globalisation
<live> conference

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global economies : global culture :
globalising art : protest movements
local, regional, global dynamics :
international aid and human rights : ecologies
sovereignties : the www :
world administration (WTO, UN, World Bank)
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Globalising Art

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Since 1996, we have organised conferences on the Discourse of the Arts. The conferences have, in turn, led to a journal entitled 'Double Dialogues'. At present, we are in the process of situating articles, essays, exhibitions etc., from both these conferences and contributions related to our themes from interested parties, on-line. Our on-line journal deals with the discourse of the arts and includes representations from the visual arts, film, multi-media, dance, music, creative writing and theatre.

Our decision to do this is manifold, but one of them is determined by our wish to become part of a global debate. We recognise that our interests are ones that are being experienced within academic institutions and art-centres world wide.

At this conference, we are interested in representing our journey over the last six years and in the process of privileging the following themes that have characterised the conduct of our conferences and the content of our journals.

Theme One: Bifurcation of Art and Theory

The first 'Double Dialogues' theme centred upon how the presentation of papers at conferences entails a practical expression of one of the arts alongside discourse concerning the most appropriate ways of representing these art-forms in words and/or whether, indeed, there should be an attempt to do so. This theme in the initial print version of the journal focusses on questions about what can be regarded as research and about the relationship between traditional academic practices and more 'rhizomic' treatments of subject-matter across the arts.

In dealing with the question of what is research in the arts, contributors took varied and oppositional positions. Jacques Delaruelle, for example, argued as follows about the boundary between the theoretical and the practical:

There is no denying that most thinkers who are worth their salt are also performers. To embody one's thoughts is a necessary aspect of both research and teaching. We need to live our ideas and nothing could be less indifferent than the telling of certain stories by means of which we try to transmit our values, our knowledge and whatever insight we may have. It is indeed inadvisable to establish strict boundaries between theoretical and artistic disciplines, yet it is necessary to distinguish between their respective method and vocation.

Nevertheless, Delaruelle's final position was that "setting theory and practice apart" was, in his view, necessary:

The reason why the link between theory and practice must be drawn is that the mutation of thinkers into performers, or its opposite, implies a loss of concern for the invisibility of thought which is symptomatic of a society having reduced the whole communicative process to a kind of visual happening. In the Society of the Spactacle prejudices aand received-ideas of the most trivial kind are predominant.
Interestingly enough, the majority of contributors from the performing and visual arts, even when claiming otherwise, were rooted to discussions of their artistic processes or to theories relating to the experience of art-making, but ultimately were not able to make a 'rhizomic' fusion of the two. However, there were exceptions. Anna Gibbs, for example, had successfully completed doctoral research in which there was a fusion between the practice of writing in order to counter essential and utterly misleading distinctions between subject and object, between representations and the world, between the body and language, and between theory and fiction.

Her work became
a kind of ficto-criticism, or theoretical fiction - a fiction which undertakes its own critique, provides its own process of self-reflection, and is at the same time an intervention into a field of argument.

By contrast, Mark Minchinton resisted any need for performers to discourse their works in words. Their performances, moreover, constituted research. As he questions:
How would you feel if you had compiled data and made analysis for a bridge and then someone said, Okay, now dance the bridge?

In the visual arts, Elaine D'Esterre saw her paintings as an expression of a revision of the way women are portrayed in the western canon of oil painting. Her paintings “disrupt the patriarchal symbolic iconography of male-artist-as-god by redeploying the matristic symbols of Minoan art.”

Apart from such lines of enquiry, there was a concentration upon issues of assessment of the arts and, more particularly, how institutions at large deal with the relationship between the practical and the discursive.

**Theme Two: Rhizomic Actualisations**

What strikes us at the present is how this debate became superceded in the next conference. Here, there was a dramatisation of a 'rhizomic' fusion between art and its discourse. Mark Minchinton, in his keynote address “The World Is Turning to Pus,” argued that he has tried to operate from the premise that research and pedagogy are not neutral tools used to discover and transmit ‘facts’ about the world and performance, but machines that intervene in and construct the world and performance.

At the same time, he warns us that to be a researcher, rather than an intellectual/artist, is to be subject to a whole range of increasingly professionalised disciplinary mechanisms.

As a result of this, Minchinton remarks that I can only think of debates about methodologies as masks for unspoken desires, usually the desire to tear someone apart, or, in more polite terms, the effort to hold on to positions of privilege, to establish disciplinary compliance, through invoking a rhetoric of professionalism.

In the wake of this meltdown of traditional humanities’ discourse of the arts, other presentations invoked this kind of ‘re-territorialisation.’ Also noticeable in the presentations to be explored was a global interest in inter-disciplinary issues concerned with gender, ethnicity, class, and post-colonialism. Alison Richards, for instance, in her “approach to the sometimes overwhelming task of attempting simultaneous exposition by means of discourse and practice,” resolved it in “Going/Not Going (Japan)” by attempting the “immediately more authentic” task, “in an existential sense,” by putting her “own body into the question.” By so doing, she enacted and problematised cultural difference in movement, words, and music. More specifically, Richards wanted “to know what happens to the fragile things, the meanings that become lost in translations,” that is, “to explore the limits to embodied understanding” in the supposed “binary opposition between the idea of the ‘Oriental’ and the ‘Occidental’ performer.”
Brendon Stewart, drawing on the philosophy of complexity theory, anchors his documentary making amongst the migrant working-class of Sydney, Australia. He almost immediately realised that he was curious not in some objective academic way entirely, but more so as a person whose cultural space was being radically altered by an obviously foreign cultural phenomenon.

Even more so, Stewart appeals to the imagination as pivotal in the exploration of not merely of the roles played by the artist, but of the possible worlds able to be occupied:

Am I an artist just playing at being an academic or am I an academic just playing at being an artist? When Alice stepped through the looking glass, she entered the realm of imagination. Looking at oneself can be a genuine source of reflection, but Alice was not content simply to see herself. She wondered what the world on the other side of the glass was like. In pretending, in imagining, the solid glass gave way and Alice was in that world on the other side of things.

At the same time, however, he provocatively teases out the implications by which disguise ignites the imagination into new research practice:

Is this not what Helen Demidenko did? The 'Demidenko effect'. If I had invented Mahmoud, an ethnic filmmaker, would it not make it easier to thieve and to use trickery, cunning and magic. If Mahmoud were my alter ego, my Helen Darville, my Iraqi refugee, would I not have sabotaged the distance between self and the other?

In so far as complexity theory makes central that which has been excluded from traditional research paradigms, Stewart invokes a new way of seeing. As he concludes:

In my 'double dialogue', I have tried to structure an inquiry into ethnicity. I want to share with you the possibility, no, indeed, the great validity of thievery, trickery, cunning and magic as ways that artists work with 'the material', that is, ways of working imaginatively in the space that separates.

**Theme Three: Art Across Cultures**

The next perspective to emerge from the 'Double Dialogues' contributions self-consciously turns upon the cultural globalisation of artistic practice. Nowhere was this more graphically captured than in the presentations by Paul Monaghan and David Wright. Monaghan recounts his experience in Bulgaria when he directed the play "Inje." "Inje" was an international co-production in 1995/1996 between the Melbourne group, Hildegard, and the Theatre Department of the New Bulgarian University (Sophia). His performance paper, "The Space In-Between: Four Languages in a Swamp," explored why the experience of cultural intercourse produced a lead ball for a baby! Problems centred upon four kinds of language relevant to the production: spoken language (ordinary communication with "the issues of translating" between English and Bulgarian); theatrical language (where "concepts and practices used by theatre-makers" proved "as unintelligible to other theatre-makers as can spoken languages"); cultural language (defined as "all the factors which inform and differentiate" a person whether done "consciously or not"); and, finally, individual language ("the somewhat artificial construction of self, a system of features, behaviours, and the learned habitual rules for interactions with others that define a person," but which "cannot be blamed on cultural difference" even when "often [trying] to hide behind 'the shibboleth of national identity'"). The experience, for all its potential personal benefits, demonstrates for Monaghan the sheer impossibility of decontextualising or transporting the situated worlds of theatre:

"Inje," as created in Bulgaria under the dominant influence of the Bulgarian team, was not a piece that was translatable. It couldn't be separated from its cultural context.
without dying. Despite the easier conditions in Australia [when performed again]... the meeting of cultures and people in the space between did not happen.

If Monaghan sounds a pessimistic note, a plea for the recognition of the local, David Wright explores a different chord. Against the background of western actors training in the methods of Peking opera, Wright “found a congruence in new relationships.” Here, he quickly discovered that, in place of language, “explanations of the performance tradition...was largely confined to physical explanations.” Even more so than Monaghan’s encounters with eastern Europe, the “tradition was passed from body to body.” In Peking opera, repetition of physical action is regarded as a way of absorbing information. There is a deliberate attempt in this form of training not to engage the actor in thought. It is the body which enters most fully into this research process. As the body learns, so the body changes as a result of that learning. When subsequently scripting his own work based on four Peking opera character-types, Wright found he was “identifying” with them rather than “relating to them as representatives of an exotic form”: “I was,” realises Wright, “writing my experience as theirs.”

The paper, “Partial Bodies in Illogical Space,” by McCulloch & Goodrich deliberately experimented with a different kind, and use, of cultural templates. It returned to ways in which certain strands of European thinking associated with Nietzsche initially, and Deleuze & Guattari subsequently, could enable us to discourse the arts. Whether seen from the point of view of, for example, creative processes or receptive dynamics, structural formations or constructed worlds, Nietzsche’s perspectivism and apollinian-dionysian duality provide a context for speaking about the arts. More specifically, they applied this approach to the work of the Australian painter, Deborah Walker, and her exploration of enigma. As a result, this brought them to the intersection of her work with the question of enigma in Giorgio de Chirico’s art. Rather than mere biographical details, art-historical sources, analyses of form-and-colour, and so forth, McCulloch & Goodrich found the philosophically informed discourse outlined previously to negotiate the artistic terrain. Perspectivism allows for inter-disciplinearity of the methodologies not only of ethnicity, gender, and class, but also of the individual arts themselves.

Theme Four: Globalising Art· Money & Power?

What we have been doing so far is to re-visit the debates that underpin the shift to globalising art, to asking ourselves where are the arts situated in terms of politics, money, and power to take three public facets of globalisation. The two conferences which followed--Industry & Art and Culture War--dealt with these ‘demons.’ Is art subversive? Or, is it inevitably trapped within economic and political constraints however these are manifested from place to place? The first of these conferences was not only looking at industry’s support of the arts, but the extent to which art works hand in hand with industry. Our visual arts exhibition played with this idea: from paintings which were produced by the ‘state of the art’ technologies to advertisements proclaiming their artistic status; from art entrepreneurs who spoke of selling acclaimed works of art to the captains of industry at the behest of the artists to displays of jewellery which made ambiguous any distinction between commodity and craft, commodity and art; from paintings and cartoons satirising the relationship between money, art, and politics....

The accompanying papers were indeed diverse. There was the problem, for example, of Ian Ferguson, a doctoral student, who needed industry support to create a machine that produced fusion of previously unfusable metals of more value to industry than to sculpture. Pivotal to presenters’ concerns was the uneasy connexions between art, industry, government, and censorship. In going cap-in-hand to industry and government, how subversive can art ever be?
The underlying assumption here is that art should not only interpret the world, but change it. Again, as Ann Marshall disclosed, the recent Olympic Games juggernaut brought about a collusion between money, power, and the arts. Even the outlying reaches of Penrith underwent a cultural transformation, but only in accordance with Olympic economies and dictates. The question she confronted was: when money speaks, does art move? Furthermore, through Pauline Coady’s ugly Snuff Puppets and Wendy Rule’s alternative vision of the sacred, the marginalised expression of the arts was visited. To what extent, we were forced to ask, must art compromise and yet sustain its integrity?

The most recent ‘Double Dialogues’ conference provided the opportunity for political analysis of where the arts are situated in relation to wider culture wars that exist on a global level. In concluding with this conference, we shall end with a metaphorical romp questioning the very notion of ‘globalising art’ in several ways. As implied above with Ann Marshall’s depiction of art and the Olympics, we were firstly asking, is "globalising" to be understood here an adjective or a verb? Is it something that art does or something that is being done to art (and by whom)?

Secondly, can globalising be construed in the sense of something spherical or globular, that is, something that was once regarded as a whole, a complete, an integrated body, but now divided in accordance with economic viability? Richard Murphett, an Australian playwright, explored the ramifications of global and local interests in the Adelaide Arts Festival. He problematised the relationship between the expectation of local traders in particular and the expression of art. Artists and the arts, he argued, were isolated and ranked in terms of the competitive value of their commodification.

Thirdly, is globalising to be thought of in the terms of pertaining to the planet earth—not merely politically, but also physically and geographically? On reflexion, we realise how many of our presenters were shifting from traditional notions of material space and boundaries towards mental constructs of self and subjectivity affecting the way we see and are seen. No longer, from this perspective, is globalisation an appropriation of the body, but of the mind. In Nietzsche’s terms, “not only have we learnt that science is not an objective knowledge of the leech and its primary cause, but only a knowledge of the leech’s brain” [Zarathustra, Book Four]. In other words, is art not so much engaged with politics and money, let alone the passions of the earth, but with thinking about thinking?

In the fourth place, and not unrelated to the previous point, is globalising to be understood in the sense of an emblem of sovereignty—‘the golden orb & sceptre’—conjuring as much images of art holding sway over all (not unlike Shelley’s ‘unacknowledged legislators’) or serving its patrons? Has art, to pursue our Nietzschean theme, created a new “herd mentality.” Instead of the conversation being between kings scorning the herd beneath them, has the conversation changed? Has it become one between a postmodern, self-reflexive intellectual elite problematising the arts and so destroying the passions of the earth that once sustained them?

Fifthly, therefore, is globalising to be enacted here in the sense of various inventions? The one coming immediately to mind is the ‘compression globe’ of a century ago—an overcharged mine which, on exploding, blasted a crater of greater radius than depth. As many of our presenters found, this metaphor all too easily conjugates the way in which the non-differentiation of materials and themes can be produced, not in minimalist art, but in ‘politically correct’ art.

Sixthly, is globalising a response to the fears engendered in the sense that the arts are everywhere. This might seem to be a trivial point unless, as ethnographers argue, there exist
communities which don't have a conception of art. Or does globalising here refer to the fear that the arts, stylistically at least, have become or are in the process of becoming homogenised or, at best, merely local manifestations of whatever it is that dominates the art world? Or again, does this capture the often populist view that all art (of worth? of significance?) is American in so far as 'globalisation' may be seen as a euphemism for the American empire? Whose paradigm of art do we actually follow when we 'globalise' the arts? Each generation of artistic practice has its preferred or fashionable modes and forms, most recently installations and hybridity amongst artforms.

Finally, what is actually globalising? Is it discourse about art rather than art itself? Our metaphorical romp with the name of this conference might serve to remind us of both the dangers and the advantages of entering into converstaions globally about the role of art in the contemporary world and the extent to which it is embroiled in economic and political forces to the detriment, perhaps, of what purposes, if any, art might best serve. Has globalisation ultimately disguised the dionysian impulse towards “totality,” an antagonism against “the separation of reason, sensuality, feeling, and will” towards a “spirit thus emancipated” which, as Nietzsche [Birth of Tragedy] allows, is the province of the arts?

Bibliography from ‘Double Dialogues’ - Conferences One to Four (in order of appearance):

Jacques Delaruelle,
Anna Gibbs
Mark Minchinton
Elaine D’Esterre & Frances Devlin-Glass,
Mark Minchinton,
Alison Richards,
Brendon Stewart
Paul Monaghan
David Wright
A.M. McCulloch & R.A. Goodrich
Ian Ferguson
Ann Marshall
Richard Murphett