



BAULDERSTONE

Public Programs are proudly supported by Boulderstone



CURATED BY  
Matthew Perkins  
Dr. Elaine Miles

QUT EXHIBITION CURATORIAL TEAM  
Lead Curator (Intern): Amy-Clare McCarthy  
Assistant Curator (Intern): Katherine Palella

Creative Industries Precinct Curator: Lubi Thomas

Presented by



Supported by



EXHIBITION DATES

4 to 21 May 2011

PUBLISHER

QUT Precincts  
Queensland University of Technology  
Brisbane Qld 4000 Australia

© Queensland University of Technology 2011  
All images and text reproduced by permission  
CRICOS No. 00213J

Image: Yasmin Heisler *Car Series (detail)* 2008-2010. Single-channel video, 02:26.

remoteness



Rebecca Ann Hobbs  
*Tumbleweeds* 2007  
 Single-channel video, 1:00

## The tyranny of remoteness

Semiotic discourse since the 1960's has been shifting away from the heuristic. Instead it has adopted a dialogue of revelation that promised a kind of semiotic enlightenment guided by direct phenomenological experience rather than by empirical and formal boundaries.<sup>1</sup> The word 'remoteness' conjures up images of distance in space, seclusion, distance in time, faint possibilities, remote concerns, distant emotions, remote technologies and remote communications. By unpacking the notions of remoteness, an understanding of the way in which meaning is created, discovered and communicated, unfolds. In this context the word remoteness is an axial point for evoking artist responses and consideration.

The idea of remoteness in terms of the impact of physical distance is not foreign to people living in Australia not only because we are geographically isolated from other countries but within our own borders we are spread over a large land mass with much of the population living in remote places. In 1966 Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey popularised the phrase "tyranny of distance" in his account of how Australia's geographical remoteness has been central to shaping our history and identity.<sup>2</sup> Blainey examines how distance has always been and will continue to be crucial to Australia's development, even in the world under the strain of globalisation.<sup>3</sup> Blainey divides his book into two parts: 'Destiny and Distance' and 'The Taming of Distance'. The former part focusing on issues such as exile, separation and land barriers while the latter discusses the shrinking effects of globalisation and thus Blainey forecasted the changing face of remoteness.

Linguistically remoteness also operates outside of the geographical and the measurements of distance, of farness. Remoteness has a psychological edge – as suggested by the word tyranny – a relationship, for example, to isolation, aloofness or detachment. The emotional implications of remoteness are in a sense two-sided – the promise of solitude but also a challenge to the individual and their mediation with the self. The emptiness of space or the emptiness of human contact meets the emptiness of the soul. With the threat of emptiness, we begin to doubt. As in the anxiety of fate, we doubt the contingencies of our beings.<sup>4</sup> The impacts of remoteness can be emotional, heartfelt and can touch our very being. Whilst remoteness can be powerful in terms of the social and political, it can also be isolating and challenging

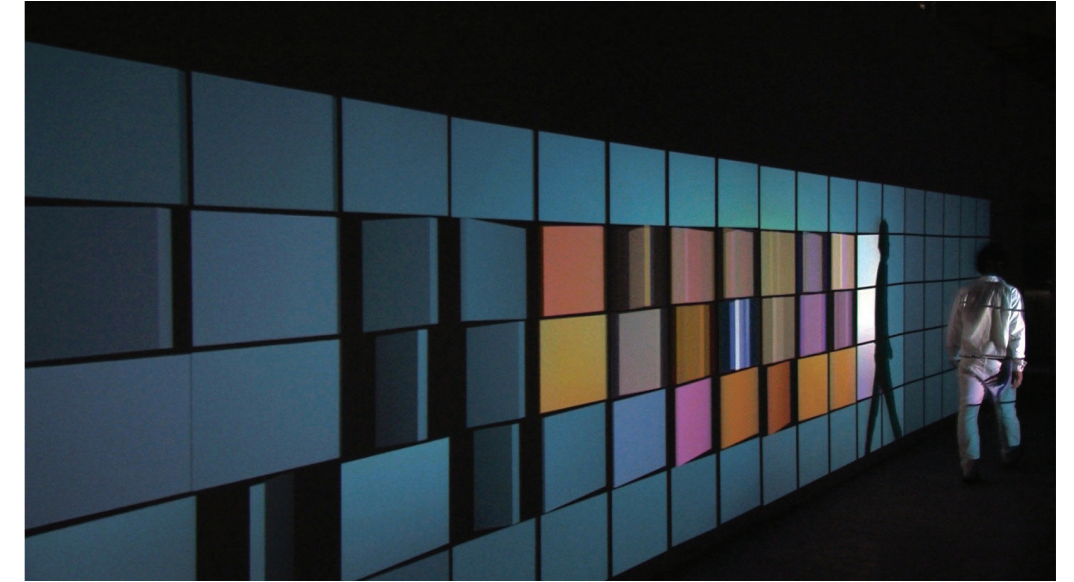


Christopher Baker  
*Hello World! or: How I Learned to Stop Listening and Love the Noise* 2008  
 AV Installation

for the individuals within. To apply a more phenomenological approach to the notion of remoteness, feelings of direct and sensory experience of perception may instead be highlighted. The integral mental field of comprehension splits into numerous spatial temporal layers that ensure that the independent existence of phenomena prevail as significant players. The notion of the psychological and the spiritual impacts of remoteness will instead remain intact and of integral importance. For the person who favours the hand that touches and the direct experiences of interactions, the idea of becoming saturated by distance itself is likely to be problematic. Merleau-Ponty for example suggests "A sensation would be no sensation at all if it were not the sensation of something, and 'things' in their most general sense of the word, for example specific qualities, stand out from the amorphous mass of impressions only if the latter is put into perspective and coordinated by space."<sup>5</sup>

Historically, Australia's remoteness is seen as an impediment to our social, political and cultural development and this mindset continues to exist. But distance can also be seen to benefit and protect fragile environments, national security and traditional cultures. The notion of the benefits of distance is taken up by the 17<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney Director David Elliott who suggests that distance is cast as integral to the differences between cultures, and to the distinction between art and life.<sup>6</sup> Elliot continues by stating that distance allows us to be ourselves despite the many capacities we share.<sup>7</sup>

Globalisation has seen the world of communication metaphorically shrinking in some ways and expanding in other ways due to digital media. Within this environment we have seen a compression of time and space bringing into closer contact images, meanings, ways of life and cultural practices, which would otherwise have remained separated by time and space.<sup>8</sup> An expansion of cultural interaction has been an imperative in the era of globalisation. Trade, adoption, adaption of cultural and artistic modes, the flow of religions and diasporas of people as well as the travels of individuals and ideas have shaped the cultures of the Asia-Pacific and beyond.<sup>9</sup> Peter Weibel states that true global art today is post-ethnic.<sup>10</sup> If so what happens to cultural, social and political specificity? If the tyranny of distance in 1966 was measuring distance's negative impact on economic growth then the tyranny of distance in 2010 may instead concern the loss of cultural specificity in the global market. As globalisation compounds our expectations of distance, digital networks dramatically



Louis-Phillipe Demers, Armin Purkrabek and Phillip Schulze  
*Prayer Drums* (installation view) 2009  
 2 Channel Interactive Installation

affect the nature of language and the rate of exchange. Digital technologies offer duplicity to the notion of remoteness. Both a cause and effect globalisation digital networks paradoxically dispel the need for physical human contact while bringing us closer together. Digital technologies offer both a utopian solution to the problems of remoteness but also challenge local languages (visual and spoken) as a global vernacular emerges.

The word remoteness is used as an axial point to inspire and to combine artists that draw on issues relating to the social, emotional and physical experiences of the various remote environments that we inhabit across the world. The intention is to guide people into a connection with remote terrains and to find responsive links between a diversity of locations. Showcasing the video, performance, new media and transmedia works of more than 20 artists from countries such as Australia, USA, Japan, Sweden and Singapore, *Remoteness* offers a unique perspective on human experience and its fragile relationship with the world in which we live. The artworks become a visual and physical tool to show how remoteness affects human perception. Digital media is used as an electronic mirror to reflect the social and the political, the public and the personal dimensions of the world.<sup>11</sup>

**Matthew Perkins is the Studio Coordinator of Photomedia in the Faculty of Art & Design, Monash University.**  
**Dr Elaine Miles is an independent curator and artist.**

### Endnotes

1. Paul Bouissac, 'Semiotics as Enlightenment: East and West. A Critical Approach', Open Semiotic Resource Center, Refer to this article for a comprehensive overview of this notion. <http://www.semioticon.com/homepage/articles/enlightenment.htm>, accessed 01.07.2010.
2. Jacqueline Millner, *Preview, 17th biennale of Sydney*, Realtime on-line, <http://www.realtimearts.net/article/96/9806>, accessed 10.06.2010
3. Geoffrey Blainey, *The tyranny of distance: how distance shaped Australia's history*, (Melbourne: Macmillan, 1968).
4. Kin Ming Au, "Paul Tillich and Chu Hsi: Comparison of their views of Human Condition," in *Asian Thought and Culture*, vol. 47, (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), p.46.
5. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Translated by Colin Smith, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1962), p.217.
6. Jacqueline Millner, *Preview, 17th biennale of Sydney*, Realtime on-line, <http://www.realtimearts.net/article/96/9806>, accessed 10.06.2010
7. David Elliott, *The Beauty of Distance: Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age*, <http://www.bos17.com/page/theme.html>, accessed 08.06.2010.
8. John Storey, *Inventing Popular Culture: From Folklore to Globalization*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003), p.108.
9. Caroline Turner, 'Journey Without Maps: The Asia-Pacific Triennial' cited in *Beyond the Future: The Third Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art*, (Brisbane: Queensland Art Gallery, 1999), p.22.
10. Peter Weibel, Editorial, *Thermocline of Art: New Asian Waves*, Germany: ZKM, [http://hosting.zkm.de/thermoclines/stories/storyReader\\$9#weibel](http://hosting.zkm.de/thermoclines/stories/storyReader$9#weibel), accessed 20.11.2007.
11. Catherine Elwes, *Video Art: A Guided Tour*, (London, New York: I. B. Tauris, 2005), p.2.