

# Media Arts Group

## Impact statement

### STATEMENT OF CLAIMS

The Media Arts Group claims to meet the Panel 13 impact guidelines, specifically, that the “adoption of the Group’s research has produced an outstanding social and cultural benefit for the wider community in Australia”. The end-users of our research fall into three broad categories. These categories overlap, given the complex social, personal and economic functions of our cultural research products and the indistinct boundaries between consumers and practitioners of media art. Our research output is diverse and covers a range of outputs including printmedia and photomedia works on paper, multimedia installations, sculptures, publications, symposia, and curatorial projects. The magnitude of our impact varies from the clearly quantifiable, for example, the public and private wealth that we have created in the physical products of our research, to the less tangible but no less valuable benefits to society that have arisen from our contributions to Australian and international artistic and new-media movements—the sense of national creativity, the promotion of cultural discourse, the opportunities provided to curatorial institutions, and the enrichment of art education in schools. These impacts are highlighted in the four Case Studies, which demonstrate our engagement with end-users who shape and transmit Australia’s historical legacies to contemporary audiences (Case Study 1), our pursuit of the social and economic development of new technologies in Australia and overseas through industry crossovers (Case Studies 2 and 3), and our work to revitalise Australian communities by raising social and environmental awareness through cross-disciplinary, government and corporate partnerships (Case Study 4). One of the key indicators of the impact our output has on all end-users has been the high rate of invitations and repeat invitations to exhibit, describe and analyse our research.

Our work has had an impact in other countries through international exhibitions, including Andrew Hurle’s *Excavating*, Kunstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin, 2005 [Output 2]; Marilyn Fairskye’s *Eye Contact*, WRO 01/9th International Media Art Biennale, Wroclaw, Poland, 2001 [Output 3]; and Rebecca Beardmore’s *The Room*, Galleria Harmonia, Jyvaskyla, Finland, 2006 [Output 1]. Fairskye’s sustained engagement with an experimental film practice has seen close research linkages develop with the International Film Festival Rotterdam (IFFR), where she has been an invited participant in their annual program of events for the past decade [Output 2]. These outputs have been viewed by tens of thousands of people and have helped raise Australia’s profile as a dynamic producer of media art. The Australian Film Commission describes the impact of the IFFR as highly significant: “with festival admissions reaching 355,000 in 2003 and its ever more successful co-production pitching forum, Cinemart, Rotterdam has established itself as a key feature film event in Europe. Known for being a progressive festival, Rotterdam has recently expanded to include interactive media with its Online Cinema initiative.” (<[http://svc012.wic030p.serverweb.com/marketingyourfilm/festivals/festival\\_31.aspx](http://svc012.wic030p.serverweb.com/marketingyourfilm/festivals/festival_31.aspx)>).

By far the largest category of end-users, but the one on which our impact is the most subtle and long-term, is the Australian public. These end-users can be seen as falling into concentric circles around our research output, starting with inner groups of consumers, such as those who attend exhibitions and private galleries at which our research is showcased and who are exposed to the accompanying literature—critical and descriptive exhibition and gallery texts, and critiques in the media. These are the people who directly enjoy and are inspired by our research; it is why works such as Vanila Netto’s *The Magnanimous Beige Wrap...*, which playfully challenges traditional ideas of photographic portraiture and subjectivity, won the prestigious Citigroup 2006 Photographic Prize, held at the AGNSW, 25/3–28/5/06 [Output 1]. Judges Edmund Capon, Lindy Lee and Rosemary Laing reported that “Vanila Netto’s photograph is not a straight portrait in the traditional sense and we were intrigued by its interpretative and directorial qualities...It is also an exquisite print with beautiful subtle tones” (<<http://www.thearchibaldprize.com.au/06/winners/ppp>>). Our impact on young art lovers is underlined by the focus, since 2004, on Anne Ferran’s work in the NSW Board of Studies Years 7–10 Art Syllabus unit *Photographic and digital media* (<[http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus\\_sc/pdf\\_doc/photo\\_dig\\_media\\_710\\_support.doc](http://www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus_sc/pdf_doc/photo_dig_media_710_support.doc)>).

A wider circle of people have come into contact with our public art works. To single out just one example, Fairskye’s 2001 public work commission, *Tide*, is located at the end of Sydney’s popular tourist locality, Rialto Square in Manly Corso [Output 4]. The six polished stainless steel columns that line the public square act, literally and metaphorically, as a mirror of our past and present. The reflections of passers-by mingle against these yardsticks of time, which mark the tidal changes of the locality’s past and draw attention to our place in its history; the impact is on both personal and historical dimensions of people’s identity. The

research is featured in the Manly tourism's full colour brochure on public art, and the impact of this and other public artworks in this district was highlighted by the Mayor of Manly, Dr Peter Macdonald's statement that they are "an important part of Manly's cultural heritage [which] serve as a symbol of a promising future for public art in Manly" (<<http://www.manly.nsw.gov.au/Content.aspx?PageID=42&ItemID=175>>).

Moving further outwards are all Australians, who benefit indirectly from our contributions to the evolution of their national identity. In a historical period that is marked by cultural convergence on a global scale, our research—much of it, ironically, using the very technological agents of that convergence—has provided new ways for Australians to look at themselves and their environment, past and present, within the country and in relation to other cultures. John Conomos's video sculpture, *Cyborg Ned*, explores the aesthetic, cultural and historical implications of the Ned Kelly saga in the context of the Australian popular imagination [Output 1]. The work incorporates excerpts from archival 1930s cinema (depicting the Ned Kelly story), sequences of Sidney Nolan's famous Ned Kelly paintings of the 1940s and 1950s, and interviews with noted historians, commentators and art critics who discuss the Ned Kelly narrative and its place in the Australian art, culture and life. It offers us a chance to consider Australia's bush mythologies through present-day techno-fantasies of cyborg outlaws. First shown in a solo exhibition at Roslyn Oxley 9 Gallery (20/11–18/12/03), it toured Wollongong City Gallery (28/8–1/10/06). Conomos was interviewed by local Wollongong ABC Radio during the course of the exhibition, and the work received critical acclaim in Ann Finegan, "Cyborg Ned", *Eyeline*, No 54, 2004. The work's historical impact was recognised in its purchase by the AFC's National Film and Sound Archives in 2006.

Drawing on the vast networks of visual culture in Australia, our research has investigated the often-overlooked significance of indigenous and migrant pasts, and how we share and communicate the legacy of that history through new media technologies. In particular, through research into different forms of media pertaining to technological reproduction, we have interpreted and re-presented archival materials to bring their contemporary relevance to light. Anne Ferran's photographic work, *Twice Removed* [Output 4], a collaborative project with artist and writer Anne Brennan, involved researching the migration of machine lace-makers from 19th-century Calais in France to Maitland in rural NSW. Ferran created a series of photographic images that brought together historical elements of the past with locations from present, in a way that was visually arresting but palpably synthetic, to highlight the frisson of time that these images captured. Young women of the present-day district were photographed wearing the traditional Calais lace bonnet, drawing attention to issues of female labour and experiences of migration in stark relief against 21st-century perspectives. Involving community residents in the project was an important part of the work's function. Specially commissioned for exhibition by Maitland Regional Gallery as part of the HunterArt1: Art Tourist Project, the gallery used this site-specific project to promote the cultural resources of the Lower Hunter region (13/2–28/3/04). *Twice removed* was also shown in *The line between us: the maternal relation in contemporary photography*, Monash University Museum of Art, 2004, and *Zero.*, showcasing new work by contemporary Australian and NZ photographers, Te Manawa Museum and Gallery, Dunedin Public Art Gallery (touring since August 2006).

The second category of end-users comprises public and private organisations and corporations, and our collaborating practitioners. As highlighted above and in all four Case Studies, a host of government institutions have drawn on our work in their development of cultural programs that promote the diversity and appreciation of Australia's uniqueness, here and overseas. A further example is Robyn Backen's work for the Sydney Museum, in collaboration with their scientists, on the exhibition *Catching...the Harbour*, (21/7–2/12/01). This enabled the institution to draw attention to why this key part of the city's natural heritage needs to be cared for, and to provide insights into the indigenous culture that grew symbiotically, as it were, around the harbour, before and after European settlement [Output 2].

Australia's independent public institutions and private corporations are increasingly recognising the value of an association with the cutting edge of artistic research. Backen has specialised in such research. Her work for the leading medical research organisation, the Garvan Institute, resulted in the production of *Atrophy*, which was made possible by her close interactions with the Institute's medical researchers and practitioners in conjunction with the Art Gallery of NSW, December 2006 [Output 2]. Backen's work investigated the way the brain changes through the slow deterioration that occurs with the onset of dementia. *Atrophy* was a major participant in the Science as Art auction at the Art Gallery of NSW that raised more than \$50K for Garvan Institute research. The output was designed to raise public awareness of the diseases that the Garvan Institute investigates, and to focus on ways in which clinicians express the humanistic aspects of their research. Dr Liz Caldon, one of the Institute's scientists involved in the project stated that "we can become

very clinical about the material we deal with. This experience gave me the opportunity to re-examine my work with a fresh eye, for both its artistic and human implications” (<<http://www.garvan.org.au/content.aspx?mid=7&iid=689>>).

Backen’s work with the prominent Bovis Lend Lease real-estate corporation, in partnership with Queensland Ministry for the Arts, led to the 2004 public work commission *Droplet*, in which the synergies between architectural design and the installation of Backen’s fibre-optic light sculpture created the illusion of an oversized water drop on the verge of falling from a building’s interior [Output 2]. This interrelationship between the sculpture and the building explored provoked different ways of perceiving and navigating Australian urban space. It raised the prestige and public profile of Bovis Lend Lease through their association with media-art research, and has promoted within this end-user the advantages of investigating new ways of constructing built environments, especially ways of increasing the value of human interactions with them.

The boundary between media-arts practitioners and consumers is blurred: many of our collaborators are also end-users. In this respect, the Group has a strong track record of highly successful collaboration with other researchers, professionals and practitioners, including other artists, curators, gallery owners, scientists, writers, computer programmers, archaeologists, architects, historians, and marine biologists. Specific examples are set out in the four Case Studies and in the Descriptive Component of the Context Statement.

## CASE STUDY 1: MEMORY, CULTURAL IDENTITY AND HISTORY

### Narratives of time

Major developments in the functions and uses of digital technology, within both private and public spheres, have seen a proliferation of recordable visual media devices, such as camera phones, iPods and home entertainment systems. The ways we record, store and retrieve information have undergone rapid change; for example, the physical analogue print has been eclipsed by the virtual snapshot, housed on websites and blogs.

Our research has explored the changing nature of analogue and digital media in relation to the construction of historical narratives. Media arts have significant advantages in their ability to examine how historical information is ‘archived’ and how archives themselves are defined; one of our primary concerns is to reconstruct and re-interpret the visual remnants of historical events through the use of photographic, cinematic and digital media, and to explore the physical presence of history and its place in Australia’s cultural memory and identity.

### Bodily memory

Anne Ferran’s research has been a rich exploration of Australia’s history in relation to these narratives [Outputs 1–4]. Her primary focus has been on the recovery of lost and ‘small’ histories, which have typically been eclipsed by Australia’s grand narratives. Often working with little-known archives, she uses the historical imagery and objects they yield to create outputs that provoke a sense of loss, at the same time connecting us with a living history tied to our cultural identity. Much of her research concentrates on the roles and identities of Australian women in relation to historical sites.

The impact of Ferran’s research is demonstrated through her major solo exhibitions of the works *1–38* and *INSULA*—mixed-media installations shown in Sydney at Stills Gallery (15/10–15/11/03) and the University’s SCA Gallery (29/5–4/7/03) that were viewed by a broad cross-section of the public, including members of the arts community, families with personal connections to the archive, and the broader community [Output 2]. The work was based on a small archive she discovered at the NSW State Library, comprising 38 female psychiatric patient photographs taken at Gladesville Hospital in the 1940s. Ferran drew attention to the way in which the identities of these women had been clinically constructed and defined through the institutional gaze of the camera within the hospital. The work presented closely cropped images, on walls and in book form, of hands and facial gestures appropriated from the original archival images, and brought these histories to light for the first time. The complexity and importance of this work was critically discussed in a feature essay by Dr Sue Best, “Seriality and insanity: the aesthetics of administration revisited” in *Eyeline* 53 (2003–04). In this essay, Best discussed Ferran’s work in the context of 1960s and 70s conceptual art, describing the historical importance of Ferran’s work in terms of its ability to give expression and feeling back to the medicalised bodies of the female subjects. Ferran’s work was reproduced in Catriona Moore, “Decoration, aspiration and nostalgia: contemporary Australian photography” in *Art & Australia*, vol. 42/3, 2005, p. 424.

The works' significance and impact were further demonstrated through curatorial invitations to Ferran to exhibit them in shows celebrating the value and achievements of women artists' depictions of women. A fine example was *5 in Focus: Contemporary Women Photo Artists*, Campbelltown City Bicentennial Gallery (May 2004), which showcased Ferran's work in the context of four other leading Australian photographic artists (Pat Brassington, Brenda L Croft, Anne Ferran, Tracey Moffatt and Robyn Stacey). Ferran presented an artist's floortalk on her work during the exhibition, extending the dialogues of history and its place in the present. In February 2005, she presented an invited guest lecture on the work at Illawarra Institute of TAFE. The work was exhibited in *Girl Band*, curated by Barbara Flynn for the Deloitte Foundation, Sydney (January 2006), as part of the Foundation's support for significant emerging and established contemporary Australian artists.

The feminist discourse of subjectivity and history surrounding this work was foregrounded in exhibitions dealing specifically with mental illness across the Asia-Pacific region. The work was shown in the group exhibitions *Still Present: Exploring Psychiatric Institutions in Photography* (April 2005), curated by Sophie McIntyre for the Adam Art Gallery, Victoria University of Wellington, NZ, 2005, and accompanied by a 32-page catalogue with critical essays by the McIntyre and prominent arts writer Kyla McFarlane. On the basis of Ferran's floortalk during the exhibition, researchers at Massey University, Wellington invited her to give a guest lecture on the work (October 2005).

Selected works from *1-38* and *INSULA* were shown in *For Matthew and Others: Journeys with Schizophrenia*, at the Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney (July 2006) and reproduced in the exhibition catalogue—a comprehensive 180-page book of essays and social histories. The group exhibition was a multidisciplinary project that examined through visual arts, text, performance and social histories the multiple impacts of schizophrenia on individuals, families and communities. The goal was to raise public awareness of one of the most stigmatised illnesses in contemporary society by drawing on the stories of Australians who live with this illness. The project was presented across three major cultural venues: Campbelltown Arts Centre, Ivan Dougherty Gallery and Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre.

Ferran's work in the exhibition contributed to the show's impact in broader fields of Australian culture, in which discussions surrounding the artworks and mental illness were played out in Sebastian Smee's review "In the mind's eye," *Weekend Australian* (21/10/06); *Sunday Arts*, ABC TV, 5pm (05/11/2006); and *World View*, SBS Radio (02/10/06). The exhibition was an event in the City of Sydney's *Art and About* festival (3–22/10/06). The impact of the exhibition included the development of an education kit to assist NSW secondary teachers and students to engage with the content of the exhibition in the syllabus areas of English, Legal Studies, Personal Development, Health and Physical Education, and Visual Arts. An image of Ferran's work is featured on p. 27 of the kit, and is contextualised on the following page with an artist's statement, background information, critical writing and educational activities related to the work. She was invited by Isobel Crombie, Senior Curator of Photography, NGV, to present her research into Australian history in an international context at the Tate Modern: *Global Photography Now—the Asia Pacific Symposium* (August 2006). This seminar focused on Ferran and two other practitioners from the Asia-Pacific whose photographic work has been informed by an astute sense of the historical past and present. It investigated encounters between cultures and histories that are both specific to the regions in which the artists live, and wider global issues. An image of Ferran's work is used in the *Tate Online* promotion of the event, and the event was webcast; an online archive of the full seminar is at <[http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/webcasts/global\\_photography/asia\\_pacific/default.jsp](http://www.tate.org.uk/onlineevents/webcasts/global_photography/asia_pacific/default.jsp)>

### Tracing history

In recognition of Ferran's work on Australian history, she was invited to be the first artist-in-residence at the new National Museum of Australia (NMA), Canberra (July 2002). During this residency, she produced the *Spill* series (a mixed-media work), which was also shown at the NMA in July 2002 [Output 1]. *Spill* concerns the period after convict transportation to NSW ended in 1840, when the Hyde Park Barracks in Sydney were redeveloped as the Female Immigration Depot. Single women seeking new prospects in the colony lived in the dormitories until their services were hired out. From 1862, the Hyde Park Asylum for Infirm and Destitute Women occupied the upper levels of the Barracks, providing a refuge for poor, ill and abandoned women. Objects such as clothing and other personal effects were recovered from beneath the Barracks upper-level floorboards during archaeological excavations in 1980 and 1981. The objects used by Anne Ferran in the making of the *Spill* photogram works date from this period of female occupation. Ferran presented an exhibition floortalk and lecture at the NMA during her residency to further draw attention to the lost histories of Australia women; in these presentations, she encouraged audiences to engage with the relevance and intimacy of these historical subjects, as well as what these subjects might signify in terms of

current Australian views on asylum seekers and refugees. This led to her invited Art Forum lecture on the work at the Institute of the Arts, ANU (November 2002). The residency was featured on the ABC Arts Online website, *Visual Arts/Features*, “Anne Ferran: photograms” (December 2003–April 2004).

The Historic Houses Trust of NSW acquired five works from this series (2004), which it uses to draw attention to the recently recovered memory of Australia’s colonial past and the forgotten histories of the Barracks and the women who resided there. The works, which have been viewed by thousands of visitors to the Trust’s attractions each year, call into sharp focus the role of museums and the how they collect and present the history of objects as portraits of our past. It is featured in John Petersen’s *Hyde Park Barracks Museum: Guidebook*, Sydney: Historic Houses Trust of NSW, 2003. The work was shown at Stills 2 Gallery, Sydney (2003). In the same year, a work from this series won the Gold Coast Ulrick Schubert Photographic Award, an acquisitive prize for outstanding still-based photomedia work. The Gold Coast City Art Gallery is one of Australia’s most prominent public regional galleries and serves a population of some 400,000. The Gallery houses the renowned City collection of contemporary and historical artworks documenting the character of the Gold Coast and the development of Australian art practice.

End-users for verification: Dr Isobel Crombie, Senoir Curator (Photography), National Gallery Victoria, 038620 2222, enquiries@ngv.vic.gov.au; Craddock Morton, Director, National Museum Australia, 0262085000; Dr Susan Best, Senior Lecuturer, College of Fine Arts, UNSW, 0293850777, s.best@unsw.edu.au; Sandy Edwards, Director, Stills Gallery, 0293317775, info@stillsgallery.com.au.

## CASE STUDY 2: GLOBAL NETWORKS AND DIGITAL GAME CULTURE

### Shifting grounds of technology

The dialogue between media arts and the broader domain of visual culture takes place across an ever-changing media landscape of analogue and digital technologies. These shifting grounds are reorienting the ways we engage with and define the real and virtual worlds. In the light of this dynamic environment, our research, we have explored the complexities of subjectivity in relation to traditional and new-media interfaces. We have examined the role of media technology in relation to post-industrial capital and have challenged the ways in which notions of identity have been shaped by globalisation and definitions of commodities and consumption.

### Digital playgrounds: screen cultures

The research of Josephine Starrs [Outputs 1,2, 4], in an ongoing collaborative partnership with Leon Cmielewski (Lecturer, School of Communications, Media and Design, UWS) has shaped new ways of understanding photographic and digital media in relation to the commodification of leisure and urban lifestyles. Starrs has produced new hybrid art-forms by incorporating various types of game play into her research. Her work on digital game culture is underpinned by strategies of collaboration, interactivity and play, as subversive forms of consumption; thus, she has dramatically recontextualised the conventions of digital game-interfaces and their action-driven narratives.

The significance of Starrs’s explorations of new media technology and gaming led to her appointment as Artistic Director of Delux Media Arts, Sydney. In this role, she convened the international event *FutureScre03: Plaything, Digital Games & Culture* [Output 4]. This comprised a three-day symposium and a two-week art exhibition of international artists curated by Starrs at First Draft Gallery (with an accompanying catalogue publication) in May 2006. These were platforms for the discussion of subjectivity in relation to play, interactivity and media arts. It was the first event of its kind in Australia and attracted speakers such as Eric Zimmerman, CEO of Gamelab in New York; Mary Flanagan, US academic, games researcher and designer; and five other international and 18 national experts. The event stimulated new avenues of debate, while emphasising the cultural diversity of game users and perceptual modes of interactivity. The objectives were to develop a theoretical framework to analyse the culture of digital games, and to increase critical awareness of the complexities and potential crossovers of game culture in the fine arts and in the games industry. The symposium explored game development from cultural and economic perspectives, and investigated strategies to intervene in the market and to encourage diversity in future commercial products. It explored alternative gender roles of users and on-screen characters in relation to the mainstream stereotypes that predominate the market. The event addressed key issues such as gender roles, cultural identity, virtual subjectivity, and interactivity, via graphical user interfaces. It was a major contribution to the development of a critical framework for analysing the culture of digital games.

*FutureScreed03* received positive press coverage (such as Swalwell, M. *RealTime*, no. 57, 2003, p. 25). As a result of the impact of the event on practitioners, Starrs was invited by the Australian new media-arts agency, Novamedia, to co-convene the *GameTime* symposium at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne (2004). The symposium explored, debated and celebrated new directions in interactive media and computer games. Starrs curated a program of guest speakers who had demonstrated innovation in digital game research and design. Among distinguished international presenters, Starrs included Teuya Miziguchi, respected Japanese game designer and former head of Sega's United Game Artist Studio (US); Ken Perlin, Professor of Computer Science and Director of NYU Media Research Lab, and Katie Salen (US), Director of Graduate Studies in Design and Digital Technology, Parson's School of Design, and co-author of *Rules of play: game design fundamentals* (MIT Press 2003).

#### Floating territories: migration and play

Starrs's research into games interfacing and identity since 2001 led to the mixed-media installation *Floating Territories*, exhibited at the International Symposium on Electronic Art in Helsinki, May 2004 [Output 2], where she presented an artist's talk on the work. This research developed into a series of interactive games that explored issues of territories, borders, migration and cultural identity. Drawing on the Australia's multicultural diversity and the identity politics of place, the work used the strategy of play to chart cultural identity, within both the virtual space of the work's graphics and the physical space of the gallery community and its players/viewers. By her design, particular attention was directed towards notions of belonging in relation to cultures of real and virtual terrains. The process of navigation and mapping were foregrounded as a means of exploring the impact of globalisation and travel in relation to issues of diaspora, community and nationalism. The impact of the event and Starr's work was highlighted locally with positive reviews in *Realtime*, where its relevance to post-9/11 anxieties in relation to ethnicity and territorial mapping were at issue. (Tebutt, J. and Muller, L. in *Realtime*, no. 63, October/November, 2004).

The conceptual innovations *Floating Territories* were further recognised with its inclusion in several major group shows, such as *re\*activate!*, an Australian–French exhibition at Experimedia, State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, October and November 2004. This exhibition concerned the interrelationship between games and interactive media art. *Floating Territories* was included in the curated group exhibition *In the Line of Flight*, presented by the China Millennium Museum, Beijing, July 2005. Starrs presented an invited conference paper on the work at the *Biennale of Electronic Art, Perth* (October 2004), a premiere Asia–Pacific biennial festival on the theme of the relationship between the real and the virtual. Starr's paper discussed these issues with respect to *Floating Territories*, Australia's multicultural diversity, and the politics of migration and nostalgia. She was an invited participant in *Free Play: Next Wave Independent Game Developers' Conference* at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne (February 2005), to discuss *Floating Territories*. Here, Starr's output received positive exposure to new-media-art and industry specialists.

End-users for verification: Ken Perlin, Professor & Director of NYU Media Research Laboratory, NYU, 2129983386, perlin@mrl.nyu.edu; Nadia Palliser, Coordinating Director, ISEA, info@isea-web.org; Kim Heitman, Chair, BEAP, 0894270880, beap@casm.com.au; Eric Zimmerman, CEO, Gamelab, 6468276644, info@gmlb.com.

### CASE STUDY 3: IN TRANSIT: TIME, SPACE AND MOTION

#### Global roam

The interrelationship between the world's physical geography and its virtual counterparts—such as the internet and satellite navigation systems—offers new ways for us to consider the dynamics of subjectivity and space. The way our bodies move through space and how we map this terrain open up questions of how we locate ourselves within and connect to a sense of place.

Our research has investigated the concept of place in relation to traditional and new media research. We have explored ways in which time, motion and connectivity between geographies and people have shifted in the light of sociopolitical and technological changes. In this frame, we have looked at issues of nationalism and globalisation in terms of media communication and the politics of identity.

#### Time travellers

Merilyn Fairskye's research is an example of how new media technology can be read against the backdrop of post-9/11 travel to reveal constructions of subjectivity and cultural identity. Her work *Stati d'Animo* uses the aesthetic legacy of the 19th-century photographic concept of 'time-stop-motion' in conjunction with high-

definition video to capture and transform images of passengers moving through the transitory spaces of airports [Output 1].

Fairskye has created numerous still and moving works as part of *Stati d'Animo*. In June 2005, a video installation and still images of the work were shown in her solo exhibition at Stills Gallery, Sydney. The impact of the work was suggested in its many positive reviews, particularly those by Tracey Clement, "Meryl Fairskye", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 22/7/05, Robert McFarlane, "Plane business of capturing reality", *Sydney Morning Herald*, 12/7/05, and Andrew Frost, "In Transit," *the art life*, <http://artlife.blogspot.com/2005/07/in-transit.html>, accessed 9/7/05. Fairskye presented an artist talk at the gallery during the exhibition. She delivered an invited address about the work at the University of Technology, Sydney (September 2005).

Still images from the series were shown in three curated group exhibitions: *The year in art*, SH Ervin Gallery, Sydney (June 2004); the Josephine Ulrick & Win Schubert 2005 Photography Award, Gold Coast City Art Gallery (March 2005); and at the Conrad Jupiters Art Prize 04, Gold Coast City Art Gallery (20/11/03–23/1/04). In recognition of the significance of her output, Fairskye was commissioned to produce *Stati d'Animo: SFO/#2*, another still image from her series, for lightbox display at the Sydney International Terminal in 2006. She was originally commissioned by Sydney Airport as part of the ongoing \$600M refurbishment of the international terminal for the 2000 Olympic Games. The project involved the creation of 11 permanent and semipermanent site-specific art installations, bringing together eight site curators and 25 prominent Australian artists, including Rosemary Laing, Tracey Moffatt and Patricia Piccinini (2001–06). *Stati d'Animo* replaced her original on-site 2000 work, *Sea*. The magnitude, expense and high profile of the refurbishment, and the association with other leading artists were indications of the impact that Fairskye has made in this photomedia genre.

The second video component of *Stati d'Animo* (2006) received wide recognition and was shown at three national and four international film festivals. In Australia, it was shown at the 15th Brisbane International Film Festival, Brisbane (July 2006) and the Harries National Digital Art Awards, QUT Cultural Precinct Gallery, Brisbane (June 2006), where Fairskye was a finalist. The work was "Highly Commended" in the Experimental Film category at the Dendy Awards at the Sydney Film Festival, June 2006. Internationally, the impact and significance of the work was demonstrated through its inclusion in Definition 2006: Digital Media Festival, Banff New Media Institute, Canada (April 2006), and was listed as a finalist in New Arrivals Online, an open stage for short films (19/4/06), NPS Korte Film Online, and the International Film Festival, Rotterdam (IFFR). In the lead-up to the assessment period since 1996, Fairskye has maintained an ongoing and rewarding research relationship with the IFFR, and has exhibited works at the 26th, 27th, 28th and 30th annual International Film Festival in Rotterdam. She was involved in numerous exhibitions in the Netherlands through her association with the IFFR, including the 16th World Wide Video Festival, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam 1998; Contamination, Microwave Festival 2000, Hong Kong Space Museum, 2000; Hedah Film and Video Festival, the Centre for Modern Art, Maastricht, Netherlands, 2000, curated by festival programmer and curator Tom van Vliet; Prospective, 50th Oberhausen Film Festival, Oberhausen, a program of shorts curated by Dutch curator and IFFR festival programmer Gertjan Zuilhof; and the 15th World Wide Video Festival, The Hague, 1997. The sustained impact of her work with IFFR not only encouraged Fairskye to continue producing experimental video research—it reinforced the significance of her work to funding bodies such as the Australian Film Commission, which led to the funding of *Stati d'Animo*. Furthermore, Strand X, the experimental film-funding arm at the AFC, was twice under threat of being abolished, in 2004 and 2006. In response to this threat, AFC Project Officer, Karin Altmann (listed for verification below) used the example of the quality and significant impact of Fairskye's work to successfully argue the case for keeping Strand X funding as part of the AFC's continued funding distribution to artists.

### Local networks and global arenas

*Connected* is another of Fairskye's works that deals with issues of travel, speed and identity through new media [Output 2]. Similar to *Stati d'Animo*, *Connected* is composed of installation and photographic components that have been shown separately and configured as installations. The focus of the video component of this work takes Pine Gap, the foreign and highly secretive military base near Alice Springs, as its site of exploration. The work—on the Australian landscape as a politicised site—made a provocative counterpart to the anonymity of the global traveller presented in the still images. An installation of *Connected*, both video and stills, was first shown in her solo shows at Stills Gallery, Sydney (28/5–28/6/03), Araluen Arts Centre, Alice Springs (31/10–30/11/03), and Jan Manton Art, Brisbane (16/3–23/4/05). She gave an artist's floortalk on the work at Araluen Galleries, which further contextualised the work in terms of its relationship to the community of Alice Springs and Australian

cultural identities. The impact of the work in this context was extended by a review by Kieran Finnane "Connected with Alice ... and the Base," *Alice Springs News* 10(40), 5/11/03, which discussed Fairskye's work in relation to the history and culture of Pine Gap. Fairskye presented an invited lecture on the work at UTS in September 2003.

Keen interest in *Connected* by curators led to the display of different versions of the video component of the work as part of curated national and international group exhibitions and festivals, including: *The Arrival*, Two Rooms, Auckland (26/9–21/10/06); *Interesting Times: Focus on Contemporary Australian Art*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, November 2005; *Connected*, 33rd International Film Festival, Rotterdam, June 2004; *Geopolitics of Media*, ISEA 2004, 12th International Symposium on Electronic Art (ISEA), Tallinn Art Hall, Tallinn, Estonia (17/8–16/9/04); *Prospective*, 50th Oberhausen Film Festival, March 2004; and *Video Medeja*, Museum of Vojvodina, Novi Sad, Serbia, April 2002. Fairskye presented a paper at the *2004 ISEA Symposium* to an audience of more than 50 international researchers, in which she discussed the nature of her work in relation to the cultural significance of Pine Gap in Australia, national and cultural identity, and globalisation.

From 2003 to 2006, the work continued to receive positive media attention, with the publication of a nine reviews and critical essays such as Anne Kirker, "Interesting times: focus on contemporary Australian art," *Eyeline* no. 60, July 2006; Michael Desmond, "We live in interesting times," *Art Monthly Australia*, no. 186, December 2005 – February 2006; Sunandra Creagh, "Signs of the times, some writ large on the clouds," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 23/9/05; Adrian Martin, "Australie – Le talent est à l'avant-garde," *Cahiers du Cinema*, April 2004; Toni Ross "Merilyn Fairskye: Connected," *Eyeline* 53, 2003–04; Annabel Pegus "Connected," *Artlink*, vol. 23(3), September 2003; and Mireille Juchau "When I'm calling you," *RealTime*, no. 56, 2003.

These ideas were initially explored in *Eye Contact* [Output 3]. A video installation composed from an archive of photographs taken between 1992 and 2000, *Eye Contact* mapped the geographic and social identities of a thousand subjects. It won the Alice Prize, Araluen Arts Centre, Alice Springs (2001— judged by Elizabeth Ann Macgregor, Director, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney), and was acquired for the Araluen Galleries collection in the same year. The work was widely exhibited in nine exhibitions in five countries including the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2002; *Screen*, the Biennale of Electronic Arts and Performance, various sites, Perth, 2002; the 13th Videobrasil International Electronic Arts Festival, Sesc Pompéia, Sao Paulo, Brazil, 2001; WRO 01/9th International Media Art Biennale, Wroclaw, Poland, 2001; the 5th Festival International de Video/Arte/Electronica, Lima, Peru, 2001; and the Art and Science International Exhibition, Tsinghua University, Beijing, China, 2001. It was the subject of a critique by Courtney Kidd, "The 31st Alice Prize 2001", *Art & Australia*, Vol. 39 No. 4, 2002 and Kieran Finnane, "Alice Prize: 'Immense diversity of humanity'", *Alice Springs News*, 7 November 2001. Fairskye gave artist talks about this work at Araluen Galleries in July 2001 and March 2003.

*Tide*, Rialto Square, Manly 2001 [Output 4], commissioned by Manly Council, was the last public artwork commission undertaken by Fairskye before her focus moved towards the relationship between the still and the moving image. This work grew out of the exploration of illusion and perception explored in Fairskye's *Material World* at Railway Square, Sydney, a \$1.4M series of artworks commissioned by the City of Sydney (1999).

End-users for verification: Sandra den Hamer, Director, International Film Festival Rotterdam, 31108909090, tiger@filmfestivalrotterdam.com; Elizabeth-Ann McGregor, Director, Museum of Contemporary Art, 61-2-9245 2400, mail@mca.com.au; Karin Altman, Project Manager, AFC (Melbourne), 03864 4300, karin.altmann@afc.gov.au; Sandy Edwards, Director, Stills Gallery, 0293317775, info@stillsgallery.com.au.

## CASE STUDY 4: HYBRID TECHNOLOGIES: SITE SPECIFIC INSTALLATIONS

### Media arts and the science of discovery

The broad definitions and applications of media arts research in universities and among end-users have seen its meaning and uses expand into other areas of society. The language of media arts in relation to science and technology has led to the emergence of many hybrid forms of communication through new interdisciplinary dialogues around understanding our perception and experiences of this changing world.

Our research explores the historical and contemporary cross-overs between media arts in relation to science and technology. In particular, issues pertaining to Australia's geographical history have been explored in various processes of mapping that articulate the layers of memories held within the landscape.



## Fluid mediums and interdisciplinary research: *Catching...the Harbour*

Robyn Backen's research provides a useful example of the ways in which media art can develop synergies with other disciplines and industries to illuminate site-specific Australian histories. The exhibition *Catching...the Harbour* resulted from her collaborative work with Australian Museum archaeologist, Dr Val Attenbrow; Australian Museum marine biologist, Brooke Carson-Ewart, and project co-ordinator, John Kirkman (July–September 2004). The exhibition explored a social interpretation of the theme of Sydney Harbour [Output 2]; it drew attention to the Harbour's complex layers of Aboriginal history, its underwater habitats and diverse marine life, and the subtle relationships between them. The project emphasised the potential for stimulating exchange between the three disciplines, united by their common language of observing and investigating nature and the human experience.

Backen's sound, installation, sculptural and photomedia-based works in the exhibition drew attention to the specific histories contained in artifacts collected by the Australian museum, and transformed them—along with representations of historical harbour locations—to extend their cultural significance in terms of Australia's national identity and indigenous history. The Museum then used the project in its educational promotion to secondary and tertiary students to promote ways in which Australians can reconnect with their history through crossdisciplinary exploration (February 2005). An example of the breadth of this audience development in relation to Backen's work is on the Australian Museum's website <<http://www.amonline.net.au/exhibitions/catching/>>. The work's educational value was underlined by its use as a case study of the power of multimedia research to have an impact on society, in the Museum Studies course at the University of Sydney (Semester 1, 2006). Backen gave an artist's talk on the work at the Australian Museum, Sydney (November 2005); Canberra School of Art, ANU (November 2005); University of Wollongong (February 2006); the National Art School, Sydney (March 2006); and the Tasmania Art School, Tasmania University (March 2006). The work was positively reviewed by Isobel Kindley, "Time and tide", *Muse*, Aug/Sept/Oct 2001. It was mentioned favourably on the online site for *Artlink*, vol. 21 no. 3, "Artrave", 2001. The historical and crossdisciplinary significance of Backen's work in the exhibition was further indicated in its selection for exhibition in *Intersections of Art and Science*, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney (September–November 2005).

The impact of one of the works, *Drop*, from *Catching...the Harbour* prompted the major real-estate corporation Bovis Lend Lease to commission its redevelopment; thus, Backen made the public work *Droplet* (launched January 2004), which is permanently installed at The Bond, 30 Hickson Road, Sydney. This work was a major part of Australia's largest single body of public art projects, the Queensland Government's Millennium Arts Project (2004–06), under its Art Built-in policy. Through the Art Built-in Policy, the Government committed 2 percent of costs of building projects towards the integration of art and design. Art Built-in seeks to integrate art and design into public buildings and spaces, rather than simply adding paintings or sculptures after the building project is complete.

## The language of cross-cultural exchange: *Rice Talk*

Backen's work has drawn attention to social issues overseas. Her work *Rice Talk* was showcased in the *Ancient Future—Australian Arts Festival* as part of The Echigo Tsumari Triennial, held in Matsunoyama, Japan (2003) [Output 1]. The Festival was sponsored by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade to celebrate Australia's inclusion in the Triennial. *Rice Talk* is on permanent display in one of the five abandoned traditional houses in the Niigata Prefecture, Japan. The Triennial was established by Artfront, a major private funding body. Artfront addresses the growing concerns of a dwindling population in rural Japan, and invited artists to draw on Japanese tradition, culture and material to help regenerate Japan's rural landscape and to investigate its complex relationship with human society. The triennial was a collaboration between artists and local inhabitants to create site-specific work; Backen's work was commissioned and selected for permanent installation, along with work by artists from 23 countries. Drawing on the development of the Morse code communication systems, Backen's work incorporated the principle structure of this obsolete communication system into fibre-optic cable and light installations. The work in the refurbished house has fibre optics woven in tatami mats and illumination operated in Morse code, along with images showing the long process of rice farming—a device to question the cultural role of agriculture in Japanese society.

Discourse around *Rice Talk* was advanced through its publication in the 2003 *Echigo-Tsumari Triennial* catalogue. The work was discussed in Sally Couacaud "Echigo-Tsumari Triennial", *Art and Australia*, vol. 41(4), 2003. More recently, Artfront has published and widely disseminated in Japan a pamphlet focusing on the three houses in Matsunoyama, featuring *Rice Talk*, and the *Dream House* by world-renowned

contemporary artist Marina Abramovic. *Rice Talk* is part of Backen's ongoing research into the science and semiotics of communication in relation to site-specific histories.

Backen's research on the language of Morse code has revolved around the intersection of analogue and digital communication systems. *Rice Talk* is the culmination of a series of artworks that have embodied that research; they include *Littoral*, *Archaeology of Bathing*, *Weeping walls*, *Purdah in the kitchen*, *SSO*, *The Building that Speaks*, *Eternal Silence*, and *Tree Talk*. These related outputs have been exhibited in curated shows across three countries: *Flow*, National Gallery Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia (October 2002), and *4 Blind Dates at the Kendra*, Sanskriti Kendra, New Delhi (January 2001). *Weeping Walls* was a public art commission for permanent exhibition at Sydney International Airport (March 2002).

Coded histories: *The Building that Speaks*

*The Building that Speaks*, Brisbane (2000–03) [Output 3], part of the Morse code series, uses interactive technology to reflect on the processes of technological change, and current and historical narratives. In 2000, Backen was invited to enter a proposal for a permanent public art commission at the Newfarm Powerhouse, which she subsequently won. The work was commissioned by Brisbane City Council for their program of public art works in and around the Powerhouse building. The works were chosen to reflect the history of Brisbane Powerhouse and its status in the cultural landscape of Brisbane. In *The Building that Speaks*, a Morse-code message of SOS is transmitted with light from gaps in the turbine-house wall facade of the building. In a switchroom tucked away on the ground floor, visitors encounter the second part of the work. Next to a bank of old switches, a touchscreen invites visitors to engage interactively with the work by composing their own messages for translation into Morse and transmission via the facade to the world. Gradually accumulating as an archive, these messages are designed to add another layer to the building's long history.

The size of the work's on-site continuous archive suggests that it is popular with the public. The work was favourably reviewed in Zane Trow, "Powering up the House", *Realtime*, no. 41, 2001. In 2002, she was invited as a guest speaker for the two new media programs, the *Very Strange Weather Seminar: Media Arts, Media Ecologies* (19 November) and *FibreCulture's 2002 Annual Conference* (22–24 November). Both events were held as community outreach programs at the Museum of Contemporary Art, and attracted a broad public audience for the discussion of digital culture and the everyday lives of citizens. Backen presented artist's talks on this work at the Australian Museum, Sydney (November); Canberra School of Art, ANU (December); University of Wollongong (February 2004); National Art School, Sydney (February 2004); and Tasmania Art School, Tasmania University, Hobart (March 2004).

*The Building that Speaks* is used by the Australia Council in "Repertoire", its online educational resource. Repertoire is a guide to Australian new media-art research in Australia, and contains images and essays on the development of Australian digital and hybrid art research. Backen's work is at:

<[http://www.ozco.gov.au/arts\\_in\\_australia/projects/projects\\_new\\_media\\_arts/robyn\\_backen\\_-\\_the\\_building\\_that\\_speaks](http://www.ozco.gov.au/arts_in_australia/projects/projects_new_media_arts/robyn_backen_-_the_building_that_speaks)>.

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