

KISSS Revealed

Deej Fabyc, Paula Roush and Camilla Brueton of Kinship International Strategy on Surveillance and Suppression (KISSS) interviewed by Katy Deepwell, London, November 2005

Katy Deepwell: How did you come together as a group to form KISSS?

Deej Fabyc: KISSS started from a conversation at my kitchen table with Joanna Callaghan. I was saying that I'd really like to go on a summer holiday with some friends and make some work together and Joanna was telling me that she would like to start a political party. This was around the time of the election campaign. Those two things came together to form KISSS, a neat acronym, but the words that go with it do define the purposes of the group. We wanted to have a title which was like a title of a political party and the triple 'sss' gave it a feminine modality. We did think about using summit in the title but we decided on strategy as there was more to it than just one meeting. The surveillance and suppression were pegs for an exploration of work on those issues, but it could have been sex and singing... It wasn't necessarily a political impulse to frame it that way. We then started to think about people we wanted to be involved and what kinds of work we were interested in. We then asked Paula Roush and Camilla Brueton to become involved.

As the project idea grew quite quickly we decided on four strategies - although that was never meant to be final - and that each of us would lead a particular strategy.

Katy Deepwell: You started with a group of four women, how did you come to know each other?

Deej Fabyc: I met Joanna a few years ago, when she answered a posting I had put on the Arts Admin web mailing list. Basically our relationship started as one of mentor and mentee. I was mentoring her practice as a young MA graduate from Westminster but it very quickly became a much more equitable relationship and she became involved in helping me run Elastic as Co-Director. We had been working together for about eight months on the gallery before we developed the KISSS project as something outside of the gallery. Paula Roush had been invited to do a show at Elastic last year and this was a very successful event. Camilla Brueton was invited by Joanna. From there, we invited other artists into the project and to take part in the exhibition. The people running the strategies did not only invite artists related to their own strategies.

Katy Deepwell: Paula and Camilla, why did you become involved in KISSS? What did you see in it for yourself and how did your own aspirations tie in with the group as a whole?

Camilla Brueton: I found the subject matter interesting but also I was interested in producing work collaboratively. I have enjoyed the way that the project has evolved, quite organically and dynamically. The website shows this, as it changes all the time. The project has allowed each of us to grow while at the same time the group as a whole has also developed.

Paula Roush: In my case, I wanted to work with Deej, Joanna and Camilla and was interested in the possibility of collaboration. In terms of the content of the project, I had made a couple of projects dealing with surveillance. There was one in particular called *Bowville*, a commission for Space in 2004. It was considered a potentially difficult project for public art agencies to show as it raised many ethical issues. I saw a way through KISSS in which I could develop that work and make a contribution to the project. So my contribution was this and then also to make it into a platform to discuss the issues around electronic tagging and to see if there were other artists interested in working with electronic tags. It was successful for me as I found a way of bringing this installation/ performance that went on for 3 days back into the context of an exhibition. In the KISSS context, it was viewed in an exhibition but behind it was a working group. I have managed to get Arts Catalyst interested in these ideas and to take part in their project on bio-id. Space is also thinking of working with this project again next year.

Katy Deepwell: You gave KISSS a very public launch at a press conference at the Whitechapel on 25 August 2005, which made it more than just a group of friends coming together or a network being started; it seemed that you wanted to present it from the beginning as a conceptual project on a public platform.

Camilla Brueton: That event was very much about setting the tone for how the project should be perceived.

Deej Fabyc: It was also a kind of lucky break. We were originally going to launch it at Arts Admin in July but because of what happened on July 7 (7/7) with the bombs in London, this meant that our original plan was cancelled. I then spoke to the Whitechapel Art Gallery and they agreed. I then found funding from my University to support the event. The Whitechapel doesn't normally allow "art" to come in under their hire of venue scheme and so they actually put up notices outside the two rooms we used stating that this was not a Whitechapel event but that the public was welcome to attend. There was a sense of alarm about what was being organised by us. It was quite interesting that it generated that sense of rupture.

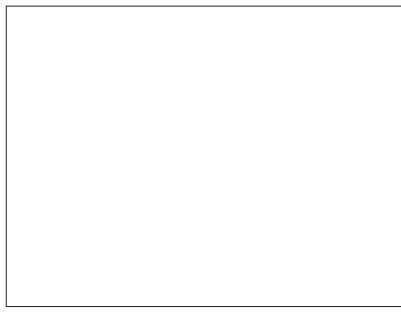
The strategy of KISSS is to work from the street to the museum. I was interested in Nikos Papastergiadis' work on spatial aesthetics (the title of his new book for 2006). He

talks about the problems of collaborations in art practice and what happens when they go into the museum: whether or not they become invisible in that space. Launching KISSS in this way was very much about raising its visibility.

Katy Deepwell: You have a very distinct model of collaboration. It is more an alliance, as each participant has their own projects within a general framework. How often have you made work together as a group?

Deej Fabyc: The summit we organised at Woodspring Priory House, nr. Western Super Mare (2-5 September 2005), was an opportunity to make work together. We did make work individually and collaboratively during the three days. We did an event together for the surveillance cameras outside the Ministry of Defence premises at St Thomas' Head. All of the participants came with different notions of what they wanted to do and we worked in different ways together. We had a two and half hour meeting before we went up to St Thomas' Head. Things emerged in the process. I, for example, initiated a collaboration which was very much informed by the site and that was an important part of being in this suppressed Priory – suppressed in the time of Henry VIII and deconsecrated since then. The building was next door to a Ministry of Defence premise. I asked everyone to help me with my response to the site, which was to use carving knives to cut off this wedding dress from my body in the chapel – which looked at notions of the martyr, carrying it to the current notions of the martyr – to suicide bombers, even. What had happened to St Thomas O' Beckett in the 12th Century was that his clothes were torn off, his blood was drained and his bones ground, each to be sent as relics to monasteries and churches around the UK. I was responding to that story and trying to turn the story into something contemporary. Paula Roush also worked with the knives but in a different way and this prop became quite prominent.

Paula Roush: We went to a site which was so charged historically. It had a museum and a library with lots of information about the place. We found a methodology or a method to work together. This was different from just sharing our present work, which we were used to doing. It seems the common thread is to work where there is a site which has a history of surveillance and suppression and where there is an archive which allows us to do some research and develop some collaborative actions, largely a tableaux or durational



Documentation of performances at KISSS summit, St Thomas' Head, 2-5 Sept 2005

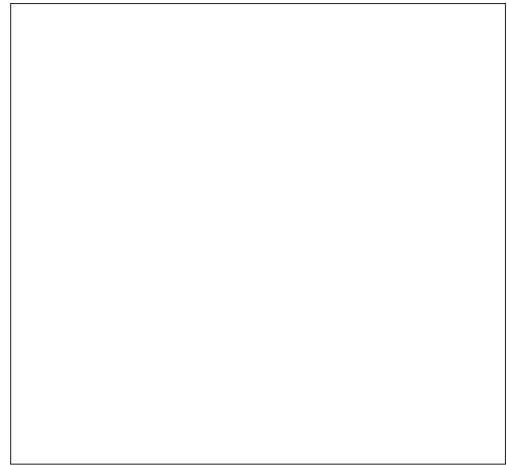
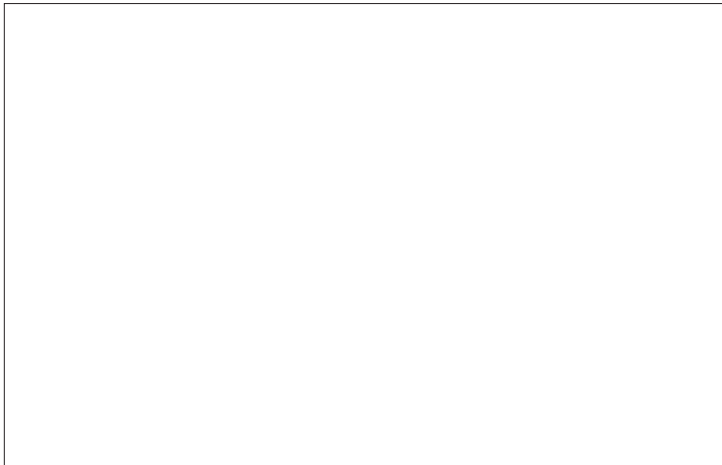
performance. I think we could develop this now in other locations: with site specificity to produce a tableaux, or re-enact some parts that we have developed together in other sites. The summit was really good, working in a no-zone, away from routine in our daily lives. Of course, the idea of collaboration has changed since the 1970s, it is more about co-operation. It was a more relaxed way of working than the pressure which often comes from working to deadlines in art institutions.

Katy Deepwell: I wondered what kind of models of collaboration you had in your heads either from workshops you might have attended in the past, your art education, or other social models from artists' networks you might have heard about and wanted to test?

Deej Fabyc: I think “*meta-performance*” covers what we are doing, even if not all the works are performances. For example, Camilla made a photograph – very beautiful photographs – of a surveillance camera, that then goes into the exhibition, and becomes part of the KISSS archive – a performative archive, an umbrella term for our individual and collective efforts.

Everyone involved has different backgrounds. In the 1980s I was part of a women’s collective making political posters, called *Jill Posters*. We used to collaborate conceptually on the production of these posters and then we would go out onto the streets and post them around Melbourne where we were based. I was also involved in another collective called *Garage Graphics* which was in Sydney so I have this background in working collaboratively. That was actually quite different from what I think we were developing in KISSS.

Paula Roush: My own interest is in fictional organisations and collectives. For me, it is a way of surpassing the autobiographical – I’m not so interested in dealing with my own stuff. One of the strategies I use is creating fictional organisations, like *msdm* (*mobile strategies of display & mediation*: www.msdm.org.uk), which some people think is a group but it is a virtual organisation which doesn’t exist but it can mutate to do different things at different times. I chose also fictional characters. For *Bowville*, for example, I chose the character Marian Manesta Forrester, who is a collective pseudonym performed by 3 women. KISSS is also a way of dealing with surveillance not individually but in a



Forum at the KISSS exhibition, Conical Gallery Melbourne, November 2005 Right: **Deborah Ostrow concrete helicopter helmet from *Anchor Woman Political Correspondent* series (2004), installed in KISSS exhibition.**

collective context. For me, it is important not to stay fixed on my own but to work within a collective environment and a social context.

Camilla Brueton: I find it quite refreshing to try working in this way. There are individuals who did want to lead on certain projects but there was very much an atmosphere of support and people were able to test out ideas within the group. Within the group there isn't a hierarchy. Deej and Joanna founded the group but it doesn't operate with a hierarchy because of this. It's not a project which is about self-promotion. Even though it is clear that it will help individuals develop ideas through conversations and opportunities to make work together. So many groups are just about self-promotion but I believe KISSS is ideas-led. People are all at different points in their career and share concerns about ways of working. In that way, it is quite democratic.

Katy Deepwell: **Do you invest in the project financially as well as in terms of time to keep it going? This is the other side of keeping a collective project going and maybe a measure of involvement in the group. There are a lot of projects these days, initiated because one person, usually a curator, raises the money for the other people to enable them to take part.**

Deej Fabyc: To get the exhibition over to the Conical Gallery in Melbourne Australia, we all invested some money. This helped to pay for the hire of equipment. We did have a small grant to hire the space. The exhibition was well-received, we spoke on several radio programmes and there's

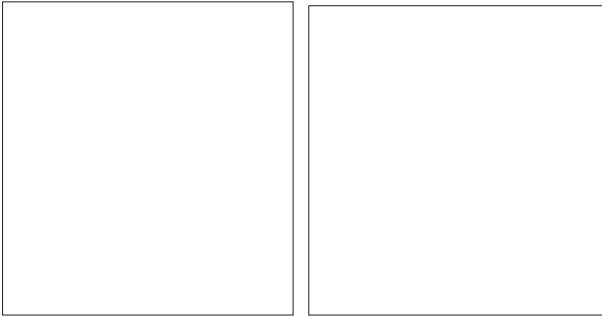
an article coming out in *un magazine* and a write-up in a few local newspapers. Working in an artist-run space is always difficult. There is usually a good crowd of people who know who will be interested in particular shows. Coming from outside of this circle, we were worried we wouldn't have an audience and that our work would be seen as coming from a different kind of place – geographically as well as politically. The Director of the space wasn't sure about the project, although in the end he was really pleased because we brought press and attention to the gallery it hadn't had. We had forty artists in the show and generally the space showed one or two fairly minimal, generally sculpture-based installations. What we were doing, which was a reasonable survey of aspects of contemporary art dealing with surveillance with some historical dimensions was essentially an archive and very different as an exhibition. There were things to read and engage with which demanded a lot more attention from an audience. People were very generous with their time and spent quite a lot of time looking at the videos and going through the archive. We also presented a forum, a group discussion with local artists, two from Melbourne: an artist from Nuronet and Deborah Ostrow, who has subsequently joined Joanna's part of the project.

Katy Deepwell: **Let's move on to discuss the four strategies you decided upon.**

Camilla Brueton: My strategy is called 'I See You See' and is about surveillance in public spaces. Those in my strategy include Nina Sobell, Eva Rudlinger, Manu Luksch, Mukul Patel and Ilze Black, and Nicolina van HarsKamp.



Camilla Brueton one of the cameras at St Thomas' Head, KISSS summit, photo. Below: **Camilla Brueton** two drawings, *the walk from home to work*



There have also been a number of discussions on the forum part of the KISSS website initiated by this strand and the artist Daedalus has produced a web article on the History of Surveillance. On a personal level, my practice is concerned with how structures and systems come together in cities and how the surveillance of those public spaces is becoming more and more apparent, especially in London since the bombings in the summer, and this has been highlighted in public discussions. I've also done some research into operators of CCTV cameras and their habits. I made a performance piece based on the route from my house to my workplace, drawing the cameras on the route. Turning the hi-fi into low-fi and turning the gaze back on the machine. The surveillance cameras are very much a passive tool, without the people to run them and interpret the data, what are they?

Katy Deepwell: Do you have any strong political take on the use of surveillance cameras? Or the policies under which they currently operate?

Camilla Brueton: Part of what I have been doing is research on those policies and I've been in contact with TFL who run an extensive network of cameras in London. Their policy is very strict and conscientious in so far as they do not

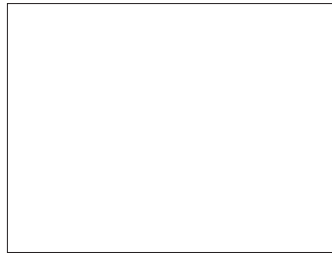
operate for financial gain. Their operators are not allowed to focus in on any one person. It is very clear cut what they are allowed to do but their cameras are accessed by other agents, like the police, whose purposes are different. On the surface, if TFL operators stick to the guidelines, no one should have anything to fear, but human beings are still human beings and we do need to be aware there are abuses. I was conscious when I came to this project that a lot of artists had been working in this area. I'm not anti-surveillance or pro-surveillance.

Katy Deepwell: What about the other strategies?

Paula Roush: My strategy in 'Bionic Bodies' was to bring together artists working with electronic tags. I was interested in how GPS tagging worked. When you, as an artist, are working with such technologies like surveillance cameras or GPS systems you trace a space, even though there is an aesthetic component there is always a political context which surrounds the technology. Camilla suggested that the technology appears neutral but the uses of technology are not neutral. Electronic tagging also involves the creation of databases in which individuals are specifically tracked and all kinds of data added: your consumption, your movements on public transport etc. I was trying to look at how I could take this further. I found out not only about many other artists' work but it also prompted me to explore electronic tagging which uses geo-data and radio frequencies which are now used in commodities and throughout urban environments. You can carry a tag on your clothing, you can implant it into your body, and it can be placed into all kinds of commodities.

I didn't have the time to get organised at this level for this show but I hope that this will happen later. So, I began to invite people I knew who were working with the body and tagging, both subjectively and politically: Maria Khierkhah, Susana Rezende, Psychological Art Circus.

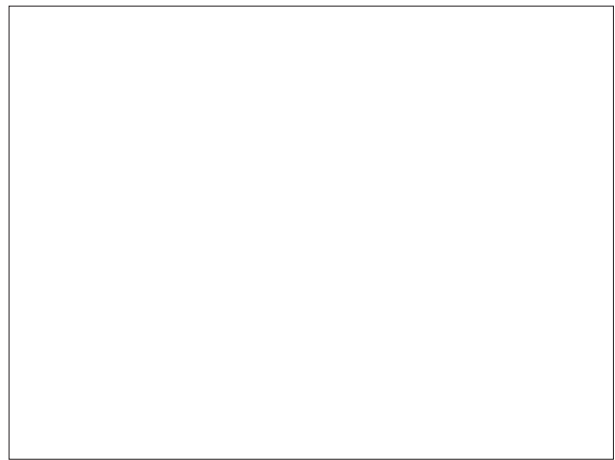
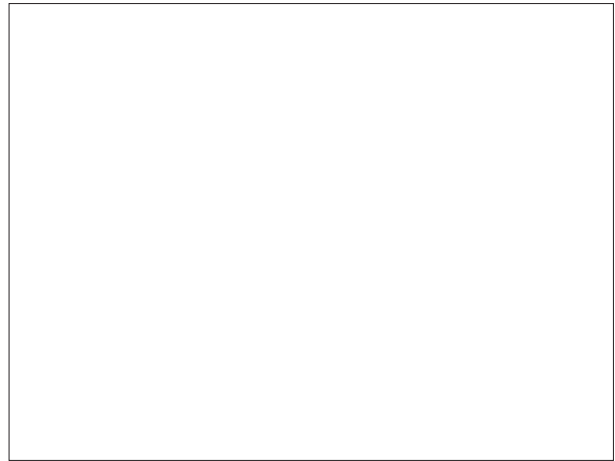
I think that it is part and parcel of the technology itself that it can be invisible as well as visible. It is closely related to censorship and state surveillance. To actually uncover the development of government and state surveillance systems is interesting for me: passports, ID cards, even the London Transport Oyster Cards – which track consumer movements. For me, this is the beginning of a working research group. The topic of surveillance creates something around which we can work and occupy a space. In terms of commercial work, it's not important. I have other projects which I pursue as well as KISSS.



Above and right: Paula Roush *Bowville* documentation of project. Image above is of Marian Manesta Forrester, a tagged subject, who has 3 days to become a citizen of *Bowville*.

**Right, below : DeeJ Fabyc *Pisstake* (2005) walk from home in Whitechapel to St Barts Hospital via underground
Photo: Hannah Terry**

Left: Maria Kheirkhah's work on bio-data *Evidence 1* self images

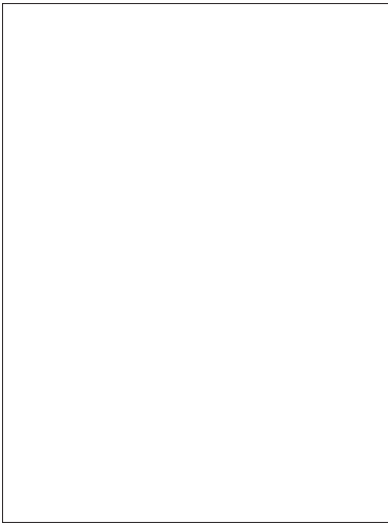


Deej Fabyc: The ‘Body Fortress’ strategy came about because in my practice I have been working on questions involving surveillance since the early 1990s. Two works in particular were important, *Sucking on the Sublime*, in which I lay , as if dead, in a room I created in a house in Sydney. I had a monitor above my head and there was a two way mirror glass between me and the audience. People were led in one by one by a person who looked like a cross between a jailer and an S & M mistress, into a room in which there was nothing but a pink chair and this two way mirror glass and a camera watching them. If they came close and looked into the surface of the work they could see me. I held my eyes open in a constant stare but I could see them above my head. In 1997, I made another piece, called *Green Room/Arcadia* at the W139 Gallery , which is in the red light district in Amsterdam, Holland. I constructed a room out of concrete breeze blocks, 4 m x 4 m, in which I lived during the month of the exhibition. There was a camera set up in the corner of the room screened 24/7, broadcast on a monitor further up the street. This project started up eighteen months before the start of broadcasting of *Big Brother* by Endemol in the Netherlands. I was even contacted by a journalist while making this project and they in fact made the link to 1984 and the notion of *Big Brother* in a television interview. It is, I believe, a very genuine response to the culture of surveillance in which we now live. It is a microcosm of

the city space and its constant surveillance of us.

With the *Piss-take* project I produced for my first involvement in *KISSS*, that project was about making a journey through the city streets, with these containers which were urine, but could have been anything, ammonia or any other dangerous substance. We were not stopped as we made this journey through the underground and the streets. The camera is so normalised now that when I presented the urine to the nurse at the end of the journey she was perfectly happy to be filmed, almost performing to the camera directly, while taking details of the urine samples for testing. Suppression is an important part of the project but what does surveillance do? Do we always act up to the cameras?

Dolores Sanchez’s piece is interesting in this respect. These photographs are a residue from a performance – a new departure for her. She asked members of the audience at the launch to wear these “*gags*” and what they felt about wearing them are recorded on the photograph. Hannah Terry’s work *Vote Junk* uses a collection based on things



Left: Dolores Sanchez *Bounding (/Unbounding) the Gag (Don't Think, Talk, Listen, Look)* (2005) photo documentation from performance, Whitechapel Art Gallery, Aug 2005
Right: Hannah Terry *Voie Junk* photo documentation of project, 2005

even in the shopping centre. Evident in our works, however, there is a counter-practice which marks the difference from our general culture of consumption and surveillance.

Katy Deepwell: Isn't the real interest in art practices about surveillance concerned with how an artist blocks, de-normalises, de-stabilises these "normative" structures within society?

that people throw away: a survey of junk. In the piece that she presented in the KISSS exhibition, she photographed a cross-dresser's collection of beaver-lamb coats and him. He talks about the fetish involved in these coats. He even has a hidden, secret door, to his wardrobe containing his fetish.

Camilla Brueton: Perhaps why we are so hooked on surveillance, it was suggested to me by someone at our launch, was because people no longer believe so strongly in God. So we've recreated this fantasy about someone who watches and judges our movements in the use of surveillance. This seemed an interesting take on 21st century surveillance.

Deej Fabyc: At the press launch, it was interesting because people had, even before we had opened our mouths, decided that we were anti-surveillance. However, it's not really that simple. People were expecting us to come up with more than a critique of surveillance. Looking at how surveillance operates is our main concern but people were expecting us to take a much stronger stance against surveillance or to impose that stance on us.

We are all constantly watching ourselves and making judgements about what makes us different from each other. There is also the notion of constant feedback and affirmation by uploading our experience on the net for people to see. It is very easy to dismiss this in our audience's experience, especially the sophistication of audiences under thirty whose experience of life includes the net and a culture of virtual experience.

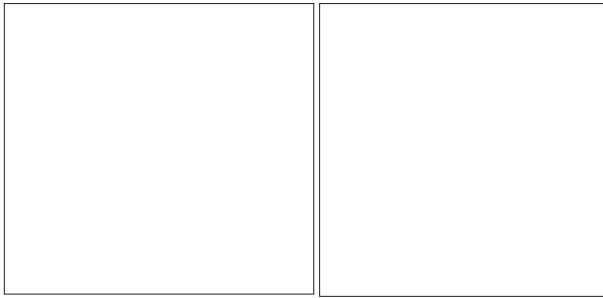
Paula Roush: There is a difference between this and the culture of suppression. There is a spectacle in surveillance

Deej Fabyc: I think that the artist can sometimes be a cipher, as well as a critic. It's a process of immersion, rather than standing back in some ways. Where an artist sits now is so different from a counter-culture. They are far more integrated into the normative processes of society.

Paula Roush: I am more interested in working at the intersections of art, science and technology in ways in which there is a dialogue with other disciplines. This makes the work much more de-centred from an autonomous art world. Everyone has a general opinion about surveillance. What other disciplines are considering about surveillance is interesting, and the interest for artists here is how visibility is constructed within surveillance. There is always a threshold for abuse in the technology and we have an interest in exposing this abuse in a visual way.

Katy Deepwell: Where do you see the project going from here, after one summit and an exhibition, will you repeat these tactics in the future?

Deej Fabyc: The archive is continually growing. We are planning another summit. We would like to show the archive in the UK and are actively seeking out a venue. When Joanna and I put the Conical gallery show together we worked 16 hours days. We realised, looking at the show, we put together in one month, that this was the kind of show a curator in a museum would spend 2 years assembling, with a reasonably good catalogue and compiling 4 video programmes.



Joanna Callaghan *Citizen Reporter* photos

Katy Deepwell: One of the artists in the show was a historical example, Nina Sobell, whose *Videophone Voyeur* was made in 1977. Was it always your intention to have a historical dimension to the archive?

Deej Fabyc: Yes. I hope this will develop in archive – particularly with regard to women artists.

Katy Deepwell: What kind of feminist cultural politics do you believe you are working with? What is the relationship you conceive between feminist politics and women’s art practices? Is the idea of women working collaboratively together at the centre of this or are you just open-minded about this and waiting to see what emerges?

Paula Roush: I can’t really speak for KISSS, as we really have different positions on this. I can speak for myself. Any specific position on feminism these days always seems very fragmentary. There is no consensus. I would say that in relation to my work, I always try to put my work in the context of other artists and especially a genealogy of women artists’ work. In relation to artists in the past, some artists might chose Duchamp but I would name Mierle Ukeles as an important influence on my practice because of its feminist content and the ways she, like Martha Rosler, deal with feminism, but not with the stereotype of the body or the parameters of the personal. They are interested in the social body and the social-political context and going beyond the biographical, putting themselves out there as feminine subjects in a social context but not expressing solely a feminine subjectivity. I mention Ukeles because I particularly like her *Maintenance* project, putting herself in the city as a woman. These are the feminist strategies I am most interested and for me it traces back the roots of my work, in cultural and social terms. I found out that the origins of police surveillance emerged at the same time as the suffragettes protests and were also part of how the women worked out

their tactics of resistance, communication with other women and protest in the street. This is also a broader struggle about effective social, cultural and political protests.

Deej Fabyc: I don’t have a specific version of feminist politics. I wouldn’t say that I’ve reframed my past experiences of collaboration and activism. I always wanted the project to be primarily a women’s project, like the Guerrilla Girls. KISSS is not particularly about careerism, it is wider than this.

I did have the idea of wanting to put women forward. I had to push the idea of having a woman only group quite hard with Joanna with whom I originally started this project. She wanted it to be a mixed programme. We agreed this was fine. The project allows for that. So, most of the people she has invited on her media programme, ‘Media Watch’, so far are men. However, Season Butler is in her strategy, her performance based on the work of a new anchor. ‘Media Watch’, her project, started with recording extracts at home from the new programmes after the events in July. She started compiling these from different news reports and making a montage, collage under different headings, identifying the “*experts*” and what they had to say, or the “*graphics*” which represented the bombs or surveillance techniques. It was a technique of surveying what was happening in July. The television broadcast aspect was one, reportage after 7/7 but edited in such a way you could see certain gaps in information and biases, the fictionalisation of the news and making it visible.

Paula Roush: KISSS has all the components of a fictional organisation. It could stretch itself to an international level but it could also stay very small and local and based in the kitchen. That’s where I think it connects with the feminist legacy. However, the difference is the idea of moving a domestic politics into a global politics, able to deal with surveillance in a public space. We have been doing it in a very small and localised intimate scale based on friendships and conversation. This is a very modest project, meetings in the kitchen with a low-fi approach, but we’ve been dealing with a socially conscious potentially global scale. The network for me is fictional in the sense it can be actualised in any place. There are a lot of participatory tools in place, including the website. At the same time it remains fluid. It remains completely open.

KISSS website: <http://www.elastic.org.uk/KISSS/>