

Full transcript of interview with Lucas Ihlein by Margaret Roberts,
3/70 Audley Street, Petersham, 22 May 2006.

3.00

What are the main concerns of your artwork generally, which could be how you frame the PhD?

The PhD is an interesting thing as it makes you frame your work differently than you would normally. You probably found the same thing. It's not just a question of something pre-existing that you then just throw a framework around. In the process of having to comply with a completely different system of thinking about art as research, it changes the way you work, and the way you think. I don't think that, until I started the PhD, I ever thought about art as research. It was a more whimsical process, or at least I didn't admit it. I thought that art as research was a bit of a daggy idea, and I always hated it when artists talked about art as research. It sound really pretentious or something. That is not to say there aren't rigorous theoretical concerns underpinning the work but they just weren't necessarily framed as research. I think sometimes that's something that artists will say to make themselves important, and even now that I have to frame it like that, I don't kind of tend to— If I spend an afternoon down at the library or archives, I don't think of it as research. I'm just pursuing some interest. Research still has a stigma about being a dry or bookish way of doing things. But they don't need to have to be that. As I have progressed into my PhD, I have discovered other possible forms of research that I could be more closely related to—things they call participatory-action research—a process of doing something and seeing what happens.

Which is what scientific research is. That's where it came from.

Yes, I guess that the artistic research that I had heard people talking about sounded much more like: there is existing information out there and you just trawl through and find it—that seems really boring to me—and all you have to do is work harder to extract all the information.

Yes, and what do you do with it then?

Exactly, then you become some sort of responsible custodian of the

information. As it has been framed by the PhD, it has honed down my work to a particular channel, because I often work on different, simultaneous lines. But due to being involved in the PhD, I have been encouraged just to focus in on one way of doing things, and pursue that, partly because it makes a good story to write about, rather than just saying there's a scattered field of activities.

That began last year when I was in Kellerberrin. I did this project where I lived in the town for 2 months as an artist-in-residence and each day I wrote on a blog about people that I met and what we talked about and the things we discovered. It was an unfolding journal of mutual curiosity between someone who comes from the city and people who live in the small town.

And I guess I have always been—when I trace back my artwork over the last ten years—I have always been interested in artwork that contains a record of its own production. Even back in 1995 I was making sculptures which contained audio documents that related to the conversations that went on in the production of that particular sculpture, and so on. I was always concerned that the audience should be let into the process rather than be just presented with a finished product. At that time I don't know if I really had a strong philosophical or political reason for that, but that seems to have emerged the further along I've gone. Now, that still remains one of my concerns. But instead of being about the production of a discrete sculpture in an art specific environment, I am doing these projects which are about the studio being the neighbourhood around you and the content of the work being real stuff from real people's lives and experiences. It being a blog means it is updated daily and if you're reading it you have a sense of the work as it is in the process of being produced. What I would say is the main thing, or what art can be, is that it can provide a framework for thinking about what is going on in the world around, but in a way that can create a framework for thinking about that world. When you embark on an art project you somehow create a strata of thought which sits flush with whatever is pre-existing, but somehow at the same time, can set apart this activity from ordinary activity, and therefore make me a little bit more conscious of what's going on. So I think about these projects as periods of somewhat more heightened consciousness or intensity of focus. It has internal contradictions, because on the one hand I am doing something which—I am an artist and I am doing something that the art world has no problems

with regarding as art, but the actual field—as that I am working in the neighbourhood or whatever—it doesn't seem like an art activity, it seems like something else, and people are not even sure what that other thing might be. It is certainly not sociological research, it has no questionnaires and interviews topics. It is much looser

Is it art to them ever?

11.58

Only in the sense that they understand that these days art can be more or less anything. Most people are not that worried about it. They certainly—Most people quickly got over the idea that art is a scam, that one where you're an artist and you're doing this project which you've got funding for, and its just about scamming, doing some sort of joke that doesn't require much work. Fortunately for me this project looks like it has got plenty of work behind it, and people respect that.

12.50

What other artists would also practice in this area?

A lot of this stuff went on in the early 70s where people were interested in social interactions as an aesthetic field in themselves. People like Vito Acconci would set up activities for themselves, whether they involve interactions with another person or some sort of process of thought on their own, its almost like an instruction or script that they followed which created a rigid framework and then within that anything can happen. For example Acconci did a piece for a period of time when he sat at the end of a long pier and people knew that he was sitting there and he invited people to come and tell him a secret, and that was the work. It was somehow the interactions, and he would tell them one of his secrets as well, and it was the interaction between the two people that was a heightened moment of encounter. I am really interested in that kind of work because for me it goes far beyond the obsession there seems to have been in the art world with the concept of interactivity, which is often really technologically focused, about setting up some really elaborate piece of technology that is triggered by some movement or voice or action or something that sets off some chain of mechanised responses, Stelarc-style, for example, and the artist's genius is in making those mechanised responses complicated enough such that you almost feel like you're really communicating with a real person. And it seems to me a whole lot of wasted labour because it still never approaches the complexity and interest in having a real conversation. So for me, it's like,

let's do real conversation. I also do believe that less work is sometimes better. You've got this existing field of really interesting lives being lived already, sitting there, doing their own thing, why do you have to invent something in a gallery space which hardly any of those people would enter anyway. That's broadly where I am coming from.

With the names like relational aesthetics that are used - would you identify with or distinguish yourself from that?

Relational aesthetic seems to be a catch phrase that people are conscious of and that's pretty useful especially because it actually does encapsulates something like an aesthetics of social relations where both the content and the form of the works somehow has to do with social interaction. When I discovered that book I was over the moon—here is someone who has written a book on what I a really interested in. And not only that, he documents a couple of dozen artists in Europe who do that kind of stuff, which is great. And Bourriaud, who wrote the book, places the concerns of those artists pretty clearly within the world where existing social relations are pretty alienated where the only place where you can go to interact with your fellow humans is down at the Starbucks where you buy your coffee and then you can use the space. It's like you become like a tenant in public space rather than an owner of public space, which in theory is what all citizens should be. In Bourriaud's construction, artists construct these temporary little spaces for the return to that freer interaction that can happen between humans, and that's pretty interesting idea about what the role of art can be. That's certainly based on the idea of social usefulness rather than an avant-garde idea of creating a rupture in society. He uses the phrase, about a particular artist's work, that she's restitching the relational fabric which has been torn.

It's an interesting provocation, but he's been criticised by some people for the fact that some of his artists are very gallery-based and what you end up getting is only a very small sample space. If the gallery is that space which you create as your temporary autonomous zone of free social interaction, than you're still restricted to people who will enter a gallery. Whereas there are other writers such as Grant Kester who wrote Conversation Pieces and Mary Jane Jacob who did the Culture in Action project who talk about wanting those interactions to be negotiated through the real spaces. Not that a gallery is not a real space, but

through real spaces within society which come with all sorts of interesting ethical problems. In a way, the gallery is much safer because you can control it.

Can we talk about what is the role of the live site - however you define it - how have you used that in your work and how has that evolved.

21.32

Even since some of those earlier works in the mid 90s when I was interested in bringing the sound of the production of the sculpture into itself, they were quite anchored to the location. Even if it was a gallery, it was about drawing attention to the fact that it was in a gallery, rather than having that sense of suspension of disbelief that a lot of artworks rely on—they want to use the gallery as a space to clear the mind and then you can focus on the artwork, and not only that, you can ignore the system of codes that the artwork uses and just focus on the content within the artwork. It is just a perspectival frame, a window that you look through to find another world. Pretty early on I began feeling uncomfortable about that those codes, the fact that you are standing there in this room looking at something, that it is requiring some sort of response of appreciation or connoisseurship. Part of my reaction to that was to make works which didn't really require any prior knowledge of art history in order to have an intellectually satisfying response. I suppose they were drawing attention to the gallery space as a construction but at the same time not really going beyond it.

Can mention a particular work?

There was one I did with Mick Hender in a gallery in Perth where we had a room set up in an ordinary way with a long table and a whole lot of glasses. Then there was a fridge in the corner of the room with orange juice and water, and a clock on the wall and a rubbish bin and some chairs set up against the bench. And that was pretty much it. And on the outside there were two sets of instructions that were stuck on the wall, quite large. One of them was a quite specific set of instructions about how you should enter the room and go to the fridge and get yourself a drink then go to the table and pour it, then sit there and drink your drink, and then the final instruction was to leave the room and continue your life as normal. And the second set of instructions was a kind of meta-instruction where it said your participation in this activity could take one of the following forms: one of them was not reading any of the

instructions, and it went on a continuum from not reading any of the instructions, through reading some of the instructions, to: you could read the instructions and you could follow them or you could read them and not follow them, all the way through to: you could read all the instructions and follow them all to the letter of the law. We had this vision that what we were doing was creating some sort of aesthetic framework that, even if you didn't interact with the artwork at all, it was still OK. We saw the other artworks around us that were based on this trigger interaction stuff, based on: you step on something and something happens. Or you clap your hands. Somehow, if you didn't do the right thing the artwork fell flat on its face. We wanted to create this structure where even if you didn't do anything, it was still within the scope of the success of the artwork. It was very legalistic. But what it actually did, it was to create this very strange sense of self-awareness in the viewer, the visitor to the gallery. We heard stories of people who carried through the instructions, and who went and sat at the bench, and had their drink, and then another person would enter the room and there would be this really strange moment of uncertainty between the two of them: am I performing for you? are you performing for me? They would have this somewhat awkward conversation about it, and then go on their way. The irony of the last instruction was to continue your life as normal. That was a kind of joke on our part because we hoped that having encountered the artwork it would be impossible to continue your life as normal, you would begin to see things in a . . . Self-consciousness has always been a big concern in my work.

Then another artwork, which is an important precedent for some of the things I am doing now, is called *Cornflakes*. It was part of an experimental theatre festival or performance art festival which went for five nights. People proposed short performances which were carried out one after another. I was interested in the theatrical environment of the space of the performance space as this strange construction where you had a hundred people sitting on chairs looking at one person doing something, and the weird social environment that that created. And the incredibly heightened sense of self-consciousness that comes about especially with the performer in that situation. So I tried to think of a situation which was diametrically opposed to that, so what I came up with from my own life was, in the morning when I wake up and eat cereal for breakfast before going off to work or university I would . . . It's quite an automatic process. I am still sleepy and I would go through this process and then

you leave. And I would often be on the train to university and I would say to myself, did you have breakfast? I can't even remember, because I used to leave quite early. And I thought this was a great activity because when I did it, I was completely unself-conscious. However if I was to transfer that same activity in the theatre, in front of a hundred people, I would become incredibly self-conscious about doing the exact same bodily movement. So my question was, if I do this for five nights in a row, one night after the other, will I be able to somehow train myself to come back to that level of comfort and unself-consciousness that I have when I just sit down and eat my breakfast in the morning? Somehow habituate myself to the audience to the extent where I can just become comfortable and not feel like I am performing for them anymore?

What was the finding?

The opposite. Because the thing that I hadn't factored in was that the audience itself comes with expectations, and the expectations of the audience are that something will happen. That something kind of cathartic will happen in a theatrical setting. So I would sit and eat my cornflakes and they would be on tenterhooks waiting for some punch-line or something to punctuate the action to give it meaning, and of course at the end of each bowl of cornflakes I would just put it down and go and take my place in the audience again, and nothing had happened, and there was this great sigh of disappointment. And each night, as I did it, that grew, because they thought, he didn't do something last night, for sure he will do something tonight.

31.03

Is it the same audience?

There was a lot of repeat audience because in general the festival had different acts on every night but my proposal was to do something every single night. So it built up and there was, Ah if he didn't do something last night, he will . . .

The other thing that happened was that I would sit there and read the cornflakes box, like what you do in the morning. But after two days of performing it, I ran out of things to read, and I thought I am certainly not

going to sit here and pretend to read things that I have already read. So, as I was eating my cornflakes, I began to look around the room, just out of a sense of curiosity really. And I had arranged for the theatrical lighting to be level, so that I was under the same amount of lighting as the audience. It wasn't harsh, but it wasn't that thing that the audience was in the dark and I am in the light. I did anticipate that at some point we might exchange glances, and I was concerned that it shouldn't be this one-way communication system where I am broadcasting to you but, or you can see me really clearly but I can't see you at all. So that's why the lighting. I began to look around the audience and just make eye contact with people and it was quite special. It was this moment that was theatre and everyone— The thing that I find boring about theatre and films to some extent, to a degree things are predetermined, that they are just being dished out, they are just being performed for you, and you in the audience have no possibility of changing them or having some role in how they turn out. But somehow even this small thing of being able to make eye contact, and looking quite deeply into people's eyes, and them locking eyes with me, it gave a real charge to the atmosphere which again moved it way beyond my experimental theory. It became much more heightened and much less comfortable, not uncomfortable in the sense of a Mike Parr performance, but there was a creation of a space of shared responsibility about what was going on in the room.

That's quite a key work for me in that it contains some of the ingredients of what I am currently doing. 34.11 For example, the repetition of a task over a series of days, based on the idea that just doing it once is interesting, but if you do it again, and if you do it again, and if you do it again, something starts to happen, some sort of relationships start to emerge. You also challenge your sense of freshness, the first time it was fresh and interesting, but try it again, let's try again, let's try again, to break through that into some kind of, a sense of maturity with it, with which comes a whole other swag of things like responsibility and possibility for failure on a grand scale. And the other thing is that interaction, the locking of the eyes. In my work now, I have taken that cornflakes model and thought I am not interested in challenging conventions of theatricality any more, so let's not worry about the theatre space as a site, let's do something in real space. The time becomes longer, as a series of months rather than just days, and the interactions become less formalised and utilize the existing conventions of interaction that we have as humans, like conversation, drinking tea, or

going for a walk, and those things that happen quite regularly within existing spaces, like the way you might bump into someone at a supermarket or walking your dog in the street. So that gets to some idea about site doesn't it?

It would be good to hear about the Petersham Project. That seems to flow naturally from what you are describing. When was the Cornflakes and Kellerberrin ones done?

Cornflakes was 1996, ten years ago. Kellerberrin was last year. That's the whole process of the PhD. It allows time to process and reflect upon projects so they have a little bit more time to live on their own before rushing onto the next thing. One of the troubles of being a poor artist is that often as soon as I finish a project, I rush straight into paid employment to cover the costs, the debt that I've gotten myself into with the project. Then all of the quite interesting things that went on, they go up in smoke because work is this drug that clears your mind. The beauty of the PhD scholarship is that you finish the project then you can sit a bit with it. So having sat a bit with the Kellerberrin one I thought to myself this is all very interesting, I have been to this country town and had this amazing experience but how would this work in my own neighbourhood? Why am I going away to do these things when I have a whole social ecology right outside my own doorstep? In this sense it doesn't matter whether it's Petersham or any other suburb. So in one moment it's site specific but at the same time it could be anywhere. It just happens to be where I have been living for the last couple of years. It also comes out of the maturity and slowing down of my own art-making methods. Part of the reason I wanted to start to do a PhD was to have the time to think a bit more and to space the projects out a bit more, let them breathe a bit, not race around like a mad person from one thing to the next. It seems to intersect with just wanting to pay attention to the local stuff that's going on around me, rather than dashing around the world doing things here and there.

I am not sure if I would have done this same project if I hadn't been living in Sydney. The whole artists-in-residence format, which I have done quite a lot of and found really productive over the years, is all based on taking you away somewhere and spending a period of time in some exotic location where both you and the local people are mutually curious, and you also have time and money to do something. Then I will come back to

Sydney and time and money are the two things that I lack here. So Sydney seems the one place where I never do an artists-in-residence and that seems absurd and that was part of my motivation was to try this. This is where some of the same concerns of the earlier pieces - the one with the obsessive instructions and the cornflakes one — come back in here because I do begin with a question, a whimsical question, but it is a question nevertheless: you did this project in Kelleberrin, how would the same thing work out in your own neighbourhood, where you are not exotic, where you don't stick out like a sore thumb, in fact where you are not even invited to do it? At this point it is a self devised project. It's harder work.

Are there also other parameters of this project? I thought there was a self-imposed requirement that you stay in Petersham. I thought that was an interesting way of understanding space as there would have been a time in history when that would have been the most common way of engaging with space, where a trip to Parramatta, Goulburn or Canberra would have been a major trip, whereas now we get on a plane or bus or car, so it is an important way of understanding space as the space in our immediate location has a coherence as it is continuous compared with the way it is broken up by faster travel. If you walked to Canberra you may have a sense of this continuity of it.

I guess I mucked around with walking in Kelleberrin, but because the town was an island - those towns in WA are like beads on a string—there is no need to create a sense of isolation because it exists already, whereas the whole thing about being in a suburb, we operate quite differently in the city, we have our network of friends which is spread geographically over the whole. Our networks are not based on geography so much as they are on interests. The city contains 4 million people and within that 4 million there may be 1000 that are interested in the same things as us but we are spread out more broadly. But somehow we still connect up within that, whereas if you live in a small country town, the geographic limitations control a lot more the networks that you have, the people you interact with. So it was just a silly artificial way of creating that sense of isolation, like a simulation of it. It's quite arbitrary really, and in another sense it's a kind of gimmick. It's something that makes people laugh—I can't believe . . . ? how will you survive? Petersham is such a boring place. It sets up a sort of tension that the project demonstrates that no matter how boring or limited you think a particular place is, if you

stop for a moment and focus your attention on what is actually there, you find heaps of interesting stuff and certainly enough to keep you going. I had a hunch that that would be the case in Petersham as it happened in Kellerberrin. People sent me emails saying I can't understand how you could survive out there with all that thundering emptiness. That's what a friend of mine wrote, thundering emptiness. It shocked me as I had this aesthetic framework of reflection and feedback where each day I would write about what happened that created a little zone where I allowed myself to see whatever happened as interesting. I guess that's where art makes things different from just being an ordinary citizen, because the art part of it just prizes this little space for allowing yourself to momentarily find things fascinating.

Can you define that space at all?

46.02

I don't know philosophically, but practically, in my case, that space was just a couple of hours a day and writing on my blog. That was the strategy I used to create that space. Ultimately it would be interesting to see if you could do that without having to, if you could just do it, just live. Alan Kaprow, who only recently died unfortunately, I think he was heading in that direction since the 1970s, I think about the happenings that he set up. They were a loose framework that he set around a set of experiences that made those experiences special. We have the ability to do that in our lives. He was really influenced by Jackson Pollock and the Abstract Expressionist thing, where the rectangular frame of the canvas was the delimiting framework and any activity that happened inside that framework is considered to be part of the art or considered to be part of the product. Kaprow really liked the idea that art could be an action in itself, and the frame didn't have to be physical. It could be a psychological frame or conceptual frame and all you need to do is throw that around whatever you are doing and haul it in and it is interesting. That is partly where the happenings came in. From the 70s onward, he disappears from the artworld, and for him—and in some of his writing he talks about that stuff—there is a logical progression into just living, living an art-like life, or carrying out life-like art, to the point where you can't even really recognise it, it's just a sort of richer experience of daily living.

That is an interesting relationship to relational aesthetics.

That is an influential precedent.

Would you use the term site-specific for your work?

I have never been obsessive about the concept of site-specificity. I have always thought that . . . There's particular site-specific work that if you take it from one physical location to another the meaning just evaporates altogether. I have never felt that strongly about it. I think that often it's the case, with my stuff anyway, you just need to tweak a few components of it to make it specific to its new home. But then again, I have made that sort of work which is open to that kind of thing, that finds that kind of thing interesting rather than finds it spoilt if that happens. That's why I think on the one hand it is site specific work but on the other hand it is not. It can transfer.

Is that because you are working with 2 ways of understanding the site?

I don't know, there's that book by Miwon Kwon, where she talks about all sorts of definitions of site—the site can be a physical thing, or it can be a community, or a discourse, or a set of concerns that seem to be in the air. She also talks about the idea of the artist as a nomad. I would need to think more about what a nomad is. But that idea is not anathema to me, in that you make a home for yourself wherever you go, and that appeals to me—the easiness of the way that you are in the world, so that it doesn't matter if you are here or any other place, anywhere you are, you can live an interesting life and you can also do it now and you don't have to wait till you get that grant, or till the moons line up. There is no excuse for saying I can't do this project until I certain things line up . . . I always think, let's do something now anyway, and see what happens, with what we have, so there is a sort of making-do thing about it, which means that on the one hand you really honour the site that your in—it's not about making one site more important than any other site, its just about making where you are is the most interesting site—but on the other hand it could equally be anywhere else.

53.02

To a lot of people, the project I am doing now is quite site-specific because its all about Petersham. No doubt they imagine that I am obsessed and fascinated by Petersham more than anywhere else. That is not really the case. It is just happens to be where I am right now. Which

is not to cheapen my concern for what is going on here. It's quite interesting.

You seem to be bringing some of those definitions together.

How do you document your artwork and how do you use it in your art practice?

54.10

This is a big concern that I have always had. When I started doing performance works around 1994, 95, I was always getting into trouble because I was at university and the lecturers were too lazy to come to performance events and these were—like I have been describing—they were events where you really did have to be there. There was a certain kind of charged atmosphere in the room and in a way that was the work. Any kind of videotape of it was just this hollow shell, and they would watch these things back and go, I can't see what's interesting about what you are doing there. And so I began developing this performance practice which was about not presenting documentation of what happened, but if I was called upon to present documentation, I would do the performance again. It was about some sort of experience of the work itself, rather than about the documentation of the work. But the trouble with that is it meant that the work had to change and become more portable or transferable to a different context. So in re-presenting itself somewhere else, it would change and that was quite interesting. And it—again like we were talking about the idea of site—it would adapt to that new site.

It's a bit vague what I am talking about there. Eventually—this was only fairly recent—I've become more concerned with bringing together that concern with the artworks which contain a record of its own making, together with that performance practice. Now what I think I am doing is I have a performance practice which the very act of doing is an act of documenting. So the daily writing process is not only where I allow myself to spend time finding what happens to be interesting, but it also creates a textual document of itself. So, in that sense, a second layer of documentation becomes unnecessary. Unfortunately, or fortunately in one sense, text is a very plastic and malleable medium that is able to be quickly constructed, quickly changed. Lots of people who are literate in English can participate in using text. Whereas if you had a project that was about creating painting everyday, for me anyway, would create a

layer of separation between myself and my so called audience, because it's much more difficult for people to respond in kind. Text is so easily transferable. So in a sense the time of interaction that goes on, where people might write comments on the blog, is a live interaction, is a performative act but at the same time as it leaves a record of itself.

What do you feel about me asking for images to go with this interview?

That's fine with the older work. With the newer stuff like the Kellerberin project or this Petersham project, images don't mean much to me. I have moved away from an image-based practice quite a lot, so on the one hand the artwork is this really good document of itself, but on the other hand if you want to access this document you almost have to relive it. For example the Kellerberin project pans out at nearly 60,000 words. You read a book. I could give you an image of a former artwork and you could get it almost instantly, whereas in this newer stuff it's much more a feeling of re-enactment or reliving of it. So I could give you an image which is a screen grab from the website but that would be meaningless because you could just go onto the web and look at it as a real thing. Or I could give you some pictures of some of the things that I have photographed while I have been in Petersham. But really those images have a more indexical nature—I am wandering around and see something interesting (1.00.00) and take a photo of it, and later, when I look back, I say I say Ah yes, that was . . . It is a memory prompt. It's like this parallel dimension of images which I don't put much store into. They're quite interesting to look at, and I'll happily share them with people, but it's not where my main concern lies.

How do you want these works to have some sort of presence among the interview? Text may be as or more evocative than images.

1.01.29

Yes text can be just as much about creating images, so in some of the places where I have written about my projects I will contain textual quotes from the website, and you might read a paragraph and it creates an image.

What role does the potential framing of the artwork by the gallery; museum and historical record have on the development of your work and

how you exhibit it?

I have answered that a little bit in terms of how I have moved from considering the gallery as interesting as a specific site to problematise through the artwork to the point where I think that I don't need to do that anymore, I really need to use my energy in—I keep saying in the real world, as if the gallery is not part of the real world, but you know what I mean. But I still use the gallery and these days the way that I use it, I think of the gallery as more of a venue. I am not so obsessed with problematising it or drawing attention to it anymore, but perhaps as using it as a launch pad for a series of events that might happen somewhere else, a place where documentation can come together in a convenient way, a place where people might get together and have meal or drink tea, so using it as a convenient venue just as I would use any other place like the Petersham Bowling Club. The gallery as just another town-hall type scenario, civic centre or something.

Where people behave in similar way to how they would in any other space?

Yes, there's a certain kind of polite suspension of your private life when you enter the gallery so you can create some space for civic exchange or something like that. I am certainly not interested in abandoning it because I think it still has its uses. As part of this project, I am going to have an exhibition next Saturday. But it will be a place where people can get together at a single time, have a chat, get printouts of the blog, and look at some photos. It's certainly not a place where I'll be demanding that people look at objects of art and make judgment of them. There is still this concern for the demystification or the removal of that intimidating, the way that galleries can be intimidating.

What is your favourite artwork in the world and why, at the moment?

I find that a really hard question to answer. I should footnote some of the things that I have said by referencing a piece from the early 1960s by Robert Morris called *Box with the sound of its own making* which I was aware of at the time we were doing those projects in the mid '90s. I am also quite fascinated with this performance group from the UK called Lone Twin. Do you know them? There's a couple of great pieces by them. There's one piece where they drag a telegraph pole from one side of the

town to the other dressed in cowboy suits, and they have a quite interesting philosophy of interaction, which again is not at all about coercing people to interact with you. For them it's about doing something so absurd and interesting that people are compelled to come and ask them what the hell they are doing. Then the discussion starts from that point. So their project was to drag this telegraph pole across the town in as straight a line as possible and people would look at the map with them and try and work out how to help them to do it. Then they would tell them stories like: if you'd been here 10 years ago this wall wasn't here. Then they'd begin to discuss stuff to do with the town's history and people's connections with the place and stuff like that. I think they are doing interesting work in that regard. It's full of humour, which is important as well. I don't know if I have emphasized that in talking about my own work. But for me humor is always an important thing, fairly self deprecating. At the same time as you think deeply and you take seriously what you are doing, there's also a lightness about the way that it's actually delivered.

Which is paralleled by the absence of heavy sculpture or frames and that sort of stuff.

Yes, it does away with that whole thing of: are you going to be able to afford this shit. It's just not a good question anymore. So that's my artwork I suppose. And we can have a conversation another time about what I have been doing with Squatspace, the tours in Redfern. We have been doing these tours through Redfern on buses and bicycles, where we bring our friends and anyone who wants to come along to hear locals speak about particular sites in Redfern, in those sites. So it's not the case of hearing or reading about them—you go there and then there's a discussion about that place. It all come about because of the concern with what was going to go down with the Redfern Waterloo Authority. We began to make contact with lots of locals, representatives around Redfern and Waterloo and that tour project has developed as a result. It is an ongoing concern now. We've done 5 or 6 of them now and every couple of months we will do another one and as issues evolve, the tour keeps up-to-date with them. On the Squatspace site we have documentation of that too. So I really consider that to be one evolution of my art practice too, where the performative situation becomes a discussion in a real space and the artist almost disappears. Our role is sort of facilitator of setting up a series of contacts and discussions and

we just step back and let it happen, and there is certainly no need for us to tell people's stories on their behalf. Its really about people getting involved in speaking for themselves.

How do you advertise that?

Through email and it floats around and gets passed on. Often we will be invited to do something. Like we were invited to be in the Cross Art project with Jo Holder so we will use the gallery as a place to advertise the upcoming tour and show a bit of documentation from previous tours. It was part of the Indonesian Gang festival. We did another tour because the organisers of that were keen to bring the Indonesian visitors along to see something different in Sydney from what the official tourist concerns were.

Finish

1.11.15

