

BEAAP

BIENNALE OF ELECTRONIC ARTS PERTH

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BEAP 2002 – The Biennale of Electronic Arts Perth
<http://www.beap.org>

John Curtin Gallery, Curtin University of Technology, Western Australia

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The Biennale of Electronic Arts Perth, in partnership with the John Curtin Gallery and the Studio for Electronic Arts at Curtin University of Technology, features cutting edge work from international, national and regional contemporary arts practitioners. The inaugural thematic focus for BEAP was *LOCUS - the place where we believe consciousness exists*.

BEAP incorporates a series of international exhibitions, conferences, symposia and forums presenting the theoretical, cultural and philosophical basis of electronic arts practice, creating a platform for critical interrogations of concerns filtered through events including:

*CAiiA-STAR's Fourth International Research Conference
- Consciousness Reframed 2002*

The Aesthetics of Care? forum

CAiiA-STAR symposium

Innovations National Symposium Part 3 - Teaching in a Digital Domain

Coding the Spectacle forum

BEAP

BIENNALE OF ELECTRONIC ARTS PERTH

31 JULY - 15 SEPTEMBER 2002

<http://www.beap.org>

BEAP encouraged collaborations between individuals and groups to seek and promote interdisciplinary practice, both here in Australia and elsewhere. The exhibited works explore the boundaries of new technologies and present them to the public in a challenging and thought provoking way without advocating any one particular methodology or art practice.

BEAP shares an interest in the possibility of future exhibitions that explore aspects of electronic arts practice and in establishing research networks to communicate with other groups or individuals in Australia and overseas.

Paul Thomas

Director, BEAP 2002 Biennale for Electronic Arts Perth

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BEAP 2002 would not have been possible without the assistance of the following people. I would particularly like to thank the exhibition curators and the conference organisers.

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BioFeel Curator
Screen Curator

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Oron CATTS
Pauline WILLIAMS

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Curtin University of Technology, through the John Curtin Gallery, is proud to be involved in the development and presentation of the inaugural Biennale of Electronic Arts Perth (BEAP). As a university of technology it is appropriate that Curtin continue its leadership in this field by examining the impact of the new digital technologies on all aspects of contemporary life. BEAP brings together the arts and sciences at the point of intersection where they are shaping our future. Through projects such as this we have the opportunity to bridge the gaps between disciplines and to encourage the development of new hybrid forms of intellectual engagement that will open up new debates and new possibilities.

At Curtin, research is interpreted within the framework provided by the first Director of the Western Australian Institute of Technology, Dr Haydn Williams: “the application of creative thinking and ingenuity to the solution of definable and practical problems in all fields of human endeavour”, so the Arts and Humanities have always been central to our philosophy. BEAP demonstrates that commitment to pushing at the boundaries of art, science and technology.

I would like to particularly thank the Australia Council for the Arts, ArtsWA and the Technology Precinct the main sponsors, for their support in realising this project, and to also thank all the other corporate sponsors, universities and individuals who have ensured its success. I would also like to congratulate Mr. Paul Thomas from the School of Art who has brought together such an exciting and challenging program of exhibitions, seminars and events. Congratulations also to curators Mr. Chris Malcolm, Mr. Oron Catts and Ms Pauline Williams and to all those who have given their time and energy to this project.

FOREWORD

Professor Lance Twomey AM

Vice-Chancellor Curtin University of Technology



Why do my eyes hurt?

The Biennale of Electronic Arts Perth (BEAP) explores new spatial paradigms that have evolved from an interrogation of the social re-evaluation of space. BEAP will be the catalyst for critical interrogations of issues that are filtered through the particular theme of Locus. This inaugural event is conceived as a contextualising forum that renegotiates perceptual constraints and develops new forms of consciousness.

Neo: Why do my eyes hurt?

Morpheus: You've never used them before. Rest, Neo. The answers are coming....

Morpheus: This is the construct. It's our loading program. We can load anything from clothing, to equipment, weapons, training simulations, anything we need.

Neo: Right now we're inside a computer program?

Morpheus: Is it really so hard to believe? Your clothes are different. The plugs in your arms and head are gone. Your hair is changed. Your appearance now is what we call residual self-image. It is the mental projection of your digital self.

Neo: This...this isn't real?

Morpheus: What is real. How do you define real? If your talking about what you can feel, what you can smell, what you can taste and see, then real is simply electrical signals interpreted by your brain. This is the world that you know. The world as it was at the end of the twentieth century. It exists now only as part of a neural-interactive simulation that we call the matrix.

You've been living in a dream world, Neo. This is the world as it exists today.... Welcome to the Desert of the Real

(Extract from *The Matrix* by Larry & Andy Wachowski)

DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT

Paul Thomas

Director of the Biennale for Electronic Arts Perth

The idea of place is now affected by computer generated and augmented virtual realities. Our skin has been replaced by digital devices and no longer maps the edge of consciousness. Formerly, consciousness was a product of our senses that converged around electrical impulses from the skin, the thin tissues of the cornea, the drum of the inner ear. The data on which consciousness is based is now being reorganised and reconstructed by way of input from peripheral devices.

Recently we migrated to a new universe, leaving the old world behind. However, bytes of information from the old reality persist. For example; one major influence on the way we still comprehend visual input data is via traditional perspectival constraints. One reason for this is that perspectival space is virtual in form. Though many artists have dealt with the reconfiguration of space to make us rethink the real, it is time to renegotiate inner and outer spatial constraints to allow us to perceive real space and cyberspace and more fully explore its potential.

Single-point perspective was the first virtual space. It prepared us for the new universe we are now entering by showing us that virtuality is a tangible liveable place. Brunelleschi (1460), with his peephole device, became one of the first to conceive of perspective. He developed a relationship with the mirror using it as a screen to create a defining process for manipulating space. The device consisted of a mirror and a painting made to represent the baptistery of San Giovanni. This small mixed media painting, said to be about 12 by 8cm, was not an ordinary work. The sky in the painting was made of polished silver. This was not done for an aesthetic reason, but for a purely practical one. There was a small hole the size of a lentil drilled in the back of the painting. The viewer turned their back on the baptistery of San Giovanni and looked through the hole into a mirror, placed at arms length. The viewer saw the baptistery seamlessly welded in to the background This device was one of the first perception defining virtual environments.¹

However, the virtuality of perspective is crude and limiting.

In a sense, perspective transforms psychophysiological space into mathematical space. It negates the differences between front and back, between right and left, between bodies and intervening space ("empty" space), so that the sum of all the parts of space and all its contents are absorbed into a single "quantum continuum". It forgets that we see not with a single fixed eye but with two

constantly moving eyes, resulting in spheroidal field of vision. It takes no account of the enormous difference between the psychologically conditioned 'visual image' through which the visible world is brought to our consciousness, and the mechanically conditioned 'retinal image' which paints itself upon our physical eye.²

Perspective has had a commanding effect on the way we perceive the world. The importance placed on the subject/object relationship in systematic perspective not only alienates the viewer from the objects, but also the objects from one another. It freezes time to create the basis for the identification of space. The points in perspective, as Erwin Panofsky states, are devoid of all content and raise no questions of diversity. Nowhere in space can these points be realised; they demand we view the world only fictitiously or virtually.

Perspective has traditionally given the viewer the idea of being immersed in a depicted scene by creating the illusion of depth. The viewer can only enter a work conceptually, as one does in the case of a representational painting, with its metaphorical relationship to skin as the surface. In most cases this demands of the viewer some familiarity with a perspectival gaze. The viewer sees through a conditioned response towards a developed understanding, like looking through a window, or as though viewing a screen. The physical interface with what we call the real can be conceived of as `data_in_space` and becomes the consciousness factor. As new emerging means of display get closer to the retina, as the computer disappears, all that you will be left with is computer aided consciousness and computer vision.

It would probably be at least another generation or two before we have consensus on the shape of that space, but if we are to believe what art and science have been saying, it is probable that that space would exist in time, be an interactive process and organised horizontally with a geometry quite different from the Euclidean geometry of renaissance perspective.³

Computer generated consciousness can redefine spatiality and repackage the stuff of our memories. The cognitive processing of perspectival traditions that only allows for this single generated viewpoint limits our criticality in the exploration of space. This tradition, when juxtaposed with the potential of virtual reality, changes our mass subjectivity in the way we engage in the perception and representations of things. The dataspatial

relationship that is to become part of our mass subjectivity needs to be initially constructed through cultural, critical and artistic concerns. This spatiality can be seamless, imaginative, phenomenological or inclusive. The change can come from the liquid nature of this dataspace and stem from its capacity for immersion.

The problems explored in relationship to this technology arise through the loss of orientation, denial of alterity and then disassociation. What we have is a spatial transformation of infinite smallness; the moving of one form into another carried out a pixel at a time. The denial can be seen in computer generated morphing 'which attempts to erase binarisms into the homogeneous, seamless, and effortless movement of transformation and implied reversibility'.⁴ Through this disassociation with spatial investigation to spatial assimilation a concern needs to develop, a new non-perspectival attitude to a spatiality that can re-explore the way we codify spatial experience.

Art is pro-active in the development of data-consciousness, which is of critical importance in reshaping the way we perceive. Its relevance is to social aspects of life; to create a bridge between the corporatised view of the developing computer generated consciousness and a social spatiality. The artists in the Biennale provide different views of spatiality that ask us to confront the perspectival effects on our consciousness. The work allows us to ask Neo question: "Why do my eyes hurt"?

There has been a significant spatial shift in recent years with artists and scientists reaching out beyond their own domains. This comes at a time when global economics, fuelled by new developments in science and digital technology, is providing increasing opportunities for artistic and technological interactivity. Artists have always been among the first to investigate the spatial effects of technological advances through their work, and using electronic and digital technologies for seeing and expressing ideas is becoming commonplace in the scientific arena. This mutual interest between artists and scientists can be seen in the use of the computer screen. This device has its own historical connections with the picture format that still suggests a way of looking at the world. Given all these factors there is now an exciting opportunity for developing collaborative partnerships for informing and inspiring society with the artist and scientist working together in the field of electronic arts.

Paul Thomas, Director of the Biennale for Electronic Arts Perth

1. Hubert Damisch. *The Origin of Perspective* (The MIT press Cambridge Massachusetts) 1994 trans John Goodman
2. Erwin Panofsky *Perspective as Symbolic Form*. (Zone Books New York) 1991 .trans Christopher S Wood pg 31
3. Don Foresta Souillac Charter <http://mitpress.mit.edu/e-journals/Leonardo/isast/articles/souillac/malvy.html>
4. Vivian Sobchack "At the Still Point of the Turning World": *Meta-Morphing and Meta-Stasis*, in *Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick Change*, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 131-158.

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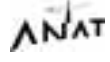
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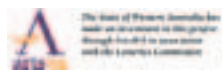
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