

Conversation between Louisa Bufardeci and Sandra Bridie

April 1999

*Sandra Bridie: Would you like to describe what you expect the viewer will see in the space?*

*Louisa Bufardeci: There are mirrors on stands through which you will see the view outside.*

*What's sort of stands?*

*They're music stands and on them there are little mirrors where the sheet music normally is.*

*I imagine - and I'm remembering that little drawing you included in your proposal for this show, the way that the stands are placed around the room will invite people to really experience the work and entice people in.*

*I hope so, because I am sure it will be quite unusual. There will be an aural element as well which hopefully people will be able to hear from the doorway, that might encourage people to enter and see what's going on in the space.*

*How's the aural component going to go?*

*This is something I've added to the piece since I made my proposal and it's very subtle. I've been working a lot with clock mechanisms and single second hands. By attaching them to the stand the actual hand is blocked and it repeatedly taps against the metal. If I have eight or nine or even ten of those scattered around the room on various stands they start to create a rhythm. It starts to sound a little bit like a heart beat because they go up at all different times.*

*So we won't be hearing a recording of this, the sound will come from the actual mechanisms in the gallery, people will see these things working.*

*Yes.*

*It's quite playful but also the effect will be aesthetic as well. All the pieces to the show have a mechanical look about them, they are not too sheer, but they are quite stylish. The music stands are not the music stands I remember.*

*Well I've done quite a bit to them, extended them obviously, so they become something quite different than the old rusty music stands of high school.*

*Did you put the wheels on them? They're the regular music stand that you've upgraded?*

Yes.

*I guess making the work involves persistent fine tuning and adapting the work spatially to see how it works the whole time.*

When I am installing the work, yeah, that's what it will be like, I imagine I will take some time doing it. I'll need persistence to get the right angles. It may not work, it very well may not work.

*You take that chance? It may not work for all the mirrors to have a view out the window.*

Yeah but that's OK.

*Is that important to you to attempt to get a portion of the view of the city on each mirror in the room?*

The main crux of the original proposal was to get that view, to bring it right inside, as far as the wall with the door, but not having had a practice run or not having had a chance to be in that space I won't know exactly what will happen. But I often find that when I am making work what I want it to be like and what it eventually is are often quite different.

*So you can let go of what initially seemed to be of primary importance to the idea and allow other things to enter into focus.*

That's right. I like the idea of letting the piece pave its own direction as well. So while I initially create it, it can take off on its own tangent, and I have a feeling if it doesn't work out that way then that's going to be what happens. It works itself out.

*It seems to me that this work was pretty clearly defined in terms of materials and the objects you would make, and an image of what was theoretically possible was conceived quite a long time ago. And then in the manifesting of it, that's where you let it go to chance, not to the degree that it's going to fuck up at this stage, it's not going to fail.*

No it's not, there will still be elements I think that can be drawn out of it! I won't be deemed a failure if it doesn't work.

*I like the term 'interesting failure' rather than 'boring success'.*

It makes it more desirable to be a failure.

*At what stage did you think of bringing in the aural aspect and how did that inform the visual experience of the work*

I have been thinking about the idea of visual language we talk about so much when we are talking about art and the possibility of that language engaging in a dialogue. I thought perhaps that could be what was happening with the mirrors,

Spector

the reflection and the actual object were engaging in a visual dialogue. But this idea just seemed too mute in a way, I felt it needed some sort of aural aspect to initiate the idea of some sort of dialogue, that perhaps these clocks ticking in sync could have been talking to each other or engaging in a conversation just as easily as the reflection of the actual object does.

*The ticking is something to accompany the activity of viewing. If the room is silent whilst the viewer is looking into mirrors to see the reflection of the windows but also seeing their own reflections, then they could become highly self conscious, especially if they are aware of the person minding the gallery whilst looking at the work. The sounds might act as a buffer to that.*

*Have you set this work up in the studio here? No? Anywhere?*

I haven't set it up at all, so it's totally theory based.

*Apart from those two?*

Which I whipped together in the last hour before you came!

*For the display.*

Obviously I have all the parts and it won't take very long to throw them together.

*Have you worked on this premise before at all?*

Not using mirrors, no, so it's a semi-experiment or a real experiment. I don't know how you feel about me experimenting in your gallery.

*That's fine, it just seems such a confidence you've assumed with this 'experiment' - the amount you've outlaid on these materials - every thing you have applied to this work is geared toward the end product without going through any interim stages, apart from the little drawings that we've seen. I imagined that you would have gone through a process of using play materials, making maquettes of the future work. No? So you will get to experience the actual physical work when the viewer does?*

Yes. For me that comes from a drawing background. I would see it more as an exhibition of drawings, perhaps, than sculptures because I work in the same way that you would making a drawing in that there's virtually nothing that's between the mind and the actual end product. That's the way I've been working for the last couple of years when I've been making projects.

*So you are not working with the materials like a sculptor might.*

In a way, yes. The materiality of the piece is very specific - metal, mirror.

*But it's more of a cerebral approach to those materials than tactile.*

*I was wondering if you have an interest in music because the clocks are*

*like metronomes and you are using the music stand, are there any references here that you are conscious of?*

I've thought about it a lot and I've tried to justify my use of these objects from a musical perspective as well, but I never seem to come up with anything substantial. I can't quite remember my original idea for using musical stands but I'm sure it's written in the proposal! It could have been that I was thinking at the time that music was a form of dialogue as well and that there's a relationship between somebody standing at a music stand playing music, there was an interaction that I wanted to replicate.

*So you could continue the analogy to the stands indicating an orchestra and the viewer becoming a player in that orchestra.*

*This is a sorry admission, but I don't know anything about John Cage, but there seems to be something in this work that may allude to his output.. Do you have an interest in John Cage?*

I'm pretty much with you in my knowledge of John Cage! I am vaguely familiar with his drawings and compositions. People have drawn parallels with this work and asked me if I've been interested before, so even though I haven't really looked into him perhaps we have similar thoughts.

*Maybe a similar drafting starting point. Have you, in formative years, had a relationship with a music stand, did you learn any musical instruments, are you familiar with the things?*

Well I did, I went to a music orientated high school so I learnt quite a few instruments for about three months at a time. So I am very familiar with the physicality of the music stand but have never really had an artistic relationship with it until now.

*I am just wondering whether the aural part of this piece for Talk is another kind of 'nature' to you, whether your aural nature as strong as your visual nature.*

In the past couple of years a lot of my pieces have had an aural nature, but it's generally not specifically musical, it's percussive.

*So you don't record the sounds, layer them with overdubs, you are creating the beats in different ways with different materials.*

Yes and generally using something directly rather than the recorded sound with an object that automatically makes the sound.

*You know sometimes when you find a material that you like or a colour that you like or you've just read something that opens your eyes to the possibilities of a new colour or new materials or images, and suddenly you see it*

*everywhere, it's like this new little bit of the world has opened up to you, do you find that your ears work that way? You go around listening to taps dripping and the tapping and hums and drones of things.*

Yes, traffic light sounds particularly. I do a lot, I spend a lot of time around those humidity indicators in the National Gallery, they make a really great sound.

*That's interesting, getting underneath the sounds of things, the things that appear as a general hum, that most people relegate to a drone that they cut off from.*

I tend to pick up on them.

*So with your aural investigations, the sounds come off the glass and the metal via the mechanical devices. The means you use here are also quite limited aren't they?*

They are. Those mechanisms, even if they are not tapping against something they still make a regular ticking sound. Even if there are ten of those in the space together, the sound is quite extraordinary. Recently in a piece I had down at Linden it had sixteen of them in a small room and while they were part of a visual piece that was the aspect of them that most people commented on. Monotony isn't a bad thing, to me, it's quite attractive.

*I would think the effect will be more like undulations of rhythms rather than a regulated sound that's agitating, that can drive you crazy. I'm just wondering how this will work in the gallery, because sounds can get lost in a vortex there overwhelmed by the confusion of sounds from outside. I've been noticing the difference in the gallery with this last show of Stephen Honegger and Anthony Hunt, the effect that their false wall has made in the gallery. Things still get lost - someone's only a metre away from you and you only get bits of the conversation, but it's even more confusing without that wall.*

It will be really interesting, I'm not too worried if it's not very loud at all because that will encourage people to come closer.

*Have you made other works where you orchestrate a looking like this piece seems to be doing?*

Quite a few actually. I've made a few pieces last year where I instruct viewers where they need to stand and what they need to do. I like the idea of insuring the viewer is getting the right perspective or encouraging them to see it from a certain direction via a peephole.

*It's fair enough to direct the visual experience of a work and be clear about what your intentions are for how it can be perceived. With the work at Talk*

*though it sounds as if there will be more room for free investigation by the viewer.*

But still there will be a sense of enticement I hope.

*How important was the aesthetic of the work, because these are nice looking things.*

I think it must be a fairly important thing to me although probably on a more subliminal level in a way. I tried to make the work as simply as I could for technical reasons, for financial reasons. Often what I find myself ending up with is something that is very minimal, I can't help it, it's sort of a by-product.

*Is there a honing down process you go through before you even get to the draft you work from, before you come down to something that seems quite homogenous and pure?*

It's true, I had some very different designs. The idea for this show I had in my mind for awhile before I put the proposal in and I had been working on quite different configurations to express the same idea. Once I hit on this one I knew that it probably wasn't going to go any further because basically there wasn't very much material left.

*So you let the idea rest until a month or so before the show. How many stands are there going to be?*

I bought forty, but I know I've only got enough wheels for about thirty five so I'm thinking I'll put forty in but some won't have wheels.

*Are the wheels an invitation to move the stands around?*

It's an invitation to consider wheeling them around. It could be done but it would be dangerous because they are very fragile.

*Yes, they do look precarious.*

I wanted to give the idea that they could be moving amongst each other quite easily.

*As entities in themselves? As if they were animated.*

More anthropomorphic. Giving it the possibility to engage in dialogue.

*So then they read as stick figures don't they?*

Yeah.

*Is that a really obvious observation? You were thinking that all along.*

When I was drawing them it was very similar to drawing a stick figure.