do you think from what you've told me that I've got a good idea of what you're planning to do?

Yes, I think so.

That will grow, obviously, when I've seen your document.

It's still in the growing stage, definitely. And then, I think, there will be a lot of work (not last minute) that will happen in that space for the project to really come together.

And your transcripts will be part of *mMa*?

*Yes, more or less. At this point, I've got no plans for a public presentation of the project. I think in the context of *mMa* the transcripts actually have a purpose but I'm hoping that it won't be obvious that they're the record of an interview. I'm really not yet sure about the shape they're going to take.*

I'm really excited about the levels of interaction and all the people involved in *mMa*.

It has been really exciting. I think there will be a couple of people that I'll interview that I know, some quite well and some hardly at all. But so far they've been people I've never met before and whose projects are amazing and really stimulating. It's such a rare, really indulgent exercise for me. It's really fascinating to have these conversations with people.

That's really great. It sounds like there's a real potential to raise awareness and the depth of knowledge about other people's practices. It's hard to get that looking at exhibitions sometimes.

Yes, absolutely. Often even just in normal friendships with other people in contemporary art communities, you don't necessarily have that type of conversation on a regular basis.

It sometimes needs a bit of a formal or a more conscious kind of construct to get people to engage on that level. It's something that I've been thinking about a lot, especially in Sydney. There's a real need for more of that up here at the moment. Anything that gets people together and talking about stuff is really fabulous, I think.