

FOREWORD

Ann Mc Culloch

'Double Dialogues: A Conference with a Difference' came into being because of a need within the academy to investigate the ways in which artistic visions and production are accommodated within it. The aim was to explore the dimensions of our double dialogue whether in respect to declarations that the artistic production was in itself research, that artistic production if theory-driven, may be subversive to its own vision, or whether there might be, despite the complex relation between art and theory, a means of over-coming incompatibilities without endangering either species.

The papers chosen for the conference came at the end of long debates amongst committee members. We received numerous submissions and we became conscious of the dangers of putting together a conference that pre-empted content and outcomes. Our request for detailed submissions enabled the abstracts to be refereed, not merely to ensure DEETYA points, but instead to bring about a collection of essays that document not 'consensus' but instead the topography of untravelled terrains. We wanted cartographers from every field of the arts to show each other the maps that were in the process of being drawn. Mark Minchinton targets in his paper the false pathways our choice of papers might have determined. I share Mark's respect for a Deleuzian distrust for "idealist schematism of Identity" and like him feared that, for example, 'performance/research discussion in general, and conferences in particular, can often be a waste of time: driven by a dynamic of "consensus" within which interlocutors assume they're using words like "concept" "performance" and "research" and so on to talk about the same thing "behind" provisional differences of interpretation' (Minchinton, 1996,).

This is a time for the fearless and I, for one, applaud the connections Minchinton goes on to draw between the discourse of party politics, performance, and university research. We are at war politically and aesthetically, a view mirrored in Cumming's paper in which he states plainly "whether we like it or not, those with a commitment to education [production of knowledge] are faced with a political struggle (Cumming, 1997,).

So was there 'consensus' of a particular kind at this conference? I don't think so unless one understands consensus in the sense that we all agreed to come out of hiding. There was a public demonstration of differences and the awareness of the problems within arts research was clearly voiced and led to fruitful exchanges.

The conference papers whether dealing with the methodology of research practice in the arts, assessment of post-graduate research, ways of working within current ARC frameworks to ensure success when applying for funding, the necessity to

identify and create a language unique to each discipline and demonstrations of discourse between the art-work and theoretical models give a comprehensive picture of our 'double dialogue'. The documentation of this conference will, it is hoped, keep the debates in the foreground. This collection of essays will remind all those involved in artistic production and /or arts research that although there are problems to be surmounted, the landscape is negotiable.

Double Dialogues - A Conference

Organised by Ann McCulloch and Howard Stanley
Deakin University and Theatreworks
St Kilda, November 1996

Methodology of Presentation

Since its original inception between Ann McCulloch and Howard Stanley, this conference has always been discussed in performative terms. We believed that a conference where papers were performed rather than read seemed to more consistent with a lot of the issues we anticipated might be canvassed in and around the conference. By choosing to site the conference within a theatre, it became a public event, rather than an insititutionalised one.

Our roles were defined from the start; Ann was to look after the content and myself, the form. We tossed the idea around, until Ann made the formal presentation. She then worked as a kind of semi producer - dramaturg. My role was to sell and then stage the conference. Our collaboration was dialogic, based on the language of he Academy and the language of performance. Like so many "new" initiatives and so many recent theses, we invented the language of our process as we moved toward the conference date. This, like some candidates, created some difficulty at an administrative level as there were no existing precedents for this kind of conference (as show).

I have always viewed this conference as a piece of theatre. Whether it was acknowledged as such by the audience or the performers is irrelevant. Some may have attended a conference in a theatre, others went to the theatre to see a conference. For me it was a prolonged aesthetic experience, rather than an academic one.

I came away from the experience with a sense that the arguments of position and approach/criteria merely confirmed the suspicions of the audience and participants. What was previously hinted at now has become stated. I don't think anyone changed their minds. I now believe there is a real basis for debate.

My primary criteria were that:

- The conference occur in a public theatre, not in an academic institution.
- That local artists have some part of the event, reinforcing the practice/theory relationship.
- That there are a lot of opportunities for participants and audience to gossip to, with and about each other, within the context of the conference.
- That presenters are aware that they are creating a theatrical performance with all that that signifies.

- That in the planning and execution of their performance, presenters were encouraged to “own” the theatre, as if it were theirs.

I believe that these modest goals were achieved. Any problems associated with the running of the conference are mine, although not totally. Lack of resources, financial and people, was a major contributing factor. Having said that the tech crew of two, Caroline Lloyd and Brian Hurley worked ceaselessly and unselfishly in helping to mount the conference. Special mention must also be given to Simon Fisher whose outdoor installation provided the site with an appropriate metaphor and set for the conference. He also helped with aspects of the staging and was an invaluable consultant. Last but not least was our luck in getting the unflappable Tony who managed the catering. I take this opportunity to thank my collaborator, Ann McCulloch (whose capacity to synthesise academic argument is outstanding and whose passion I love). Thank You. It is so nice to create precedents.

Welcoming Address

Ann McCulloch

Welcome to Conference with a difference: Double Dialogues

I think it would be safe for me to assume that the reason we have come here today is because the Arts, whether music, dance, theatre, multi-media, film, Art and creative writing have now found a home within the university. The question becomes What kind of home? Are they to be nursed, trivialised or nourished?

If nursed they might be seen to be accommodated as something different, as significant but not considered by the Australian Research Council as worth entering into dialogue with when determinations are made concerning funding.

If trivialised - the Arts will be subjected to the influence of science methodologies or those pertaining to traditional humanities subjects. Working within these methodologies the Arts become distorted by inappropriate criterion that favours the rational at the expense of the emotive instinctive, gestural and theatrical aspects of the art, forcing a production of dispassionate and cerebral art. Will artistic production be reduced to discussing theoretically the processes of the art at the expense of creating art itself?

If on the other hand the arts are to be nourished in their new home problems relating to the classifications the index provide for arts research outcomes, and to the minuscule weightings given to these classifications, must be addressed. Currently no comprehensive and agreed system of measurement of the creative arts is in place. Funding provided for the arts within the academy is not ensuring equity for its members. ARC must broaden its definition of research to recognise and support the diversity of activity now included in the contemporary university.

The performance papers, talks and discussions that you will experience over the next few days and evenings will reflect the difficulties and pressures of the Arts staying at home. What lengths does the creative artist have to go to in order to fulfill the criterion for funding and yet at the same time create art? If a visual artist is required to write an exegesis to accompany his/her art should the art historian also be expected to demonstrate his/her insights with paintings of his/her own? Why is it not appropriate for research in the arts to be communicated solely through means of the medium in which the applicant for funding, or the candidate for a higher degree is skilled, for example visual forms, performance and musical compositions? Should, can or would theoretical material written about their work improve or affect an assessors understanding of a candidate's work? Research in the art form is different from research about the art form.

The language used within distinct disciplines is unique to it and has its inherent legitimacy with which we should become familiar. In the last decade or so we have come to implement as well as research various post-modernist strategies employed and inherent in all disciplines. The blurring of distinctions between analytical and creative interpretation and practice, the cross-disciplinary approach to texts, and the engagement with developed technology are some of the realms in which such strategies have become increasingly engaged. Language, in all discourses and all disciplines is experiencing varied forms of subversion and/or re-invention within, for example, feminist and post-colonial contexts. This applies as much to traditional humanities disciplines as it does to the Arts. We are all interested in an outcome or a product; perhaps we should become aware that our current obsession with process, particularly if attempting to work within inappropriate frameworks, may undermine outcomes.

Let us proceed to do dialogue with varied models

Dr. Jacques De Laruelle will now open up the debate. He has written extensively in the field of Art Theory and Aesthetics and he has recently been appointed as Head of Art Theory and Aesthetics at the National Art School in Sydney. You may or may not know that the Art School has been established as an independent institution outside both the university system and the tafe system. Jacques was a prime lobbyist for an independent school. Art, he believes, belongs to a field of its own.

Jacque will differentiate between the performer and the scribe, between artists, poets and other thinkers.