



images sourced from mark newlands

MARK NEWLANDS aka MARK N • RECORD LABEL • NEWCASTLE

BLOODY FIST RECORDS

www.bloodyfist.com.au

“When Bloody Fist started, people tried telling me what music to release. I didn’t listen to them and concentrated on a niche market. I’m glad I did. Do what you like. Don’t answer to anyone. Take risks. Shoot yourself in the foot occasionally. At the end of the day you’ll learn from your mistakes, and feel much better for it.”

Bloody Fist Records have been releasing and distributing “acrid Newcastle electronic music” worldwide for the last eight or nine years. They also import and sell similar styles of music from Europe and the USA. From a small inner city Newcastle office, Mark Newlands runs and records music for the label; organises worldwide DJ performances (as Mark N); or organises gigs as part of the now hibernating group Nasenbluten.

Mark used two fortnightly dole payments to fund the start-up costs of the label—such as registering a business name. “My only help was a paid TAFE course. I threw myself into the deep

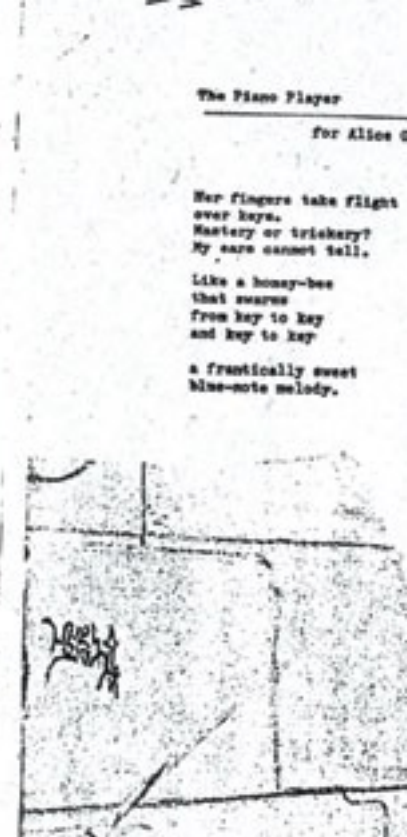
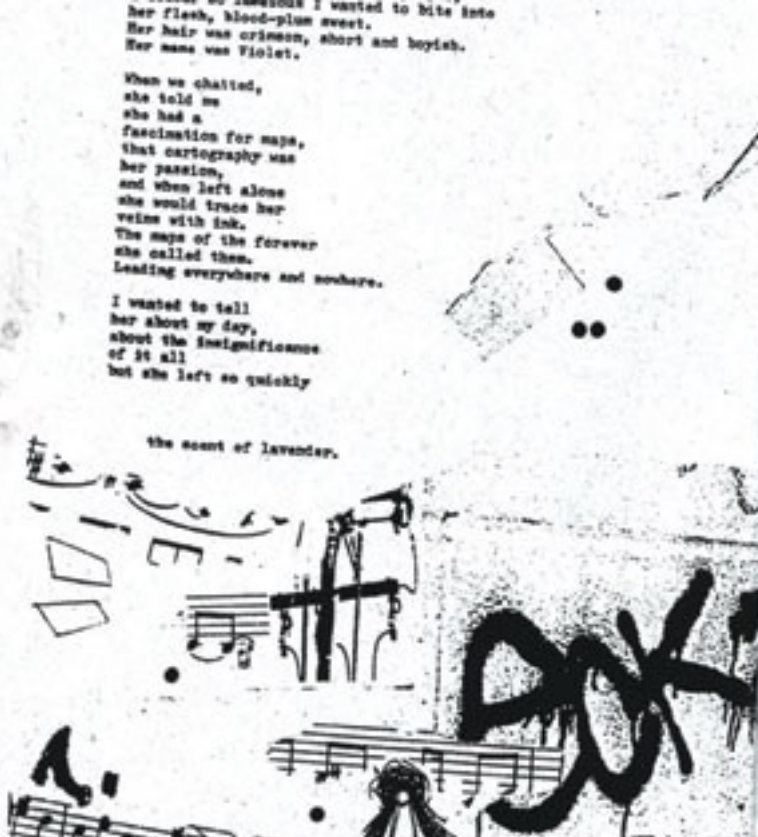
end and worked out how businesses operate by observing and getting involved. NEIS were NOT interested in assisting me.” He then used more of his dole money to fund the first label releases and self-distributed them to record stores. “After 12 months of rejection, closed doors and bullshit politics I scored a worldwide distribution deal with a German company. I then took a full-time job working in a record store to help fund releases and operating costs until the label could stand on its own two feet. Eventually there was enough money in Bloody Fist for me to scrape a very tight living from.

“Moving from my bedroom into a commercial premises (a small Newcastle office for \$60 per week) meant public liability insurance, which I coughed up reluctantly ... and signing a commercial lease, for which you need a guarantor and a solicitor’s endorsement in some cases. Jumping through unnecessary hoops becomes infuriating sometimes, but such is life.”

Unlike a lot of people that think there is only one way to success, Mark has largely ignored the How to Win Friends and Influence People approach. His suggestion to anyone starting out is “Perseverance. Getting in people’s faces. Getting mates to help you. Offend. Challenge. Scare. If people are bothered, then they’ll inadvertently talk about you and what you’re doing. This trickles down to a lot of different people and will get people curious to check out the shows, buy the records and make up their own minds. I don’t know anyone else who does specifically what I do in Australia—I currently make money from DJ gigs; importing and on-selling 12”s to Australian stores and mail order customers; recording and releasing records; acting as a pressing agent for people who want records pressed; distributing Australian 12”s and CD releases to several overseas territories; remix work; and selling records I don’t even like to local club DJs. All of this combined manages to pay my rent and drive a crap car.”



images sourced from lou smith



LOU SMITH • RADIO, LITERATURE, ZINES, OTHER PROJECTS • MELBOURNE

(3CR COMMUNITY RADIO) DIY ARTS SHOW

Lou Smith runs the DIY Arts Show on Melbourne's 3CR community radio station in Melbourne. The show focuses on experimental, independent, community, grassroots artforms such as street art, zines, festivals and performances that are under-funded, misrepresented or non-existent in the eyes of corporate media. The show also plays experimental and independent music. The show is also about providing space for discussion on issues artists face: legal stuff, how people have put their projects together, creative activism, poetry and short story writing.

"Community radio stations can't afford a defamation case and it can be easy to slip up or have someone you're interviewing say something defamatory, even on an arts show. You have to be pretty quick to delay their comments or fix it in the aftermath. I interviewed someone once who said some pretty full-on factually incorrect comments about some groups here in Melbourne and I basically got them outta there. It can be very tricky sometimes and you can actually miss the comments people make and then it's too late. Busted by Media Monitors! I've been involved in projects in a volunteer capacity

and then become a paid worker for the same project. That happened with Cultural Stomp (Newcastle), the festival I was involved in, and then that led to me doing Summer Cinema [a free outdoor cinema supported by Newcastle City Council]. Through working on these projects I've gained lots of experience coordinating people, events and gigs, as well as working with councils, government bodies, community groups and funding bodies. This has also given me confidence in dealing with bureaucracy if I need to."



artworks by (L) heidi lefebvre, (R) kate ford

MARTIN WILSON AND IZABELA PLUTA • ARTIST RUN EXHIBITION SPACE • NEWCASTLE

ROCKETART

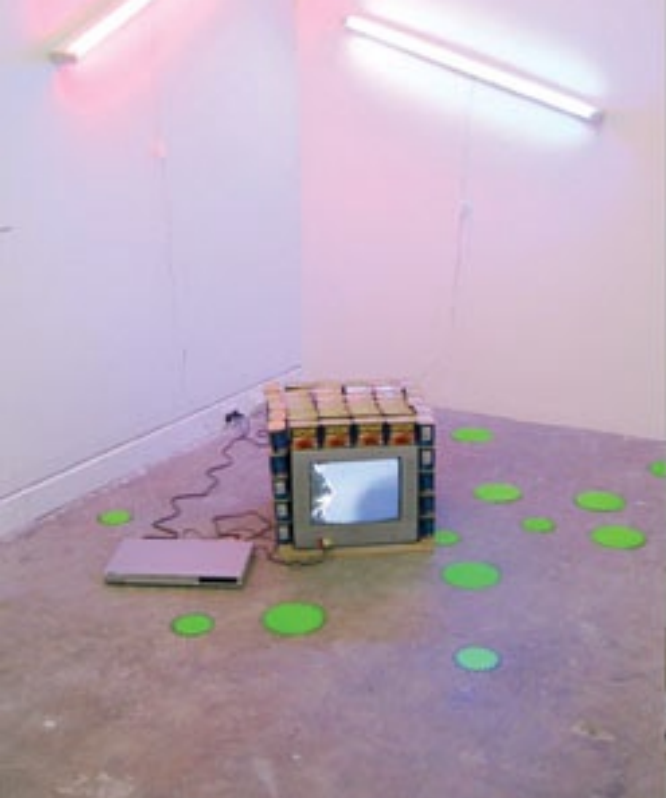
www.rocketart.org

Rocketart was the brainchild of three friends who, frustrated at the lack of opportunities in their home town, wanted to provide a space for emerging artists of Newcastle to exhibit their work locally. Rather than go through the often laborious process of applying for and waiting for funding, they decided to jump straight in and set something up themselves. “We could have sat around and waited for money to come in to pay for the space or pay our wages, but with something like this there was no guarantee that that would happen. It was just three of us who threw in our own personal savings and got it set up,” Martin says. “We knew

we wouldn’t see that money again but it was worth doing—it was money well spent.”

Their largest overhead cost was rent. “The idea was to pay the rent with the fees that artists paid Rocketart to hold an exhibition here. So for our own sakes, and the sakes of the artists we were trying to support, it was important the rent be as cheap as possible. We got a rental rate that was low enough so that if we couldn’t fill the space with an exhibition at any stage, we could afford to split the rent between us. It helps to have that peace of mind that you can afford the costs yourself beforehand, even though you obviously don’t want to have to do that.”

After a year, the original gallery became unmanageable for the three artists to maintain on top of work and other commitments, and they had to close down for a while. Martin emphasises, “One thing to think about when you set something like this up, is how or when you are going to get out of it. If you are going to establish something then you’ve got to make sure that there are other people involved to carry it on if you are going to leave. You can slowly bring other people into the project group but you need to have a structure that can be passed on easily because you can’t physically do it forever.” After much discussion about the necessity for long term sustainability they regrouped and brought in more artists, who introduced fresh ideas



artworks by (L) pete volich, (R) michael kime

MARTIN WILSON AND IZABELA PLUTA • ARTIST RUN EXHIBITION SPACE • NEWCASTLE

ROCKET ART

and new motivation, to co-manage the space and lighten the workload.

“The second time around we got a bit of sponsorship, not just from a local pub for alcohol—where you’d usually seek gallery sponsors—but also from hardware suppliers. It’s good to think creatively about sponsorship. We also got a grant from the council for projects. We used the money for renovations even though we shouldn’t have, so now we have to pay that money back. But because we had nothing upfront we had to use that money, to begin with, on little bits and pieces of hardware. We were also lucky to find a sympathetic landlord this time who gave us the first three months rent

free as in-kind sponsorship. This rent-free period (a fairly common occurrence in business rentals) gave us time to find our footing and establish the gallery.”

Location was also important. “We wanted to have street frontage this time, and to set up near other galleries so people could wander between the galleries. We’ve started having openings with the other galleries on the same nights so we share audiences and get more people along.”

Although they’ve found the project has been rewarding, increasing their opportunities to promote their work and the work of their peers, it has been tough for all involved to divide their

time between management responsibilities, their own art practices and paid work. “You have to find a balance. There are times when you say you just can’t do it and that’s when you find you have to trust the others because you just physically can’t be there all the time to work on the running of the space. It is a case of being able to let things go and make sacrifices.” Martin adds, “When we first started Rocketart one of the others said, ‘I want to do this but I still want this to be fun’ and I just fucking laughed at him. You know—setting things up are not fun; they’re boring and they’re tedious and you’ve got to just get in there and do things. It’s satisfying in the end though. But it can be frustrating.”



photograph of VA SERVER RACK by jesse reynolds (VA)

SAM DE SILVA • COMMUNITY WEB SERVER • MELBOURNE

mySPINACH

www.myspinach.org

mySPINACH is an Australian-based independent server set up in 2000 to provide web hosting services to individuals and groups active in various random independent arts and cultural projects, and to community groups that have had difficulty (financial, political or otherwise) finding a hosting service elsewhere.

During the past two years mySpinach has grown to host some diverse content. Some of the virtual websites that call the server home include the Coober Pedy Community Radio www.dustyradio.org, net theory and research group Fibreculture www.fibreculture.org, an independent newspaper thepaper.org.au, an exploration of community media in the Asia-Pacific www.smallvoices.org, and

a space for websites of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people and their friends www.kooriweb.org. Many more sites are indexed at www.myspinach.org. On a monthly basis, mySpinach web content is accessed by over 76,000 visitors, generating more than 1.2 million hits. The lists provide regular discussion and announcements to over 700 active users and there are over 50 individuals and groups making use of the server's email and webmail.

"The server lies on the Virtual Artists network www.va.com.au and we have a commercial relationship with them to provide us Internet connectivity. Unlike some of the other community net servers, mySpinach is not run by a collective. I am its single coordinator and its technical side is professionally serviced by Iain Pople of brunny.com. Having said that, mySpinach does provide facilities

to a like-minded community of people and is also guided by peer feedback from these groups and others like them."

Though the mySpinach server was originally established to provide spaces for projects that have difficulty finding a home, the most significant threat at the moment is not the possibility of content censorship, but rather the financial cost of bandwidth. In Australia bandwidth is not cheap and the server is in a catch-22; the more content it hosts and the more popular it gets, the higher the bandwidth costs involved.

"Virtual Artists provides us with one of the best deals in Australia. So it is not really possible to shop around in the domestic market. One of the solutions would be to relocate our server to the US, where bandwidth



SAM DE SILVA • COMMUNITY WEB SERVER • MELBOURNE

mySPINACH

costs are significantly less, but that is a 'sweatshop' strategy that would be quite against principles. I feel that it is important to host the content in Australia—not for any nationalistic reason, but rather because it is important to create spaces where we live where we can afford to host high-demand content. Virtual Artists is not a large corporation and mySpinach would rather be connected with a friendly business here in Australia than an anonymous and indiscriminate server farm in the US. I am interested in exploring a funding system which combines a voluntary user-pays system and a careful sponsorship plan. The volunteer user-pays system has been adopted by some of the users and around 30 per cent of the current mySpinach costs are being covered through that process. However, many of the groups hosted here operate on zero budgets, and will not be able to

make a financial contribution. So far, a subsidisation strategy has been in place. I have been fortunate enough to have obtained a couple of grants for an electronic art project and, effectively, my component of that grant has been used to support mySpinach.

"Sponsorship is the other strategy that we will explore during 2003. There is content mySpinach hosts that attracts specific audiences. For example, some of the art and culture content attracts a large audience interested in graffiti and street art. There are many organisations that would like to expose their messages to this kind of audience. Of course, I am not talking about corporations such as Coke and Nike—who would probably love to be connected with mySpinach—but rather creative design faculties and government funding bodies may be interested in sponsoring content that engages with these creative

niche audiences. Of course we need to proceed with incredible caution. If external sponsors ever influence the content on mySpinach, then that is when the mySpinach project dies.

"It's probably finally important to stress that mySpinach is not a provider of services to the general public. It only wants to work with particular types of network groups and individuals. Running a server is not an automatic process. Like any machine, like any community, it needs looking after and mySpinach is operated on a professional level while maintaining its independence. How long mySpinach lasts will depend on the sustainable strategies it is beginning to implement. Let's see what happens!"



images sourced from www.cat.org.au

(AN ANONYMOUS CATALYST COLLECTIVE MEMBER) • COLLECTIVE • SYDNEY

CATALYST

www.cat.org.au

Established in Sydney, Catalyst was formed from the base understanding that a strong individual or group presence on the Net is integral for communication, debate and support within and between healthy communities in a networked information society. Catalyst is a non-hierarchical and non-profit collective, whose aims are to deliver equitable and accessible technology and information-sharing services to progressive activist and community groups and individuals, especially those that are information-poor, and under-

resourced technologically. The collective's broader aims are to support and encourage the wishes of anyone to learn and develop skills in information technology and new media and to understand their processes. They have a detailed community dossier online.

"We started up sometime in 1994, some of the crew at a local warehouse were wanting to start some multimedia activity, and hooked up with the Newtown anarchist/activist underground. Specifically, some of the energies of those involved with the local Community Access TV propelled

Catalyst towards its Internet trajectory. At that time too there was a push—inspired by Melbourne's Xchange Anarchist BBS—to have anarchist media rooms in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. We also have a healthy reciprocal relationship of support and cross-promotion with the Black Rose Anarchist Bookstore, Newtown.

"In starting up, I guess we could have gone for sponsorship or government grants, but we would have got bogged in red tape and ads. Instead we grew our own dollars with some fully excellent benefit gigs, a tape catalogue, available online from the site, and membership donations. Running



(AN ANONYMOUS CATALYST COLLECTIVE MEMBER) • COLLECTIVE • SYDNEY

CATALYST

on Linux, a free operating system, and Debian, a distribution of Linux, provides the backbone to the core of our activities and the philosophy of what we do. Our collective and its work spaces and infrastructure are living proof of what is possible with free software and old or recycled computers—you don't need to throw them out, they can be rebuilt, or they can make good servers! We also run a lot of cheap workshops these days to skill people up in all sorts of areas—from basic computer usage, to CD burning, web page design, building your own computer, system administration and building online communities on the web—just to name a

few. They are also a fundamental part of what we are all about, while bringing in a very small amount of income that goes straight back into the running of the space and future workshops. We also have a page on our site about ways people can donate to us, and that also creates some income.

“We've leaned a lot of stuff the hard way: making the machines reliable and making sure they stay that way; creating a geek centre that was attractive for people to learn in; and finding a distribution of Linux which wasn't too painful to upgrade. It's interesting that even though we're a community of web and computer geeks, monthly face-to-face

open meetings are really important in keeping us running. They are an important way for us to bring in a healthy flow of new volunteers, members and workshop attendees. That's not to say email isn't important. We have two internal email lists that keep Catalyst running, 'catgeek' and 'catkore', as well as hosting lists for other purposes. Catgeek hosts operational and technical discussions; while catkore works with the more general business of what goes on. All of the people involved in the collective have genuinely helpful attitudes and their support and help goes a long way towards maintaining momentum and enthusiasm.”



images sourced from www.thisisnotart.org

ANNA POLETTI • FESTIVAL • NEWCASTLE, NATIONAL

THIS IS NOT ART

www.thisisnotart.org

This Is Not Art is an independent digital arts and media festival that incorporates the National Young Writers' Festival, Electrofringe (an international festival of new media and digital arts), The National Student Media Conference, Sound Summit (formerly the national Independent Electronic Labels Conference), Radio Active (Independent Radio Conference), and The New Media: Critical Approaches Conference (a postgraduate students conference). Combined, the event amounts to five days of panels, debates, workshops and night time gigs.

“The story goes (I think): In the mid 1990s a crew of talented friends who'd been putting on small events and gigs at uni came together to organise the first Newcastle Fringe Festival.

They incorporated the non-profit Octapod Association around this time, as a physical space and auspicing body to run local arts and environmental projects through. After the Fringe idea lost its legs, the first National Student Media Conference, Electrofringe and the first National Young Writers' Festival were born in 1998. The Writers' Festival particularly was meant as a real challenge to the perceived generationalism and technological backwardness of Australian media, publishing and arts funding structures and cultures of that time. People like Mark Davis for example [author of *Gangland*], had been making a strong case in print about the lack of support available to emerging writers and artists in this country, and a lack of appreciation and awareness of the new styles and technologies we were taking up in our everyday arts and media practices. So it

was just this crazy situation where the momentum of a group of under-employed friends with similar political ideas, a serious love of Newcastle and a little bit of experience under their belt had a genuine desire to build a unique national arts and media event.

“The events have received some support from the Newcastle City Council, and receive funding from the Australia Council, the NSW Ministry for the Arts, and other medium specific funding organisations. The student media and radio conferences are both still unfunded. It's a matter of spreading the money as far as possible. Predominately, support has come from our participants themselves. By inviting particular artists, writers and identities to the festival (and the press they can generate), the profile and legitimacy of the event has spread.



ANNA POLETTI • FESTIVAL • NEWCASTLE, NATIONAL

THIS IS NOT ART

People like Richard Fidler, John Birmingham, Linda Jaivin, Sophie Cunningham, and the Ninja Tune crew in the UK, who had more clout and profile, were lobbied by individuals in Newcastle to support the event. That made convincing organisations of the relevance of the event a lot easier. Marcus Westbury went to many, many meetings; it was kinda like arts organising trench warfare—many hours were spent lobbying and arguing for why the event was a good idea.”

All the individual festivals use different methods of cheap, highly-targeted marketing tactics: websites, egroups, email and selected paid advertising in niche street presses. “We do send out press releases nationally, and have had relationships with Triple J and the local ABC radio. This year [2003] we received a grant from Tourism NSW to

market the event, so it will be the first time we’ve had a ‘real’ marketing budget. Because the festival incorporates media makers themselves, they’re pretty active in reviewing and talking about the event, and we seek out free plugs and favourable mentions where possible. We’ve also been blessed with a great sponsor relationship with the local ISP Hunterlink/IPERA.”

“Because many of the coordinators involved in the programming of the events in This Is Not Art are not based in Newcastle, and often have other employment commitments, an email group is the central organising feature, supplemented by face-to-face meetings every month or so. It facilitates cross- and joint-programming and allows everyone to have their say on the general running of the event. Since 2000 the management structure

has included a This Is Not Art manager (Marcus Westbury) and a central team of volunteers. The individual festival coordinators develop their programs, while the This Is Not Art manager and volunteers take care of all the logistics centrally: venues, technical requirements, insurance, scheduling, accommodation and so on, as a way to save on resources. Now that Marcus has left the festival, we are still handling the logistics centrally, but by committee made up of the individual festival coordinators, who decide on the expenditure and organisation of logistics. This seems to be working well. All this emailing does mean a lot of hours online, but because the individual festivals utilise email and online technologies for their programming, it seems to fit in to the general culture of the events pretty well. “We were really lucky to have some insomniac



THIS IS NOT

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programmers build us a customised database in 2000 that processes all the festival information. Without this technology I think This Is Not Art would almost be a logistical impossibility. Essentially, it has a basic interface where you can enter each session, its participants, their contact details and bio and when they'll be in Newcastle for the festival. You can also attach technical and room requirements to each session, and attach each session to an individual event. There are a whole bunch of different filters which can then be run over this information to produce different reports for different aspects of the organising of the event; the technical coordinator can generate a tech list, the accommodation coordinator can generate a list of how many people need somewhere to sleep, for how and long and what kind of accommodation

they should have. That database is then connected to the websites of the individual festivals and This Is Not Art, and generates the program listing online.

“Our timeline is tight. If we have to source new organisers, the timeline will begin in December. The initial big deadlines are to do with funding applications. Once individual events have an idea of their budgets, programming usually kicks in around April, with a first draft program to be handed to the group by mid-July. Our final program deadline is September 1, which gives us a month of publicity and logistics fine-tuning. Logistics is dependent on the development of the program, so the timeline for that runs alongside and climaxes in August and September when the size and shape of the event is in view.

“This Is Not Art is essentially a community project, no one gets paid anything estimating a real wage, and I think that creates an atmosphere and culture of volunteering. We try to meaningfully delegate tasks, rather than give people one job at a time. It can backfire (when people say they'll do something and they don't) but we try to invest in our volunteers, by skilling them up and praying they'll come back next year. There is also a burnout element to the event which is concerning, some people find they have to walk away after two years or so, and I'd like to think we could improve on that by easing the loads some positions have to carry. It is difficult negotiating the sexy/fun volunteer positions (programming etc.) with the behind the scenes grunt work of setting up venues, lugging gear, scheduling accommodation and cleaning up. This



ANNA POLETTI • FESTIVAL • NEWCASTLE, NATIONAL

THIS IS NOT ART

is an age-old problem and sometimes promises of beer can solve it, but not always.

“The outcomes of the festival are wide-ranging. It has facilitated and strengthened networks for young(er) people working in all kinds of arts and media, and contributed to people’s individual artistic and professional development through heaps of workshops and forums over the years. The event has also contributed greatly to increasing the profile and growth of certain types of media and styles of art and publishing. Early on I think the outcomes of the festival were inspirational; lots of people came away from Newcastle feeling quite empowered and excited by the possibilities and potential of both arts and media practice and the organising of events and projects. It can be quite a religious experience the first time. That was definitely the case for me.

“Locally, the event has created its own economy. The cafes and shops on Darby Street often make 50 per cent or more of their year’s takings during the festival, and we book out all the cheap and mid-range accommodation in the city. This Is Not Art has contributed to the re-shaping of Newcastle’s identity from an old school industrial city to something different.

“Being unbureaucratic is both a plus and a minus, and as the event has grown and consolidated there are basic things such as accounting that are becoming too complex for our traditional volunteers to handle, especially since the introduction of GST fun and games. Unfortunately we’ve never had the money to pay people to do these things, and it’s looking increasingly likely that we’ll have to do that in the future. Sometimes I fear that we may be

discovering the limits of volunteerism, especially when we run into issues of accountability and people following through.

“We’re also coming under more pressure to develop income streams, which is a whole new ball game for most of us who are not used to thinking about risk management or ethical means of generating income for the event. Luckily we’ve got some leadership and guidance coming from Seb Chan and the Sound Summit crew in that regard, but given the political/cultural groundings of the event it’s going to be quite an angst-ridden transition to a balance between funding and income. We’ve got to try to negotiate it in a way that the audience is supportive of, and which maintains the accessibility of the event.”