

# Miscellaneous documents

## Interview project, May – July 2004

in conjunction with multiple MISCELLANEOUS alliances (mMa)

Edited transcript of a conversation between Stuart Ringholt and Elizabeth Boyce regarding Stuart's participation in mMa

*Elizabeth Boyce*  
Stuart Ringholt

*I'm just trying to find out what you're planning to do in relation to this project: what your ideas are at this stage, the history of those ideas to a certain extent, and the future of them. So, the first question is "What are you planning or thinking of doing for mMa?"*

My involvement in mMa will revolve around public workshops - direct interaction with the public. I've only been thinking about it in the last two days.

At Gertrude [Contemporary Art Spaces], across the street from where mMa will go up, I had an exhibition called *Crimes of the Apple Worms*. That involved a public workshop, which was called *Funny Fear Workshop*. Last Saturday was the culmination of those public workshops. So, what happened with that is very fresh in my mind.

I have an audio recording of, say, three hours of conversations between about a dozen people who took part. We had a dozen people come to one of the workshops, which was great. There were some very brave people that were involved. We spoke about the nature of embarrassment. We got people to think about the nature of their fears and to share those with the group. And people did that. Well, a couple of people did. One guy was very up front and very brave and honest and revealing with what he came out with. So we developed some strategies for him.

I imagine I'll have some kind of archive of the workshops, either still images (there's some video) or a sound recording. Possibly, I might develop a new workshop for mMa as well.

*What are you thinking about at the moment in relation to that workshop?*

I came up with an idea yesterday, and the idea was a yoga/jeans workshop. It's called *Yoga Jeans*.

*Like doing yoga wearing your jeans?*

Not quite. Yoga and jeans are two words that aren't commonly used together.

I have an idea about measuring people's postures, their flexibility. Once I've measured their flexibility in a particular pose - a yoga asana or something like that - the idea is to transfer that into fashion. So, develop a new style of jeans that reflects the flexibility of each individual.

*With what unit are you going to be measuring flexibility?*

Well, for instance, in one particular pose, which is sitting on the floor with one's legs apart, some people may be able to do the splits. So, they'll have an extension of 180 degrees but many of us will have an extension of 20 degrees. So, that angle will be cut out of a piece of denim and will be attached between people's legs. That was the idea for the workshop. It will be a sewing workshop and people will have a new, original fashion piece at the end of it. That was the idea.

So, we might have some new fashion accessories. Well, it's not a fashion accessory. It's fun and it will get people thinking about the nature of their bodies and how that's expressed in what they wear - a reminder of their bodies. That was the idea, but I don't know.

*It's quite amusing in relation to the nature of denim, in that it stretches.*

It doesn't stretch. Does it?

*Stretch denim seems to have the capacity to stretch and come back into shape when it's washed, whereas ordinary denim bags out. You know when the knees and the seat of your jeans bag out? It stretches but it doesn't come back.*

Ok. I don't know much about denim. I personally don't like wearing denim. I find it really constricting and uncomfortable. I wear really loose, baggy clothes which probably don't look so good. My girlfriend wants me always to wear tighter fitting clothes or jeans and I kind of refuse to do it because they're not comfortable. I want to bring these two things together, but I'm not sure.

So, what do you think of the idea?

*I think it's really great.*

*I didn't relate you to the project that I read about, the embarrassment one, but I was really curious about that just because of the overlapping with different disciplines like qualitative research or psychology practices. I'm quite curious about the way that art practice relates to those kind of disciplines, probably from the perspective of my own practice.*

*There's an amount of embarrassment that could come out of this new workshop idea as well. You know, not everybody's comfortable with their bodies to the same degree. I guess you wouldn't participate to you if you weren't.*

I'm not sure. I mean, if you read a poster and it says, "Yoga Jeans Sewing Workshop"... as simple as that.

*If that appealed to you, you'd go.*

Yes. I'm not sure how much information I need to provide, that it will be about measuring people's bodies and so forth. I suppose I just present the ideas and if people are embarrassed or mortified by the whole thing or just think I'm just stupid or crazy or whatever...

I think it will be fun. I could start this thing as a sculpture project in the studio by myself before I've even made a pair of jeans or I could do it with strangers and see what happens. It will be fun. We'll all make a pair of jeans each.

*I suppose that interaction leads to new angles of the idea being revealed to you that you wouldn't discover in the studio on your own.*

Yes. But that was my idea and I just had it yesterday.

*So, it's a new idea, but not so much in relation to the process because you've had lots of interaction with the public in projects before?*

Not a great deal. I'm really interested in working with the public. I've exhibited in shopping centres. I'm really interested in working with laymen, the kind of people that aren't art educated.

*Will you have a series of workshops or just a single one?*

I think just a single one. For *Funny Fear Workshop*, I planned two workshops and three people came to the first. They felt, I guess, self conscious because they'd wanted to participate in a larger group. I was willing to do the workshop with just three people but they didn't want to and so only one workshop took place.

Two of those people didn't come to the second workshop, which was strange. Well, not strange, I guess. They were kind of quizzing me, "What are we going to do?" So, I guess I'll just do one workshop.

It's just advertising it, getting it out there, getting people to come, getting the local newspaper involved and radio. Radio's good. From talking on radio I had a few people come to *Funny Fear Workshop* but it's difficult getting people to do anything. Well, what the heck, you put a poster on the wall and just see what happens.

*It's probably too early to tell how the idea might change.*

Yes. It mightn't change at all. It might just be *Yoga Jeans Workshop* and we'll just run with it. We'll see.

*It's quite exciting to have an experiment like that and just invite the public along.*

It's nice. Yeah, it's nice.

*When you're making objects there can be a preciousness about making something absolutely the quintessence of the idea that you envisaged at the beginning; it has to be the perfect expression of that idea. There's something quite nice about doing something that is a very imperfect expression of this idea. "I'm just going to try this today."*

Yes, that's the kind of angle. It's clunky and it's rough but if people do attend this workshop if it happens, and if I present it so that people can bring their own ideas as well, then they might think of doing a Yoga Jacket instead.

*They might say, "Can you measure my Downward Dog? It's much better."*

Exactly. "Can you measure my Downward Dog?" Yes.

*Do you know what date it's going to be?*

Well, I haven't even looked at that. Hopefully there's a public holiday because people enjoy their public holiday.

*If I'm on town I'll see if I can come along. I find the idea, as a participant, a little bit scary.*

Really? What would you find scary about it?

*Well, I have a fear of humiliation.*

I think this is perfectly safe, this workshop. I mean, for the last workshop I was asking people to self-humiliate, literally. This one, this is just about fun. I don't want to set out to humiliate anyone.

There's going to be some sewing machines there. People will bring along a couple of old pairs of jeans and we cut them up and reconfigure them and then we could walk them out the door.

I wouldn't think people would be too self-conscious about coming to it. But I guess they could be. That's the nature of anything with strangers in a group with a strange idea, I guess.

*How do you envisage the jeans will be reconfigured? You'll get this angle...*

It's like a skirt. People will be kind of wearing a skirt.

*Yes. But do you then use the rest of the jeans that you haven't cut out. You cut out a piece and then what happens to the rest of them, the abandoned pair of jeans?*

Well, it depends on people's flexibility. If you're inflexible, you might only need to pull one pair of jeans together and use one leg or something, but if you're really flexible you'll need quite a lot of denim.

*So, you have to really cut them up and sew them back together.*

Yes, sew them back together, or you could actually make the jeans from scratch. But that's a larger project. I haven't figured the logistics out.

*Its sounds a little like the logistics will be figured out on the site.*

That would be nice.

*I'm just trying to understand, at this point in time, what your idea is. Do you think you've told me enough to explain that, or is there anything else you need to convey? I feel like I know what you're planning to do.*

That's good then. [Laughs]

*It might be presumptuous.*

I don't think so. I think it's a fairly simple idea.

I've recently been interested in fashion. I'd love to attend a fashion presentation where people walk down the catwalk but I don't have those sorts of contacts. People are making these really weird clothes and I think, "Well, I want to be a part of that as well."

I'm not sure about the history as to whether fashion represents individuals' flexibility or the nature of their body, the inner dynamic of the body, the health of the body or the ill health of the body. You could maybe tell a lot about a person through what

they are wearing, through the development of this pair of jeans.

*I can't imagine many garments that would. The history of fashion's often more about the containment of an individual in a more generic costume rather than something specific. Maybe tailoring? A tailored riding suit, I suppose? I can't think of a garment that has much to do with the inner workings of the body.*

Maybe I'm going to become the doyen of the Melbourne fashion scene.

*A pioneer.*

That would be funny, wouldn't it?

*That would be excellent. Maybe it's the beginning of something very extravagant for you.*

Maybe. Yes, maybe it will be a jacket or jeans or a cape sort of thing. I don't know. It's funny. That's the motivation for it. It seems quite humorous or entertaining but it works on another level as well.

#### **[Break in recording during conversation about ideas and yoga]**

In that meditation afterwards you can get a massive flow of creative ideas. Have you found that?

*It's like a state when you're a bit submerged. Do you mean when you think you might be half asleep or do you mean after the class altogether?*

You've spent an hour and a half doing all the asanas and often after that the teacher will get you to do a relaxation, which will be a ten minute meditation. Often I find that I'm probably not relaxing and not meditating and I just get a massive rush of ideas. It isn't so similar to thinking. It comes in a feeling sort of way.

Maybe this is the connection with this project in some ways.

In the early days you'd take drugs and things like that, smoke pot in your early twenties. I thought, "That's where you get ideas from". But I don't think that's the case. By having really good circulation through doing yoga or exercising or looking after your body, that that actually increases the flow of ideas and increases the creativity level.

*I don't so much after yoga but I walk a lot, quite long distances and I also ride as well.*

And ideas come out of that?

*Yes, just out of when the exercise starts to become rhythmic and automatic and you are really in the place that you're in. It's good. But in yoga, I kind of go to sleep at the end of the class.*

Would it be an interesting question to ask, "The best ideas, do they come through physicality or do good ones also come from just being at a desk, drinking coffee and smoking cigarettes or something?"

*I don't know.*

Or both, I imagine.

*In a way I'm not interested in what the best ideas are.*

*I'm perhaps interested in the way they change or the parts of the ideas that are discarded. They don't work or for some reason they just seem impractical.*

Why do they interest you?

*It probably comes from thinking about all of those ideas that I haven't pursued, which are probably in my notebooks and that kind of thing. I don't know whether they're good ideas or not but I suppose I'm more interested in finding out why I don't choose to pursue those particular ideas. Do they not fit into a particular context or are they too much hard work?*

I remember I did an exhibition a few years ago. I worked for two years on this exhibition and it was quite a big gallery space, so I decided to exhibit everything I'd made in those two years. I'd initially approached the exhibition by designing what would go there and that enters into the creative process as to what will get created. So I decided, "What the heck, I'm going to exhibit all the bastards as well". You know, all the sculptures that don't work and that are ugly. I put them amongst highly refined and highly developed sculptures that have taken a lot of time and were pure in a sense. It was good.

*Did you feel pretty comfortable with the result?*

Yes, it was me getting interested in embarrassment as well, not to be embarrassed by it. It was about accepting failures and things like that. I saw the positive side in things.

*I'm very interested in the activity of making things and what goes on, what the interaction is and what the relation is: what actually happens. Not in a navel gazing way but more in a community oriented way.*

*I would never have put it in terms of embarrassment before. [I think about] the exhibitionism or the performative nature of making work in a community, how your sense of self doubt, your need to fulfil a certain expectation or your ideas of other people's expectations might influence what you show or produce.*

*This project itself is a very new idea too. It arose just last week because of the speed at which mMa's cropped up. It's kind of a nice project in that way; it's got lots of unfinished, unresolved, experimental aspects to it.*

Yes, that's the good thing about it if you consider work being an experiment. You don't have to think about it too much, you can just sort of go and do it. "Ok. I've got this idea about interviewing people" and then just go and do it. Commit yourself, because otherwise you might not do it and you miss out on those opportunities. There's something to be said for the first idea.

*So you think there's something to be said for adopting the first idea you have, the first wacky idea that comes along? You think, "Oh yeah, I'll try that one out."*

Yes. My experience has been that those ideas, if they're relevant for your process or for your artistic practice, will re-occur all the time. They'll keep coming up. Is that your experience?

*So you shouldn't worry about losing by not pursuing them?*

Yes.

*I often find with a particular idea that when I look back I'm glad I didn't pursue it. It might have seemed like a good idea at the time but lack of energy makes me think that...*

It was never...

Yes.

I'm trying to think whether I've been glad that I've not pursued something. I don't know.

*It's because the act of pursuing idea will send you down a particular path of thinking and exploration. It doesn't necessarily close off other pathways but it has that effect in a way, because you're busy doing something else.*

Yes.

*I reckon we've probably wrung every drop out of that.*

Dry towel. Good.

*Yep. Excellent.*