New media, art and a creative culture

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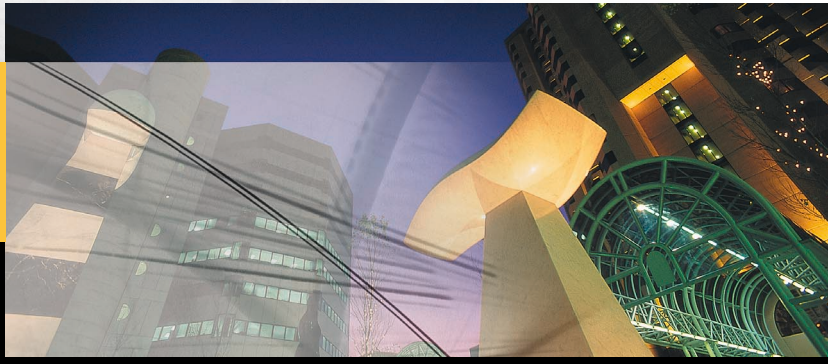

Blast Theory
Thinkers in Residence 2004

Government
of South Australia

New media, art and a creative culture

Prepared by
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Adelaide Thinkers in Residence

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Blast Theory

The following partners and sponsors were involved in Blast Theory's residency:

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Blast Theory is one of the leading artists' groups in Britain, making interactive performances, installations, video and mixed reality projects. Combining rigorous research and development with leading edge technologies, their practice ranges across media and disciplines, taking risks and encouraging critical debate.
Comprising Matt Adams, Ju Row Farr and Nick Tandavanitj, Blast Theory has been shortlisted twice for an Interactive Arts BAFTA Award. Their work *Can You See Me Now?* was originally commissioned by the UK Shooting Live Artists initiative of the BBC, Arts Council of England and the Culture Company. This work won the *Golden Nica* at the *2003 Prix Ars Electronica* - an international competition of cyberarts - and has led to the group being commissioned by the BBC to develop an interactive television program.

Blast Theory were accompanied by personnel from the Mixed Reality Lab (MRL) their collaborative partnership from the University of Nottingham. MRL brings together leading researchers from the Schools of Computer Science, Engineering and Psychology to research mixed reality – new technologies that merge the physical and digital worlds. The members from MRL accompanying Blast Theory were Martin Flintham, Jan Humble, Professor Steve Benford, Head of the Mixed Reality Lab, and Dr Ian Taylor.

Foreword

The Thinkers in Residence program brings some of the world's greatest minds to Adelaide. The aim is to stimulate debate and discussion on matters vital to the State.

The program recognises that international experts bring new perspectives, foster different approaches and provide a valuable source of networking to our State. Thinkers transfer skills, build local capacity, develop industry, advise government, and inform and educate leaders in the community.

Matt Adams, Ju Row Farr and Nick Tandavanitj make up Blast Theory – one of the leading new-media groups in the world. Their work is watched by technology companies, the defence and entertainment industries, and academics. Their period in Adelaide has been closely followed by universities and IT companies across the globe.

Blast Theory challenged us to think innovatively and creatively in a relatively new field of human knowledge: interactive games, including their power, ethics and social implications. Blast Theory is not talking about the games young people play in the privacy of their lounge rooms. It is talking about the streets of a city as the gameboard, with mobile phones, laptops, 3G technology and the web as tools. The interactive games industry is already much bigger than the global film industry, and it is continuing to grow. We are merely at the tip of the iceberg in understanding how they will change our lives.

Blast Theory's residency culminated in a highly successful, world-premier new-media performance for the Adelaide Fringe. *I Like Frank In Adelaide* was a technology-based game using 3G mobile telecommunications. Nearly 3000 people from all over the world played it and were introduced to a virtual Adelaide.

The linking of the arts and sciences is considered one of the most promising frontiers for the development of human knowledge, and this is the focus of Blast Theory's work.

In total, 5000 people were directly involved in Blast Theory's residency – from teachers and students, to business people, academics, technical experts and the players of *I Like Frank In Adelaide*. This report forms just one part of the Blast Theory experience in Adelaide.

Mike Rann
Premier of South Australia
September 2004

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Ju Row Farr, Nick Tandavanitj and I from Blast Theory spent three months in Adelaide during January, February and March 2004. We were accompanied by our collaborators from the Mixed Reality Lab at the University of Nottingham, Martin Flintham and Jan Humble. For shorter periods Professor Steve Benford, Head of the Mixed Reality Lab and Dr Ian Taylor spent time in the city helping us to create the world's first mixed reality game for 3G (Third Generation) phones entitled, *I Like Frank In Adelaide*.

We also conducted a masterclass with artists, scientists and IT professionals from around Australia. We held seminars with school teachers and with pupils. We mentored high school students and worked with others to make documentaries about our work. We worked with three local artists and two scientists for seven weeks to create *I Like Frank In Adelaide*.

We met with artists, scientists and more than 240 local new media industry representatives via breakfast presentations, visits to labs, backstage tours and a multitude of informal contacts. We exchanged views with leaders in the cultural sector and consulted widely in the arts communities about the challenges facing South Australia.

This report is an attempt to synthesise this powerful, thrilling and exhausting process into some outcomes that may assist the city and the State.

As artists, we were enormously privileged to be given such a platform from which to engage with this friendly, enquiring and forward-looking community.

We would especially like to thank Premier Mike Rann for having the courage to invite us as part of such a prestigious program. Surveying our fellow Thinkers In Residence is a humbling experience. It says a great deal about the Premier and the city that we should be given the opportunity to approach this program from what might be considered an oblique angle. Ann Clancy was a perceptive, supportive and critically engaged mentor throughout. And without the vision of Heather Croall then at the South Australian Film Corporation, Karen Hadfield at the Adelaide Fringe and Julianne Pierce at the Australian Network of Art and Technology, we would never have had such a fantastic opportunity.

Matt Adams
Blast Theory

Blast Theory

When I was fourteen years old a visionary visited my school. The man was a pioneer in new technologies and he had come to announce how the world I was growing up in was on the verge of radical change. He brandished a VHS tape and announced that television was going to be transformed forever. Using the power of VHS everyone would make their own TV programs. Instead of accepting the bland output of comedy and drama from the existing networks we would simply take control ourselves and become producers as well as consumers. TV stations would close, corporations would fold and a new wave of creativity was about to be unleashed. To me it seemed like impeccable logic and the scenario he described seemed inevitable.

Over the following years it became clear that what he had predicted was certainly not coming true and I began to think of him as an idiot. Someone who was misguided and over confident. He had failed to understand that people are essentially passive, happy to consume what they are fed.

Then the internet happened and I became less sure. Suddenly there was exactly the kind of explosion that he had seen. Instead of making their own TV on VHS, people were making their own comedy, drama and documentaries online. It was impossible to foresee the impact that the internet would have and yet, in a way, the VHS evangelist had done precisely that.

The ideas that I present here have been developed collaboratively with Ju Row Farr and Nick Tandavanitj from Blast Theory. I have spent more time with them than with anyone else in my life and together we have shaped each other's ideas and identities. I may have written this text but the ideas are shared and have been developed through argument and discussion with Ju and Nick.

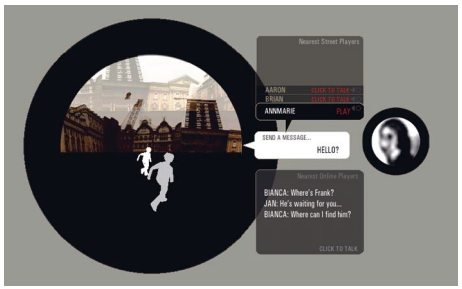
I want to discuss some of our work and talk about its relationship to mobile phones, games and new technology. I want to explore the relationship between art and society and how culture is being seen as increasingly important in economic development. And I want to talk about how new media has blurred some of the boundaries between science, art and commerce. But first of all I want to go back to our beginnings.

We chose the name Blast Theory in 1991 from an anarchist fanzine which, in turn, had stolen it from the British artist Wyndham Lewis. The phrase that made such an impact was 'Blast Theory, Bless Practice'. Against the backdrop of post modernism and a Thatcherite recession, we set out our stall to be about doing, making and taking action. Nearly fifteen years later our artwork is still the place where we can fully express ourselves. It is only in that context that our personal fears and our public concerns can be fully expressed.

I Like Frank

I would like to start by describing *I Like Frank in Adelaide* which we created as part of the 2004 Adelaide Festival Fringe. It is a game in which players online, in a virtual city and on the streets of the real city, are searching for Frank. On the street each player moves alone through the CBD of Adelaide using a 3G phone to guide them. By clicking a button marked 'I Am Here' they trigger messages about Frank; where he is, where he might have been and what kind of person he is.

Online players inhabit a virtual model of the same area. Using their arrow keys they move their avatar around the city. As they do so they can open up photos that show a different view of the same area. They too are looking for Frank but in order to find him they have to guide street players to a location in the city to retrieve a hidden postcard. Then they must make sure their postal address ends up on the postcard.



For both sets of players a successful outcome is a 'meeting' with the voice of the game. This person explains that Frank is someone they spent time with in Adelaide but have now lost touch with.

This work, like *Uncle Roy All Around You (2003)*, is a hybrid of games, theatre and mobile technologies in which social interaction is the governing principle. But most importantly it is a work about loss and absence. Frank is never found, he is permanently missing. The internet, the mobile phone and virtual worlds all serve to create people who are both there and not there at the same time. The voice we hear in our ear sounds next to us but the person may be thousands of miles away.

Blast Theory are not cheerleaders for new technology. All three of us have very mixed feelings about these new devices, but we are fascinated by how they are changing our society.

Why New Media?

As mobile phones have reached near ubiquity in many developed countries, they have attained a distinct position as pieces of new technology. From the VCR to the home computer, from the Walkman to the internet, no other technological development has reached so deeply into the social fabric. Mobile phones have become established within demographics such as pre-teenagers, the poor and – in Europe at least – rural dwellers who have traditionally been excluded from, or resistant to, new technologies. According to one study in the UK, mobile phone usage was higher among the homeless population than among the general population. A mobile communication device has become increasingly important for those without a fixed address.

As artists, we have become fascinated by this seismic shift in how we talk to one another. Some outcomes – which are easily measurable and have revenue implications for telecoms companies – are well understood and frequently discussed, such as the rise in texting. But what are the marginal or invisible shifts that are taking place?

Social arrangements among high users of mobile devices have been profoundly altered. It is now typical, in my experience, for plans for a group of friends to meet to unfold in a new way. In the days of fixed phone lines friends would ring each other to arrange a time and place to meet a few days in advance. Subsequently the group would converge at that rendezvous. Now, the entire process proceeds on a contingent and ad hoc basis. There can be many small communications between the group in which the members of the group, the time and the location may be revised on the fly – up to a few minutes before the designated time. What does this do to our sense of friendship or our understanding of place?

Most shockingly, on September 11th 2001 it became imprinted on our consciousness that the mobile phone collapses the distinct zones of communication that once existed. As relatives received their final communication from their loved ones in their cars, on buses and on trains during the morning rush hour, the appalling contrast between the banality of their location and the impact of what they were hearing added to the horror. On a more mundane level, users in many countries are now familiar with the juxtaposition of private, intimate conversations with a secondary, inadvertent audience. What does it mean to have an argument with your partner while simultaneously being aware that you are being overheard by acquaintances or strangers?

With the advent of the third generation of mobile telephony these profound changes will take on a new dimension. 3G promises a constant connection to the internet, a high bandwidth (enabling live video calls) and ultimately, location-based services. For example, TV news could be playing on your handset while you call a taxi which already knows where you are.

This now means that the internet spills onto the street and so do many of the social anxieties that the internet has brought with it. If you only consumed the mainstream media you could believe that the internet was entirely populated by paedophiles, neo-Nazis and cannibals. This enormous sprawling world is, in my experience, an endlessly complex, subtle and fascinating place in which a ten year old can have a better home page than a multinational corporation.

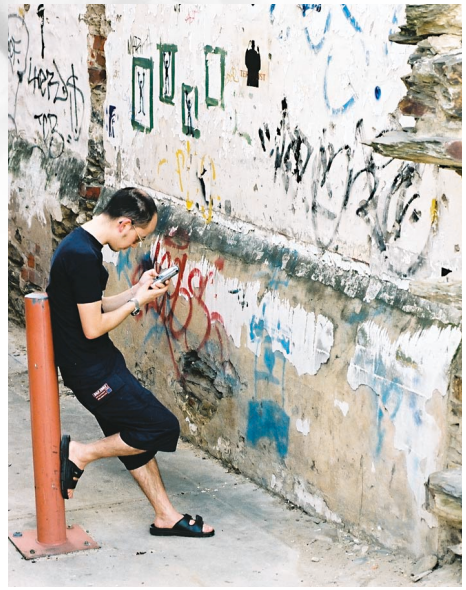
Attempts by governments around the world to control the most fundamental transformation in publishing over the last 500 years are as unedifying as they are impotent. But they may not remain impotent indefinitely. Behind the rhetoric of protecting our children and saving the 'helpless' multinational recording industry, lies a concerted attempt to roll back the free spaces that new technology has created. Attempting to make Internet Service Providers responsible for the content delivered on their servers is the equivalent of making the telephone companies responsible for the conversations on their network. It is a regressive, restrictive step driven by a relentless overstatement of the dangers.

At its heart this is an 'old school' battle for the control of information. Let's have no illusions that the changes in global media ownership over the last two decades have restricted choice, undermined independence and inhibited the plurality of voices heard. If these processes are replicated online they will have profound and long term effects.

This is not to say that the internet is a paradise of free speech and democratic values. There are many legitimate concerns about the reliability of information that is distributed and about the potential abuse of the innocent. And in our work we try to explore these issues. In *Uncle Roy All Around You*, online players and street players are asked whether they will make a commitment to be there for a stranger for the next twelve months. If they agree, they swap their email address or phone number with another player in order to activate that contract.

When we presented this work to a group of teachers in Adelaide there was some unease that we were encouraging young people to trust strangers in direct opposition to current educational practice. But in a subsequent seminar with 120 students aged between twelve and sixteen, we found that at least sixty percent of them had pretended to be someone else in an internet chat room. It is not enough to take a 'Just Say No' attitude to young people and the internet. They are already exploring these spaces for themselves and finding out that, in the vast majority of cases, the risks are very low. There is a tremendous challenge for educators to learn about what is going on out there and to engage positively with it. Sites such as *Habbo Hotel* provide a template for well managed, beautifully designed social spaces for young people.

Games are the biggest drivers of these changes. The cliche of a lone teen in a darkened room, shunning nutrition and social contact while pretending to be a wizard, is long past its sell-by date. Well, except the wizard part. That's worse than ever. But you can blame *The Lord of the Rings* for that. What has changed is that games are becoming social spaces. *Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Games* are huge. These games such as *Everquest, Lineage*



and *America's Army* involve virtual worlds in which you build up a character through your interactions with other players, as well as by interacting with the game. Driven by the adoption of broadband this genre of gaming is growing fast. *Lineage* has over four million players, those playing *Everquest* spend an average of twenty hours a week in the game, in return for paying a monthly subscription.

Concurrently, there is a burgeoning interest among artists in games. As the first generation of gamers from the 1970s and 1980s has matured they have not stopped playing games. Instead they are looking for new ideas and new challenges beyond the fantasy and sci-fi genres which have dominated mass market gaming. People are taking games engines – the software used to describe the world of the game – and are making modifications for their own purposes. *Machinima* is the emerging genre in which movies are made, using virtual sets taken from games.

911 Survivor is a modification of *Unreal Tournament* in which you are a victim trapped in the World Trade Centre. Sometimes you can escape down the seemingly endless staircases, in other games there is no way out. *Escape from Woomera*, which is currently under development, invites players to play the role of a refugee escaping from a detention centre, posing many questions about who we identify with, why and when we play games. At the moment, games such as this often attract opprobrium for combining games with serious issues. They are seen as trivialising important political questions. I see this in reverse: they bring a long overdue seriousness to games.

When we compare these tentative steps to the emergence of cinema as a bone fide art form 90 or 100 years ago, the parallels are striking. Here is an industry ,that is making money (lots of money), that is seen as low-brow, unworthy of serious comment and one that generally sticks to tried and tested combinations of sex, violence and dazzling effects. In other words, here is cinema in 1914, just before DW Griffiths, FW Murnau and Sergei Eisenstein between them created *The Birth of a Nation*, *Nosferatu* and *Battleship Potemkin*.

When we combine games on the internet with the internet on mobile phones and artists working on games, we have the preconditions for a profound cultural shift. These are particularly reflected in the general move towards greater mobility. Whether it is refugees travelling thousands of miles, the number of cars in circulation, or the rise of personal organisers, we are surrounded by evidence of the increased movement of people and objects. In this environment static things have less relevance and less purpose.

Artistic Practice

My background is in the theatre. At the age of thirteen I fluked the audition into a professional production and found my passion. At the same time, I saw a production of *An Inspector Calls* and realised that theatre could combine the personal with the political in the here and now with a knockout punch. For a decade acting and directing was everything to me. But it gradually became apparent that the form of theatre was in a slow motion crisis. As audiences worked longer and more irregular hours, as they travelled greater distances, as their time became more constricted, theatre became less and less attractive. When we performed at eight o'clock in the evening, much of the audience would arrive directly from work without having eaten. The format of theatre has changed little since the 18th century, but our society has changed beyond all recognition.

This is not to say that traditional theatre is finished. But in the same way that painting was transformed forever by the arrival of photography, it does have to change. Especially if it seeks to reach a new, younger audience and to have cultural impact.

In the face of the social changes I have described, we have sought to rethink the fundamentals of the performing arts. Given that the essential aspect of theatre that compels me is a group of people coming together at a particular time and in a particular place to engage with complex ideas and emotions, how can the art form respond to these social and technological challenges?

Through our collaboration with the Mixed Reality Lab at the University of Nottingham we have explored the ways in which interactivity may provide a new set of possibilities. The MRL is a multidisciplinary team of around thirty researchers with backgrounds in computer science, sociology, ethnography and product design, focussing on the ways in which real and virtual space may be joined. Over the last seven years we have made four major works together.

For *I Like Frank In Adelaide* we had up to four of our colleagues from the MRL working with us programming the game engine, programming the 3G phones and developing the game in discussions with us.

What we have discovered is the combination of scientific and artistic approaches is a very powerful way of addressing technology problems that have social outcomes. As part of backstage tours for members of the new media industry, I gave an example of this approach.

Games such as *I Like Frank In Adelaide* rely on understanding the position of players in the city. Traditionally, this has been achieved with the Global Positioning System (GPS), an American military system that uses twenty-four satellites to pinpoint a location. However GPS is deeply flawed in urban environments because tall buildings obscure the satellites. We quickly realised that we would have tremendous problems explaining GPS to players of the game. Instead, we wondered whether we could create a game in which players indicated their own position by moving a map. Inspired by the observation that you only tend to look at the part of a map that shows where you are, we then rethought the game so that it would work in this way. We created a game in which if you cheated, the information you received would mean nothing and thus, removed the need for any location-based hardware. When the Mixed Reality Lab analysed the results of this technique several fascinating conclusions became obvious.

At first our technique of self-reported positioning seemed less accurate than GPS. However, on closer examination it transpired that as players came to understand the technique, they were exploiting it. They were moving the map so that it showed them at a road junction 100 metres ahead of their actual position. Players were doing this because they knew that the system has a certain latency: it takes 10 to 20 seconds for their position to be transmitted from the phone to the game servers, then out to the players on the web. Also, they knew that a road junction was a key moment when they would need assistance: it was a more valuable place to be seen.

When faced with the weakness of GPS the traditional route of computer science would have been to attempt to improve the performance of the technology. Instead, by inverting the problem we created a solution that was quick, cheap, flexible and allowed the players to use it intelligently to enhance their experience.

The Value

As well as attempting to respond in our work to the society around us, we have been making work during a fundamental reappraisal of the importance of the arts. The role of the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, or of Tate Modern in London, as tools of regeneration is widely appreciated. What distinguishes these projects is the bravery and risk-taking required to make them happen. Frank Gehry, who designed the Guggenheim Museum, was initially considered a maverick by many in the architectural community. Herzog and De Meuron, who designed Tate Modern, were little known. Both teams were given the support and the scope to create their masterpieces.

These projects have an impact that extends far beyond their immediate roles of displaying art to an enthusiastic audience. They send powerful messages about the values of their culture and have transformed their immediate surroundings. Ju and I have twice experienced at firsthand, the ability of artists themselves to transform their surroundings. First, in Bermondsey in South London, and then in Hoxton in North London where small communities of artists have changed perceptions of these neighbourhoods. These small communities have brought new development, new wealth and then, ironically, been driven out by the rent hikes that follow. In both instances it has not required large buildings to achieve results. And the rise of a more mobile society, in which artists are working in more and more diverse contexts, makes buildings less and less important. For the cost of one Tate Modern you could fund thousands of smaller projects for a decade.

In Hoxton a forward looking council and a canny property developer saw the potential, created once hundreds of artists migrated into the area. As the column inches accumulated in the press, bars and cafes then restaurants and boutiques gradually clustered around Hoxton Square. By the late 90s the entire geography of the London art world was transformed as White Cube and other major West End galleries migrated East. In the earliest days, grants of a few thousand pounds were sufficient to nurture this process: the *Fete Worse Than Death* in 1994 was a summer fete in which performances (including one by Blast Theory), live music and stalls were created by artists in Hoxton Square. Now a legendary event that features in books on art in London, and which symbolised the rebirth of the area, it was created with enthusiasm and a tiny grant.

It is a common misperception to view artists as people who are subsidised by the State, who take money out. In fact, the artists subsidise the work more than anyone. My friends and contemporaries who are not artists earn many times what I earn. Most artists work for little or nothing in order to fulfill their passion and to make a contribution to their culture.

In education there is overwhelming evidence that engagement with art enables students to synthesise complex ideas, enhance their self esteem, be more confident of their place in a complex world and understand other points of view.

Even on the most narrow materialistic appreciations of the arts they can contribute significantly. In the last few years we have had increasing interest in Blast Theory's work from the commercial sector. Companies like Siemens, Motorola and Nike have approached us and in response, we have established a new company – Everpresence – to exploit these opportunities. Having taken modest amounts of State funding in the UK we are now exporting our work around the world and through Everpresence, started a dynamic new company.

In a global economy in which knowledge and creativity is an ever more highly prized resource, there is a fantastic opportunity for a small, vibrant and welcoming community such as Adelaide. We were shocked when, upon being invited to participate in the Thinkers in Residence program, we discovered that of the six leading creative Australians that we knew around the world, every one was originally from Adelaide. Clearly there is no shortage of fantastic talent here. Equally telling however, was the fact that they have all moved to Sydney, London or New York to build their careers.

Over the last thirty years the festival culture in this city has brought the cream of the world's culture here, to the obvious delight of locals and visitors. It has given Adelaide a global reputation. I would argue however, that in the future there needs to be a shift away from bringing global culture into Adelaide, rather towards creating a globally significant culture in the State that is exported outwards.

The episodic nature of festivals may be good for audiences but is not ideal for artists because it leads to feast and famine. Artists thrive in a mixed economy, in which there are plentiful creative opportunities, at a variety of scales, on a persistent basis. In London artists thrive on the piecemeal work generated by other richer industries such as music and advertising. It is a critical goal to establish and nurture a community of young artists and recent graduates in Adelaide and to convince them to use this city as a platform for international success. With modest amounts of money it is possible to build a very significant creative community.

The generation of young British artists who have conquered the world such as Damien Hirst, Gillian Wearing and Tracy Emin almost all came from Goldsmiths College, a small and previously relatively undistinguished university in South London. *Portishead, Massive Attack* and *Tricky* are only the best known of a wave of bands who emerged from a tiny community of musicians in Bristol. So it is with the Dogme film makers in Denmark and with fashion from Antwerp. A relatively small city such as Adelaide has huge potential. This is a city of tight networks and informal contacts in which face to face interactions are the norm. That Adelaide is cheap to live in and has a fantastic quality of life, provides a fertile ground for creativity. Now that trade is increasingly electronic or intellectual, the city's distance from the great world centres matters less and less.

Creativity

Creativity is widely understood as a vital part of a forward-looking, healthy society. At all levels of education and training there is a renewed focus on how innovation is led by creativity. We have undertaken a range of consultancy work in Europe on this exact area. While in Adelaide, I participated in the *Creativity Think Tank* as part of the Department of Education's Learning to Learn project. We were also fortunate to be hosted by the Technology School of the Future in Hindmarsh, which lead the way in using technology to foster creativity.

Like *innovation, creativity* is a word that you can't argue with. It seems to inherently be a good thing. But I would like to explore a little further what we mean by creativity. In my experience it is not a neat, sunny attribute like enthusiasm. It is often awkward, oppositional, disruptive and antagonistic. Looking at the seminal creative people of the last century, they are often marginal up to their moment of greatest impact and, in many cases, revert to the margins soon after that moment. Jackson Pollock is one example of a man whose career was intense, transforming our understanding of painting, but began to fade almost as soon as he came to prominence. William Burroughs and Francis Bacon were unfocused drifters well into their late thirties.

We can all be creative. Expressing ourselves is a critical part of being human and to refine those skills – whether in DJ-ing or in needlework, our style of dress, or our use of language – is life affirming and contributes to our society. But most of us are fairly tame most of the time: my poetry would make anyone shudder. Most of the time our attempt to be creative is merely aping what we have seen elsewhere. Witness the Sunday painter's crude pastiche of the great artists of the past.

The truly great creative people find their voice with such precision, such depth and surefootedness that we see their individual identity in a way that is shocking and delightful in equal measure. This applies to Woody Allen or *New Order*, to Kryzstof Kieslowski or Lucian Freud. Most of us cannot do this. Ironically, many of them cannot stop doing it; they are to some extent trapped by their talent.

Britain has a great tradition of producing creative people but it is notoriously antagonistic. We rarely venerate our talent. We attack it, question it and often undermine it. Damien Hirst and Tracy Emin are mocked in the mainstream press with thudding predictability. This creates a febrile public dialogue with many problems, such as a lack of serious discussion, damage to the individuals concerned and a focus on personalities rather than outputs. But it also engenders a constant challenge to the status quo. You are no sooner top of the pile than you are being called upon to defend your right to be there. This is in stark contrast to countries such as France where respect for artists and creativity is very high. Their leading exponents of creativity are feted and treated as national treasures. Of course this is a more civilised system: it rewards creative people and respects them for their achievement. However, it also enforces and upholds the status quo. Those who are venerated stick around for years, or decades, dominating the wider discourse. Neither the British nor the French approach can be deemed correct: but they create radically different kinds of culture.

Creativity cannot be corralled or neatly controlled. It doesn't usually arrive between 9am and 5pm. It is unruly and surprising. The very best ideas are often treated with scepticism and disdain. British inventor Trevor Baylis spent many years touting his clockwork radio before he could finally convince someone that this was a new technology that would transform the flow of information in the developing world. Marcel Duchamp's *Urinal* was seen as an insult, a mockery, childish, stupid, lacking skill or thought when it was first exhibited. Today we see it as important precisely because he saw so much further than anyone previously about the status of the artist and the art object.

The Key to Success

If we are serious about fostering risk, innovation and creativity we have to be brave, open minded and intellectually enquiring. The only reliable method of achieving these goals that I know is to search out creative people and give them space, time and support in order to enable them to reach their potential. And in terms of returns for this nurturing, the maximum gains are reached by supporting people early in their career. In effect, we are talking about research and development.

In corporate circles L'Oreal is held up as a template for the successful application of research and development (R&D). The fortunes of the company were transformed during the 1990s by an aggressive expansion of research and development with a budget in the hundreds of millions of dollars. A steady flow of market leading products began to flow and repaid the investment many times over.

In the UK the funding bodies for higher education have long championed R&D but now they are beginning to see the value of interdisciplinary collaborations. The Arts and Humanities Research Board has created an innovations fund and has created research fellowships to support this activity. Nick is currently a recipient of one of the fellowships. The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council is now following suit. The European Union has a track record of supporting major multi-partner collaborations between artists and scientists and companies.

What is crucial in all these processes is that the outcomes are not certain. This is the difference between development and innovation. In development we can plan for the outcomes in advance and measure the subsequent achievements against that plan. In order to innovate we must step into the unknown. This is not to say that the process should lack planning, rigour or careful assessment. This is not about handing resources over in return for a vague promise. It is about calculating the risks, weighing up the options and then taking a chance. It involves being prepared for the unexpected, for the oblique. It requires faith in the medium to long-term: results do not come at a predictable time or in a predictable way.

As many artists have begun working with digital tools, their skills have dramatically converged with the new industries of gaming, special effects, web design and so on. Artists who can script, who can program, who can edit, who can design, are increasingly common.

All of this means that the potential for partnerships between artists, scientists, games developers, broadcasters and the wider new media industry are growing fast. Now is the perfect time to take action to foster this process. One of the international tasks to be achieved to maximise this process is a thorough overhaul of the intellectual property laws. As currently configured, they offer scant protection to small teams of creative people. The painstaking lobbying by large corporations is inscribed in every facet of the international system.

Our work *Can You See Me Now?* was commissioned by a consortium of BBC Online, the Arts Council of England, the advertising agency Saatchi and Saatchi, a television production company and a conference. We received £10,000 to create the new work. Professor Steve Benford who heads the MRL, supported our idea. Through staff time and the loan of hardware, he leveraged our initial funding three or four-fold. We then created a work that ran for a total of six hours to a few hundred people in Sheffield in December 2000. It began to attract attention overseas. Then it was nominated for an Interactive Arts BAFTA. Then BBC Interactive approached us to make a TV program based on the idea. Then the piece won the *Golden Nica* for Interactive Art at the *Prix Ars Electronica* in Austria.

At the same time we were creating a range of other works, some more expensive and more high profile. We had no way of knowing ourselves where the most successful outcomes would be. Any funder, assessor or potential partner would have had equal difficulty identifying those outcomes. And it is with that kind of trust and faith that the strongest partnerships are built. Blast Theory has no written agreement with the Mixed Reality Lab that covers our collaborations: we have worked on trust and will continue to do so.

Throughout the early years of Blast Theory's development we relied on the support of a few key funders and partners in order to survive. It was only after nearly a decade of promise and incremental development that we found our voice and widespread recognition.

Part of the key to our success was the fostering of regional and national funding agencies. The Arts Council played a key role in brokering relationships with the BBC and with universities. Key officers at the British Council helped us to build relationships with foreign promoters and curators.

I believe that the kind of strategies that I have outlined:

- fostering a vibrant, local creative community through seed funding
- government support to build relationships between art, science and commerce
- exporting Adelaide's creativity around the world
- creating a broad commitment to innovation and creativity in the widest sense

have the capacity to build a thriving new media economy, arts community and research environment in South Australia.

Recommendations

From this broad overview we would like to suggest some possible methods of implementing these ideas.

Art and science

- Consult in detail with artists and scientists about their respective expectations and aspirations for interdisciplinary practice.

- Begin a diverse set of seminars, presentations and one-day conferences, with a specific agenda to foster links between the two disciplines. A balance of attendees from each sector will exchange views, learn about each other's practice and engage with interdisciplinary debates. The outcomes should be an informed debate, in the context of best practice around the world, that deepens and expands understanding between the sectors. Debates should have frequent opportunities for the general public to ask questions, make comments and engage with the discussion. These activities should have a thread and continuity (in organisation, location, structure) to contribute to a sense of momentum and should build on recent successful projects such as the Crossover Labs in 2003.

- Create a Hub Club. Inspired by a London-based forum of the same name which ran during the 1990s, the Hub Club is a regular informal gathering in which interdisciplinary practitioners show work to one another and then have the opportunity to ask for help or advice. It is open to all, but is fostered by careful invitation to maximise the cross-fertilisation of ideas and practices. Allowing guests from out of State will help to establish Adelaide as a national beacon for progressive practice.

- Run residencies. Both to put artists into scientific institutions and, especially vice versa. The Institute of Contemporary Arts in London has a Scientist in Residence. This is a crucial indicator that the two areas are seen as equals and both have things to learn from one another. Residencies may be very short (a week or two) or longer (three to six months) but need to be carefully mentored by an experienced person or team to ensure clarity of purpose, productive collaboration and to disseminate outcomes.

Art and commerce

- Create partnerships between arts funders and industry development programs. The goal should be to look for opportunities for those in the creative sector to bring fresh perspectives and surprising innovations to the South Australian new media, telecoms and games industries in particular. An early vehicle for this is to establish a fund that involves artists in commercial developments. For example, three grants of $10,000 could be offered in which artists can work with one local company to create a work. m.Net is the kind of company that could benefit greatly from this kind of collaboration.

- Instigate relationships between artists and companies, arts funders and industry development specialists to use their clout to nurture artists, make introductions, make the case to companies about the benefits of inter-disciplinary practice. One model from the UK is *The Club*, a monthly social event in which a carefully selected list of guests from across the different sectors are invited to meet over drinks. The hosts make themselves available to make introductions. Like The Hub Club the events are always thematic: the focus is on ideas.

- Give games serious consideration alongside traditional art forms. Adelaide already has a thriving games sector, but the potential is far greater. As mobile devices, the internet and games converge, strategic relationships between these different industries will be key. Adelaide is a great incubator for these kind of interdisciplinary relationships. Cultural organisations should recognise the potential of artists to engage with this process. Intellectually rigorous examinations of games will provide a vital underpinning for these developments.

Education, training and social inclusion

- Build thriving, multiple dialogues between the creative sectors and pedagogy. Encouraging students from Year 10 onwards to discuss culture, articulate why they like or dislike certain works and appraise developments in creative practice.

- Put experienced professional artists into schools to challenge, inspire and expand the horizons of students. These can be single short sessions or may run over weeks or a term. They need not necessarily be tightly integrated with the curriculum – short visits with a high impact may be more effective – but can be appraised on a broader set of criteria.

- Encourage educators and support them to learn about developments in contemporary culture. For example, where students and their teachers engage with contemporary cultural practice, serious discussion about gaming, chat rooms, blogs and texting might provide starting points. The Technology School of the Future is ideally placed to facilitate this process.

- Give gaming, the internet, music and the graphic arts a significant place in the curriculum. Current research into the role of the arts in education indicate that they play a crucial role in reaching disaffected students and fighting social exclusion.

- Consider placements for students in the final years of their education in local arts, science and industry organisations. This works for the mutual benefit of all concerned when careful consideration is given to the needs of those students.

- Expand multi-disciplinary training in which technical skills, critical debate and artistic approaches are taught side by side.

- Use new technologies to increase the possibilities for artists to serve the regeneration of neighbourhoods. Blast Theory has worked with several local councils to re-animate pedestrian corridors, problem streets and areas lacking an identity. This notion of social inclusion is expanded upon as part of 'Fostering a vibrant creative community' below.

- Use the new range of mobile technologies to reflect aspects of culture not possible in static museum displays. Blast Theory's experience at Flinders University discussing this issue with representatives of the Indigenous community, made this particularly apparent. Using Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs) allows self-guided tours of urban areas or outback areas to link cultural experiences to geography in a way that is ideally suited to Australia. Some of this work is already under way in Adelaide, but there is potential for the city to be a world leader in this kind of cultural experience.

Research and development

- Broaden the definitions of R&D funding and cultural funding to include processes in which outcomes are not tightly defined in advance, or may change during the research. To create opportunities for blue-sky thinking in all fields and across all areas. (In 1997 Blast Theory received £5,000 to spend two weeks undertaking R&D with no requirements for public outcomes. We chose to experiment with projecting into water spray: it was through this work that we forged our collaboration with the Mixed Reality Lab.)

- Place collaboration, partnerships and multi-disciplinary practices at the heart of the criteria for R&D funding.

- Make links between humanities and science-based R&D funds to coordinate targets, criteria and share good practice.

- Establish a favourable intellectual property environment. The city and the State may be limited in what they can do to change laws, but we believe that this is a massive opportunity to build creative industries. At the least, the State can disseminate information and lobby for change to support small creative teams. Current IP law is complex, expensive to implement and favours large corporations.

Exports

- Conduct a thorough overhaul of how creative work from South Australia is exported nationally and internationally, including discussions with key cultural partners about current practice.

- Ensure that State funding is flexible enough to support some out of State activity.

- Nurture key practitioners and give them focused support to reach a national and international audience.

- Showcase emerging work from the State (and from interstate) through festivals. Care should be taken to brand this work to maximise its visibility and to highlight the nascent status of the work. Artists must be chosen with care, encouraged to take risks and given the right to fail from time to time.

- Set aside a particular venue at future Fringe Festivals to build a distinct identity for the cream of South Australian work.

- Make funding available to bring international artists visiting Sydney and Melbourne to Adelaide.

- Replace South Australia's current slogan, *The Festival State* to reflect an outward looking and forward looking impetus in the medium term.

Rewarding excellence

- Make money available to get behind success stories and maximise their potential. For example, a theatrical hit should be able to pick up additional funding to enable it to tour or be revived, or to visit national and international festivals .

- Shift a proportion of arts funding away from buildings. They consume enormous resources, but put relatively little into the hands of artists. The cost of one building can translate into huge amounts of artist-led activity. This can be implemented incrementally over the medium term without the need to close buildings. The first step is to be very wary of new cultural buildings.

- Build on the strengths that already exist. The Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT) is a prime example of a nationally significant organisation that must not be lost to Melbourne or Sydney. ANAT provides a ready-made platform from which to launch some of these initiatives.

Fostering a vibrant creative community

- Put the interests of young and emerging artists at the heart of arts planning and urban planning. This group is diverse, diffuse, often marginal. They do not have good mechanisms for influencing agendas. They often lack lobbying skills and may not articulate their needs in simple or palatable ways. But they are a crucial part of Adelaide's future and the city must keep them if it is serious about building innovation, creativity and risk. One starting point is to talk to and listen to these people. Why do they leave? What do they lack? What excites them? What do they love about Adelaide?

- Generate cheap places to live, cheap places to make work, a diverse range of outlets throughout the year in which to show young and emerging artists' work, a supportive and constructively critical discourse surrounding their work.

- Establish a range of setting-up grants for young artists. These grants could be between $5,000 and $15,000 per year for three years. This gives promising talent a great vote of confidence as they graduate. Although the sums are small the prestige for the artists is high. Because they are staggered over three years they encourage those practitioners to stay in SA over the medium term.

- Expand the foundations of the existing creative quarter in the West End. Spaces such as the Experimental Art Foundation and the Jam Factory should be expanded with a marketing push. Consider relaxed regulations about live/work spaces and short-term leases with flexible terms to make the area into a desirable destination at all times of the day. The potential is there to transform perceptions of Hindley Street, with growth in the number of independent artists, galleries and performance venues. This process requires a light touch; if it becomes too branded it will lose its vitality. The goal should be to enable artists, not to lead them. In this way, surprising and innovative outcomes are possible. Measures should also be put into place to safeguard this initiative into the medium to long term: as rents rise, strategies should be put in place to protect artists from being driven out.

- Disseminate best practice: codes could establish what artists ideally should be paid, how they should be treated and how they can seek redress if they feel aggrieved. Many artists feel disempowered and uncertain about legal and financial issues. This process needs to have a lightness of touch; we are not advocating a lengthy or complex process, merely the establishing of some guidelines that create common standards and act as reference points for the artistic community.

- Create a prize. Although disliked by many artists for its competitive focus, it is impossible to underestimate the importance of, for example, the Turner Prize as a means of celebrating younger artists, providing a forum for discussion and boosting the careers of the artists concerned. A prize or set of prizes (with a cash component) should be established to honour the best artists and artworks across a range of disciplines each year. The choice of disciplines should be carefully made; for example, the best collaboration might be celebrated. Esteemed Adelaidean artists should be invited to present the prizes, serving as an example of what has already been achieved.

And finally...

- Adelaideans should pay less attention to outsiders telling them what to do!

Adelaide Thinkers in Residence
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