

introduction

In the Material Media dissertation I propose that the reuse of media content, expression and formal properties of the medium has undergone a significant shift through its deployment by contemporary new media artists. These contemporary artists reuse media from a position internal to the global flows, spaces and temporalities of contemporary media itself. No longer do artists position themselves as 'outside' appropriators of media images but rather see themselves as contaminated by and resonating with the materiality of media itself. However, by their reuse of media these artists are able to create something new.

To indicate the landscape that contemporary media reuse artists work within, chapter 1, *televisual terrain*, introduces ideas around the role media – and the various mediated spaces it engenders – play in constructing our reality. The first section presents a framework for thinking through the relation between the workings of the human perceptual apparatus, television and political manipulation. It argues that *televisual terrains* come to live within us, as part of our interface to the world, determining the ways we are able to think. The exemplum of US media and the recent Iraq war is discussed in terms of cognitive dissonance and media manipulation for specific political ends.

The second section of *televisual terrain* has three main components. The first will briefly summarise the European non-commercial televisual world from the late 1950s to the early 1980s in relation to the American and Australian experience, as a way of examining the new spaces of televisual enclosure and the construction of mediated communities and audience memory. I discuss contemporary television communities and narrative (including reality television), then look at the on-going dream of public television and artist access, which were once considered ways forward in the 1960s and 1970s.

The title of chapter 2 is *screenworld*. As we live in a space more and more dominated by screens of one kind or another, this chapter will introduce the idea of 'architectural media space' as it plays out in everyday life. By this I am referring to media in public spaces, and the way architecture is increasingly a support for media, what Paul Virilio calls the "electronic gothic."¹

The second section of *screenworld* introduces the idea of the 'resistant subject.' It poses the question: how can people resist the increasingly mediated world, and how can artists build public artworks which themselves resist, or at least open up spaces of engagement rather than closing them down.

To open up spaces of engagement within a media landscape of 'new spaces of enclosure'² is the intention of artists discussed in chapter 3, *mediazone*. International and Australian artists who use, or more properly reuse, media in the screening and gallery context are examined. I found that media reuse was a trend amongst artists particularly when I was curating the *contagion* exhibition in 2001, and I had also worked with media reuse in my own work, *eurovision*. This practice is an area which has

both historical roots and contemporary reverberations. *mediazone* features a number of those artists selected for the *contagion* exhibition like Kate Murphy and Emile Zile. It also focuses on a range of international artists including Stan Douglas and Janos Sugar. It undertakes a brief historical overview of the practice of media reuse in order to establish what is different now about the way artists work with media imagery today. The essential difference being that artists speak from within the media flow.

Having moved from the macro-view of large media spaces in *televisual terrain* and *screenworld* to focus on artists' reuse strategies in *mediazone*, the fourth chapter, *netspace*, works at what might be thought of as the micro-level. It leaves so-called 'hard space' to look at artists who rework media images inside another medium, the internet.

Works in internet space become increasingly complex in terms of reuse strategies. The artists discussed work with webcam imagery, referencing its affiliation to both the televisual (particularly the reality television mode) and surveillance technologies. Other artists' works are discussed which operate at the level of database, like that of Kevin and Jennifer McKoy. Finally, Vuk Cosic and Victor Liu See-le are artists who get inside the materiality of the media to develop what could be called a 'machinic aesthetics.' These works are of increasing complexity in terms of *remediation*, an idea which is a key theme of the thesis (that is, both of the studio works and the dissertation.)

Marshall McLuhan observed that 'the content of a medium is always another medium.'³ Bolter and Grusin call this representation of one medium in another *remediation*, and argue that it is a defining characteristic of new media. They write that each act of mediation depends on other acts of mediation, arguing that: "media are continually commenting on, reproducing, and replacing each other, and this process is integral to

media. Media need each other in order to function as media at all.”⁴ The artists’ works discussed in *netspace* all work implicitly with remediation.

A related idea and another of the dominant concerns which frame the thesis research is the idea of ‘truth to materials’ in the digital environment, at the level of both the content and the form of expression. Barbara London writes that in the mid-sixties, when the introduction of the portable video camera to the consumer market spawned video as an art form, the ideas of critic Clement Greenberg were well known within the artistic community in New York. She writes that “his analysis of modernism stipulated that each discipline must search for and determine what is unique and irreducible to that art. Many of the artists of that day who tried their hands at video were modernists in the Greenbergian sense, for they focused on the effects peculiar and exclusive to video.”⁵ This idea is examined in the *mediazone* chapter. Given the abundance of media forms, affiliations and contagions as remediation implies, in what ways can it be said that the notion of ‘truth to materials’ is pursued by artists working in the digital environment.

Another of the key themes of the overall thesis research, and addressed throughout the dissertation, is the idea of space: national, geographic and historic space, as well as the space of ‘community media memory,’ as constituted by different media like television, print and the internet. Ideas of inside and outside, and legal and illegal spaces inform the work (particularly in terms of what can and can’t be said in different spaces), as does a notion of architectural media space which is largely addressed in *screenworld*.

Chapter 5 summarises key points. The dissertation argues that artists’ reuse of media is an increasingly interesting area of practice. The analysis articulated here can be applied to the work of artists in the decades to come, as media itself will only become more

complex, rich and strange. The arguments presented will also be valuable in thinking about the changing face of architecture and the possibilities it presents to artists and viewers alike as it increasingly becomes a support for information and communications.

I focus on television in this dissertation as it is the primary distinguishing feature of the contemporary media landscape. Most of the artists discussed in chapter 3 reuse television imagery in some way, and I expect that there will be more of this in the future as the media becomes more globally homogenized. It is to be noted that I will not discuss the reuse of sound except in passing as this major area is outside the scope of the dissertation, as are legal arguments around copyright and Intellectual Property.

As a practicing artist and curator the ideas set forth here proceed from my involvement in and knowledge of the field of international and Australian new media arts practice. The ideas bring together aspects of media and architecture that may not previously have been discussed together, as well as a range of artists who may not have been discussed together. As such it traces unique pathways connecting contemporary and historic media artists who make media *reuse* and media *materiality* part of their practice. The discussion thus bring new understandings to these areas.

I apply a range of philosophical, aesthetic and cultural studies theories to examine in novel ways both the work of individual media reuse artists, and also the context of this practice, in terms of technological change and the spatialised, mediated reality. In particular I am influenced by the work of Gilles Deleuze, and have also found the work of Lev Manovich helpful. These ideas inform the dissertation, as does the work of other contemporary thinkers writing about today's work and historically.

My aim is to demonstrate that we live inside the media, that we dream media, that we are *mediated*, and that our imaginations have been colonized by the media. I show that media reuse artists now speak from a position inside media flows and hence their works contribute to the ways that we are able to think about media culture. By looking at media reuse artworks we are forced to look at media culture in general – by looking at one you cannot but look at the other.

¹ From an interview by François Burkhardt published as an article in the first issue of *Crossing*, quoted in “Leggere”, a book review article by Antonino Saggio (cited online at 28 October 2003) http://architettura.supereva.it/coffeebreak/20020420/index_en.htm

² Yann Moulrier Boutang, “Los nuevos cercamientos: nuevas tecnologías de la información y de la comunicación, o la revolución rampante de los derechos de propiedad.” Unpublished Paper. Quoted by Martin Hardie in the unpublished paper “A Shape of Law to Come?” private email, June 2003

³ Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Cambridge (Mass.): The MIT Press, 2000, pg 45, quoted in Lister, Martin/Dovey, Jon/Giddens, Seth/Grant, Iain/Kelly, Kieran, *New Media: A Critical Introduction*, London and New York: Routledge, 2003, pg 54

⁴ Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Cambridge (Mass.): The MIT Press, 2000, pg 55

⁵ Barbara London, “Media Art 2000: Escape”, *Media City Seoul 2000* catalogue, September/October 2000, Seoul, Korea, pg 21