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This is an edited version of a talk I gave as part of the *Situation* forum at the MCA in June 2005, on 'audience and accessibility'.

Go to <http://www.squatspace.com/situation/> to access and contribute to an ongoing dialogue which has emerged from the *Situation* show.

When the artists in *Situation* conducted an online forum earlier this year, one of the concerns raised was how the work and our activities were going to be made available and accessible to the general public.

I can see how audience accessibility is intrinsic to many of the projects represented in *Situation* – making art with public input and involvement breaks down and challenges the rarefied nature of the art object, usually seen to be created by the 'genius' artist in special and isolated circumstances. The role of the art object and the notion of 'the artist' are challenged and questioned, among other things, via audience involvement.

However, when questions about public accessibility to our activities in *Situation* came up, my instinctive response in regards to my own work and activities was that I didn't care about audience accessibility; in fact I didn't want to make my activities accessible to the general public – I wanted my meetings and dealings with the artists in the show to belong to us, rather than be mediated through the institution of the museum, or viewable to the general public. I didn't discuss this point fully in the online forum, and I'd like to do so here.

I don't want my response to accessibility to be confused with a sense of exclusivity: when my partner and I ran a gallery, *Front Room*, in our house for two years, at the end of every opening my partner Jay Balbi would go around to all those left and invite them into the house for dinner, regardless of how many people that meant we ended up hosting. Therefore at one of our dinners you could end up sitting next to and sharing a meal with a student, a sailor, a builder, or an academic, but most probably an artist – we didn't discriminate or exclude, and this was important to us and the gallery's ideology.

These issues of exclusiveness and inclusiveness, or accessibility or non-accessibility, can be contradictory and therefore difficult to talk about; for example, while I believed we were being inclusive at *Front Room*, it came back to me when the project was over that some artists had viewed it as a cliquy scene; so you can aim for or believe you're doing one thing, but achieve the opposite result. In the same way, I find it hard to discuss these issues of accessibility without immediately contradicting myself.

My inclusion in *Situation* is via a magazine I produce called *Lives of the Artists*. One of the many reasons I began the magazine was that I felt that when a collector, or audience, has an interest in the work of an artist, it can go beyond the object itself, beyond the product of the artist, and into the life and activities of that artist; indeed, in terms of the art market and collecting art objects, I think the best and most passionate collectors will want to get to know the artist they collect, and support that artist through continued collecting of and interest in their work. So I thought that to focus on artist's lives was to look at this area as almost a commodity in itself.

Another reason I began to publish the magazine, was that I personally am interested in reading about people's lives generally, and in the humdrum ordinariness of their existence. Another reason was to make un-famous artists famous, to treat them as celebrities.

In regards to accessibility and audiences for our activities, my magazine does not function well in terms of reaching a wide readership. I produce less than a hundred copies of each issue, I don't distribute it, and I have a subscriber list of six people, and this is more than enough for me to cope with. The thing is, I'm an

artist, not a magazine publisher, and if *Lives of the Artists* ever became as large and widespread as, say, *New Weekly* magazine, I don't think I would be interested in doing it any more. So I see my magazine as a kind of simulation of a magazine, where I try to make the content as readable and populist as possible, like a popular magazine, but keep it as an artwork, within an art context.

The actual lives of artists are really quite mundane. *Situation* focuses on a number of artists who do not produce art objects at all as their work; the art is their activities and networking. If you look at the reality of this kind of art, you will see it is no different to the activities of most people in ordinary life – it consists often of sitting at a computer and sending emails, laying out publications, scanning documents, organising events, making phone calls, etc - nothing different to the activities of an ordinary office worker, or a florist sweeping the floor at the end of the day. What's there to see, and what is so special?

Since the Museum is supporting and representing our activities, it must be somehow important that this activity exists. And since people are turning up to see what we do, there must be something in it. However this activity is going to occur whether there is an audience for it or not, and in a way I feel it is important that as artists we keep these things to ourselves – not in the sense that we are excluding others, but in the sense that we don't do things with the sole aim of people seeing them. To conduct art activity simply in order that it be validated by an institution and seen by a large audience is to somehow devalue it.

When I call Sarah Goffman and we discuss the state of our kitchen floors, how we clean them, or that we don't have time to clean them, it is unimportant – but to me it may be important to record it in my magazine. I don't have this conversation in order that people hear it or read it, but I still record it. Perhaps it is the recording of these things that is important – the gallery is recording the fact that these things are going on via this exhibition *Situation*. The audience for a gallery is already there – art is set up as something people can go and see or do with their time. Do they really want to know what is going on, or are they just here because they know that the museum exists?

Within the art world in Sydney, even among artist run spaces, I find there can be a general apathy in regard to new projects or ideas. And I have also been aware of a kind of a lack of support, or even complete mistrust or competitiveness against artist run projects on the part of commercial galleries and institutions here. To me, these attitudes are the ones that need to change before I can worry about whether the wider public are interested in our projects or not.

As I mentioned earlier, this subject is hard to talk about; art will occur whether there's an audience or not, and members of the public who are interested enough can easily find out what's going on if they look for it, so I don't feel the need to make any special effort to show them what I'm doing – actually I feel there's something more interesting and special about work and artist activity that occurs privately and away from the public eye. At the same time, I recognise that I (and all the other artists I know) would prefer that their work was seen by an audience than not seen at all. Perhaps all I can really say on the subject of audience and accessibility in relation to art is that in the end, it's the intention of the artist in making their work that is most important, rather than whether the work is seen or accessible.