

Miscellaneous documents

Interview project, May – July 2004

in conjunction with multiple MISCELLANEOUS alliances (mMa)

Edited transcript of a conversation between Sanné Mestrom and Elizabeth Boyce regarding Sanné's participation in mMa

Elizabeth Boyce

Sanné Mestrom

I am interested in what you said about having written down your initial thoughts and not having re-read them. What's the sense you get from briefly reading them now?

I think my interest is still the same. This project conveniently ties in with my general framework of production of art.

I'm documenting certain parts of the gallery throughout two months or so, looking at different shows and the way that artists have chosen to arrange their work in the same space. I'm responding to the gallery space as a work in progress.

I'm interested in the way that certain people acknowledge the space as a site and other people just use it as a space to present their work, because my work's always site specific. Some people have a lot of disregard for the space and others really respect it as a space to work with.

So, I'm documenting people using that space differently and then I want perhaps to do a series of posters. For example, taking one section of the gallery and documenting exactly that same space six or eight times (or however many different times I can) with different artists using it.

In many photos, there may be nothing there. In other ones there may be lots of people and in other ones there may be a painting.

I'm generally interested in the relationship between the viewer and the site, or the artist and the site and the author (the gallery directors) and the site, and tracing or mapping out the interaction that occurs and addressing the way the public communicates.

I'm really interested in issues of authorship – the people who claim to own the space or the art in the space – and for my work to be about nothing to do with me other than the fact that I have a camera and a viewfinder staring at it. Even though I'm documenting other people's work, the author (myself, in this case) gets taken out of the picture in some way.

So, my work is actually a 'selection' of other people's work. No one really owns it.

What strategies do you use to effect that?

In general? I co-curated an exhibition at Seventh gallery a few years ago. It was about social exchange and interaction. There were fourteen artists doing small works on paper. The works weren't for sale; they were exchangeable. It was this idea of, "Who owns the artworks? Who decides what the value of the artworks is? What does the artwork actually mean?" The 'meaning' is the more in the interaction and the dialogue between artists and participants than in what goes on the wall – the outcome.

In my recent work, I've worked with text. I sample statements. It depends on the site I'm working with. I've done a few projects in Clubs where I've re-quoted the people who've worked there and taken samples of their comments out of context and painted them onto the wall. I use whatever dialogue is happening within and around that space and re-contextualise what's happening and try to disempower it or re-empower it or position the viewer somewhere in relation to this dialogue.

My interest in this project is in persistence. The person making the work has moved on but my documents are about something that I've chosen to persist.

I guess the author's a great deal more present in that type of process than in the one that you're proposing.

The author is always still present in my work and I very much acknowledge that.

Yes, and your selection of which space to document...

That's a huge part of it. Sometimes those spaces are incidental and are kind of given to me and at other times I really seek them out.

For a Clubs' project, I [painted the texts] "site of critical feedback" and "feedback of critical site". The viewer stands in the middle and tries to negotiate whether they are they giving the feedback or the

feedback has already been given to them. Who owns the feedback? Who owns the readings of that site? They're watercolour wall-paintings.

I very much respond to what's happening around me. The space and what's happening in the space is what informs my work: the documenting of what's going on.

I really like the nebulous nature of this indefinable exhibition, *mMa*. I like the fact that it can't be pinned down. There are a few artists kind of directing it but, essentially, there are almost no parameters to the extent of where it might go and the dialogues that might extend outside the exhibition – ongoing relationships and interactions. That's something that's really interesting.

Returning to this text that you've written, have your ideas changed since you wrote that?

Besides the fact that I'm trying to own an idea here, for me this is very concrete. It over simplifies the potential of the idea, I think, whereas now I feel a bit freer because there's less time than I thought I'd have. Somehow I need to make do with that and either take a lot of photos in the next few weeks or economise the imagery that I use. Somehow I'll need to work within this reduced time frame.

So the time frame's a contingency that is going to affect the outcome and change your proposal or your initial idea?

I'd like to extend it past *mMa* and let be a work in progress, an ongoing thing.

Will your documentation be presented within the context of Clubs or will it be outside of it? Online, perhaps?

I envisaged it being posters on a wall in a gallery. I'm sure I can come up with something a little bit more innovative. Initially I wanted to have six photos in that site I showed you, lining the site, and six photos in another part of the gallery. Maybe it would be interesting to have the photos in a different section of the gallery [to where they were taken] so they contradict [their location]. There are linkages that could run through the gallery. I'll have a photo of one site and then the documentation of another will be over here and so on, so the viewer will have to make those connections themselves by moving around the space.

So there's a dislocation between the images and the spatial relationships?

And the reading becomes more of a mental connection of ideas than visual information.

I've been asking people about how they think their projects might change given the contingencies of real time and space and other people being involved

But I'm not so interested in the development of an idea as I am in the failure of ideas, this sense that what you might write down, whether it's for a funding proposal or it's a draft idea of your own, is somewhat black-and-white and has an indulgent quality to it. It's a bit like a fantasy; it's what I might do. (But it's so often written in a very assertive and certain way. It asserts what the future will be – for sure. It seems to be the tone in which it's necessary to write those kind of documents.)

I'm interested in ideas in all of their rampant possibilities, and the clarity but confusion of their first inception. So, feel free to ramble on about all of the different kind of avenues that you're thinking of going down.

I would rather have more to do with some of the artists, like we are now. As multifaceted as it could be, I feel quite isolated [in the *mMa* project] and I'm sure many people do, besides those people that are doing your sort of interactive project. There are some really interesting artists in that group and I want to be working with them! I feel like it could go a lot further.

I could take the initiative and contact them but I'm so over-committed at the moment with other projects that it's unfortunate timing.

I don't know if you intend to do this at all, or if it's at all interesting to you, but it would be interesting for you to draw connections between the artists you've spoken to and make relationships, be they real or fictitious or presumptuous. I'd be interested and I'm sure all the other artists involved would be interested to have someone whose had an intimate dialogue with everybody say, "I really don't think your work's got anything to do with Jo Blogg's work but your ideas are similar to this artist in the way that you communicate your ideas", or "the outcome of your work is similar" or, "your personalities are similar". They can be quite personal sort of insights; you're in a very privileged position to make these connections.

That's a very interesting idea... [an edited transcript] is always somewhere in between fiction and documentation. If you give someone a sound recording, they will assume that it's documentary (it may not be), whereas a text really is ambiguous. The possibilities of invention seem so much more obvious.

Do you mind if I flick through your book?

Sure. I'll show you an exhibition that I've got on at the moment. I see texts in perspective in relationship to each other, trying to create virtual spaces, spaces that aren't really there.

Which is what a text does.

The interpretations of text, yes.

But a book could be considered a space, a three dimensional space that's...

Yes, exactly. Print media is one of the most interesting resources, or points, for me to jump from. There's another piece in here where I tear pieces out of the newspaper and look at them as sites. I'll show you the one I'm thinking of. These dots form a stereogram. When you hold it at a certain distance and cross your eyes, the dots jump in front of the page, which blurs in the background. It becomes a virtual reality.

Whenever we read an article we're actually very detached from the reality of what's going on within that article. This is a particularly sad one: "Who Was the Girl who Died in the Gutter". We have no idea but [the headline] simplifies such a complex person, death and scenario, so the dots do actually create quite a literal virtual reality in that they create a space that's not really there.

I'm really interested in text as site, creating virtual environments out of print. I'm really interested in linking new media technologies with watercolour, with quite old school fine-art practices. Rather than seeing virtual reality as this really quite incomprehensible computer thing, bringing it back into more traditional art forms.

A lot of those media do that, eventually. They start out as being new media and interesting to some people because of their newness but they become traditional media pretty quickly.

Yes and no. They can still be quite alienating. Even the internet is quite an alienating concept that we're all still coming to terms with. I feel as if there are no parameters; it seems infinite. That's a concept that I can't get my head around. I'm sure that if I can't there are others out there.

The internet is as profound – that sort of virtual reality – as perspective would have been in the Renaissance. The whole perception of space and the viewer's relationship to their environment and the way they see the world is altered. You can never go back. You can't ever pretend it hasn't happened. That really interests me.

Do you mind if I read your initial statement while I'm here?

No, of course not. Then I'll remember what's in there too!

"Outline Proposal: Clubs, Sanné Mestrom.

"I propose to document the work of various artists 'exhibiting' in Clubs during a given period of time during 2004. The aim is to explore artists'/viewers' changing relationships to and engagement with the transient nature of the project space. This will be represented in book or poster format.

"I propose to photograph in order to document certain physical sections within Clubs during each show that is held in the space over a given period of time: 3 months. I will then represent this information in a hybrid of graphic ways, drawing together visual components of various projects to open up a conceptual space for creative reinterpretations of the space/people that inhabit it. The sections I document for each show may include, for example: a particular corner of the main room, a section of the back wall, a space around the window.

"I'm interested in the ways that some artists will acknowledge certain parts of the space, internal and external, and ignore others in their pursuit to communicate their ideas, whether it be performative or installation-based or graphic.

"Referencing the ever-changing social, physical, cultural nature of the project space, my intention is to set up a range of possible relationships between the various projects which have been created specifically for Clubs. Dislocating the representational values of the images or re-presentations of the work of other artists will take the previous projects out of their intended context and place them in a new conceptual framework. Re-contextualising the works opens up spaces for conceptual reinterpretation.

"This representation will include various visual diagrams of the images taken in the space chronicling changes to the space over time. These images may be collated in book or poster form, representing information from various projects in 2D graphic form, inviting the viewer to renegotiate her relationship to the space and the projects/people that have occupied it over a certain period.

"The work will become almost an archive of time and space, documenting habitation and interpretation of the space. Reflecting the transient usage and readings of the space, the documentation will not be about the work that is produced in the space so much as the ways in which people – artists and viewers – choose to engage with the space physically and conceptually."

It's very wordy, isn't it? But I do feel that it still makes sense. So, my ideas haven't changed that much.

How do you choose the spaces that you document?

This was the first roll of film. [Opens a folder of photographs]. They're just corners and walls, doors, anything boring or interesting – a range. I prefer the ones that don't have too much information. I prefer something like this, which is in a corner. It will be empty in others whereas at every opening I'm sure that there'll be people. So [I'm interested in] having sections that are not going to be occupied by viewers.

Will you now arbitrarily document each location that you've documented here, or will you choose sections and document only those?

I'll choose a section or about six or eight sections. I've only done it twice since so I have to get back there and do some more. But there are only four shows until *mMa*.

I need to more or less guess the height of my tripod. And, yes, it's not going to be perfect. I look through my viewfinder and think, "Yes, that looks kind of like the template images".

I wonder if they'll be quite apparent, those slight difference of framing and light.

It's something that's a little bit un-me, because I do like things to be quite perfect. Well, I don't know about the word, "perfect" but I do like to control exactly what I'm doing. So it will be interesting how I edit the images. I'll probably end up Photoshopping them and trying to get them to look like they have been taken from exactly the same spot. And if that is incredibly unachievable, then I'll make a dramatic difference and use that.

I suppose that, aesthetically, the images are a bit out of your control because the use of spaces...

...and the time of the day that I can be there. At night time everything changes. In the daytime there's a lot of light coming in so the images can be quite silhouetted. It can be quite overexposed and at other times it will be underexposed. I quite like that inconsistency in light source and that sort of thing.

Do you think I understand enough of what your plans are at this point?

Do you?

Yes. You've told me enough.

Yes, I think so. It's a fairly simple project.