

A Handbook for Coding Cultures

d/Lux/Editions/02:

A Handbook for Coding Cultures

Edited by Francesca da Rimini

This free book can be downloaded from:
<www.dlux.org.au/codingcultures/handbook.htm>

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Campbelltown Arts Centre, located in South West Sydney, is home to one of Australia's fastest growing and most diverse communities. While the region is experiencing economic growth we need to ensure that cultural growth is also sustained. To do that it is critical that organisations such as Campbelltown Arts Centre have the tools and the processes to engage with our diverse and growing communities.

Coding Cultures is an important project that fits perfectly within the model of Campbelltown thinking about its future, and continuing to position itself within the new environments that it's moving into. To do this we need to think very seriously about how emerging technologies and practices influence what we do as artists and arts and cultural workers, and how this change will continue to influence our practice over the next decade.

Campbelltown Arts Centre works very hard to bring together a contemporary cultural program that is socially engaged with ideas and issues that are priorities for our communities. We see our role as being to contextualise these ideas within national and international frameworks. Western Sydney has a well-established reputation for its innovative application of community cultural development practice and the intersections it makes with contemporary art. The application of new technologies within these established models allow arts and cultural programs to have a much broader impact. It is organisations such as d/Lux/MediaArts, who bring a level of expertise to organisations like Campbelltown Arts Centre, that show us the broader potential of the work that we undertake.

I would like to thank d/Lux/MediaArts for working with us to produce such an important project in Campbelltown. d/Lux/MediaArts continues to expand its critically important work across NSW and nationally, and the impact of this work will continue to be felt by artists, organisations and communities.

On behalf of the staff of Campbelltown Arts Centre I would like to welcome to Campbelltown mervin Jarman, Camille Turner, Giles Lane and Alice Angus. They have travelled a long way to share their knowledge with us and have been extremely generous. I also congratulate Francesca da Rimini for curating such an exciting

program. I would like to thank our major partners, Campbelltown City Council and Arts NSW, for their ongoing support of Campbelltown Arts Centre.

Lisa Haviilah, Director, Campbelltown Arts Centre

Coding Cultures explores how a range of media technologies can enable communities to express and share their stories in innovative and imaginative ways. I am particularly interested in this intersection between people using well established processes for engaging with communities and individuals and the application of a range of information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the web or mobile phones for example. These new technologies enable a rich participatory media culture where people can make, share and distribute their experiences.

We are proud to be working with Campbelltown Arts Centre which ranks as one of the most progressive cultural organisations in our country who, together with d/Lux/MediaArts, are hosting a week long program of free concept labs, a symposium and the *Handbook for Coding Cultures*. Working together with our remarkable Project Curator, Francesca da Rimini, we have brought together an extraordinary group of leading international artists from the UK, Canada and Jamaica with some of Australia's most inspiring and innovative new media and screen culture practitioners. These projects use an array of digital and communication technology tools, including customised softwares, the internet, mobiles, streaming media and online video sharing sites, to extend creative community projects such as multi-narrative documentaries, urban mapping, social activism, digital story telling projects, performance, audio labs and digital radio networks.

While to some the kinds of activities and ideas we introduce through Coding Cultures may seem very new and challenging, many of them are fundamentally rooted in traditions and aesthetics which predate the digital. One only need look at the tightly embedded conceptual frameworks and motivations that inform projects based on community mapping or public authoring of spaces we see in the work of UK-based Proboscis. It is not hard to strip away the technological layer used in some of their projects to see that the principle and politic of their work is based on well founded processes and ideas hammered out in the mid to late twentieth century. These include not least the highly influential works of movements such as Fluxus and their idea of social sculpture, and the Situationists' free ranging practice of *dérive*.

Likewise, concepts of the layering of space and the multiplicity of narratives and subjectivities that informed the Public Art movements of the 1980s clearly remains to the fore. These ideas are now significantly enabled by an array mobile devices including mobile phones and GPS. In this cluster of technologies we can include wireless and free file sharing applications such as blue tooth or semacode, a barcode with an embedded URL that links real world objects to unique on-line data resources, e.g., a story or short video about the location.

Like the concepts and learnings derived from earlier socially-engaged arts, community-based media practice is informed and enabled by the beliefs and values of the open source software movement which at its heart steadfastly supports the idea of the importance of free and open transfer of information. We too need to acknowledge new regimes of content licensing systems such as Creative Commons and the importance of a free, shared online public space, the digital commons. No one yet owns the internet (which in this era is somewhat of a miracle) and that's what makes it such an important and valued public resource.

In this handbook you will encounter examples of some really progressive thinking about the idea of media and community. For example, Brazil's Digital Culture Agenda, the *Pontos de Cultura*, and the idea of digital citizenship, is quite breathtaking as an example of where government cultural policy has engaged so imaginatively with the idea of digital culture underwritten by access to media tools and networks.

I frequently come across really practical, imaginative and inspiring projects, some of which we are introducing here in Coding Cultures. It is unfortunate that at this time there has been a steady withdrawal of Australian Government support for art forms that successfully blend both community-based art and new media practices. I also commonly encounter people who to me represent a sort of digital divide. Not in the way the term digital divide is commonly understood as a lack of access to networks or computers, but more an attitudinal resistance or unwillingness to seriously engage with, and think about, the implications and opportunities that new forms of technologies and their applications enable, especially in a community or cultural context.

This attitudinal digital divide is, I think, borne out of fear and uncertainty. It is to some in the worlds of art and film where we work that the 'digital' is a kind of 'inconvenient truth', which to their minds destabilises established positions and debases traditional forms of practice and ways doing things. What I still find extraordinary about this resistance is that the amazing facility new information and

communications sharing technologies provide, really doesn't take away from what is being done already but rather provides astounding opportunities for greater participation, imagination and diversity in our creative and cultural lives. I think that this can only be a good thing.

The job I see at hand at this moment in Australia is to get on with fostering an environment where some of the new ideas we see coming on are promoted and supported. We must maintain the momentum that has been steadily building amongst practitioners, who are already working with the kinds of concepts and technologies Coding Cultures shares.

So on behalf of d/Lux/MediaArts my thanks to the many people who have supported the development and realisation of Coding Cultures. My sincerest thanks go to Francesca da Rimini, our guest co-curator and commissioning editor for the Handbook for Coding Cultures. Campbelltown Arts Centre has again joined with us to host this project, and we are glad to be working with them again. The British Council have been enthusiastic and generous supporters, and our project funding agencies and partners, the Australia Council, Arts NSW and the NSW Film & Television Office, have our acknowledgement and thanks for making this project possible. We too are grateful to the writers for taking up our commissions to write for our Handbook, and Symposium speakers David Vadeloo, Chris Saunders, Carl Kuddell, Lena Nahlous, Ben Hoh and Trey Thomas. Our international guests have been inspiring—so thanks to mervin Jarman, Camille Turner, Giles Lane and Alice Angus, who have travelled so far to join us in thinking about these ideas of Code and Culture.

David Cranswick
Director, d/Lux/MediaArts

Introduction: Archipelagos of open code and free culture

Francesca da Rimini

Introduction

Contrary to Romantic notions of individual 'genius' and Divine inspiration, innovation requires access to existing bodies of human knowledge. All knowledges are cumulative, built by processes of accretion, not exclusion. Knowledge is formed by branching generative processes; the action of knowledge upon knowledge creates new knowledge. Repeat sequence *ad infinitum*. In an 'information society' labour undertaken by 'knowledge workers' becomes a primary productive force, call centres nudging out the factories. Communication and co-operation remain key to technological development, whether this be the capacity to build smarter bombs, smarter dwellings or smarter networks.

For technological innovations to generate social impacts, they must enter the public sphere.⁰¹ A spirit of reciprocity—a mutual sharing of ideas, stories, knowledge and expertise—is critical for the evolution of any field. Information and knowledge are prerequisites to wisdom, a human quality which is surely needed to solve the urgent problems we face on a planetary level. Yet today there prevail cultures of scarcity, and enclosures of knowledges—via the unprecedented and aggressive application of intellectual property law extending even to lifeforms. The social circulation of knowledge is significantly impeded. Authors of the Vienna Document anticipate “a silent spring in Information Society when even a bird's song becomes subject to copyright control”. They suggest that “intangible information resources raise the issue of a digital ecology, the need to understand ecosystems constituted by information flows through various media”.⁰²

If we consider the big ecological picture of the global mediascape, a few mountains loom so large it is no longer necessary to name them. The landed crossmedia and telco owners transform themselves and their heirs into digital entrepreneurs. They divert large amounts of debt capital away from traditional advertainment channels to colonise electronic spaces opened up by the internet. The glare of mergers and acquisitions is blinding, and the rewards of wayfaring in the once unbounded frontier zones are often disappointing. Too many billboards and increasing restrictions choke the way.

Yet outside the shadows cast by these giants, irregularly-shaped landforms can be found. Small chains of interconnectivity, Digital ecologies of fringe media systems, exploratory artforms, software and media activism have always been pushing at The Impossible. Archipelagos of freely-shared knowledges, atolls of recycled and custom-built free media tools, riverine networks carrying ideas and informational goods through hundreds of cultures. This is the subject of this book—stories about innovation within art and media and beyond—from the isles of free culture.

The Coding Cultures project was conceived by David Cranswick, Director of d/Lux/MediaArts, to introduce audiences in Australia to some of these new ecosystems. The focus is upon socially-engaged cultural practices that provide frameworks to cooperatively build and share free media tools, content, visions of change. This is a powerful historical moment, involving networks of networks, spaces of flows, cultures of abundance, and local and global social campaigns and movements. By opening up access to the means of production, people around the world are creating knowledge-based products and social relations that resist commodification, command and control. *A Handbook for Coding Cultures* offers readers a small series of “deep excursions”⁰³ into the nexus between creative practices and social goals of groups from the UK, Belgium, Australia, Brazil, Italy, Hong Kong, Canada and Jamaica.

Open Code, Open Culture

These emergent forms of cultural production emanate from the Global South and the Global North, from ‘centres’ and ‘peripheries’. They are enabled, in part, by socio-technological phenomena such as the Free Software movement, and the related Open Source Software design and development model.⁰⁴ Geographically-distributed, highly communicative networks of people utilise the internet to build digital artefacts which remain ‘open’. That is, the deepest strata of these artefacts, their source codes, are not proprietary or exclusively owned in the conventional sense.⁰⁵ Thus the resultant products resist privatisation and can be modified and used by others, as long as they likewise agree to retain this open quality.⁰⁶

In his book *Behind the Blip: Essays on the Culture of Software*, Matthew Fuller (2003) proposed that computers are “assemblages”, combining technical, mathematical, conceptual and social layers. Through critical examination we can better understand “the wider assemblages which they form and are formed by”. Software creates sensoriums, “ways of seeing, knowing and doing in the world”.

So-called Open Code has ramifications, beyond the technics of bits and bytes of data, that feed into a global movement of ‘Open Culture’. Code as craft, language and cultural text. The labour processes required in making free media tools feed back into broader social visions, cultural mores and creative practices. Such collaborative processes become templates for ‘contributory culture’ or ‘participatory culture’. Experimentation with others ranges from open access to knowledge fostered by the Open Science movement, to encyclopaedic Open Knowledge projects like Wikipedia; and from the Open Editing of citizen journalism platforms such as Indymedia and OhMyNews, to the copying and remixing of creative output enabled by Open Content media platforms.⁰⁷

These kinds of autonomously-managed, horizontally-organised, generative activities have been termed ‘peer production’. Each of these cultural practices has its own trajectories and histories and influences—from nineteenth-century political activism via self-published pamphlets, to the visual/textual collages of Dadaism and environmental sound sampling methods of Fluxus, from the anarchic *auto-gestiti* (self-management) of Italian social centres to the *Do It Yourself* praxis of early Punk.

According to sociologist Manuel Castells,⁰⁸ internet-based technological transformation of media participation is of “historic dimensions”. He likens it to the “new alphabetic order” of the ancient Greeks, which “provided the mental infrastructure for cumulative, knowledge-based communication”. Hypertext and a “meta-language” integrate oral, textual, aural and visual modalities into one system of communication, which reunites the human spirit, says Castells, in “a new interaction between the two sides of the brain, machines, and social contexts”.

The knowledge-based outcomes of peer production contribute to a global ‘digital commons’. Just as earthly commons centre around communally-shared and co-operatively managed material resources—land, trees, water, air, and so on—so the digital commons can be imagined as shared *immaterial* resources. These proliferating nodes of electronic spaces, social technologies, intellectual goods and cooperative labour are made manifest by the internet. The voluntary labour driving this phenomenon is acting on an unprecedented scale, effecting both knowledge generation and social organisation.

In a recent text, cultural commentator and curator, Armin Medosch, stated:

Fundamental to Open Source Culture’s value system is the belief that knowledge should be in the public domain. What

is generally known by humans should be available to all humans so that society as a whole can prosper. For most parts and wherever possible, this culture is based on a gift economy. Each one gets richer by donating their work to a growing pool of publicly available things... Open Source Culture is a culture of conversation and as such based on multiple dialogues on different layers of language, code and artefacts. But the key point is that the organisation of labour is based on the self-motivated activity of many individuals and not on managerial hierarchies and 'shareholder value'.⁰⁹

Coding Cultures Concept Labs

The Coding Cultures project initiated by d/Lux/MediaArts comprises four main strands. Firstly, there are the **Concept Labs**: a week-long program of peer-to-peer, face-to-face interaction and exchange between four guest artists, two associated with the Proboscis group (UK) and two with the Container Project (Jamaica), and local Australian artists and community cultural workers. The Concept Labs will run from 5–8 March 2007, and are hosted by Campbelltown Arts Centre, situated in the vibrant, culturally-diverse region of Western Sydney. Reflecting the spirit of free culture, the Concept Labs are free of charge, and each participant will spend an intensive session with Proboscis or Container artists. Workshopping specific art project ideas together, the focus is on testing ideas about how digital tools, hybrid technologies, community-based media centres and web platforms can provide affordable means of collaboratively crafting imaginative works for local or geographically-dispersed audiences.

We anticipate a serendipitous synergy arising from interactions within the Concept Labs. Our guest artists bring with them very specific experiences—in art and in life—but what they share is a passionate commitment to co-operative creative processes that can illuminate experiences and (potentially) transform specific material conditions. Cross-cultural dialogues occurring in compressed spaces of time (like conversations with strangers on trains), and invitations to reveal a creative idea while still a seed, can summon some alchemical power—jump-starting an embryonic idea, suggesting unexpected ways of materialisation, or doing a total Rumpelstiltskin makeover, from straw to conceptual gold, and maybe back to straw again.

Alice Angus and Giles Lane form the heart of UK-based Proboscis. Collaborating with geographic communities and communities of interest in partnership with other subject specialists, Proboscis innovates within and extends many media forms, from tactile paper-based, unfolding multi-narrative *StoryCubes*, to gleaning net-based

mapping tools which enable “guerilla public authoring”, to customising and hybridising toy robots and environmental sensors in *Participatory Sensing*. The group’s interdisciplinary practice offers visionary frameworks for “playful experimentation for how society can question and understand what it is to be social beings in a networked world”.

Camille Turner (Jamaica/Canada) brings a substantial experience as a black new media artist working to create “points of access for other marginalized people to represent themselves”. To fulfil this aim she has helped tailor sustainable Digital Storytelling and multi-lingual Peer-Facilitator programs aimed at empowering a range of communities. These diverse groups include refugee and immigrant women, and deaf girls, from housing projects in downtown Toronto, to under-employed youth in Jamaica.

Artist mervin Jarman employs “street art-technology (arTec) initiatives... to ignite the curiosity, imagination and emerging energy of young mongrels on the street corners”. Collaborating with other “mongrels”, mervin has drawn upon his own experiences on the streets of Jamaica and London. He uses art, especially digital and internet-based forms, as a means of cultural intervention and social transformation, “repatriating technology”, and exchanging skills and ideas, with other marginalized communities around the world. The hub for many of mervin’s activities is his Container Project initiative, a community-based media centre inside a converted shipping container situated in rural Jamaica.

Coding Cultures Symposium and Regional Program

The second strand of Coding Cultures is the **Coding Cultures Symposium** on March 9th, 2007. This event brings together our international guests artists with Australian cultural activists, filmmakers, creative producers and artists. Using examples from their community-based internet, software, video, performance and public art projects, speakers will share experiences of coding / recoding / uncoding cultures. These will illustrate how digital and communications technologies can amplify and extend cultural production.

Writer, film director and interactive media producer, David Vadiveelo, draws upon his experiences with the groundbreaking Indigenous children’s television and web series, *Us Mob*. He speculates—with a sense of urgency—how “substantive partnerships”, those authentically inclusive of some of the most disregarded, neglected and scorned in local communities, those offering real opportunities for skilling-up, can be developed and sustained. How can these kinds of process-driven collaborations, feeding into the new distribution

portals of the internet, “exploit the commercial hunger for new content” and reshape political, cultural and social landscapes?

Jennifer Lyons-Reid and Carl Kuddell from tallstoreez productionz will describe their creative processes, concentrating on two projects—*First Fleet Back*, a reality TV mockumentary made in collaboration with Arabunna elder, Uncle Kevin Buzzacott, and *Directing the Hero Within*, a highly successful digital storytelling and video skilling project involving groups of young people around urban and rural Australia. They will share their first steps in creating a web-based social network and video-sharing platform to foster dialogue amongst the young videomakers in the *DTHW* program, and discuss how this project can be considered a form of dynamic ‘social sculpture’.

Big hART, an acclaimed and prolific Australian arts company, opens up opportunities “for people experiencing the effects of marginalization to make positive changes to their lives through participation in the arts”. Chris Saunders, a Big hART creative producer and program coordinator, discusses three very different recent collaborations—*Junk Theory*, *Ngapartji Ngapartji*, and *Northcott Narratives*. These have employed a mix of technologies, languages and artistic approaches with which to explore issues of critical importance to many Australians—Indigenous, ‘settled’, and recent immigrants.

Lena Nahlous is the Director of Information & Cultural Exchange (ICE), an organisation based in Western Sydney “working at the intersection of arts, culture, technology and community”. ICE initiates and supports a wide range of projects within affinity-based and ethnic communities. These projects include blogging narratives, hip hop poetry performance, documentary and experimental video, and sound works, and employ art methodologies and outcomes to “build community resilience, autonomy and infrastructure and to enhance quality of life and well-being”. Sharing the symposium presentation slot with two artists who work with ICE, Ben Hoh and Trey Thomas, Lena Nahlous will discuss the collaborative processes underpinning recent projects and the social networks forming through new critical platforms of expression.

The third strand of Coding Cultures is the **regional tour** of artists from Proboscis and Container to Broken Hill, an iconic mining city in rural New South Wales. d/Lux/MediaArts has mentored Broken Hill Art Exchange in a recent project, setting up a residential media art lab. The Coding Cultures rural outreach events aim to inform and inspire local artists and community arts development workers, with a view to fostering future joint projects that could include an extended artist-in-residency program, and media skilling workshops.

A Handbook for Coding Cultures

The fourth strand is this book itself, *A Handbook for Coding Cultures*. As Commissioning Editor for the publication I wanted to invite texts from people who are co-operatively building some of the nodes and networks, tools and processes, of participatory culture. But a mere handful of authors could not represent the diversity of approaches, cultural influences and ethical positions driving this emergent phenomenon, especially within the confines of a small book. I decided upon a series of “deep excursions” into the fields and fiords of open culture, commissioning six original texts from artists, writers and cultural activists whose work I have followed with interest. Their projects and processes are emblematic of many of open culture’s animating key principles and practices. *A Handbook for Coding Cultures* also includes contributions from guest artists Alice Angus and Giles Lane, Camille Turner, and from mervin Jarman with Jamaican journalist Sonia Mills, plus statements from each of the Symposium speakers. When these texts are considered together they offer a framework for understanding the interrelations between free software and free culture, open code and open knowledge, co-operative research and production, nodes and networks, and the dynamic conjunctions between art and activism.

Ruth Catlow and Marc Garrett from Furtherfield, a non-profit arts organization that is physically based in London and simultaneously manifested as a distributed community of “sister-sites and projects” around the world, discuss their experiences in using and developing “networked media” to enable socially-engaged projects. They introduce the concept of “artware”, which they describe as “software platforms for generating art”, where users—who often come from under-represented constituencies—become “co-producers in a network”. Furtherfield term the co-operative relations generated when people come together in this way “Do It With Others” or “DIWO”, a new kind of DIY approach to collaborative grass-roots cultural production. DIWO enables the generation of new kinds of art projects, digital tools and “structures of co-operation”, and the dissolving of modern(ist) boundaries separating an elite class of artists from a passive consumer class of audiences. The results of such co-production—from online art residencies to realtime media jams over the net—are seen as contributing to a “cultural landscape that has value and meaning for all participants”.

In their text Maja Kuzmanovic and Nik Gaffney from FoAM, a small artist-led organisation with studio bases in Brussels and Amsterdam, discuss workshop structures and learning processes for enabling knowledge sharing and skills exchange. FoAM have a particular research and production focus on collaborative ‘Mixed Reality’ or

'Hybrid Reality' work, in which digital and physical worlds intertwine, and scientific knowledge coupled with appropriate technologies, contribute to the making of art works. The writers present case studies of two interdisciplinary, social learning events they co-ordinated that have used the flexible 'Open Space Technology' workshop format: *Soft-Wear* (using responsive textiles), and *Soft-ware* (using real-time computer-generated animation). From electro-luminescent spuds to sound-responsive pattern-changing wallpaper, to "amazing feats of abstraction-wrangling", the workshops skill people in new ways of making innovative cultural forms. For FoAM, the processes of art production are not separate from quotidian realities. They consider that "transdisciplinary knowledge and hands-on skills encourage a more pro-active and responsible participation in all aspects of our everyday lives".

In his discussion of two free media projects, EngageMedia and Transmission, Australian media activist Andrew Lowenthal provides a brief introduction to free software, and highlights some of the guiding ethical principles of this movement that have been "ported" to other realms, influencing and shaping new socio-technical assemblages. His text draws out important distinctions between the popular, commercial media-sharing (or "pseudo sharing") sites such as YouTube and MySpace, and independent grassroots manifestations of the "free culture movement" as exemplified by the open publishing Indymedia network or the recently established EngageMedia video sharing website. Andrew Lowenthal delineates some of the trade-offs that are (often unwittingly) made by users of proprietary online spaces, where the so-called Web 2.0 business model is another way of advertisers and media oligopolies accessing demographically-enhanced "communities for sale". With the internet increasingly resembling a shopping mall, the symbolic and strategic importance of independent, inclusive, cultural production frameworks and related peer production networks, becomes apparent. As "the masses are replaced by the network, [and] command by collaboration", different kinds of productive and co-operative social relations emerge, prefiguring new pathways for building progressive social change.

Leandro Fossá is the international coordinator of the Brazilian Government's Digital Culture team. In collaboration with Claudio Prado (a "counterculture activist" from the 1960s, and now Digital Policy Coordinator of the Cultural Ministry of Brazil), he sketches out the groundbreaking initiatives around "free culture" emanating from Brazil's Digital Culture Agenda. The *Pontos de Cultura*, or Cultural Hotspots, radiate out from the heart of this vision, hundreds of community-based free media centres, situated in urban *favelas* and rural villages, "laboratories of technology, based on free knowledge". Valorizing and stimulating existing (and very diverse) socio-cultural

projects, the *Pontos de Cultura* combine hybridised multimedia production kits (low-tech, recycled gear and free software) with three web-based knowledge-sharing systems. Added to this are "Free Knowledge Meetings"—a touring program of community discussion and practical skilling labs. Leandro Fossá highlights the linkages between collaborative cultural production, social inclusion projects and the new opportunities afforded generally by digital culture, especially when utilising the communicative platforms of the internet. He concludes that the strategic "experiment in Digital Culture in Brazil constitutes a laboratory of the new ways of the twenty-first century".

Agnese Trocchi recounts ten years of working with *CandidaTV*, a Roman video collective that aimed "to give space and tools to people's points of view on reality and to give legs to our dreams". In tracing the group's history—from their involvement with digital networking via the birth of the first bulletin board in the Forte Prenestino social centre, to their collaboration with software artists to make innovative narrative tools for projection in self-organised rave parties, to their production of community-based "domestic television" programs that were also "narrowcasted" via the Italian *Telestreet* network of neighbourhood tv—she also depicts the changing media horizon. *CandidaTV*'s slogan is "Make your own TV!", and to encourage this goal the group ran technical and creative workshops with socially marginalised communities, "passive spectators becoming active creators when handed the tools to produce spectacle". Agnese Trocchi describes the role of events such as the annual *Hackmeetings*, and web platforms like *NewGlobalVision*, in which collective decision-making and practical work generate free digital tools and public electronic spaces to enable "the engineering of the next medium...where internet, videos, art practice in the streets and hacking technology, are mixed all together... to express people's freedom of communication and people's imaginary".

Media activist Lam Oi Wan takes us into the heart of Hong Kong, chronicling a social movement campaign in 2006 that sought to preserve the integrity of two significant piers. The controversial outcomes of a secretive urban planning process (demolition followed by Disneyfication) generated a series of public interventions played out in both the symbolic field of art, and the discursive field of media representation. Nostalgia was generated by a series of site-specific performances and art installations, events that also attracted mainstream media coverage. This mood of discontent was "politicized later into a citizen campaign through the involvement of media activists". Hong Kong In-Media, an online platform for citizen journalism, provided space for reflection and dialogue between local artists, media activists, academics, students and interested residents. A "fading subject" was unexpectedly revived, developing momentum as it rejected "the politics of public relations". Lam Oi Wan analyses the

interplay between the symbolic interventions of cultural activists and the reportage of media activists, each contributing to the making of meaning in the public sphere. She concludes that finding ways “to bring together the forces of the art and media activists would be a most important and experimental agenda for the future”.

Conclusion

The projects included in Coding Cultures illustrate how decentralised, networked social laboratories for experimentation can adroitly bypass the digital divide. In each instance their inclusive participatory processes are coupled with clearly articulated philosophical and ethical perspectives. The manifestation of these, and thousands of similarly-shaped projects, challenges the poverty of a Globalization agenda determined solely by narrow economic imperatives. In so doing they instigate broader participation in democratic processes, and perhaps more importantly, generate new social imaginaries. Flights of butterflies outreaching the plod of the behemoth.

Endnotes

01
An invention (accompanied by technical documentation such as design drawings, notes, and prototypes) must at some point be released into the public realm. There it can be tested in real world conditions, faults identified and remedied, and improved. Patented inventions and tightly guarded trade secrets notwithstanding, it is only through such circulation of ideas, schema and the machines or processes themselves, that the generative potential of inventiveness and creativity can be fully manifested.

02
'The Vienna Document', *World-Information*, Vienna 2005.
<static.world-information.org/infopaper/wi_ipcitedition.pdf>

03
My thanks to my twin, artist John Tonkin, for this way of conceiving the contents of this handbook.

04
Acknowledging some key philosophical and political differences between the two camps of Free Software and Open Source Software, they are often grouped by umbrella acronyms FOSS, and FLOSS (Free/Libré Open Source Software), or the neologism 'Open Code'.

05
Source code provides the underlying building blocks of any software system, the lines of alpha-numeric instructions. When source code is 'open' people are legally entitled to make changes to the instructions, to improve the code, or to expand it to enable the program to do something requested by user communities. Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) include operating systems (the classic example is GNU/Linux), programs (for example, OpenOffice word processing, or the Apache web server), and protocols (for example, the TCP-IP and HTTP protocols for data transmission over the internet).

06
Such agreement is legally reinforced through viral 'copyleft' licensing schemes, like the pioneering GNU General Public License (GPL). Created in 1989 by

programmer Richard Stallman, the GPL has inspired other licensing schemes, including the Creative Commons licenses for media content.
See <www.gnu.org/licenses>.

07
The examples of participatory culture are numerous, and multi-lingual. For a small taste in the English language, see <sciencecommons.org>, <opensource.mit.edu>, <www.opencontentalliance.org>, <wikipedia.org>, <english.ohmynews.com>, and <indymedia.org>.

08
Castells, M. (2000). *The Rise of the Network Society* (2nd ed. Vol. 1). Oxford: Blackwell. pp 355-56.

09
'The Next Layer or: The Emergence of Open Source Culture', a draft text by Armin Medosch for Pixelache publication, London/Vienna 2006-2007. Published on the *nettime* mailing list 17 February 2007.
<www.nettime.org/Lists-Archives/nettime-l-0702/msg00029.html>

As an artist-led group, Furtherfield has become progressively more interested in the cultural value of collaboratively developed visions as opposed to the supremacy of the vision of the individual artistic genius. This interest has led Furtherfield to develop *artware* (software platforms for generating art) that relies on the creative and collaborative engagement of its users (formally known as artists and their audiences) to make meaning. It explores the extent to which those who view and interact with work, including those from under-represented groups, become co-producers in a network, rather than 'audience'.⁰² To explain what we mean we will describe *FurtherStudio*, online art residencies, and *VisitorsStudio*, a platform for online multi-media collaboration, a particular strand of our activity that focuses on developing real-time online *artware* and projects. That is, work created and distributed in real time across the Internet.

A Short History of Furtherfield—How and Why it Came About

From the early 80s, and well into the 90s, UK art culture was hijacked by the marketing strategies of Saatchi and Saatchi, a formidable force in the advertising world. The same company had been responsible for the successful promotion of the Conservative party (and conservative culture) that had led to the election of the Thatcher government in 1979. Saatchi and Saatchi promoted art products from their own gallery under the populist brand of *BritArt*. Applying their marketing techniques and corporate power, the company accomplished a parallel coup within the British art scene, creating an elite of artists who embraced the commodification of their personalities alongside depoliticized artworks. *BritArt's* dominance of the 90s UK art world—its galleries, markets and press—with a small number of high profile artists, delighted nouveau toffs but disempowered the majority of artists. It degraded and smothered artistic discourse by fueling a competitive and divisive attitude towards a shrinking public platform for their practice and the representation of their work.

Against this background, Furtherfield's first website was a humble affair, created by the authors in 1996. It featured a small collection of artworks and short reviews. The main motivation was to share an enthusiasm for particular artworks with a wider audience than could be reached in the gated gallery spaces of London. This small website was first hosted at *Backspace*⁰³ (1996-99), an informal production space, sited on the Thames at London Bridge. *Backspace* cyberlounge was open to people at all levels of technical experience and encouraged the sharing of ideas and technical resources, both in the physical space and across the globe via the Internet. It also acted as a venue for events and mini-conferences advocating a DIY consciousness and encouraging users to get their hands dirty with

technology and its culture. The unspoken challenge to its members was that they should create something alternative to the dominant commercial culture on the Internet. It drew on the experience and involvement of its members (including the authors') in pirate radio and pirate television, digital bulletin boards and use of the streets as a canvas and art platform. It connected with the work of groups like I/O/D, Irrational, Mongrel and *Mute*⁰⁴ magazine to hack around everyday culture using public communication platforms to create independent art works and publications. In spite of its makeshift form, the works that were presented in early issues of *Furtherfield* gave rise to a lively and encouraging dialogue between artists around the world, including users of email lists such as *Syndicate* and *Rhizome*⁰⁵ who were dedicated to the discussion of networked culture.

The Furtherfield Neighbourhood Do It With Others

Ten years on, the Furtherfield community—by which we mean its neighbourhood of sister-sites and projects (see the map)—has morphed and expanded with over 400 active contributors and a regular readership/audience of approximately 16,000 people around the world. Its activities and projects have steadily grown in scope and ambition. Its core activities of review, criticism and discussion have been directed, sustained and driven by the research, skills and energy of the Furtherfield team, and its diverse international group of users, on a mainly voluntary basis. Specific projects that facilitate in-depth collaboration between programmers, artists, and artist-programmers have received some public funding. Since 2004 Furtherfield has run a gallery for networked media art in North London called *HTTP*⁰⁶ and has received regular core funding from the Arts Council of England to help consolidate and develop the sustainability of its activities.

In recent years the Furtherfield neighbourhood has initiated or participated in collaborative projects that experiment with and develop artworks, tools and structures of cooperation. These have been co-invented or adapted by artists, activists and technologists, many of whom (but not all) are committed to ideas of social change through their practice, being specifically concerned with the freedoms, openness and democratization of media and technology.⁰⁷ One such project is the *NODE.London Season of Media Arts in London*,⁰⁸ organised consensually by a large group of voluntary organisers. In March 2006 150 media arts projects took place in over forty London locations, as well as online in the form of exhibitions, installations, software, participatory events, performance-based work, and many other self-defining forms.⁰⁹ Its structure was inspired to some extent by the scale-free networks of the Internet, which, the science of networks tells us, maintain high levels of connectivity regardless of size.¹⁰



Do It With Others (DIWO) : Furtherfield Neighbourhood Map

- 1) Cut on dotted line.
- 2) With printed side down, fold each corner to the centre.
- 3) Turn the folded paper over so that the flaps face down.
- 4) Again fold each corner to the centre point.
- 5) Fold in half and crease to make a rectangle, unfold and then fold in half the other direction.
- 6) Using both hands put your thumbs and index fingers under flaps.
- 7) Push towards centre until pyramid forms and the DIWO map appears.
- 8) Pick a word and open and close the game in alternating directions for each letter of the word.

- 9) See how the projects make different connections with each other in the Furtherfield Neighbourhood.
- KEY to Projects in the Neighbourhood**
- 1) Furthernoise.org
 - 2) HTTP Gallery
 - 3) Rosalind : Upstart New Media Art Lexicon
 - 4) FurtherStudio real-time online art residencies
 - 5) Skin/Strip real-time contributory artwork
 - 6) NetBehaviour Mailing list
 - 7) Blogs- blog.furtherfield.org, blog.visitorsstudio.org, blog.game-play.org.uk
 - 8) VisitorsStudio real-time online multi-user mixing.

Left: DIWO Furtherfield Neighbourhood Map

This map draws on a children's game and was conceived of as a way to deal with the troublesome issue of representing both the lateralness and the connectedness of projects and activities in the Furtherfield Neighbourhood. This origami-style map allows travellers to see how different projects are located next to each other at different times.

For many, however, the first need is for community—to cultivate neighbours who “interact, share, converse and play with each other”.¹¹ *FurtherStudio*,¹² an exploratory project of real-time, online net art residencies, was launched in September 2003. This project was inspired by conversations with UK net artist, Jess Loseby. She spoke of her difficulties—as a disabled mother of three, living in a rural area—in accessing the resources and engaging in critical dialogues available to other artists and academics through the usual round of conferences and residencies. The *FurtherStudio* web facility offered a public window on the artists' PC desktop as they worked.¹³ Residencies lasted for three months, during which time the artists worked from their studios or homes creating works that incorporated and responded to visitors' contributions. The chat and critical forum facilities enabled artists, critics and visitors to discuss the work made by the artists for the project in a series of live, globally accessible interviews and critical debates.

VisitorsStudio,¹⁴ created in parallel to *FurtherStudio*, was envisaged as an experimental break-out space for visitors to the online residencies. The idea was to give visitors an insight into some of the artistic processes and concerns of resident artists by creating a social space online where they could experiment and learn together using some very simple audio-visual media mixing tools. *VisitorsStudio* was enthusiastically adopted by writers, programmers, artists and musicians. It provided an informal creative space that supported learning and fruitfully connected established practitioners with newbies, acting “as a container, connector, and root node for artists and performers wishing to virtually get together and ‘jam’ online.”¹⁵

With *VisitorsStudio* the art is created and distributed in real time across the Internet by many participants linking together at the same time, who mix and remix files that they have created or found and subsequently uploaded to the common database. Alternatively, participants retrieve, manipulate and remix files that have been uploaded to the database by other contributors. The live conversations shared as they collectively create the work may also be considered a part of the performance—along with comments or occasional heckling from the audience.

VisitorsStudio sits within rapidly shifting artistic territory of real-time art, software art, net art and participative and collaborative expression in contemporary, digitally-enabled *remix culture*. The late twentieth-century shift from material to immaterial culture, and the explosion in the rate of copying, duplicating and redistributing of cultural artefacts, means that this culture is now open to the influence of not just ‘professional’ cultural producers but of the vernacular. The process is further accelerated by the popular adoption, mainly by 16–25 year olds, of commercial (but ‘free’) spaces like *Flickr*, *MySpace* and *YouTube*,¹⁶ which support the mass sharing of media files.

VisitorsStudio provides a space for informal, impromptu and *ad hoc* collaborations and a place to not just chat and store and share media files but also to extend the dialogue beyond text into a rich audio-visual medium: to work together on projects, and towards the co-production of a cultural landscape that has value and meaning for all participants.

Larger events are also organised that could be said to fall into two categories. The first is the showcase—where established artists and musicians collaborate to create sophisticated performances that showcase their innovation and artistic concerns, such as the *Month of Sundays*¹⁷ series organised by Bristol-based *Furthernoise.org*.¹⁸ The second approach is to focus on shared human, political and global concerns. By projecting *VisitorsStudio* into public spaces—community centres, cafes, bars, galleries—these events can connect communities of people in public spaces around the world. An example of this kind of project is *DissensionConvention—A Transatlantic Multimedia Protest Jam*¹⁹ which coincided with the Republican Convention in New York, in 2004. Over twenty international net artists and digital artists created a five day long broadcast of “collaborative art-polemic with a focus on how Bush and the US Republicans negatively influence every locality around the world.” The protest jam was projected at *RNC NODE* at Postmasters Gallery and in local NY bars and cafes, and attracted thousands of online visitors.

Furtherfield is now working with *Furthernoise* to develop a workshop programme called *CoMix*, in which young people from London and Bristol in the UK will collaborate with others in the Bronx, NY, USA, collaging and mixing audio-visual files and creating performances together live. A new database will be created especially for young people, the first new installation of the *VisitorsStudio* artware to be dedicated to particular groups of users.

We hope that we have been able to communicate some of the processes, contexts and practice in the Furtherfield Neighbourhood. *DIWO* means exploring the potential to share visions, resources and



DIWO Furtherfield Neighbourhood Map

agency, through collaboration and negotiation, across physical and virtual networks—maintaining a critical consciousness and hopefully, somehow having a decent life at the same time... We are aware that we may have underplayed some of the difficulties that we continue to face in sustaining our activities. Another time. Instead, we wanted to share our understanding, drawn from our own experience, of the value of nurturing non-commercially-driven spaces for collaboratively authored and variegated visions that involve the use of technology. Because if we do not take control of the tools and the media, and at least make an effort to empower ourselves and the communities that we value, then others may come along and take that possibility from us.

Ruth Catlow and Marc Garrett—Furtherfield.org 2007
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5/>

Endnotes

01
 Geert Lovink in an interview between David Garcia, Geert Lovink and Andreas Broeckmann, for *The GHI of Tactical Media*, Transmediale.01 Festival, Berlin, 2001. <www.uoc.edu/artnodes/eng/art/broeckmann0902/broeckmann0902.html>

02
 <small.omweb.org/modules/wakka/HowNodeIWorks>

03
Backspace <bak.spc.org>

04
I/O/D <bak.spc.org/iod>, *Irrational* <irational.org>, *Mongrel* <www.mongrel.org.uk>
and *Mute* <metamute.org>

05
Syndicate <syndicate.anart.no> and *Rhizome* <rhizome.org>

06
HTTP [House of Technologically Termed Praxis] <http.uk.net>

07
These ideas include notions of 'Free' and 'Open' culture as defined by association with i) network-facilitated sharing and development processes of Free and Open Source Software (FOSS) ii) open organisation and consensual decision making of anti-globalisation protest movements iii) Political philosophy such as Hardt and Negri's *The Multitude* iv) the Happenings and art events of 1970s Fluxus artists.

08
NODE.London Season of Media Arts in London <www.nodel.org>

09
See *NODE.London - States of Interdependence* by Catlow and Garrett. Available from <publication.nodel.org/States-of- Interdependence>

10
Albert-Laszlo Barabasi, (2002) *Linked: How Everything Is Connected to Everything Else and What It Means*, Perseus Publishing, Cambridge, MA.

11
<www.electrichands.com/artstatement.pdf>

12
<www.furtherstudio.org/online>

13
The *FurtherStudio* web facility utilised a technical solution (using server-sockets and Perl script) developed by Neil Jenkins for *Skin/Strip Online*, an earlier real-time online contributory project developed by Furtherfield and *Completely Naked*. See <www.skinstrip.net>

14
<blog.VisitorsStudio.org>

15
A text about *VisitorsStudio* by Patrick Lichty for the Game/Play exhibition <blog.game-play.org.uk/?q=VisitorsStudio>

16
Flickr <www.flickr.com>, *MySpace* <www.myspace.com> and *YouTube* <www.youtube.com>

17
<www.furthernoise.org/index.php?url=page.php&ID=134&iss=57>

18
Furthernoise.org is a sister-site to *Furtherfield.org*, run by musician Roger Mills, that provides an online platform for the creation, promotion, criticism and archiving of innovative cross genre music and sound art.

19
Organised by *Furtherfield.org*. For archives of the protest jam, see <www.Furtherfield.org/dissensionconvention>

Open-ended processes, open space technologies and open laboratories

Maja Kuzmanovic and Nik Gaffney

It is a fearsome thing, like diving into water. And yet it is exhilarating—because you aren't controlling it.
Christopher Alexander

What is FoAM?

FoAM is a laboratory for people engaged in hybrid practices, people whose knowledge tends to fall through gaps between disciplines (or ties together disparate disciplines), people who thrive in the interstitial spaces between culture and science, technology and ecology. Since its inception in 2000, FoAM has changed appearances, from a department in a Brussels-based private research lab, to an independent artist-led organisation, to a networked entity, with studios in Brussels and Amsterdam and partner organisations worldwide. Its collaborative structure allows FoAM to remain small and flexible, able to change directions and contexts as appropriate.

The primary focus of FoAM's work is in what has become known as 'Hybrid Reality' or 'Mixed Reality' (MR), where physical and digital worlds are increasingly intertwined. The most common forms of artistic works in MR include responsive environments, context or location specific games (eg. LARPs—Live Action Role-Playing games or ARGs—Alternate Reality Games), active materials and tangible (or gestural) interfaces.

Knowledge sharing

In the process of developing MR works, our collaborators have gained substantial knowledge, skills and contacts, which tend to be uncommon amongst artists or other members of the cultural proletariat. This is perhaps due to a lack of contact with scientific communities, the prohibitive cost of proprietary technology, or the knowledge and persistence required to participate in open source communities. As an organisation which can function as a 'mediator' between the scientific and technological and the artistic worlds, we feel that we should share this knowledge with a wider group of our peers and audiences.

The sharing of knowledge is incorporated into the core of our projects as professional development and participatory design activities. These activities can be designed for our peers, students or enthusiastic DIYers, marginalised groups (who would otherwise rarely come in contact with contemporary artistic works), or the general public. They can occur at various stages of a project and can range in scope from informal parties where a part of a project is presented and tested, to facilitated workshops, to fully fledged anthropological and design studies. Each of these forms of knowledge and skill-sharing has its own requirements in terms of space, time and commitment required and, as such, should be designed carefully, adapting existing models where appropriate, or inventing new models where necessary.



Soft-wear: Collaborative fiddling. Image courtesy Joanna Berzowska.

Designing and planning

Designing our workshops and other professional development activities can begin with particular goals, a specific topic, or solidify from vague ideas of how to bring several themes together. These can be collected from within FoAM, as well as from suggestions from previous, or potential workshop participants. The subjects can cover anything from teaching kids how to make their own computer games; to helping a group of prominent artists to make their practice more ecologically sustainable; to working with families on urban guerilla gardening.

With the topic and the goals determined, we look at the group in terms of their shared and lacking knowledge, which suggests different teaching methods, workshop leaders and formats. Depending on whether our goals include teaching specific skills (e.g., basic electronics), or whether they are of a more holistic nature (e.g., understanding the dynamics of human-computer-human interaction in MR), the workshops can require either focused hands-on tutorials, free-form group learning, or both (or perhaps something else all together).

Since FoAM is not an official educational institution, we are free to explore a wide range of teaching methods, and use what we think would be most appropriate for the participants and topics at hand.

An important part of the workshop format is the space and atmosphere in which the workshop takes place, as is the time allocated for it. In our experience, if the workshop lasts around a week, it works best if the participants are with each other continuously. A 'retreat' tends to produce a much deeper and more engaged understanding, while social interaction provides a chance for everyone involved to get to know each other on different levels, often resulting in new collaborations and friendships. In such a setting, people's attention is focussed, they occupy themselves not just in terms of working and learning, but also in conversing, relaxing and eating together, away from their daily habits and contexts.

Preparation, consumption and sharing of food during workshops is an often overlooked aspect which we find crucial to the success of the events. In the workshops that we organised, we found food an infallible bonding agent, regardless of age, culture or gender.

Finally, an important element of the design are the participants themselves. In our workshops the participants usually include a mixture of those who have been invited and those who responded to an open-call, their selection being primarily based on their motivation. The second important selection factor is the overlap of interests and the complementarity of the skills of different people in the group. Each person should share some common characteristic with at least one other person (who should have something in common with at least one other participant). Selecting a group in such manner assures a compact, yet diverse team that can learn a lot from each other, in addition to learning from the workshop leaders.

Open space and individual responsibility

As workshops are usually concentrated, short term and often unique learning opportunities, their quality should be high. In order to get as much out of the workshops as possible, we share the responsibility

for the quality and depth of the event with the participants. We state this clearly at the beginning of each workshop, making sure that the participants are aware of the ‘principles’ of their engagement.

We found a great source of techniques and principles for steering group dynamics towards shared, collaborative processes from colleagues working as consultants for conflict resolution and business strategy. We were pointed towards ‘Open Space Technology’ (OST) as an interesting format for a variety of situations. OST is founded on the basic assumption that all participants are passionate about the topic, and responsible for their actions. Based on this, we introduce five principles:

1. whoever is present, they are the right people for the project at hand
2. whenever a process starts, it is the right time
3. whatever happens, it is the only thing that could have happened
4. when it’s over, it’s over
5. do what you need to do, and go where you need to go, but don’t waste time

These simple principles allow the individuals to find their own place and pace, while encouraging a group spirit. They have been proven in large scale conflict resolution settings (for example, in Bosnia after the war in the 1990s), as well as in small, diverse groups dealing with complex issues.

Open space events enable the participants themselves to shape the agenda, allowing everyone involved to present and discuss issues that are most important to them. There is no passive consumption of knowledge, only pro-active participation, learning and sharing. OST may not be suitable for all workshops, but its principles can be applied in a broad range of situations, regardless of topic or teaching method.

Soft-wear and Soft-ware, two case studies

Two examples of FoAM’s workshops using OST are ‘Soft-wear’ and ‘Soft-ware’. The workshops were designed to explore different ends of the mixed reality spectrum—responsive textiles (soft-wear) and real-time computer animation (soft-ware). Both workshops involved a mixture of hands-on and theoretical sessions, requiring active participation and creative commitment from the participants. Both were held in the same studio and each concluded with a public presentation. During the course of the workshop all participants had

the opportunity to present and discuss their artistic practice. This ensured that common interests and collaborative possibilities were expressed in a face-to-face situation.

The Soft-wear workshop, (a.k.a. ‘The Knitting Club’, led by Joey Berzowska and Rachel Wingfield), taught fifteen people basic electronics, along with the basics of textile design, weaving and printing. It swiftly moved onto emerging areas of soft electronics, flexible displays and shape-memory materials (materials able to change shape under different conditions). We found that short, concise tutorials were enough to get people started ‘fiddling’ on their own. When reference material and expert support were provided, the participants came up with some mind-boggling designs and even stranger technical solutions in a matter of hours (individually, or in groups). Over several days, their ideas matured and the techniques reached a point where they could continue experimenting on their own. The results included electro-luminescent potatoes and glowing wall-paper which reacted to sound levels in the room; prototype garments which changed colour depending on buttons being open or closed; textile radios sewn onto trousers which transmitted AM noise. Even though the experiments were not all finished, the participants acquired many new skills and knowledge applicable in their individual practices—from interior design, to audiovisual performance and electrical engineering.



Soft-wear: Powering a textile. Image courtesy Mette Ramsgard Thomsen.



Soft-wear: Demonstrating the result. Image courtesy Joanna Berzowska.

The Soft-ware workshop, which focused on the emerging realm of ‘real-time’ animation (lead by Dave Griffiths and Nik Gaffney), had the advantage of a common technology which was used by all participants—‘fluxus’, a programming environment for generating digital graphic worlds. The main challenge for us with this heterogeneous group was to balance the range of skills in computer programming and to keep the group conversations alive, without the



Soft-wear: The working table. Image courtesy FoAM.



Soft-wear: Sewing and soldering. Image courtesy FoAM.

participants disappearing into their glowing screens. Each morning the workshop leaders went through theoretical and practical tutorials on a single large screen, or scribbled on large sheets of paper. In the afternoon the participants would work in pairs, designing small experiments to implement some of the techniques learned that morning. This ‘pair programming’ technique was borrowed from a software development method known as ‘extreme programming’. As one person enters code, the other will keep track of the overall structure of the programme, ask questions, discuss the code being written, as well as notice typos or potential errors. This tends to make programming more social, the teams work faster, make fewer obvious mistakes and have fun seeing each others’ results, mishaps, or amazing feats of abstraction-wrangling. Often, similar question arose from different pairs, so the pair’s screen would be projected on the wall, enabling discussion with the whole group. In this way, people would be temporarily drawn away from their own projects, giving them a few minutes of distance, or a new idea. In the same space, we brought a collection of movies, animations and books, so that participants could take breaks from crafting their own animations, while still being immersed in wondrous animated worlds. The evenings were reserved for informal ‘fiddling’ and screenings of different materials. At the end of the week, there were dozens of little animations—abstract and figurative, glitchy and slick, responding to movement, ambient network traffic, or the rhythm of music.

Open Labs

Many workshops have some kind of public moment as their culmination. This is not always a good way to finish a workshop, as it can put an unnecessary emphasis on presentation and can destroy the process of careless exploration, which is crucial for informal learning. We are therefore very careful in designing these



Soft-ware: Discussing animations. Image courtesy Alkan Chipperfield.

public presentations, so as to satisfy both the participants and the audiences. The format that we used in both *Soft-wear* and *Soft-ware* is the ‘Open lab’—simply opening the doors to anyone interested.

In *Soft-wear* the working space itself was an intriguing setting, with large tables covered with strange materials and semi-finished experiments. During the Open lab, the participants continued to work on their ‘pieces’, explaining their process to anyone interested in what they were doing, sometimes even giving their own *ad hoc* tutorials.

For *Soft-ware*, we felt that the fluxus environment should be shown in its full glory—used by an expert (Dave Griffiths), so the audience could better understand the relevance of the different experiments. We also wanted to bring an element of physicality amidst the forest of flickering screens, so we invited Stevie Wishart to play her augmented hurdy-gurdy, a very analogue instrument which incorporates movement sensors able to influence synthesised soundscapes and visuals generated with fluxus. After being flooded with hypnotising images and sounds, the audience was invited to chat with the participants, whose experiments were projected throughout the space. They were able to linger for hours, while sipping thematic cocktails and tasting ‘animated’ foods.

A few recommendations

There are many different ways of organising and designing workshops and many exciting topics to be covered. We approach the process differently each time, in consideration of the people involved, the contexts in which the workshops are held, or the subject matter. However, there are a few recurring threads that we try to improve upon each time:

- Having two or more workshop coordinators proved to be a good thing, but it is essential to keep each other continually updated on directions, processes and findings.
- Oral and/or written summaries of the material covered should be provided for the participants each day (first thing in the morning might be the best time), preferably with short discussions and suggestions.
- Some topics may require longer, a time-frame with more time for reflection—this should be incorporated into the duration of the workshop.
- The participants should always have a 'syllabus' to take with them, which should include materials covered in the workshops, suggestions for further reading/viewing/listening and contact sheets.
- Evaluation of the workshop process should be carefully planned.
- If there is a public presentation of the results, it should be discussed and designed together with participants, with consideration for the audience.

Even though our workshops vary, there is one common aim shared by us and our participants. We believe that transdisciplinary knowledge and hands-on skills encourage a more pro-active and responsible participation in all aspects of our everyday lives. We greet people, and part, with a simple message: "grow your own worlds".

More detailed information about the cited workshops can be found in the book *x.meda*, downloadable from xmeda.be/xmeda.screen.pdf.

@ FoAM vzw. cc-by-sa > <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/>

Free Beer vs Free Media

Andrew Lowenthal

The free beer Richard Stallman loathes is everywhere. Media companies are currently falling over themselves to produce the new hive for user-generated content. The names have rapidly become commonplace—YouTube, MySpace, Flickr—and their effect has been enormous, dramatically changing the production and distribution of media globally. Free beer pours from the taps of these new hubs of participatory media as they clamour to get you in the door. But free beer, as Free Software Foundation founder Richard Stallman has always emphasised, is not the same as freedom.

The Free Software Foundation has a stock standard one liner about what free software is and is not: "free as in free speech, not as in free beer". That is, free software is not about price, but liberty. Free software is software that may be freely shared and modified on the basis that those modifications be made available to others. The defining document for free software is the GNU General Public License (GNU GPL).⁰¹

Free software is the philosophical genesis of a much broader set of practices that seek to empower the user and challenge the limitations of the proprietary model in the realm of software, culture, media, politics, science and more. The model and ethics of free software production can be ported to a range of other realms. I will explore two activist media and software projects I am involved with that attempt to embody free software principles and challenge the proprietary model.

They are:

- EngageMedia.org—a Melbourne-based free software project and video sharing site for social and environmental justice film from Southeast Asia, Australia and the Pacific.
- Transmission.cc—a new global network of social change online video projects co- founded by EngageMedia.

But first.....

What's not free about free beer?

The spread of affordable media production equipment, combined now with a global online distribution network, provides grassroots media makers with an amazing opportunity. This ground-breaking shift cannot be overstated. However, many of these new distribution networks are a double-edged sword, on one side liberating, on the other representing a new nexus of control.

Many of the new commercial media-sharing sites offer highly restrictive terms and conditions on their user contributions. The most dubious is that of YouTube who state:

...by submitting the User Submissions to YouTube, you hereby grant YouTube a worldwide, non-exclusive, royalty-free, sublicenseable and transferable license to use, reproduce, distribute, prepare derivative works of, display, and perform the User Submissions in connection with the YouTube Website and YouTube's (and its successor's) business... in any media formats and through any media channels.⁰²

By uploading to YouTube you grant them the right to do near anything with your video, including modifying and selling it, as long as it stays on their site.

Even as it appears the big players are giving up control by opening their sites to user contributions there remains a strong desire to control the content as much as possible. There are some exceptions, Flickr, for example, does allow you to add Creative Commons licenses to your photos.

Creative Commons⁰³ is a form of 'Open Content Licensing' that derives its roots from the principles of free software. Creative Commons allows users to specify on what basis their work may be shared—for example, whether or not the work can be modified, used for commercial purposes or only non-commercial purposes. Whilst more conservative than the GNU GPL, Creative Commons situates itself as part of the 'free culture movement' and seeks to lessen the restrictions of traditional copyright by creating a more 'flexible' copyright regime.

Beyond this specific example however there are many more general problems. The acquisition of YouTube by Google in 2006 for 1.65 billion USD dollars highlighted just how much money is at stake in this arena, and just how big the gap is between those making fortunes and those making media. The work of the founders and employees of YouTube, while responsible for creating the infrastructure that allowed

others to publish, represents only a fraction of the work that made the site such a wild success. Literally millions of people added videos, comments, promoted the site, built profiles and more, all creating value for the company and enhancing the experience of other users. All of these users should be paid for their contributions given the wealth they generated, none have, though YouTube has recently announced plans to create some kind of revenue sharing model. It's either this or lose market share.

Up until a few years ago the idea of building a site based on user-generated content was a fringe idea that worked counter to the 'in control' philosophy of most business practices. Additionally, there was no 'business model' for this type of site. How could you make money providing free hosting and distribution for other people's content?

Communities for Sale

One of the key business models for these "Web 2.0" start ups has been the basic idea of providing an infrastructure and technology for users and then selling those eyes to advertisers and the contributor community to a larger company—it happened with Flickr, YouTube, MySpace and more. There is a huge rush of companies trying to create the next big site to bring in the people and make their pot of gold. Users need to become far more savvy as to the imbalance in power that is being generated and whom they are helping make millionaires.

Most of these platforms offer a simple trade-off: distribution, storage, membership in a community, and an audience in exchange for advertising next to your content. You provide the reason for coming to the site, they provide the infrastructure. This situation, however, mirrors the current exploitation of artists in many other fields: you get an opportunity at a slice of the pie but you must provide your work for free, or almost nothing, just to prove yourself. It's like being on permanent provisional employment. "We (might) make you famous, just give us your talent and we'll see."

If we think of online media in terms of the public sphere we can see that it has very quickly become 'mallefied', that is public debate has moved, just like the town square to the shopping centre, to a privatised and commercialised space.

Sites like YouTube, Google Video and MySpace employ a 'hoarding architecture' that provides only a form of pseudo sharing. These sites severely limit what you can and cannot do with the media you upload and view. For example, YouTube doesn't enable you to download the videos on their site (there's a small hack you can get that will allow

you to do this but it isn't official), only embed them in your blog with YouTube branding. As such, you can only share through YouTube and the videos are of such low quality they are almost useless offline. You can't control how your video is encoded and instead get left with a generic low-resolution Flash Video version, a proprietary codec that Macromedia control. You can't subscribe to feeds of other users' videos off-site (video podcasting), only through the YouTube site—where you'll of course get to view many ads.

Added to this, and this applies to even the more 'progressive' companies, the software used to run the site is entirely proprietary and not available to you, the user, to share and improve upon lest you go and build your own site.

With all these limitations why do people publish on these sites rather than those that are more likely to respect their rights? One key reason is the ubiquity they've been able to establish—YouTube and Myspace are the names that get thrown around most in mainstream media and, as such, many people just don't know about the alternatives. They've reached such a scale as to be able to offer potentially huge audiences, if you don't get lost in the noise every other contributor is making. Additionally, the massive resources these companies command mean they can offer features many smaller initiatives can't, and implement them much more quickly.

What's concerning and puzzling however, is the apoliticism with which many independent media creators approach these sites. Even with the knowledge that Rupert Murdoch owns MySpace, somehow it doesn't seem as corporatised and controlled as the 'old media'.

The degree to which people's critiques of these new media corporations have been disarmed is highly alarming. People are happy to make the compromise for the additional features and the larger audience: it's hard to blame them—and we shouldn't make apologies for badly designed but politically correct sites. All this adds up, however, to a more subtle form of control that is in many ways more exploitative than the passive consumerism of television. Online video demands your creativity, thoughts and feelings, and then sells them: television just asks you to be a passive receiver of information and sells you to an advertiser. With media-sharing sites you become an underpaid (if paid at all) precarious contractor who produces content while others make millions.

When is there going to be a stronger reaction to it all? One could imagine unions of media makers going on a content strike, demanding pay increases—or any kind of payment—for their work. It sounds unrealistic, in many senses, but not unwarranted. Unfortunately the

major players have such massive audiences that the balance of forces is squarely in their favour, especially until people realise the bad deal they are getting. Resistance currently takes place within the framework of the market: those unhappy with the current state of affairs move to friendlier spaces, or if they have the skills and energy, they produce their own sites that promote a different ethic of collaboration and sharing.

Free Media Models

For many years one of media activism's cornerstones was the idea that dissenting and minority voices were denied the ability to have their issues heard due to their exclusion from mass media channels. The answer was to build alternative media infrastructures—magazines, newspapers, radio and television stations—that would act as 'the voice of the voiceless', or to campaign for space within the mainstream. Access was the panacea for injustice: if only people could have their voices heard society would change.

This idea was pushed to its limits with the birth of the Indymedia network and its 'open publishing' philosophy which stated "Open publishing is the same as free software"—the title of the seminal article written by Sydney-based Indymedia activist Maffew.⁰⁴

In late 1999 when Indymedia was born there were few places that allowed non-geeks to publish their content online. Open Publishing was a radical idea that aimed to bridge the divide between the have and have-nots by democratising media access. Using a piece of free software called "Active", suddenly anyone with net connection could publish their thoughts to thousands of others with little or no editorial control.⁰⁵ The possibility of making your own media and reaching a large audience at zero cost was suddenly available.

Indymedia's tagline of 'don't hate the media, become the media' has now been realised. Apple, MySpace, Google, YouTube, and more, all want us to 'become the media'—and they want us to buy their products to create it and put their advertising next to what we create.

The web itself has become 'Open Publishing' and access is no longer the issue. Those using media as a tool for social change need to start asking new questions. How do community and activist media define themselves now that one of their core aims has been fulfilled? How are the processes of production different from, or antagonistic to, the commercial sphere? What social relations are being sought between users and how do they translate to the offline world? How can these 'free media' projects directly effect social change, or support work towards it?

The issue now is, Who controls this media, this community, the money it generates, its infrastructure and its technology? Fundamentally the question is one of self-management and democracy. As the old saying goes, “we don’t want a slice of the cake, we want the whole bakery.”

Some basic principles for “free media”

If we are looking to create media and infrastructures that are free as in freedom, not as in beer, what core principles do we need? The list below shouldn’t be seen as exhaustive. However, they might be useful in assessing how much any given project seeks to control its users, and how much it is controlled by its users.

Those key elements are:

- ability to add open content licenses to your work
- transparent and democratic editorial processes
- use of free software to run the website with the code available for others to make improvements
- use of free software codecs⁰⁶
- revenue sharing if the initiative is a for-profit entity
- ability to download, redistribute, screen and remix works, including the ability to download and share via open source protocols such as peer to peer networks
- a guarantee not to sell you and your community to the highest bidder

Practical Examples

Within EngageMedia,⁰⁷ attempting to incorporate most of the above principal—as a small group of just four people initially and having no budget—we immediately went looking for some free software to run the site we wanted. We found very quickly, however, that the software that did exist either had very few features, a small or non-existent developer community, or had not yet been customised to really handle video. We set out to adapt a free software Content Management System⁰⁸ (CMS)—Plone⁰⁹—to be able to handle video. We soon discovered others doing the same thing and were able to join forces and share code which gave momentum to our respective projects.

Inadvertently we found ourselves spending the first eighteen months as software developers, rather than running a video sharing website. Building the system from scratch, however, would have taken years longer; making the code we wrote closed and proprietary would have meant others couldn’t build on and improve our work. Despite taking so long to launch our site we now have a ‘free’ system we can offer to other video projects. The software is by no means perfect but the more people that use it the better it gets and the more quickly the problem of producing a sophisticated video CMS is solved. To control it means only to slow its evolution.

In the course of looking for software to adopt we noticed another thing: almost every activist online video project was using a different CMS—and most of them were written from scratch. With little collaboration going on they were able to offer very few features to their users and improvements were very slow. People weren’t communicating, everyone was re-inventing the wheel and we were all being less effective.

On this basis, in June 2006 EngageMedia collaborated with the Italy’s CandidaTV to put on Transmission—a gathering of around forty people from twenty-five different free software activist video projects—from Korea, Australia, Argentina, the US, Malaysia and a range of European countries—at the Forte Prenestino Social Centre in Rome.¹⁰ For four days we discussed ways in which we could collaborate better and attempted to find common ground.

At the end of the four days we agreed to form an ongoing network and to work on a range of common projects that would take us all forward collectively.

Those projects included among others:

- creating a common meta-data standard to allow greater sharing of content between projects
- a wiki-based common documentation repository where organisations could work together to create open content licensed tutorials on online video
- closer collaboration on some of the CMSs currently in use
- a global database of video screening organisations
- development of a collaborative subtitles and translation tool

- the development of tools to facilitate the uptake of free software codecs

The social relations built on by these projects through their use of free software and open content licensing are dramatically different from their commercial counterparts. Instead of dependence and control we have free collaboration, sharing, and a true many-to-many model. But the benefits are not just ethical. Beyond a close alignment with free software principles and progressive politics, this type of collaboration also makes sense for groups with limited means as a more efficient mode of production. The ethics do not sit outside the form of production but are integrated within it: sharing is not a moral imperative but a better way of doing things. Competition and selfishness are counter-intuitive in this context. Collaboration and solidarity become the principles that spur on improvement and build different social relations in the here and now.

</end>

The explosion of user-generated content is a major crack in the passivity that has been fostered by both governments, media, political parties and business over the last hundred years. The one-to-many model is being usurped by the many-to-many, the masses are replaced by the network, command by collaboration. We are only just scratching the surface. The desire to control and exploit has certainly not ended, but has shifted to a new phase. New antagonisms emerge in this space, demanding the ability to participate meaningfully in the construction of every day life, not just to choose between a series of choices. The future remains open.

CC attribution-share-alike

<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.5/au/>

by Andrew Lowenthal - EngageMedia

Endnotes

01

GNU stands for GNU's Not Unix. It is part of the basis of the Linux operating system. <gnu.org>

The four freedoms of Free Software are:

- * The freedom to run the program, for any purpose (freedom 0).
- * The freedom to study how the program works, and adapt it to your needs (freedom 1). Access to the source code is a precondition for this.
- * The freedom to redistribute copies so you can help your neighbor (freedom 2).
- * The freedom to improve the program, and release your improvements to the public, so that the whole community benefits (freedom 3). Access to the source code is a precondition for this.

02

<www.youtube.com/t/terms>

03

<creativecommons.org>

04

<www.cat.org.au/maffew/cat/openpub.html>

05

<active.org.au>

06

'Codec' is an amalgam of compressor/decompressor. It is a programme that will "encode a stream or signal for transmission, storage or encryption and decode it for viewing or editing." <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Codec> A common example would be mp3, mp4 or wmv. Most audio and video codecs are proprietary, not open to modification, and often require users to pay licensing fees. There are concrete alternatives such as OGG that are open source. <theora.org>

07

<engagemedia.org>

08

A Content Management System, or CMS, is software that "facilitates the organization, control, and publication of a large body of documents and other content". Most websites these days use a CMS to manage and present their content.

09

<plone.org>

10

<transmission.cc>

Digital Culture: the jump from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century

Leandro Fossá, in collaboration with Claudio Prado

The purpose of this article is to briefly introduce the digital politics that have been created and implemented by the Digital Culture of the Ministry of Culture of Brazil, in conjunction with several groups within civil society. Here will be shown the practical as well as theoretical aspects of our experience so that other governments and civil society can take a position and act decisively, in such a way as not to drown but successfully surf the digital waves.

The twenty-first century begins supported by the Digital Era which allows the rise of the peer-to-peer society. When I talk about peer-to-peer society I mean access to cyberspace available to everybody, as a policy, a public policy. Allowing people to find what they want without having to move geographically. The centre of the world now is cyberspace, so you can stay local and be at the centre of the world, allowing diversity.

The digital technology revolution obliges us to rethink ways to create, register, distribute and financially manage our intellectual creations, realizing that the only way to understand and act is from the cultural perspective, working from the principle that technology is also culture, in the broadest sense.

It follows from this assertion that this moment does not represent a linear step into the twentieth century, but a change in the paradigm, imposing new paths. The twentieth century has produced a world of differences. The world today produces three times more food than is needed to feed everybody and half of the population is starving. Nature has been destroyed everywhere and global warming is a problem that cannot be ignored. A peer-to-peer life can be a new model for the twenty-first century, because the old model has been going awry.

Open Source and the Internet give us two examples of a new world that can arise, one based on a new ethical perspective. The Open Source Software movement represents an ethical change in the work area: here people have worked for the benefit of everybody and not for the benefit of themselves. The Internet only exists on the basis of what is essentially an ethical move. It's the biggest thing in communication—and, quite properly, it belongs to nobody.

It is with this cultural understanding of these phenomena that the Digital Culture of the Ministry of Culture of Brazil—one of the few in the world to mix cultural politics with those of the technological sphere, has acted, with the objective of proposing the effective use of new technologies of communication to give *dynamism* to cultural production, stimulating cultural diversity, local production, the formation of new productive arrangements with the support of technology and the integration of local cultures, based on similar interests and contexts. This action has taken place on two main fronts:

The first has taken place in the philosophical and political fields. We discuss and put to society, in all kind of forums, through Minister Gilberto Gil's Digital Culture Agenda and through public announcements, the new paradigms of the twenty-first century. This has prompted greater awareness and created turmoil in many places, especially in the official world, since Gilberto Gil is both an internationally successful author and musician, *and* a State Minister.

The second field of action is the *Pontos de Cultura* (Cultural Hotspots). These are local-scale socio-cultural centers selected by government's open call for projects. Government provides resources for these entities, supporting them to continue and amplifying the activities that they already undertake in their communities. The aim is not to create something new but to support and celebrate these valuable initiatives.



The reason we work for!

At the moment there are about six hundred Cultural Hotspots and one hundred of them are already using the multimedia studio. A word that better describes those projects is diversity: they're from all over Brazil and tap into many different cultural backgrounds—from hip hop groups to Indigenous tribes that work with videomaking, from traditional Brazilian music bands to projects that work with people with vision disabilities. They focus on a diverse group of users of all ages, genders, and ethnicity.

The Hotspots represent the area where the action takes place and where we try to promote the concepts of free culture, working collaboratively with communities spread throughout Brazil, which act within several different cultural languages. This laboratory of technology, based on free knowledge, is coordinated by Claudio Prado in conjunction with spokespeople for several groups of civil society. It is responsible for that dimension of digital culture in the Cultural Hotspots which takes technology from the twenty-first century to communities still living the reality of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—I mean people who have never seen such technology before, have never heard of copyright, have no prospects of employment, who have absolutely no social security entitlements.



A view from *Nós do Morro*, a Cultural Hotspot in a *favela* in Rio de Janeiro.

Almost one hundred multimedia production kits have been donated to the *Pontos de Cultura*. Each kit comprises an internet/network server, a light terminal, a multimedia workstation with two monitors, photographic cameras and digital video cameras, two printers, one scanner, microphones, a sound table and an audio monitor.

These communities learn to use FREE multimedia software to interact fully with all the sorts of communication the Internet enables: text, hypertext, graphic image, sound, music, video and software programming. We try to help them to be self-sufficient in digital technology so they need not rely on anybody else, such as government authorities or the support centers of various business enterprises.



Grab the camera and let the ideas flow!!! A video workshop.



It's possible to create nice videos using free software.



Cris Scabello—playing and recording music using free software for our first workshop, Teresina, 2005.



Meeting Linux

Free and open source software represents the possibility of autonomy via technology. That's the core of the issue: to be autonomous, to be free, to own your perspectives, to own the possibility of access to whatever your interest is. Of course, if you are not technologically minded, maybe you should wait a bit longer before exploring free software; maybe it's not a good idea to move too suddenly.

In Brazil, everybody uses pirated software. So the motivation to use free software is not that it's free of charge, but that it allows freedom. And that's a step that should be taken—from pirated software to free software—once you understand what is behind this idea of freedom. It's a philosophical, and an ethical, choice that has to be made—a political one as well. You have to understand the issues: and then you move.

At the same time, at the Cultural Hotspots we are working on another level: recycling discarded computers. Because the idea that you have to exchange your computer every two years because of technological advances is *not true!* This is planned obsolescence. Our solution is to get kids to build top technology out of PC garbage, to do WiFi connections on their own and to connect computers that they have reconstructed themselves, using equipment that has been thrown away.

Recycling Workshop
—a non-traditional class.



Recycling Step 1:
the donated computers waiting to be recycled.



Recycling Step 2:
selecting what still works.



Recycling Step 3:
mount, unmount,
break pieces... make
all the mistakes you
want!!”



Recycling Step 4:
mounted, painted and
ready to be used.



Recycling



As part of the strategy of the implementation and replication of the concepts and techniques diffused by Digital Culture, we have undertaken several regional workshops (thirty-five so far since July 2005), which have been named “Free Knowledge Meetings”. These are events that last a week in which about 150 people participate. Each meeting has debates, speeches and introductory practical labs, that work together to strengthen the network of relationships and the collaboration between the various Cultural Hotspots. In these meetings the possible uses of the multimedia production kits are demonstrated, along with new sorts of publication and distribution of the material created with the kits. The aim is to strengthen this network through the new paradigms brought by the Internet.

Poster announcing a
Free Knowledge Meeting
in Vassouras, State of
Rio de Janeiro, July,
2006.



Free Knowledge Meetings: a space to share
your knowledge—a Capoeira demonstration



A technological meeting or a cultural process?



The week's schedule—paste your workshop here!!

After the regional meetings, we continue with the local workshops that are fostered directly in the Hotspots, to look more deeply into the technical aspects of the multimedia kit's operation.

These local workshops are built to give support to the local situation, and are responsive to the needs of each Hotspot, to better use the multimedia kits and understand the potential uses of free software, according to the local reality and its specific needs.

To stimulate the publication and organization of information, and to enable local discussion and the collaborative processes of knowledge-sharing, we developed three tools (systems on the web), all of them based exclusively on free software. The members of the Hotspots learn how to use them during the workshops. These tools are:

The *Converse* (converse.org) is an environment for direct conversation between people in the Cultural Hotspots, typically including projects of social inclusion and open to virtually any person interested in digital culture and the facilitation of actions (virtual and local).

The system called *Estudio Livre* (www.estudiolivres.org) consists of a website with information about free software for multimedia

production and free gallery and is a platform for the publication of multimedia production. The *Estudio Livre* is a self-organized collective in which participation in the free software movement goes beyond the staff of Digital Culture—tens of volunteer workers collaborate to develop the content for the website.

Thirdly, the *mapSys*: this adds to and organizes information between the Cultural Hotspots and allows the transfer of information between the Hotspots, the generation of contextual maps related to the Hotspots, and other kinds of analysis.

As a result, we observed that in the Hotspots individuals and collectives from remote and isolated regions are discovering cyberspace as a new territory that changes the geographic notion of the 'centre of the world', and offers real opportunity of a 'glocal' (that is, staying local but connected with global ideas) life: a healthy existence between the globalization of knowledge and access to information, and with a strengthening and guaranteeing of their extraordinarily rich local cultural life.

We have seen that through the free multimedia kits we bring oxygen and new horizons of hope to these communities. We know that we have found a short cut to allow people who live in the eighteenth and nineteenth century to leapfrog the twentieth century and plunge directly to the twenty-first. In the Cultural Hotspots people are learning and licensing their songs, videos and texts via Creative Commons licences. We believe that our experiment in Digital Culture in Brazil constitutes a laboratory of the new ways of the twenty-first century.

The first result that I (myself) look for with this project is not something measured by numbers. That is, it doesn't matter how many workshops have been done, how many videos have been produced and uploaded or how many people have attended the workshops... What matters is that there has been an increase in self-esteem and the opening of new possibilities for the members of the Hotspots who have participated in our workshops.

An interesting example cited in this regard is the Hotspot ITAE located in the beautiful historical city of Paraty, on the south coast of the State of Rio de Janeiro (300 kilometres from the city of Rio de Janeiro). They started this project twenty years ago and they offer educational and social support for about two hundred young people, who go there after school to participate in activities not found within the Brazilian school system, such as ceramics, judo, music and, now, digital culture.

Computer recycled and painted in the workshop—ITAE, Paraty, 2006.



And technology became more friendly and funny.



Doubts??? That's our intention!!



I had been to ITAE in the third week of January for our first local workshop of 2007, where I wrote some paragraphs of this article. While I was waiting for a meeting, some boys who have a hip-hop band arrived with their instruments (bringing the drum was such a funny adventure—for the audio workshop to record and edit their first song (in the studio created with the multimedia kit), testing their knowledge in Ardour and Jack (free software for audio).

The recording process was being documented with a digital camera by three ten year old girls, but, while they were having a lot of fun, the machine's battery ran out. After a brief discussion, the instructor agreed to lend them the video camera that, in general, is only used by older girls. They shared it with each other. If someone had refused to share then the instructor would have taken it back.

The next step planned by ITAE is negotiation of space on the local TV Channel to broadcast some documentaries done by the young people who have attended the video course.

Of course, it is very difficult to find the balance between such ideas and reality. We have made many mistakes along the way and we don't have all the solutions (and probably we won't have) for the problems that we face in this laboratory—but the fact is that something very new is happening on the Hotspots. And some people understand it and some people don't.

We are about to formalize an International Observatory of Digital Culture, a space that will be integrated by people of all kinds of background, that can guarantee visibility, consistency and sustainability to our project extending beyond the government's support. And I would like to invite Australian people to collaborate with us: exchanging knowledge, sharing experiences, commenting upon what we are doing and, above all, coming to Brazil to develop new experiences in the Cultural Hotspots.

Leandro Fossá
International Cooperation
Digital Culture/Ministry of Culture
lfossa@gmail.com or leandro.fossa@cultura.gov.br

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All images courtesy Digital Culture.

What is that Star? Media cultural action in the claiming of space

Lam Oi Wan

Let me begin with a story on a local social movement campaign. It is about the preservation of Star Ferry Pier and Queen's Pier at Central, the heart of the City.

Twinkle twinkle little stars

Here are some historical facts about the two Piers:

The Star Ferry is a passenger ferry service operator in Hong Kong. Its principal routes carry passengers across Victoria Harbour, between Hong Kong Island and Kowloon. The company has been operating since the late 1880s. It was founded by Parsee Dorabjee Nowrojee as the Kowloon Ferry Company in 1888 and renamed Star Ferry in 1898. The name was inspired by his love of Alfred Lord Tennyson's poem "Crossing the Bar", whose first line was *Sunset and evening star, and one clear call for me!*

As for the Queen's Pier, apart from being a public pier it had been a place for the colonial governor's inauguration and departure during the British colonial period. In 1975, when Queen Elizabeth II visited Hong Kong, she anchored at the Queen's Pier. In 1997 when Patten, the last governor, left he also departed from this pier.

The demolition of the two piers was ordered under the land reclamation plan proposed in 1999 for a new highway, a new shopping district and a seaside park. Although the land reclamation plan had gone through public consultation, the public were unaware of the proposed demolition of the two piers. Even professional architects had expressed their opposition; some had put forward alternative plans for preservation but were ignored by the Government.

Since August 2006, a group of public art students (from the Youth Center) started to do performances and installations outside the Star Ferry Pier in Central to express their concerns about the demolition of the pier. The meanings of their works were very diverse: some expressed a sense of loss; some showed the disappearance of Star as a losing of direction; some represented the pier as social history; some were nostalgic; some were in a mourning mood and some showed their anger. Actually, passers-by didn't understand exactly

what they were doing; and everyone had their own reading of the artwork / performance. However, the mainstream media in general represented their work as being in a nostalgic mood.



Artists' performance and exhibition at Star Ferry. Photographs courtesy Choi Tze Kwan.



Artists' performance and exhibition at Star Ferry.
Photograph courtesy Choi Tze Kwan.

Choi Tsz-kwan, Ger and Tsang Tak-ping were facilitators of the public art workshop. Their work in Star Ferry Pier was meant to be an experiment, a course which brought what the students learned in the classroom into a real public space. The effect of their public performance and exhibitions was tremendous in terms of consciousness raising among the students (as they had to think about their relation with the space). It also generated some public awareness / wonderings / feelings as to the meaning of Star Pier in relation to Hong Kong. Such sentiment was politicized later into a citizen campaign through the involvement of media activists.

To claim or not to claim, that's the question

We can say that the artists are the first group of citizens in Hong Kong to claim the space in the Star Ferry by inscribing their feelings about and interpretations of the Pier and Clock Tower onto the disappearing space. However, their claims could not prevent the space from disappearing.

Instead of preserving the actual pier, the government constructed a Disney-style new pier which mimics the Western style old pier of the early nineteenth century, and claimed that the government had preserved Hong Kong people's collective memories: they had scanned and saved the old Star Ferry pier with three dimensional digital techniques into virtual computer files! The government emphasized that the reclamation and road construction plan had been approved since 1999.

There were bits and pieces of reports and commentaries about the demolition of Star Ferry Pier since June 2006 at inmediahk.net.⁰¹ The first commentary was written by Leung Po, an artist and a core editorial member of inmediahk.net; the article complained about the malady of the city: an independent intellectual bookstore had closed down and Star Ferry Pier was to be demolished.

By the end of November, the demolition had started. The government expressed its "condolences" regarding the historical building but insisted that the development still needed to carry on. From December onward, there were several calls for public participation to protest the demolition: December 3rd, a rally to Government offices; December 5th, a human chain outside the construction site.

Hoidick, another core member of inmediahk.net, published a critical report on the December 5th action expressing doubts on the nostalgic mood and "photo-shooting" gestures of protest. It stirred

up some very important discussion among the activists. A major organizer of the public arts performance, Ger, said:

At this stage, I think we should stop executing our wrong representation towards the Star Ferry action, stop this action that makes the people feel annoyed, stop the funeral, stop the ceremony.....otherwise, we will lose the support of the public in future struggles concerning the city.

Our action actually focuses on the city's planning, a fight for our participation in the city in the cultural and historical context, not simply as common memory, not as mere personal emotions. It is because all those common memories and emotions are not convincing enough to ask for the support from the public. Memory and nostalgia don't mean a thing in Hong Kong. Our aims are actually far more important and meaningful than this.

The representation of our action as a mourning ceremony is totally wrong. Coz once you finished the funeral, the "thing" must die! In these last couple of days I was thinking about the reason people do not support us. I found that when the public finished all that ceremony (taking photos, tears, travel with the last ship....etc.), they wouldn't keep it alive in order to make their ceremony reasonable! They would just give it up.

That's how people treat the sort of memory that we are emphasizing in this action. Of course, the mass media are responsible at this point too. Coz they reported the whole thing as a good memory that we have to keep (something easily solved by taking a photo and scanning it). From the very first, we failed to keep the emphasis on our concerns for the city, to keep our own aim. We have lost already.

Another artist, Yeung Yang, who participated in the December 5th action, wrote:

Organized social action / movement (not that I know too much / have much experience of that) must be viewed in relation / tension / contradiction with personal transformation. A person is always in public, and what one does, can do, will actually be done in public, related to her/his personal transformative power. Everyone has his/her own rhythm for achieving that, and allowing it to happen throughout their whole life time. No one can be, should be, forced, because this itself is the most inhumane thing to do.

I don't know what it takes to have an 'organized' front based on degrees of solidarity. I can only see that we are more critical—but perhaps not to the point where we understand how our bodies relate to social space, and can respond to it revealingly. My hunch is that activism requires that.

There is a lot to learn.

On December 11th Hoidick picked up breaking news (released by a citizens' group) about the Secretary for Home Affairs' lie on the legislative council about a consultation report that the demolition had been supported by the Antiquities and Monuments consultation committee in 1999. The fact was quite the reverse.

On December 12th there was another call (posted in the commentary of Hoidick's report) for a human chain action. The action turned into an occupation of the construction site by a few activists (many are citizen reporters in *inmediahk.net*) for thirty-six hours, and a series of spontaneous actions, such as a sit-in protest outside a key government official's home late at night, etc. The campaign had developed into a small political crisis. The activists' demand was simple, stop demolition, which the government perceived as a challenge to the administrative body's governing power. Instead of suspending the construction, the government speeded up the construction and cut the Clock Tower (the symbol of the pier) into half on December 16th. Activists reacted with a forty-nine hour hunger strike and the protest activities moved to Queen's Pier

In December there were more than a hundred reports, commentaries and announcements regarding the two piers at *inmediahk.net*. The discussions covered movement strategies, discourses, reports, personal reflections, debates, etc.

Media activism and cultural activism

The government, mainstream media, politicians, and even organizers and activists who have been involved since July 2006, didn't know what exactly had happened: why would a fading subject be revived and develop this momentum all of a sudden?

Clichéd analysis said that it was the power of the internet network, as some participants explained that they went out to strike because of what they read in *inmediahk.net*. They called this post-modern flash mob aggregation. Some pointed out that a new activism has emerged which rejects the politics of public relations.

To some extent, the rejection of the politics of public relations is a valid description, as independent media's founding principle is to reject manipulation by the government, business and political parties. It fails to capture the delicate rationality of media activism, a belief that reporting is a transformative power for both the individual and the society. Through engaged / subjective / analytical / emotional writing and reporting, an individual makes his / her own claim for the event, and becomes part of an incident. In other words, the media activist believes in what s/he writes, takes responsibility and jumps into the story of his / her own construction. They are not writing for the past alone, but also for the future.

Since the anti-WTO demonstration in Hong Kong in December 2005, there have been some discussions, and tensions felt, about the balance between the writing of a story or script (reporting) and action. Quite often, when a media activist jumps into the story, s/he couldn't jump out and write the script. In the Star Ferry Pier campaign, it has been proven that script-writing is a most significant battlefield as the government has been very active in defining the campaign with its public relations machine. It tried to confuse the public with the concepts of "relocation" and "collective memories" to dilute the campaign's political significance.

Reviewing the process, in fact, the radicalization of the campaign can be seen to have started with Hoidick's few reports in early December, first questioning the representation of the campaign in a nostalgic mood, then redirecting the campaign to target the government officials and the decision-making process. Words / script generated from the event came before action. On the next day, participants were determined to stop the construction and supporters outside the construction site had a midnight hunt chasing after a major government official. The representation of the event (script), via action, pushes the flow / development of the event.

While media activists' reports are discursive representations, cultural activists' works are more symbolic. Meaning is generated from the artistic acts in interaction with the space. And the readings of the artwork are diverse. The diversity of meanings, feelings, symbolisms that the public arts created had been extremely successful in aggregating different people together: some participants joined in because of their memories, some wanted to protect the harbor, some determined to claim the space in the central district, some protested against the developmental thirst, etc. In evaluating the campaign, Tsang Tak-ping also said that the result was beyond his expectation. The public art project has radicalized the students. At first, the students were just doing what they wanted in that space. Once the connection was made, they started to ask, "What can I do to

save this space?" If there were a single and overarching script at the very beginning, I don't think people would come together for such a prolonged fight.



Artists' performance and exhibition at Star Ferry. Photograph courtesy Choi Tze Kwan.

The media activists' reports entered the scene later as an articulating power able to draw people with diverse interests together with a clearer agenda.

People are looking for connections. Arts and media are connecting devices. Both are making claim on space and interpretations of event. The former is at the symbolic level, the latter in the discursive field. How to bring together the forces of the art and media activists would be a most important and experimental agenda for the future.

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Endnote

⁰¹ *Inmediahk.net* is an online platform found in 2004 by a diverse group of people in Hong Kong, including activists, artists, former journalists, academics and students. It promotes citizen journalism as a practice of participatory democracy. Up till now, the website has more than 3,000 registered users, 500 of whom are contributors. The website has approximately 4,000 plus visitors per day, and about 60,000 to 80,000 per month. About 80% of visitors come to the site every week. It is funded by Hong Kong In-Media which gives support to independent media movements, media research and education.

Hong Kong In-Media established another website, *interlocals.net*, in 2006. It is designed to bridge the information gap among local independent media in different places, especially non-English speaking countries, through translation in order to counter global news agencies' representation and mediation of non-Western locals.

Shivers of sharing

Agnese Trocchi

I'm sitting in my living room by the seaside, it's a winter evening and I'm trying to explain to my boyfriend what I have been doing in the past ten years. He is a ballet master and he considers me a digital-video artist. Yet I'm not sure what I am, even if I have written pages and pages of papers to describe, *in progress*, the artistic-activist projects that I have been developing collectively in a decade of life in Rome, from the nineties to the first years of the new millennium, from the analogic to the digital age.

I would like to convey to him how passionate and committed we have been in the attempt at *becoming our own media*, in the attempt at sharing our vision and our knowledge and in the attempt to build an economic structure that would guarantee sustainability for the project and a wage for every one of us.

Practice, action, struggle, the creation of sense and sharing. These were the cobblestones we had in our bag for the making of the video project called *CandidaTV*. The project was legally constituted as a small-sized cooperative so as to enter the market realm and to give us the chance to earn a living from our own activity. This is for us the first important artistic gesture: to not separate the making of art from the needs of everyday life. We wanted to give space and tools to people's points of view on reality and to give legs to our dreams.

We are a group of people that grew up in the seventies, tv sets were in every house and we grew up with a television as a baby sitter, we were fed for years on visual data, information, movies, ads, on moving images over which we had no control. We were children of the *Society of Simulation* but we didn't own the tools of production for this *collective circus*.

In 1995 some of the young people who were gathering around the *Social Centers*⁰¹ were feeling constrained by political identities of the past and they adopted the concept and the practice of *Psychical Nomadism*.⁰² What they did exactly was to apply this concept to the rising reality of the digital networks. Internet was not yet as common as it is now but the *cyberpunk*⁰³ myth was running fast through the telephone lines, using the Bulletin Board System⁰⁴ as a mean of communication for fast-growing communities.

Forte Prenestina, the biggest and oldest Social Center in Rome, in 1994 hosted the birth of *AvAna BBS* (*Avvisi Ai Naviganti – Warning to the Sailors- BBS*), the first *European Counter Network* node of the city. *Avana BBS* spread the concept of the Subversive Telematic: access for all, digital democracy, the right to anonymity, freedom of expression, the sharing of knowledge.

Slowly we shaped a strong relationship between technology and activism: the encounter between the principles of the *hacker ethic*⁰⁵ and the nomadic, revolutionary attitude gave life to the experience of the *TAZ* (*temporary autonomous zones*), or, simply, illegal rave parties. At the core of the TAZ experiences were music, dance and the temporary squatting of abandoned industrial areas.

At that time we needed a new form of communication to integrate with music, one that could use moving images and texts. We felt the city haunted by an unknown mutant organism, imperceptible, visible only to the ones who, like us, were experiencing it from party to party. We wanted to reveal this subversive process by the use of such means as words and videos projected onto ephemeral screens (walls or sails). Suddenly, two of us (Coast and Loop) had the idea to write a software program for the immediate projection of texts, we called it *ShootConceptsMachine*.⁰⁶ With it we have been able to “jingle the words”. The effect was an impressive, collective, flux of consciousness.



Shootconcept machine in action during a rave party, Rome, 1999.

Imagine the set: a party in an ex-industrial area where thousands of people were raving, a bunch of us connecting tv sets, monitors, vhs players and laptops, vision and words screened on the walls: we were no more the passive consumers of what the Society of Entertainment imposes. On the contrary, we have been finally able to unleash our imaginary and to create the conditions to express it in a collective way. A real aesthetic experience: art after the death of art (or art in the aftermath).



Shootconcept projection, and the video console, at a rave party, Rome, 1999.

Over the long transition from dawn towards a new day, some of us took the camera in our hands, released it from the video-console and started to float in the ghostly morning light of the industrial slaughterhouses. It was time to infect institutional television broadcasting and let everyone becoming his/her own media. We decided to create our own TV...

CandidaTV was born by the seaside, on *Isola del Giglio*, a small Italian island, in the summer of 1999. We sat on the shore for four days discussing the creature we wanted to give life to, and, of course, what name to choose for her. We weren't even sure that it was a female, but we wanted a flexible, pure, morbid, smart, complex and fearless being. And obviously Television is female. She sits in our living rooms, in our bedrooms, in our kitchen; she speaks to us with different tongues, her voices fill the house, she gives us a sense of protection and security, our immune defences slow down and we absorb any kind of information from her reassuring stability.

Our creature was a grain of sand in the machine, the drop that brings down the system, the little sister that enters the bunker of Big Brother because she is too small to be seen. She was pure and fresh as snow, but dangerous and sneaky as a poison mushroom that enters your guts and makes you see other realities. It's an infection... it's *Candida, the Household TV*.

Our slogan has been: *make your own TV!* We wanted to show that television is something that you can make yourself with everyday tools: a TV set can be a monitor, a camera can be an eye, a video player can be a tool for editing.

CandidaTV aims to turn television consumers into television producers. Passive spectators become active creators when handed the tools to produce spectacle. 'Some individuals will take and use these tools, some will not. We don't bring people to our studio, but



Supervideo, the hero of *Supervideo vs G8* (2001), Genoa. <www.ngvision.org/mediabase/22>

instead create the studio in the street.⁰⁷ Our aim is at least to supply the critical tools to understand audiovisual language and how TV is made, to dismantle its mystification and open the way to the creation of everyone's preferred mystification. An interesting perspective on what we were doing with *CandidaTV* was given in 2004 in Barcelona, during an event named *Copyleft*.⁰⁸ After our presentation, during the night at a nice party, a young woman come to talk with us. She was in the conference and she really liked our presentation and then she stated: "You make art...When you manipulate and mystify with a certain amount of humor and without a final goal. That procedure does not belong into the realm of manipulation anymore, it becomes creation, it is art."

In 1967 Marshall McLuhan wrote that: "The next medium, whatever it is—it may be the extension of consciousness—will include television as its content, not as its environment, and will transform television into an art form."

In 1999 there were fifteen of us. We all came with different experience: in independent radio, street theatre, subversive computing, professional video making, humanistic studies and in independent underground magazines. We were all interested in expressing visions through technology and we had been learning from each other's expertises: "we just shared everything, we exchanged responsibilities and jobs as a 'creative commons'".⁰⁹

Every week we would organize ourselves in groups to make clips on diverse topics: independent cinema, jail issues, news, life on the internet, entertainment, urban subcultures, queer activism. After filming, we would lock ourselves up in a studio for two days to shoot the frame for this varied material, with four people introducing the issues. After editing it all together we always had to run to get the tape to a local TV station that broadcasted *Candida* in time: "in that first period we had a deal with a local commercial TV station. The channel needed a certain amount of original programming, *Candida* needed space on-air and the deal was done."¹⁰

The media horizon on which we were working was going to change soon: two years after, in 2002, we saw the explosion of the *Telestreet* phenomenon. The *Telestreet* network was born from the realization



Candida crew in Marino filming *Soapopia* (2004).

of a pirate TV station: *OrfeoTV* in Bologna.¹¹ Hundreds of small groups of people followed the example of *OrfeoTV* and as a result *CandidaTV* was no longer alone in the attempt to make television from below but became part of a national network: a TV made by people, made out of their desires and their needs. Our productions were no longer released for commercial broadcast stations but for independent small, local TV.

With the birth of the *Telestreet* network we had a new season of workshops to share technical expertise between everyone willing



Frames from the short video *Ciccio and the Antenna* (2003).
www.ngvision.org/mediabase/163

to take part in the adventure. The words of McLuhan became reality: with the encounter of the hactivist¹² scene and the creative scene, mostly in the physical events called *Hackmeetings*,¹³ we witnessed the engineering of the next medium, a kind of Frankenstein Monster, still unborn, where internet, videos, art practice in the streets and hacking technology, are mixed all together in the basic attempt to express people's freedom of communication and people's imaginary.



A workshop during the *Hackmeeting* in Forte Prenestino, 2000.



Hackmeeting 2001, Catania, Sicily.



Hackmeeting 2001, Catania, Sicily.

The same scene in 2001 founded *NewGlobalVision*,¹⁴ a pioneer project in the field of online video distribution. *NGV* is a video archive and video distribution project. It's a useful tool for videomakers and independent broadcasters all over the world. *NGV* sustains the *Telestreet* network to share their production efforts and it functions as a resource for each small TV station. *CandidaTV* is using it to release her videos, to circulate them and make them available for independent TV stations or cinemas in every city.

In 2005 *NewGlobalVision* won an Award Of Distinction together with the *Telestreet* network in the *Ars Electronica Competition* within the *Digital Communities* category: “programs, artworks, initiatives and phenomena in which social and artistic innovation is taking place, as it were, in real time. *Digital Communities* spotlights bold and inspired innovations impacting human coexistence, ... sustaining cultural diversity and the freedom of artistic expression.”¹⁵

In the era of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), to struggle for freedom of artistic expression is an artistic practice in itself. When I look back to see what we have been doing with *CandidaTV* I understand that, if we want to gain freedom of expression, the attempt to share visions in the real is not only necessary, it is also beautiful, and beauty has been always a sign of the existence of art.

At least this is what I think when I watch my ballet master dancing!

Links:

CandidaTV

<www.candidatv.tv>

Forte Prenestino

<www.forteprenestino.net>

Ordanomade

<ordanomade.kyuzz.org>

Italian Hackmeeting

<www.hackmeeting.org>

Transhackmeeting

<www.transhackmeeting.org>

Telestreets

<www.telestreet.it>

New Global Vision

<www.ngvision.org>

Endnotes

01
CSOA, Centri Sociali Occupati Autogestiti: in Italy, places that are squatted and self-managed not only for housing but for cultural and political activities as well.

02
Psychical Nomadism implies taking (as one needs) from any moral, religious, political, ethical, or whatever system, and leaving behind the parts of that system found to be unappealing. It is one of the main features of the *Temporary Autonomous Zone* by Hakim Bey. <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psychical_Nomadism>

03
Cyberpunk is a science fiction genre noted for its focus on “high tech and low life”. Its name is a portmanteau of “cybernetics” and “punk”. It features advanced science such as information technology and cybernetics, coupled with a degree of breakdown or a radical change in the social order.
<en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyberpunk>

04
A **Bulletin Board System**—or BBS—is a computer system running software that allows users to dial into the system over a phone line and, using a terminal program, perform functions such as downloading software and data, uploading data, reading news, and exchanging messages with other users.
<en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bulletin_Board_System>

05
The term “**hacker ethic**” was coined by journalist Steven Levy and used for the first time in *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution* (1984). In Levy’s codification, the principles of the Hacker Ethic were:
- Access to computers—and anything which might teach you something about the way the world works—should be unlimited and total. Always yield to the Hands-on Imperative!
- All information should be free.
- Mistrust authority—promote decentralization.
- Hackers should be judged by their hacking, not bogus criteria such as degrees, age, race, or position.
- You can create art and beauty on a computer.
- Computers can change your life for the better.
See also: <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacker_ethic>

06
The software is written in C++ and runs on Windows only. You can download it from <ordanomade.kyuzz.org/Spara.htm>

07
Interview for *Untitled Magazine*, London, March 2007.

08
<copyleft.sindominio.net>

09
‘Business Model – The Candida TV Approach’ • A.Trocchi, in *Media Mutandis: a NODE. London Reader*, London, 2006. <publication.nodel.org>

10
Ibid.

11
OrfeoTV was set up in 2002. Based in Bologna and broadcasting in the shadow of MTV, it initiated a network of small pirate stations, combining low-tech television with high-tech internet. More info: <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Telestreet>

12
Hacktivism (hack and activism) is often understood as the writing of code, or otherwise manipulating bits, to promote political ideology—promoting expressive politics, free speech, human rights, or information ethics.
See also: <en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hacktivism>

13
The **Hackmeeting** is a reunion of people with a passion for computing, especially

digital rights activists, coming from all over Italy but also from abroad. It took place every year in the Social Centers in different Italian cities. The first Hackmeeting took place in Italy in 1998. The topics usually are: cryptography, artificial intelligence, digital divide, and free software.

From an email dated 19.01.07 on the *Transhackmeeting* lists “[...] we all agreed on the attempt [to do] an event that is not sponsored, [but] spontaneous and grassroots, as a Temporaneous Autonomous Zone (see Hakim Bey’s book *TAZ*), and we did it as an experiment, to see what comes out, instead of the many other funded events that have always been available [...] in that sense, the term *hackmeeting* defined itself as the practice of _hacking the format of any other meeting_ and the hierarchical system behind it.”
<it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hackmeeting>

14

<www.ngvision.org>

15

<www.aec.at/en/prix/cat_digital_communities.asp>

Part II

Coding Cultures Guest Artists

Public Authoring and Everyday Life

Over the past five years many of Proboscis' artworks and projects have explored and developed the concept of 'public authoring', the everyday mapping and sharing of knowledge and experience by people about the places and spaces they live, work and play in.

The concept and act of listening are crucial to this vision of public authoring: where public authoring offers space and agency for people to use their voice it also needs to encourage that voice to be heard. The everyday experience of sound, and the skills of listening, are largely dominated by visual culture, yet cultures of listening are crucial to cultural experience and understanding human relationships, from the intimate to the civic, local to international. Proboscis' long-term *Social Tapestries* programme aims to investigate and develop practices of public authoring that engender 'cultures of listening'—places and spaces in which we pause to reflect on what we hear and disentangle meaning from the babble of noise.

Social Tapestries includes challenging and playful artworks, projects and experiments exploring how public authoring can pervade everyday life in different situations and contexts. Building upon the *Urban Tapestries* knowledge mapping and sharing software platform (developed by Proboscis and its partners), *Social Tapestries* includes discrete works and public collaborations with specific communities addressing education, social housing, community arts and local government. The flow of ideas from *Social Tapestries* has increasingly emphasised the importance of storytelling and narrative as a living, everyday process that underpins how people co-create and inhabit culture and society.

Fragmented Narratives and Storytelling

From cutting edge mobile and internet technologies to traditional paper-based methods, our recent work has involved exploring non-linear and fragmented narratives using visual, three-dimensional and spatial methods. Artworks and projects arising from this include *DIFFUSION*, the *StoryCubes*, and *Endless Landscapes*. In different local contexts and situations these have been adapted into tools for storytelling and public authoring that link the online and offline worlds.

Urban Tapestries mobile client.
Image courtesy John-Paul
Bichard 2004.



Traditional paper technologies also underpin the *StoryCubes* and *Endless Landscapes*. They are poetic and playful, shifting and fragmenting narratives, making unforeseen associations and connections. As formats for creating two- and three-dimensional narrative structures, that reveal multiple possibilities in storytelling, they have been used as discrete artworks and as part of public projects that build shared narratives.

Each face of a *StoryCube* can illustrate or describe an idea; placed together to create large constructions or landscapes it is possible to construct multiple narratives with interlocking three-dimensional relationships. Each cube can be folded in two different ways, presenting two different ways of telling a story, and like books turned inside out they can be read by turning and twisting in your hand or by following the flow of vertical and horizontal constructions, adding a new dimension to what we now think of as interactivity.

Bridging analogue and digital media *DIFFUSION* is a downloadable book format (to print and make up) using Adobe PDF technologies that can be shared electronically, by photocopy or as hand-made paper books—*samizdat* for the digital age. Six years into publishing commissioned texts by artists and writers an innovative web service is being created that enables people to generate their own *DIFFUSION* eBooks without the need for design expertise or professional DTP software. The aim is to extend the reach of the *DIFFUSION* publishing format by creating an online community tool.

DIFFUSION.
Image courtesy
Proboscis 2006.



StoryCubes. Image courtesy Proboscis 2006.

The *Endless Landscape*, or myriorama (meaning ‘many views’), was a popular eighteenth- and nineteenth-century storytelling game. It consists of paintings, depicting fragments of a panorama, that can be arranged in many combinations to form a continuous landscape with each card extending or shifting the narrative. Originally created for the bookwork *A Case of Perspectives*, Proboscis’ first *Endless Landscape*, by Alice Angus, was inspired by creating non-linear narratives of the city. It connects real and imaginary fragments of London’s present with traces, shadows and spectres of its past. It has been further developed into a resource used by schools and in participatory projects.



Endless Landscape. Image courtesy Proboscis 2006.

Communities and Collaborations

Since 2004 Proboscis has run a number of projects with specific communities exploring the uses of public authoring. These include Havelock Housing Estate, St Marks Housing Co-operative, Jenny Hammond School, users of London Fields and the Institute for International Visual Arts (inIVA) in London.

In Southall Proboscis has been working with residents of the Havelock estate to enable people to gather evidence about systemic neglect and failure of the housing authority. The information gathered by the residents can then be used to assist the service providers in

dealing with the maintenance and repair issues and also to hold local authorities to account.

A project with members of St Marks Housing Co-operative captured and recorded the memories of the co-op to help the organisation carry on its mission in the future, as the make up of the co-op changes. Ongoing recording of the activities of the co-op, including its history of successes and negotiations with housing associations, will aid future developments.



Workshop with St Marks Housing Co-operative. Image courtesy Proboscis 2006.

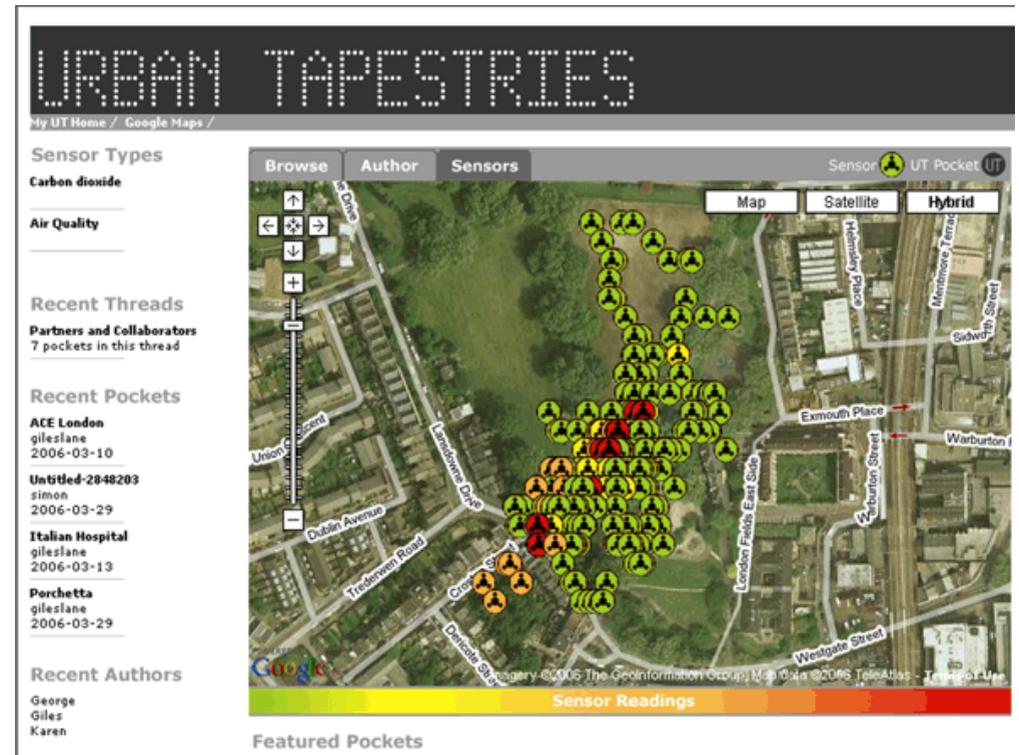
The *Everyday Archaeology Project* was the third stage of a long-term collaboration with Jenny Hammond School in North West London which enabled students in key stage two to learn about, explore and gather evidence of the relationship between pollution and their local environment. Using new media tools, cameras, sound recorders, *DIFFUSION* eBooks, the *StoryCubes* and *Endless Landscapes*, the project cuts across subjects in the curriculum.



Everyday Archaeology. Image courtesy Proboscis 2006.

For *Participatory Sensing* Proboscis has been building experiments such as *Robotic Feral Public Authoring* (with Natalie Jeremijenko) to enable people to record and map pollution in their environment. The experiments combine adaptations of toy robots and cheap home electronics with GPS positioning, environmental sensors, wireless data and online mapping technologies.

Robotic Feral Public Authoring. Image courtesy Proboscis 2006.



Feral Robots' sensor data viewed with *Urban Tapestries* web client. Image courtesy Proboscis 2006.

Building on these Feral Robots, *Snout* is a new collaboration, between London's Institute for International Visual Arts (inIVA), Proboscis and researchers from Birkbeck College, London, which explores relationships between the body, community and the environment. It will investigate how data can be collected from environmental sensors as part of social and cultural activities, creating two prototype sensor wearables embedded within costumes based on traditional carnival characters.

Scavenging free online mapping and sharing technologies, as forms of 'guerilla public authoring', the project also explores how communities can gather and visualise evidence about local environmental conditions and how that information can be used to participate in or initiate local action. *Snout* proposes 'participatory sensing' as a lively addition to the popular art form of carnival costume design, engaging the community in an investigation of its own environment, something usually done by local authorities and state agencies.



Snout. Image courtesy Proboscis 2006.

Weaving Threads of Engagement

Through our processes, collaborations, tools and techniques Proboscis seeks to foster spaces of exchange and encourage a culture of listening. A crucial part of the *Social Tapestries* programme has been the creation of networks and partnerships with intermediaries and peers—in grassroots communities, civil society organisations, arts and culture, academia, business and government. Without this kind of collaborative and collective effort we would not have been able to bridge such vastly different sectors, often bringing together people with diverging views and interests who would otherwise not meet. We do not believe in quick technological fixes for the complex community development issues encountered in the programme, and are working with local groups to develop our understanding of how knowledge sharing, mapping, and public authoring can contribute to the communication ecology at the local level.

Creative artistic processes, artworks and thinking are central to all our projects and the fact that we are artists is also crucial to the process of collaboration, it gives us licence to act and to engage across these different, often conflicting agendas without being co-opted by any single one. From the *Urban Tapestries* software platform to the *StoryCubes*, the *Social Tapestries* programme seeks to offer

models of playful experimentation for how society can question and understand what it is to be social beings in a networked world. As twenty first-century communications evolve, this vision of grassroots knowledge-mapping and sharing is a reminder that people are not just consumers—but that they are actors, agents and authors of their own experiences.

[Link](#)

Proboscis
<www.proboscis.org.uk>

By way of introduction—Sonia Mills

I don't know the details of mervin's background and I don't want, or indeed, need to know... it was only after a couple of years of knowing and interacting with him that he alluded in my company to his bad boy past.

However, his insight into what makes people run (boys, in particular), his commitment to the Container concept, his day-to-day persistence, and his tolerance of things that don't happen when and as they should, are indeed the attributes of a convert... somebody born again to some new insights and understanding, and in mervin's case, I believe because of his own transformation, the CERTAINTY that transformation can take place.

Of course, chance is a factor. A great factor. It was in mervin's case. He was at the right place at the right time. And also, he may very well be THE one in a million. Those are the imponderables. It may very well not be possible to convert the life of one, or two, or three in ten... On an average. Or every time.

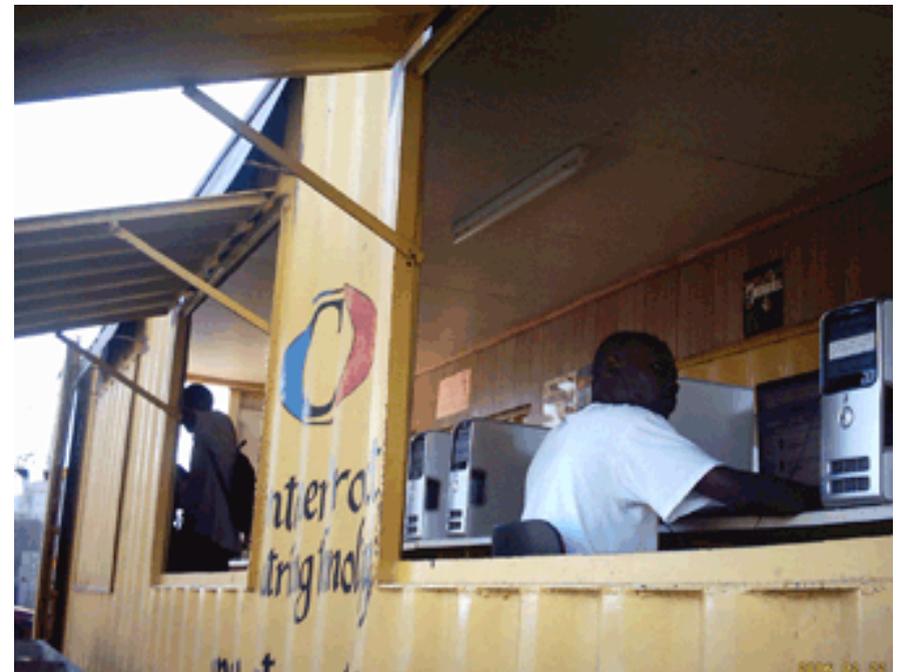
Because of mervin's overstated 'yardie' style of dress and presentation, and his understated style of personal communication (open, pleasant, speaking quietly and gently), it is necessary to enter his space to fully understand what the Container hopes to do, and this is not just to 'transfer technology' by teaching people computer skills. mervin's conversion from whatever he was to what he is now was obviously from within. A penny dropped and unlocked the alleyways to places in his right and left brain that he didn't know existed—sophisticated thought, intellectual longing, social action, stability... It is all of this that mervin wants to transfer to the people of Palmers Cross and Jamaica and he had hoped to do this by traveling around in a container and dispensing it! Interestingly, it obviously involved as well some aspects of 'social technology' which he must have observed in his society of adoption and chose to 'repatriate'. Aspects like cordiality, courtesy, honoring commitments—including time, respect, social responsibility...

The philosophy of the Container is encoded in the Container itself—the way it's built, the way it's run—and in mervin's writings and other artistic output. Much of it has to be received subliminally!

What is so charismatic about the case of the Container, and mervin himself, is that once inside the space—the physical and psychological space, that is—it is possible to feel the potential for change, and the power of faith.

This magnetism is obviously experienced by the clients of the Container, bad bwoy and girl alike. How to sustain this, and transfer it, is the problem. It is clear to see what can make it die... just neglect and lack of resources. But... what can make it live?

The truth is that Container space as conceived by mervin cannot function without mervin, or without *a* mervin. The external circumstances, the politics and economics and poverty of social capital, don't allow it. Whatever the faults of the UK or societies like that, you can usually find a space to incubate 'a container'. Until the political and economic powerbrokers join the struggle for transformation... Well... The search continues.



A peek inside the Container as John listens in on some digital ring tones for his mobile phone.

mongrelstreet: the culture of code—mervin Jarman

Codes are migratory property, often applied to make solutional changes. As mongrel, our existence is dependent on the application of the right set of codes. This sometimes means software codes, at other times it is a mixture of soft and hardware, but always there is a social code. Personality, attitude and response, all these have to be subliminally encoded into the work so that it can produce the required response, both in audience and participant.

Palmer's Cross, though special to me, is certainly not unique to the world. Our corners are not dissimilar to other hang-out zones across the reach of poverty-stricken, marginalized communities world-wide, even some which are not so impoverished but lack directional energy, and where the applied code is not distinguished or channelled in a way that enables greater self-clarification.

If you understand how to read the codes, if you know when it's off or on, the binary becomes simple, like breathing in and out. The codes are not strict but are explicit—dyslexic programmers take responsibility for the delivery of the code that's driving the process.

The Container is a quasi self-sustained anomaly created out of Mongrel's attitude and response, driven by the codalisation of culture and technology. The Container exists on the margin of the mainstream but, however marginalized the global peripherals are, still subject to the basic binaries. As a community-based initiative the Container has had to make situational decisions that determine the kind of challenges that will affect the users and ultimately the community. Significant to this is how these codes are perceived by others and the ramification of its actions as it applies across the social demography.

At work or play the Container permeates a Family of happy boyz and girlz!! Community Without Borders Workshop.



Recently I was speaking with a friend about the exploits of Mongrel and why we are perceived to be so successful; this I explained was because we speak the language of the streets. Rich and I are 'in the streets' prodigy/progeny of a mongrelStreet culture! My friend wanted to know if I was talking about 'patois', a localised cultural language. Indeed I was referring to the codes of the street, the subliminal blips by which we analyse, assess and determine an identity. These are equated to and reasonably assigned as codes, digital codes, a subliminal codalisation of culture and ethics! The Container Project is representative of this mongrelized code, constantly changing, seeking new and more diverse ways to better serve its nucleus, the Mongrel X Factor.



Catching a sneak pre-view of Jim's Repair, Maintenance and Coding Workshop sponsored by UNESCO/IPDC.

When I suggested the collaboration that became known as the "Mongrel Collective" this was our first advance towards the street codalisation as we began to apply it to our cultural identity. 0101 (codes) began its journey of reclassification as culture. Rich Pierre-Davis and I are authentic 'STREET'. We recognized the codes although we were from very different cultural backgrounds and geo-location, Identification, however, was instant. We appreciated the empathy which this new technology had to offer, the mode of representation as prescribed under the Artec umbrella. We knew immediately that, to the youth on the corners, this would be a welcoming alternative

and we subsequently used our influence to get as many youths enrolled at Artec as we could.

We have continued through our work to use the Mongrel collective as an instrument of this intervention, working with international communities of marginalized youths and other artist groups to foster this emerging culture. We will continue to develop street art-technology (arTec) initiatives, so as to ignite the curiosity, imagination and emerging energy of young mongrels on the street corners.

The Container has enjoyed marginal success. Unfortunately we still require stake funding for us to implement sustainability plans. This would enable us to encourage more young people to participate. It is commonly suggested that when you bring something like this (the Container Project) to a community the youths, especially those hard to reach youths, should find the incentive to come and participate. The reality is that these youths often have no parental safety net, so they have to secure for themselves food, clothing and shelter, basic necessities on a day-to-day basis. It therefore means that a day spent at the Container is a day essentially without food, a day that they could have been begging, hustling, or robbing someone. Thus, is the reality, as much as they desire to come, the facts of their lives determine that, though most in need, they have to give it a miss.

Sometimes I feel like the walls are closing in: it feels so depressing, as it seems there is no one to remedy their situation. This



Interactive screen with mervin Jarman pointing out the way to computer competence and its legacy. Community Without Borders Workshop.

is a heavy personal burden; I often wonder if it is always like this for others, or is there a select bunch of individuals that are prescribed this pill!!! With regards to the 'repatriation of technology', sometimes it is pleasing to acknowledge the achievement/contributions that the initiative has made to the Palmers Cross and to other communities. On several occasions individuals and organizations from around the world have benefited from insight into the concept and functionality of the Container **philosophy**.

On other occasions it can be rather dismaying, as we struggle to maintain the project as a viable entity.

In the UK the project raised a lot of eyebrows. It was hailed as a rather powerful statement of action "**repatriating technology**", which may also be one of the factors in the lack of a political support and resulting lack of support from funding establishments. Was it seen as diminishing their power—'this likkle bugeyaga bway talking bout repatriating technology! A who him tink him is??' Although widely hailed as the height of genius in its conception and extreme bravado, not much more than lip service has been paid to the project by most. Could it be that giving full-on support to the project would mean acknowledging that the system has failed us 'the bugeyaga ragamuffins' in the street.



A group of participants at the Container's Community Without Borders Workshop sponsored by ICT4D Jamaica.

April 2006 marked the third year of the Container Project implementation in Jamaica, land we love! We have managed to get an evaluation commissioned by UNESCO, a Project grant for purchasing equipment and workshop productions from IPDC UNESCO, the Canada Council and ICT4D Jamaica. We have also managed to get broadband connectivity via the Cable and Wireless Jamaica Foundation, and Training Courses accreditation by Heart Trust NTA. Outside of this no other corporate entity has responded in a manner reflective of the responsibility that the project has adopted. But we have hope and in the belief that others will come to see and believe/invest in this leap of faith for our own salvation.



Container posse cooling out after a long day's work—Digital Storytelling.

The aim of the project is to try tame some of the street's hardcore! To give to the young men and women of our street corners an alternative to their seemingly endless spiral of drugs, unwanted pregnancy, crime and violence! Many initiatives speak to this, but none so localized as us, and not a lot with the street cred and insight of the Container Project. As a progeny of the street I may not be the best face to represent the project. It is my opinion that institutions/organizations exhibit a certain level of discomfort when faced with elements that are either unknown or unstable. My quantities are not known, there is no quantifiable definition for mervin (the mongrelStreet) Jarman. And that may well be the biggest discriminatory factor of all.



Audre Tulloch, Melesiea Miller and Novalyn Kelly teaming up to produce a group story.

I do what I do because no one else will do it for us. It is ok to use sports to attract the idle youth, it is cool and encouraging to work with youths who are "safe". This means that there are no risks, a fail-safe programme for corporate Jamaica (and for the world) to invest in. Success is assured and all elements of difficulty eliminated. This is a subliminal code. This is the margin within which codalisation is bound, the margins that still leaves the cadre of real bad boys and girls who don't come with any security or assurances but who need as much or even more attention and motivation to achieve the change. I know this because I am one of them, one of the rejected, and sidelined, those relegated to the sidewalks and street corner of our time...

[Link](#)

<www.container-project.net>



Camille Turner working with the participants, sharing the info unselfishly, always with a smile.



The Container Project



Jennifer LaFontaine and her team before they head out to discover Palmers Cross under the cameras.



Local schoolgirls having a look inside the Container

All images courtesy mervin Jarman.

Representing in Digital Space

Camille Turner

I am a digital artist living in Toronto, one of the most ethnically diverse cities in Canada, and indeed on the planet, yet I never met any other black new media artists until 2001 when I attended a conference called “Race in Digital Space” at MIT in Boston. One of the presenters was Mervin Jarman, a fellow Jamaican new media practitioner. He and Richard Pierre-Davis, from Trinidad, represented the UK-based (h)activist collective, Mongrel. Their presence at the conference affirmed for me that there was a place for me in the digital world. In stark contrast to the academic presentations, they were down-to-earth. They were passionate. They spoke the language of the streets. Drawing from their backgrounds and personal experiences they connected with communities outside the digital mainstream all over the world. I was inspired.

Returning to Toronto, I was determined to make a difference, to not only find my voice using digital media but to create a point of access for other marginalized people to represent themselves. Generous funding from the Canada Council for the Arts allowed me to embark on a year-long curatorial residency at InterAccess Electronic Media Arts Gallery. The gallery’s support enabled me to develop partnerships with community-based organizations and practitioners that I have continued to work with over the years.

Through my collaborations I’ve experienced a range of community-based media. The first partnership was with Regent Park Focus where Adonis Huggins directed a youth Media Arts Program. Located in Regent Park, Canada’s oldest and largest social housing community, this program includes a recording studio, a film course, a radio show, and a community newspaper written, edited and distributed by the youth. We invited Mervin to come to Toronto to facilitate a workshop in which the Focus youth learned to create their own interactive media projects using Linker, a software developed by Mongrel, that anyone with a little knowledge of computers can use. Assisting Mervin helped me to learn how to facilitate community media art workshops and how to work with youth. Mervin’s philosophy was to start with the glass half full, leaving room for the group’s input.

Mervin invited me to participate as a workshop leader during the boot-up of the Container. I left Jamaica for Canada as a child, so I

experienced teaching at the Container as a joyful homecoming. I was welcomed into the community and have since returned to teach more workshops. It’s been an ongoing, rich cultural exchange, an insider’s view of Jamaica few are privileged to experience. Colleagues from other countries who have visited tell me they received far more than they gave and I encourage practitioners to take part in a Container residency.



Camille Turner and Jennifer LaFontaine opening the screening of the Digital Storytelling Workshop movies. Image courtesy mervin Jarman.

Another important community partnership that has continued over the years is with Central Neighbourhood House (CNH), a social agency located in downtown east Toronto next to Regent Park. I joined forces with Jennifer LaFontaine, head of the CNH’s Women’s program. My first contribution was to add a digital media component to a photography program she had started years before. InterAccess hosted an exhibition of the resulting work. We had pot-luck feasts, mini-digital media workshops and other participatory activities right in the gallery space during the exhibition. We invited several community groups representing a variety of cultures and interests to participate. Continuing the work I started during that pivotal year, I’m now completing a three-year artistic residency with CNH funded through Ontario Arts Council, Toronto Arts Council and several other funding organizations.

A few years ago we came across The Center for Digital Storytelling (CDS), an organization based in California that developed a process for enabling anyone, with little or no computer experience, to use digital

media to create their own 3-5 minute videos. Participants use personal photographs, artwork, mementos, text, sound and their own voice to tell their stories. Jennifer and I took a Digital Storytelling course from CDS and with their support we used their curriculum as the basis for developing our own program. We have mainly worked with immigrant and refugee women from a variety of cultures. More recently, we started programs for deaf women and girls.

Our work involves creating a supportive environment to allow participants to feel safe enough to share their stories. As I do this work I have witnessed Story Circles in which stories urgently bubble up, from grief, sorrow, pain, and joy, demanding to be told. Some stories have never been told before. Some have finally found a place where they are acknowledged and valued for the first time.

We shift and change our programs in response to the needs of the various groups we work with. For example, a voice-over track is usually the most important element of the story. When working with deaf women, we substitute a subtitle track and give them the option of video-taping themselves signing instead of just using still images. With participants whose language is not English, they also have the option of recording a voice-over track in their language with English subtitles.

Over the years we have worked steadily to achieve our dream of creating a community media lab at CNH. Because of the diversity of languages and cultures in the communities we work in, we've created a peer-facilitator program in which we train women from our programs to become part of our teaching team. This enables us to deliver Digital Storytelling programs to a variety of communities in various languages.

A lab can be put together for very little money. What is mainly needed along, with the rudimentary equipment, is determination and flexibility. We started our program by borrowing computers and equipment from friends and neighbouring agencies. When we secured funding, we purchased a simple 4 channel mixer for about \$150 and a SHURE condenser microphone for about \$100 (all prices in Canadian currency). These are essential tools to ensure a good quality voiceover—the backbone of the digital stories. We use Audacity, a free program we downloaded from the web, for mixing sound and we purchased Adobe Photoshop and Premiere Elements, which together cost \$150, for photo and video editing.

As an artist working with communities, this long-term project has been very fulfilling because I have been able to see the fruits of my labour. I am now working towards the sustainability of the program. We've come a long way since our beginning. We now have a fleet of 7

PC laptops and trained multi-lingual peer facilitators delivering the program in Tamil, Somali, Bengali, Mandarin, Spanish and American Sign Language (ASL). One of my deepest hopes is that the community will take ownership of the work and will continue to use technological tools to tell their stories and represent themselves in the digital world.

Links

Regent Park Focus

<www.catchdaflava.com>

Center for Digital Storytelling

<www.storycenter.org>

Digital Story Methodology

<www.techsoup.org/learningcenter/techplan/page5897.cfm>

The Story Project collaboration between CNH and InterAccess

<www.thestoryproject.ca>

Blog by Camille Turner of her experiences at the Container Project

<www.year01.com/containerproject/blog.html>

CNH Digital Stories

<www.thestoryproject.ca/digitalstories.html>

Linker

<linker.mongrel.org.uk>

Part III

Coding Cultures Symposium

The Coding Cultures Symposium was designed to get participants up to speed and networked into the latest in community based media practices and cultures.

This one day Symposium took place at the Campbelltown Arts Centre, Campbelltown, NSW.

Symposium Speakers:

Giles Lane and Alice Angus, Proboscis, UK

David Vadiveloo, Us Mob, AUS

Camille Turner, CAN

mervin Jarman, Container, Jamaica

Carl Kuddell, tallstoreez productionz, AUS

Chris Saunders, Big hART, AUS

Lena Nahlous, Ben Hoh, Trey Thomas, ICE, AUS

A time for empowerment or a new digital divide?

David S. Vadiveloo

The past five years, and the next ten, represent the most significant period in the history of media access and message distribution ever faced by minority and disenfranchised communities. The rise and rise of the internet and digital interactivity means that for the first time in the modern era of mass-communication, the self-serving harbingers of minority community dysfunction—the electronic media and their print networks and corporatised political interests—do not have control of the single largest distribution portal in the world—the web. Not yet anyway. So while the last five years have been spent trying to fully grasp the potential of this portal, the response of communities, artists and agencies over the next ten could come to represent either the emergence of perhaps the most significant domain for communication, empowerment and agency amongst minority groups worldwide, or, the formalising of the ever expanding digital-divide between disenfranchised groups and the ‘mainstream’.

What is exhilarating about this period is that we have before us the *means* of getting stories and messages (previously unheard or consigned to the commercial waste-basket of ‘worthiness’) to a global audience that is looking to control its information and entertainment space—an audience that is actively looking elsewhere for stimulation now that the Western mythologies have been exhausted by Hollywood. But how will we use the portal and what will we do with our programs and initiatives to ensure that this is an era of empowerment and not a time of further division?

Paying lip-service to this potential to reshape political, cultural and social landscapes to the benefit of our communities is the greatest threat to this change happening. It will only happen if it is driven by substantive partnerships with the disenfranchised and disempowered groups with whom we work. Countless professionals across the arts, media and community development are as guilty as many employees in NGO’s and government agencies of ‘farming’ the disenfranchised and disempowered communities that they work with or represent. There is a lot of money to be made in keeping disempowered peoples dependent on the expertise and skills of outsiders. How many of you have concrete programs in place that are premised upon your job or the jobs of your colleagues being replaced permanently by members of the community or disenfranchised group that you work with?

The development of media programs in the interactive and digital domain must be premised upon such models. If the communities we work with do not have at least equal control or agency over the process, from its development, through to story, content, production and final product, then talk of empowerment is purely lip-service. When this shift in our working models is achieved, then we can look with anticipation to raising the bar on the quality and marketing of our stories and messages and exploiting this new portal of distribution for the benefit of all peoples.

*David S Vadiveloo is the Director of **Us Mob** (www.usmob.com.au), the world’s first children’s interactive Indigenous content television and web series and Australia’s first Indigenous children’s television series. **Us Mob** was created after David spent seven years in communities in Australia and around the world developing the “Community Prophets” model of community cultural development. **Us Mob** employed over 70 Arrernte Town Camp residents as story contributors, actors, crew and editorial executives. The project was created in partnership with Tangentyere Council and the community retains a profit share in the series. **Us Mob** was funded under an Australian Film Commission/ ABC broadband initiative with support from the Adelaide Film Festival, the South Australian Film Corporation and the Telstra Foundation.*

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Returning the Gaze: the hero-project how to join politics, youth empowerment and entertainment Jennifer Lyons-Reid and Carl Kuddell, tallstoreez productionz

Directing the Hero Within is one of Australia's largest digital storytelling projects for young people. The umbrella project encompasses video workshops, 'train the trainer' professional development, an interactive website, a youth film festival and a DVD training resource. Developed in the field in consultation with educators, youth workers and young people, the project is founded on the principles of community, youth-empowerment, peer mentoring and student voice and invites young people to creatively claim their future. Created by tallstoreez productionz in association with the South Australian Film Corporation, Directing the Hero Within has become a dynamic and supportive youth media network.



DTHW Director Jennifer Lyons-Reid with Pinnaroo student. © tallstoreez 2006

Directing the Hero Within Youth Video Workshops

Directing the Hero Within run video workshops for schools and youth groups in metropolitan and regional areas. Workshops are tailored to give every participant a hands-on introduction to digital video making. The workshops cover concept development, storyboarding, camera techniques, sound recording and in-camera

editing. Depending on the size and duration of the workshop, the course can also cover non-linear digital editing and web distribution. By the end of the workshop each group will have made their own film.

Educators Professional Development Training Sessions

Our Professional Development Training gives community workers and teachers the confidence and expertise they need to make digital storytelling part of their work in community groups and schools.



DTHW students filming for *Pinnaroo Surfer*. © tallstoreez 2005

Interactive Website

Our website, <www.directingthehero.com>, will be the nexus for the Directing the Hero Within community. Here groups can upload their film, view examples of student work, find extra tips, post comments and participate in forums—all within a specially designed and monitored digital site.

Directing the Hero Within Festival

The Directing the Hero Within Festival will be launched during the 2007 Come Out—the Australian Festival for Young People.

Directing the Hero Within Training DVD

The workshops and the DVD Educator's Starter Kit package are designed for emerging filmmakers, classrooms and youth groups. They are suitable for the absolute beginner or those who want to skill-up on

a particular aspect of digital storytelling. Featuring dramatic landscapes, a dynamic young host and a funky design, the Directing the Hero Within package is a high-quality digital media experience.

Nine short films, six behind-scenes-documentaries and eleven training modules showcase the rich talent of Australia's regional young people. By following the behind-the-scenes clips viewers are rewarded with delightful insights into the filmmaker's own learning and the inspiration to make their own digital story.



dreamcatcher, artists
Jennifer Lyons-Reid & Carl
KuddeU with sculpture.
©tallstoreez 2006

Directing the Hero Within is leading the way in:

- promoting youth-empowerment and identity
- supporting peer education
- developing new strategies for school retention
- providing media literacy programs across the curriculum

- bridging the digital gap using Information Technology and social documentary
- investing in creative digital learning tools
- encouraging vibrant online youth digital storytelling communities
- supporting youth participation in the community through documentary practice
- empowering regional and marginalised communities

A partnership of tallstoreez productionz, SA Film Corporation, the Office for Youth, SAYAB, Country Arts SA, Arts SA, Come Out.

Links

Directing the Hero Within
<www.directingthehero.com>

Tallstoreez Productionz
<www.tallstoreez.com>

Big hART—a model for social and cultural change

Christopher Saunders

Big hART is one of the country's most prolific arts companies, producing eight new works and presenting at eleven major arts festivals in 2006/07. Over sixty artists are currently contributing to seven projects with communities around the country. Big hART's work incorporates many art forms including theatre, film, photography, music, poetry, opera, dance, painting, sculpture, ceramics, sonic art, online delivery and computer-generated imagery.

Big hART's mission is to provide the opportunity for people experiencing the effects of marginalization to make positive changes to their lives through participation in the arts. As well as this, the company aims to create new work for national arts festivals and forums, and to foster a more inclusive Australian culture.

The following are just three of the most recent projects that have had a digital media or new technology component:

Junk Theory

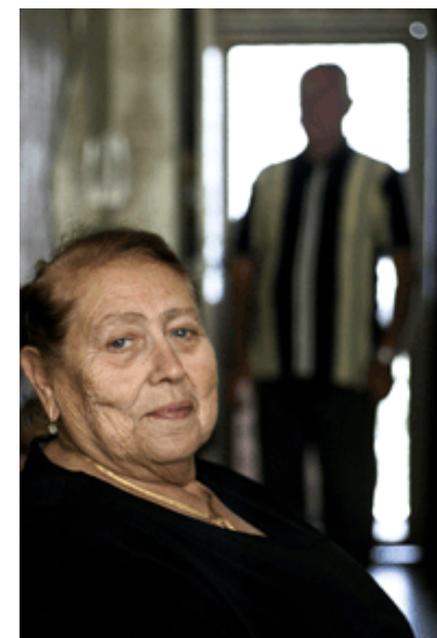
At dusk throughout December and January 2006/07, around the foreshores of Port Hacking and Sydney Harbour, a Chinese Junk glided past residents, pedestrians and picnickers. Projected onto its sails were a series of diverse portraits and evocative films made by artists and residents of the Sutherland Shire. Shot in both colour and black and white, utilizing both still and moving image, the visual projections were accompanied by music, sound scape and live song wafting from the vessel's decks. *Junk Theory* was designed as a response to the Cronulla riots, to create a beautiful and thought-provoking picture of the values that make up our society. Digital technology played an important role in creating the content for the final work and in designing a system by which the works could be screened and played on the junk.

Ngapartji Ngapartji

Ngapartji Ngapartji is a long term, inter-generational language arts project based in Alice Springs. The project seeks to highlight the status of indigenous languages and generate a national and international groundswell with a desire to maintain and preserve these languages. This includes the development of the "ninti site"—an



Junk Theory. Photo courtesy of Keith Saunders.



tenant by tenant—Raissa and Iofim by Iofim. Photo courtesy of Keith Saunders.

online Pitjantjatjara language and culture site where the young people, assisted by their families and elders, become the language tutors for the national and international audiences of the *Ngapartji Ngapartji* production. This production is a high profile and beautiful touring theatrical work, incorporating filmed work and imagery, and which is performed in Pitjantjatjara and English at international festivals.

Northcott Narratives

The *Northcott Narratives* work 2002-2007 produced five films including the ATOM Award-winning documentary *900 Neighbours* which screened on ABC TV in February 2007. It included, as part of the 2006 Sydney Festival, the on-site multimedia performance sensation *Stickybricks* and the *tenant by tenant* photography exhibition. A resource box of art works and information, *Northcott Narratives—Say Hello* was published as a legacy to the work in November 2006. The work won a National Crime and Violence Prevention Award in 2005 and the community was given World Health Organisation accreditation as a Safe Community in 2006.



StickybrickS. Photo courtesy of Keith Saunders.



Ngapartji Ngapartji - Pukatja girls. Image courtesy ngapartji ngapartji team.



Ngapartji Ngapartji - Batesy and Sadie. Image courtesy ngapartji ngapartji team.

Links

Big *h*ART
<www.bighart.org/bighart>

Ngapartji Ngapartji
<www.ngapartji.org>

Junk Theory
<junktheory.org>



Ngapartji Ngapartji - Language lesson planning
Image courtesy ngapartji ngapartji team.

A presentation about why ICE exists and how it works

Lena Nahlous, Ben Hoh and Trey Thomas (aka MC Trey)

Information and Cultural Exchange (ICE) supports Western Sydney communities, organisations and artists to engage with arts, information and communications technologies, new media arts and culture in order to build community resilience, autonomy and social energy. ICE manages the SWITCH multimedia and digital arts access centre and produces the critical publication and online resource *Artfiles*, the arts directory for Western Sydney. ICE has expertise and success in developing new media, community cultural development, professional development and arts programs that access thousands of individuals, artists and communities annually.

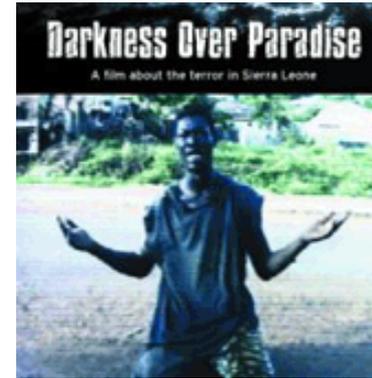
ICE conducts grassroots new media projects with communities, often using popular, vernacular media. *Storybox: write your life online* was an Internet writing project for young people who came to Western Sydney as refugees or recent migrants. Through blogging, participants explored issues of trauma, identity and settlement.

Another important stream of ICE's work is in supporting and developing urban music cultures in Western Sydney. Thanks to the Vodafone Australia Foundation World of Difference campaign, MC Trey is working at ICE for twelve months on inspiring urban music and hip hop projects to make a real difference in the lives of young people, using digital technology for music making and recording. She has delivered a music program for young women – *Suburban Sistas*, *African Soundz* (for newly-arrived African youth), and *Hip Hop 101*.

All images courtesy of ICE.

Link:

Information and Cultural Exchange
<www.ice.org.au>



Darkness Over Paradise—documentary about the civil war in Sierra Leone. Image from the video cover.



Hip hop projections at the Sydney Writers' Festival.



storybox: write your life online: a blogging project for young African refugees.



Participants of the refugee radio collective.

Biographies

Ruth Catlow and Marc Garrett of Furtherfield.org

Ruth and Marc are artists and co-founders of Furtherfield.org, an online platform and community for networked art started in 1997. They opened HTTP Gallery and production space in North London in 2004. They work with others to develop platforms and projects that facilitate grass-roots artistic collaboration across networks in social, physical spaces and the Internet. They are also Voluntary Organisers for Node. London.

David Cranswick

David is the current director of d/Lux/MediaArts, one of Australia's key new media arts organisations. At d/Lux/MediaArts he has been responsible for a range of programs, including FutureScene, d/Art, their regional touring program d//Tour and the development of d/Archive which was recently launched to mark the 25th year of the organisations operations.

Prior to working for d/Lux/MediaArts he was Curator at Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre in Liverpool NSW where he worked for five years on a broad range of contemporary arts and cultural projects, including international residencies. He has also worked as a consulting artist on public spaces and urban planning projects, with a specific focus on ecological restoration and process.

Francesca da Rimini

Francesca da Rimini is an artist and writer. She has worked on Australian research and publishing projects on the creative applications of new technologies, and was founding Executive Officer of the Australian Network for Art and Technology in 1988. Her work is generally collaborative, and she has been a member of the cybefeminist group VNS Matrix (1991-1997), and identity_runners (1999—current). Her early experiments with the internet as a space of co-operative network-based creativity were played out through her online persona of *GashGirl (Puppet Mistress)* at LambdaMOO, a dynamic online text-based environment. She worked with sound artist Michael Grimm on subsequent net projects, including the web labyrinth of *dollspace*, and the dynamic electronic collage of *Los Días y las Noches de los Muertos*, a meditation on globalisation and the militarisation

of outer space. In 1999 she received an Australia Council New Media Fellowship. She is currently researching the nexus between free media and cultural activism as a PhD Candidate at the University of Technology, Sydney.

Leandro Fossá

Leandro Fossá was born on July the 3rd of 1983 in Ubatuba, a tropical city on the coast of the State of São Paulo, and one of the best Brazilian surf spots.

When I was 4 years old I started playing tennis in my father's academy and I just gave up at 17, when I was a top-15 Brazilian junior tennis player and realized that I wasn't sufficiently talented to become a professional player. So I decided on moving to Italy for a year with an AFS scholarship for exchange students (2000/01).

After returning to Brazil I moved to Brasília, the Brazilian administrative capital, to study Public Management at the University of Brasília (UnB). At university I developed some projects that aimed to support, with managerial tools, micro and small enterprises and NGOs located in poor zones of Brasília.

In 2003 I met Claudio Prado who invited me to be a trainee of the Digital Culture team, a new department that had been created in the Ministry of Culture by Minister Gil. This project started to be implemented in 2004, and in 2005 I became the international coordinator (one of my present roles), presenting the project in Tunis, at the World Summit on the Information Society, promoted by the UN.

In 2006 I became also the coordinator of implementation in the Center-West region and in December I was awarded my degree and moved to Rio de Janeiro, where I'm a member of the regional coordination of digital culture and also an early morning surfer.

In the near future I'd like to start post-graduate research into the issues that are exposed in my article.

nik gaffney

nik gaffney is a founding member of FoAM, where he operates as a tangential generalist, designer, programmer and *sous-chef*. He prefers breadth-first-searches and bottom-up design; randomness as a strategy, and depth where required; dynamic to static; Lisp to C; realtime rather than recorded; and complexity over the complicated. He is also part of 'farmersmanual', a pan-european,

net-based, multisensory disturbance conglomerate. {buzzing, clicking, deconstructing and ecstatic flickering}. Partially Luminous.

nik@fo.am

Ben Hoh

Ben Hoh is a writer, researcher and award-winning new media designer. He has worked on various new media arts projects with migrant and refugee communities, and is currently writing a postgraduate thesis on blogs, geopolitics and war.

mervin Jarman

mervin Jarman is a community art activist, interactive multimedia designer, human computer interface expert and developer of the *Container Project. Frustrated by the lack of opportunities that existed for young men in the street, he fostered a concept of 'repatriating technology', taking new media technologies into what he describes as the mongrelStreet, the grassroots of cultural dynamics and home of all creative mediums. An active member of the newly formed **Mongrel X Factor he is a particular kind of mongrel—a new breed of street art-hactivist emerging in new media and technology. mervin's theory has maintained that "art is life" hence his life is his only claim to being an artist, therefore his art is a total expression of his life. His engagement with technology as a tool for empowerment and intervention stems from his exposure to new media arts at ***Artec in London where here he got his first taste of computers and new media arts. His struggles to broaden his experiential being had prompted him to migrate to London: mervin's timely collision with Harwood and Richard Pierre-Davis evolved the ****Mongrel Collective. mervin Jarman is now an avant-gardist of digitally-engaging mongrelStreet culture worldwide.

* Container Project: Community multimedia centre designed in a 40 foot shipping container based in Jamaica.

** Mongrel X Factor: is a new arm of mongrel and represents a new catalog of London-based initiatives.

*** Artec: Arts Technology Centre (Artec) for creative, social and economic development.

**** Mongrel: Now represented as the Media Shed in South-end, England.

maja kuzmanovic

maja kuzmanovic is a generalist interested in inciting small miracles in everyday life. Throughout the 1990s, she worked in MR, VR and online, infusing digital technologies with physical movement,

narrative alchemy and audiovisual poetry. For her works, Maja was elected one of the Top 100 Young Innovators by MIT's *Technology Review* in 1999. She initiated FoAM in 2000 and has since functioned as FoAM's PI, eco+media artist and head chef. Her leadership skills have been recognised by the World Economic Forum, awarding Maja with the title 'Young Global Leader' in 2006. She holds a BA in Design Forecasting (HKU-1996) and MA in Interactive media (University of Portsmouth-1997).

maja@fo.am

Lam Oi Wan

Lam Oi Wan is a founding member of Hong Kong In-Media, a non-profit organization established in October 2004 to enhance the development of citizen media and the public sphere in Hong Kong. It helped to establish the first citizen media website *inmediahk.net*. Its *interlocals.net* project (launched in September 2006) is designed to facilitate people-to-people, border-crossing dialogue on social, cultural and political issues. She joined *Global Voices Online* in 2006 as one of the regional editors responsible for introducing the Northeastern Asia blogosphere to the world. She worked as journalist on political news (the handover of Hong Kong to China) from 1994-97; then joined an Asian NGO (Asian Regional Exchange for New Alternatives) for their alternative education programme, later working in Taiwan as managing editor for *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Journal*. She then studied in Beijing for three years. Lam Oi Wan is now more or less settled in Hong Kong.

Andrew Lowenthal

Andrew Lowenthal is a Melbourne-based media/tech activist. He is co-founder of *EngageMedia*, a video sharing site about social and environmental issues in Australia, South East Asia and the Pacific. He also works with the Tactical Technology Collective as the series editor of the *NGO-in-a-box* project, a collection of free software toolkits and guides aimed at NGOs, non-profits and activists. The editions focus on audio/video, open publishing, security, telephony and more. Additionally Andrew has been involved in the Indymedia network since 2001 as an editor and organiser.

[<engagemedia.org>](http://engagemedia.org)

[<tacticaltech.org>](http://tacticaltech.org)

[<indymedia.org>](http://indymedia.org)

Jennifer Lyons-Reid & Carl Kuddell, tallstoreez productionz

Jennifer Lyons-Reid & Carl Kuddell, tallstoreez productionz, are Adelaide-based multi-award winning filmmakers, educators and new

media artists. They love: fun, social impact filmmaking, innovative education, interventionist public art and creative collaborations. They hate: boredom and ignorance. Please visit [<www.tallstoreez.com>](http://www.tallstoreez.com) for updates on their latest ventures.

Sonia Mills

Sonia Mills is a Jamaican journalist who has worked in print, radio and television and has also written for the stage. She has been a Communications and Public Relations consultant, been involved with women's issues and headed an organisation engaged in worker training and the development of adult education programmes.

The challenges of decoding and reinterpreting 'messages' in plural and multi-cultural societies, and in the Global Village, are only one of her main pre-occupations. She believes that the ability to code-switch is the new multi-lingualism.

She lives in Kingston and works independently.

Lena Nahlous

Lena Nahlous is Director of Information & Cultural Exchange (www.ice.org.au), an organisation working at the intersection of arts, culture, technology and community. She has a particular interest in digital arts and multimedia, and has curated multimedia installations, produced websites and short films, and published and performed her writing. Her arts management achievements include establishing *Artfiles: The Arts Directory for Western Sydney* (www.artfiles.com.au) and *SWITCH Multimedia and Digital Arts Access Centre*. In 2006 she received an Asialink Fellowship, undertaking a digital storytelling project as part of her residency at Videotage in Hong Kong. She holds a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) from Sydney University.

Claudio Prado

Digital Policy Coordinator of the Cultural Ministry of Brazil

CULTURAL ACTIVITIES

Counterculture activist of the 60's in London, connected to the alternative press, pirate radios, and the production of the Isle of Wight and Glastonbury Festivals where he produced Gilberto Gil and Caetano Veloso.

Founder of the first Brazilian rock production company called, "Dreams, Artistic and On the Road Productions" in São Paulo.

Artistic director of *Band 13*, first rock program of Brazilian television.

Producer of os Mutantes and Novos Baianos. Co-producer of the Águas Claras Festival, active collaborator of the counterculture movements of Lira Paulistana and Revista Bondinho in São Paulo.

Marketing Director of Mangueira Samba School of Rio de Janeiro.

NON-GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Founder and CEO of the social-environmental NGO Salve a Amazonia (Save Amazonia).

Founder and Director of PróRio92, one of the leading NGO's networks in the organization of the Global Forum of the UN's World Environmental Summit Rio 92.

Coordinator of the NGO Phoenix, an experimental project working to interconnect formal and informal education in a governmental secondary school in São Paulo.

ENTREPRENEURIAL ACTIVITIES

Responsible for promotions and events of DPZ publicity agency and Gradiente in São Paulo.

Partner and Director of CPG Marketing, pioneer agency for corporate consulting in ethics, social and environmental responsibility.

GOVERNMENTAL ACTIVITIES

Marketing Director of RioTur, City of Rio de Janeiro Tourist Authority.

Executive production of Rio de Janeiro's Carnival and New Years Festivities.

Proboscis

Proboscis, founded in 1994, is an artist-led studio directed by Giles Lane & Alice Angus with a core team including Sarah Thelwall and Orlagh Woods and a large team of cross-disciplinary Associates. The studio combines artistic practice with commissioning, curatorial projects, design and consultancy. Collaboration is at the core of our creative practice and ethic: Proboscis works across disciplines and practices, working with associate artists, writers, curators, critics, designers, technologists, filmmakers, scientists and theorists to explore social, cultural and creative issues.

Our work includes large scale collaborative artworks such as *Mapping Perception*, long term media works such as *Urban Tapestries* and *DIFFUSION Generator*; multi-project initiatives involving in-depth research and a high level of public participation, such as *Social Tapestries*, smaller scale artworks, interventions and films such as *Topographies and Tales*, experimental forums and events such as *Human Echoes—A Dialogue on Cultures of Listening* and large scale curatorial initiatives such as *Navigating History*.

Projects and activities are supported from a wide range of sources and since 2004 Proboscis had been a Regularly Funded Organization of Arts Council England.

Trey Thomas

Trey Thomas (aka MC TREY), dubbed 'a national treasure' by Inthemix.com.au, has established herself as a prominent artist within hip-hop & urban music in Australia over the past nine years. Since 1995 Trey has entertained crowds around Australia, NZ, US, UK & Japan. Following the release of Trey's album *Tapastry Tunes* (Shock Records) she toured with Triple J, headlining a sold-out show at The Basement (Sydney) & a 'Live at the Wireless' recording on Triple J. She performed nationally with the 2004 Big Day Out Tour and has supported and performed with some of the most political names in hip-hop, including The Fugees, Naughty by Nature, Run DMC, Michael Franti, RZA, XZIBIT and JURASSIC5. Trey recently released an album as part of Foreign Heights. Trey is currently being supported by the Vodafone Foundation to work at ICE for a year, developing a series of urban music programs, including for at-risk young people.

Agnese Trocchi

Agnese Trocchi has been active from 1995 in the field of ICT and Industrial Cultures, developing practical experience with television, Internet and satellite broadcasting. She has organized and managed international events and projects to do with issues of communication and information networks.

Camille Turner

Camille Turner is a Toronto-based media/performance artist and cultural producer. She is a founding member of Year Zero One, a network for the dissemination of media art and digital culture. She has presented her collaborative projects, community engagements, public performance and digital interventions at venues such as: *Dak'art lab 2004*, *La Biennale de l'art Africain contemporain*, Senegal, and *Skinning our Tools: Designing for Context and Culture* at the

Banff New Media Institute. Camille has participated in international residencies including: The Container Project, a community media lab in a 40 foot shipping container in Jamaica, and Interaktions Labor, an interdisciplinary art lab in an abandoned coal mine in Germany. She is currently artist-in-residence at Central Neighbourhood House, a social agency in downtown east Toronto where she is working with the Women's Program to develop a Digital Storytelling Program.

Christopher Saunders

Christopher Saunders has been a creative producer and program coordinator with national arts and social change company Big hART for the past twelve years. He initially began working with the company as a performer but soon found himself managing and producing projects. His most recent work has been *Northcott Narratives* at the Northcott Public Housing Estate in Surry Hills. He produced the multimedia sell out sensation *StickybrickS*, for Sydney Festival 2006, and was co-producer on the ATOM Award-winning documentary *900 Neighbours*. He also produced and published the Resource Box *Northcott Narratives—Say Hello*. He is currently producing Big hART's latest project *GOLD—Water is the New Gold*, in Griffith NSW, which explores the social ramifications of climate change on rural farming families.

David Vadiveloo

Internationally awarded screen director, writer and producer, David Vadiveloo is the creator and Director of the ground-breaking cross-platform interactive series *Us Mob* (ABC TV and www.usmob.com.au), the first Indigenous children's project of its type in the world. Also a human rights lawyer, David established Australia's longest running 'at-risk' Indigenous youth video training program and his award winning films have stirred debate on issues of national significance. In 2005 David received the Australian Human Rights Award for Individual Community Achievement and is the youngest person to be Highly Commended for the Human Rights Medal, recognising lifelong commitment to human rights.



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Francesca da Rimini, March 2007

Commissioning Editor, *A Handbook for Coding Cultures*

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Contributors:

Ruth Catlow	Sonia Mills
Marc Garrett	David Vadiveloo
Maja Kuzmanovic	Jennifer Lyons-Reid
Nik Gaffney	Carl Kuddell
Andrew Lowenthal	Christopher Saunders
Leandro Fossá	Lena Nahlous
Claudio Prado	Ben Hoh
Lam Oi Wan	Trey Thomas
Agnese Trocchi	

d/Lux/MediaArts

PO Box A106
Sydney South NSW 1235
Australia