

REMOTE INTERVENTIONS

Australia may be one of the most urbanised and coast-dwelling populations in the world. However, our imagined and projected national and self-images also tend towards the expanses of the interior and the 'bush'. I will explore some examples of what 'remote' means in the context of an imagined Australia and transnationalism.

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Australia may be one of the most urbanised and coast-dwelling populations in the world, as more than 80 per cent of Australians live within 100 kilometres of the coast. [1] However, our imagined and projected national and self-images also tend towards the expanses of the interior and the 'bush'.

I will explore some examples of what 'remote' means in the context of an imagined Australia and transnationalism. This means we can bring issues of

working across cultures, landscapes and nations into the discussion and presents an opportunity to discuss how many of the more interesting art works stem from their collaborative forms.

Two Australian arts organisations that work consistently in remote Australian communities are IASKA and Darwin Community Arts.

IASKA *SPACED*

IASKA (formerly International Art Space Kellerberrin Australia) has a long history of fostering innovative art projects in regional and remote areas and is regarded as among the most interesting art organisations to have emerged in Australia in the past decade.

Spaced is a Global/Local Community Exchange Through Art and Technology.

Conceived and organized by IASKA (*International Art Space Kellerberrin Australia*), *Spaced* is a new biennial visual arts project that links local communities throughout rural Western Australia as well as several overseas locations. *Spaced* forms a multi-voice but unified project that explores the relationship between local identity and the social, cultural, environmental and economic effects of globalisation. The projects draw on art and digital technology to implement cultural exchange between geographically and culturally distant communities. It features residencies, exhibitions, site specific works, educational and mentoring activities, a web-based forum and a publication. [2] The first iteration of the biennial will be held at Fremantle Art Centre in February 2012.

The methodology of *Spaced* is to partner with local community groups who invite professional artists to stay with them for substantial periods of time and produce artworks that articulate the specificities of these remote communities. Frequently there will be particular issues that are already explicit, but as frequently the issues may take some time to filter through to the stage of articulation. The artists who are most successful in these endeavours will have developed this ability to work within a community setting to realise high-quality artworks.

Marco Marcon, the director of *Spaced* and co-founder of IASKA, explains:

Spaced offered another innovative curatorial approach that involves the direct and active participation of a network of partner organisations and communities. It involves visual and media arts projects created by artists working on-site with a wide range of local social and environmental situations. *Spaced* centres on contemporary art practices with a strong social focus; it comprises context-responsive projects, international exchanges and a multi-purpose online hub. [3]

BIRNDIWIRNDI – WORLDS APART

One such project, *BirndiWirndi – Worlds Apart*, formed part of the ‘work-in-progress’ phase for what has now become the Spaced biennial. In late 2010 Sohan Ariel Hayes spent two months in Roebourne working on a collaborative project with Michael Woodley from the Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation.

Roebourne is located 1563km north of Perth in Western Australia's Pilbara region. IASKA's project partner, Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation, is an Indigenous organisation dedicated to the recording, preservation and maintenance of Yindjibarndi language and culture. Juluwarlu professionally collects, records, documents and broadcasts the language, culture, history and the contemporary lives of the local Indigenous people. Sohan is an award-winning animator and visual artist who works across media.

Sohan works closely with Michael and the community on a number of projects including outdoor projections at community gatherings and a series of editing and filmmaking workshops to assist Juluwarlu to achieve its goals. *BirndiWirndi – Worlds Apart* is a video-based work depicting the hearts, minds and spirits of the Yindjibarndi who, despite the enormous forces of the mining boom, still stand strong. The work was recently projected onto the now boarded up Victoria hotel in Roebourne.

The word is that this is the most activated Roebourne has been for quite some time. The local community and the Aboriginal Corporation are looking to extend the project with this artist - a sure indication of the success of this remote intervention and collaboration.

CRAYVOX

The Island, a cemetery exhaled by the sea.

The tree of life, calcinated to a bleached white clinker raft.

Whilst all around, submerged beneath the endless sheet of water

Fronds branch and entwine, filament and fan, knoll and star

Electric pink jostles acid green, fading to sombre blue where the sharks sleep.

Nigel Helyer, 2011: [4]

On the tiny Abrohlos Islands archipelago off the coast of Geraldton (500kms north of Perth, Western Australia), Nigel Helyer spent two months with the

crayfishermen and women for the Spaced biennial. Living and working on a number of these very remote islands which are made of calcified coral, he formed ties and recorded the tales of these very independent people.

Nigel Helyer is a sculptor and sound artist whose inter-disciplinary creative practice links art with scientific research and development. His research for the work will continue by linking in with the destination of the crayfish which are shipped directly to Taiwan. Helyer will spend time there with the import companies as well as restaurants and chefs who are the next main part of the chain of relationships in this project.

The resulting piece, *CrayVox* aims to present some of the issues of marine food security, environmental change, water security, and folklore, myths and oral histories. A small vessel will be equipped as a floating media and biology lab and will also serve as the artist's accommodation. The artist will operate the vessel's scientific and technological systems and engage in a creative manner with the fishing communities, their related service industries on-shore and the research section of the Department of Fisheries. The community has been selected to highlight a unique cultural, environmental and economic activity within the region. [5]

DARWIN COMMUNITY ARTS: *FRONTLINE*

Moving to the top end of Australia, to an outlying area of Darwin we come to Malak, where Darwin Community Arts is active in an outreach program with local Indigenous and recently arrived refugee teenagers.

Since 2009, Darwin Community Arts (DCA) has facilitated a locative media project in the Malak area of Darwin. *Frontline*, builds on previous work by DCA dealing with the relationship of Indigenous, African, and other communities in Malak and the northern suburbs of Darwin, enhancing its “community arts intervention” in Malak through locative media. [6]

Malak is considered a frontline suburb for confronting social, economic, and cultural issues facing Darwin today. It is also the frontline for exploring positive changes, including cultural changes, at a local level. This is why DCA is based in Malak; they seek to make a difference at the frontline.

Frontline builds on DCA's work in Malak since mid 2007, which has included running a Telecentro (community based Internet access facility), facilitating workshops on digital media, and hosting Darwin Fringe events.

The project engages with all communities in Malak, including but not limited to Indigenous and African youth, with whom DCA has worked since 2007. Special attention is given to engaging young people, particularly Indigenous and African

young people who make up a significant proportion of the population, and who have featured prominently in tensions in the area.

The Malak Telecentro -- in Shop 10, Malak Shopping Centre -- offers broadband access to the Internet and digital office and production facilities free of charge to the community. It currently has a running network of twelve (12) personal computers with the Ubuntu GNU/Linux operating system, and one (1) Apple eMac; there are more computers that are in storage, slated for setting up later. WiFi connectivity is available for Telecentro volunteers.

The computers and other equipment were donated mainly by Charles Darwin University, and also by St John's College, Bunji Elchoate, Controlability, Taminmin High School, Bees Creek High School, and Mike Foley. The furniture is mainly from NT Government surplus stores. Other equipment was provided by Darwin Community Arts, which operates the Telecentro.

NT Freenet (<http://www.the-mesh.org>) provide technical advice and support for the Telecentro and related projects. The Telecentro is staffed mainly by volunteers from Darwin Community Arts, Melaleuca Refugee Centre, and NT Freenet. [7]

Participants have been experimenting with open-source laser tagging and LED Throwies during the Darwin Fringe, at Malak Shopping Centre and car park and more recently with tagtool at the Darwin Parliament House.

The methodology of DCA is to use media in a number of forms, with the intention that interest will be maintained with the groups of, predominately, teenagers. Other media forms include:

- Amazing Malak: A version of the Amazing Race, which has proved popular with young people in Darwin, organised through vacation care programs. This game/race is held across Malak's parks and other places, with on-the-ground racers working with virtual, online participants in spaces such as Second Life.
- Computer Kiosks: Computers placed around Malak to accept video blogs and other contributions that annotate and trace people who come through these spaces.
- Interactive Spaces: Multimedia presentations are made about the spaces themselves (e.g. film or video clips) and triggered by movements of visitors to them.
- Online Social Mapping: Residents are encouraged and assisted to post information about places in Malak and surrounding areas on Google Earth/Maps.

Frontline is a great example of how collaborative artistic interventions can work by using the kinds of activities the young people are interested in. It aims to move them from breaking into the shops in the mall and acting out in the streets, to making art in one of the shops in the mall and taking that to the streets.

LARGE SCREENS AND THE TRANSNATIONAL PUBLIC SPHERE

The *Large Screens and the Transnational Public Sphere* research project explores the exchange of information and interactive content between cities identified as media 'hubs', and the impact on the formation of a regional public sphere. This project currently links screens between Federation Square, Melbourne and those managed by Art Center Nabi, Seoul. [8]

Begun in 2009, research for *Large Screens and the Transnational Public Sphere* will continue until mid 2013 developing interactive realtime artistic events between Melbourne and Seoul to explore the capabilities of different art practices that inspire and bridge communities across two cities. [9]

Our program of cross-cultural exchange and empirical analysis of public interactions around large screens, aims to inform media, cultural and urban planning policy. Our culturally and organisationally diverse team members include theorists, administrators, technicians, artists and curators, from the Art Center Nabi, Seoul, South Korea, Federation Square PL, University of Melbourne, University of Sydney. Funding comes from the Australian Research Council and the Australia Council for the Arts.

THE SCREEN AS TRANSNATIONAL 'CAMPO'

Can recently 'created' public spaces become places of civic engagement - can they become a transnational 'campo'?

The hypothesis being tested is that real-time, interactive artwork presented between nations, on large public screens can have a positive impact on how we engage with one other and, in a broader sense, affect our civic lives. We intend to inform media, cultural and urban planning policy to revitalize public space and public interaction by increasing risk-taking and creative opportunities.

The aim of the Large Screens and the Transnational Public Sphere project is to show what an interactive city can be or should be. We envision the city as a living organism that expresses in real time its emotional and physical states. We dream of a new collectivity based on diversity. This is possible with today's media. The large screen works as a window to other cultures, airing cultural and artistic contents from around the world. But as cities develop and their populations expand, it becomes clearer that public art should also be able to question our notion of the 'civic', reflecting on it, asking if there are any holes, rather than conforming to it. The term 'civic' can be refined and redefined by good public art. In the end, it is a process of cultural negotiation. Through this project, we are proposing both new modes of experience to share with and between people, delivered by a new *template* for content delivery — across countries, across screens. Mediated by technology, but inherently live.

This is a highly collaborative arts-based project between nations and cultures where the role of the artist and the project teams are closely intertwined.

The first two works which blazed the trail related in a delicate way with each other, both articulating identity in some way, beginning what is becoming a poetic transnational creative dialogue.

'sms_origins' uses the large screen as a public sms graffiti board. Leon Cmielewski and Josephine Starrs conceived and designed the piece working closely with programmer Adam Hinshaw. A phone number is displayed on a large screen in a public space along with the instruction "sms the name of the country you come from." When participants sms their (and/or parents or grandparents) country of origin a curved vector is added to the map of the world displayed on the large screen, which updates in realtime as it receives messages.

The concept, design and programming by Seung Joon Choi in '<Value>' explored what is important to people. A word sent via sms responding to the question "what is valuable to you" generated a text and data flow. The wordcloud expands depending on how importantly people value each word. The words may be 'love'/'networking'/'home'/'joy'. <Value> expresses what any particular group, in that time and across space, wish to emphasize and suggests that we take a step back and lightheartedly explore whether it is possible to harmonise different values.

The current work-in-progress is the "HELLO" project. The idea, based on the practice of Australian choreographer, Becky Hilton, in collaboration with Korean choreographer, Soon-Ho Park, is that gestures are gathered from various groups, five gestures are subsequently selected to form a choreographed sequence. These are then exchanged one-on-one between participants to produce an unanticipated dance.

SANS-FRONTIERS

The scale and impact of the works I have described vary significantly in terms of the support systems and populations involved, however the basic premises for successful artistic collaboration remain fairly consistent. These include the need for great investment in time, communication techniques and expansive thinking beyond borders. We could also consider these remote interventions as effective artistes-sans-frontiers projects.

References and Notes:

1. "Australia's environment at a glance," http://www.dfat.gov.au/facts/env_glance.html (accessed September 2011).
2. IASKA website, <http://www.iaska.com.au> (accessed September 2011).

3. *Artlink* vol 31, no. 1 (2011): 5.
 4. "Abrolhos Islands: Nigel Helyer," http://www.iaska.com.au/content/project/Abrolhos+Islands%3A+Nigel+Helyer/43/work_in_progress/post/120/ (accessed September 2011).
 5. "Abrolhos Islands: Nigel Helyer," <http://www.iaska.com.au/content/project/Abrolhos+Islands%3A+Nigel+Helyer/43/project/> (accessed September 2011).
 6. Frontline was supported by the Australia Council, the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) and Northern Territory Government's Office of Multicultural Affairs.
 7. Darwin Community Arts website, <http://www.darwincommunityarts.org.au> (accessed September 2011).
 8. Please see the full paper for ISEA2011 on the Large Urban Screens and the Transnational Sphere is entitled "Towards a transnational campo."
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