

material media: artefacts from a digital age

report

introduction

The PhD thesis project **material media: artefacts from a digital age** was undertaken from March 1998 to November 2003 at the Australian National University School of Art. This report on the studio work will have several components. It will begin with an overview of the material circumstances of the PhD then look at the three studio works separately. These are the exhibition ***PROBE: explorations into Australian computational space***, and the videos **lovehotel** and **eurovision**.

There are three key themes examined in the **material media** thesis, that is, the studio projects and the dissertation. The first of these 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. The thesis proceeds from a sense that we live inside media, that we are embodied by media and hence a large part of our memory is 'audience memory,' and that our more intimate interface to the world is mediated. Ideas of inside and outside (interior and exterior), and legal and illegal spaces inform the work, as does a notion of 'architectural media space' which refers to media in space, either as surfaces of buildings, or as advertising in public spaces for example, airports and railways.

Following from this, that our more intimate interface to the world is mediated, is the idea of ‘truth to materials’ in the digital environment. The modernist period brought with it the influential ideas of Clement Greenberg – that one’s medium should be the essence of one’s art practice. This was played out in, for example, the work of Jackson Pollock and the NY abstract expressionists whose work came to be about paint and the surface of the work – not so much to do with what the image itself ‘represented’ but more to do with the materiality of the medium used. In this way the media itself became the object: “paradoxically, by eliminating the ‘real’ or the ‘world’ as a referent, modernism emphasized the reality of both the act of painting and its product.”¹ Given that there are so many mediums now, and each has its own specific meaning and place in our culture, this relation to the *materiality* of the media itself becomes increasingly more complex, especially within the digital environment. For example, people associate anything which looks like Super8 film as having something to do with ‘memory.’ Super8 is now not much used except by specialists, but in the 1960s and 1970s it was a very popular domestic medium. Its veracity is complicated in the digital environment as one can easily just put an ‘old film filter’ onto any image and immediately it resonates with the past, where the ‘original’ piece of digitized footage was not necessarily ‘old,’ or Super8, or even film for that matter. It could have been entirely computer generated and bear no relation to any actual moment in time. This is different from previous times in that once, the old film ‘look’ was evidence of the fact that the material was itself both old and film, and that the images on it were a record of a particular never-to-be-repeated moment in time. Such complexities are examined in the dissertation, and particularly underlie the two studio video works.

This growing complexity of image production relates to the third key theme of the dissertation: McLuhan’s observation that ‘the content of a medium is always another

medium.”² McLuhan’s examples in *Understanding Media* (1964) were things like the content of writing is speech, the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph. He was not thinking of simple repurposing but of a more complex kind of borrowing “in which one medium is itself incorporated or represented in 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

These key themes are present in the three studio works, to a greater or to a lesser extent in each one. The dissertation explores these themes by discussing the kinds of media spaces emerging globally and the communities they bring into being. It also explores the themes through the prism of media reuse by artists.

Almost by default Australia itself provides the big picture frame and is implicit within the thesis. The works speak to the question of what it means to be an Australian in these times of accelerating intensities. In contrast to contemporary Europe, where there is much searching for ‘national identities’ (an issue no doubt brought into sharp focus by the EU and the introduction of the common currency), there is something rootless about contemporary Australia, yet something mysteriously grounded. Aboriginal culture is the core of Australian culture but this is not generally as well articulated as it might be. The Australian Government, in these conservative times, is busy constructing mediated audience memories based on one war story after another, the latest of course the Bali victim remembrance (and who could question that?). Permeating the thesis, and the studio works in particular, is this ambiguity around this question of Australian ‘national

identity,' which can be thought of as a multiplicity of dynamic, conflicting and overlapping spaces hovering around the construct 'Australia.'

In contemporary Australia we see artists working more closely with scientists. Indeed there is some institutional pressure on them to do so, and paralleling this there are opportunities presented for them to work at this nexus. For example we see this as many artists reconfigure their practice in terms of technological research in order to join the queue for Australian Research Council funding. This development seems to be happening at the same time as the development of an overall 'institutionalisation' at every level of art practice in this country. This relates again to one of the spatial themes of the dissertation, in particular, that of outside and inside space.

examination materials

I will present to the examiners a video tape with three works on it – the documentation of the exhibition **PROBE** in China and the works **lovehotel** and **eurovision**. At the examination there will be other material including a 30min CCTV (China Central Television) documentary on **PROBE**, a series of large format transparencies on the exhibition, the media file from the show, and complete screening lists of both works. This screening list and related material is also available on the websites for the videos, as is there a lot more material on the **PROBE** exhibition on the website, including images, two texts, information on the artists and works as well as artists' comments on their experience. www.machinehunger.com.au/probe www.machinehunger.com.au/lovehotel
www.machinehunger.com.au/eurovision

overview

In late 1997 I was selected for a scholarship with the Advanced Computational Systems Cooperative Research Centre (ACSys CRC) based at the Australian National University in Canberra. I accepted this opportunity and in 1998 began a studio-based PhD at what is now the Australian National University School of Art. Martyn Jolly was my studio supervisor throughout and Helen Ennis was one of two initial theory supervisors. Craig Lindley from CSIRO's Digital Media group was another supervisor.

Fortunately I was also offered a secure office inside the Department of Computer Science (DCS) on campus, as they were partners in ACSys CRC. Other partners were the CSIRO Information Technology Division and various Information Technology companies. My office was on a floor which also housed the ACSys Virtual Environments Laboratory. Having the office was invaluable as it provided security for my own video editing equipment and a safe environment to work late hours. It was also more convivial than working at home by myself. DCS and the closely connected Robotics CRC, and CSIRO all had open weekly seminars by permanent and visiting scholars which increased my understanding of their research agendas and working methods. Being inside this environment enabled me to learn more about the way computer science people think. Understanding their approach – that by and large projects are technical problems to be solved – has enriched my work and led me to think along different pathways which will be further elaborated on in this report.

I was part of a group of about eight other ACSys PhD scholarship holders from computer science, robotics, mathematics and engineering. Together we would have training and

workshops as well as progress meetings. I was the only artist, and in fact as far as I know am the only artist in Australia to ever be awarded such a scholarship from a technology-focused Cooperative Research Centre.

The ACSys scholarship brought with it the excellent working environment. All PhD students in DCS had their own room and computer, and all resources including network and technical assistance. Every year the ACSys PhD group had a two day educational seminar to do with business and research skills. Professionals would be hired to work with us to develop our thinking around issues like appropriate frameworks for collaborative research teams, commercialisation of research within and outside university structures, Intellectual Property and other business related issues.

Initially it was difficult to find a way to manage working between the two institutions – the Art School and the ACSys CRC, however over time things fell into place. In terms of my thesis' examination of spaces constituting worldviews, each was its own unique universe. The computer science people were fully automated with email and web information flows, whereas when I began in 1998 the Art School was more in the Gutenberg Galaxy. This indicates that in DCS everyone was online, all the time, whereas this was not the case at the Art School which had a completely different set of activities not necessarily connected to computers. The DCS high-security card-access environment, with its fast and reliable network access influenced my thinking throughout the thesis period.

During the time I was housed in DCS – three years until I moved back to Sydney in March 2001 – I found my colleagues incredibly supportive and generous with their time and open to new ideas. In a way, they could afford to be. The difference in the resource-

base between the institutions – the Art School on the one hand and the ACSys CRC which included the Department of Computer Science and the CSIRO – was astounding.

The ‘truth to materials’ zone is also a key area of difference between the art discipline and the sciences. In the video works I use a variety of mediums for specific reasons, but of course they all just end up in the digital editing environment. To my colleagues at Computer Science such details as the original source material were completely irrelevant. In their mind one would just put an ‘old film’ filter on to get whatever effect you were after. The idea of the camera and the stock as documenting some kind of moment in time, as having a veracity in the world, is one which has underpinned, for example, video art, since its inception. To use this idea or to *still* use this idea is then an act of affiliation with the history of one’s discipline. I think here of the Chinese video artists and their use of the camera as discussed in my *Realtime* article (in particular the video works of Zhang Peili.)⁵ Such issues as ‘truth to materials’ in the digital environment will only get more complex as the amount of media forms increase, paralleled with the length of time we live inside (mass) media. For example it is now over fifty years that we have (in the West) been living inside the space of television.

In 1999 I undertook the Art School’s Communication Design class taught by Chris Meadham, and continued this into 2000. This project-based class was very helpful for my work. It touched on Photoshop and Illustrator as well and desktop publishing software and design issues. It helped me incorporate more Illustrator vector graphics into the video compositing I was teaching myself for the studio practice. Also in 2000 I began to learn the 3D software package Houdini with Karen McCann at the Australian Centre for Art and Technology (ACAT). This was very worthwhile as it renewed my interest in 3D and allowed greater understanding of the Unix-based SGI platform

(knowledge which came in useful later when I ported over to a Linux desktop system, and also more recently for Mac's OSX). It is to be noted that there were very few people on campus working with digital video. At the time, in 1998, there was some low-end production in the Art School (in Adobe Premier). ACSys CRC didn't do 'production' so there was no knowledge of video editing or compositing systems – they did a lot of shunting video over networks or around databases but no content development. However I did manage to locate one man on campus who ran the ethnographic film unit. He was a documentary maker and had an AVID system and other gear and was very generous with this which proved an invaluable help to me. I stress this here as equipment and the issues surrounding it (for example, fixing it) are an integral part of digital media production.

PROBE:

explorations into Australian computational space

Australian Embassy, Beijing. October 15 – 24, 1999.

what and why: introduction

I came to the research for my PhD with a background of curating a large range of new media projects for clients such as the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT),

The Australia Council for the Arts and the Australian Film Commission. Some of these curatorial projects include:

Voyage: a journey into the Australian televisual imagination, for the Cebit event in Hannover, Germany, February 1995, commissioned by the Industry Research and Development Board;

aliens.au, a significant component of Video Positive, Liverpool, England, April 1997, commissioned by the Australian Film Commission;

PROBE: explorations into Australian computational space, Beijing P.R.C., October 1999, commissioned by the Australia China Council, part of DFAT;

hybrid<life>forms Montevideo Time Based Arts, Amsterdam, The Netherlands, March 2001, commissioned by The Australia Council for the Arts; and,

::contagion:: Australian Media Art @ the Centenary of Federation, at the New Zealand Film Archive, Wellington, October 2001, by their invitation.

PROBE forms a component of the studio work. I chose to include this project as it speaks to a number of my research concerns. Clearly the fact that the show was in Beijing speaks to issues of national and geographic space, as does the site of the exhibition – within the confines of the Australian Embassy in Beijing. **PROBE** called into being particular media and event spaces, as it did ideas of inside and outside, and legal and illegal space (in terms of what can and cannot be said).

PROBE offered me a chance to realise many of the ideas I had developed in the then 18 month period (by mid-1999) on PhD scholarship within ACSys CRC. These were ideas around artists' use of the internet and advanced computing, as well as the idea that the artist's studio was 'extended into space' via the networks. This new reality had implications for the future of practice, in terms of the idea of geographic specificity within

increased globalisation and the idea of collaboration. These advanced computing networked spaces offered new regimes of speed and intensity. Such understandings were helped by virtue of being inside the walls of Computer Science and seeing how they did things, also the simple experience of being on campus and learning about campus wide networks and servers. For example, in Chris Meadham's class and the 3D Houdini class we would save digital work to a server somewhere – for me this was new as I'd previously been just running a home office. I had of course been connected to the internet for years by then, built my website in 1995 and had done curatorial production online for years – for example the entire UK Video Positive exhibition in March 1997 was done online, with both the UK organisers and the artists, which was then new, as was the entire Australian Council booklet *embodying the information age* produced from Sydney in early 1998 online with Melbourne designers and artists from all over the country. But the scale of the networks that Computer Science, ACSys and CSIRO partners were using, and speculating upon, were of another order of magnitude to that of the small business (as well as the computational power they were imagining and indeed already using). Being inside that environment allowed the possibilities of this to present themselves to me more clearly. This was articulated in the essay for the exhibition.⁶

It is to be noted that **PROBE** and the next work to be discussed, the **lovehotel** video, were conceptualized and developed in parallel. I think that there are many thematic crossover points between them, particularly (as mentioned above) in terms of network spatialisation and the impact on traditional national boundaries.

In June 1998 at the invitation of the Australian Embassy in Beijing, I made a trip to China with a view to a future exhibition there. I traveled to Beijing and Shanghai, and wrote an

article on Chinese video artists published in *RealTime*.⁷ My notes from the trip are also on my website.⁸

During this journey I met Chinese artists, curators, visited Art Schools and looked at work in order to consider an exhibition of Australian new media arts for Beijing. A number of 'unofficial' artists, mainly coming from painting backgrounds were then working with video. I met only one working with video with a film background. I didn't meet any 'multimedia' artists during that trip, though did hear of isolated cases...Feng Meng Bo for instance. In 1998 the computer courses in the Art Schools seemed largely focused on design imperatives which is a practical approach given that this is where students are most likely to get jobs. The fine art training emphasis was largely on traditional forms like painting. There seemed then (and I understand that this is still the case) to be very little of the kinds of links and conceptual dialogues between the arts and sciences that an organisation like ANAT (the Australian Network for Art and Technology) encourages, feeding as it does from, and into, a global discourse and infrastructure around art and technology. Such non-participation in the art/science nexus has its advantages for new media artists in China as it enables them to position themselves and their work more actively within the traditions of their own discipline, art.

However, the 1998 manic chaos experienced during a trip to Haidian, the computer district of Beijing, suggested another side to the city. This possible faultline became apparent in October 1999 with **PROBE**.

The idea of curating an exhibition of Australian new media in China was irresistible but one fraught with difficulties. To show anything publicly in China one has to navigate the state approval machine. This control extends to books, magazines, television, public

speakers and of course, art exhibitions. The outcome is that there is very little (outside) information flowing into China, particularly into Beijing (though southern China seems to be more free). The rapid spread of the internet is one area where the government appears to have less control.⁹

To have an exhibition in a 'public' space meant that all works would have to be submitted to government authorities months before the exhibition, severely curtailing curatorial choice and flexibility, and making the logistical viability of such an international project tenuous in the extreme. Therefore the idea of **PROBE** colonising the Australian Embassy was appealing as it is an elegant and imposing building by Melbourne architects DCM, and being on Australian territory meant that there was no need to deal with information controls. There was a large exhibition hall space and another lounge area with good wall space for use. It wasn't long before we were calling it 'the gallery.'

Finally, after months of activity the exhibition was ready. Following the opening night on October 14 1999, China correspondent with *The Australian* newspaper Lynne O'Donnell reported that the Embassy had been mobbed: "Australia's Embassy in Beijing was besieged last Friday night by hundreds of young Chinese eager to experience the marvels of new media as presented by a handful of Aussie artists." **PROBE: explorations into Australian computational space** dropped down into Beijing like a satellite seed carried lightly on the breeze, and then exploded its ideas, images and technologies onto a youthful audience, hungry for techno-stimulation. **PROBE** was the closest thing to a rave@theEmbassy. So how to explain the success of the exhibition? It appears that **PROBE** emerged in the right place at the right time.

who: selection of artists

The objective was a survey show of Australian new media practice. The artists included in the exhibition ranged from low-tech to high-tech. They represented a range of media and also degrees of technological sophistication in terms of platform, software and computational power. *PROBE*'s works were not overly dependent on English.

I selected works which would not offend anyone. And not just the Chinese 'outside' the Embassy – there was resentment about the Public Affairs area within the Embassy having the exhibition in the first place from the security staff who believed that a flood of young potential refugees would get into the Embassy grounds and refuse to leave. So the works had to be inoffensive to these security people lest we give them cause to take the show down before it opened. The works would also need to be as accessible as possible for a local audience not familiar with the practice.

The selection also showed the diversity of Australians. After looking at a lot of work, the artists I chose were Leon Cmielewski, Justine Cooper, Brenda Croft, Zen Yipu, Jen Seevinck and Patricia Piccinini. The artists who had the largest installation works, Justine, Leon, and Patricia were invited to come to Beijing to install the works and participate in forums and media interviews.

how: organization

I organised the exhibition from my office in Canberra via email and occasionally by telephone. The Embassy hired an onsite co-ordinator who was great at some things but

like most art people and organisations at the time in Beijing didn't know much about new media work.

I was assisted in a number of ways by two Chinese nationals who then lived in Australia and worked in the Department of Computer Science. There were interesting issues around translating the word **PROBE** into Chinese characters. The root character is the same, but then there are two potential characters for the second character which makes the compound concept 'probe,' each one giving a different take on the central idea 'to explore.' These two versions are: 'to explore' as in risk, and 'to explore' as in scientific method. On site in Beijing they used the latter that is to do with scientific method, giving the exhibition a science flavour by definition, however my choice was the former for use as the character on the website – that of risk, as this speaks more about the nature of art practice. The Chinese organizers (that is the Australian traditional art gallery owner who hired a translator) used this science translation (against my suggestions). What this demonstrates is that the only way they were really able to deal with technology as a medium for art was to put it in a techno-science frame, rather than an art frame. This issue was prescient of things to come. It also echoes the way artists who work with technology have traditionally been positioned in Australia and elsewhere.

As to the organization of the show, it went on for months and was complicated. Working with the Embassy and the Department of Foreign Affairs has always been a very interesting experience for me. One aspect of the **PROBE** exhibition organization was of particular interest to the spatial concerns of the thesis. This lay in the use of the diplomatic bag to get the works to Beijing. It was decided that we could use this method of transport so as to avoid any possibility of the works being held up in China's Customs. Diplomatic bags are not checked at the border, so to speak, and are another case of the

ultra-national spaces which circumnavigate the globe – the Embassy is directly connected to Australia through these freight channels. They constitute extensions of Australian space, like moving tendrils wrapping around the globe.

exhibition walkthrough

All history is the history of contingency. **PROBE** began cannibalizing new spaces inside the Embassy soon after landing.

As you entered the building to your left was the Visa section, in the mornings full of Chinese people patiently waiting for their number to come up, on the two weekends of the exhibition screening Justine Cooper's sublime animation *RAPT*. Using medical software, the artist animated – in the high-end supercomputing environment of Sydney Vislab – a complete dataset of her own body using magnetic resonance imaging technology. **PROBE** turned the visa section into a wondrous theatre.

Through the foyer one entered the first of the two halls. From the plush of the deep black leather couches you could view the *west/ward/bound* series of five prints by Brenda L. Croft: cool, melancholy and deeply mysterious. "I like these the best" one quiet girl said to me.

On the opposite wall the two large prints of Beijing-born Australian artist Zen Yipu – the *Ghosts in the Shell* series – referenced Japanese anime characters suspended into the

gel of a chaotic Tokyo, blurring the lines of reality and the city and also challenged the conception of what it might mean to be an 'Australian' artist (particularly as nearly one million Australians live and work overseas).

As you walked into the main room one passed two 'television towers' on either side, like an electronic doorway of monitors, showing the high-end ambient animation *blue in the bluebird* by architect-trained and former ACAT 3D teacher Jennifer Seevinck, produced at ANU's supercomputer facility. The subtle bass sounds of Tim Krueger filled the space.

Into the darkened main exhibition hall visitors were confronted with the installation works of the three artists who traveled to Beijing with the show: Justine Cooper, Patricia Piccinini and Leon Cmielewski.

The 10m long databody of Justine Cooper using 72 'slices' of her own body visualised through MRI scans hung low in the space so that people could approach closely, even walk between the slices. By the end of the exhibition, given the pollution in Beijing, this work was covered by a thin veil of dust, giving to the 'body' a gothic sense that it had been in place for centuries.... In fact, in a television interview the artist described her wish to be 'just like Mao,' that is, preserved for all time...

This interview was part of a documentary, screened on one of the six state-run national CCTV channels. Possible audience, 1.3 billion? It was one of the two half-hour documentaries produced on **PROBE** by CCTV. The media response to the exhibition was extraordinary. I would estimate that **PROBE** is likely to have generated the most media attention in one country of any international exhibition of Australian art.¹⁰

In this way, **PROBE** extended itself from the Embassy exhibition space into deep Chinese media space, to create its own reality there. Space is a key theme of this exhibition, and this is seen in a number of ways in Cooper's work which is all about space, particularly inside and outside space. We look inside the body by virtue of the MRI scans, and not just any body, but the artists' own body. In the exhibition space we can walk around that visualized body hanging in the space, over a span of around 10 metres, and we can in fact walk through the body in several spaces, between the head and shoulders for example.

Space was also an issue addressed in different ways by Patricia Piccinini in the *Protein Lattice*. Along one wall at floor level were five monitors featuring the tissue engineered 'Onco' mouse running along in the empty and claustrophobic lab/labyrinth, while high above on the wall perched six images of models and rats. Piccinini's images proceed by way of *infecting* advertising, in particular for new scientific and medical technologies.

One of these images of the model and the rat was featured on the invitation which visitors needed to get past the military guard stationed on a 24 watch outside the Embassy, and directed by the Chinese government to impede Chinese residents from entering (all Embassies) without the correct papers. We had over 5,000 multiple-entry, endlessly transferable invitations to start with and had none left towards the end of the nine-day show. Piccinini's image therefore became synonymous with the exhibition, aided by its meme-like reproduction in the popular press.¹¹

Then there was Leon Cmielewski's brilliant interactive animation, *Dream Kitchen* (produced in collaboration with Josephine Starrs), hovering in the space like a perverse child's game. Cmielewski, after seeing Japanese television images of a happy inspired

couple examining their new, architect designed 'dream kitchen' in VR, was equally inspired to show the underside and decay of the consumer dream. Again this work examines space. We go on a journey into different hidden spaces of the kitchen, under the fridge, down the plughole of the sink for example. In terms of remediation, Cmielewski combines the tradition of stop-motion animation and digital interactivity. *Dream Kitchen* was perfect for a largely non-English speaking audience with little familiarity with interactive artworks. It set up a series of unique narrative pathways, each visual 'story' funny and weird. Audiences of parents and their children grasped this work intuitively – it operated beyond language and cultural context via images and an acutely-timed sense of sound. And, most importantly, it worked. It was robust and didn't crash.

forums, catalogue and internet site

The Sunday following the opening we held a forum for artists to show their past work and have a general discussion. Crowds appeared. We all packed into the visa hall. It was clear from these talks that the **PROBE** artists have a deeply ambivalent attitude to technology. The mood of the discussion was positive. Questions were posed along the lines of "is it the idea or the technology which comes first?" The artists all responded, similarly, that the technology is an enabling mechanism, a tool to execute the ideas, and that the idea comes first.

Word had spread during the exhibition week and the artists' talks built to such audience numbers that by the final Friday the Embassy translator had to stand on a table and use a megaphone to reach people in the space. There were many students with their

teachers from various institutions – including design, sculpture, and architecture. The artists and I were able to discuss software and hardware issues as well as the ideas inside the work. One 'technical' journalist published a comprehensive list of all software and platforms used to produce every work, which I was able to provide.

And I think the latter point is important for curators of new media – it really helps if curators have a hands on appreciation of how such works are made, the amount of time they take and the kinds of technical issues addressed. Such background extends the richness of the curator's appreciation of the work, as well as contextualising it within the greater body of practice. I would argue that this curatorial lack of technical appreciation of work is one of the reasons why we don't see a lot of leading-edge new media work in Australian galleries.

PROBE also featured a computer homed to the **PROBE** internet links site, and also showed a range of CDROM artworks. Audiences were generally unfamiliar with the idea that artists were using such technology as CDROMS and the internet as their media. There was also a mirror site on a local (News Ltd) server which featured the site translated into Chinese language. The **PROBE** site was designed by ACAT's David McDowell. It has two main levels, a before and an after the show. For more information about the exhibition after it was staged go to the *exhibition* link from the main menu.¹²

The exhibition essay (see addenda items) discussed the idea that the artists' studio extends via digital technology into a networked world. This essay was translated into Chinese and was on the Chinese site. The translation was also photocopied and freely available in the exhibition space, along with a details of all the artworks and artist biographies (in Chinese). This functioned as the free catalogue.

After returning to Australia, and some time later, one of my Chinese colleagues in Computer Science found the exact essay had replicated from the Chinese site as a news story on a Southern China news site (in Chinese characters). The first introductory paragraph was missing however to be replaced by a headline “Australian Artists Shock Beijing!! “ and then went directly into the essay, as an online newspaper story. Wherever else the text traveled to is open to speculation.

outcomes – exhibition as event

The artists I originally met in 1998 were all what is known as 'unofficial' artists – these are the artists who circulate on the international art circuit and in Biennales but who rarely if every show their work at home. If they do it is largely in equally 'unofficial' shows which may only be up for a few days, or one night. So Chinese audiences do not see the Chinese work which we see, and rarely (if ever) do shows of innovative contemporary international work appear in Beijing, and China in general. This is slowly changing with exhibitions like the Shanghai Biennale, for example. **PROBE** allowed a glimpse of an outside art practice, well established in <the west>. Not to colonise, but to exchange ideas. The experience made all of us involved more aware of our 'western' frame. With amusing irony, viewers have a better chance to see the work of Australian new media artists in Beijing than they do at the so-called 'national' gallery in Canberra dedicated more-and-more it seems to 'official' traditional art forms of which the Chinese government art gatekeepers would no doubt approve.

Is **PROBE** in this sense a noun or a verb? Whether the **PROBE** was an instrument examining the body of China, or whether the **PROBE** was in fact probing the furthest reaches of the body of the Australian nation state, that is, within the confines (albeit in the outer reaches) of our space in foreign territories, is all open to conjecture.

PROBE was *event*: an emergent phenomena. It articulated what could be thought of as a faultline in contemporary China – a hunger for that to do with the creative uses of technology (outside of the purely pragmatic) and a desire for a culture of critique around technology. **PROBE** initiated dialogue, but only because people wanted to chat.

The virtual **PROBE** machine fell to earth in the capital of communist China late in the second millennium, and distributed itself from that point. It only moved out into the ideas and media landscape because the People's Republic allowed it to do so. The event changed those of us in Beijing as part of the project, inside that China of 1.3 billion people, so that we could say "not to arrive at the point where one no longer says I, but at the point where it's no longer of any importance whether one says I or not. We are no longer ourselves. Each will know his own. We have been helped, inspired, multiplied."¹³

For me I really think this work was almost perfect. I say this as the combination of the artists selected (and having them onsite, as they were generous with their time and loved being treated like celebrities), the site itself, the works installed in the site, the mystery and excitement of China and Beijing in particular, the public and the media response, and most of all the timing – it was all about the timing – all these elements combined made it unrepeatably. Other curatorial projects I have done since pale somewhat in comparison. I curated two shows subsequent to it, in more traditional spaces in the west, speaking to an audience who were familiar with this kind of practice.

In a way the latter speak to a ghetto, while paradoxically **PROBE** spoke to a much wider group of people.

There are artists' comments on the website. World renowned Sinologist Geremie Barme, based at ANU, commented on how remarkable an event it was, particularly given that it occurred within the tight security of the October 1st celebration of fifty years of the communist party.¹⁴ Multimedia Australia Asia-Pacific's Kim Matchen, who in mid-2002 staged a huge new media event in Beijing when interviewed for ABC Radio said "...and remembering the great excitement of **PROBE** in Beijing in 1999 where Linda Wallace setup a new media exhibition within the Australian Embassy. That exhibition had a great impact and certainly I have to recognise that paved the way, no doubt...."¹⁵

PROBE furthered the thesis research in a number of ways. I was able to implement a lot of ideas to do with 'architectural media space' in a real space and from this to develop ideas around how the subject moves about in space and experiences works within that movement. This was particularly interesting as the audience was largely non-English speaking, and so brought the idea of the 'international' public space into focus. It also brought the idea of community and communities of media realities (and knowledge realities) into relief, and how porous these are to cross. Also how open the media facade is. Having a background in public affairs and publishing as well as video and film, I am aware of how to plant strategic fragments into the global information flow, but the media garnered by the exhibition was beyond my comprehension. It was also beyond the comprehension of the Embassy media unit staff who were used to visiting Australian Trade delegations from the Grain Board the like. They had never before had to deal with such media interest in one of their events.

For many visitors to the exhibition it was also a chance to go to the Embassy, and quite a special day out. A huge amount of people brought their cameras and took photos of themselves and their friends in the grounds, or with the artists, and many were found wandering around the Embassy grounds (to the horror of the security staff), simply enjoying the building and the world it held. Of course such an event is inconceivable now, post 9/11.

It wasn't just one way. I personally learnt a lot from the Chinese artists, as did the other **PROBE** artists, particularly Justine Cooper who has done a number of projects in Beijing since **PROBE**. I developed a deep respect for the artists we met, like Qing Qing, Zhu Jia, Song Dong and curator Huang Du and the conditions that they work within.

***PROBE*: summary in terms of themes of the dissertation**

PROBE opened huge media space. It was an investigation of space and spatiality on many levels: national space, territorial space, diplomatic space, media space. The works themselves and the ways in which they played with space (particularly Justine Cooper's work, and what it said about body space), the issues raised in the essay to do with the artists' studio extending into networked space, and ideas of inside and outside, legal and illegal spaces – were all realised through the event of **PROBE**. It also brought ideas of art and technology into the space of Chinese contemporary and traditional art. This is perhaps the most interesting long-term spatial overlap. In terms of the other themes, for example, truth to materials and remediation, these ideas were fairly straightforward in the works selected. Issues of the content of one medium is always another medium were

apparent in all the works in **PROBE**, from Brenda Croft's reworked family photographs transformed into layered digital prints, Zen Yipu's use, or reuse, of anime characters and cityscapes, Leon Cmielewski's *Dream Kitchen* and its affiliations with games and also the use of surveillance imagery within a CDROM form, Justine Cooper's use of medical data using medical software, realised as printed architectural film 'slices' and also as a video/animation, Jen Seevinck's animation of bird forms and the affiliation with advertising imagery inherent in the *Protein Lattice* by Patricia Piccinini. In all these ways **PROBE** advanced the themes of the research.

lovehotel

background

The company I direct, machine hunger, had bought a Media 100 video edit system in 1996. I mainly worked as a producer on various projects but didn't edit anything on the system. In fact I think I was resisting learning the system, coming from a more analog background. I had formerly worked in photography, in film (trained as a camera assistant, in 16 and 35mm) and also in analog video. machine hunger was formed in February 1995 in order to take on large projects, often Australian new media art curatorial projects for international audiences, but also general marketing projects for a

variety of government and corporate clients. My role was one of concept development and project management.

I mention this to indicate that I wasn't very advanced with digital video in March 1998 at the beginning of the thesis. However as a director/producer I had worked very closely with digital editors on the company's and other digital systems (and had done since the early nineties when such systems were introduced), and so had a fair idea of how such systems worked and of what was possible.

My video work to date had been both single screen and installation video. When I left the College of Fine Art, graduating with a Master of Fine Arts (research) and left access to a video studio, the single screen work had been hampered by the fact of not owning the *means of production*, so to speak, therefore having to hire equipment at very high cost and being severely limited by budget and also by the operator/editor's imagination and mood.

Therefore, owning the system and being freed from time restrictions offered great potential to follow up in a more coherent manner some of the aesthetic and technical concerns to do with multiple narrative either within the frame, or multiple monitors in the space which had been a dominant idea in my work. Examples of this direction are the **REGION** series of works in *POSTcode* at the Performance Space in 1994 with Brad Miller, Stephen Jones, and Dennis Wilcox, The Substation exhibition in Singapore 1994, and the works in the 1991/2 *Fuel* exhibition curated by Jay Younger at the Institute of Modern Art Brisbane, at Sydney's Australian Center for Photography (installation and a billboard) and at Melbourne's Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.

I decided to work with another narrative text to allow more time to focus on developing the narrative structure and to learn the technology. The project therefore at a content level became one of adaptation, an act of contagion, of creating a hybrid narrative from a work which was essentially text based. Echoing McLuhan's observation that "the content of a medium is always another medium,"¹⁶ the idea of a text which had been spawned on the internet and turned into a book, as the subject of a further reworking into digital video appealed to me, as in "propagation by epidemic, by contagion, has nothing to do with filiation by heredity, even if the two themes intermingle and require each other. The vampire does not filiate, it infects."¹⁷

the text

Francesca Da Rimini was a friend of mine and in early 1997 she had sent me some texts she had written. One of these was called DNA. At the time she was working on a book called *Fleshmeat*. Francesca was a member of the four-person VNS Matrix group, a cyberfeminist collective which 'climbed out of the swamps of Adelaide'¹⁸ in 1991 and proclaimed to the world the cyberfeminist manifesto. Francesca at the time was living in Adelaide and was totally engaged within the internet and within its communities, as is often the case with people living in extreme isolation.

In the book *Burn Rate* Michael Wolff talks about the growth of AOL (America On Line) as being fuelled by the sex talk in chat rooms from middle America. This is not an aspect of its growth AOL likes to promote. It is this kind of world which Francesca logged onto every evening from Adelaide. In 1994 I saw VNS Matrix do a performance at the Institute

of Contemporary Art in London set in an internet MOO.¹⁹ Engagement in the early world of cyberspace was part of their practice, and each member had their own take on it.

In 1994 Francesca had built a number of 'rooms' at Lambdamoo which was a text-based environment. In this space she played out a range of different identities with a diverse range of 'other identities' – people entered into the parlour games she devised knowing that to do so was to take part in her on-going art practice. Within these environments and closeby in similar spaces Francesca developed multiple engagements at various levels of emotional attachment, all at a text-based level. Such environments are exquisite spaces that allow free flight of the imagination, and emotional attachments formed within such spaces can be as real (or more real) than those in the so-called real world.

We have now incorporated the new technological space afforded by the internet into our everyday lives, but in 1994/5 it was very new. I began to use the internet in 1994 when I got my first account, but it was really in 1995 that I began to rely on it.

The *DNA* text I found particularly engaging as I thought it could work at a number of different levels – as 'reality' and also as semi-documentary style. Francesca was also keen for me to adapt it for video, as she believes in what might be called 'open source culture.' The *DNA* text itself was a lyrical piece of prose. It was not in an actual dialogue style like email, rather it is first person narrative about a person coming to terms with the end of an online relationship. The original project outline was totally different to the one which finally emerged. **lovehotel** was planned to open with an 'expert' (in a documentary style) in discussion around the issues at stake with online relationships – when is infidelity really infidelity – if you are involved in a virtual relationship with no physical

contact, just text and a good imagination. The Pope has banned such online relationships, deeming them sinful ("if you think it, then it is a sin...") The original video would then have moved from the expert to a reworking of the *DNA* text, the aftermath of such an online relationship between Francesca and a 'Mr Manhattan.' After over 12 months of online intimacy they did actually meet and the relationship lost its mystery, particularly after he revealed that he was married.

In 1998, the first year of my PhD I mainly did a lot of tests with the equipment and began to learn to use the various softwares. In June that year I went to China for the first trip of what was to become **PROBE**. Over the space of that year I became increasingly dissatisfied with the *DNA* text as it seemed too linear, choosing instead to work with the *Fleshmeat* book Francesca had recently finished editing for publication by SHAKE (Milan, London). However this was no ordinary book. Detailing the online adventures of gashgirl (aka Francesca) and other Da Rimini entities with names such as dollyoko, ghost AI, Puppet Mistress, the text featured actual text-based dialogue from the Home of the Puppet Mistress (the name of her Lambdamoo space) and also email and IRC (Internet Relay Chat) chat from a series of other relationships she had formed in cyberspace from 1994-1997.

I felt that this text provided much richer material for me to work with on **lovehotel**. One of the major reasons was that the *DNA* text told the story of a woman defeated by love, whereas the *Fleshmeat* text was much more powerful, the central character (or characters) being far more complex and richly textured. Also the narrative was told via a range of devices (all 'true' stories): email exchanges, actual Lambdamoo dialogue, IRC dialogue, as well as journal entries by Da Rimini and prose pieces like *DNA*.

Initially I wanted the piece to be 12-17 minutes long. However the further I got into it the more I wanted to reduce it to around 7 minutes. There are a number of reasons for this: as a curator of new media art I had spent many a day watching too-long videos, and I realised that the work could never be the book, or even part of the book. It was at most going to be an impression of these online experiences.

I also was keen to use various types of writing – prose, journal entries and email dialogue. The form I was working with was based on the idea of the new forms of literacy apparent in video clips, commercials and cinema which combined multiple narrative threads, or lines, within the frame. The question is how complex one can get before losing cohesion.

I worked on **lovehotel** over 1998 and 1999 and finished it in May 2000. Eight months of that time was dedicated to working fulltime on the **PROBE** exhibition (including the 1998 trip to China), but the rest of the time was largely dedicated to working on the video – around 18 months full time.

The first task was really to decide what parts of the text I wanted to use from the massive selection. I read and re-read the text over and over, searching for the bits that held the most reverberation. I gradually culled it down to a number of key parts and stories that I felt I could work with. The next stage of the textual selection was to consider what would be part of the voice-over, and what would be presented as text on screen – using words as graphic elements – and of course how to put these two elements together to maximise their effect and not ‘overload’ the viewer.

The idea I came back to was that of creating an overall 'impression.' It wasn't that a viewer was going to sit down and 'get' the full work. That would be impossible. But I wanted to set up the conditions for the viewer's attention to be able to move from one narrative thread to another, as if in a dream. One is watching and reading some text on screen, then one's attention is taken by something said, the mind follows the voice-over for a while, all the time reading something on screen and gradually the attention shifts back more fully to the screen, and so it goes. In **lovehotel** there is the text, there are the images and of course, also there is the sound.

The way I began working was that I paced out the text that I wanted on the soundtrack. I dummied up a soundtrack as a voice-over to get an idea of the timing of the various segments and began to cut the visuals to that sound. Finally I had cut something together that was around seven minutes. This comprised a huge amount of rendered sequences which took time to construct. It was a good thing I had vast amounts of footage which I will now discuss.

the image

The material in the work was all shot in two primary locations – Tokyo and New York. It was shot on a trip I funded in November 1998.

I took two video cameras. The digital video camera I used in Japan, and the Hi8 video camera I used in New York. It was my intention to shoot the two locations with different shooting stock to enhance the qualities of the locations. The Hi8 tape produces a grittier

image, whereas the digital is cleaner and sharper. I used a very wide angle lens on most of the footage shot in Japan.

This method of working is one I have been fascinated with for a long time, the idea of the different materialities of image recording stock. In the very early eighties I was shooting high contrast 35mm film titling stock and 35mm sound film through the stills camera. In 1995 I made a video called *A Story So Far* which shot Super8 film components in Melbourne, Umatic video in Sydney and domestic video in Brisbane in order to again say something about each place and its particular feel, using different media to generate texture and narrative ambience. Now Hi8 video has become like Super8 film in the way it speaks to and functions as 'memory'. It interests me even more now as all these components end up in the digital video editing environment. As discussed earlier in the introduction, this entire 'truth to materials' approach is one which was incomprehensible to my Computer Science colleagues, and one of the many living qualities of art practice subject to change as media art more and more seeks to align itself with science and technology research funding.

I realise that this approach is one which I have developed after twenty years of image and sound production – a way of working with the materiality of different stocks and different recording and editing devices. These years of practice enable me to take some kind of long view.

Back to **lovehotel**. Fran was in New York in late 1998 and we shot a lot of material together. The idea of shooting overseas was that when she was on the internet these places that she met people could have been anywhere – for instance, where is the Home of the Puppet Mistress at Lambdamoo? It is more an imaginary space, into which

people come from all over. 'Mr Manhattan' was a character that the entity gashgirl formed a relationship with, so there was a certain humour about shooting in New York – was Fran always just around the corner from him in real space?

Jason Gee and I recorded Fran reading my selections of the text in 1999. I asked her to read rather than hire a professional voice-over person again as a 'truth to materials' logic. Maybe it would have been better to have a 'professional' person as they would have projected their voice better and had more clarity in their delivery but...as it is, sometimes the voice is too fast and this can be frustrating to viewers. There is an authority with the voice-over, people really want to be delivered by it, and when they cannot hear it one hundred percent of the time I think they get frustrated. However in the work the idea is that one switches from the voice-over to the sound to the image track constantly, making the viewing of **lovehotel** a very dynamic process.

There is no synch voice-to-image, but there are various synch points which hold the work together, in that they tie the audio track to the image track. My approach here in writing about **lovehotel** in this report has been to approach it in a formalist manner, as I don't wish to impose narrative outcomes on the reader (and/or viewer.)

Having said that, I think that what happens with the narrative is that a new and altogether different *quiet* narrative emerges *despite* all the words coming at the viewer through the screen and audio. This quiet narrative emerges through the images themselves and the structure of the editing. It took a long time to see that this was what I was in fact creating. It emerges in the interstitial spaces *between* the voice-over and what is on the screen, in the cracks and chasms which open there. Interestingly, after a Brisbane screening of **lovehotel**, with its focus on text as graphic elements, a curator

called me to say that hearing impaired people really loved it, as they weren't as excluded as they normally are by image work which primarily uses audio to carry much of the narrative. According to figures from the South Australian Health Commission, some 2 million Australians are deaf and hearing-impaired and the ageing population means that number is forecast to rise to 3 million by decade's end, creating an increasing demand for captioned film and television.²⁰ This new literacy, which **lovehotel** and **eurovision** engage in, albeit accidentally, is brought about by physical necessity.

screenings

lovehotel premiered in the *DArt* program at the Sydney Film Festival in 2000 and has subsequently been shown around the world. It won First prize at the Palermo Video Festival, was selected for screening at Berlin's transmediale in 2000, and at Amsterdam's World Wide Video Festival in 2000, as well as a host of other festivals and events. It continues to be screened around the world as it is included in a number of curated programmes including *E-identities* curated by Kathy Rae Huffman for Chicago's Video Data Bank, and the *desktop icons* programme from Media Scotland.²¹ Both have traveled widely, with *desktop icons* currently touring in Columbia, Moldova, LA, Poland and Ireland. Swiss artist Ursula Biemann ran a conference around the idea of the video essay in 2002 and has published a book on this, including **lovehotel** as one of the key works of the genre.²²

lovehotel: summary in terms of themes of the dissertation

In terms of the key themes of the dissertation, **lovehotel** looks at the media space of the internet, geographic space, time and the construction of communities (albeit transient, temporary communities) within these spaces. It is as much about the space of desire within so-called virtual space as it is about anything, and the kinds of affiliations such desire brings into existence. The idea of 'truth to materials' is played out in the shooting stock (particularly using different stocks to enhance ideas of geographic location) and in the digital effects. In terms of the theme of the content of one medium being another medium, the essay *lovehotel: formula for the emergence of the new* by Chris Rose²³ points out that there is very little actual visualization of the internet itself, instead what we see are other earlier technologies like phones, cameras and chairs. The fact that **lovehotel** is based on a book of transcriptions of moments and events from internet time is a case of one medium echoing another, inside another...

eurovision

introduction

I began serious work on the **eurovision** project in late May 2000, when I began taking shots on a Sony digital camera on the second of three trips to Europe that year. The first

was in February to Amsterdam in preparation for the **hybrid<life>forms** Australian new media exhibition at Montevideo which I was co-curating with Josephine Grieve. The second was in May/June, and the third trip was in September for the World Wide Video Festival in Amsterdam, then on to Banff in Canada for the *Living Architectures* conference. These trips deeply informed the direction of the third work, though at the beginning of 2000 I didn't really know what direction that was going to take. Being deep inside European space in 2000, in retrospect, clearly got me thinking about the formations of the inherited European traditions, of language and language difference, and particularly of the legacy of European culture internationally, as well as the place it now occupies.

In June I participated in the Field Screen project when I took the ANU School of Art camera and laptop to Europe for a number of activities including a new media workshop in Bulgaria. I then installed quite a number of these images on my website in order for the supervisors to look at the images, and also a written report from the Amsterdam Tulipomania conference for discussion via Field Screen software Timbuktu. I was in Amsterdam and my then supervisor Mathew Holt, the Field Screen people and others were demonstrating their software and set-up to those gathered in Canberra for a 'virtual' meeting which lasted about forty minutes. This is mentioned here as it is an investigation of new technologically mediated spaces forming part of the thesis research.

I took lots of images in Amsterdam, and many again in Paris, particularly in the Louvre. I returned to Australia around July and began to play with these images. I was particularly interested in turning the stills into objects in 3D space – in pushing the particular limits of that possibility within an After Effects environment without moving into an actual 3D program. I began to test strings of still images in After Effects, spinning them around so

that they intersected, approaching 3D. I made a lot of tests with such images, also using Photoshop and various other filters and effects in After Effects.

Another thing I became interested in was patterning – using repeats of stills and video sequences to fill the frame. Some of this kind of investigation was in **lovehotel**, in one sequence in particular. For the new work I wanted to take this further – to use the repeat. I was interested in the work of Mieke Gerritzen, a contemporary Dutch designer,²⁴ who repeated strong bold typographic forms and icons to stunning effect for print, the web, t-shirts and even a Dutch television station's identity graphics. I also was looking again at Warhol, particularly the 'death and disaster' series of the late fifties/early sixties. Here he was taking images from the newspaper and, using screen printing, repeating them to form abstract patterns.

From July and August 2000 I played with these images, rendering up sequences everyday. At this stage the working title was **<sos>**. This later became **test pattern:eurovision**, which has now become simply **eurovision**.

The possibilities of how to make the video interactive were discussed at length with one of my former supervisors, CSIRO's Craig Lindley, who was working on interactive video. However the problems associated with using their (CSIRO's) somewhat early-stage application software, coupled with the fact that it was written for platforms I didn't use and that would be generally difficult to obtain in other public contexts (for example hardware like Sun Computer Systems, Silicon Graphics or other unix type hardware) and may be unstable in a gallery context, coupled with the fact that Craig was then to be leaving for the Starlab Research Centre in Brussels, meant that we decided it best that, at that stage of the project's conceptual development (mid-2000), I just stay with

commercially available software like Macromind Director or DVD authoring software that was just then becoming more available.

In September 2000 I had been invited to attend the screening of **lovehotel** at the World Wide Video Festival (WWVF) in Amsterdam. I initially traveled to Berlin. Here I was able to learn some new skills, mainly streaming video, and be amongst people at Berlin's microlab which is something akin to a media resource lab. I met up with a person who built the streaming server for ZKM, and I got a password for that system. I took a lot of images in Berlin, including the exterior of the Jewish Museum which hadn't yet opened, and on the way there at Singapore airport. After Amsterdam and the WWVF I flew to New York. Again here I met up with streaming people at NY's Location One, a gallery and media lab, and organised to stream **lovehotel** from their server as well. I then traveled on to Banff Centre for the Arts in Canada to give a key note address at the *Living Architectures* conference. This event was to prove influential on the direction of my work and in particular, the dissertation.

This third trip furthered the research objectives in many different ways. One, I shot a lot of new digital stills for **eurovision**. Two, the experience of attending the WWVF in Amsterdam (five days of video screenings), showing **lovehotel** and being able to discuss it and other video work with peers was great in terms of gaining confidence in the style I was developing. Being at microlab was inspiring as many people from all over the world were there, pushing the media boundaries, as they were at Banff. The conference was excellent for refocusing on architecture and media in space, and getting an in-depth update on contemporary projects in the field. These three sites/events were like nodes in some kind of global flow, bring the new into being.

Upon returning I began to work on getting **lovehotel** to stream from these various servers, and also was able to stream it from the linux box in my own office. One thing which came out of this streaming experience was a better appreciation of the notion of truth to materials and what this means in the world of digital technology, various softwares and most importantly in this context, compression algorithms. **lovehotel**, when compressed for different players, that is, Real and Quicktime, had a different look, and then when this was combined with compression for the different bandwidths (that is, 28K modem, 56 K, ISDN and T1) the differences within these versions of **lovehotel** are remarkable. I found this research quite compelling.²⁵

Going through the streaming experience opened up a lot of new spaces for **lovehotel**. Within days of it being on the ZKM server a curator, Christine Wang, from New York wanted to include it in an exhibition called *Dystopia and Identity in the Age of Global Communications* at Tribes Gallery, NY, which she duly did as a streaming file. Amanda McDonald Crowley, former director of ANAT showed the streaming version of **lovehotel** at a Sydney conference rather than playing a version from tape. She preferred the streaming aesthetic which came into its own when projected large, even though much of the detail was lost, particularly of the text. Going down this streaming path gave me a certain perspective which was to emerge in the subsequent construction of **eurovision**.

Questions around the modernist notion of 'truth to materials' and how this works in a digital environment began to haunt **eurovision**. Where the materials may have began as separate entities – for example, scanned material, digital stills, text, film footage shot in the late fifties but digitised from a well-used, subtitled VHS tape hired from the local video store – in the digital environment they are all just the same material, data. Hence, at one level the digitisation process does destroy the unique 'materiality' of the source

elements, that is, they are no longer a piece of video tape, however as I will argue their materiality is written all over them, so to speak. It is there in the textures and ambiances. All their pasts are present – for example, take the Godard film: the transmission interruptions/scan lines afforded the digitised image by the vagaries of old worn VHS tape, and indeed a further, deeper layer of materiality is there in the unique colours of the image shot on film in 1967 on Panavision film.

This comprehension became a kind of cross roads. How to make sense of the idea of ‘truth to materials’ in the digital environment in such a situation? The answer that I began to develop is one which is further articulated in the dissertation, following Deleuze and Guattari, that ‘truth to materials’ in our time proceeds by way of *contagion*.²⁶ The concept shifts away from a notion of ‘pure’ materiality to one which is suffused with post-colonial hybridity and strange alliances, at both the levels of ‘media’ – firstly, the content, in all its cultural, mediated complexity, and secondly, the media itself, that is, the recording medium (for example, the film or the tape itself), coupled with the recording device (the camera and lenses, or the sound recording device and microphones). This then leads to the complex potentials for meta-media critique.

eurovision begins as ‘that which cannot be contained’

In the mid-year 2000 trip I had traveled up to northern Holland. With some friends we visited a number of sites thought to have been pagan. Many churches were in fact built on them. On a holiday to Siracuse in Sicily, I saw that the Temple of Athena now housed a monstrous church, having been successively rebuilt on that same spot for centuries by

various cultures. I was struck by the obvious layering of European cultures, sites, spaces, meaning, and its strange parallels somehow to digital re-processing.

I was particularly interested in Euro-pagan times and in what it might have felt like to be outcast from the group. Basically, this idea was one that I dreamed the first night I spent in Berlin. After flying for about 30 hours, and in a state of dislocation after having a severe migraine attack at Frankfurt Airport, in Berlin I woke up with it in my mind – the idea of the fear of being the one who might be cast out, quite a primal human fear. In the dream, it was not me who was being cast out, but another woman. I was aware that this person in the dream was in fact a woman who had been stalking myself and my partner on every communication channel we had, since 1998 (for him, longer). She was indeed being locked out of various internet lists as people who were aware of her activity didn't want her to use the lists as another stalking vehicle. Actually the original dream was of women casting out another woman, and at the time of the dream the discussion that was going on about the stalker was to do with a women's only internet list called Faces.²⁷ The moderators did not want the stalker on this list and hence had barred her. The whole experience of being stalked was, and is still, disturbing.

Groups and communities always articulate themselves through the construction of difference, it is a fundamental human organisational trait, this functioning of an inside and an outside. I wrote about this community idea in 1998 for the nettime *README* publication (a piece called "other eurocentricisms.") In the dissertation I discuss the idea of the construction of various media communities at length. In 2000 I began to think about how this might be realised in the form of the third work, the interactive video. I had in mind to shoot a narrative sequence of material – I had an image of a woman being forcibly removed from a fire, taken away from the group by tough hands, just showing

different shots, as different aspects of the scene, that is, long shot, then close-up for example as a 2D plane, just this simple story, told as if from a dream, enclosed on both sides by 3D forms of airports and other transitional spaces from the series of European still images taken in 2000.

The work was to be a triptych. Each of the three segments of the story of the woman being removed from the fire and from the group was to be top and tailed with similar elements, starting with images to do with going to Europe, that is getting there – Singapore and Bangkok airports, also Frankfurt (Frankfurt was the scene of the 2002 “no person is illegal campaign” as many illegals come into Europe via Frankfurt Airport.) Each ‘story’ would then end with an Australian landscape sequence. This landscape was to just be itself, a long still shot which at some point, a barely discernable spherical 3D form was to ‘push through’ into the image, reshaping it as it moved around the landscape, as if from behind the curtain of the real.

Each piece of the triptych would give us more of the story, until after the third piece, the viewer would be able to reconstruct the whole.

The initial ideas outlined above gradually expanded as I ran further tests on the material. It developed to a point where I wanted to include selections from the following elements:

- the images which I had shot on three trips to Europe in the year 2000. These included still images and a number of the type of small 15 second MPG2 movies which the digital still camera can make.
- a video of the *Eurovision Song Contest*, 2000, taped from the television.

- a documentary on Russian space technology which I had for a long time wanted to work with as their technology and approach to space exploration was so different to the American approach.
- the Australian landscape, as somehow remaining untouched by any forms of cultural colonialism. It just keeps on going on the way it always had (unless it is being mined, sold or blown up, that is).

Then I decided to use – as material for tests – two films: Godard's 1967 film *Two or Three Things I Know about Her* and Bergman's famous 1957 film *The Seventh Seal*.

The Bergman of course had the witch scenes from the medieval times I was interested in to do with the outcast idea, as well as the scenes of Christian processions and ritual flagellation.

Ever since thinking about the issues raised by the *Living Architectures* paper from Banff, particularly the concept I had posited of 'architectural media space,' I wanted to try to achieve 3D and interdimensionality in realspace as well as in the digital environment. So I began to project the test video onto the walls of my apartment in Kingston in Canberra and then reshoot that. As well, projecting sequences from the two films I had begun to cut up. I'd position the projector's light to fall on various corners, the intersection of ceiling and walls or the support columns in various rooms, then shoot that image as it distorted and wrapped around the architectural space. Then, in the edit suite, I'd apply various effects and cut ups to that reshot material and work with layering.

Then I began to digitize and cut up the Bergman even further, as well as the Godard and moved away from the projection/reshoot material. It occurred to me that I could use this

material to achieve a piece which dealt with the ideas I had in mind initially, without shooting more material. As it was, there was a consistency possible by just resampling the two films. In around November 2000 I decided to stick to these two films, and pull from them the interesting shots to make a series of sequences which, when all were played, the viewer would get some kind of coherent narrative, though of course this would be a new one to the two original films.

The period from 1957 to 1967 is a curious time – the crisis of faith (Vatican II in 1963), the impact of 50s post-war existentialism within Europe and abroad, the space race from the Russian perspective (as their technology and thinking was so radically different to the US), the impact of the United States and the Marxist analysis leading to events of May '68, the growth in advertising, theories of representation, semiotics and post-structuralism, modernism and its perceived failure and the beginning of notions of a European Union. These were some of the threads I became interested to explore in this work. Also of course the impact of television – the period from 1957 to 1967 encompasses this beginning – and visual culture in general. Strangely this period also roughly marks the rise and fall of the Situationist movement.

The *Eurovision Song Contest* began with the introduction of television, and was one of the defining televisual events giving Europe a sense of itself through media. Families would sit around the television, and as the jingle was played a notion of a live Europe would form as various of the countries came online via the live satellite link.

I had a tape of the *Eurovision Song Contest* from 2000. These are now considered extremely amusing international television events, to the general dismay of many Europeans, who would be surprised to find that Australians have been known to

organise parties around the night of the screening. It reminded me a lot of the kind of ways this version of Euroculture found its way onto Australian television in the sixties, pre-SBS and wide-ranging travel....I am thinking here of programs like *Variety Italian Style* with early versions of big hair and dramatic torch songs. A large proportion of the television I watched growing up was American, outside of what my parents watched. However, as discussed in the chapter 1 of the dissertation, in Europe, the Europeans didn't really receive any American television, their TV was largely state controlled and tended to be nation-based.

The video work **eurovision** articulates a small slice of European psychic space from the period 1957 to 1967. It was a psychic space that was exported as well as being popular on the continent. European film culture tended to be delivered to Australian audiences in the sixties and seventies via the film festival circuit or the Arthouse cinemas. To a largely English-only speaking audience these films were subtitled. This is indeed how I received European culture as a teenager. For example, I learnt Japanese at school, not French.

By including the subtitles of the Bergman and Godard films I was using text as a graphic element. I began to cut up scenes. It then became an editing process, with similarities to **lovehotel**. I had 5 sections, then three, then more than five – finally it began to kind-of sort itself out after months of playing with it. The work became an exercise in understanding the construction of narrative. Disassembling the films in the digital environment makes it clearer how the story was put together, then putting them back together in different ways constructs whole new narrative plots and subplots.

The landscape material: I had thought I might run sequences of Australian bush through all of the segments, or just at the end, so I went out and shot a lot of material. Each

sequence was (back to the first plan) going to end with slow shots of the bush. The idea was that the 'culture' never really told us what was behind that curtain of the world we saw, the one we looked out onto (this refers to Maturana's ideas from chapter 1 of the dissertation). Since the texts of the films dealt with death, the limits of consciousness and language, it seemed possible to use the bush idea in this way, as some kind of logical conclusion or 'answer' to that which is without any answer.

Ironically, in a 'that which can't be contained' kind-of way, the bush material looked completely appalling when digitised. It looked even worse when run through the various sequences as a design element. I found out much later that such things as leaves with the wind blowing through them are the most difficult thing for video compression to handle, this exact thing – leaves blowing in the wind, or sunlight on water – as light playing on the small surfaces changes so rapidly it is impossible for the video compression algorithms to handle it. I had to abandon that idea. I also had tried to use some of the material I had re-shot from projecting the sequences onto walls, but I decided after a while that this was not working.

Given my lack of formal Art School training, particularly in composition, I didn't realise that the square format is one of the most difficult to work with. The Bergman is more square than rectangle, and the later Godard is cinemascope (rectangular) which lends itself so much more elegantly to being cut up and reframed. The process of making the work was becoming more and more a composition issue, that is, how to work with the rectangle and the square within the PAL frame. And also how to most effectively use the repeat for both 'compositional' issues but also for the narrative emphasis – to set up primary and secondary narrative threads or lines.

Truth to materials: this question becomes even more complex when one is sampling images rather than generating 'originals.' I decided, in general, to be as 'true' to my source material as possible. By this I meant that I decided to not cut into (that is, to cut inside and manipulate to radically change) sequences and/or change them too much. I do however make new narrative constructions to a greater or lesser extent throughout the work.

The two films are of very different styles. One is black and white and the other colour. One is more traditional, in terms of shot setup, framing and transitions from one shot to the next, the other is really experimenting with montage in, for 1967, radical ways. Most of Bergman's shots dissolve into the next one, whereas Godard uses hard cuts all the time. Bergman sets up each scene with the classic 'establishing shot' leading to various mid-shots and close-ups, combined with lots of elaborate camera movement and single takes, whereas Godard's camera does not move so much. The Godard is made dynamic by the surprises within the shot, within the sequences and within the narrative itself.

I got to know the two films as I recut them in the digital environment, which is more akin to a database (chapter 4 of the dissertation looks at this aspect of digital production). To this environment all the material is of the same order, that is, digital information. Be it a series of stills, a bit of Bergman or Godard or shots digitised from the television programs (*Eurovision* or the Russian space technology documentary) – it is all the same from the point of view of the digital environment. It is just data. This was perhaps an obvious but nonetheless curious fact that was made increasingly apparent to me.

Getting the combined sequences down to around 18 minutes or so was a challenge, as was the issue of how to combine the other material I had with the Godard and Bergman sequences. This 'other' material was basically secondary to the primary material of the two films, and acts to enhance and frame the primary narrative.

As far as the stills go, they are true to a certain time, that is, my time in Europe in the year 2000. From these I have selected images which I think enhance the primarily material. There are many other things which could have been selected from other sources, but the sources I had chosen to use for this work were to be drawn from the image material I shot in Europe in 2000. This was one of the conceptual parameters of the work.

The inclusion of *Eurovision Song Contest* from 2000 gives the images shot by myself in 2000 a certain logic. It was taped from the television – Europe came to Australia at that point. A Eurovision sequence introduces each of the four segments. The countries of France and Sweden are selected as this is where Godard and Bergman originate from respectively, as well as Germany and Russia as the space technology images are Russian, and some of the still images used are shot in Germany (as well as the fact that the German entrant was extreme). Each of the *Eurovision Song Contest* sequences act as a transitioning device to enter the new 'recombinant' (a term used by artist Bill Seaman) narratives of the two films. There is no link from the Eurovision contestant to what follows, that is, the German singer does not herald anything to do with Germany, or a 'German' section. They are like random elements (but as mentioned before, there is a logic in the choices of countries). They are devices to introduce segments, with no real narrative causal connection to what then follows. In this way they are anti-narrative, and

when they are used as they are in the interactive version, as the menu icons, become 'anti-interactive' – defying interactive conventions and expectations.

From the Bergman I drew out the character of the knave, the knight's assistant. I had tried to work in the crisis of faith of the Max Von Sydow character, but it was too long and ponderous. I had also focused initially on the Death character and the way it manipulated events but this either had to be a main focus of the work – or if not, it diluted the other narrative threads.

Instead I increasingly focused on the knave character, with his hard somewhat cynical realist world view, deeply existentialist, and on the story of the witch. I was interested in these witch sequences for their sheer horror, in terms of how humans have constructed an other to 'blame' for the woes that collectively befall them, as the witch was said to have caused the plague that the land was in the grip of. Of course, the fact that it is female sexuality which is so dangerous here is obvious. The witch was said to have had sex with the devil. I was particularly interested in the way the film articulates the role of capital and the church in defining, constructing and maintaining this relation of the witch as 'other,' again, the construction of an inside and an outside. In one sequence, within the frame, the witch in the stocks is montaged with images shot of the new Jewish Museum in Berlin. Jews were also blamed for the plague.

This thread is then articulated again though differently in the 1967 Godard film. What Godard does is more talk about the domestic politics of his characters in relation to the capitalist order he perceived France to be increasingly living under. Such analysis by Godard and others was exemplified and culminated in the May '68 movement, and is of course as relevant now as it ever was.

Other threads the work picks up are the relation of images to language and to representation, and of course to thought, being and death. All the other sequences deal with this – the long ‘coffee’ sequence of Godard’s, the thought and being sequence, and the long Bergman sequence to do with painting.

Each of the four sequences is then ‘finished’ by a 15 second MPG movie shot in the heart of contemporary Europe, at Brussels Central railway station which is fairly ordinary compared to other European Central stations. Each of the four shows some kind of movement. Again the subject I touched on earlier to do with truth to materials plays itself out here. These movies are low resolution, and so when played at full screen really break up. I decided to break them up even further by consistently applying an unsharpen mask filter in After Effects – *contagion* by software. All the sequences from the Bergman and the Godard have been masked, many of the primary shots within the frame of the Bergman have had the contrast increased and the focus sharpened, however the Godard sequences remain largely untouched by image filters – they are just cleaned up around the edges for a sharper look.

the sound

I worked with Shane Fahey who owns the Sydney recording studio Megaphon. We had been talking about the project for a long time, and we met several times in 2000 to discuss it.

I began sending him images that I was working on in January 2001, and we talked further about the time, and about what was happening in music around that time, from '57 to '67, particularly in France. This was mainly black American jazz.

He send me a CD to listen to of electronic music and sound from 1937 to the seventies (including for example, John Cage), and I put some of this on some of the sequences for tests. However jazz seemed to work really well, particularly open percussion sounds. I had been listening to the four **eurovision** sequences with a Ninja Tunes jazz-style track most of the time.

On March 5 2001 we went into the studio for a week to record the soundtrack. Shane used some of the sound from the original films as well as new live music from a jazz outfit called Out of the Hat. For this, I arranged to get a projector into the studio to project the video sequences (which were then just under twenty minutes). The musicians then played alongside, generating tunes in response to the video. This went on for some days until there was a signature-style tune for the work, and enough other material to work with. The result is a very 'live' sound, into which Shane cut, reordered, engineered and sampled.

The complexity of the soundtrack moves the video along, and twenty minutes go past very quickly.

eurovision as a linear version of an interactive narrative

eurovision works best as a single channel work, however, because I set out originally to make an interactive narrative, I did press the video material to DVD as an interactive. The interactive interface is extremely simple. The main menu shows each of the four Eurovision Song Contest performers. The user chooses a performer, then gets something quite unexpected, or a sequence that doesn't necessarily relate to the original menu item. After the sequence has played through it reverts to the menu where another item is chosen until all four sequences have been played and the entire 'narrative' has unfolded. It is structured so that you can see any of the four sequences in any order.

As a classic interactive it is frustrating for the viewer as they want more interactive tricks from it, and it doesn't give them. I did show it as a DVD interactive in Sydney one evening at a performance night at Casula Powerhouse, but prefer it as the linear version of the interactive narrative. This way people just sit back and enjoy the work for a twenty minute period – they don't have to worry "have we seen this one or that one?" an anxiety which is deeply disruptive to the pleasure of viewing. Instead they just watch, and immerse themselves in the work.

It is a work which builds up layers over time – the more pieces you look at, in whatever order, the more of the story you get – but you get it in a convoluted manner. It loops around, back, then forward, it doesn't just give you more linear direction, but keeps making connections across the segments to built a horizontality of narrative construction (and diagonal) as well as a verticality.

In **eurovision** one 'gets' the narrative by having it repeat itself and fold in over itself with each sequence. It is not like a classic narrative, neither is it like the commonly understood 'interactive' narrative experience, where each new sequence takes us further on in the classic linear narrative pattern. It is a start, a move, toward interactive narrative, by more deeply understanding what has been done before with 'classic' narrative.

eurovision as a conceptual prototype for multiple streams into the frame

eurovision is also very much an emergent network form of expression for multiple streams into the frame. And here I want to make perfectly clear that I am talking about streaming video over the internet, not simply just making 'multiple narratives into the frame' – techniques which have been advancing since the 1980s advent of machines like the Quantel Paintbox and are seen in the work of, for example, Peter Greenaway. What **eurovision** does is offer a conceptual prototype for video streaming over a high bandwidth connection. Peter Greenaway and many others experimented with 'multiple streams of narrative' into the frame which are all composited/rendered together onto one piece of footage. What I am meaning here by 'multiple streams into the frame' is literally separate image streams, discreet units of footage streaming 'into place' over the internet and into one frame (or one screen). In this way **eurovision** becomes compositional research – how to devise templates and compositional strategies for such multiple streams into the one frame – streams which would in fact be being called from a database and 'slot into' templates or otherwise unique compositions. At the time I was working on **eurovision**, it was not easily possible to render on the fly, that is, to create

elaborate multi-layered composites from a database selection and have them render as they go out over the network. So the design approach **eurovision** takes is one of composing multiple PAL size 'windows' (that is, the small rectangles) into a single frame. It is a conceptual prototype as of course they are not actually streaming, but the work gives an idea of what such 'multiple stream into one frame' could look like. Ways of rendering on the fly and mixing video streams over the network are becoming more available through developments in VJ culture but these are not yet operating at very high resolution. **eurovision** is of course also narrative research – how to devise narrative strategies to suit such a type of delivery where the streams could be either being called up in tight, scripted sequences or they could be being called randomly, or somewhere in-between. **eurovision** in this sense was a turning point in my understanding of the potential of high-end video streaming from a database/server.

Each individual element in **eurovision** can be thought of as streaming to the viewer, over the network as if the screen is a large computer terminal/screen. The data comes *at* the viewer, rather than playing back across the heads or another linear delivery method. This idea clarified as I went further into the process of making the work and was clearly influenced by the streaming **lovehotel** experience, and by having such fast and reliable network access at DCS. I also believe that, in retrospect the DCS environment itself, and the my conversations with the people there enabled this kind of thinking to emerge. Though we rarely if ever spoke about art...

This is an area of real technological research, how to get multiple streams into one single frame. The Internet Futures group at DCS in Canberra will begin to work now on this precise thing and I will work with them on this. The issues are around how to get the streams synchronized and in the right places within the frame. **eurovision** and its

experiments with multiple narrative into the frame could provide content and design templates for such experiments, and in fact after a screening of the work²⁸ I was approached by the Distributed Systems Cooperative Research Centre based at the University of Queensland with the view of them adapting the work for a similar research project. These and other such possibilities are what was meant when I stated in the introduction that I was influenced, after having been in DCS for three years, by the idea that research is that of 'technical problems to be solved.'²⁹

There are clearly all manner of ways artists can work with scientists, however the risk is that the artists' idea of research could be compromised in the process, as there may be some pressure for the artist to produce something that is readily understood. For example, the artists may have to produce something akin to art as entertainment, to be enjoyed by all. It would take a fairly sophisticated team approach to make such collaborations work for the artist and for their research. At present there are few places in Australia where an artist can enjoy the same conditions as a scientist to perform their research, in terms of wages, freedom to experiment, and access to reliable equipment and technicians, for example.

screenings

Like **lovehotel**, **eurovision** has been screened all over the world. Berlin's transmediale, according to artistic director Andreas Broeckman, is Europe's most significant media festival. In 2002 it was nominated for the Image Award, one of three works from an international field of over 600. The two other nominees were a Spanish animator called

Juan F. Romero and a group of four VJ/sound men called the 242.pilots. There were five honorable mentions in the Image Award category, including works by Coco Fusco and Lev Manovich.

The three judges for the (AU) ten thousand dollar award said this of their task:

The starting point for the jurying of the 'Image' category for this year's prize, the search for 'innovative contributions to the development of moving images in the age of the digital, interactive and network based media can hardly be translated into a pragmatic series of criteria for judging or even classification, based on actual competition entries. The expansion of the notion of the image has made the fixing and demarcating of the visual, if only hypothetically, much more complicated.

Globalisation is prevalent in the language of the visual as our terms of reference and knowledge become similar. Our historical trust in the image as arbiter of truth is satirized through re-appropriation, the 'appearance of authenticity' becomes a software filter and truth or the quest for it has been transferred from the image itself to its means of production and dissemination. Images have become a complex language of related knowledges requiring understanding of the context, knowledge of histories, politics, technological developments and possibilities. But the resonance of images is so powerful and so appealing to our physiological attraction to visual beauty, rhythm and our intrigue with space and time still elicit a gut reaction rather than solely a cerebral response.

For this reason, the discussion about the entries focused on the question of the positioning of an image, not stylistically or aesthetically, but rather within its cultural context - to what extent can a kind of 'politics of the signifier' (Benjamin Buchloh) appear? Above all, this locus of the image, the starting point of its circulation and meaning production, is at the center of what needs to be constructed.³⁰

Of **eurovision** they said:

***eurovision** takes the Eurovision Song Contest out of the year 2000, a topos of the European popular culture, as the starting point for a general research about the different image cultures of television, video and film and juxtaposes this in a stringent image organisation whereby a number of arguments and contexts are placed side by side. Above all, the jury was convinced by the sovereignty of this 'montage' and the stringent content of the reference material.*

eurovision is now touring with the transmediale program to places such as Spain, New Zealand, Poland, England, Australia, India and Hong Kong. **eurovision** will show at the 2004 Biennial of Video and New Media in Santiago de Chile, the only Australian work in the Biennial. Like **lovehotel**, **eurovision** is often the only Australian work to be screened in various festivals, and as such, I would say it is possible that both works are having more international screenings than any other contemporary Australian video works, largely due to their inclusion in touring programs. Both **lovehotel** and **eurovision** are now entering collections in Australia and elsewhere.

eurovision: summary in terms of themes of the dissertation

In terms of the themes of the dissertation, **eurovision** investigates space in a number of ways. The space of European cultural exports is a key idea, the space of language and language as subtitle is another. A period of time (1957 to 1967) is selected as something which was exported into space, the space of Australia. In terms of 'truth to materials' in the digital environment what we see is the texture of old ragged public video-library VHS tape with all its glitches, transformed into digital material, combined with other visual textures taped off television and stills pristine in their capture by a digital camera. We see the MPG compression of the small movie files, manipulated to enhance their inherent grain. In terms of the idea of the content of one medium being another medium, here we have cinema, digital stills and television reworked to produce a new, digital video work. **eurovision** is a conceptual prototype for an entirely new type of delivery, that of multiple networked video streams into the frame. Interestingly for all the work I did initially with 3D in After Effects, **eurovision** is completely flat 2D. This is a result of what became the new concerns of multiple streams of media into the frame. **eurovision** relates to the dissertation (and to **lovehotel** in particular) in the way that it seeks to both make apparent – and in fact build – new relations by turning old or 'other' media into new and emergent media forms.

report conclusion

The ideas in the dissertation have been informed by the development of the studio works. In a way the dissertation is the fourth work, having been written well after finishing **eurovision** in early 2001. This studio research heads into the territory of the dissertation. Particular themes were emerging and strengthening over the course of the completion of the works, such as truth to materials, ideas around space and community as well as media reuse and the implications of this in terms of McLuhans' insight that within every medium are other, past media.

What was clearly emerging in **eurovision** is the idea of mediated communities. This was present from the development of **PROBE** and also clearly apparent in **lovehotel**, though it really reaches a distillation with **eurovision**, which is carried forward and given theoretical basis in the dissertation.

The research studio works led to the posing of the dissertation question of what is different now about the media and artists' reuse of media. The studio works presented here do what Lev Manovich suggests:

At the end of the day, if new media artists want their efforts to have a significant impact on cultural evolution, they indeed to generate not only brilliant images or sounds but more importantly, solid discourse. That is, they need to situate their works in relation to ideas that are not only about the techniques of making these works. The reason that we continue discussing Duchamp's urinal or as Paik's

early TV sculptures as though these works were created today has nothing to do with the artistic and technological skills of these artists – it has to do with their concepts, that is, the discursive statements these artists were making through their objects. In short, if modern and contemporary art is a particular discourse (or a game) where the statements (or moves) are made via particular kind of material objects identified as “artworks,” digital artists need to treat their works as such statements if they are to enter the larger cultural conversation. This means referring to the historical and presently circulating statements in the fields of contemporary art and/or contemporary culture at large.³¹

The works can be said to be contributing to dialogue in these ways: **PROBE** is articulating and opening up the new spaces of enclosure of the nation state and also the technological reality we all now live within, **lovehotel** is in dialogue with ideas of presence, new literacies and definitions of location and geography, and **eurovision** is an update on historical art appropriation strategies. It speaks from a position that we live inside media, that we are mediated. It is also to do with seeing Europe from the periphery. All works raise by implication questions to do with what it means to be an ‘Australian’ at this point in history.

The three works constitute artifacts from a digital age. They are material media. Their media materialities flow into each other in the digital environment carrying traces of their histories with them. These histories are not just at the level of ‘content’ but are at the level of the materiality of the ‘original’ media, for example the tape or film stock, and the historic materiality of the cameras and recording devices – central the history of the image. These ‘apparatus of capture’³² frame spatial and temporal fragments from an ‘outside’ world (and of course now an inner world) and record these to the ‘inside’ of the

device. These recordings are then burnt into our consciousness and become the way our histories are written. Indeed, as Jonathan Crary articulates so brilliantly in *Techniques of the Observer*³³ “vision and its effects are always inseparable from the possibilities of an observing subject who is both the historical product and the site of certain practices, techniques, institutions, and procedures of subjectification.”³⁴

¹ Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Cambridge (Mass.): The MIT Press, 2000, pg 58

² Ibid., pg 45

³ Ibid., pg 45

⁴ Ibid., pg 55

⁵ http://www.machinehunger.com.au/china_trip98/realtime.html

⁶ link to essay from <http://www.machinehunger.com.au/probe/>

⁷ http://www.machinehunger.com.au/china_trip98/realtime.html

⁸ http://www.machinehunger.com.au/china_trip98/index.html

⁹ http://www.machinehunger.com.au/china_trip98/internet.html

¹⁰ to see media report on **PROBE** website, got to exhibition link, then link from new menu to media coverage <http://www.machinehunger.com.au/probe/>

¹¹ to see invitation card on **PROBE** website, got to exhibition link

<http://www.machinehunger.com.au/probe/>

¹² <http://www.machinehunger.com.au/probe/>

¹³ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, “Rhizome”, *On the Line*, Semiotexte, 1983

¹⁴ In an email sent on November 30, 1999 to David Williams (Head of the ANU Art School) and to Nigel Lendon (Graduate Convener) and Martyn Jolly, sinologist and Senior Fellow, Division of Pacific and Asian History at ANU, Geremie Barme says:

I've been following Linda's adventures in China for nearly two years now and am very impressed by her energy and innovative skills in putting on such a superlative show in one of the hardest environments for contemporary art – how easy for Chinese artist to show internationally, but how difficult for cutting-edge foreign work to be displayed in China.

I have a number of friends who are electronic-video artists in China and have heard very positive responses to the show from them as well. I've also noticed that PROBE garnered extraordinary media coverage in the Chinese capital, from print media (all the major Chinese and English papers ran stories) as well as the electronic media (including the hard-to-get-on-to China Central Television). Quite a feat at a time of great unrest and tight security around the celebrations of the 50th Anniversary of the People's Republic. (excerpt)

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- ¹⁵ transcript from ABC radio interview (cited online on October 30, 2003)
<http://www.abc.net.au/arts/digital/stories/s736168.htm>
- ¹⁶ 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
- ¹⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pg 241
- ¹⁸ This is the way they describe their gestation in their publicity materials. It used to be on their page at <http://www.sysx.org/>, but as of July 2004 that page is not there. A similar idea is expressed at http://www.heise.de/tp/english/pop/topic_0/4027/2.html
- ¹⁹ The four VNS Matrix members sat at a long desk on the stage and read out text from an imaginary MOO encounter set in various rooms and spaces. Many of their familiar net-entities were present -- one of the characters I recall was 'beige guest', spoken by Virginia Barrat with characteristic disdain. For more on these early explorations see <http://www.sysx.org/gashgirl/>
- ²⁰ Sally Jackson, "Dodging the hail of homophones," Media section, *The Australian* newspaper, October 30 2003
- ²¹ <http://www.mediascot.org>
- ²² Ursula Biemann, (ed.) *Stuff it: the video essay in the digital age*, Institute for Theory of Art and Design, Zurich, 2003
- ²³ Linda Wallace, (ed.) *testpattern:::* booklet, 2004, or link to essay from <http://www.machinehunger.com.au/lovehotel>
- ²⁴ www.nl-design.net
- ²⁵ To see the various versions of lovehotel please go to: <http://ova.zkm.de/perl/ova-prep?skrit=genre&dep=science%20fiction&access=query>
- ²⁶ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987, pg 241
- ²⁷ <http://faces-l.net/>
- ²⁸ *Protection* screening program, Museum of Contemporary Art, November 11-13 2002
- ²⁹ Discussed further on pg 6 of this report.
- ³⁰ www.transmediale.de
- ³¹ Lev Manovich, "Don't Call it Art: Ars Electronica 2003", Rhizome (cited online 20/9/03) <http://www.rhizome.org/thread.rhiz?thread=10269&text=20140#20140>
- ³² Vilem Flusser, *Towards a Philosophy of Photography*, London: Reaktion Books, 2000
- ³³ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer*, Cambridge (Mass.): The MIT Press, 1998
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, pg 5