

## **SONIC ARCHITECTURES: MAPPING THE ANCIENT THEATRE IN IMAGE AND SOUND**

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### THE SONIC ARCHITECTURES PROJECT

Staff and students of the Faculty of Creative Arts, with Diana Wood Conroy, have contributed since 1996 to the University of Sydney's Paphos Theatre Expedition in Cyprus. The marvellous adventure of combining art and archaeology over a decade of excavation came about through the vision of Professor Richard Green, director of the excavation. Creative arts and archaeology came together again in fieldwork at the theatre in Paphos in April-May 2006

The Sonic Architectures project asks: How might an understanding of the ancient theatre give contemporary artists new imaginative insights in working at the cutting edge of electronic technologies?

The theatre in antiquity brought together all the arts (architecture, sculpture, painting, poetry, music, song, drama) as the central point of communication and ritual. By discovering the parameters of visual and sonic mapping of the ancient theatre, we are constructing a parallel cross-disciplinary alliance across the senses of sight, sound and touch in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Artists:

Diana Wood Conroy: Texture and touch

Brogan Bunt: Video, sound and programming

Diane Epoff: Digital photographic mapping

Ian McGrath: The acoustics of voice

Stephen Ingham: Sonification of visual data

### ACOUSTICS

The resonant signature of the Greco Roman theatre at Paphos is formed by the innate hardness, density and even crystalline structures of its architecture. Sandy limestone (as bedrock and cut blocks), marble, granite, at least three distinct grades of plaster for seating and walls, pebble and marble mosaic floors combine in the curved architecture of the semicircular theatre. Every element in a theatre, either ancient or modern - from plastic to plaster, concrete to stone, plywood to solid timber - provides a specific affinity for sound. The theatre and its material surfaces is itself the instrument upon which the actor or musician plays.

Ian Mc Grath. Honorary Fellow, Sonic Arts Research Network.

Unpublished paper, Echoes in Stone, 2006

#### THE SITE MAP

In Cyprus I fused camera to body to map the visual topology of the Paphos Theatre site. The process of photographic map-making was a journey of understanding the site as a 'work-in-progress'. Over two days I moved up and across the whole area of the theatre, fifty metres by eighty metres of uneven ground, taking more than two thousand photographs. I stayed aligned to the theodolite's position held by the excavation surveyor, Kerry Plapp, as I moved across the orthogonal axis of the theatre, stepping out the grid of the site as I took frame after frame.

The map is informed by relationships between my body and the site, the archaeological grid, and the camera frame. The mapped textures reveal how multiple histories merge in the physical matter of the earth.

Diane Epoff, Doctoral Candidate and Tutor, Visual Arts, 2006

#### MUSIC COMPOSITION

Taking the scanned rubbings of the theatre textures as a starting point, I have created sound textures through merging innovative computer programs with musical thinking.

While the fields of electroacoustic composition and spatialised sound diffusion are not in themselves new, the composer's ability to harness recent digital technologies to generate and spatially diffuse sound output from vast quantities of scanned (or otherwise derived) data - sonification - is an exciting new field of creative investigation.

Stephen Ingham, Associate Professor of Music Composition, 2006

#### ARCHITECTURE AND MUSIC

*The artist works with forms. Forms are present everywhere in space, in society. They're close to musical form so we have to be able to 'read' them to understand them, to create something new...*

Nouritsa Matossian. Biography of Xenakis. Moufflon Publishing, Nicosia, second edition 2005, 104.

Iannis Xenakis, a Greek composer, worked with Le Corbusier as an architectural engineer in the 1950s and 60s. He often visualised a model in mathematical forms, animated it, and then fitted different sound components to recreate essential characteristics of the structure. These graphic plots formed the basis of handwritten musical scores.

## TOUCH

*The object brought forth from the depths of forgetfulness and history burns with the memory of the senses.*

Nadia Seremetakis (ed) The Senses Still: perception and memory as Material Culture in Modernity. University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 1996, 144.

The graphite rubbings of the textures of the ancient theatre relate to my work as a textile artist with a long preoccupation with the 'haptic' or tactile qualities of materials.

The sense of touch is of primal importance in the understanding of space and may be overlooked through the dominance of the sense of sight, especially in the virtual realm. The nuanced markings of the surfaces have their own visual 'grammar' of expression, especially the newly discovered inscriptions unearthed in 2006.

The combination of complex surfaces creates a visual and sonic pattern of light and dark, with 'touching' emotional overtones.

Diana Wood Conroy, Professor of Visual Arts

## VIDEO AND PANOFIELD

### Video

This video is a set of temporal studies of Paphos, Cyprus that I photographed in April 2006 at the margins of the Australian archaeological project excavating the ancient Greek theatre in Fabrika Hill. It explores the coincidence of the mythological, the historical and the contemporary in Paphos, focusing on small scenes in which time becomes space, and space shimmers in time'

### Panofield

This is a set of Quicktime VR panoramas of two closely related sites in Paphos that show the variety and complexity of the ruins. One cluster of 360 degree panoramas comes from the ancient Greek theatre on Fabrika Hill (in mid-excavation). After the theatre was struck by a major earthquake in 353AD, many of its columns and architectural marbles were used in the building of the Christian basilica known as Ayia Chryssopolitissa, less than a kilometre south of the theatre. Another group of panoramas (click on the site on the computer screen) documents the substantial spaces of the Early Christian architecture that still remain. The Basilica of Ayia Chryssopolitissa is particularly significant for its mosaic floors. Fragments of similar floors have been found in the two eastern and western entrances of the theatre.

Brogan Bunt, Senior Lecturer, New Media

### Labels for Lithographs:

Diana Wood Conroy. *Eustorgis I*: Lithograph 2006

(printed by Thom Goulder, Lithographer)

Diana Wood Conroy. *Eustorgis 2*: Lithograph 2006

(printed by Thom Goulder, Lithographer)

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