7.9 Cubic Metres

A gallery within a gallery

Interviews

Eliza Tan and Adam Knight discuss *Loss Velocity* (02/05/09)

Eliza: shall we start?

Adam: yes, lets start.

Eliza: I have kind of broken the interview into two parts, the first being just talking a bit more about *Loss Velocity* and the second part about art and language, so I guess we start with just asking you, what the main questions your practice seeks to address?

Adam: I suppose its shifted of late, I'm finding myself dealing with being a part time artist and I suppose that each set of works try to somehow to deal with that not necessarily trying to justify it but to try and make sense or to unpack things. I think it's been really important with this project. It was really about becoming very sick and tired of making objects and images in the studio. And wanting to try and unpack that and make sense of that. And also why I was choosing to go to this space, to sit down and to just make things and accumulate a pile of stuff, and I always thought that that was a way of making things and doing things and working things out it was getting to one thing and it was kind of, a practice, I always thought of my main practice was a kind of container and you sort of test its boundaries and its limits but somehow making things and making objects that were too clumsy or just didn't seem to work and it sort of necessitated this other process or this other dialogue or something to happen outside of that, to be able to critique it. I think, and in relation to the art school as well as that, that being something that I felt should have been, kind of outside of that studio environment, and critiquing it but somehow being incredibly enmeshed in it and I kind of find it really difficult to sort of unravel the strains of those sort of connections and it kind of fluctuates I think when you talk about what you think your practice is doing or what you think its trying to achieve and I suppose there's a sense that that kind of deviates from responsibility in some cases and then feels incredibly responsible. Maybe its a responsibility to itself in some way and making art objects just didn't seem to be responsible to the practice in some way. So that's, I guess how I've engaged my approach to this project. Because this is kinda the first thing that I've felt as if some things come along and it's made me feel responsible again for what I'm trying to do which felt great and still feels really important.

Eliza: And why did you choose to refer particularly to Barry Le Va's *Velocity Piece* and Bruce Nauman's *Bouncing 2 Balls Between the Floor and Ceiling with Changing Rhythms*?

Adam: It was from a strange sort of art school perspective, Bruce Nauman and Barry La Va are two incredible artists and they were two artists that I constantly kept referring back to when I was at art school, but somehow, leaving that, didn't seem relevant. I was interested in other things and this piece of work the bouncing the balls was about a sense of boredom, and I liked the fact that if you are in your studio and you are making, you are doing something somehow that qualified as being art in some way and that was something I really struggled with and still struggle with in the studio and being really conscious of that moment of where you think something is becoming art or that something is beginning to happen and I suppose in a strange way they're polemics but they seem to be talking about the same thing. I like the fact that Nauman's dealing with this idea of boredom and the role of the artist and Le Va is about a kind of endurance, aggression and frustration. In a similar way that

Nauman is dealing with those things and the fact that within these two pieces of work there were always these two elements happening. That it was about this slippage between synchronicities and trying to make things work and to align themselves within the strange environments of the art school institution where the *Velocity Piece* was filmed and produced and also within Nauman's studio it seemed that there was something really banal but poetic which I suppose are the two things that are of most interest to me. By referring back to those pieces of work it was referring to to a time where I felt much more engaged with work and it would act as a corner stone for this project. I wanted to refer to that and strangely enough the idea of the piece of work came whilst my degree show was up, it felt as if it was the closing of a particular time but also directing me to other things. To have it festering away for two or three years and then for it to sort of come to the boil again and still be incredibly relevant, whilst at the moments it's been difficult to go into a studio and to make things and to think about things and it feels like its this, cyclical way of trying to revaluate stuff as an artist and being inside of art school and being in that alternative space and having to sort of operate on various levels. For something then to be as simple as bouncing a ball in a space was completely reaffirming in a way, so yeah, I think that probably answers your question?

Eliza: yeah.

Adam: (laughs)

Eliza: did you actually get bored of the idea at times during those two or three years, when, or did you just leave it for, for a bit and then come back to it?

Adam: No, I never got bored. I don't, because it was so strange since I really thought I could completely, in my head, imagine how it was going to be and how it was going to operate and then sending the proposal and that process of being absolutely clear and crystal I knew exactly what I wanted. And then this fantastic, stumbling block of 'well how actually can you make those sounds separate and how can I do this?' It was interesting to think about that sort of relationship between ideas based work and much more process and technical led work. I had a really interesting conversation with an artist friend of mine and we were talking about the relationship between the artist and the autonomy of the art object and how striving for this autonomous object somehow the artist has to completely negate themselves in that process and where does that leave the artist? I was talking about this to my friend and I said I had an idea for a piece of work that was really kind of idea based but I said I didn't make it and document it and then I discovered this other artist had made it. I said I think that's really an odd thing to happen, and then he said well I guess that's' because you are dealing with ideas and processes and you within a similar context. I didn't mention the artists' name and then my friend came back to me a couple of weeks later and said he saw this piece of work, and he mentioned the name and I said that it wasn't this guy, so three people had an identical idea and pretty much identical realisations. This all took place at the time I was thinking about making this piece of work and I suddenly realised that its all operating in, dodgy territory, because I think this idea of autonomy is really appealing but where does that leave you as an artist? Maybe this work kind of talks a bit about that usefulness of an artist and art. Particularly in relation to yourself as a curator and James as an artist but also co-curating and that sort of three way dialogue….

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Eliza: (coughing)

Adam: Do you want some water?

Eliza: I'm OK thank you (still coughing)

Adam: (laughs)

Eliza: do you think this will be a part of James document? video? (laughing)

Adam: (laughs) he'll cut that out, that's fine... And then perhaps with that three way thing the piece needed to be centralised within the two camps of curation and art. It felt slightly incongruous to the whole thing. Where actually that offered opportunities for synergies of ideas or synergies of intention. All three of us have spoken quite a lot about this project that's been really interesting and quite important to actually contribute to it, to the reason why.

Eliza: *Loss Velocity*, from the outset, demonstrates, as you mentioned before, a de-emphasis of art as object. I was thinking that the piece could also be discussed as an enquiry into the transitional nature of the object in relation to surrounding spatial elements. So what for you constitutes the object? Does, for example the artist's body or audiences' bodies, or the actions performed in the space or the experience of the space, do these become objects?

Adam: I think that's really interesting, and that was the thing that constantly evaded me with the project. I thought I'd be very clear about where this kind of object would exist and I was keen for it to not be present and to not exist but of course that's impossible and things need to be physical, things need to be there, that's art. I didn't see the performance as an object or as a body either. I'm not really sure how I can talk about that but it didn't feel like a performance, it felt more like I was, I guess testing things and working things out, the performance lasted an hour and forty nine minutes and in a strange way that period of time offers up a strange space between Nauman's piece and Barry La Va's piece. I started to think a lot about the work I was doing when I was making it, but that not really affecting the piece of work but trying to actually consider the idea of performance and the role of the artist in the studio space. Finding myself in a gallery and just having that period of time to almost kind of consider the work and think about the work within a gallery space is incredibly strange and then it came to making the piece of work and there were lots of technical issues and how the microphones would be positioned. The microphones acted as a surrogate body I think, for the artist and then that became interesting because for sound recording reasons that the microphones had to exist in the space and so invariably there would be moments where the ball would hit the microphone and there would be this cling and clang and then I would have to sort of recover the ball. So I liked the fact that the recording device somehow played as much a part in the performance as I did. And then rethinking about that in terms of how that can be presented so that the microphones and the speakers would start to become this artifice an object and then again the CD player and the amplifier creating this object or this threshold that I found myself situated in when I was doing the performance. The equipment facing into the space, again there was a sense of activation within a fairly passive space more or less a sort of strange dialogue, but I was never interested in creating anything relational or for people to go in and

something would happen but I guess people did go in, we did discuss things at the time. Perhaps people were encountering dialogue within that space and it felt important in some ways, whereas, crossing the threshold and activating the viewer was something else, was other, perhaps as body, perhaps as object, was unexpected, but felt right for the project. This project was about the transitory nature of objects and artists in space and chasing things and then things happen attempting to control those incidences. This thing is unavoidably is an object (looking at the gallery structure) and all the things I wanted to negotiate in this project. I think its thrown up more possibilities and more ideas than I originally intended which is great you know, which is really good, I think its something I'm certainly thinking about it a bit more now.

Eliza: so, you mentioned then a bit about the performativity of this piece and the fact that nobody witnesses the performance was one of the conditions under which *Loss Velocity* was produced. Can you comment on the role of theatricality in performance art?

Adam: It never really entered my mind that it was a performative piece of work. But I suppose that it was, I was quite aware of the theatratical nature of work that I have made in the past because it was always about constructing an experience in some way which I suppose is tantamount to a kind of actual experience but, but maybe thinking a little bit about Michael Fried and that relationship between minimalist objects and theatricality and maybe that providing a new space for things to happen, a lot of performance art at the moment is less about the theatrical and more about the artist. Maybe theatrical isn't so bad but when it's about the artist then I think it becomes slightly problematic. I think it's a case of constructing a certain parameters for a viewer to be able to feel comfortable in being located within and attempting to subvert or play, to misrepresent or deviate. Things that I've found could happen but the work has never been interested in the artist in a sense, which is strange when you think that the work references, particular works and particular artists and particular people that I deemed heroes of 60's and 70's art. I felt that by laying things bare the technical object inside of the thing that I was showing would somehow oppose this idea of performance or its theatrical nature. The work itself is quite mechanical, there are slight moments where the balls don't quite bounce together and they bounce off and it doesn't quite sync up, it doesn't quite work in that space. As a viewer hopefully it all adds up to the fact that this isn't looped or pre-recorded, there are moments where the unexpected happens, it happens and problems occur and that tries to shift your role as a viewer and your expectations of the space - it becomes aggressive and at the same time it's rhythmic and quite sensual, I guess speculative in some way. So, yeah, there were lots of things that I wanted this piece to deal with - the relationship between performance and theatricality and the absence of an audience and just not being comfortable with that at all. At the end my feeling was you just get a sense of whether it was right for the work or if it's not right for the work. I started being conscious of what wasn't part of the project or important. And likewise the fact that no-one was present, it wasn't something that I was very strict about. I'm interested in that sound and the relationship between me and the space and I wouldn't be interesting if people gathered around, it doesn't feel like that's part of the work, so trying to maintain the work's logic, when external elements encounter that logic, they either sort of fit or don't fit, and the most interesting elements are the ones that could possibly fit or possibly not fit. But I suppose, that being watched wasn't a thing, it just didn't fit, I

just rejected it, it didn't seem like it was important.

Eliza: Can you comment on the kind of relationship, in terms of occupance, withdrawal and complicity, which you've negotiated between your practice and the space of *7.9 Cubic Metres* the art school and the artist's studio? (Bearing in mind that the *7.9 Cubic Metres* is very much a parody of the white cube, or an imitation with critical difference rather than white cube itself.)

Adam: It's strange really in that I have spent more time in this space than I have in my own studio in the last few months. It felt far more satisfying than just sitting down at a desk trying to work things through, the white cube is something that I am incredibly interested in, I wrote my thesis on how I thought the studio was a really important part of being an artist, if you are an artist you have a studio, that was important, that was somehow tied to what you did. And I argued for the studio and I argued for the need of a space where the work could exist outside of the studio and that the separation between the work leaving the studio and arriving at another place was part of the work. The separation and distancing was incredibly necessary, and then by having this strange overlapping of the space that could exist as part studio, part gallery, part academy / institution. And for the separation to be really unclear and perhaps separation to be demarcated in some way. As the curator you've got a screen and James has this structure and I have the sounds and I wanted the sound to start from this kind of white cube space, that I suppose James is completely designing for presentation but in a sense to present really nothing and then the sound to begin to rattle around a bit. I guess throwing out ideas or kind of a dialogue about something, that was a really important part of the work. But then also how it naturally begins to demarcate itself anyway. That's why I wanted to use the equipment as a threshold, a crossing, so that the separation of the studio and the gallery and the institution that although they were mounted onto each other in this project, that it was still important to have moments where you were aware if you were in one space or another. I think its interesting in terms of this idea of disciplinarity and a kind of constant obsession in this postmodern culture of overlapping and being interdisciplinary. I always felt that it was important that once you are aware of the boundaries of what you were doing it is much more interesting that you could start to engage with it in some new way, engage with the mechanics of these strange silos of things. And that's incredibly relevant to particularly fine art education where there is this constant drive for the interdisciplinary, anything goes and everything goes and that's encouraged and how do you critique that, how do you make sense of that? I think the project, by having these kind of stringent constructed parameters meant that we were able to talk about what we were doing a lot more theoretically than if we just had this huge open space where we could maybe use some speakers and some desks etc etc.

Eliza: I guess we'll move on now to the second part of the interview where we can discuss a bit more about art and language, I guess this really came about from all the discussion about the wall label. (laughs)

Adam: yeah (laughs)

Eliza: which I think the three of us had had very different views about. I suppose because we are all coming from different positions or roles in a way. In place of an exhibition of 2 dimensional or 3 dimensional object art, *Loss Velocity* could be called

a sound piece, a performance, a document and an on-going process in itself, but, the exhibit comes into being through the verbal and the textual, through enquiry and interpretation. In other words, it exists firstly as a demonstration of art as an autonomous language and its second life, in its second life it exists as a conversational piece.
To what extent is the verbal (the act of speaking and writing) conflated with the visual (the act of seeing and viewing)? Do these faculties converge with this piece?

Adam: I have greater difficulty with the element of language, both implicit and explicit as well, I think it is something I am not particularly comfortable with. I've always felt that the kind of labeling or demarcation of work, as being something incredibly institutional and I suppose that with this project and trying to engage with that in some way we were talking about subverting it in some way, by showing it in a certain space at a certain time with certain dynamics. I felt it would have been playing too much into the subversive nature of the space if we'd have included labels and text within the work.
I always felt that the subtleties of this lied in the demarcation of the space that we were talking about just now, and I know James was interested in this idea of text as being object as being something autonomous and talking about histories of making in some sense. I was aware of James as an artist thinking about text within the space and does that begin to shift the ownership and demarcation of language, of dialogue. I wanted you to be aware of what was happening and the text describing the project operated on its own terms in its own language, and by using I tried to use sound to try and fill that gap between the verbal and the written which was fairly intrinsic with this project. It's strange because we talked a lot about object and text and in my practice I've never dealt with text as object. I suppose thinking about it now I just think of language as being inadequate to articulate about art and it being in this art school as a complete antithesis and maybe there needs to be something else.
At the same time language came about as a form of community, I suppose in some sense this project is an uncomfortable project for anyone to see it, because of the idea of absence that you have pointed out, so I guess when it came to 'should we put the word outside or inside or take it away altogether', it was still a very tenuous decision in the end. And it relates, so, I guess that that's a good thing.
I suppose that was something really important, that a lot of the decisions early on were clear, but as the project picked up and became more self-reflexive; things became complicated. Us as artists and curators couldn't handle certain moments or elements of it and maybe that's a good thing. I certainly think it's good to feel uncomfortable about it.

Eliza: Every act of speaking, writing and interpretation, might possibly be construed as arising from various subjectivities rather than from objectiveness. So, how far do you think in a sense, is a work of art autonomous? You're talking in terms of its language, through mediation and by mediation I mean its susceptibility to external meanings being added to it or taken away, if you can take it away, if meaning can be taken away or through abstraction, and by that I mean separation from external meanings?

Adam: I was thinking again about the conversation I had about work that was incredibly

autonomous and watertight, but ultimately really dull. For an artist you're aware of that when you think you will make a piece of work, and I think making is probably not the right word, but thinking about that piece of work. That that moment of gestation which is very small, as somehow being the work, but then if you sort of continue down that similar line of having an idea, making it and seeing it through, it always falls flat because if it succeeds then people respond but don't need to respond, its in your head and that's enough. But I guess it just comes down to what you're happy making as an artist, and I like work that is more interesting in establishing a system of logic or a faith in a logic system. So that it was shared, and its shared because you have belief that other people will get it or be interested in it, but not necessarily get it in terms of one plus one equals two but in terms of what you're trying to achieve. Maybe just being interested in those spaces and those gaps and people will follow you there and if only one person follows you it justifies its existence in a sense. Making work that sort of is a self-fulfilling prophecy isn't really a good way of making work, but I'm not sure. Equally, relationalist tactics of creating a space with dialogue is also rather an empty gesture. It is more about creating a space for things to happen, but also for things to not happen as well and to be OK with that. I don't know, perhaps it's about the artist again, becoming a greater part of the whole process of making and showing art. I think a lot of artists are slightly apologetic for being able to talk about or show their work and feeling inequipped to do that, it's really a strange position. The persistence of autonomy as being something that is in vogue, as an artist how on earth do you think about where you exist, if you're making work that, that anyone can make, that anyone can show, isn't that really kind of terrible? Maybe it's a covering of ground and testing again and actually really thinking about what it means to make work. I know it sounds silly to say, you know, why you make work, but I think every bit of work you make has to somehow deal with that because it's an incredibly important political question why would you make work, rather than not make work, and why make that work and not that work, but that can be an incredibly destructive process as an artist to follow that line of enquiry…

Tape ran out after 41minutes and 35 seconds