

PELL: CCAI Faculty of Communications & Creative Arts Industries, Seminar 09-08-04

I am live artist exploring underwater performance possibilities. This is a very exciting collision of ideas and technologies that I have formalised as a PhD Research project at the School of Contemporary Arts; Edith Cowan University titled '**Aquabatics as new works of live art**'. This newly proposed field of research not only proposes a visceral interdisciplinarity, but the politics and aesthetics of collaboration and production of knowledge at the crossroads of visual and new media arts, performance, and various strands of physiological and hyperbaric research.

I have begun the journey by becoming a fully qualified commercial diver (in accordance with ADAS AU and HSE UK standards). To date, I have devised and performed a series of live performances and videos; produced public exhibitions and installations, an operations manual; made various physiological-technological interface recommendations, technical material and conceptual discoveries and proposals.

The experiential embodied nature of **Aquabatics** has also enabled me to examine various levels of philosophical, theological and ontological hypothesis in a very direct fashion via the adopted PARIP methodology (or practice as research in performance approach). Aquabatics also proposes a micro biosphere of the artist's inner world, and from this, I have also produced associated 'dry' works that allude to varying states of 'immersion', situating the very personal physical, emotional and spiritual within a critical new media context.

My research has also led to a parallel project titled **LifeBoat** [© Oron Catts, Nigel Helyer, Sarah Jane Pell, Ionat Zurr, 2004] that was recently presented at the International Symposium Electronic Arts, ISEA2004. The project explored living systems and new media intersections as a result of research collaboration between Sonic Objects: Sonic Architecture; SymbioticA: the art & science laboratory, The School of Anatomy & Human Biology at the University of Western Australia; ARTi Aquabatics Research Team initiative with the support of the Australian Government through the Australia Council its Arts Advisory and Funding Body; ArtsWA and the Norwegian Government through Riks Utstillinger the National Touring Exhibitions Organisation.

LifeBoat challenged me to consider my ideological positioning and examine varying methodologies and strategies within a collaborative context especially those relevant to designing the engagements between, and translating across, disciplines. It was also critical research opportunity that challenged me to design and impart a system for navigating the production experience on a corporeal and ideological level on a much grander scale. I was specifically responsible for the installation, pre production preparations, performance design and integration. I produced a series of **LifeBoat** instructional videos, onboard announcements, an operations manual, visitor processing information and various other instructional material and performative devices towards a "total biological and psychological processing system".

During the production itself, I play "Pearl": both a LifeBoat Official and a living specimen to be sustained and 'cultured' by those gaining clearance to the lab. My performances were designed to both challenge and entice visitors to the project. The culmination of

these live presentations was also designed to emphasise the encapsulated biological process as a metaphor for the global environment, political and all living systems.

I am mostly interested in the *live* in live art and as I begin to compose a thesis I am conscious that consolidation between the theoretical and practical in this instance, needs to remain very much *both* a live(d) process *and* a live(d) outcome supported by an appropriate level of analysis and post production of the material.

It is my intention that '**Aquabatics as new works of live art**' and all of my associated research projects reflect diverse media geographies/ biographies/ choreographies to cite my relationship to real life structures, phenomena and systems in both their direct public outcomes, their documentation and the supporting exegesis and thesis.

I am not resolved on the final formal outcome of this process and I am *still* attempting to refine a strategy to reflect both the resultant products and processes appropriate for an ever- morphing or developing aesthetic and understanding. It is important that I feel I can make a critical contribution of a new body of knowledge as a foundation for wider research *without* solely depicting the work historically: I am fearful and careful not to simply package a collection of artifacts and ideas of what was, or what could have been, preferring to keep it very much a living and vital research programme or living system.

I am confident that **Aquabatics** has an exciting future ahead. Never the less the various components of my research require an injection of reference and resource material beyond my immediate horizon to ensure their ongoing success and currency. With the support of a Freedman Foundation Travelling Arts Scholarship I have been able to design an itinerary of professional development engagements including residencies, meetings and formal visits for reasons of research, strategic development and negotiation towards future research and production developments in the areas of 'Aquabatics'; 'live art'; 'living cultures' and their associated collaborative practices. In a few weeks I will be traveling to study the archives at the School of Art & Design, Nottingham Trent University; conducting research at the Live Art Development Agency, London; presenting works to critical organisations at conferences and festivals in London and Manchester; and liaising with organisations such as Arts Catalyst about aquabatic research opportunities for 2005-7.

Aside from the desire to prepare a thoroughly fantastic PhD, my longer-term intention is to determine, to generate and realise collaborative and production support across Australian and international markets so that 'Aquabatics as new works of live art' has a sustainable research future. It is critical therefore that I take every step now towards strengthening professional development relationships and work towards extending a supportive network. It also makes sense to capitalise on the incredible momentum, profile, interest and enthusiasm generated by the successful presence of LifeBoat at ISEA 2004 and my Aquabatic debut at the NRLA, UK in 2003.

This trip is an important and timely professional development opportunity for me at the outset of my career *and* a critical period of consolidation, intense peer review and refinement in the final phases of my PhD research. I know I need to continue to reach beyond myself and remain visible, flexible and focused but I also need to seek out others, to learn from those around me and seek their guidance and support in continuing a research practice that cannot exist in isolation. I see these next steps leading into an immeasurable network of new stimuli, like-minds and challenging influences that will no

doubt be formative and invaluable to my practice, professionalism and sense of context as a budding Australian new media arts researcher.