RMIT

# Contents

# Acknowledgments

**For Alex (1923 – 1983).**

# Introduction

*OMA: Ausländer und Staatenlose* (Grandmother: Foreigners and Stateless Persons) began in 1995 as a project based MA that was to research the use of online media for the creation and production of an experimental opera. It also endeavored to explore the Internet both as site for performance and as a means of accessing and engaging an audience.

Specifically, *OMA: Ausländer und Staatenlose* was to address the following questions:

- How can we use the Internet's World Wide Web for live performance works?
- How can opera be created and produced with new media technologies?
- How do we design/compose an online multimedia performance?
- What specific technical and creative issues have to be addressed when composing online multimedia performance?
- How can we create interactions that engage audiences via online media?

The final project was to be delivered as three individual components: a live performance, a live performance networked via the Web, an archive of the performance and the components of its creation accessible via the Web.

During the course of the project, a number of significant influences changed its outcome. This paper discusses the changes, what brought them about and how the research has resolved to deliver a tangible project and record of its development.

Several diverse projects and overseas commissions that wove influences and new directions throughout the course of the project punctuated the entire period of research, from 1995 to the present.

Given the context of the project as research, numerous technologies were experimented with, papers written, presented and published (see App. 1). The entire program involved overseas research, performances and installations experimenting with different technologies and techniques, including the exploration of the more potent themes in the opera.

The project became a personal odyssey, a metaphor for the opera itself. At times, it felt as though I was living the opera, particularly during the period spent writing the libretto and designing the final project, the virtual representation of this work, *Ausländer Micro*. This informal report documents the influences, background, research trips and productions that have contributed to this project.

## Why an opera?

Opera originated as public theatre in the early 17th Century. It was defined as *combining the visual, aural and performing arts into one elaborate unity*[1]. I wanted to create a public theatre for the Internet, or rather; an Internet based project based on the principles of public theatre combining the multidisciplinery skills of the multimedia savvy production team of today.

An opera can be described as, *a dramatic composition or performance of which music is an essential part*[2]. Historically, operas drew together various art disciplines to create a *theatre by the people, for the people*. Two-way interaction with an audience occurs via the web browser, much like a stage.

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[1] Morehead, P 1992 Bloomsbury Dictionary of Music
[2] Morehead, P 1992 Bloomsbury Dictionary of Music

*Ausländer Micro* demonstrates the non-narrative, visual and aural forms that are emerging with the broad availability of new technologies, making it possible to participate in an electronic theatre. Hence the description of it as a *virtual opera*.

The themes of displacement and political marginalisation running throughout this virtual opera are not a specific comment on Australia. Rather, the opera's influences are international in scope and aimed to reflect the global nature of the information sources and technologies that influence our lives daily. It is a non-linear journey through the mechanisms of ideology that play a dominant role in the colonisation and denigration of unique societies and cultures.
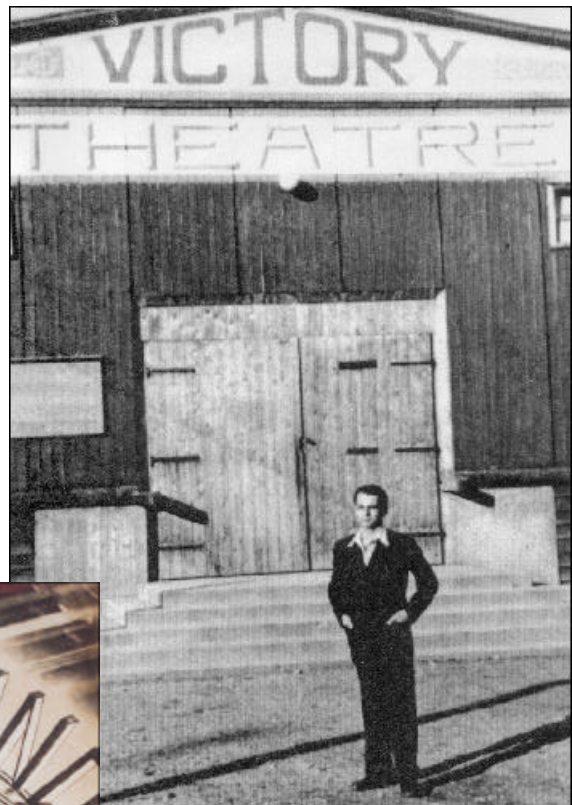






TOP Alex Garton standing in front of the Victory Theatre, Spittal an der Drau, Austria, 1946.

LEFT Andre Garton, Alex's father, played trumpet in this WWII touring group, Santo Band.

TOP LEFT Andrew Garton performing Carnival of Disembodies Souls, Black Harlequin, Sydney, Australia, 1991. Photo. M Ney.

# Vintage net works



Since the mid-1970s, perhaps even earlier, I have involved myself in Community/independent media. From radio and public access video in my teens to computer networking in the late-80s. I have spent a good deal of my time producing collaborative media art works, combining interests in music, performance and public media.

In the past twenty years I have written and performed plays, joined and formed bands, written scores for television documentaries, penned countless songs, piano and electronic compositions experimented with recording and performance techniques. Each a journey of their own, each with their failures and successes, lessons learnt.

In 1989 I began working with computers and modems, integrating both my literary and political interests in the then embryonic Pegasus Networks. By 1990 I was based in Byron Bay, north coast of east Australia, assisting in the establishment of a network that would reach anyone, anywhere in the country for the cost of a local call. Pegasus became the first, and perhaps most underrated Internet Service Provider (ISP) in the country. We must have introduced thousands of people to their first modem, and many to their first computer.

Between 1990 and 1991, I published instalments of a novella I had been writing since 1986. *In August* was posted to the newsgroup, *visionary*, which was later changed to *gen.cyberculture*. Around the same time, I produced a "live to Pegasus" reading, *Poets at the Café Byron*; publishing text as it was being read by the author. These were sent to the newsgroup, *café.byron*. I recall that around six to eight people were online at the time. It was real-time, live to text broadcasting.

It seems quite primitive looking back at it now, but at the time it was empowering to simply expand the notion of place: we were in Byron Bay, but our audience was quietly reading our material in locations around the country we would have no hope to reach otherwise. Examples of other early arts practice on the net are provided in the paper, *Theatre as Suspended Space*.

During the 1991 Australian Federal Election, I had a live text-based feed from the Canberra Tally Room where I was posting updates on Green candidates to the Pegasus newsgroup, *café.australia*. I believe this may have been the first Internet connected election, and certainly well before it was referred to as the Internet.

Pegasus provided me with a base from which I could assist in the practical applications of low-cost networking in Southeast Asia. What I was not able to achieve in Australia I was able to do so in Brazil (Earth Summit 1992), Indochina (*IDRC PAN Asia Networking Report*[3]), Southeast Asia and the Pacific Islands (PACTOK Community Network).

I was not alone. I worked with a small number of ex-poets, writers, architects, engineers, mechanics and musicians: a community of network activists extending the capabilities of computers and modems and their use in the developing world.

In some places, I found modems as scarce and as much sought after as legal aid and medicines. My first trip to Sarawak resulted in a fund raising exercise to cover the cost of modems for an indigenous people's network. They really wanted modems! (See App. 3, *FIERCE/InterRave*.)

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[3] PAN Asia, [online] http://www.panasia.org.sg/ [Accessed July 2000]

My most recent trip to Sarawak involved a web publishing workshop and a visit to long house communities that inspired the netcast installation, *Tat Fat Size Temple 1* and the dark ambient sound machine, *Tat Fat Size Temple 2* (see *Outcomes*).

By 1994, the Web was starting to take off. I had spent several months travelling through Indochina and Southeast Asia, researching the status of networking facilities for the International Development and Research Centre (Singapore). From Nanjing to Phnom Phen, from Ho Chi Min City to Jakarta, the Web was catching on and I had to catch up.



Black Harlequin, Livid Festival, Brisbane, Qld, 1993. Photo. K Williamson

When I returned I commenced work on a web site that would be an online representation of my first non-traditional operatic work, *Black Harlequin*[4]. *{PRIVATE}Black Harlequin* was originally conceived as a one-person *new media* opera, performed in sequence with video projections and soundscapes. Extracts from the opera were performed between 1991 - 94.

In 1994, much of the visual, sound, text and stage designs were archived on the web. This site is both a record of its creative life span as well as an exploration of the work contributed towards its fruition. In addition, it was the first of many interfaces I would design in collaboration with video artist and designer Kim Bounds. We were interested in an interface to unexpected pathways, perhaps taking the user to parts of the site they would not necessarily visit were the interface marked with signs pointing this way and that. We were of the opinion that content should be non-hieratical and that an interface should reflect this.

The *Black Harlequin* web site incorporated MIDI files of the score, which played in the background as pages were loaded. It also contained audio files in .wav format as well as RealAudio. The score and those parts of the libretto that I was able to record could be heard from a list of files, or from pages that contained individual components of the libretto. This index of sound material is the single most popular page on the site and is routinely among the top ten downloads on the Toy Satellite server.

When I first started using the net, these informal, low-bandwidth, text based networks quickly became what I considered to be the *most* public of public access media. Public broadcasting licences for television and radio are hard to get. At the time of writing one hundred and ninety permanent community radio and seven television stations hold broadcast licences. Another one hundred and fifty aspirant radio stations are bidding for a limited number of available licences and bandwidth, some able to broadcast in rotation, 6-8 weeks at a time.

The net took off. By the mid-1990s the *audience* was not only reading and listening, it was learning to participate, learning to publish online. Everyone with a phone line and an income to support a computer and bandwidth had in most cases become, or had the potential to become a media publisher to their own communities on the Internet. In 1995, as I commenced my MA, the production house, Toy Satellite, that I had formed with my partner, Justina Curtis, collaborated with Pegasus and the State Film Library on *Melbourne Online to Beijing*.

The Association for Progressive Communications (APC) provided computer communication services to the NGO Forum and UN Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. To coincide with this project, a temporary public access Internet venue was created in Melbourne. *Melbourne Women Online to Beijing* consisted of eight donated computers, modems and phone lines;

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[4] Garton, A 1994, *Black Harlequin*, [online] http://www.toysatellite.org/bh/ [Accessed July 2000]

network access via Pegasus and a support group of dedicated volunteers. It was located at Cinemedia, formally known as the Victorian State Film Library.

*Melbourne Women Online to Beijing* began as an idea to provide women of Victoria free access to the proceedings of the Beijing Conference. It became a four-week institution, during which both volunteers and participants discovered a means to source information overlooked by much of the mainstream media. Although news about the events in China made the daily papers, information available via the APC and MWOB was rarely, if ever, covered by them. *Melbourne Women Online to Beijing* was described as an empowering experience for those who visited the centre. (See App. 3, *Report: Melbourne Women Online to Beijing.)*

It was with these varied experiences and influences of life within electronically mediated networks that I embarked on a journey, being *Ausländer und Staatenlose*.
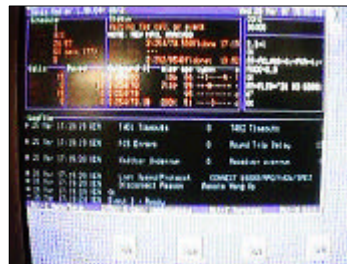


TOP LEFT NGO Forum, Earth Summit, UNCED, Rio, Brazil, 1992.

TOP RIGHT SEAFDA Interdoc-Asia Conference, Manila, 1992.

MID LEFT Roberto Verzola, Email Centre, Manila, 1992.

MIDLE Dominic and Jagdish, Pactok Hub, Sibu, Sarawak, Malaysia, 1993.

MID RIGHT Chinese students on IRC at Melbourne Online to Beijing, 1996.

BOTTOM LEFT Boy showing hand-drawn keyboard (used to teach himself computer skills with) to Shahidul Alam, (founder of Drik), Dhaka slum dwellings, Bangladesh, 1998.

BOTTOM MID Mole - Indonesia, East Timor FIDO gateway server, London, 1997

## Writing

Mark Fedotych is dying and his wife, Marusia is to be forcefully repatriated Mark and his Marusia are refugees. The war they fled has neared its end. They spend its final, brutal days in a camp somewhere in Central Europe. Freedom is near, but remains elusive. So begins *Ausländer und Staatenlose*.

Through the course of the project, I had felt its development had in some way been the opera itself. It had grown around me, grown with me and will probably continue to do so for years to come. I was to experience the geographical origins of my family and feel its resonance within me - a journey that began in 1994 when I made my first visit to Prague.

I had not known it at the time, but the writing had begun there. *God's Tears Europa,* which I initially thought of as an addition to *Black Harlequin*, was directly influenced by Prague; its recent liberation from the Soviet Union, the emerging tourist economy and the scream of raw history I could feel and hear from every stone this city was built on.

I wrote *God's Tears Europa* in two stages, all within a couple of days whilst sampling the local wine at Valentin Café, central Prague.

*I uphold the world*
*I raise my fists*
*I turn the key*
*I fight for you*
*I die for you*
*I long for you*
*God's tears Europa*

*Take the weight, the weight*
*I know no pain*
*I take the pain*
*You open the doors*
*fill our streets*
*with glassy eyes*
*with glassy hearts*
*looks as though they're here to stay*
*I take the weight*
*Hose me down*
*I shine for you*
*God's tears Europa*

*I uphold the world*
*I raise my fists*
*I turn the key*
*I fight for you*     *Forget me not*
*I die for you*     *Forsake me not*
*I long for you*     *Carve me out*
*God's tears Europa*    *I stand by you*
         *Carve me up*
*Still the pain*      *I stand by you*
*I face the world*     *Would I leave*
*know me, know me, know me, know me*  *God's tears will fall, Europa.*

Something about the drama on Prague's streets intrigued me. Throughout the city, particularly the older areas, you will find countless statues, many which gesture to each other atop buildings. These unsung stone heroes and heroines seem to labour under their sandstone burden, while saints raise their fists to the world. It's as if their world goes unnoticed. I had found myself drawn to them, befriending and confiding in them.

I was reminded of the silent, patient and resigned manner of the ancient statues I had seen in the National Museum of Cambodia (1994). They were in stark contrast to those in Prague which appear active and integrated into the world around them. The Cambodian's were silent, engaged in a deeper, more far-away quest. The Czech's reach out to the world, greet it, take its weight effortlessly, do battle and offer beauty to its citizens. The Cambodians have left the struggle, seeking peace for an awakening that seemed a long time coming.

During that first trip, I met the stage designer, Daniel Dvorak[5], who was managing the arists agency, MozART Praha. He was also working on non-traditional opera, most notably Mozart's *Don Giovanni* in the National Theatre of Marionettes. Dvorak was clearly interested in exploring new works and we discussed collaborating on a Prague production of *Black Harlequin*.

The innovative writer/director, Robert Wilson[6] was in Berlin that year opening a new work written in part by Tom Waits[7] and William S. Burroughs[8]. *Black Rider*[9] was based on a German folk tale. It had elements of the *Black Harlequin* and strong European roots. It was brash, passionate and a significant marker in *Ausländer's* embryonic roots. I came across posters for its opening throughout Prague. Pieces that I had not been aware of at the time were only just starting to fall together. I was dealing with a kind of collage, but it would be at least another six months before I really knew what I was doing.

I left Prague, promising to return with *Harlequin* in tow, not realising that I would be back in three years to write a new and challenging work. *Black Harlequin's* costume was put into storage and a web site would archive its achievements. *Ausländer und Staatenlose* would emerge and my life would never be the same again.

By the end of 1994 I was down my networking activities and embraced the world I had left behind: theatre, music, independent media. It was around that time that I was to come into contact with Associate Professor John Bird who invited me to participate in the first Masters and Ph.D. program undertaken by the Centre for Animation and Interactive Media (AIM), Department of Visual Communication, RMIT University. I had also met AIM graduates David Cox, Kim Bounds and John Power and with whom I would collaborate on numerous projects.

My Masters project was initially part design, part technical, part coordination. It became a personal odyssey that is reflected in the writing process documented in my journals and emails. These have been pieced together, along with stories, poems and photos, that represent a travelogue of impressions, expressions, enquires and of course, inspirations.

The project took off early 1995 when a colleague of mine, Persian playwright and author Ma'mma'd Aidani, drew my attention to the yet-to-be translated stories authored by my Grandmother (Oma), Elena Garton. They were stored with family artefacts I had borrowed from my Mother. Here, Ma'mma'd was to say, is the opera.

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[5] Daniel Dvorak, at the time if writing, is Director of the Prague State Opera.
[6] [online] http://www.gsd.harvard.edu/library/bibliographies/wilson.htm [Accessed July 2000].
[7] [online] http://www.officialtomwaits.com/ [Accessed July 2000].
[8] [online] http://www.bigtable.com/ [Accessed July 2000].
[9] [online] http://www.eff.org/pub/Misc/Publications/Misc/William_S_Burroughs/black_rider.burroughs [Accessed July 2000].

I was already digging through this priceless cache of photos, passports and other official documents, each a story in themselves. I wanted to write about political refugees, but I did not have a strong enough narrative to piece my ideas together with. But here, literally in front of me, could be the words I had been looking for. I had already found the title of the project from Oma's Identity Card, issued 14 May 1947. It took Ma'mma'd, himself a political refugee and victim of torture, to alert me to the literary past of my family.

My family had migrated from Europe shortly after WWII. They brought with them stories of their tumultuous experiences. Some of which we thought may have been buried in Oma's writing. Ma'mma'd suggested that if I was to do nothing with this material, I would be robbing my culture of access to her stories. I quickly set about to write the libretto for *Ausländer und Staatenlose*, but not before I could have this work translated. No one really knew what Elena had written. For all I knew, there may have been nothing of worth in these beautifully hand-written pages.

Originally, I wanted to create a non-narrative opera, one that drew its content from historical events related in particular to the cultural dislocation that comes with being a political refugee. I wanted these events to be placed within a non-linear time-frame. The story could be anywhere, any time. I discovered that to have a true non-narrative, non-linear approach, I would need to start with a narrative before I could break it apart.
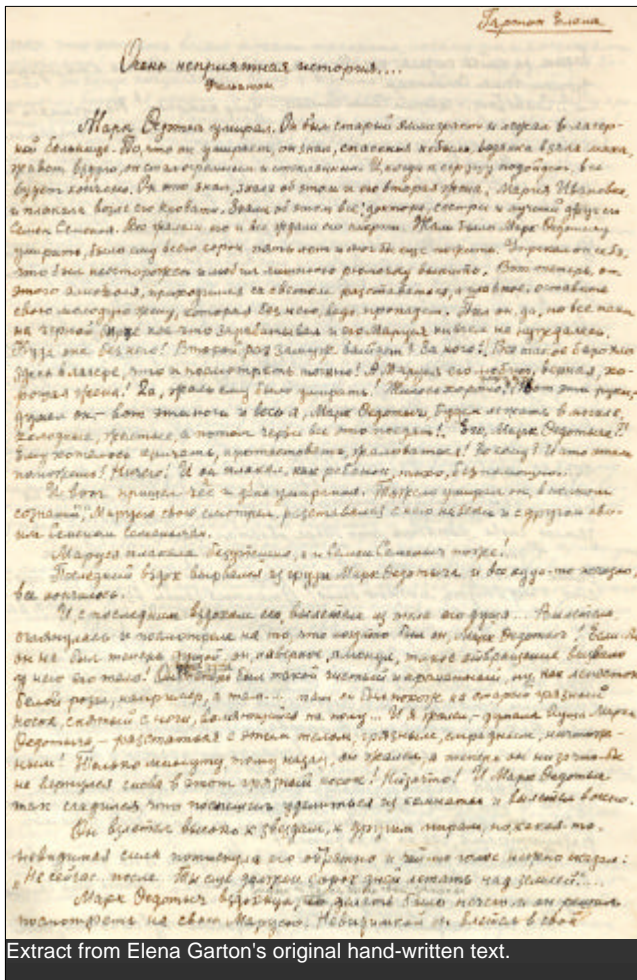

Extract from Elena Garton's original hand-written text.

*OMA: Ausländer und Staatenlose* is based on a short story Oma wrote some where between the late 50s and early 60s. Originally, the project was to be derived from notes, plays and other stories she had written, but when we had some of them translated[10] it was clear that *A Very Unpleasant Story*[11] was by far the most appropriate point of reference to represent the themes of the opera.

Oma's texts were translated by Elena Leonoff, who was the founder *of Webgrrls Melbourne*[12]. It was an exciting process. Most of Oma's stories and plays, some with songs written in Italian, were of the boy meets girl variety. *A Very Unpleasant Story* stood out from the rest. It's part science fiction, part drama, part political. My partner, Justina Curtis and I, couldn't believe what we had found. Justina was a consistent support throughout the project, very much an integral part to its realisation. It was through her that I met Elena.

Elena discovered a metaphorical piece with bizarre references to Russian Orthodox religion, the atomic bomb, the

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[10] Translated from Old Russian to English by Elena Leonoff.
[11] Garton, E (N.D.) *A Very Unpleasant Story*, in possession of the authors family.
[12] [online] http://www.webgrrls.com/melbourne/ [Accessed July 2000].

unmistakable power of commerce, and Martians! Here was a ready-made story that would underpin the concepts I had wanted to work with including the text I had already written. I had a collaborator who, despite having passed away when I was 11, was very much alive.
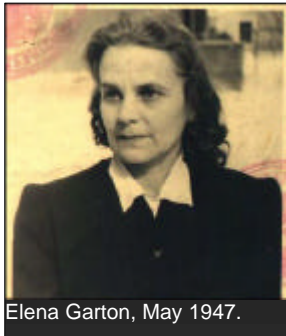

Elena Garton, May 1947.

I undertook to re-write Elena's piece, breaking it down into individual acts which would form the narrative, *Forever Ausländer*[13]. This was largely written from February to March 1997 during the MA Research Tour I had conducted in the Czech Republic and Austria. This second trip to Europe ratified the project, having spent most of the time delving into it conceptually and philosophically. The Journal provides a detailed expose of the project's conceptual development, as well as the synchronous events that helped to pull the more difficult components together.

The libretto drew from my own family history, Russian Orthodox practice[14] and the experiences and people I had encountered throughout my travels in Southeast Asia, Indochina, Brazil and Europe[15]. In some way, it was to help me piece together parts of my own life, giving it a sense of place despite being first generation Australian (see App 4, Sources).

I ended up with four narratives: Elena's original story, my adaptation, my mother's interpretation of the events Elena had tried to depict (taken from recorded interviews), and the narration scripted in the libretto. I would have them collide simultaneously creating non-narrative events at the points where the stories would intersect. *Ausländer Micro*, contains the adapted text and libretto weaving over each other and separated into individual scenes.

The first act, *Between Staatenlose*, blends Oma's story and some aspects of my Fathers' experiences. He spent the period towards the end of WWII in a concentration camp in Spittal an der Drau, where my mother was born. Aspects of his story coincide with research conducted by historian, Nikolai Tolstoy, who wrote about the"…forced repatriation, after the German surrender in early May 1945, of about 45,000 anti-communist Russians, and about 30,000 Yugoslavs,

whose crime was to have considered Stalin a worse tyrant than Hitler and joined forces with the Germans against Stalin's Red Army."[16] My Father survived the repatriation and managed to stay in Spittal. We believe the only thing that saved him was that he cooked for his British jailers and could muster enough English to get by. A remarkable article appeared in the June 2, 1990 edition of the *Good Weekend*[17], describing almost in the same detail, the events that caused my Father to be brought to Spittal and eventually stay and marry my Mother there.


Camp in Spittal, 1945 (SMH, June 1990).

Act Two, *The Message*, is pretty much true to Oma's story, however I do draw references from my Father's story as well as more recent situations witnessed in the refugee camps in West Timor. This is the irony of this opera – the stories that I drew inspiration from are no different to those of the ongoing struggles in present times. From East Timor to Serbia, from West Papua to the

[13] Garton, A 1997, *Forever Ausländer* (1997).
[14] Listsova, O 1996, The holy image makers, *Russian Life*, v39 n12 pg22.
[15] Garton, A 1994, *LOG: onroad impressions, confessions and observations*, [online]
http://toysatellite.org/news/onroad/agarton/ [Accessed July 2000].
[16] Gill, A 1990, The Final Secret, *Good Weekend*, Sydney Morning Herald, June 2, pg33.
[17] Gill, A 1990, The Final Secret, *Good Weekend*, Sydney Morning Herald, June 2, pg33.

Solomon Islands innocent people are caught in the cross-fire as the power plays unwind through the complex layers of racism, religion and globalisation.

Act Three, *The Message is a Lie*, explores the notion of freedom, what it is and what it means to someone who seeks it out despite the political violence they may have to live through. It is also very much of corporate information flows, the one to many media tools that cultivate mass consumers of entertainment and news.



L TO R Annemarie, Alex, Shane Garton. Migration transfer camp, Italy, on-route to Sydney, Australia, 1959.

Act Four, *Freiheit Revealed*, was the hardest to write. I did not want to follow too closely the way Oma's story ended. It was not until a chance meeting with an elderly Vietnamese woman that this act was completed. I met her in a second hand clothing store on Smith Street, Melbourne. She was minding the store for her son. We got to talk about her life in Australia. She told me how she had got there as one of the many people who travelled by boat to escape the violence post the Vietnam War.

She told me how she lost a couple of grand-children at the hands of Vietnamese police, who were known to stop refugee boats and apparently sink them rather than have them towed back to the main-land. She had also explained that on some occasions children who were born on these boats were often thrown into the ocean to spare them from hunger or worse.
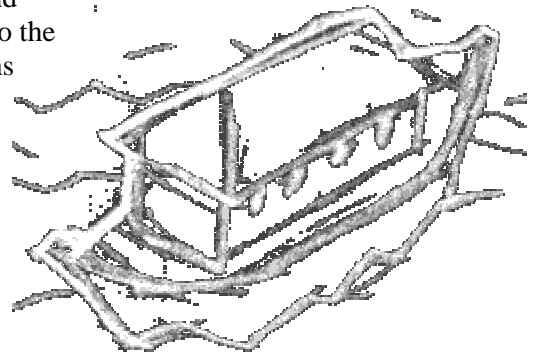
# Screaming text

You get a lot of attention when you scream. It can feel good too. Over the years I have enjoyed watching and listening to homeless eccentrics wailing, yelling and abusing passersby, traffic and phantom creatures that only they see. I don't know if they influenced my singing and spoken word style, but I found some of them perhaps freer than many of us could ever be.

In 1994 I formed a choir to perform the emerging libretto, as well as experiment with vocal techniques I had developed for my own solo performances. These, I had considered, would be more powerful when re-produced by multiple voices arranged to make the most of the nuances and extreme tangents my work could take.


Justina Curtis


Andrew Garton

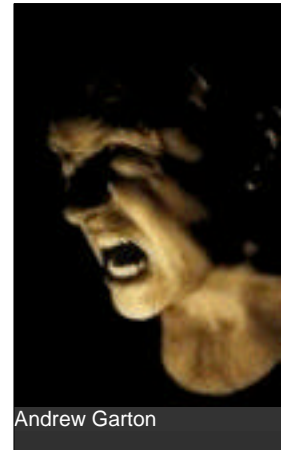*Fierce Throat* was first heard as an impromptu choir made up of ten male performers from the Brisbane based Debacle Theatre Company. We performed *Gods Tears Europa* at *Trance Plant*, a two-week multi-performance art installation held in a disused power station in Brisbane, Queensland, August 1994. We had two rehearsals and performed the piece once a night for just under a week. I had each member of the choir force words out at full volume, pushing as much air behind each word as could be mustered. We stood as still as we possible could enabling the volume and intensity of our voices to carry the full force of the piece. It was like an army of boxers trained to punch holes into air. I no longer had to shout alone. *Fierce Throat*, a screaming choir was born.


Joe Stojsic


Tim Ralph

When I moved the Melbourne the choir went through several incarnations. The first Melbourne iteration of *Fierce Throat* debuted at *Where are the Silences*, September 1994, alongside Persian poet, Ma'mma'd Aidani, Fitzroy Gallery, Melbourne.
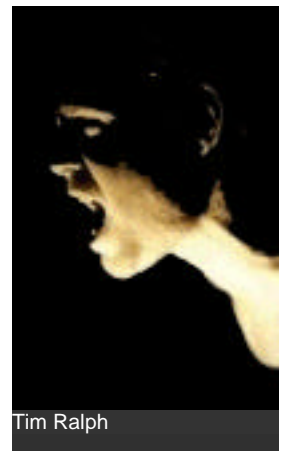
The choir settled into a kind of vocal quartet, each member bringing their own personal intensity into the mix. *Fierce Throat* members included Justina Curtis, Tim Ralph, Joe Stojsic and myself.

The technique I was developing for performing my pieces required rigorous preparation, rehearsal and concentration. *Fierce Throat* members need not know how to sing, nor how to sustain a melody. All I required of them was passion and patience. The rest they would learn through rehearsals.

Care had to be taken. I would have them do breathing and vocal exercises to ensure that extreme levels of volume would not tax their throat. The idea was to focus on the delivery of text, using volume sparingly, by controlling the way air was passed through the throat. The idea was to create as much power during whispered passages as those that required shouting. Air was important, both to control projection and protect the throat from damage.

Apart from vocal techniques, it was important for the choir to perform to a generative underscore. This required of the performers to both listen and concentrate on each other's timing. Given the uncertain directions the underscore would take, the delivery of the libretto had to be no less intense, no less precise. The uncertainty between underscore and performed libretto became a necessary tool to sustain focus and adrenalin during a performance.

Early 1996 saw *Fierce Throat* at *Odd* (Melbourne University Student Union), then *Formication* in Fitzroy, Melbourne. The choir performed extracts from *Ausländer* at the opening of the 1997 *Melbourne Fringe Festival* (Budinski Theatre). Other Fringe performances included *Exstatic* (Glitch), and *CyberFringe*, held at Melbourne's Southbank one sunny Sunday afternoon. In 1998 we recorded one song from *Ausländer*, components of which were used in *Ausländer Micro*.
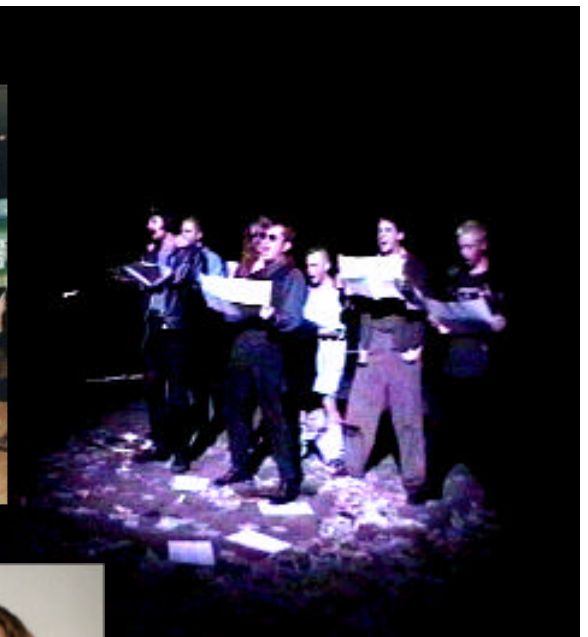






TOP Fierce Throat, TrancePlant, Brisbane, Qld, 1994

LEFT Fierce Throat, Fitzroy Gallery, Melbourne, Vic, 1994

TOP LEFT Fierce Throat, Southbank, Melbourne Fringe Festival, 1996

It is said that within a decade, English could become the common language of Europe. If language is lost, what then will become of cultural history? Our sense of place will no longer be bound by soil, but by the culture of commerce, the culture of inequality. Displacement will become common-place, language will become a single universal code for exchange with little, or no regard for the physical, mental and cultural condition of people who would crawl, walk and die doomed to forever being *Ausländer und Staatenlose*.

# Sound and score

Given the interleaving affect of the libretto, the idea for the score was to create an ebb and flow of found sounds and music, in part, informed by the aural landscape of the environments the opera was set in. Its creation would also be informed by the technologies available to both deliver and have it heard via the Internet.

Early 1995 I began working with the notion of a score that would be non-repetitive, that would be some how be different for every performance, both via the Internet and in real-time. The ideas were largely fostered by my experiments with improvised, systems compositions in the 80s. They would take the form of real-time audio collage and would also send me on a parallel research path: generative music and real-time, interactive compositions for performance and streaming via the Web.



System devised in 1982 utilised in first Koan based compositions for Ausländer, 1995.

I wrote about these ideas in the papers: *Generation: A Digital Aesthetic* (April1996); *Generative Sound for Interactive Media* (October 1996); and *Theatre as Suspended Space* (March 1997). *Generative Sound for Interactive Media* was rewritten and published under the title, *Lost Time Accidents* (*Some Such*, December 1996).

I was interested in the non-linear, non-repetitive nature of these possible sound works. These would be compositions working as metaphors for the notion of journey - dangerous, unpredictable, foreign and uncertain freedoms – the concepts that I would deal with personally in Europe and write about in my journals.



KoanPro, generative music software from SSEYO Ltd, UK.
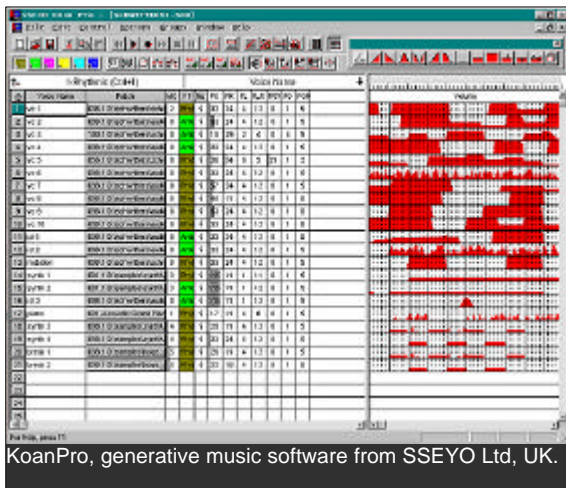
In several of my papers I talk about the software package, KoanPro, which has influenced my work since early 1995. It was the first piece of software I felt I could use as a kind of collaborator. It worked with me and I with it. It would seed it with musical ideas and sound files (samples) and it would in-turn provide me with fresh possibilities. Here was a piece of software designed to create generative music with. I would turn it into a sound processor.

The more I worked with Koan, the more I began to question the idea of repetition in our musical landscape. Repetition, it seems, is at the heart of what drives the music industry. It sustains its market place by the cultivation of audiences whose ears are tuned to their pockets. This in turn sustains an industry that controls not only what we hear, but the artists who must churn out endless variations of the same. I explored these tangents in the papers, *The Politics of Dissonance* (March 1997), and *Breaking the Loop* (December 1997).

I experimented with a number of techniques, each attempting to provide an audio experience on the web with the least amount of customisation. Having come to this project with a public access media background, I was very conscious of the need to provide for an experience that would be broadly accessible.

The problem I had was how to create a generative soundscape for an online work that could be experienced by PC/Mac and Netscape/Explorer users. They should not have to download and install software they would have no use for elsewhere, and they would not have to make alterations to their hardware.

I was to find that this would not be possible until the turn of the century, but even at the time of writing there are still issues of incompatibility at the heart of the software we must use to access the web with.

I began with simple MIDI files embedded within web pages. This ensured that anyone with a PC and soundcard would hear my composition. These would play as soon as a web page opened within a browser. Both of the popular browsers provided support for embedded MIDI, .wav and .aif files. However, the quality of sounds that came with soundcards at that time varied so much that it was near on impossible to create anything that didn't sound like a toy.

Koan's Audio plugin technology meant that one could play pieces created with KoanPro via a web browser. It used the sample principle as MIDI files, being that it was reliant on the sound banks that came with standard sound cards. At the time, I was using a Turtle Beach Tropez, which came with 12Mgs of memory and an excellent General MIDI sound set. However, it was not possible to replicate the pieces I was producing with this card on another person's computer. However, I could stream them via a RealAudio server, both on-demand and in real-time. This was one solution, but along came the SoundFont.

SoundFonts were developed by Creative Labs as an attempt to create a standard for the distribution and playback of original samples. Sounds could be grouped into banks and saved as a single file, a SoundFont. These would then be stored in memory on the soundcard. The Koan Audio plugin could download SoundFonts from a web site onto a Creative Labs soundcard and replay your piece in the way that it was intended to sound. This was a breakthrough, but was still very much reliant on a specific combination of hardware, operating system and software.

Before I could even begin to design sound for *Ausländer*, I had delivery issues to deal with. Streaming audio intrigued me, so I began to look for ways to utilise this within *Ausländer*. A Melbourne based ISP dedicated to streaming audio, WiredAudio, understood what I was trying to do and provided me with the infrastructure support I needed to experiment with on-demand and live RealAudio projects. It would become possible to combine my interests in generative music with that of tools that would make it possible to perform to international locations without ever leaving my studio. As I began to develop my first streaming projects, I found little interest for them in Australia. Where I could not find an audience in Australia, I found few obstacles for this work Australia.

## ORF/KunstRadio



L TO R Andrew Garton, Sergio Messina, Scanner. Networked Theremin performance with Moscow and Berlin. Touchless 1, Recycling the Future, KunstRadio/ORF, Wien, Austria, 1997. Photo. E Zimmermann

ORF is the Upper Austria Broadcasting Corporation. KunstRadio (translated as ArtRadio) is a national radio arts program broadcasting from the ORF studios in Vienna. KunstRadio is described as "…an on-air gallery for live and recorded projects. Radio is the site, content and context of art. The exploration of radio as a constantly changing constituent medium in the contemporary mediascape."

I met KunstRadio founder and producer, Heidi Grundmann, in March 1997. Heidi invited me to participate in the forthcoming *Recycling the Future* (RtF) events celebrating a decade of KunstRadio. The first collaboration, *FUTUREScan*, was a live performance of generative soundscapes netcast from Toy Satellite, to *DocumentaX/Hybrid Workspace*, Kassel, Germany (see *Outcomes*).

The next project was realised at *Ars Electronica 97*, Linz, Austria. KunstRadio invited me to attend the festival where I coordinated a second netcast from Toy Satellite, *Malaise | Unsound | SASS* (see *Outcomes*). I also participated in an eight hour, live to air and netcast performance. I joined composers and sound artists from Italy, Germany, Quebec, Slovenia and Austria performing the impromptu piece, *Golden Boomerang Machine*.

*Long Radio Night*
[online] http://thing.at/orfkunstradio/FUTURE/ARS/RADNITE/  [Accessed July 2000]

KunstRadio is "…an agency for the realisation of artistic projects connecting radio to other material and immaterial public art spaces."[18] It bridges traditional communications media with the new, utilsing arts practice to guide this relationship. The projects we worked on together gave me many opportunities within which to experiment with the emerging technologies I had wanted to utilise for *Ausländer*.



Recycling the Future Netcast Studio, ORF, Vienna. Photo. E Zimmermann

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[18] [online] http://thing.at/orfkunstradio/ [Accessed July 2000].

# Sensorium Dial



In December of that year I returned to Austria to participate in the final of the RtF series of projects, installations and lectures held at the ORF studios. My installation, *Sensorium Dial*, was placed in the foyer of the Grosse Sendesaal, RadioKulturhaus, which caused both amusement, for myself, and frustration for ORF management.

*Sensorium Dial* was derived from radio frequencies drawn together by twenty antique radio receivers. A subtle and ever changing composition comprised of tunings made between licensed bandwidth carriers - free and yet to be commodified sound space.

The installation would explore the silences amidst the frequencies that articulate the ebb and flow of radio broadcasting in Europe. The silences represented what remains of that space which existed prior to the emergence of the first publicly accessible communications network, a community of listeners bound to each other by glowing valves and tissue-thin speaker cones, and no less by the crisis of Europe's tumultuous history through which radio matured.

It was a sonic wash of howls, screeches and noise. Given the size of the transformers in each of these radios, the magnetic field created by them would create wild, crazy, audible disturbances in the soundscape when ever someone walked within a one metre radius of the installation. People could interact with the installation merely by walking up to it or by waving ones hands around a single radio.

Here was a kind of generative soundscape, changing in real-time according to the proximity of passersby and atmospheric changes within the foyer. It was not unlike a Theremin (see Theremin), although somewhat indelicate. Every morning I would arrive at ORF and have to turn the installation back on. Every evening someone would turn it off, not turn it down, but turn it off at the powerpoint. There were complaints from ORF management about the *noise* and how it interfered with the running of the activities they generally dealt with in their foyer. Fortunately, the installation remained for the duration of RtF, but due to technical difficulties, we were unable to stream the project in its entirety. I had contact and lapel mikes taped and/or inserted into most of the radios.

*Sensorium Dial*
[online] http://thing.at/orfkunstradio/FUTURE/RTF/INSTALLATIONS/
SENSORIUM/sensorium.html [Accessed July 2000]

## Theremin song

On my return from the MA Research Tour, February – March 1997, I spent a week or so in London. One fine, sunny day, I met up with friends from Australia, and spent the day at Camden Markets. We were wandering through the markets when suddenly we were drawn to an uncanny sound wafting out of the catacombs where a few stalls had been placed. There, amidst an array of bizarre objects stood Tony Bassett.

Tony built Theremins[19]. I had never seen one, but had heard them often enough over the years. Here was an instrument that responded to physical gestures without touching a thing. Body capacitance is used as a controller for this instrument, freeing the performer from a fixed intonation and keyboards. I bought one straight away.



Gunther, Touchless 2, Krems, Austria, 1998.

The Theremin, or termen-vox, was conceived and built by the Russian inventor, Lev Sergejewitsch Termen in 1919. The first production model of the Theremin was built in 1920. It consisted of two ariels, one for pitch, the other for volume or velocity. As you moved your hands closer to either ariel you would alter pitch and velocity. The sound it created, by way of an oscillator, was often compared to a voice or violin.

The fact that the Theremin had its origins in Russia gave it natural home in the soundscape and score that was emerging for *Ausländer*. I returned to Europe with it December of that year performed in a radio concert for three Theremin players.

[online] http://thing.at/orfkunstradio/FUTURE/RTF/LANA/TOUCHLESS/ [Accessed July 2000]

In 1998 I met three Russian Theremin players when eight of us were brought to Austria to perform *Touchless*, a composition for Theremin Orchestra and voice by Elisabeth Schimana.

[online] http://thing.at/orfkunstradio/PROJECTS/TOUCHLESS/ [Accessed July 2000]



International Theremin Orchestra, Ars Electronica, 1998.

When I returned from the *Touchless*, I composed two pieces for Theremin, *Lung Fish* and *Donnerstag Remains*.

*Lung Fish* was commissioned by the Percy Grainger Museum. The composition was built from a generative underscore with looped Theremin samples. It was played at the International Melbourne Festival, 1998, at public re-opening of the Museum.

Austrians have had a long fascination with telecommunications and the arts. Radio in particular has, in the short time of a decade, created somewhat of a tradition in collaborative use of wireless and online technologies. In 1979, Heidi Grundmann, founder of the experimental radio program, KunstRadio, and then an arts journalist, participated in what many consider to be first modem and radio art events. Whilst on-air, the announcer read messages ground out of a dot-matrix printer, messages posted to a BBS at the radio station.

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[19] Lev Sergeivitch Teremin and the Theremin [online] http://www.obsolete.com/120_years/machines/theremin/ [Accessed July 2000].

*Donnerstag Remains* is based on an interview with Heidi. The recording had undergone various permutations, largely out of my control. I had lost the original recording and had to cobble what I could from a heavily compressed RealAudio. The underscore is a duet with Theremin and KoanPro.

The Theremin is an interactive, gestural controller. A very simple, but effective instrument that not only influenced aspects of *Ausländer's* sound design, it become an important inspiration in the interactive design of our interface.



The Tony Basset Theremin used in Ausländer.

With a computer it's you, the screen and a mouse. Most sound based software is designed around more conventional devices, replicating dials and faders. I find the slider, knob metaphor an unrealistic approach to interface design when one basically has a mouse to control everything with. Knobs and sliders are designed to be tactile. You turn them this way and that. A mouse is not designed to turn something, particularly as it requires a flat surface to work on. It's like trying to draw with a brick.

So why are people not designing interfaces that are specific to the medium of the computer? Why could not a computer interface be as simple and as graceful as a Theremin? I wanted to replace the mouse with a Theremin. Though not necessarily possible at the time, it did influence the general direction we took when it came to designing the *Ausländer* interface. As an interactive instrument, the Theremin influenced more the interface than it did the sound design.

## Towards Ausländer Micro
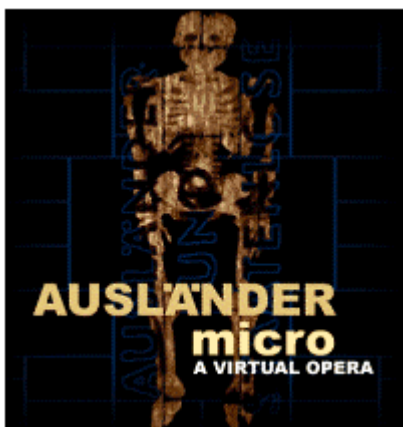


*Ausländer Micro* was produced between February and May 1998. It was funded in part by an Australian Film Commission (AFC) *Stuff-Art*[20] grant (see Appendix 2, *Ausländer Micro Proposal*). The point of *Stuff-Art* was to encourage artists to create high quality, low bandwidth, small file size web sites. This seemed a perfect opportunity to realise *Ausländer*, tying together all the influences and ideas that had emerged and taken seed through the course of this Masters Research Project.

*Ausländer Micro* is a web based interface through four acts of this *virtual opera* (see *Why an opera?*) can be explored. Various forms of navigation are provided where the user encounters combinations of text, graphics and sound.

The opera follows the afterlife of an Eastern European refugee. A foreigner in every country, he passes away in a camp after countless years of travel and ruthless persecution. However, in death freedom is found to be as allusive as it was in life.

*Ausländer Micro 1.1* was launched by the AFC in Sydney, June 1998. It was launched in Melbourne at the AFC conference, *Being Connected*[21], July 1998. *Ausländer 1.2* was first previewed at the presentation of the *John Bird Award for Excellence in an Online Production*, Cinemedia, August 1999[22].

*Ausländer Micro* was conceived and created by Andrew Garton, John Power, Bruce Morrison and Justina Curtis at Toy Satellite, Melbourne. It was produced in association with the Australian Film Commission and the Centre for Animation and Interactive Media (Department of Visual Communication, RMIT University).

## Collaborative production



Untitled, Elena Garton 1960(?).

*Ausländer Micro* was the result of a collaborative effort. Musician/writer, visual artist, programmer, web technologist: four skilled people working together to bring to life the ideas that had been evolving since 1995. I have always enjoyed collaborations, particularly those that bring people of different disciplines together.

I had a great deal of respect for the visual aesthetic of John Power. What attracted me most to him were his origins as a painter. Most of my family are painters. Oma was a painter. I knew the smell of linseed oil all too well. John and I were also interested in the possibilities of collaborative sound and image, particularly in relation to performance. He understood music, he listened and he was no doubt drawn to the resource material I had been collecting. I learnt a lot from John. I am still learning from him… we have gone on to collaborate on live, interactive music and image, which in itself is a journey worthy of documentation.

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[20] [online] http://www.abc.net.au/arts/stuff-art/stuff-art99/stuff98 [Accessed July 2000].

[21] [online] http://www.screenarts.net.au/beingconnected/ [Accessed July 2000].

[22] [online] http://minyos.its.rmit.edu.au/~rpyjp/JBaward99.html [Accessed July 2000].

I met Bruce Morrison at Pegasus Networks around 1993. Most of our work in those days had been done online. He in Brisbane and I in Melbourne. I worked like this for years, with many Pegasus staff. With Bruce I developed a strong rapport. I think it was his ability to contribute creatively to not only technical concerns, but also visual, sound and text. He is one of the few people I know who can work anywhere so long as there is a keyboard and screen attached. No comfort requirements for this man. I owe much of the animation design to Bruce, most of which he storyboarded with John.

Justina Curtis has worked with me on just about every project since we met in 1994. She is one of the most patient and hard working people I know. She has an extensive knowledge of the web, its hidden secrets and beauties. She is also one of the fasters web coders I have met, having a strong and sound knowledge of HTML standards, browser and colour issues. Justina is also a musician. She listens. Justina was invaluable during the production of *Ausländer Micro*. She maintained not only a strong coding discipline, when the going got rough she managed to stay focused and keep the team in check.

Collaborations are not always perfect. One has to work at them, and work consistently at improving and maintaining relationships within the team. They easily fall apart when members of the team frequently fail to meet their commitments, or if the production manager fails to recognise these problems early. If the production team is unable to sustain momentum, the project does suffer. *Ausländer Micro* is not without its faults, but it does have substantial merit. *Ausländer Micro* would not have been possible without the commitment of its production team who, under often unreasonable conditions, pulled through.


LtoR Power, Garton, Morrison at Toy Satellite.


John Power at Toy Satellite.

Given the experimental nature of the project, it was necessary for the production team to work very closely together. Problems need to be solved quickly and often collectively. We could not work entirely interdependent from each other, although there were attempts to do so. That two members of our team often chose to work outside of the Toy Satellite studio meant that at critical periods it became increasingly difficult to maintain momentum, not the least our deadlines.

A great deal of my time was spent getting people to talk and meet with each other. At times it felt as though we were working in isolation from each other. That is not to say that it was fragmented. There were exceptional moments during pre-production. There were however, lessons to be learnt.

Collaborations require a certain amount of give and take from all participants. In the case of arts projects, the take can often outweigh the give. Some people choose to work with completely different notions of time than others. Some work best under pressure, some work at a more

leisurely pace. Neither necessarily produces the desired result, nor it is an ideal way of working within a collective. Production teams must work collectively, sharing responsibility, giving more than taking from the project.

I do not enjoy hassling, haggling, negotiation or mediating, but this is the director's role. Collaborations are theoretically sound, but in practice I have found that despite a collective process, in most situations someone needs to provide strong leadership and vision to ensure the project meets everyone's expectations.

In the case of *Ausländer Micro*, I wanted the process to be the result of a shared vision. Often it was not. Sometimes it was struggle just to get things done and done on time. I could not rely on


Justina Curtis and Supercat at Toy Satellite.


John and bagle at AIM/RMIT.

everyone to meet his or her obligations. Fortunately, to everyone's credit, we arrived at a point where a common vision was achieved. I'm still not sure how this happened, but I am grateful to everyone for making it so.

Remarkably, the problems we had with *Stuff-Art* brought us together. *Ausländer Micro* started off as a collaborative endeavour and it finished that way. We still love each other, and have gone on to work together on other projects.

Perhaps we all had to become estranged from each other to get some sense of the isolation potrayed in the story, to be cut off, to be on the outer… Freedom is indeed elusive – one knows freedom only in moments – we keep walking, never to look back, forever ausländer, forever staatenlose…

## Visual design

The visual design borrowed strongly from conventions surrounding popular theatre, opera and performance. In her essay *Computers as Theatre*, theorist Brenda Laurel has compared the dynamics discernible between a theatre performance and its audience with the interaction that evolves between a computer user, the computer and the computer's software. A mutual symbiosis takes place between user and machine.

To this extent, stage performance offers a useful metaphor for human-computer interaction. A genuinely *world wide* web site should be easy to understand and use, like a performance from the days when opera was still a widely popular form, and not yet marginalised as *high* art.

The design concept of the site could be described as a process *towards visual moments* - a flow of images that are based on that which we often over look. Images that form part of our lives, our histories and trajectories that have become blurred in our day to day perception.

For example, the origins of much of Europe's architectural heritage has become blurred and/or forgotten. Despite its prominence in the urban landscape, they are now merely representations, or icons of the past that play more a role in the continents tourist industry than its cultural heritage.

A clear example of this scenario is the plight of the magnificent statues of Prague. They have become invisible, flat and dormant, forgotten in the flat terrain of commerce.

*Towards visual moments* may not necessarily be taken as literally as the example provided, but more to keep in mind the possibility of a *re-awakening* of sight and *memory of place*. In that we not only see that which is ever present, but also discover the new.

Source materials for graphics were essentially comprised of the following:

- Hand-written manuscripts from Elena Garton
- Numerous B/W stills from Russia, Austria
- Stone walls and pathways
- Doorways
- Statues
- Maps
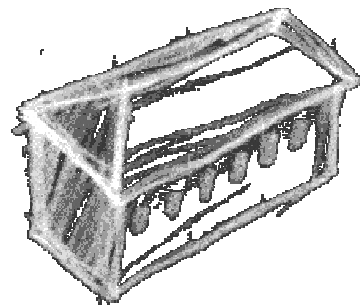
John Power describes his contribution to the project:

"The 1.4 MB size restriction set in the brief for *Ausländer Micro* provided a useful base for developing a sense of the aesthetic required. Taking in consideration for sound and programming requirements, we agreed from the outset to aim to keep the entire graphical content for the finished piece under 800 kilobytes. While accepting that the amount of graphical content incorporated in the piece would be in direct relation to the level of compression I would need to exert on the final output, I was still keen to draw on a rather dense, photographic look in many areas."

"The development for the visual component of *Ausländer Micro* was influenced to the greatest extent by the collection of photographs and identification documents from war time Austria belonging to Andrew and his family, and by photos taken from Andrew's travels through Austria and Prague. Much of the imagery illuminates visual sequences in the narrative while attempting to navigate a space around the volumes carved out by the sonic presence of this screen entity we call a *virtual opera*."

"Ghosts drift through deserted refugee camps, cross dreadful maps of human conflict, sink into the grainy wind of electronic media and communication, and dissipate in an ocean of swimming souls. I hoped to maintain the density of the photographic source material as well as projecting the figures into the ethereal cavern I imagine in the words *on line*. This concern was addressed with the conventionally wide screen and the reduced, monochromatic palette. Expansive as our intentions may have been, the prospect of cramming the atmospheric space the Opera describes into the minute corral of eight hundred thousand zeros or ones."

"There are 378 images, all images are 4 bit (have a possible maximum of 16 colours each) except some images used in the shadow effects and the splash screen. We used digital and scanned photos, documents, pencil and ink drawings. I recommend viewing the piece with your monitor set to 800 by 600 pixels, and colour depth higher than 8 bit (256 colours)."
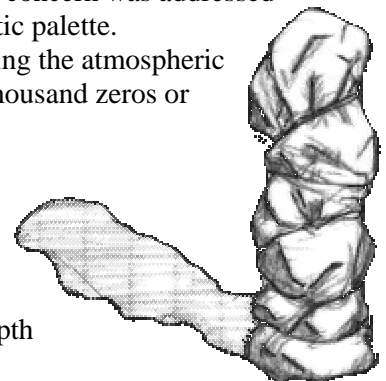
## Interactive design

Interactives, whether they be CD-ROM or web based, require users who have both the time and desire to explore them. Most successful interactives draw on adrenalin and the competitive nature of their users. *Ausländer Micro* would do neither. Although there are good arguments for the creating of dense explorative environments much of the content, as evidenced with Black Harlequin, remains unseen, unexplored, unknown. Black Harlequin, though a very popular site in its time, rarely drew users deeper than its first level pages.

So, how interactive would *Ausländer* be? Would it need to be interactive? If it were, would it find and sustain an audience? At one point, it was considered that Ausländer be designed much like a run-time movie. That is, it would play from beginning to end with little to no user interaction. However, the interface would change at random, Koan or scripted algorithms would create a sense of on-going change. However, neither of these ideas were taken up in *Ausländer Micro*. Although the expertise was there to at least produce a generative interface, we had no additional funding to take this step.

The ideas we did implement for the interactive design were largely influenced by discussions I had had with John Power prior to leaving for the MA Research Tour in 1997. John introduced me to the work of Italian artist, Francesco Piero. I was particularly taken by the painting, *Flagellation*[23]. "He conceived of the human figure as a volume in space, and the outlines of his subjects have the grace, abstraction, and precision of geometric drawings."[24]

In the centre of the painting the figure of Christ is standing on a mosaic of tiles. Here is a carefully articulated design, visually hidden, though completely, mathematically accurate.

I recalled the impression made on me in the final chapters of Russel Hobans, *Pilgermann*, where a magnificent mosaic is built. To view it, one had to stand from an elevated vantage point. This idea of perspective hiding information. Nothing is ever, as it seems. The richness of meaning need not be shared with all and sundry. The process towards its creation is what seemed just as important to me as the end result.

The language of mosaics also intrigued me; the complex arrangements of patterns that can only be read by those initiated into their meaning. I refer particularly to those of religions origins, the mosaics that adorn the temples of the world's great religions.

I would not wish to presume that *Ausländer Micro* had such lofty goals. Components of its interactive design were clearly informed by these concepts, but I feel we have barely scratched the surface of possibilities for such interfaces.

During the MA Tour, the mosaic ideas continue to emerge. My journals reflect their appearance in doodles and comments. Eventually, John became more involved in the project, taking these embryonic ideas and devising animated and interactive sequences with Bruce Morrison, Technical, that continue to reveal intriguing relationships between the visual components of the project.

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[23] Flagellation, approx. 1453, Galleria Nazionale at Urbin
[24] Microsoft® Encarta. Copyright ©1995 Microsoft Corporation.

The mosaics are largely conceptual within the context of the *Ausländer Micro* interface. More visible is the layout, each significant component of the site broken into individual frames. The original frameset was designed to change as one moved through the site.
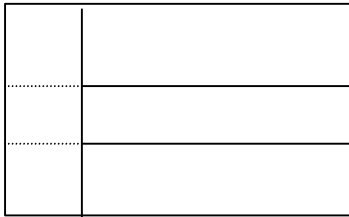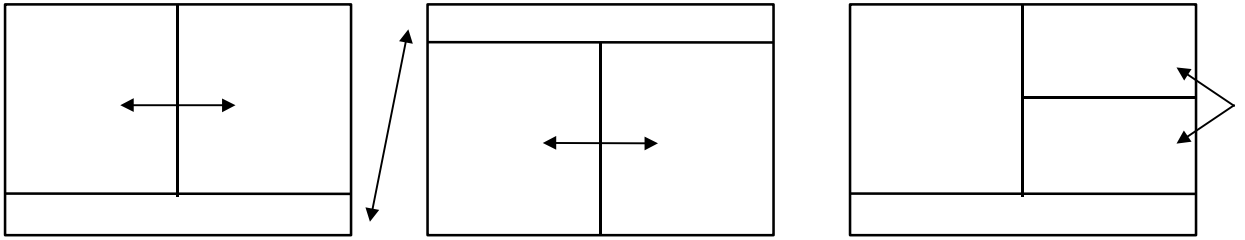


The menu on the bottom would appear in the following scene at the tope. The two interior panels would reverse sides, sometimes splitting into additional rows. The final design took on a more static form, however it was informed by these original ideas.

The far-left panel contained the main menu. This was broken into three sections; each comprised of one part of the sole of a foot.
The following scene/act would not play its associated soundscape without the foot in its complete state. It was possible, however, to create combinations of each of the four acts, but only visually. Sounds were linked to the top of the foot.

The foot represents the journey that takes place in the story. It was derived from a number of interesting sources. The boot that dominates Act One is a scan of one of my boots. A pair of Blundstones to be precise. These are a popular and hardy shoe worn by many people in Australia. Act Two is a composite image, largely derived from a scan of my foot and the remnants of a shoe found in the garden at the back of Toy Satellite. Act Three is my foot again, but merged with an x-ray and heavily treated. The final Act, is John Power's niece, who thoroughly enjoyed having her foot scanned.
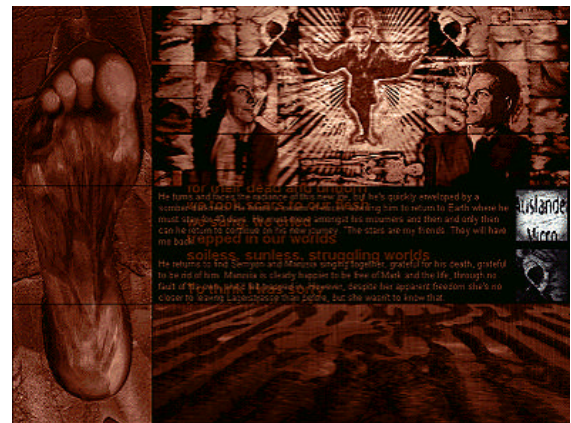
## Technical Design

One of our aims was to produce a truly web based interactive devoid of plugins, but hot on code. This meant using the most recent versions of HTML and Javascript alongside the current browsers. Bruce Morrison describes his contribution to the project:



Bruce Morrison, notebook and pencil at Toy Satellite

"Early on in the project it was decided that *Ausländer Micro* would run on both major Web browsers, Microsoft's Internet Explorer and Netscape's Communicator. We were eager to take advantage of the relatively new Dynamic HTML (DHTML) technologies found in both these products. This posed many problems as the Document Object Model (DOM) employed by these products differ considerably.

"Another decision was to produce *Ausländer Micro* as a truly HTML project. To do so, it was decided that the site should require no additional software (ie. browser plugins and other browser add-ons) to function. This meant utilising the primitive sound capabilities of both Explorer and Communicator, despite differences in their implementation of sound."

"[We] wished to demonstrate the extent to which straight HTML code and its integration with Javascript can produce dynamic results without the use of additional software. Making full use of version 4 browsers (Communicator and Explorer) [we] integrated Dynamic HTML, Cascading Style Sheets and cross-browser compatible Javascript."

"Frames, Cookies, Javascript, Cascading Style Sheets and Dynamic HTML were used to realise *Ausländer Micro*. The use of these features in combination was a journey in itself and has lead to a much greater appreciation of open standards and the work of the World Wide Web Consortium[25]."

Version one of *Ausländer Micro*, as produced for the Stuff-Art, succeeded in meeting these objectives. The most recent version requires the use of the Flash plugin for the delivery of more manageable sound. This is described in more detail in the following section, *Sound design*.

One of the most frustrating technical problems we encountered was ensuring it would run successfully on the Macintosh platform. Two out of every four Macs we tested *Ausländer Micro* on indicated poor Javascript implementation in Netscape 4.5.

We also tested it on three different web servers. Two servers running on Sun Solaris (Netscape server) and one NT server running Apache. To test download times we had *Ausländer Micro* running on servers in Russia, Austria and the Czech Republic and it has performed consistently on every occasion. The only lag in download time was caused be the need to pre-load the sound files. This meant that as each scene appeared, the user did not have to wait for the corresponding sounds to download.

The entire project, up until recently, had been mirrored on web servers in London, Prague, Linz, Moscow and Melbourne. An RMIT mirror was available for a short duration, but was removed due to storage limitations. Another RMIT web server was offered at I3, but this too was removed for similar reasons.

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[25] [online] http://www.w3c.org [Accessed July 2000].ZZ

At the time of writing, mirrors of the site are available via Econnect in Prague, Ars Electronica[26] in Linz and Toy Satellite in Melbourne. The London and Moscow mirrors are no longer available due to changes in their web server software that does not support the tools being used to maintain the project archive.

Curiously, as I was completing this section I received email from Liz, Web Administrator at GreenNet[27] in London, "I checked out PHP for NT and it was pretty simple to install, so I have done it (first on a non-live server to test) and now on the main server. You should be able to use php pages in your site now. I only have tried very basic scripts as I am no php expert! So please experiment and let me know if there any extensions/modules that are not installed that you might need." *Ausländer* is back online in London!

## Sound design

I have written a lot about the work I had been doing on aspects of the score and design for Ausländer. Most notably the following papers: *Generative Sound for Interactive Media* (1996), *Lost Time Accidents* (1996), *Multimedia Imaging and Sound* (1996), *The Politics of Dissonance* (1997) and *Breaking the Loop* (1997). I have also lectured on the ideas presented in these papers: *Lost in Sound* (1998), *Sound Breeding* (1999), *Low-cost Interactive Sound Design for Multimedia* (2000). Presentation files for these lectures are available on the MA web site archive:

[online] http://www.toysatellite.org/agarton/MA/ [Accessed July 2000]

Sound design for *Ausländer Micro* was largely influenced by the web technologies available to us in 1998. At the time of production, the *Koan Audio* plugin was not available in a cross-platform format. A PC and a Creative Labs Awe 32 soundcard were required to ensure consistent quality of sound and delivery. As such, I was limited to the number of sounds we could use, their quality, length and file size.

*Ausländer Micro 1.1* consisted of only four sounds, one for each scene. They were standard, uncompressed audio files. The only alternative option available to us was the Beatnik Audio Player[28], but it did not support Active-X at the time. Active-X is crucial to the implementation of Beatnik Audio in Explorer[29]. This meant audio would not run on anything other than Netscape. Added to this, we needed to have some control over each loop to ensure that they would play when their corresponding scene was fully loaded.

The following provides a brief description of each of the sounds used in *Ausländer Micro 1.1*, Acts One to Four:

Act One: Drone. The opening sound, a somber drone, was required to introduce users to site as well as carry the theme of the 1st Act. It was created by recording Chinese bell as it was scraped with a thin metal rod. This produced a variety of harmonics, which were only audible by close miking the cymbal and enhancing the sound digitally. We had in fact recorded several cymbals using various techniques.

Once the harmonics were isolated from other features of the recorded cymbal it was pitch-shifted down by a 5th, processed with slight reverb and resampled from 44hz - 16bit to 11hz - 8 bit. This ensured that we had a full, haunting sound at a reasonably acceptable file size.

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[26] [online] http://www.aec.at [Accessed July 2000].
[27] [online] http://www.gn.apc.org [Accessed July 2000].
[28] [online] http://www.beatnik.com [Accessed July 2000].
[29] At the time of writing, Beatnik have addressed this problem, however Active-X, a Microsoft format, has yet to be fully implemented in the Mac version of Explorer.

Act Two: Passage. A second somber, though more medative drone was required for Act Two. The final sound is comprised of digerido, vocal chants and digitally manipulated traffic noise. Each sound was recorded separately, processed digitally, mixed together, cropped and re-sampled.

Act Three: Techno Babble. A harsh tangle of electronic sounds was sought to provide the underscore for Act Two. We opted for a synthesised sound that was created using freeware software.

Act Four: Loss. Loss and despair were the overriding themes required of the sound for the final Act. We used a recording I had made of a Toucan in Brazil. Significantly pitch-shifted and treated with reverb the end result is more than haunting. It also seemed fitting to use the Toucan, a diminishing species, further echoing the grief encountered in Act Four.

With the release of Flash 4 in 1999, it was suddenly possible to stream audio files compressed in the MP3 format. Not only could one stream these files, we could use several for each Act and they would take up less file size collectively than the audio files used in *Ausländer Micro 1.1*.

*Ausländer Micro 1.2* provided the user with a simple interactive audio mix for each scene. It performs on both PCs and Macs via the more common Web browsers. It takes less time to load and gives *Ausländer Micro* the atmosphere it needed to compliment its rich visual treatment. Flash programming was skillfully applied by Andrew Sargeant, with whom I worked with on *Tat Fat Size Temple 1*.

The sounds for 1.2 were sourced from the vast library of material I had been collecting since the project commenced. These include extracts from the libretto as performed by Fierce Throat, atmospheres from Prague, Graz and Vienna, and samples from *Stratosfear*, the only recorded piece from the full score of *Ausländer und Staatenlose*.

*Stratosfear* is the second soundscape of Act 3, followed directly by the song, *Die Like a Tourist*. I recorded this piece whilst working on *Ausländer Micro*. It is a rich collage of sounds representing what might be heard would it be possible to listen in on every single audio transmission broadcast from Earth to its many satellites and back. The entire piece is comprised of twenty-nine individual sounds. It took almost all of six weeks to produce and is by far, the most important piece of music I had composed at the time. (See App. 5 for extracts from the studio journals.)

## Feedback

When *Ausländer Micro* was released a comments page was installed on the project web site. Feedback was mixed as can be seen in the following extracts. Only one comment has been omitted, as it was particularly offensive.

> this is the most beautiful thing i ever saw on the web. Especially the poem.
> *Thomas Rutgers <tombo@home.nl>*
> *Netherlands - Monday, July 10, 2000 at 18:50:06 (MDT)*

> Nou äuzzländerr
> *Skkinn BomBer <uebermensch@budweiser.com>*
> *Switzerland - Tuesday, March 14, 2000 at 06:46:12 (MST)*

> This story is a piece of trash. It is bound for failure.
> *Margaret Smith*
> *- Friday, December 31, 1999 at 01:51:36 (MST)*

> Irkcilik dunyanin en kotu duygusudur. Lutfen irkciliktan vazgecip tum dunya bir araya gelip insanlara yardim edelim. Racism is the worst feeling to have. Why bother saying 'I don't like you,

you're black etc' that is just ignorance. The world should join together to help people whatever their nationality.

*Turk <denzmail@yahoo.com>*

*Turkiye - Monday, September 13, 1999 at 05:09:59 (MDT)*

Gothic style, beautiful colours and intricate images a 20th century tragedy. got a bit lost in act 3, where was fritzi? and and enjoyed that robust chorus

*cherylynn holmes <cherylynnholmes@apex.net.au>*

*australia - Saturday, September 04, 1999 at 08:29:57 (MDT)*

at last i stumble accross surfborn squares of beauty and intrigue - sonically alone it was a delight to play with and the use of dhtml revealationary in it's scope. many thanks

*ma kus <mark@koodos.demon.co.uk>*

*uk - Monday, August 30, 1999 at 11:43:02 (MDT)*

Una nueva forma de hacer arte usando las herramientas que nos acerca la tecnologia de informacion. Seria muy bueno lograr una version traducida a distintos idiomas. Nos anotamos para el español. BRAVO! muy buen trabajo. AVANTI!

*Carlos E Alvarez <carlos@wamani.apc.org>*

*Argentina - Friday, August 27, 1999 at 12:29:44 (MDT)*

Tremendous Andrew! Well done! It is a work of art, each act conveys a message and mood brilliantly. Where did you come up with the idea? I've never seen anything like this and can only imagine how long you spent slicing and placing images, and coding the sequences. :-)

*Don Anderson <don@no.spam.apc.org>*

*New Zealand - Thursday, August 26, 1999 at 00:35:18 (MDT)*

Ausländer geht heim! Deutschland den Deutschen! Es lebe die deutsche Volksgruppe! Es lebe die BBA!

*Franz Fuchs*

*Deutsch-Österreich - Wednesday, June 09, 1999 at 12:52:28 (MDT)*

This was an absolutely excellent piece! A very good utilization of DHTML (and I know what it's like slicing up all those little pixel parts). I love the misty quality you get with that sort of dithered transparent gif method.. makes up well for the lack of true gradient transparency in dhtml. My only complaints were the long loading times, and some audio problems. I would love to see this distributed as a zip archive so I could study it on a more intellectual level without the technical hiccups. thank you!

*Ian Campbell <ianc@islandnet.com>*

*CANADA - Friday, October 23, 1998 at 00:51:59 (MDT)*

I was just checking back on the progress of Ausländer and I appreciate the increased possibility of interaction on this site! I also wanted to thank Andrew for all his imput his work and our long discussions had on my work and my threads of thoughts :) Hope our ways will cross soon again in one of the real continents. take care Mon

*Monika Wunderer <wunderer@krampus.org>*

*NY&Austria - Sunday, August 30, 1998 at 17:27:19 (MDT)*

Andrew Garton commented to me recently that I was the one who had shown him a modem for the first time... something I'd forgotten after hundreds of emails and conference entries over the last nine years... its truly great to see how far the web has grown since the days of text-only interface... and the contribution that Andrew (and all the team at Toy Satellite) has made with this site is a landmark spearheading even more adventurous forays into DHTML and artistic endeavour. Simply THANKS for a really interesting web exploration.

*Michael Ney <vrx@vrx.net.au>*

*- Thursday, August 27, 1998 at 06:27:10 (MDT)*

## Outcomes

The research project involved the trailing of netcasting technologies which, through the course of the project, had significantly improved: compression rates, platform and hardware inconsistencies, advanced scripting and mixed media integration[30]. This provided both an ever-changing range of delivery media and broader scope for the inclusion of many more creative ideas.

To ensure broad accessibility to the notion of a netcast opera, even an experimental one, I began working with the RealMedia[31] format. Real Networks had managed to penetrate the market to such an extent that their streaming format had become near on ubiquitous with Internet netcasting.

I had experimented with other formats: Quicktime™, Windows Media™, Shockwave™ and MP3 streaming. In terms of reliability, consistent performance, strong development paths and user up-take, the Real format kept coming in on top. More recent developments in MP3 audio streaming are proving a worthy contender. Several netcasts have proved even more successful with the fledgling MP3 streaming servers.

The following selected projects utilise various audio delivery methods and collaborative strategies to realise both real-time and on-demand access to them. The most important lessons learnt from them are itemised in the concluding remarks of this section.

## FUTURE*Scan*

*FUTUREScan* was performed live from Toy Satellite, Friday, 25 July, 1997, as a contribution to Hybrid Workspace, Orangerie, Documenta X, Kassel and Recycling the Future, KunstRadio, Vienna.



This was the very first audio and video netcast I had ever done. It was a remarkable experience. I did not have to heave a single piece of equipment out of the studio. I performed to a small international and local audience across a single telephone line, carrying both a RealAudio stream and web cam.

We used a laptop, courtesy of Cinemedia, to run the RealAudio encoder and a Zyxel[32] modem, courtesy of Colin Renwick, to keep the connection to Pegasus Networks, sustained for the duration of the performance.

The webcam, supplied by the Communications Centre, Queensland University of Technology, was installed on one of our PCs which was also running KoanPro, Cubase and sound processing software.

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[30] Synchronised Multimedia Integration Language.
[31] [online] http://www.real.com [Accessed July 2000].
[32] Zyxel's were popular in Southeast Asia for their ability to sustain net connections no matter how noisy the telephone line was. They have achieved near legendary status in the world of modems.

Coordination between Melbourne, Austria and Germany was conducted via IRC, a mailing list, email and telephone. Simultaneous performances were also streamed from Kassel, Berlin and Linz.

[online] http://www.toysatellite.org/future/scan/ [Accessed July 2000]

## Malaise | Unsound | SASS

On Wednesday, 10 September 1997, Kim Bound and Dale Nason performed *Malaise | Unsound | SASS* from Toy Satellite, necast via WiredAudio[33] direct to Linz. Created for RtF, Ars Electronica 97, it was assisted by Justina Curtis and Bruce Morrison.

From Ars Electronica, I performed simultaneously with Kim and Dale, adding incidental samples and generative sound events. The necast was conducted with a 28.8bps modem, carrying a live stereo encoded RealAudio stream directly to WiredAudio. The Linz end of the stream, carrying both Melbourne and Linz performances, was delivered across an ISDN link to a RealAudio server in Vienna.


Web cam, Linz, Austria.


Web cam, Melbourne, Australia.

The quality of the stream from Melbourne to Linz was suprisingly stable and clear. It was considered one of the more successful netcasts during the Festival. Few dropouts, stable servers at WiredAudio and on-site technical support at both Toy Satellite and the KunstRadio setup at Ars Electronica contributed towards the success of this project.

With the addition of a web cam in Melbourne, the overall impression was one of low-tech hi-fi. Both the web cam and live RealAudio stream were being delivered across a single domestic telephone line.

[online] http://www.toysatellite.org/future/malaise/ [Accessed July 2000]

## Sensorium Scan

*Sensorium Scan* is a generative composition in six movements. It is essentially a reconstructed collage of a lecture by Robin Rimbaud (a.k.a Scanner) given at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 1996 Melbourne Fringe and Cyberfringe Festival. Instead of streaming or relying on a plugin, this project provided the user with all the components required to make their own versions of *Sensorium Scan*.

Users can listen to my versions archived as RealAudio files. The rest of the site is comprised of individual sound (.wav) files, SoundFonts and KoanPro design files.

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[33] [online] http://www.wiredaudio.com.au [Accessed July 2000].

Each of the six movements could be described as an aural metaphor for Rimbaud's foray into scanning culture, the source of much of his creations. Three pieces from the current collection were on exhibit at the Blue Armory (Virginia, USA).

[online] http://www.toysatellite.org/sensorium/scan [Accessed July 2000]

## SSEYO Koan^oasis 198

Initiated by SSEYO Ltd, *Koan^oasis* was a unique opportunity to collaborate with twelve composers, including Brian Eno. The idea was to create a Koan based composition, each composer contributing at least one voice (track) and one SoundFont sample. The final piece worked as an inter-networked, patchwork with individual components located in numerous locations. A single page, scripted accordingly, pulled all remote assets into a single piece.

SSEYO described *Koan^oasis* as "… a kind of global music eco system. Each composer contributes a musical *life form* with its own character and behaviour, and the music is the rich, ever-changing ecology of interactions between the life forms."

"*SSEYO Koan^oasis 198* is an online generative composition created by a networked community of Koan artists. It has allowed the Koan artists in their own time to realise, develop and amend their own online components of a generative sound environment and thus to compose music in a distributed manner. The artists do not have to be present or online when the work is *consumed* by you. For the first time, artist's all over the world have been able to contribute, offline and in their own time, to a low bandwidth generative community project which anyone in the world can hear 24 hours a day. It opens the doors to new forms of virtual performance and ultimately interaction."

"A SSEYO *Koan^oasis* is an empty *container* Koan piece placed on a webpage at SSEYO's web site which contains links to participating Artist's contributions. When you visit the webpage the linked contributions are downloaded to create a composite virtual work on your PC."

We used a mailing list to coordinate the project, each contributor sharing their Koan and SoundFont files as the composition came together.

It was important to understand what each contributor was attempting to create within the context of the entire piece. Eno was the only participant who did not contribute to any of the discussions, nor did any of us hear his track until the piece was near completed. Regrettably, his silence limited the success of this as a collaborative composition. I do not know why he remained outside of the process. It was like playing in a band with one musician playing whatever they felt like, whilst the others attempt to play together. Collaboration is about participation – all contributors share responsibility to bring a project to a mutually agreed end result. If one person begins to make decisions for themselves, despite some level of collective consensus, the collaboration can fall apart.

*Koan^oasis*, to my mind, is not musically successful. It sounds like many pieces all struggling to be heard. It is for this reason that I chose to create a sub-harmonic drone that did not attempt to compete with any of the other contributions, rather act as a kind of binder.

The voice/track I created, *Passage*, provided *Koan^oasis* with a low-end, bass resonant undertone. *Passage* is designed to be barely perceptible, something akin to the constant drone of the metropolitan soundscape. It adds a sombre counterpoint to the ceremonial nature of the piece.

The SoundFont is a sample of a close miked cymbal from a series of recordings made with Melbourne percussionist, Sharky Ramos. Close miking from beneath the cymbal captures a broad series of harmonics. The sample contains approximately 7 beats creating a complex series of overtones which are further accentuated by down-pitching the voice in KoanPro and adding a slight filter sweep.

[online] http://www.sseyo.com/koan^oasis/koan^oasis198/koan^oasis198.html [Accessed July 2000]

## Tat Fat Size Temple (1)

From 1 – 9 September 1999, composers and sound artists from 16 different international locations collaborated on a unique, perhaps the first of its kind, remotely actuated generative soundscape.

Sound Drifting could be heard via numerous web sites and public installations including the OK Media Deck, Linz (Austria), one of the host venues of the international Ars Electronica Festival.

Toy Satellite artists created *Tat Fat Size Temple* (TFST), a challenging installation comprised of sounds and images accessible via a dedicated web site, public installation and the *Sound Drifting* installations in Linz.
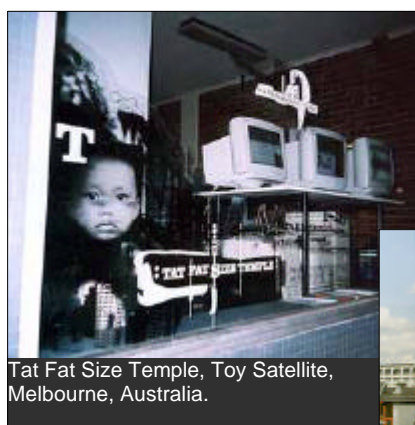
Tat Fat Size Temple, Toy Satellite, Melbourne, Australia.

Tat Fat Size Temple, Sound Drifting installation, Ars Electronica, Linz, Austria.

KunstRadio originally commissioned TFST after discussions with Heidi Grundmann, Sound Drifting curator, held in Vienna (May 1999). The notion of a real-time, live and online collaborative generative soundscape was of great interest to me. Given my background in such projects, having created compositions of this nature since 1996, Heidi was keen to see my involvement, and that of Toy Satellite, with a contribution fed into the global mix from Australia.

In June, Justina Curtis and I traveled to Sarawak. During our stay, there we were privileged to record, videotape and photograph the day-to-day lives of the people of the Rumah Sauh and Rumah Jeli longhouse communities. This extraordinary material formed the basis of both sound and visual components for TFST.

The idea was to create a soundscape that represented the fragmentation of Dayak culture due to the encroachment of *western* economies and social values. A generative approach to this project

gave us more opportunity to replicate the *ebb and flow* of such influences as they cross into the various social structures that have bound these communities together for more than three centuries.

See App. 3 for a detailed report on this project.


## Tat Fat Size Temple (2)

Encouraged by the success of this project we (Toy Satellite) were interested to take the idea further and develop a totally screen-based music/sound instrument that worked in tandem with image - a prototype of an instrument that both sound and image designers could compose for.

Rather than opt for the conventional knobs and sliders approach, we were interested in the notion of an interface that had a strong conceptual background that was subtle, delicate, informative and satisfying to use. We applied for another Stuff-Art grant through the Australian Film Commission. The application was successful, giving us the opportunity to explore these ideas as well as to illustrate the source of our sound and visual inspiration.

TFST is an attempt at creating an informative and interactive, sound-based web site of a culture in transition, one that endures both the urbanisation and economic imperatives that are alien to it.

This is identified by the contrasts provided in TFST by the images of Smith Street, the main commercial artery running through the former working class suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood, Melbourne.

Landmarked by government housing apartments, these suburbs have been common destinations for migrants in particular Vietnamese, Chinese, Greek, Italian and to a lesser extent, middle eastern communities.

In the past two decades these areas have become synonymous with significant increases in residential and commercial property values. Despite the fact that inhabitants of government housing live on the fringes of the poverty line, commerce has descended and with it comes expectations of a higher standard of living at the expense of low-income residents.

The conditions in this urban environment informed the parallels that could be drawn between urbanisation of indigenous Sarawak society and the homogenisation of urban life in Australia.

Soundscapes evolve out of recordings made in June 1999 during the Gawai Antu festival at Rumah Sauh and Rumah Jeli, Iban longhouse communities, Sarawak, Malaysia. TFST is dedicated to these remarkable and resilient people.

September 1993 I first visited Sarawak and spent a week there being exposed to the social inequities and tragedies that are all too often hidden from the international community.

Under the guise of a popular democracy the Malaysian Government has successfully sanctioned, supported and profited from the felling, extraction, pulping and trade of 80% of Sarawak's primary rainforest. All this in less than 20 years… and with it the traditional lands and self-sustaining livelihoods of its indigenous peoples.

I'm not a politician, I'm not a journalist, I'm not a member of any activist organisation nor do I donate to any. I have eyes, an inquiring mind and occasionally defer to my heart for compassion. Above all, I'm proud to proclaim myself an artist. The challenge was to take what I had seen and

felt and translate this into something meaningful not only for my own people, but the people who had to remain in Sarawak to continue their struggle.

I took my Sarawak experience back to Australia and within six weeks of my return launched *FIERCE/InterRave*, a multi-faceted party, performance, symposium and what could be described in current terms, a precursor to today's net casts, a text-cast with about 40 participants representing the net connected world in 1993. We managed to raise enough money to purchase three 9600 Baud modems which I believe are still in use by NGO workers in Sarawak today.

June of 1999, I had the opportunity to return to Sarawak, this time with Justina Curtis. She ran a two-day web-publishing workshop for NGO workers in Sibu, a riverside town north-east of Kuching, the capital. After the workshop we were privileged to visit and stay with the Iban of the Rumah Sauh and Rumah Jeli Longhouse communities.

We shared their food, generous hospitality and festivities, most of which appeared to us as perhaps the last fragments of animistic traditions that remain with these people today. The pressures of an ever encroaching urbanisation has brought with it not only a cash based economy, it's brought with it Christianity which appeared to have created a divide amongst some of the communities. However, despite its appeal to some, I doubt any of us would ever experience, live through and survive successfully a share house of up to 100 or more cohabitants. We were told about one longhouse where near on 200 people lived. That's about 80 families… Talk about getting it together… These people know what it takes to create and sustain a community and it hasn't got much to do with partitioning kitchen shelves and stepping over your mate's underwear in the bathroom!

It was an exhausting and often uncomfortable experience, but despite the difficulties our soft, pale skins endured, we were inspired and motivated to record, document and produce work not only in honour of these people, but to raise awareness once more to the tenuous and fragile lives our indigenous brothers and sisters must live and the wisdom we will no doubt lose should we allow their cultures, traditions and spiritual practices to perish.

Thus the foundations for *Tat Fat Size Temple* were laid.

Early November 1999 Toy Satellite launched the first iteration of the *Temple*; a nine-day generative soundscape drawn from recordings we made in Sarawak. Tat Fat Size Temple was streamed in real-time into a global sonic collage entitled, *Sound Drifting*. *Sound Drifting* was produced by Austria's KunstRadio, for the 1999 Ars Electronica Festival held in Linz.

It was an awesome and sublime experience. The soundscape intermingled with the streetscape of Smith Street becoming part of our lives - an aural waterfall if you like, always fresh, always illuminating, never tiresome.

We were so pleased by the response to this work, both to its online and onsite presence that we couldn't lay the Temple to rest. We asked ourselves, how do we take the generative properties of these sounds and bridge them with the rich source of images we had accumulated from Sarawak? How do we create perhaps a deeper experience of Sarawak, its people, and its traditions? How can we demonstrate this fragile relationship between what was, what is and inevitably will be? And can we demonstrate that despite what is crushed on the surface can never be truly buried within?

These were big asks! But along came *Stuff-Art 2000*…Big asks, little disk! We raised similar questions prior to the first *Stuff-Art* project and we were fortunate enough to produce *Ausländer Micro* for it.

Now, some have asked why we took the *Temple* to *Stuff-Art*, something so technically challenging, time consuming and personally challenging to produce? A very good question…

Perhaps we like doing it tough? It was tough, but there were good reasons for applying for Stuff-Art.

Not only does *Stuff-Art* provide challenging constraints for net artists, it reaches an audience that would otherwise remain ignorant of the potential for new media to provide not only works of entertainment value, but inspiring, evocative and personal experiences, experiences that usually relegate art works to the often austere environment of the gallery. The *Temple* is an art piece; there's no doubt about that. Whether it has entertainment value or not, doesn't particularly concern me. The question of what is entertainment and how it is manufactured is another issue all together. I feel projects like *Stuff-Art* expand the notion of entertainment by show-casing what is termed as "the best compact Interactive work from around Australia" via the Internet. We are fast maturing an online culture where onsite and online can be merged into a public, more diverse, less net focused experience.

I know I'm not alone these questions, ideals and pursuits. Nor is it an original idea to challenge the presumptions of entertainment. At the end of a long, caffinatted day I'm simply someone who is compelled to make things happen despite the constraints we often have to work. After all, this is Australia, not Mozambique. We have resources!

When producing *Tat Fat Size Temple* we also wanted to use tools that these days seem to be marketed to the producers of more mainstream applications. We wanted to point towards, as technically exacting as it was, the production of content that isn't necessarily born of commerce, e-commerce and that which has the become the hallmarks of today's Internet. Maybe we wanted to take the "enter" out of entertainment and replace it with a single "a" … to "attain" knowledge not simply to be entertained by it.

I used to fear the mainstream, but it's the mainstream audience that votes and buys shares in Telstra. There's power there. But the medium of the mainstream can sting, and it too can bight… I guess some of us, and I include some of my other *Stuff-Art* colleagues in this if I may, some of us want to inject a potent venom into the relationship between the medium and its audience. But like all good medicines, they take time and a great deal of patience to do their work. So my friends, please take time in the *Temple*… it may not be all things to all people, it's simply a humble offering from people moved to create.

[online] http://www.toysatellite.org/tfst/ [Accessed July 2000]

# Feedback

The following feedback was received via email.

> Very nice work!
> *Thomas Dolby*

> Very immerse!  I enjoyed it, although I must admit, I didn't 'get it'.
> *Jim Welles*

> Overall this is one great Flashnik example. Very well done and a delight to experience. It's refreshing to see that not everyone is contaminated by mainstream US originated cultural pseudo values, and that production of such gems still happens. OK, OK, I loved it. That's enough.
> *Redstar*

> TAT FAT SIZE TEMPLE, besides being the coolest name I've heard in  awhile, is a great site. The concept comes through nicely without being too overt. I really like the moving buildings. It reminded me of the film "Muriel" by Alain Resnais: 'International' style architecture become threatening in the middle of the film. Excellent use of sound paralelling the shifting visual metaphors. Really fine work!
> *Chris Burke*
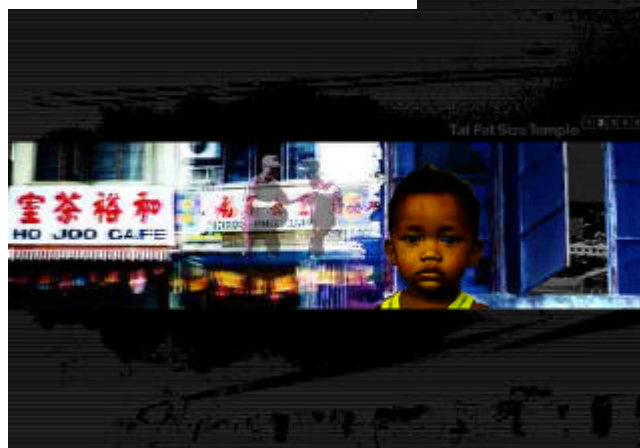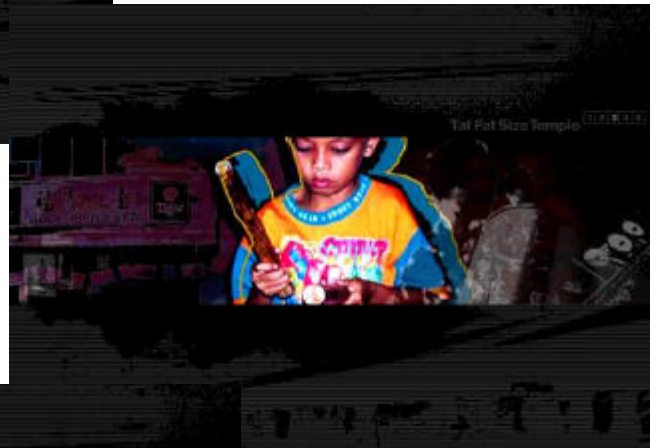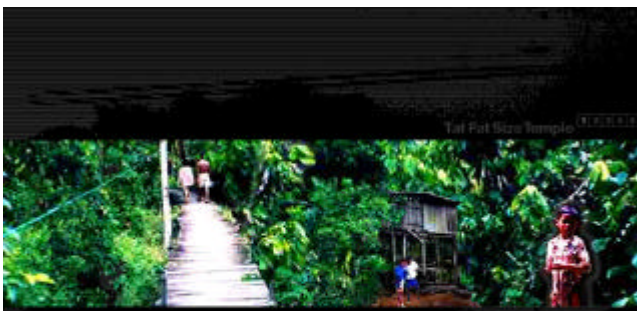
# Concluding remarks

At the outset it was clear to me that a full blown production of *OMA: Ausländer und Staatenlose* would not only tax the meager resources available to the project, it would be near on impossible to fund. Traditionally, arts funding bodies do not fund academic research. This was the first; perhaps most significant change made to the original proposal – from live to online interactive.

However, during the course of the project, as outlined in the previous section, a number of live and on-demand netcasts were initiated. These provided answers to questions the project was originally to address, although the process to get to them was more random, more *generative* than traditional forms of research.

Laurie Anderson remarked that, "Technology today is the campfire around which we tell our stories."[34] With that in mind, and as this new campfire was to become more than text and ones imagination, and as the difference between the Web and CD-ROM interactives began to blur, I chose to pour *Ausländer* into a Web site, a virtual representation of the opera produced entirely, in its original form, without any plugins.

In some way, *Ausländer Micro* is representative of the proposed live performance. The artwork designed for each of its four scenes is derived from the image resources and concepts that would have been utilised on stage. The libretto can be read in association with the scene effects much like they would be narrated within a live performance. The soundtrack, now utilising the Flash plugin, is reminiscent of the generative underscore that would provide the atmospheric ebb and flow to a sung libretto.

The story is still being told and retold in combinations unique to each visitor to the web site. *Ausländer Micro*, as the name suggests, is the opera collapsed into an experience that will never replace the stage, but can and does provide its users[35] with a window to a world, to stories that would otherwise go undocumented and uncharted in the general practice of recorded history.

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[34] McCorduk, P 1994, Multi-Mediatrix, *Wired*, 2.03, pg81.
[35] Ausländer Guestbook, [online] http://www.toysatellite.com.au/as_guestb/ [Accessed July 2000].