

### **3 HOUR TEXT**

From: racheldobbs@hotmail.com

To: hmjones99@hotmail.com

Subject: 3 hour text

Date: Thu, 19 Feb 2009 11:53:45 +0000

Hi Han,

So we're sitting down to do this again (write for 3 hours – an email exchange/dialogue/investigation). No contact other than email. Distractions are ok, so long as you write about them in the next email. You are in your house in Mutley and I'm in my house in St Judes.

For potential readers of this text, you should know that Hannah and I have tried this task before, at a similar time of year, four years ago in an artist-run space in Rotterdam. It was informed by an entanglement we had been set (define each our own parameters as part of Low Profile) and an online text by Lone Twin that Hannah couldn't remember the name of. But today we've got a different question.

QUESTION:

What is it about the picture of us and Ray Mears?

(see attached)

Good luck Hannah, and see you in the pub later.



From: hmjones99@hotmail.com

To: racheldobbs@hotmail.com

Subject: RE: 3 hour text

Date: Thu, 19 Feb 2009 12:16:11 +0000

Hi Rachel,

Right...

It's strange that we keep coming back to this picture. A picture of ourselves in which we are both definitely not looking our best!

We seem to have collected a lot of these pictures over the years. Pictures which in any other situation you might well/probably should delete. When we go through the pictures that have been taken of a performance we have done, often it is a process of trying to find the small amount of pictures of us where we are both looking 'o.k'. We don't always have a lot to choose from! I think our 'o.k' has sometimes been bit of a compromise - you might be looking alright, the performance itself/setting/audience might be looking alright, but then there's me, with my eyes closed, or my arse sticking up in the air.

There was that other picture of us that we used for the flyer for our performance Double Acts at The Royal Standard. Do you still have that photo? We willingly sent them that image as the image to use for their publicity - but as soon as we saw it made up as a flyer it became quite clear that we had sent them a photo of us looking like a pair of tired/un-made up/slightly hot and sweaty fools.

Other artists we know (and admire) have these beautiful promotional images. Images of striking moments of their performance. Images that they have staged especially. Images which make you want to go and see their work.

We have tried tho, haven't we!? Tried to look at and learn from what our peers are doing and translate that into making our own brilliant promotional images and beautiful documentation. It just seems that, we haven't quite managed it, or we haven't quite managed what they have managed.

So what do you do when you/your work is un-photogenic?

Sorry this reply took so long.

Hannah x

From: racheldobbs@hotmail.com

To: hmjones99@hotmail.com

Subject: RE: 3 hour text

Date: Thu, 19 Feb 2009 13:00:21 +0000

hey Han,

Oh, it's exciting when the email arrives (isn't it!)

While you were writing, I was thinking about how the picture of us and Ray was not even meant to have been taken – not really our 'aim' of going there – more a sideline kind of thing – like a by-product of us being there that day.

Everyone else was doing it (getting their pictures taken with Ray) and we happened to have a camera – getting the bookshop assistant to take it for us – point and shoot on automatic (no make-up, hot and red-faced, no time to compose yourself of 'get ready' for the camera).

It makes me think straight away of the story that goes with it – we were asking people what they had 'just in case' in the queue for this booksigning – we were staying in Oxford for a month, we had seen the little sign in the bookshop window that Ray Mears was doing a book signing, and of course, who is more 'just in case' that Ray Mears?

I find it hard to show the photo to other people without all of this story – the photo is constantly a prompt.

I was also thinking about when people have pictures in their wallet – carrying around these pictures as reminders, as things to show people, as prompts for conversations – things/people you care about, that are important to you, that you want to 'hold on to'. Do people still have pictures in their wallets? Maybe it has all gone onto phones...

Did you see slumdog millionaire in the end? There's a scene in the film when the kid has the picture of his favourite film actor – seems like it is his only possession – he is going to do whatever it takes to get it signed, to shake this guy's hand – he has to jump out of a makeshift toilet and jump into a massive pile of shit to get to meet him. The photo becomes more than a photo – becomes kind of charged with all his hopes and desires – there's a lot more caught up in the photo than the record of this person's existence or the record of meeting him when the kid gets it signed.

I was doing that looking at the clock, pressing refresh and worrying about the email not having sent thing a lot! And I really should have gone to the toilet/got some food on the go before starting this – didn't really think it through!

Went to the toilet and got one of those 'foreign looking things' I was eating the other day, to tide me over.

Back to this thing about the photograph, or maybe photographs more widely and thinking about why we might need "Low Profile photographs". I suppose it's a bit like this thing you carry round in your wallet – the thing that you want people to look at so you can tell the story, the thing that you can show people to start talking about what

you've done/where you've been/what happened there – something that starts the conversation.

Maybe what we're after is holiday pictures?

The 'foreign looking thing' has made me more hungry rather than less.

Or maybe it's like a family picture? I don't know if you have this, but we always have these pictures of us as a family (often taken about five minutes before one of us has to get in the car to go to the airport!) whenever you all go home for the holidays (that's not an American-ism, just that we meet up at holiday times!) and then these pictures tend to end up in frames on my mum and dad's kitchen wall. We've even started to stand in the same place on the patio with the crap palm tree in the background – I think it's about marking time or continuity and change (sometimes there are other people than me, my brothers and mum and dad in the picture, like boyfriends/girlfriends etc).

Yeah, the pictures you might well delete or should delete thing is quite important isn't it – and the pictures you definitely shouldn't send out as publicity shots (i'll have a look for that picture and try and attach it). But there's something genius about them at the same time.

I think it might have something to do with our keen-ness/willingness to admit to not being perfect – and that maybe the imperfect is what we are really keen on in our work – this haphazardness that we kind of work with all the time.

I don't know, it's difficult to explain – I think it has something to do with Heat magazine and to do with seeing the really slick, over produced images of someone like Cameron Diaz in a film still, then seeing pictures of her on her way to the gym, all a bit red faced and with bad skin. But that's not quite what I'm trying to get at either.

It's probably more to do with that thing you do when you go through photos and delete them/throw them away because they are really unflattering – but for me there is something better about those pictures than the ones where you have adopted the exact same pose/camera face – there is someone I went to school with who does that – when you go through her photos on Facebook, it is almost as though you could have just cut her head out of one picture and stuck it on all the others. It gets a bit sinister I think

So when other artists have these images that we really like and admire for their slickness, their perfectness, how they do just look amazing, it starts to become a really big question for us. Maybe it is all about selling yourself, and how much we are engaged in that/interested in that/"good at" that?

But it does bring us round to thinking about how much these images are about orchestration – about composing a bit in the performance that "looks great for the camera" – but in our performances it's not so much about people looking at us/at it?

Maybe we're trying to orchestrate something that people want to be part 'of'. I'm thinking of Macgyverthon and how we kind of did this in the task, rather than in an image – set up a task, said we were going to do this epic thing and that we'd like people to come and join us (rather than just come and watch us) – and I suppose the story (of these two girls in Plymouth watching macgyver for 18 hours) kind of worked, maybe better than a picture on its own would have?

Chirst, this is a bit long – and possibly getting tied up in knots a bit – I'll find the Liverpool picture and press send, that's probably best.

I'm going to think more about what you were saying about this thing of finding the pictures where we/the work looks 'ok' as well – there's something really nice about the idea of "that'll have to do" or "making the best of" with these pictures we 'have' after the event rather than a process of fully composing these pictures before the event itself.

And unphotogenic-ness in general...

I hope things are ok with you.

x rachel

From: hmjones99@hotmail.com

To: racheldobbs@hotmail.com

Subject: RE: 3 hour text

Date: Thu, 19 Feb 2009 14:09:12 +0000

Hi Rach.

I just noticed how I come up as 'Hannah Bristol's' in your email contact list, which is nice!

I didn't know how long I would be waiting, but it seems that I managed to do quite a lot of distracting myself. I read your text on 'scale of emergency', I deleted some spam, watched the clock, tried to not think about how much all this DIY is going to cost me. I thought about making some food, gave the cats a cuddle, put a wash on, missed a call from Steven and then phoned him back, made some lunch and pressed refresh a lot.

I'm going to try and break this down into manageable chunks.

1. Photographs as prompts for conversations/telling the story of the work/concerns/experience
2. What do we need our Low Profile images to do?
3. unflattering/haphazard photos versus slick/stylized/posed photos
4. the particular set up of our performances and why they don't work well as photos

1. Photographs as prompts for conversations/telling the story of the work/concerns/experience:

I like this a lot. I think there is definitely something in this.

I wonder whether or not the 'Ray Mears' photos can only exist with the stories attached? - or whether or not they can also be used for other purposes, e.g promotional?

I mean, we haven't put the Ray Mears photo on our website, or been choosing to send it out in our promotional packs. So are there two types of photos we want?

If the images like the Ray Mears image need the stories attached, then maybe this is a project in its own right. I know we've talked about this, but I can see that it might be interesting to go out to try and collect more photos like the Ray Mears picture, which is as much to do with the story (as the image). We could then set up situations/contexts where we can show/present these photos and tell their stories. I guess the crucial thing about the Ray photo is that it was intrinsically linked to the performance Just in Case, so we would need to go out to find those other scenarios which would allow us to find interesting parallels to our performances.

## 2. What do we need our Low Profile images to do?

We do need images that we can send to programmers and put on our website.

We want to show our work locally, nationally and internationally - so much of getting invited to present work is bound up in documentation.

I think we are at the point where we have realised and accepted that our work is generally un-photogenic. We aren't worried about this, we quite like it - we think its interesting. But - then how do you solve the issue of open call scenarios where programmers who don't know your work, think that what you do is ugly! It could be that they think we haven't considered the aesthetics of our work, or put sufficient effort into documenting it well. This might make us look unprofessional.

I think also, we can't escape the fact that the documentation of performances is often for/about getting images which can then be used to promote/sell the work. When we talk about documentation maybe we are really talking about promotional imagery. That seems so obvious when I write it down, but I guess we might think about documentation slightly differently?

## 3. unflattering/haphazard photos versus slick/stylized/posed photos

Maybe we should look at some examples of artists promotional images/documentation. I really love some of our peers/friends/other artists images. I started to try and make a folder of some examples but I'm wary of the time and how long I am taking. I'll try and work on this whilst i'm waiting for your reply.

I think maybe we have built this up a bit too much. I just had a quick look at Search Party's website - I really like their images, but although they have the really nice staged one's in their garden, the pictures of their performances are more straight forward and less posed, although they still look really good!!

<http://www.searchpartyperformance.co.uk/>

<http://theatrebristol.net/directory/search-party>

## 4. the particular set up of our performances and why they don't work well as photos

If in doubt, make a list!!

We make work which is often durational and repetitive.

We don't do work on a stage, as such.

We don't wear costumes.

We don't really plan what we are going to wear at all.

We use what we have got at our disposal - borrowed kit, low fi equipment.

We don't use props (really)

The work is pretty casual looking

The audience come and go

not much happens (no grand gestures, not a lot of movement)

we don't rehearse

This has taken me ages, I needed a while to digest and think, so sorry if you have been worried that something had gone wrong.

I'm going to go to the loo and maybe have a quick coffee break whilst looking for more image examples.

Hannah x

From: Rachel Dobbs (racheldobbs@hotmail.com)

Sent: 19 February 2009 14:56:54

To: hannah bristols (hmjones99@hotmail.com)

Hi Han,

Yeah, the Hannah Bristols thing is a kind of hangover from when we used to live in Cedars and when I'd be referring to you in conversation – it was Hannah Ross Mawer and Hannah Bristols – it's good isn't it!!

I found the picture (see attached) (I had to go on the royal standard website to get it!) – what kind of eejits use a picture like this to promote themselves/their work?

(I was a bit scared that the email had broken – doing refresh, refresh!)

I think we sent the picture of us on the train drinking beer to The Royal Standard out of desperation – we didn't have anything else and we thought that it "would do". Maybe it is about taking more care – actually going out and creating these images, just as we would go out to create a piece of work.

The numbered list is great – I think it's really useful to start working this out with it.

I'm going to skip to number 3 first (the one about unflattering/haphazard photos versus slick/stylized/posed photos)

I think you're right in that we could build this up too much – I was thinking about it in terms of what these other artists are making as well – is it theatre? I mean, we are kind of involved in stuff that is un-spectacular, stuff that doesn't have good lighting and a stage and costumes, stuff that isn't theatre.

Also, are these photos often not actually "of" the work? I'm just looking over at the Neil & Simone poster on my wall (where they are standing on the end of a long concrete pier, wearing red jumpers) and it's a great image, but it's not "of" the piece itself.

However, search party's printed tracksuits in the photos of them doing table tennis at antifestival are quite fabulous – maybe Jason is right and we should adopt costumes afterall!!!

Wanting something a bit more – a bit more of an action shot.

More dangerous

More exciting

When we were going to do the PJ & Duncan dance at the Arnolfini, do you remember being asked for a picture, something a bit more exciting – a bit more of an action shot? This was so that it could be in the newspaper. I can't remember what kind of image we sent them originally – the one that must have been deemed to be not exciting enough.

It is making me think of something I was reading about what one of last year's MAs was saying about what they could make if money was no object (it was the girl who made the 'falling' piece). I've found it now, she says "I would make a piece where I

was just the tiniest bit wilder. I wouldn't describe my performances as wild. Yes, slightly wind-swept but not wild". I think there is something admirable about the windswept.

Maybe this is also about the holiday pictures – pictures where you look like you are having a great time, or you're meeting famous people, or doing something adventurous – and that a bit of that excitement/glamour/'wildness' might rub off on you and the people who you show the pictures to will be impressed.

When I was clearing out my files on my computer the other day I found a folder in my photos that is just titled "drunk" (don't know what that says about me!) and it is a collection of things that I obviously thought it would be funny to have a photo of when drunk. They are quite good, in that they made me laugh and think about the points in time when they were taken – so have a really strong function – but are maybe not the photos I would include in an application for a job – but they probably tell those looking at them something about what I am actually like/find funny etc.. There's something about them that could give you a better idea of what makes me tick than there would be in a photo of my face – and for this reason I'd be tempted to publish them. Maybe this is why I never really got the hang of the whole guardian soulmates thing!

## 2. What do we need our Low Profile images to do?

As well as showing our work to programmers/potential audiences (selling it/promoting it) (these "selling it/promoting it" images probably need to be constructed rather than straight documents of the performances), I think there is also a case for these images (and these words, or these 'packages' of words and images) as a kind of holiday picture – images that also start to unpack some of our concerns, that act as prompts for stories, that operate in the wider discourse of our work (maybe this grouping is more like the ray mears photo – and all the "1. Photographs as prompts for conversations/telling the story of the work/concerns/experience" stuff)

I don't think the ray mears photo can be used as a stand-alone promotional image (but wouldn't it be great if it could!) (<< maybe being the starting point for a piece of work is just as good/if not better – I am excited about the prospect of "showing it")

## 4. the particular set up of our performances and why they don't work well as photos

I don't mind that our performances don't work well as photos, because I am a lot more excited by the things on the list you made – I'd rather change the way we make the promotional images and the other stuff (that is documentation – made after the live) than I would change the way we make the performances look/feel.

I'm also thinking a lot about something called "macgyverthon – the aftermath" that could work as a kind of documentation 'package' for the macgyverthon piece

Making things tidy (or making tidy things)

Finish off / Put away / Clean Up / Shut Down

Making safe

In the work that we make, we are spending a lot of time unpacking, delving into and drawing on this impulse to order/categorise/make taxonomies/work out/make sense of things – when I was talking to Mark the other day, we were talking about these things in terms of a desire to make things tidy.

I think that's how I'm currently thinking about this word 'package' when I use it – something new that we could create, after the live work, to make 'a tidy thing' – and this thing might be just for us, or it might be for programmers, or it might be for displaying to an audience, or it might be part of a lecture, or it might be published – it could be quite good though!

The time is probably nearly up.

It was really good to do this. Looking forward to the pub and not having such cold feet in a minute.

Sorry it takes so long... Hope this all makes sense.

x rachel



