

## **FIVE POINTS OF VIEW**

Charlotte Day and Bianca Hester

### **ONE**

(Charlotte Day) Can we start with your title for this exhibition? It seems to me that it's a particularly apt description of how you conceive of the relationship between the gallery space and the external world, but it also reflects on your working methodology and the importance of openness to your practice more generally

(Bianca Hester) I stumbled across this text in the Melbourne University architecture library on a hot summer's day in 2007. The sign was pinned to a window that was left ajar above the photocopy machine. I was struck by the relationship the text has to time, inhuman forces and architecture — and to the interdependence between interiors and exteriors. But also, especially, to the intimate relationship between the human body and the constructed world in which we are enmeshed — a world from which we extract, develop, destroy, tend to maintain and inhabit in various ways. I took a photograph of this text without knowing what to do with it at the time. As the current project developed it became more obvious that the text needed to be re-contextualised as a title, not only because it connects with the main elements that are engaged with by the project (i.e., architecture, the body, time, change and process), but also because I'm becoming more interested in working with titles as texts in themselves, as provocations that open things up rather than clarifying or pinning things down.

Concerning the gallery space, I try and approach it more like an opportunity (both in a spatial and a temporal sense) to do something that I could *never* otherwise do within my domestic, working or public environments for reasons of scale, access and function. This approach — of thinking of an exhibition as an opportunity — has developed primarily through the experience of working in artist-run environments in an organisational capacity, where you gain a great deal of access to space. So this spirit of 'access', or of attempting to open and occupy space in ways other than those necessarily prescribed, has continued to be a current running through my working processes. In many ways, the question of working within this spatial opportunity has become a question of engagement, of experimenting with ways to engage with the limits provided by the space and then testing how to open this engagement up to others. Each project I've made since 1999 has more or less involved being physically present in the space of presentation/exhibition, involving actions such as working within it, hosting a project, maintaining it or performing within it. Also, I don't make work that is ultimately positioned that I walk away from as finished or complete. Instead the work is structured around ongoing processes and usually undergoes a series of shifts within the framework of its presentation. It therefore demands that I (and others) become present with or within it, or at least with a part of it.

So I guess this idea of access connects to your point regarding 'openness'. I wonder if you could specify more for me what you mean by openness? I'm assuming that you are referring to the way the project opens up to the involvement of others?

### **TWO**

The openness is, yes, 'an openness' to the involvement of other people, although I don't think it is necessarily easily accessible to all people. (Maybe we can come back to this point?) I like your idea of 'opportunity', which is more positive than the broader notion of possibilities, and I could see it operating in the way you occupied the gallery space during the 10 days of installation prior to the opening. It felt like a studio space, with you casting, sewing, constructing, painting. During this time I was particularly struck with how you remained open about what would be included in the final exhibition — the structure before its occupation by these others. I felt that you held on to this openness for as long as you possibly could! And that you were also open to considering others' opinions of what it might look like. I hadn't experienced such openness put into real practice before.

I think of and engage with the process of making/production/construction as ongoing. The event of installation and exhibition is as much a part of the process of production as preparing the work beforehand. Actually, much of the thinking and working things out takes place onsite, in those few days before opening and then beyond. As an example of the work feeding into an ongoing process, over the last couple of years I've attempted to include the process of documenting/recording as a part of the project, not as something outside of it, but a performative action in itself. This became full-blown in this work, to the point that purpose-built structures (those blue, metal camera arms and moveable dollies) were made specifically for the recording process and to become a self-conscious part of the work. They were employed to partially capture events as they occurred, with the idea that the footage would be used later on in another project — one thing therefore feeds into another and becomes part of a longer term practice.

Remaining open — to things changing, being re-worked, and to the suggestion of others; both during and then beyond the installation of the work arises from my interest in what I've recently come to understand as a 'progressive method' (by the way, I borrow this term right now from the title of Charlie Sofo's current blog). This strategy has largely been intuitive and 'native' to my working methodology since beginning a practice, but it seems appropriate or useful to name it here. I recently heard someone on late-night radio discussing what it means to engage with processes progressively. They discussed an approach that was responsive — responsive to change, to the unknown or the unforeseeable, that which enters and which you either ignore or block (or tolerate), or to which you respond to in a way that allows that other (person, thing, force — whatever) to transform you.

I'm interested in this generative, proliferating potential of process, and running with that as far as you can. I'm also interested in absorbing the generative potential in encountering what absolutely cannot be foreseen. For me, things don't *really* happen until I get out of the studio and into the situation (in this particular case, the gallery space). This situation presents a whole lot of forces/events to encounter and engage with, and so it's crucial to respond to them as they arise.

I'm also really interested in the fact that you can only 'think' or imagine something to a certain degree; in your mind things are quite abstract and without limitation. But in a real situation there are forces to be reckoned with that you absolutely cannot foresee, which you must grapple with onsite. This is exciting! It's about dealing with the specificity of a spatial, social and temporal situation, the specificity of which reveals itself through a localised embodied engagement. I'm also open to sacrificing my preconceived ideas about how something should end up or be resolved. I want to work that out in the process of being in the middle<sup>1</sup> of a situation. I guess this relates to where I choose to position myself in terms of the question of authorship and the related issues of 'intent'. I see my position much more as being in the midst of a network of relations than at a point of origin.

And then in terms of the involvement of other people: well this practice has emerged from a deeply shared, long-term discussion with a few people — namely Spiros Panigirakis, Scott Mitchell, Lisa Kelly, Saskia Schut, Lucas Ihlein and Terri Bird. I regard what I do as extending and inflecting the dialogue that develops from these relationships. So it is really important that they are involved in part of the process somewhere along the line — not all of them of course, but some of them, some of the time.

### THREE

I get the sense that the people you mention are a ground force or anchor point for a practice that is contingent by nature. I wonder if it would be possible to maintain such openness without such support? Spiros et al. have also been an important audience — maybe that's the wrong word — for your practice. You have generated a lot of your own exhibitions and contexts for

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<sup>1</sup> The middle is the place where multiple forces converge – articulating a swarm of relations: Upon this idea Ronald Bogue writes: “a theory of revolution that is based neither on beginnings (the conquest of the old system) nor on ends (the implementation of a new system) but on middles...the space(s) in between, the unpredictable interstices of process, movement and invention” (Bogue, 1989: p.105)

showing, along with other colleagues involved through such ARIs as CLUBSproject. This commission for ACCA has opened up and exposed your practice to a broader audience for the first time. (Note: Bianca previously exhibited in the group exhibition *A Molecular History of Everything\** (\*Well Not Everything) in 2004–05, but this is her first solo project at ACCA). What has this meant for you and how you approached the opportunity?

The openness definitely relates to the social context. What do you think? As a very particular kind of participant-observer yourself, do you think that the openness might be able to be maintained without such support?

I'm sure it could be but I think that it is relevant, too, that the genesis has come from a particular set of relations.

I guess I've never made projects that don't, in some way draw from the involvement of people in some way or another. It's been built into the practice. It doesn't seem special or extra in any way. It's just how it is for this practice. I think most practices do draw from some kind of support base — simply through being involved in something that is larger than yourself or being connected to groups of people that are engaged in something similar to you, like studio neighbours, students, peers, mentors or whatever. This only expands and deepens as you keep working. I think it would be a fantasy to pretend otherwise — that our work does not emerge from a series of connections — whether these are made with people in a contemporary sense or made with work and ideas from deep within history. For me, this is also about where I choose to locate 'subjectivity'; I don't position myself as a subject that is separate, but one located absolutely in the middle, forged through the relations that compose it, saturate it.

I've always brought this idea of a support group into the foreground. But this does not come from a desire to remain safe within a well-defined clique or clan. This is about trying to acknowledge the larger matrix of ideas that one draws from and contributes to — a living culture<sup>2</sup>. This is a separate issue, though, to opening up the work to 'others', unknown others, a broader audience.

I don't produce work for an audience in the sense that I don't try to cater for an abstract construct or a supposedly 'given' entity. I don't believe that there is an absolute entity that is 'the audience'; rather, it is composed of a stream of individuals. Also I think that an audience is shaped in the moments that it encounters/perceives/engages with a work. It is formed in the process — as is meaning and knowledge.. Each individual brings their own experience, modes of perception, assumptions, expectations and knowledge to each and every 'art work' (or any phenomenon) that they encounter. I think of each person who comes to view/engage with a work as a force; this force encounters the force of the work in relationship to the force of the institution, and something happens in that event. What happens is different each and every time. I attempt to make work that operates on a multiplicity of levels so that different people can engage with it differently, or get something from it that would inevitably be different and dependent upon the frame of reference or experience that they bring to the work.

One of the ways that I've approached the work at ACCA differently — in relation to the question of 'audiences' — is through involving the paid invigilators, who host the show on a day-to-day basis. I tried to acknowledge their presence and function (which I was thinking of as performative — they perform a very particular role, as does the work), and so I wrote a set of actions for the invigilators. I tried to locate the invigilators within the work rather than outside the frame. This was definitely an opportunity that I haven't had access to before — working with a willing staff body.

#### **FOUR**

Yes, perhaps with the exception of Martin Creed's *Lights Off*, your project has involved invigilators in a more proactive and performative way than would normally be required of

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<sup>2</sup> 'Living culture' is an idea developed by the Danish Situationist Asger Jorn, to acknowledge that individual production is inseparable from the collective experiences of a community that lives through an engagement with its ideas and processes.

invigilators. Although, in reality, they are always the public interface with the work, and here their role is really important and it is significant for both ACCA and your practice to bring their role into the foreground!

Do the actions come before or after the installation component? I have noticed that some have appeared and then reappeared across different projects. How do you determine them?

Some of the actions were appropriated and developed from a performance made in Adelaide in 2008<sup>3</sup>. In particular, one of the instructions was to *lie down*. Other actions developed in response to the institutional context in which the work was taking place. While some have developed from observing movements that occur in the world on a regular basis; for example, waiting at the traffic lights one day and witnessing a team of construction workers do their thing according to a whistle being blown by the foreman. A golden moment! I loved the potential of appropriating this simple action. Much of my work is sampled from disconnected observations and events that occur in the world which are then redefined by being built into other contexts (the large brick wall is another, more obviously 'material' example of this).

Actually, the action of *lying down*, although developed from a previous work, also emerges from a series of observations of people lying down in different situations. For example, while traveling through eastern Africa earlier this year I was struck by the many numbers of people lying down, resting, seemingly wherever, in public space — particularly on nature strips. This also happens in places like Spain, but there are often infrastructures built to enable and accommodate this, such as fantastically long stone benches that define the perimeter of public spaces. Lying down in public is a kind of assertion of the body's need, an act that gives the body a moment to rest. I am starting to think of lying down in public as an act of privileging the body and celebrating a mode of passivity or inactivity, in some sense in resistance to the upright and productive one.

In terms of the ACCA work, it was a gesture that was scripted as a way to give a counterpoint to the more obviously 'active' body that was implied or summoned. The work demanded an obvious physicality: by redefining the space in a way that beckoned you to walk into it and around it; or through the example of the ring of grey besser blocks that ran around the space's perimeter, to sit in and on it; or through taking up other suggested engagements, like kicking a ball. So requesting particular people to *lie down* within and on parts of the work (wherever they chose to) was an attempt to assert a kind of physicality different to the more functional or 'engaged' body present within the work.

## FIVE

Although your work is sculptural, you avoid the status of the unique or precious object through mixing up found with made objects, reproducing an object multiple times through casting it, moving objects in and out of an installation and so on. It seems to me, you also actively avoid the application of a specific meaning or reading of your work and that your practice doesn't fit neatly into common thematic structures. So do you see your particular approach to art making as a political stance or one that's at odds with much art around it, and here I'm thinking specifically of the contemporary art market and how your practice connects to that of an earlier generation, specifically to art of the 1960s?

The work develops from an affirmation of the partial and process-based or durational nature of 'things' and of being. By being composed of a multitude of relations, actions, bits and pieces, objects, structures, repetitions, appropriations etc., it willfully performs an absolute refusal of a singular, masterful, ocular-centric comprehension that lies at the core of representational logic and practices of reception<sup>4</sup>. This is used as a strategy to open up a realm for making and

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<sup>3</sup> Implements, actions and a scoring of moments. Exhibited as a part of Line Drawing, curated by Dr Linda-Marie Walker, South Australian School of Art, Adelaide, 2008

<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to Terri Bird for arriving at this idea - which has emerged through years of practice-led conversation. Terri addresses related issues in the essay wrote with Tom Nicholson *This Conversation*, present within this catalogue.

viewing/receiving that is structured upon something other than such representational modes. So instead, meaning is asserted through the way the work tries to 'address' the space, the context, the viewer, as something that arises in a partial and durational process. It's something that occurs in *time* and that is slippery and pretty 'un-masterable'. Elizabeth Grosz puts it beautifully when she announces, in the example of the act of embodied perception, 'everything else remains in obscurity, unperceived and unsignified,' making the world 'fully accessible by *no* living being'<sup>5</sup> & <sup>6</sup>.

An attempt to 'centre' meaning privileges a movement towards identification, based on the logic of unification in which art is subject to an interpretive will that seeks to contain, centre and identify through a linear or narrative 'progression'. I think this is at the heart of an arrogant anthropocentrism. Instead, working with multiple modalities is a tactic used to perform a de-stabilisation of the site of experience in order to bring about an encounter with the indeterminate and the durational. So rather than being reducible to an artist statement, iconic image or validating catalogue essay, meaning instead becomes asserted as a process that can only ever be achieved provisionally. So meaning in this work is not something to be made once and for all, or fixed into place, but becomes an event that crystallises and then dissolves in a perpetual movement.

My position regarding the production of objects is not based in *opposition* towards the commercial art market that trades in autonomous/precious object-commodities. I have no 'moral' objection to this, but I think that it does matter where you choose to put your energy in terms of what forms of life you participate in and actively produce. So I'm not idealistically 'anti-commercial' — it would be ridiculous to assert a place for practice outside the commodifying forces of an all-pervasive capitalism from which art, as we know it, is embedded<sup>7</sup>. Even if you don't make work with a market in mind (as a force at the foreground, structuring the decisions you make), that doesn't mean that the residues (the objects, documents, texts, etc.) that result from your activity can ultimately resist the market, the market appropriates everything and anything, whether it be an object or not.

My approach towards art is to take it as a kind of large-scale and ongoing action that enables experimentation with the ways we might make, do, think, say, be together, perceive and become. This has been informed by Holmes and by Rancière, who, in particular, discuss art as possessing the potential for redistributing 'the landscape of the visible, a recomposition of the relationship between doing, making, being, seeing, and saying...'. The crucial factor in this approach is the notion of experimentation, because an experiment is contingent upon unpredictability, where the unknowable and the unforeseeable might occur. I think that at its best art is a practice that allows for the possibility of opening up experimental forms of thinking and practising 'alongside' that which is already known and practised. However, this notion is not used with the rhetoric of opposition, which begins to situate process against product, artist against institution, independent against commercial, inside against out. That's why the idea of working from the 'middle' (discussed previously) becomes useful, because it relates to a strategy that avoids a simplified critique, but which still works to develop a 'critical' kind of relationship to what is given. I think the process of negotiating this is endless, and for me that's the point.

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<sup>5</sup> Grosz, Elizabeth, 'A Thousand Tiny Architects: Art and the Animal', paper presented to Department of Architecture, University of Sydney, 2008a.

<sup>6</sup> This quote was originally contextualized in an essay I wrote in 2009, regarding the work of Geoff Robinson: We cannot access the possibilities of the world in its teeming entirety. Our bodies connect with and in turn frame this world by virtue of the limits of our sense organs (Grosz, 2008a: p.10). The body's physical limitations are expanded by the virtual capacities of these organs (eyes, ears, hands, nose, tongue). In turn the world becomes strangely 'organized' (Grosz, 2008a: p.10). As they stretch us out into the material universe they do so only *so far*. Thus the sensorium within which we dwell is simultaneously made available and inaccessible by the limits of these organs - for beyond the limits of our perceptual-embodiment "everything else remains in obscurity, unperceived and unsignified" making the world "fully accessible by *no* living being" (Grosz, 2008a: p.10).

<sup>7</sup> To assert this would be a "*reapplication of Romanticism whereby art is conceived as an immediate form of non-capitalist life.*" (Martin, 2008: p. 379). The danger in conceptualising art as a practice that somehow exists outside the larger economy is that positioning art as an exceptional or heightened kind of production veers towards a form of Romanticism. It sustains delusions that art can constitute a kind of direct engagement with life disengaged from an all-pervading system of exchange.

The expansiveness, incompleteness or process-driven emphasis of the sculptural elements is not based in a strategy that is oppositional. Instead, this strategy is structured by an absolute affirmation of the contingency of relations between objects, space, time and contexts of presentation and encounter (the situated and the localised). It's about working with sculpture as 'fluid rather than fixed' and made up of a series of provisional relations in constant re-organisation with one another <sup>8</sup>.

It's here that the approach of artists such as Gordon Matta-Clark become really powerful as a strategy to be appropriated and made useful within a current climate. Matta-Clark asserted an engagement with form that was oriented through activity, operation and process, rather than dealing with form as static. This has many implications from production to presentation, consumption and distribution. So the issue is not about opposing or abandoning form, but about grappling with it in ways that open it up to proliferation and indeterminacy. The potential of this is literally endless.

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<sup>8</sup> quoted from an essay written by Anneke Jaspers concerning a work made for Artspace, Sydney titled *enabling constraints*. Her essay is titled *Shadows and Accumulations: enacting a legacy of early conceptualism*, published in Column 5, Artspace, Sydney, 2008, p.p 24-25