

Coding Cultures explores how a range of media technologies can enable communities to express and share their stories in innovative and imaginative ways. I am particularly interested in this intersection between people using well established processes for engaging with communities and individuals and the application of a range of information and communication technologies (ICTs) such as the web or mobile phones for example. These new technologies enable a rich participatory media culture where people can make, share and distribute their experiences.

We are proud to be working with Campbelltown Arts Centre which ranks as one of the most progressive cultural organisations in our country who, together with d/Lux/MediaArts, are hosting a week long program of free concept labs, a symposium and the *Handbook for Coding Cultures*. Working together with our remarkable Project Curator, Francesca da Rimini, we have brought together an extraordinary group of leading international artists from the UK, Canada and Jamaica with some of Australia's most inspiring and innovative new media and screen culture practitioners. These projects use an array of digital and communication technology tools, including customised softwares, the internet, mobiles, streaming media and online video sharing sites, to extend creative community projects such as multi-narrative documentaries, urban mapping, social activism, digital story telling projects, performance, audio labs and digital radio networks.

While to some the kinds of activities and ideas we introduce through Coding Cultures may seem very new and challenging, many of them are fundamentally rooted in traditions and aesthetics which predate the digital. One only need look at the tightly embedded conceptual frameworks and motivations that inform projects based on community mapping or public authoring of spaces we see in the work of UK-based Proboscis. It is not hard to strip away the technological layer used in some of their projects to see that the principle and politic of their work is based on well founded processes and ideas hammered out in the mid to late twentieth century. These include not least the highly influential works of movements such as Fluxus and their idea of social sculpture, and the Situationists' free ranging practice of *dérive*.

Likewise, concepts of the layering of space and the multiplicity of narratives and subjectivities that informed the Public Art movements of the 1980s clearly remains to the fore. These ideas are now significantly enabled by an array mobile devices including mobile phones and GPS. In this cluster of technologies we can include wireless and free file sharing applications such as blue tooth or semacode, a barcode with an embedded URL that links real world objects to unique on-line data resources, e.g., a story or short video about the location.

Like the concepts and learnings derived from earlier socially-engaged arts, community-based media practice is informed and enabled by the beliefs and values of the open source software movement which at its heart steadfastly supports the idea of the importance of free and open transfer of information. We too need to acknowledge new regimes of content licensing systems such as Creative Commons and the importance of a free, shared online public space, the digital commons. No one yet owns the internet (which in this era is somewhat of a miracle) and that's what makes it such an important and valued public resource.

In this handbook you will encounter examples of some really progressive thinking about the idea of media and community. For example, Brazil's Digital Culture Agenda, the *Pontos de Cultura*, and the idea of digital citizenship, is quite breathtaking as an example of where government cultural policy has engaged so imaginatively with the idea of digital culture underwritten by access to media tools and networks.

I frequently come across really practical, imaginative and inspiring projects, some of which we are introducing here in Coding Cultures. It is unfortunate that at this time there has been a steady withdrawal of Australian Government support for art forms that successfully blend both community-based art and new media practices. I also commonly encounter people who to me represent a sort of digital divide. Not in the way the term digital divide is commonly understood as a lack of access to networks or computers, but more an attitudinal resistance or unwillingness to seriously engage with, and think about, the implications and opportunities that new forms of technologies and their applications enable, especially in a community or cultural context.

This attitudinal digital divide is, I think, borne out of fear and uncertainty. It is to some in the worlds of art and film where we work that the 'digital' is a kind of 'inconvenient truth', which to their minds destabilises established positions and debases traditional forms of practice and ways doing things. What I still find extraordinary about this resistance is that the amazing facility new information and

communications sharing technologies provide, really doesn't take away from what is being done already but rather provides astounding opportunities for greater participation, imagination and diversity in our creative and cultural lives. I think that this can only be a good thing.

The job I see at hand at this moment in Australia is to get on with fostering an environment where some of the new ideas we see coming on are promoted and supported. We must maintain the momentum that has been steadily building amongst practitioners, who are already working with the kinds of concepts and technologies Coding Cultures shares.

So on behalf of d/Lux/MediaArts my thanks to the many people who have supported the development and realisation of Coding Cultures. My sincerest thanks go to Francesca da Rimini, our guest co-curator and commissioning editor for the Handbook for Coding Cultures. Campbelltown Arts Centre has again joined with us to host this project, and we are glad to be working with them again. The British Council have been enthusiastic and generous supporters, and our project funding agencies and partners, the Australia Council, Arts NSW and the NSW Film & Television Office, have our acknowledgement and thanks for making this project possible. We too are grateful to the writers for taking up our commissions to write for our Handbook, and Symposium speakers David Vadiveloo, Chris Saunders, Carl Kuddell, Lena Nahlous, Ben Hoh and Trey Thomas. Our international guests have been inspiring—so thanks to mervin Jarman, Camille Turner, Giles Lane and Alice Angus, who have travelled so far to join us in thinking about these ideas of Code and Culture.



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