

MULTIMEDIA MULTICULTURALISM AND THE ARTS

A discussion paper from the Australia Council

December 2003

An updated version of a discussion paper prepared for the Australia Council in 1998, entitled *A Multicultural Superhighway?*

Dr Bill Cope
Director, Common Ground Publishing

Professor Mary Kalantzis
Dean, Faculty of Education, Language and Community Services
RMIT University

Dr Christopher Ziguras
Research Fellow, Globalism Institute
RMIT University



Contents

Findings and recommendations **4**

Introduction **7**

Issues

Project methodology

Multimedia, multiculturalism and the arts: defining the terms of discussion **10**

'Multimedia'

'Multicultural'

Utopias

Dystopias

Illusions

Paradoxes

Multimedia developments and multicultural arts in Australia **21**

Multimedia facts

Access to the machines and the know-how

Access to new creative possibilities

Multicultural/multimedia: artists' needs

Multicultural/multimedia: suggestions for change

References **31**

Findings and recommendations

Findings

This discussion paper, and the investigations upon which it is based, suggest four, alternative meanings of 'multimedia', as:

1. A technological system that is able to transmit and run interactive programs that combine image, text and audio
2. The convergence of previously distinct media based on common digital systems of recording, transmission and representation
3. Multimodal representation
4. Programs with non-linear narrative structure that is shaped by user interaction

It is possible to have #1 and #2 without #3 and #4, and the reverse. This produces a good deal of policy and practical confusion about what is happening in the multimedia field, and what should be happening.

The paper has also suggested two versions of the multicultural idea:

1. A narrower version, in which the question of *access for non-English speaking immigrant groups* is central

A broader version, in which the thematics and logistics of *pluralism and globalism* make multiculturalism a matter of core or 'mainstream' concern

In the narrower version of multiculturalism, this report finds that there is evidence of significant interest as well need: access to 'computer literacy' (#1); experience in working on digital media (#2); exploring the possibility of extending existing hybrid forms of representation into new, multimodal forms (#3); and the need to experiment with interactive and non-linear forms of expression in the context of art-in-communities (#4)

In a broader view of multiculturalism, there is a need to highlight the centrality of issues of pluralism and diversity in 'mainstream' multimedia developments, including:

- The meaning of the shift, accentuated by multimedia developments, away from the pressures to cultural homogeneity intrinsic to mass media/mass culture, and in the direction of cultural divergence, inherent in narrowcasting, web-based media and other new communication technologies
- The ways in which multimedia is used as an agent of cultural pluralism, within local cultures and across global diasporas and group affiliations; including the extent to which dispersed sites of cultural representation might serve as a counterbalance the forces of cultural centralisation that are just as possible given the nature of the technology and its ownership structures
- The development and application of cutting edge areas of technology, thus creating a working environment where multicultural/multimedia art is more likely to happen:

machine translation, multilingual and multiscrypt browsers, language-less iconic meanings, etc.

- Negotiating the cultural and artistic logistics of increased artist-audience interactivity, including the ways in which the process of allowing a much greater ‘role for the reader’ will lead to new ‘discoveries’ of diversity in audiences and cultural ‘niche markets’
- the development of a larger, pluralist vision for arts policy, which is in its turn conceived as an integral part of the politics cultural democracy.

Recommendations

Crystallising the data that has emerged in the research undertaken for this project, there appear to be a number of practical requirements and possibilities if we are to make progress in the relation of multicultural to multimedia arts:

1. We do need *data on access* of first and second generation non-English speaking background (NESB) immigrants to multimedia equipment and skills. This is a crucial background to issues of access in multicultural arts. And, from the arts perspective, we need data on funding for a) multicultural arts as a proportion of the whole; in both the narrower and broader conceptions of ‘multicultural’, and through both dedicated and ‘mainstream channels; b) multimedia arts as a proportion of the whole of arts funding in all and each of the four definitions proposed here; and c) projects which can be classified as both a) and b), as a proportion of a), b) and the whole of arts funding. Such data is not only crucial to establish current levels of equity in access; it is also a necessary datum point for *benchmarking* progress of any new policies and programs.
2. In bringing about change, the most important starting point appears to be *access to equipment*. This does not necessarily have to involve buying equipment; it might be just a matter of promoting and making available equipment that is already a part of public infrastructure.
3. Having established possibilities of access, *training* is required, from introductory sessions and conferences, to intensive, hands-on experiences.
4. Artists and organisations need also to have a concrete sense of the possibilities in the meeting of multimedia and multicultural arts; not only would this would involve *targeted funding* of exemplary activity, it would also involve devising ways to ensure that this activity gets an audience, not just in communities but across the multicultural and multimedia arts fields generally—funding that based, in other words, not just innovation but on a *multiplier strategy* as well.
5. Peak multimedia and arts organisations must recognise the importance of cultural diversity in multimedia developments in their *policies and mission statements*. Much of the time, absence is a function of not seeing, of being unable to visualise possibilities. The multicultural issues need to be put on the ‘mainstream’ agenda, and this will only happen if the people who drive that agenda realise their increasingly central significance.
6. Mainstream recognition should lead to *partnerships* between multicultural arts organisations and multimedia organisation that come naturally. In the first instance, however, it may be necessary to support these partnerships to develop with the aid of targeted funding for joint ventures.

7. Points 5 and 6 need to be set in the larger context of a global assessment of the future, including the *comparative advantage* Australia has in the areas of multiculturalism and multilingualism. Such strategic thinking, and a strategic pitch to go with it, is necessary in order to attract venture or risk capital in the linking of multicultural and multimedia developments in Australia.
8. *Indigenous links* will also be critical. This is an area where greater recognition has been given to the implications of multimedia developments, and with some very positive results. Particularly in a broader view of cultural pluralism and multiculturalism, strategic partnerships need to be developed linked to indigenous multimedia initiatives.

Finally, as has been suggested by the Australia Council, a series of *focus groups* might be usefully conducted involving people working in the borderlands of multicultural and multimedia arts; these may well prove to be an excellent way to address the above issues, from the 'big picture' ideas and designing practical ways to go forward in the relation of multicultural and multimedia arts.

Introduction

Issues

Historically, information and communication technologies have had enormous cultural effects, from the invention of print reproduction to photography, film, audio recording, radio and television. Each new wave of technological development has produced new forms of artistic expression, as well as transforming the media of expression and ways of seeing inherent in old art forms.

We are in the midst of yet another new wave of technological change, centred around the digitisation of media and communications and the resulting convergence of previously distinct forms of communication and representation. Digital information networks now span the globe, carrying previously unimaginable amounts of textual, visual and audio information. These networks are accessible to an increasingly diverse cross-section of the world's population. Within these ever expanding networks, the term 'multimedia' usually refers to forms of digital content that combine text, image and audio, and allow for user interaction.

However, there is potentially much more to multimedia than simply the ability to combine media forms into one program. The technological developments that have made multimedia possible have also opened up a range of new cultural possibilities. This leads into one of the key questions: is multimedia both a cultural symptom and a cultural agent within larger forces of globalisation which lead to increasing homogeneity; or is it a tool for cultural pluralism? It is one thing to describe the programs and the machines. It is quite another to account for the cultural forces that render the machines useable and that seem to determine our cultural destinies as users of the machines. These are the main questions of theory and definition that we discuss in Section 2 of this paper.

Section 3 goes on to examine the specific issue of the arts in a multicultural society. Here, our opening question is: Do all groups have parity of access to the new information and communication technologies as media of artistic expression?

In relation to NESB immigrant communities in Australia, two alternatives present themselves. On the one hand, the new technologies might restrict access, insofar as the dominant language of the Internet (in Australia) is English and the costs of access are beyond many (a new PC and software every few years, modems, Internet connection). On the other hand, the new technologies have peculiar advantages which might enhance cultural production for NESB immigrant communities. The technologies are rapidly becoming no more expensive than televisions and telephone connections—and these have long been considered a part of a minimal standard of living in Australia. In addition, they can interconnect members of ethnic groups which are geographically dispersed in Australia. They can connect Australians with global diaspora communities at no greater expense than with local communities; many languages and scripts are easily available in digital form; and some uses of the technologies are especially well suited to narrowly focused, 'short run' cultural reproduction, being inexpensive to produce in the first instance and with zero marginal cost for each additional reproduction. All of these aspects of the new technologies may serve to enhance cultural production and reproduction amongst NESB Australian immigrant communities.

This raises a series of related questions that are simply empirical: To what extent have NESB immigrant communities been excluded from access to the new information technologies in artistic production? To what extent have the new information technologies enhanced arts

production and access for these communities? Is there variation in take-up according to different artforms? What is the variation according to older/new established, or larger/smaller groups etc.? To what extent are new or hybrid artforms emerging? How do these compare with developments in 'mainstream' or English language arts which use information and communication technologies, in Australia and internationally?

Beyond this is the larger question of cultural pluralism. An earlier phase of development in information and communication technologies was based on mass media with the effect of creating a mass culture (hence 'broadcasting'). In this context, ethnicity was in some senses a form of resistance to the assimilating tendencies of a mass culture which, in its nature, propagated a singular national identity.

The new information technologies, however, have an effect intrinsic to their character that is quite the opposite of the cultural logic of broadcasting. As much as they create progressively more universal global information transmission systems, these technologies also favour 'narrowcasting'—fostering ever more diverse cultural and subcultural networks, each with its own distinctive forms of cultural and aesthetic expression. The inherent globalism of these technologies, moreover, will allow distinctive new and hybrid cultures to acquire a 'critical mass' at the same time as creating linkages which make diasporas far more tenable and dynamic than was possible in earlier times.

This leads us to a consideration of the mutually defining relationships of culture and technology. To what extent might the new information and communication technologies, against the homogenising forces of globalisation, themselves foster a dynamic cultural pluralism—to which arts communities and arts policies must respond?

Project methodology

The research methodology used in the preparation of this discussion paper included the following elements:

- *Comparative*

We undertook an international Internet search, ranging across many hundreds of sites focusing on the key multimedia concepts as they related to artwork and cultural diversity.

- *Speculative*

We scanned the international theoretical and philosophical literatures on information technologies and cultural pluralism, to develop a speculative overview of the structural interlinkages between the two, with a particular view to investigating the issue of the shift from information technologies more suited to cultural production akin to broadcasting, to cultural production akin to narrowcasting. Our key question in this endeavour was: What are the challenges of pluralism for all producers and consumers of art? We report upon the results of these comparative and speculative endeavours in Section 2 of this paper.

- *Empirical*

We conducted a mail and email survey of 314 multicultural and 'mainstream' arts organisations and artists requesting information regarding:

- Arts developments they may have undertaken using the new information and communication technologies
- Arts developments that use the new information and communication technologies

- Access for NESB immigrant communities in general, and in the case of ethnic community organisations, their own communities in particular; e.g. What partnerships have been formed or might be formed with 'mainstream' media organisations or commercial providers?
- A series of specific questions on the kind of access and training arts organisations might require

We received 45 responses, or a 14.3% response rate. Many of these responses represented whole organisations, and were joint responses or the result of community consultations on the issues raised in the survey.

The results of this survey are described in Section 3 of this paper. As an overall generalisation, there was a huge disjunction between what people said they already knew or did about multimedia in the multicultural arts community (which, they reported, was by and large very little), and enthusiasm for the issues raised and interest in knowing. Perhaps the most important outcome of the survey was to create an expectation that the issue of multimedia developments in the arts was being addressed by the Australia Council. People were very keen to hear of the outcomes of the research we were undertaking, and for the publication of this discussion paper.

- *Programmatic*

Finally, we addressed the practical question of how access of NESB immigrant communities to the new information and communication technologies might be enhanced, including:

- NESB communities and arts organisations: possible impacts, responses and strategies
- Arts for a multicultural society and information technologies in the arts: what are the policy links
- Strategies for the encouragement of partnerships with 'mainstream' media organisations, commercial providers and other technology organisations
- Strategies for seeking resources to support new arts work using the new information and communication technologies
- Training: technical, artistic, commercial, etc.

Our practical conclusions and recommendations are to be found in Section 4 of this discussion paper.

Multimedia, multiculturalism and the arts: Defining the terms of discussion

‘Multimedia’

Here are four ways to define ‘multimedia’:

Definition 1: *Multimedia is a technological system that is able to transmit and run interactive programs that combine image, text and audio.* These systems include individual computers, software applications, communications systems linking computers, and recording and retrieval systems, such as CD-ROMs, DVDs and web servers. In this definition, multimedia is conceived in terms of the mechanics of the information medium.

Definition 2: *Multimedia is the convergence of previously distinct media based on common digital systems of recording, transmission and representation.* Text, audio, still images and video are increasingly created, manipulated stored in digital form. Digitisation is a very recent phenomenon in each medium, dating from the commercialisation over the past couple of decades of word processing, digital phototypesetting, digital audio recording, the compact disc, image scanning, digital image manipulation, printing, photography, video and television transmission. Convergence has meant that one commonly accessible machine—the personal computer—is able to work across previously distinct media, by transmitting, receiving and representing music, voice, text and still and moving pictures. Convergence also means that even those machines still dedicated to one form of representation (such as telephones or television) are developing computer-like qualities, such as interactivity and parallel transmission of text, audio and video signals on demand. As a consequence, qualitatively different kinds of information can now be sourced from the same storage media (such as CD-ROMs, DVDs and Internet servers).

Definition 3: *Multimedia is multimodal representation.* As a consequence of the new information and communication technologies, and convergence of media of storing and representation around digitisation, the grammar and the art of meaning is becoming less located in singular and relatively isolated media of representation than it is a layering of many media, such as language and graphics and sound. This represents a profound shift from linguistic to visual modes of representation in mediated communications, reversing the language-centric tendencies that dominated societies in which print was the main form of mediated communication (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996; Kress 2001). We are on a journey in which visual culture is being revived, albeit in very new forms, while written-textual culture is now more closely integrated with visual culture (see also Cope and Kalantzis 2003).

Definition 4: *Multimedia has a non-linear narrative structure that is shaped by user interaction.* Interactivity allows a higher level of reader/viewer/audience intervention than was possible in older forms of representation and artistic media. Symptomatic of this shift of orientation, the readers/viewers/audiences in multimedia environments are called ‘users’, ‘surfers’ or ‘players’. Associated with this shift of agency in the relationship of production and reception is a movement away from rigidly ‘told’ narratives, to the more open and ‘flexible’ possibilities in which users actively structure the presentation of texts. This involves a logic of multiple branching rather than unilinear directionality; a logic of many possible, user-created paths, rather than a single, author or artist-created end.

These four definitions of multimedia do not simply and comfortably overlay each other. Multimedia machinery (#1) and digital media (#2) are not intrinsically interactive or non-

linear (#4), even though that possibility is clearly immanent. As a consequence, the machines (#1) and the digital medium (#2) can be used for long established forms of representation without significantly impacting on either form or content (#3 and #4)—such as newspapers or art prints; the transition might simply be a matter of increasing productivity and reducing costs. Multimodal representation, moreover, (#3) does not have to be entirely digital, or digital at all. And the relationships of readers/viewers/audiences to representations such as works of art can be transformed in ways analogous to multimedia (#4) without any of the technology (#1 and #2).

In this discussion paper, we use all four definitions. So, one question we ask is who has access to the machines and digital forms of representation (#1 and #2) whether these are used in new, multimodal forms of representation (#3) and audience relationships (#4) or not? Quite another question is whether the domain of ‘multicultural arts’ has been influenced by multimedia developments to the extent that it has moved in the direction of multimodal representation (#3) and interactive or hypertextual relationships of expression (#4).

‘Multicultural’

Employing a narrow definition of multiculturalism, the problem of multimedia in any of its four possible manifestations is one of access. How do groups marginalised on the basis of a difference from the cultural and linguistic mainstream get a chance to play the new, multimedia game—from simply accessing the technology (multimedia #1 and #2), to the creation of innovative multimodal artforms (#3) and audience relationships (#4)? If we adopt a broader definition of multiculturalism, it becomes apparent that cultural diversity in all its guises is a central feature of global information networks.

We will break, for a moment, into a parallel discussion of the nature and consequences of the alternative understandings of multiculturalism.

A Narrower Definition Of Multiculturalism, Implicitly Or Explicitly Addresses ...	A Broader Definition Of Multiculturalism Addresses ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • immigrant disadvantage • the problem of the access of cultural and linguistic ‘minorities’ to opportunities more readily available to those in the cultural and linguistic ‘mainstream’ • neatly bounded ‘ethnic groups’ and the perceived need on the part of governments and community organisations to help people feel they belong by celebrating their difference and promoting ‘ethnic colour’ 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • multiple identities, multiple and overlapping senses of belonging—for all people • diasporas of all kinds, from English or Irish to Armenian or Tamil • multiple cultural origins, multiple chosen affiliations, hybrid cultural re-creations, subcultures, fashions and styles • the broadly global as the relevant domain of cultural diversity ... • ... as well as the minutely local as manifest in the logistics of negotiating all manner of cultural and linguistic differences in local spaces • a new, post-national mainstream, in which negotiating differences, from the local to the global, replaces the simplifying mono-logic of nationalism focused on the nation-state; decline of

	the nation state
... And, As A Consequence, 'Multicultural Arts' Refers To And, As A Consequence, 'Multicultural Arts' Refers To ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • artwork undertaken by artists of non-English speaking immigrants and their children • artwork which revives or recreates traditions of places of origin; hence the ethnic, craft and heritage connotations often ascribed to 'multicultural arts' • artwork which deals with themes of migration and settlement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • artwork, undertaken by anyone, which represents or interrogates cultural pluralism or globalism • avant-garde art addressing pluralism and globalism, just as much as art that explicitly references culture-as-tradition • hybridity and cultural transformation as much as references to cultural origins or ethnic roots • the question of pluralism of expression generally, including Indigenous art • art that challenges the fundamentals of nationalism, or the unitary identity that is supposed to coincide with the geographical nation-state
... So, Using This Narrower Definition Of Multiculturalism, Multimedia Developments Will Require So, Using This Broader Definition Of Multiculturalism, Multimedia Developments Will Require ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing access to multimedia machinery (computers, software—multimedia) • training in forms of representation for which these media are intrinsically suited, such as multimodal, interactive and non-linear • providing another channel for the representation of ethnic diversity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • all that is necessary to meet the multimedia needs of immigrant communities in the narrower version of multicultural arts, plus ... • an acknowledgment that, for artists in every part of the community and working in every artform, multimedia developments intensify the proximity of cultural differences, making global the immediate domain of cultural diversity • an acknowledgment of the intrinsic relation between multimedia developments (the shift from broadcasting to narrowcasting, for instance) and cultural and subcultural divergence (from more strongly integrated diasporas to the creation of more and more obtuse communities of affiliation, fad or fetish) • a recognition that multiculturalism is integral to multimedia, a dominant content theme or underlying anxiety, and inherent in the tangential or dissonant point and click jumps from one community/context/site in the globe to another • a recognition that increasing audience interactivity (multimedia #4) brings invariably divergent subjectivities into the meaning-making process—making cultural and linguistic differences in 'reception' a more prominent issue

The broader line of thought does not supersede the narrower. Rather, the broader understanding of the 'multicultural' includes the narrower. The narrower angle is one take on the politics of ethnicity, and an always-necessary one. It does not fade away within the context of the broader understanding; rather it gains a new significance, a new lustre.

In order to elaborate upon the relationship of multimedia developments to multicultural arts in a broader version of multiculturalism which includes a vibrant multiculturalism in the narrower sense, we need first to take several steps back ...

Utopias

Computers have clearly changed the world in profound ways, yet since the 2000 'dotcom' crash the triumphalist tone and apocalyptic techno-enthusiasm of much of the early writing about the Internet has moderated into a realisation that much has not changed. Nevertheless, it is worth revisiting the utopian visions of early commentators on the cultural impact of multimedia.

The new information and communication technologies, we were told, portend the end of space as we know it. Once we lived in a civic world where you had to go to particular places to do particular things. The infobahn, by contrast is antispacial. It puts an end to geographical and institutional separations. And, with the demise of spatiality, so the social distinctions of space also wither away. Now, for instance, you can live and work anywhere and the distinction between home and work becomes blurred. This spells the end of social distinctions and 'civic legibility'. The bank's facade, the boss's suit and the fancy letterhead are all reduced to the level playing field of web pages and email messages, a kind of vernacular republic.

The new information/communication environment is also asynchronous, unlike the necessary coincidences of time as well as space in the pre-information city. It is, moreover, a place of disembodiment, of messages detachable from bodies and times and places. Without the reference points of the pre-information world, this environment is also a place of easy concealment and multiple identities. Perhaps the cyborg is a key metaphor to capture the physiology of computer connectivity. Perhaps even, the mechanics of the virtual might mean the collapse of the self-other distinction. Or perhaps, the technological trend to miniaturisation that is at the heart of the computer revolution might eventually mean dematerialisation, and a focus on trade in cultural symbols rather than a trade in things. These were some of the philosophical-technological speculations in the literature on computers, information systems and multimedia.

As a consequence, it was argued, forms of representation are also transformed in the new multimedia environment. The form of the message is transformed by the nature of the medium; or perhaps the scope and technological possibilities of the medium create a space for the creation of new forms of message, new ways of seeing and speaking and thinking the world. Gilster (1997) referred to a new, digital literacy which, contrary to the sequential reading of the printed word, is non-linear and discontinuous. We become browsers instead of readers. Information is packaged into screen size fragments, linked by the user's navigational choices. So whereas the stuff of book length arguments and narratives demands sustained attention, multimedia is the stuff of reader-constructed pastiche. Gilster also speaks of new relationships of cultural creators and their audiences. Whereas television is exclusive, he says, the Internet is inclusive; whereas television broadcasts out, the Internet draws users in.

Art, as a consequence, would be transformed. Take, for instance, the relationships between the work of art and its audience. According Sal Humphries (1997), we are now witnessing a transition from the 'simple branching structure of CD ROMs with a point and click

interface' to 'an immersive 3D virtual environment where a user and other people and artificially intelligent creatures co-author a narrative of undecided outcome'. The rise of 'interactive narrative' means a shift in the framework of artistic production and reception in which the 'audience moves from being actively engaged on an interpretative level to actively intervening in the representation'. This means a 'convergence of creator with the spectator'.

And this was de Kerckhove's (1995) characterisation of the transition, referring specifically to the impact of the Internet:

While traditional art activities addressed cognitive and emotional responses through the use of objects or spectacular performances, art on the Net puts the effects before the cause ... and addresses cognition directly in the interactive process which makes every user a partner in the artistic process. Indeed, the notion of 'art on the Net' takes a fuller meaning when the Net itself is used as prime material for the artform. Among the aesthetic qualities specific to networked communications are 'webness' and 'metadesign'.

Andy Cameron (1998) foretold the end of the world as we know it, in which narrative itself comes under challenge. History, politics, memories and even our subjectivity, our sense of identity, he says, are all representations in narrative form—signifiers chained together in temporal, spatial and causal sequence. But, in its very nature, the new regime of interactivity is on a collision course with the old world of narrative. We are in the midst of 'a general transformation from a culture of stories to a culture which expresses its truths through an immersive, interactive medium'. He takes the computer game 'Hellcats' to be paradigmatic. Narrative closure is not inevitable, and has to be fought for; and whereas traditional narrative is of the past, the simulator places the player firmly in the present; and the player is just that—in a position more closely resembling an actor rather than an audience, though without the script. 'Digital computers and digital communications will provide a unified site for first world culture in the near future', he concludes, somewhat enigmatically.

Dystopias

For every multimedia utopia there was, of course, a countervailing dystopian prognosis. For every 1990s techno-enthusiast there was a technophobe, somebody who expressed at least some reasonable cause for anxiety.

Some of the dystopian forewarning came from the enthusiasts themselves, recognising that access to the benefits of the new communications environment would invariably be uneven. Clearly, the world of the information superhighway will be more accessible to some than to others. Such is the way of commerce, and capitalism. So, Lash (1994) writes of the geography of 'wild zones' that are 'communication dead'—from urban ghettos to third world regions. The new information and communication technologies may well be the basis of a new reflexivity—a central concept in Lash's socio-political analysis of our, late modernity. But, in every moment in when new relationships of civic communication and participation are created, a new machinery of exclusion leaves out those who were previously left out in other ways. This is not just a question access to the Internet for poor whites, or women at home, or immigrant minorities; it's also a domestic question of who's holding the remote or the Sega controller. Or who can only afford the copper-wire telephone connections to the 'world wide wait', versus those who can afford fast broadband connections. Here, Mitchell (1995) speaks of a new 'bandwidth disadvantaged'.

Paul Virilio (1997) provided a more systematically dystopian version of our imminent multimedia communications future. The new technologies, in his view, are forms of

'electronic dazzlement: optical, acoustic and tactile', in which the able bodied person is modelled on the 'disabled' person. These technologies make us 'telepresent': a state of being virtually anywhere and everywhere without ever having to leave. The person comes to be like a terminal, 'sedentary man', computer-like man. This leads to a phenomenon he calls dromospheric pollution—from the Greek work 'dromos': running or racing. Telepresence creates forms of contamination in which the space between the object and the subject (the trajectory, or journeying) is abolished. It also leads to the creation of a 'civilisation of forgetting' epitomised in the paradoxical immediate memory in the all-powerful nature of the image—which actually spells the end of traveller's tale and a loss of memory. This world of 'telepresence', or 'trans-appearance', or 'tele-existence', creates an environment in which we are deprived of both horizon and optical density; it is an environment lacking in depth of field. There is no longer a clear distinction between the here and the there, the inside and the outside, the virtual and the real. In the end, we will be living in a 'grey ecology' devoid of regional distinctions, where local cultures are collapsed into the cultural grey of the global dromosphere, and where the exotic has disappeared. As relationships of immediate proximity give way to remote relationships, we make strangers of those close to hand, and we come to experience a 'generalised insecurity of territorial hold'.

Virilio's is a relentlessly totalising technological dystopia. It is a dystopia not just where distance and difference are destroyed. It is also one capable of forms of centralisation of knowledge and power, coupled with systematic surveillance barely imaginable even in Orwell's *1984* dystopia.

There is also, however, a chaotic-fragmentary version of technology-induced dystopia. When every culture or language or subculture and dialect can have its global channel of communication—on cable television or on the web—what common culture will we conceivably share, locally let alone nationally? Not to mention every subcultural group with every conceivable interest, and style, and sense of affiliation. Does the technology lead us into a kind of Babel, of cultural fragmentation where we share less and less with those who are closest to us? Does not the technology promote a fragmenting cultural divergence, quite the opposite of Virilio's oppressive, 'greying', global convergence?

Illusions

Add the utopias to the dystopias and they come out to something like zero. But zero is not the answer; things really are changing. The answer seems to be more like a paradox, and, as we will argue later, a paradox in which the logic of cultural pluralism is central.

Before addressing the nature of this change, there are important respects in which in the technological changes (multimedia definitions #1 and #2) need not make any great cultural or representational difference. In other words, there is no necessary flow-on from the technologies into the multimodal, interactive and non-linear aspects of multimedia highlighted in definitions #3 and #4, even though the technology seems to beg such applications. On the other hand, the cultural effects achieved in multimedia definitions #3 and #4 do not necessarily require new information and communications technology to be realised in some form. That is, in some ways there is nothing so very new about the multimodal, intertextual and non-linear representational forms now being used in interactive multimedia.

For a start, probably in the bulk of its uses, multimedia technology is simply a tool for increased productivity. There is less interactivity in computerised banking transactions than there is in relating to a teller; multimodal representations are of the simplest iconic variety and there is nothing hypertextual of any note. And, after all, most of the zeros and ones zooming along the information superhighway add up to numbers so dreary as to justify automation. Multimedia often does boring things in a way that adds nothing other than efficiency to older paperwork systems. Or, it does inspiring or deliberately aesthetic things in ways directly analogous to other representational media. When Jukurpa artists

<<http://www.desart.com.au/artcentres/jukurrpa.htm>> put themselves on the web, they do little more than they would in a printed mail order catalogue. They might reach people in a different way, reach them quicker, and possibly reach different people. But the web has not affected the way they do art; they are not doing art on the medium and they are not adopting any of its multimodal, interactive or non-linear possibilities as a representational tool. At most, the Web is an advertising medium. The art and the representational innovation happen elsewhere. In other words, for much of their life, the new communications technologies do nothing new, or nothing new at least in terms of the revolutionary cultural potentials suggested by utopians and dystopians alike.

And when the new technologies are recruited to do things that are new—genuinely multimodal, or interactive, or non-linear, for instance—one is always left with a nagging sense of *deja vu*. The methodology of hypermedia, Hilf (1996) points out, evolved from the conventions of cinema, with stages directly analogous to cinema's processes of pre-production, storyboarding, script development, production, post-production or editing. The first web browser, mosaic, was modelled on television, argues Gilster (1996), and as bandwidth and processing speeds increase it becomes even more television like. Certainly, there are new things about multimedia, but they draw on existing traditions of media production and have more than a ring of familiarity in their reception.

The argument about the novelty of interactivity in multimedia is also dubious. Art and communication are in their very nature an interactive. This was precisely Roland Barthes' point about 'the role of the reader'. Readers are never mere receivers of texts; they choose what they read, they read as much of a text as interests them, and they read into texts what they will. The meaning in literature is as much in its reception as in its production. There is always multiple channels of interaction between the world of artists and the world of audiences—applause, ticket sales and reviews, to name a few. Indeed, interacting with audiences becomes a prime focus in many moments of art, such as theatrical engagements which incorporate audiences in one way or another or the shock value of modern art. These are all interactive media.

Nor are the precise techniques of multimedia new. For example, the film by Argentineans Fernando Solanas and Octavio Gettino, *La Hora de Los Hornas* ('The Hour of the Furnaces', 1976) was presented at the time as a 'film act', designed in such a way that the audience might interact with the controversial political and cultural issues it raised. The projectionist stopped running the film on cues which raised critical questions. The film was 'branched' to suit audience response, much in the fashion of interactive multimedia. The film was also left open-ended so the audience could construct its own narrative resolution. And, to give another example, there is a genre of adolescent novels that provides multiple paths and multiple endings. The text is divided up into many small parts, with cross-links at the end of each part akin to those of hypertext—if you want the story to go such and such a way, turn to page x, or this other way, turn to page y. The whole book is scrambled, in the sense that, apart from the introductory framing, text fragments are placed in arbitrary order. The path of the story, and its ending, are constructed by the interests and inclinations of the reader. The most interesting thing about these examples is that they are at best obtuse and obscure, or at worst junk. The key representational resources of multimedia interactivity have always been available, but rarely used.

There are, nevertheless, domains of interactive multimedia in which the reader is made author in a way far more radical than the traditional artist-audience relationship. These, however, are rarely considered to be art. Computer games are perhaps the best examples of cutting edge multimedia interactivity to date. Their early lineage was not from the world of art, but derived instead from the world of board games and sport. More recently, the gaming and feature film worlds have merged and 3D animation is perhaps one of the most dynamic fields of artistic production at present. In computer games the player becomes like an actor in a narrative that is partly open (choices in the range of possible moves) and partly constrained (the rules and the aim of the game). The closure of the narrative is the triumph or failure of the will or skill of the player. And much of the fun of the engagement is the

framework of restraint, the restrictions on the scope of player interactivity, and the pitting of will against closures which relentlessly restrict that will. In one sense, this is only an extension of the anxieties, and hopes and expectations of the interested 'reader' as they relate to the restraint on their will that is traditional, authored narrative.

Similar generalisations might be made about the non-linear character of multimedia. Not only do conventional texts have their own hypertextual devices that facilitate non-linear readings: contents pages, indexes, footnotes and explicit cross-references. Multimedia, in fact, uses metaphors taken directly from the world of the printed text to describe the reading process: such as 'browsing', 'bookmarking', 'home pages' and 'searching'. More broadly, however, art is in its nature hypertextual, the stuff of cross-references in the form of allusions, iconic representations and metaphor, for instance. And the fragmentary, non-linear, anti-narrative feel of much multimedia is very much like the effect deliberately created by modernism, by Joyce or Kafka in literature for instance.

Then there is the phenomenon of 'the virtual', the ostensible verisimilitude created by 'immersive' multimodal representation. And, once more, there is a remarkable ring of familiarity to this discussion. It feels like something we have been talking about for a long time, even though we are supposed to think that 'virtual reality' is something special or new. In their time, the photograph, the telegraph, the newspaper, the book-novel, the telephone, the radio, the television were all credited for their remarkable virtualness—remarkable for the 'real' being so far away, yet here so easily, so fast, and so seemingly true to life. In their time, each of these new virtual presences became a new kind of reality, a new 'telepresence' in our lives. We virtually lived through wars, per medium of newspapers; and we virtually made ourself party to the lives of other people in other places in other times per medium of the novel. Multimedia is just another small step in the huge journey that is the cultural logic of modernity, in which technologically mediated communications come to exercise enormous power in shaping the imagination. For art, multimedia simply reopens the fundamental questions of aura, authenticity and location raised by Walter Benjamin in the thirties in his discussion of 'the work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction'.

And there's an even bigger question here. As representation, all art is an exercise in virtualness, bringing the distant, the other, into close proximity with the audience. Yet there are defined limits, and this is the point of the medium. The great thing about novels and paintings is that you can be there to the extent that you want to, without the burden of actually being there. The implied objective of virtual reality is verisimilitude. But the allure of most communication media is systematic lack of verisimilitude—why, for instance, a telephone call is a better and not just a quicker way to communicate than going there, or why 'chat rooms' on the Internet work precisely because they are in some important respects quite unlike chatting in rooms, so identities can be constructed around particular forms of unreality. So it is with art. The art is in the less-than-virtualness, the nature of the representation in the context of the constraints of the medium—a meaning expressed in two dimensions and paint on canvas, the evocation of physical location in words alone.

Paradoxes

We might weave our way between enthusiastic utopias and bleak dystopias, yet still be left with the sense that nothing is really changing, and this despite the aura of cultural transformation that surrounds multimedia technologies and global information networks. Yet there is a one important thing that is without a doubt happening, and this is centred on the paradox that is pluralism. Roger Chartier (2001) is one of many writers to suggest two seemingly contradictory possibilities. One is the 'loss of common references, ... the compartmentalisation of groups and the exacerbation of idiosyncrasies'. Yet, the opposite possibility equally presents itself. 'It could also bring about the hegemony of a single cultural model and destroy diversity'.

Here is the factual socio-economic-technological variant of the pluralism paradox: the more the world becomes interconnected by the global cultural web of communication and information technologies and integrated into a single accessible market, the more significant differences become. For every moment of global convergence of cultures and peoples, there is another moment of divergence. And here is the in-principle political and cultural variant of the paradox of pluralism: in the face of the inexorable reality of difference, the most powerfully integrating political and cultural forces are those most comfortably able to negotiate differences, and those that are able to operate pragmatically on the basis of the devolutionary principles of subsidiarity and federalism.

We will spell out the socio-economic-technological facts first and illustrate the argument by way of the example of the news media. Information and communication technologies of our recent past operated in a fashion that came to be characterised as 'mass media'. The three or four major newspapers, and later the half a dozen or so radio stations and four or five television channels, together created the 'we' of the modern nation state. This was the basis for the illusion of common experience upon which the nation state imagined its citizenry into existence. The presumption was cultural and linguistic homogeneity; the process of negotiating difference was cultural assimilation to the imagined community of nation through the creation of a 'mass culture'.

Recent developments in information and communication technologies might soon provide us with hundreds of television channels. They already provide us with millions of websites. In a way, this makes us even more strongly interconnected, and seems to put our lives on progressively more convergent cultural paths. This is true; but it is also untrue. As soon as there are dedicated Croatian, or gay, or biker television channels and websites, we are moving away from a media regime that forces us in the direction of common cultural experience. Our interest and aspirations at once become more expansive than the nation state, and more narrowly refined. By way of direct counterpoint to the era of 'broadcasting' and the mass media, the new media regime often called 'narrowcasting'. These developments are not just the result of technical possibility, even though the main lesson of consumerism must be that supply is the parent of demand. The same is happening in areas where there have been less significant technological developments in the communication medium, such as in the proliferation of subculturally defined specialist magazines, each with their own progressively more divergent and arcane discourses and imagery.

Overlaying this is the next aspect of the socio-economic-technological paradox of pluralism: that for all the domination of the new media by the likes of Murdoch and Gates, and for all its domination by the language of an ethnic group who just a few centuries ago lived only around London, the new media are more open than ever to forms expression other than these domineering voices. Some forms of expression using digital media are cheaper than their analogue equivalents, and less demanding of technical-craft skills. And on the web, distance costs nothing; short run production costs no more than long run, and the marginal cost of reproduction is zero. The web's general accessibility can be accounted for in part in terms of its origins in environments quarantined from commercial imperatives—the US military and higher education—and it has proved notoriously hard to turn into marketable product. The consequence is that more powerfully interconnected global diasporas have become possible and affordable, and there are no economies of cultural scale. Every culture, every subculture and every subtle variation on every subculture can have their say. Mediated public spheres that formerly operated on a national scale have transmogrified into globalised diasporic public 'sphericules' comprised of niche video, television, cinema, music and Internet use (Cunningham 2001). And whereas non-alphabetic scripts produced enormously expensive difficulties for analogue text reproduction, digitisation has proven the great leveller.

Even the character of English is changing. Ken Wark (1998) talks of 'netlish', a strange *lingua franca* or interlanguage in which an increasing proportion of the communicators are not speakers of English and the conventions of 'standard English' don't seem to matter. On the other hand, divergence is a phenomenon within English itself, an in part as a result of its

peculiar character as a world language, a *lingua mundi*: the different national forms; the dialects (from Kriol to 'wog English'); the increasingly mutually unintelligible register variations (professional, hobbyist). The name of the communicative game is not so much learning an international standard, but negotiating language differences within English.

The digital environment may also facilitate greater communication between speakers of different languages than was possible in other media. Machine translation, which is slowly becoming more sophisticated and available for more languages, allows users to obtain a rough translation of web pages which is impossible in any other medium (Gerber 2001). Similarly, producing multilingual versions of is often simpler in multimedia formats than in other media. While television and cinema versions of films can only be printed in one audio language, and can cater for other languages only through subtitles, films distributed via DVD routinely include several audio language versions and subtitling options on the same print of the program. Likewise websites are more easily able to be produced in multiple languages than books, for which the economics of printing and distribution make multiple editions in a range of languages expensive (Ziguras and Brown 2001). These developments provide further evidence that the new communication technologies might not be such a homogenising force, and could conceivably obviate the practical need to be proficient in the standardised form of the language of global power.

And the paradoxes of pluralism extend still further. The forces of globalisation engender as their obverse assertions of difference—a kind of resistance against the possibility of cultural homogenisation. Indeed, it is doubtful whether there is even any longer much cultural sense in homogenisation. The differences are the reasons why the newfound proximity is of interest. There is no point in having the exotic closer to home if the process of bringing it closer makes it more like home. Such is the case with tourism, and film, and, for that matter, websites. You only take each of these journeys because they take you somewhere else. This means that people only visit for that 'somewhere-elseness', more or less preserved, or celebrated, or exaggerated in order to encourage the visiting. The paradox here is that the technologies of connection and communication, technologies that glory in global reach and local exoticism, intensify the significance and poignancy of differences.

Then there's the increasingly important role of the reader and of more active audiences—of 'churn rates', 'site visits', and the interactive relationships of multimedia. Once again, the broader the audience that is drawn into the communication-information system, and the more scope it allows for their subjectivities, the more important differences become in the making of cultural meaning. In the era of mass media and supposed mass culture, culture makers could almost afford to be blasé about differences, with more than a little moral backing from public ideologies such as assimilation and the melting pot. Now the key ideas are 'customising your information feed' on the net and, more generally, niche marketing of culture and information.

These are the socio-economic-technological paradoxes of pluralism. They fit within a larger frame of reference in which multiculturalism and pluralism become central factors within a new kind of social contract. Charles Taylor (1994) points out that the modern nation state and liberal-democratic political philosophy were founded on the universal individual, and the interests and needs of all citizens were conceived to be identical. Since the end of the Cold War particularly, this vision of the state has reached a crisis point. This crisis is most clearly manifest in the politics of difference, from the crazy ethno-nationalisms that have replaced Cold War frontiers as the primary reason for wars, to the rise of forms of identity politics that do not fit comfortably onto the old left-right political spectrum.

The solution can only be in new forms of overlapping sovereignty, cultural as well as political, where it is possible to live and work across self-governing communities—shunting backwards and forwards being a member of an Aboriginal people, to being Australian, and gay, and part of the global movement of Indigenous peoples. The stronger states of the post Cold War world will only be strong because they are federal as a matter of cultural principle, taking strength from their ability to delegate cultural control, to negotiate

differences, and to take their cue as subsidiary groups delegate cultural responsibilities to groups whose responsibility is more broader and integratory.

Differences are an inexorable cultural reality. They are more critical than ever, and the new communications and information environment is just one of the things that makes them more critical. Cultural pluralism, paradoxically, makes for stronger integration than forced homogeneity. Multiculturalism is the new shape of cultural democracy.

Multimedia developments and multicultural arts in Australia

Multimedia facts

Within a decade of its practical availability, ten per cent of the world's population have become connected to the Internet. In December 1995, 16 million people were connected to the Internet. By December 1997, the figure had risen to 101 million; by December 1999, 201 million; by September 2001, 516 million; and by September 2002, 606 million. At the end of 2001, 29 million Chinese citizens were connected to the Internet; by June 2002, this figure had risen to 46 million. By the end of 2002, there were 275,000 Internet users in Uzbekistan, compared to 137,000 a year previously (Nua.com 2003). The burst of the 'dotcom' bubble in March 2000 may have dented financial markets but it did little to change the social realities that drive the rate of growth of new users. By 2000, over half of all Australian households had a computer and one third of households had Internet access, a 49 per cent increase on the previous year. Nearly half of all adults and three quarters of 12–24 year olds in Australia had used the Internet some time in 2000 (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2003).

Figures are not available for key variables that might be useful for this project, such as first language spoken or Indigenous/first, second or other generation immigrant. However, if the evidence of this survey is just one window on variation in multimedia usage, it is probably fair to generalise that NESB immigrants enjoy less access than the general population.

Access to the machines and the know-how

Thirty-three of the forty-five organisations that responded to our 1998 survey directly addressed the question of multimedia developments amongst multicultural arts organisations and artists of immigrant and non-English speaking backgrounds. Of these, nineteen (58%) considered the uptake to be less than artists and arts organisations generally; and ten (30%) said they didn't know whether it was comparable or not.

Language factors were frequently cited as the reason why access was not comparable. Responses ranged from a generalised 'lack of linguistic ease' to a more direct statements such as that 'barriers of language, and a perception that the Internet is an English-language domain, inhibit activity, including training, design, education, mounting of web projects etc.'.

Other respondents considered the issue of access, at root, to be a question of resources. One person argued that 'some new communities (e.g. Hong Kong Chinese expats) may not have the same problems, insofar as they may not be struggling financially. I think that this divide is the most important consideration—money and time. If an organisation or individual artist are struggling to stay afloat on a day to day basis, then issues of multimedia take a back seat.'

The issue of the very nature of multicultural arts organisations frequently came up. Here are three typical responses each from organisations that would classify themselves as multicultural.

1. 'Many multicultural organisations have a focus on direct, traditional processes. Many of the practitioners are of an older generation, seeing contemporary media as for the "experimental" and the young.'
2. 'Multicultural arts organisations are smaller and receive less funding than others, therefore the cost of equipment is a major factor.'
3. 'Multicultural arts organisations tend to have less access to resources and multimedia is perceived as a luxury.'

Well known 'mainstream' arts organisations reported in a similar way. Typical was the comment, 'our own contact with other arts organisations indicates that multicultural arts organisations are more concerned with survival than with multimedia developments'.

Of those who responded to the question of comparability, only four respondents (12%) considered the take-up to be broadly equivalent between arts organisations generally and multicultural arts organisations in particular, although this could be taken to mean comparably poor take-up. 'Everyone must be prepared to invest time and effort to learn and stay abreast of the new technologies. We are all disadvantaged in this regard', said one respondent from a 'mainstream' arts organisation. A 'mainstream' writers' organisation pointed out the problem was a generalised issue of access: 'Unfortunately this area is still quite new for writers, especially for migrant artists.... I discussed the matters raised ... with various writers and they all agree on how unaware writers are about the use of multimedia'.

A frequently mentioned key was simply access to the machines. 'The main problem is lack of networks in IT, lack of up to date IT resources and skills. These are mostly monetary considerations.'

Having got beyond this fundamental issue, some respondents argued that not being a part of the linguistic-cultural 'mainstream' was not in itself an issue. 'Funding is a key. Our experience is that Aboriginal communities identify with and understand multimedia intuitively', one respondent pointed out. Another respondent described the immediate effects of access: 'There has been a great deal of involvement from the Italian Government to "install" multimedia centres within the Italian community in Australia, particularly for the purposes of continuing Italian language programs.' Another respondent, representing a local government organisation reported that, as a result, 'the Italian take up of IT is considerable in my area. My experiences indicate that IT issues are of significance to many cultural groups, irrespective of language.'

The enormous influences of multimedia communications on culture and diversity are increasingly being recognised by the few commentators who have considered the connections between multimedia and multiculturalism. In Larry Stillman's words, 'both civic locality and ethnic nationalism are now under challenge because of the explosive growth in interactive communications technology' (Stillman 1996).

However, this recognition had barely influenced either multicultural arts or 'mainstream' multimedia developments. Here a response of a multicultural arts organisation to our survey:

The main reason [for lack of multicultural multimedia developments] is the lack of support to arts agencies which have a multicultural brief. In the case of [our organisation], although the intention of catching up with the superhighway is there, the infrastructure and human resources are not available. [The nearby Co-operative Multimedia Centre is a] huge, foreboding building, not accessible to NESB or Indigenous people. It's a sterile environment.

As we noted in 1998, none of the Co-operative Multimedia Centres even mentioned cultural and linguistic diversity as a key issue in the global multimedia environment. The companies that have been formed out of the remains of these CMCs operate on a commercial basis and are even less concerned now with broader social issues than they were five years ago <<http://www.accessonline.com.au>>, <<http://www.emerge.com.au>>, <<http://www.qantm.com.au>>, <<http://www.imago.com.au>>, <<http://www.impart.com.au>>, while the Ngapartji Multimedia Centre in Adelaide ceased operations completely in March 2003.

The Australian Film Commission does not mention cultural diversity or multiculturalism in its interactive digital media programs and funding guidelines <<http://www.afc.gov.au>>, despite obvious interests in Indigenous content and creative teams. Nor does the Australian Film, Television and Radio School in its digital media area <<http://www.aftrs.edu.au>>. Nor does the Australian Network for Art and Technology, <<http://www.anat.org.au>>, which in 1998 was one of the few national organisations in the field to have expressed an aspiration to 'encourage cultural diversity within the field'. Unfortunately, this lack of recognition of the significance in global and local cultural diversity in multimedia developments filters all the way down to the multimedia arts innovations. Experimenta Media Arts, 'Australia's peak organisation for the exhibition and promotion of the experimental media arts' does not mention diversity or multiculturalism, in either of its narrower or broader senses <<http://www.experimenta.org/>>.

Neither did the Department of Communication, Information Technology and the Arts film and digital content site have an explicit focus on cultural diversity <<http://www.dcita.gov.au>>. However some of the Department's activities reflect Australia's cultural diversity to some extent, including the Australia on CD series, which was completed in 1999, includes one title on immigration and multicultural diversity, *Convict Fleet to Dragon Boat*, and one title on the relationship between the production of contemporary Indigenous art and Indigenous cultural heritage, *Moorditj: Australian Indigenous Cultural Expressions*. Two of the Department's more recent initiatives have the potential to benefit multicultural arts considerably—the OZeCulture Program, which provides cultural organisations and workers with networking possibilities, ebusiness support and IT training, and the www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au website, which is a comprehensive portal providing access to over one million pages about Australian culture and recreation, and featuring information about major upcoming cultural events across the country. The Victorian government, like many others, has sought to improve access to the Internet among sections of the community that are underrepresented online, including some multicultural groups who have received basic Internet training aimed at providing them with access to online resources in English and other languages (Multimedia Victoria 2002).

The Australia Council's new media grants schemes are currently encouraging 'proposals that investigate and further develop cross-cultural contexts for new media arts' and 'outcomes which enhance the cultural and regional diversity of interdisciplinary art and/or new media art. This reflects the organisation's renewed commitment to promoting cultural diversity, as expressed in its 2000 policy statement that 'the Australia Council values the traditions and capacity for innovation that exist in Australian multicultural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society and encourages the creativity and artistic expression resulting from this diversity' <<http://www.ozco.gov.au>>. There are several interesting attempts to promote culturally diverse artistic expression across Australia by using the Internet to promote communication between artists and related organisations. One notable effort to provide resources for multicultural professionals working in the field is the Australian multicultural artists database <<http://www.kultur.net.com>>. This Australia Council initiative aims to build a network to heighten communication between multicultural and Indigenous artists, artworkers and community organisations across Australia.

Another recent development in this area is the formation of the Regional Cultural Alliance

<<http://www.museumsaustralia.org.au/aboutus/rca/rca.html>>, which has been formed by five national peak bodies – The Federation of Australian Historical Societies, the Australian Council of National Trusts, the Australian Library and Information Association, Regional Arts Australia and Museums Australia. The Alliance aims to work with remote rural and regional communities to make available the same cultural opportunities as those enjoyed by other Australians. This is an effort to strengthen the sustainability of regional, rural and remote communities by supporting arts, cultural development, libraries and museums and heritage organisations and activities. There is a strong emphasis on cultural diversity in this initiative, both in supporting the diversity within and between local communities across the country, and in creating opportunities to bring into regional and remote communities diverse cultural activities from other parts of Australia and overseas. Although there is no mention of multimedia in the Regional Cultural Alliance's mission statement, this would seem to be one means for rural and remote organisations to supplement face-to-face cultural and arts activities in order to reach distant audiences and to create a lasting record of significant events.

In summary, some public institutions that support new media development and the arts have since 1998 developed some interest in tapping into the creative possibilities afforded by Australia's diverse multilingual, multicultural population. However, apart from the Australia Council's initiatives, these efforts are relatively minor at present.

To respond, first a story of opportunity lost. When Postscript came onto the market, Australians were the first to create fonts for non-roman scripts, because the language skills were here and multicultural policy imperatives demanded multilingual printed matter for public instrumentalities, and because digital fonts are simply much cheaper and easier to use. Without systematic support, this global advantage was soon lost. And now a story of a similar kind of opportunity, which this time we took and from which we have gained. American Express chose Sydney as its western Pacific regional headquarters because Australia is the only place where one can easily recruit speakers of every language in Asia. If you like, Australia is the most Asian country in Asia, and in economic terms, this is our comparative advantage—there are enough people who can speak English perfectly well in most other countries of the region.

And now a story of another opportunity lost. The most dramatic growth in the Internet at present is languages other than English, as the statistics at the beginning of this section bear out. In Australia we have the language resources, as well as the multimedia infrastructure, to tackle key problems such as multilingual, multiscript browsers, machine translation and languageless, iconic forms of computer interlanguage. Australia could also become the focal point for cultural contents that link global diasporas, in Arabic, Spanish or Mandarin. But we have lost our multilingual and multicultural advantage to the only other country that could be a serious competitor—French Canada. Unfortunately, the Australian multimedia industry has been dominated by people who are so captivated by the technology that they cannot see its cultural implications.

Unless the ideas of diversity and multiculturalism become a key part of mainstream multimedia agenda, there is little hope of multicultural arts organisations getting involved in their own right, let alone in joint ventures. As we have already argued earlier in this discussion paper, there are more than enough reasons to consider the multicultural idea to be a central motif within multimedia.

Access to new creative possibilities

So far we have been considering the access of NESB artists or multicultural arts organisations to multimedia equipment and techniques—the narrower version of multiculturalism and multimedia definitions #1 and #2, as outlined in Section 2 of this discussion paper.

Remaining with the narrow understanding of multiculturalism for the moment, there is even less evidence of use of new forms of artistic representation that multimedia environments seem to present as a possibility (definitions #3 and 4).

In 1998 our searching on the Internet revealed very little activity on Australian sites that could be considered multicultural arts. Since then, the scale of activity has increased considerably, however most of the online content remains relatively simple promotional material rather than artistic output in its own right. Most websites of multicultural arts organisations and government agencies did not use the medium for other than conventional promotional purposes. For example, Multicultural Arts Victoria's website <<http://www.multiculturalarts.com.au>> and the Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland's Multicultural Arts section <<http://www.eccq.com.au>> use their sites to describe current activities. The Ethnic Communities Council of Queensland's site does include one innovative feature of the medium in that it allows users to obtain machine translations of the multicultural arts page into French, Spanish, German, Italian, Portuguese. The Hellenic Writers Association of Australia has a bilingual site which promotes the Association, includes current and past issues of its magazine Logos in both English and Greek, and lists links to Greek-language bookstores, libraries, online periodicals and writers' websites <<http://home.vicnet.net.au/~hwaa/>>.

While none of the sites above use the more novel features of multimedia as a form of artistic representation, there are a growing number of culturally diverse sites that are beginning to do so. Kominos Zervos (1996), who says he used to be 'the ethnic you are having when you're not having a poet', has now moved from being an ethnic to a cyberpoet. His online poetry celebrates and explores the capabilities of the medium, through combining spoken word with animated design, incorporating user interaction, playing with the possibilities of poem-writing software. Each of his poems toys with a creative avenue opened up by the multimedia form <http://www.gu.edu.au/ppages/k_zervos/>.

The Yothu Yindi Foundation's artistic output extends across a wide range of media forms, from music to film and cultural festivals, so it is fitting that its website <<http://www.YothuYindi.com>> would make use of the multimodal features of the Internet more than most other arts organisations. Visitors to the Yothu Yindi site can listen to music clips and view QuickTime video grabs (although these elements are samples of tracks and programs made for other media, not specifically designed for the web) and purchase albums, videos and books. The most distinctive interactive multimedia work on the site is the fabulous Yothu Yindi Audio Mixer, which allows users to mix looped audio elements over one another to make their own music using samples from Yothu Yindi's music.

One of the most strikingly interesting innovations has been Doppio Teatro's 'cross-country Internet arts project', and a process called 'parallelo performance' which explored complex issues of the nature of art in the new multimedia environment. With its origins in Italian underground youth culture, the result was dj squat. dj squat built on the ideas of Gomma, a leader of the Italian alternative movement who has set up community and arts projects focused on internet access points set up in squats around Italy. Doppio say that, with dj squat, they are deliberately not working at the 'sexy, glossy' end of the multimedia spectrum. Rather, they are building on 'an equally interesting phenomenon happening at the poorer, grungy-community end. It is finding a powerful expression through the squat movements, the dance/multimedia parties and other "innovative" events.' In 1997 the group expanded its range of activities under the para//elo banner, giving them 'the space to work more broadly from a bicultural platform to a cross cultural platform'. Their work now draws on the group's Italian heritage as one of many ingredients in a contemporary global perspective. They are broadening the definition of what multiculturalism means to include to work on parallel cultural experiences in the context of global Internet communications <<http://www.doppio-parallelo.on.net>>.

Some of the most interesting multicultural artistic expression in multimedia is being produced by museums, either for interactives that form part of physical exhibitions,

'virtual' exhibitions that are accessible online and reference CD-ROMs for educational purposes. Museums, libraries and historical societies are likely to become major producers of culturally diverse multimedia. Most small museums and galleries use their websites for promotional purposes, and in some cases to provide background information for school groups and prospective visitors. For example, the Brambuk Aboriginal Cultural Centre Web sites <<http://www.brambuk.com.au>> , <<http://au.geocities.com/brambuk2001/brambuk.html>> provide extensive information about the history of the exhibition centre, some background detail about the community and the region, but does not use Web as medium for artistic expression.

Larger and better-resourced museums are increasingly using the Web as a creative outlet to supplement physical exhibitions. Museum Victoria's Immigration Museum has an online exhibition called Hear Her Voice <<http://www.museum.vic.gov.au/hearhervoice/index.htm>>, which uses music, video, animation, story-telling and photography to present the stories of women in the migration process. The exhibition looks at four women's 'dreams, aspirations, family ties, disappointments and achievements, while capturing some of the diversity of cultural background, patterns of immigration and experiences of settling'. Similarly, the Jewish Museum of Australia <<http://www.jewishmuseum.com.au/index.htm>> has produced an online version of an exhibition entitled Art and Remembrance: Addressing the Holocaust, which makes many of the objects and images used in the physical exhibition available to users on the Web. It includes all of the images used in the physical exhibition, and additional resources including biographies of artists, commentaries by artists and essays reflecting on the works that are only available online. Both these online exhibitions use the medium to present artistic and cultural works in ways that are not feasible in a gallery space, such as long audio-visual interactives, comprehensive listings of images with thumbnails, essays that can be printed out at any time, detailed bibliographies, and links pages.

Because young people in Australia are the heaviest users of the Internet, the most likely places to find cultural diverse multimedia artforms are the youth-oriented websites, such as SBS's Whatever Music site, which showcases 'diverse and emerging Australian talent' <<http://www.sbs.com.au/whatever/>>. The site contains details about SBS's multicultural radio programming, music downloads, and an online youth-oriented magazine featuring animated stories and interviews.

Multicultural/multimedia: artists' needs

As if to balance the limited amount of multimedia development in the multicultural arts field, our survey revealed an enormous thirst for knowledge and the chance to 'give it a go'.

Many respondents wanted to attend training sessions, even if they were of a brief and introductory nature in the first instance. 'Hold one day fairs to teach people the basic html skills. Don't go in for long training programs.' A model of training of training suggested by one worker involved 'peripatetic workers and demonstrations, contacting community organisations specifically; multilingual advertising and documentation; and a strategy that highlights benefits to the community (e.g. preservation of craft processes on CD ROM).'

Another respondent argued for training that would have multiplier effects beyond the trainee, such as training for Multicultural Arts Officers and other arts/cultural workers so that could pass on in a practical way some notion of the possibilities of the multimedia medium. 'It is not necessary to understand it at an operational level', this respondent said. Another person recommended 'specific training for web content with different language groups.' But, they warned, 'in the multimedia world there is a danger of hype and unrealistic expectations of people new to it—and I include some ethnic groups who could go on line.'

Another respondent saw the training issue as fundamental computer literacy. 'Working overseas has alerted me to the fact that the Internet currently serves many languages—Internet Chinese language communication is alive and well. The first step is a computer literacy issue foremostly.'

Others argued for far more extensive, and thus expensive, learning interventions. One respondent said 'we need a lot of training on expensive equipment and programs, to experiment'. Another complained that 'there has been a lot of "talk" about multimedia and the arts but ultimately too few organisations resourced to provide access and training to artists. Artists need the opportunity to experiment—the area is too new to fully understand the implications and potentials.' And a third comment arguing for intensive on-site learning linked with developmental opportunities: 'Education and training must be offered to relevant/interested artists/organisers as to how to use existing multimedia software and infrastructure to a) access existing channels, b) create their own home pages and promote their works, c) use the tools and the creative possibility of the multimedia medium offers to create work of global relevance.'

Many respondents underlined the importance of practical, hands-on activities. In the words of one organisation, 'we need specific training in technical aspects but also in practical applications and the use of multimedia. Some communities and individuals have trouble realising the relevance and application of multimedia.' Another suggested 'mentoring—use NESB artists working in the field to workshop/work "hands on" with other artists in community workshop projects. Showcase the positive.' Still another cautioned the ineffectiveness of training that had a mainly technical focus. 'Many multimedia initiatives and support programs are particularly product and IT focussed. While this approach suits some projects, it does not usually fit well into community/cultural development activity.' In this spirit, a multimedia developer who had not worked in the multicultural arts area suggested that 'it is contact, not content, that makes the www so valuable. Content will be enhanced by contact, especially where meaningful interaction takes place. The www does provide a global forum for "villages" to form, but it will be the improved interaction and contact with local communities that will excel.'

A number of respondents suggested that training might be artform-specific, such as 'the place of technology in live performance', or 'workshops aimed specifically at writers and illustrators'.

As to the likelihood of multimedia 'taking off' in the multicultural arts area, several, somewhat contradictory responses seemed to emerge. To some, the possibility seemed to some as distant as multicultural artists have ever been from 'mainstream' developments. 'Generally the multimedia area is seen as a fairly elite clique by NESB artists.' To others, it was accessibility that made it well suited, but that also created the ironic possibility of not doing multicultural arts in the form in which it has come to be understood. 'I think this [the issue of training] is rapidly becoming a non-issue as the cost of access drops and the literacy associated with use rises and becomes widely present among younger members of the community. The greater issue will be that take up is amongst those community members who are least attached to the traditional cultures.' And to others again, there was a danger of multimedia itself not being seen as the mainstream. 'I still believe that identifying multimedia as "something different" or "something extra" to "traditional" arts marginalises the practice and prevents adoption. New media arts *ARE* the contemporary art of this period. All of the Australia Council's funds should acknowledge this fact and fund the area accordingly.'

Multicultural/multimedia: Suggestions for change

Amongst the respondents to this survey, the most frequent suggestion for change involved resourcing for facilities. In response to our invitation to suggest measures that might

support multimedia developments in multicultural arts, one community-based organisation answered, 'Quite simply? Providing the funds to help establish Internet facilities. This is the biggest stumbling block. Theoretical discussions are a waste of time. Let's face it, we all need it. Perhaps the Australia Council could strike agreements with computer supply companies to subsidise costs, including software support etc.' And another asked, 'Well, if the government can afford multilingual interfaces at Social Security, then why can't they support a version of "Website Designer" in Ukrainian?'

There was also a clear view of the kind of training that was needed. This was the response from one of Australia's leading and most respected workers in the multicultural arts field:

There are no strategies in place which I am aware of which might access NESB migrant communities to these new information and communication technologies. A methodology for such access cannot be developed within the arts community alone. It requires development with the communities in question, with the organisations which service their requirements daily, and with the artists who remain invisible often working and practising their art on a voluntary level within their community.

In the same spirit, other multicultural artsworker suggested:

Resource, fund, train, support community based organisations (e.g. MRCs, ethno specific organisations) either individually or cooperatively and/or through mainstream arts and multimedia organisations. Control of these projects must rest with the community-based organisations and not with the mainstream hierarchy. People need to know that opportunities are there—they won't respond to ads from the Australia Council, but initiatives from local councils and organisations that know the scene may engender applications and more positive responses. ... Community development and education processes could lead to some really creative responses, not the 'Big White Man' _telling them_ what arts are, and how to be artistic.

One respondent defined 'accessible training' thus: 'If we could train some of our NESB artists, they could pass on the skills to other members of their and other communities. If the training were delivered by members of NESB communities it would have a better result than training solely imparted by representatives of the dominant culture.' Some projects of this kind are currently being run on a small scale, such as the YMCA's FutureSkills Multimedia Project which provided accredited Internet and multimedia skills training and work experience for Young Indigenous Australians (Kuchmar 2000). For the film industry, MetroScreen runs mentor schemes for multicultural and Indigenous young people <<http://www.metroscreen.com.au>>, but we know of no similar initiatives for multimedia.

The other major area suggested was grants, 'targeted grants with backup funding', or 'allocation of specific funds to NESB artists that use multimedia means'. 'Fund arts organisations who are good at art, not groups excited by the technology', one respondent concluded. Another suggested 'partnering with organisations who currently provide resources and education opportunities'. And one respondent complained that 'We are a multicultural arts organisation who have been assisting multimedia developments with arts/cultural workers from NESB, and we have just been defunded. I would suggest that the Australia Council assess and acknowledge what is already happening out there in the field and not pull the plug on it, especially when it is its own investment in the organisation that has made the initiative possible in the first place.'

A number of respondents spoke of the importance of showcasing exemplary practices. One said, 'we need examples and documentation on the power and potential of multimedia for artists of immigrant and non-English speaking backgrounds, ... enabling the network of multicultural arts officers and regional arts officers as a catalyst.' This respondent considered this to be more important than resourcing, as 'collaboration and partnership with Education Department and TAFE could provide opportunities for accessing existing resources'. Another respondent recommended 'free seminars and workshops; plus

identifying active, professional multimedia artists and offering community groups free residences by these artists to produce collaborative works’.

In the same spirit, one organisation explained how important it was to see exemplary finished products: ‘The most useful things are really great sites that draw in the audiences you want to attract to using the technology.’ The importance of giving multicultural arts organisations a concrete sense of multimedia possibilities was highlighted by an organisation from regional Queensland: ‘Support the creation of multimedia projects, and get them to the regional and rural areas. The most difficult thing about trying to introduce new technologies is not having any tangible examples of what the technology can achieve.’ Finally, one respondent suggested that a conference be held, showcasing whatever had already been achieved in the field: ‘Fund and promote a broadly conceived digital arts conference with specific sessions by and for multicultural arts organisations.’

Several respondents made distinctions between simply using the machines (similar to our definitions #1 and #2 in Section 2 of this discussion paper) and new forms of representation (#3 and #4). For instance,

One needs to differentiate between content development and delivery based applications. A multicultural arts organisation wishing to deliver its services on-line is not engaging in ‘cultural activity’. ESD is a mainstream technological methodology. Providing ‘special’ support for this kind of activity can be quite inefficient and extremely costly. Developing multimedia content that tells stories reflecting cultural diversity, however, is completely different and does warrant specific support programs.

One multicultural arts organisation made the point that ‘hybrid arts and across arts projects are easier to develop if the organisation has no resources for multimedia developments—too much emphasis placed on that area.’ This highlights an important issue, also raised in Section 2, if in a somewhat different way. Multimodal representation, or art that crosses the media and conventions of artforms, goes part of the way in the direction of multimedia arts insofar as this kind of art is innovative in a representational sense, and in ways often quite similar to multimedia—such as multimodality, audience interactivity and cross-referencing in a fashion akin to hypertext. In a way, multicultural arts organisations are more open to change than well-established artforms based on canonical repertoires. Multicultural arts are in their nature hybrid and experimental, and thus potentially particularly open to the creative possibilities offered by multimedia.

Others raised the question, also broached in Section 2 of this discussion paper, of what multiculturalism now meant, particularly in the context of multimedia developments and global cultural diversity:

What are multicultural arts—are we falling into colonisation of the NESBs once again? There are some Israeli artists on the web, but in Israel, they are ...? Their pages are in Hebrew and English, so what are they? And what is art? ‘High’ arts, computer game design by Suomi kids in Lapland (this is happening)? crass nationalistic home pages? What are, who is the audience?

Many respondents mentioned their disappointment with ‘mainstream’ arts agencies, and expressed the view that it was essential to get them involved. The following response is indicative, and predictable, perhaps, in the context of a survey for a project funded by the Australia Council: ‘The Australia Council is only dimly aware of what is really happening within its own organisations, especially outside NSW. A careful inventory/internet/multimedia audit would be a great first step.’ And another response in the same vein: ‘In many ways, I feel that in terms of its multicultural policies and approaches the Australia Council seems a little confused at the moment.’ At the more positive and constructive end of the responses, there were suggestions for joint ventures

between the multicultural arts and multimedia areas: 'Co-operate with existing organisations—Film Commission, Australia Multimedia Enterprise, Victoria 21 and other State-based bodies, for the creation of joint initiatives.'

Amongst the respondents, there was also frequent allusion to the importance of policy, and its relationship to practice.

The issue is about access and equity—same as for other issues relating to NESB communities—do they exist in the periphery, or are they a part of the action? New technologies and the money that is needed to utilise them will not be home to NESB artists and communities for some time.

Policy documents like *Creative Nation* were credited as playing a constructive role in the push towards multimedia arts. However, in the area of multicultural arts, there was perceived to be a gap between the policy and its realisation. 'The LOUD festival, for instance, has been almost exclusively focussed on using multimedia (and no input from the people it is said to be benefiting). Most NESB artists and groups have not been able to get effectively onto this bandwagon—since their considerations are grounded in other areas.'

Acknowledgment

The authors wish to thank Sava Toumazou for his work in managing the survey of arts organisations upon which this section of the discussion paper is based.

References

- Alexander, Stephen. 'The Big Picture: Keynote Address, Community Cultural Development and Multimedia Symposium, Adelaide, 24-26 September 1996.' *Artwork Magazine*, December 1996, 6-7.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics. 'Communication and information technology: household use of information technology.' In *Year Book Australia 2003*. <<http://www.abs.gov.au>>, 2003.
- Australian Multimedia Enterprise Limited. *Corporate Plan*. Sydney: <<http://www.amme.com.au/>>, 1997.
- Benjamin, Walter. 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.' In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, 219-254. London: Fontana, 1970.
- Cameron, Andy. 'Illusions of Interactivity.' In *Dissimulations*: <<http://www.wmin.ac.uk/media/VD/Dissimulations.html>>, 1998.
- Chartier, Roger. 'Readers and Readings in the Electronic Age', text-e.org, <www.text-e.org/conf>, 2001.
- Cope, Bill and Mary Kalantzis. *Text-Made Text*, Altona, Common Ground, 2003.
- Cunningham, Stuart. 'Popular media as public 'sphericules' for diasporic communities', *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, Vol. 4, No.2, 2001: 131-147.
- de Kerckhove, Derrick. 'Network Art and Virtual Communities.' In *Parallel Gallery and Journal*: <http://www.va.com.au/parralex2/journal/derrick_dk/>, 1995.
- Gerber, Laurie. 'Translation in a digital environment.' In *Multilingual Book Production*, edited by Bill Cope and Gus Gollings: 105-122, Altona: Common Ground, 2001.
- Gilster, Paul. *Digital Literacy*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1997.
- Guarneri, Ermanno 'Gomma'. 'Italian Counter Culture in the Age of Multimedia.' *Artwork Magazine*, December 1996, 11-12.
- Hilf, William Homer. 'Beginning, Middle and End - Not Necessarily in That Order.' : <<http://www.cybertown.com/hilf.html>>, 1996.
- Humphries, Sal. *Narrative and Interactivity: An Overview of the Story So Far*: <<http://www.ngapartji.com.au/research/rosebud/research.html>>, 1997.
- Kalantzis, Mary. 'The New Citizen and the New State: An Australian Case for Civic Pluralism.' In *Occasional Paper No.9*. Sydney: Centre for Workplace Communication and Culture, 1997.
- Kuchmar, Denise J. *FutureSkills Multimedia Project*. Vocational Education Community Online, <<http://www.veco.ash.org.au/gallery/ShowItem.asp?ItemID=30>>, 2000.
- Lash, Scott. 'Reflexivity and its Doubles: Structure, Aesthetics, Community.' In *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, edited by Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens and Scott Lash, 110-173. London: Polity Press, 1994.

- Mitchell, William J. *City of Bits: Space, Place and the Infobahn*. Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1995.
- Multimedia Victoria. *Connecting Victoria: A Progress Report 1999-2002*.
<<http://www.mmv.vic.gov.au>>, 2002.
- New London Group. 'A Pedagogy of Multiliteracies: Designing Social Futures.' *Harvard Educational Review* 66, no. 1 (1996): 60-92.
- Nua.com. 'How Many Online.' ComputerScope Ltd.
<http://www.nua.ie/surveys/how_many_online/>, 2003.
- Stillman, Larry. 'Citizens of the World or Citizens of a Community: Just Where is the Internet Heading?' *Migration Action*, October 1996, 35-36.
- Taylor, Charles. *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994.
- Virilio, Paul. *Open Sky*. London: Verso, 1997.
- Wark, McKenzie. 'Netlish: English Language on the Internet.' :
<http://www.mcs.mq.edu.au/Staff/mwark/warchive/Other/netlish.html>, 1998.
- Zervos, Kominos. 'Kominos: Cyberpoet.' *Artwork Magazine*, December 1996, 16-17.
- Ziguras, Christopher and Melissa Brown. 'Digital multilingual book production.' In *Multilingual Book Production*, edited by Bill Cope and Gus Gollings: 49-60, Altona: Common Ground, 2001.