

# **Spatial Relationships, Cosmopolitanism and Musico-Literary Miscegenation in the New Media Work of australYSIS**

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In Australia, contemporary interactions between the verbal and the sonic occur not only through the literary representation of sound, but also, more directly, in performance-based or screen-based new media work. Such creative practice arises out of a strong drive to explore, both formally and culturally, the synergies words and music can create when juxtaposed, combined or superimposed in technological environments.

I concentrate here on the work of australYSIS, of which I am a founding member. My focus is my new media collaborations with the director of australYSIS, Roger Dean, who is a composer, performer and new media artist, but also our collaborations with other members of the group. Two of the works I discuss, *motions* (2014) and *Film of Sound* (2013) were created together with US-based video artist Will Luers, whose contribution has been very important in recent work; a third piece, *Disappearing* was jointly made with Sydney-based sound artist Greg White. I elaborate the importance of spatial relationships in these works both technically and thematically. In particular, I explore the dynamic interaction between a cosmopolitan, transnational outlook and a strong sense of belonging to Australia in our work, and show how this relates to our technologised manipulations of word and sound.

To this end I also conceptualise the broader field of intermedia and multimedia work in which australYSIS can be located. In such works words and sound are ideally juxtaposed on a non-hierarchical basis in which neither sound nor word dominate, allowing for considerable emergence, that is for effects to arise which are not entirely predictable from the words and music alone. I propose that such non-hierarchical crossings of word and music can facilitate various forms of cultural crossing, resulting in what I call musico-literary miscegenation. The term miscegenation is one that was used historically, particularly in America, to connote interracial sexual relationships, and evokes the laws historically aimed at criminalising such relations. I, like others, for example (Dunning, 2009), am trying to reclaim miscegenation more positively, just as gay studies has successfully repositioned the word 'queer'. Miscegenation metaphorically maps sexual relationships between different ethnicities on to the word-sound relationship, to suggest the rich cultural effects that relationship can have.

## **australYSIS: Europe and Australia**

australYSIS formed initially as LYSIS in London in the seventies, and neither Roger nor I are Australian born, though we have come to identify strongly with Australian culture. LYSIS had two wings, as an improvising and jazz group, and as a performing ensemble that played compositions by other people but also included improvisations in its performances. During this period, in London 1975-1988, I was a professional musician. I performed as violinist in the group and played many contemporary works including numerous premieres. In 1988 Roger and I moved to Australia and re-formed (and renamed) the group as australYSIS. Over

the period since, austraLYSIS has evolved into an ensemble that largely performs and publishes its own compositions and improvisations. During this period, my role in the group has changed, and from 1996 has become that of a writer; consequently we have developed many word-sound compositions. These compositions are of two types: performance-based new media works, usually involving music and spoken text with some technological manipulation of words and voice, and screen-based new media works that involve music and screened words, as well as (sometimes) visual images and performed words. The works span a considerable range, and every work we create attempts to enter the word and sound relationship with a slightly different emphasis that is sometimes more sonic, sometimes more semantic. (Smith, *personal website*)

The performance-based new media works exist along a continuum from sonic poetry to what we call ‘sound technodrama’. The sonic poetry can involve technological interventions such as splicing and re-formation of words, and manipulation of the voice with regard to rhythm, pitch and timbre. These interventions create an interface between speech sounds and musical sounds but also renegotiate that interface, sometimes transforming speech into sound or making sound seem speech-like [for example, see *The Writer, the Performer, the Program, the Madwoman*, 2004 (Smith and Dean, *Writer*); *The Space of History*, 2006 (Smith and Dean, *Space*); also (Dean) for analysis of some aspects of the endeavour.] The ‘sound technodramas’ contain these manipulations and transformations too, but also include dramatic, fictional and poetic text. The texts cohere round a narrative impulse less common in sonic poetry, though that narrative is usually multiple, fragmented and overlaid. Many of the sound technodramas were developed through Australian Broadcasting Corporation commissions for the programs *The Listening Room* and *Airplay*. They include *The Afterlives of Betsy Scott*, 2007 (Smith and Dean *Afterlives*); *The Erotics of Gossip*, 2001 (Smith and Dean *Erotics*) and *Nuraghic Echoes*, 1996 (Smith and Dean *Nuraghic*). The ABC has historically been extremely hospitable to experimental performance work, though with the axing of programs such as *New Music Up Late*, *Airplay* – and some years ago *The Listening Room* – it is currently unclear to what extent this will remain the case. Our performance-based new media works often involve the creation of ‘voicescapes’ – a voicescape consists of the multidimensional and multidirectional projection of voices, some digitally manipulated, into space (Smith and Dean *Voicescapes*). I usually perform the sonic poems, but some of the sound technodramas have employed actors.

The screen-based new media works, *Time the Magician*, 2008 (Smith and Dean, *Time*); *Instabilities 2* 2009 (Smith and Dean *Instabilities*); *Clay Conversations*, 2010 (Smith, Still and Dean), generally belong to the form of endeavour known as new media writing or electronic literature (Hayles). Work situated in the field of new media writing normally includes features such as kineticism (words, texts and letters moving round the screen); interactivity (the reader can make changes through processes such as clicking on links or dragging text, the performer can drive or change the coding); textual variability (the text, and the order of the texts, is not the same on different viewings); processing of blocks of text, words and letters (for example by stretching, compressing or fragmenting them); split screens so that several different texts, or texts and images, can be simultaneously displayed; text generation (the production of new texts through computer programming) and, particularly relevant to this essay, the creation of multimedia environments in which words sounds and images can be overlaid, juxtaposed or merged into each other. Our work *Instabilities 2* includes all these characteristics, and many of these features can be seen in the work of leading new media practitioners such as Serge Bouchardon from France; John Cayley, Christine Wilks and JR Carpenter from the UK; Jhave, Stephanie Strickland, Amaranth

Borsuk, Ian Hatcher, MD Coverley, Brian Kim Stefans and D. Fox Harrell from the US; as well as Jason Nelson and geniwate in Australia.

An important element of australYSIS's new media work (and of much contemporary intermedia/multimedia work) is that there is no hierarchy between words and sound. At times during any one work, words or sounds may predominate, but they are throughout projected as if on an equal footing. This maximises the possibilities for the interplay of word and sound, and for emergence beyond word and sound alone.

Its formation in England, and subsequent sojourns and performances in many parts of the world, has made australYSIS a very cosmopolitan group. We have some members who are based in other parts of the world, such as video artist Will Luers in the US and musician Torbjorn Hultmark in the UK. We have also collaborated internationally with artists who are not members of australYSIS, and may even be from other disciplines, such as British ceramicist Joanna Still. This cosmopolitanism arises partly out of travel, collaboration and immigration, and it colours our creative outlook. Roger and I are both as influenced by European and American culture as we are by Australian and Asian Pacific culture. However, our sense of identity with Australian culture is very strong, and moving between different environments has given us an enhanced sense of place and history. In our word-sound collaborations I write and perform the text; Roger composes the music and digitally manipulates sounds, voice and words. In the resulting works, Roger often merges sounds associated with European or American culture with those redolent of the Australian environment, though they may be transformed and abstracted. For example, in the 1996 work *Nuraghic Echoes* (Smith and Dean, *Nuraghic*), boathorn and didgeridoo sound samples that evoke Australian environments are juxtaposed with samples of stones being dropped or rubbed together to evoke the prehistoric Nuraghic stone structures in Sardinia. These sounds are intertwined with three scripted voices written by me, emanating from contemporary Australia, prehistoric Sardinia and a futuristic world that is not located in any currently identifiable place. Likewise, *Returning the Angles*, 1999, is about returning to London from Sydney, and viewing from a new perspective the legacies of Thatcherism, the growth of black Britain, the history of 'the Angles' (a Germanic people who settled in Britain in the post-Roman period) and a host of newsworthy and controversial events in modern day Britain, such as posthumous artificial insemination (Smith and Dean, *Returning*).

In all our work spatial relationships are important both formally and thematically. For many years, we have been 'spatialising' sound (including the sound of the voice) through the use of multiple speakers in the auditorium, usually two at the front and two at the back, with sound also moving between. While the spatialising of sound –through the positioning of performers in different parts of the auditorium and/or the use of strategically placed loudspeakers – has been an accepted practice in the musical world for some time, in the literary world it has been almost non-existent. Although poets often address place and space thematically, performance poets usually speak from the front of the performance space only. Even if they perform together with a recorded voice, or move round the space, multi-directionality is not normally explored.

Elsewhere, in considering the work of other new media writers, I have developed the concept of a 'posthuman cosmopolitanism' (Smith, *Posthuman*). This formulation – in which the use of the term posthuman points to the extension of the human through the use of computers – fits very well with the work of australYSIS, which mediates not only between different geographic environments, but also between acoustic and digitally-manipulated sound, and

between writing for the page and writing for the screen. A posthuman cosmopolitanism might seem to be a contradiction in terms, but it is a way of addressing how human/computer interactions can and do cross national boundaries, through the Internet which is a global structure. The term adapts and develops the discourse known as ‘the new cosmopolitanism’ that emphasises the connections between and across nation states rather than the centrality of the nation state itself (Fine and Chernilo; Fine; Beck; Schoene). The new cosmopolitanism is highly relevant to virtual environments because they are not bounded by the nation state. Often when we visit a website, we may not be aware of where it is based: it is also likely to contain the collaborative input of people from diverse locations and cultures. The technical means of new media work – the ability to interweave, split, superimpose and link environments – also lends itself to traversing the boundaries of nation states.

This posthuman cosmopolitanism, tied to an investment in the ‘glocal’ – the interface between the globalised and the local theorised by Ritzer (Ritzer, *Rethinking*; Ritzer, *Globalization*) – is characteristic of new media work by a number of Australian new media artists. For example, Australian new media writer geniwate’s 2003 interactive piece *concatenation* is about the way that political events are ‘globally concatenated’ (Weight). It links Liberia, Uganda and Rwanda to Australian detention centres such as Baxter, Port Hedland and Nauru through interactive pithy texts, combined with sounds whose clicks, rumbles and glitches suggest intermittent gunfire. New media writer Jason Nelson’s pieces often address Australia’s relationship to other places (Nelson himself is American by nationality but has lived in Australia for many years). His 2010 work ‘Wide and Wildly Branded’ (Nelson, *Wide*) is a new media piece based on an interactive compass structure that ambiguously both evokes and problematises location. Nelson says that ‘the work represents Australia’s strange multi-directional spin, its confusion about how it sees itself, its indigenous past and future, its relationship with its neighbours in Asia, or its western-world counterparts in Europe and North America’ (Nelson, *Email*). Such posthuman cosmopolitanism is also evident, more generally, in some of the classics of new media writing, for example in John Cayley’s 2004 piece *Translation* (Cayley). This piece morphs between German, French and English through substitution of letters – what John Cayley calls ‘transliterate morphing’ (Cayley) – with accompanying algorithmically programmed sung letters. A posthuman cosmopolitanism is also extremely evident in Young Hae Chang Heavy Industries’ 2003 work *Nippon* (Young), in which the words appear on a split screen in both Japanese and English, and in which the instruments in the accompanying music move rhythmically either with the English or Japanese text (piano with Japanese, saxophone with English).

### **Relationships between words and sound; musico-literary miscegenation**

The formal challenges and interests of the relationships between words and sound have often been discussed, though sometimes more in relation to song than with regard to intermedia or multimedia work (Lodato and Urrows; Bernhart and Scher). In the context of intermedia or multimedia, theoretical formulations tend to take on the concept of what musicologist Nicholas Cooke calls ‘the reciprocal transfer of attributes’ (97) between the different media, which he also sees as competing for the same space. Laurence Kramer, a leading expert in the musico-literary area, argues that words give meaning to music because music is ‘semantically absorptive’ (149), that is, if you juxtapose words and music, the music will be perceived as embodying or reflecting the meanings of the words. However, Kramer argues, the music may in return give extra meaning to the words, so that there is a continuous feedback loop (149). Kramer and Cook both stress the concept of emergence in the relationship between words and

music.

Another related way of thinking about the relationship between words and music is through the concept of semiotic and perceptual exchange. I have often used the term semiotic exchange to talk about the way that different media can take on each other's characteristics when juxtaposed, for example in intermedia pieces where spoken words may be interwoven or alternated with musical sounds (Smith and Dean *Improvisation*; Smith, *Cursors*; Smith *soundAFFECTs*). The referential aspect of language sometimes masks its sonic aspect, while music seems primarily sonic rather than explicitly referential. However, in the presence of sound we become more aware of the sonic and abstracted aspect of words, while words highlight sound's referential potentialities. Recently, influenced by theories of musical perception (Clarke), I have expanded the term semiotic exchange to semiotic and perceptual exchange, because the transfer of characteristics is not only intrinsic to the media but also arises out of how the juxtaposition of the two media is perceived. When words and sound are brought together we often *perceive* music as more referential and words as more sonic, because humans have a cognitive tendency to assimilate disparate kinds of information (Clarke).

Such semiotic and perceptual exchange can take place through a variety of different types of juxtaposition of words and music in new media writing, all of which allow for the possibility of emergence, and all of which can be combined. It can occur through *parallelism*, in which music and screened text run continuously together but independently; *coordination*, where there is an associative, illustrative and representational linking between word and sound; *interactive variability*, where the reader or performer can change or reorder either the sound or text or both; *algorithmic synaesthesia* (Dean et al.) in which words and sound are composed using the same computational process for both; and *heterogeneity*, where sound and text are composed of multiple, mobile elements that continuously couple and uncouple in different ways.

The cultural consequences of semiotic and perceptual exchange, however, also need to be considered. I want to suggest that crossings between words and music can facilitate other forms of cultural crossing: between the human and posthuman (the extension of the human through computers), between different genders and sexualities, and most particularly between different national identities, ethnicities and languages. These crossovers of national identities and ethnicities can result in what I call musico-literary miscegenation. As mentioned earlier, the term miscegenation was used historically to describe interracial sexual relationships, but in contexts that were racist and discriminatory. The word miscegenation used positively here maps the ethnic, erotic and reproductive onto the mixing of words and music, to stress formal and cultural merging and emergence. It is resonant of the power relationships of colonialism and postcolonialism, but power relationships are also relevant to the interaction between words and music in new media writing, where the most fruitful conjunctions are usually non-hierarchical. I am using the term allusively here to cover a variety of types of cultural crossing that are not exclusively interracial, but involve transnationalism, and various forms of cross-cultural encounter, borrowing and appropriation.

The relationship between these formal and cultural crossings in new media writing is shown in figure 1 below.

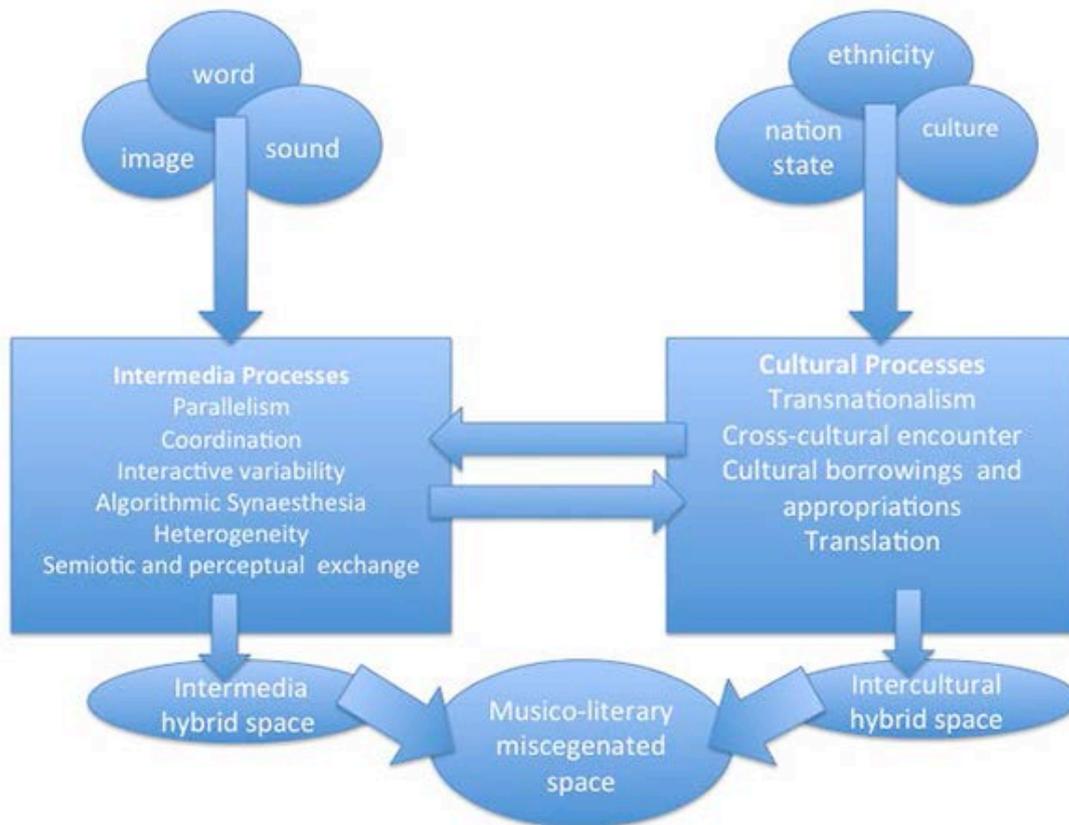


Figure 1. Musico-literary miscegenation in new media writing

The two sides of the diagram mirror each other, the left hand side models the formal processes while the right hand side models the cultural ones: they speak to each other and meet in the musico-literary miscegenated space in the bottom middle of the diagram. In the top left hand corner are the basic elements of word, image and sound; the intermedia processes are the possible conjunctions between word and sound and the various forms these can take: these conjunctions become the intermedia hybrid space that flows into the musico-literary miscegenated space. On the right hand side of the diagram are various forms of social construction (nation state, ethnicity, culture) that when subject to forms of encounter, crossing or appropriation can create an intercultural hybrid space. The intermedia processes are, of course, inextricably bound up with the cultural processes, hence the arrows between them. The intercultural hybrid space and the intermedia hybrid space both flow into the musico-literary miscegenated space.

The idea of both formal and cultural crossings is fundamental to the work of *austraLYSIS*. Some of our previous work, for example, explored crossings between male and female identities through manipulation of voice samples, so that a female sample might sound male, or might seem to be situated along the continuum of male to female, a phenomenon I have elsewhere called ‘sonic cross-dressing’ (Smith, *Sonic*).

While I do not wish to imply that all aspects of musico-literary miscegenation are applicable to the work of *austraLYSIS*, I want to show how transnationalism in particular has been an important aspect of our conjunctions of words and sound in recent works. To this end, I will discuss three new works by the group, drawing attention both to the way that they combine words and sounds, and to the way these combinations of words and sound facilitate a transnational and intercultural approach.

## Disappearing

Whereas the other pieces I will be discussing use screened words, *Disappearing* (Smith, White and Dean) constructs a voicemap to connect death and disappearing, from natural death to political murder, across different cultures and nations. The piece is a collaboration between Roger Dean, Greg White and myself, and has been performed several times in Australia and the UK. It weaves voices, and their sonic transformations, into a word-soundscape that moves between varying historical eras and geographical spaces, and superimposes a mix of cultural identities and contexts upon each other. Here, I suggest, word and sound crossovers facilitate cultural crossovers between different nation states in the way I have just discussed.

*Disappearing* creates a ‘voicemap’ of four voices. The voicemap includes acoustic delivery, and digital manipulation of the voice and other sounds. I wrote, performed and recorded the four-voice script. Greg White provided a series of acoustic transformations of the pre-recorded voices. Roger Dean rearranged, layered and mixed the text, together with the acoustic transformations of the voice, into a montage. He provided extra sound and also ‘spatialised’ the work, that is, arranged it so that it would emanate from the four loudspeakers. The piece consists of four voices that approach the theme of disappearing from different perspectives. *Voice one* includes a scenario based in Australia (though not explicitly) about a man who wants to visit a sick woman (implicitly his mother) who is overseas. He talks about the difficulties of being overseas as the woman dies; he also imagines what he will do when he visits the woman and how he will comfort her:

She lives across seas and there are so many obstacles, discouraging voices.

He won’t listen to them.

He will take her flowers; she likes flowers. He will arrange them for her though he is not skilled at arrangements. (Smith, White and Dean)

This scenario is cut up and juxtaposed with sections of text performed by *voice two*. These *voice two* sections play linguistically and rhythmically on a famous quotation from Epicurus ‘that which is the most awful of evils, death, is nothing to us, since when we exist there is no death, and when there is death we do not exist’ [quoted in (Garvey)] that is progressively transformed and permuted throughout the piece. The experience of a natural death evoked by *voice one* contrasts with other deaths in the piece, evoked particularly by voices two and three. These deaths are due to the actions of totalitarian regimes and involve political abductions and murders in and across different nations. Within *voice two*, for example – which is partly juxtaposed with *voice three* and *voice four* – there are allusions to the deportation of Jews from Rădăuți (Romania) to Transnistria during the Second World War. *Voice three* focuses on ‘the disappeared’ in Chile under Pinochet in the 70s and 80s, and in Argentina under the military junta during the Seventies and early Eighties, through a poem of which the following is an extract:

she undresses  
but finds  
her flesh has fled

their heaviness

thrown alive in the ocean  
  
 what can detain us?  
  
 no more disappeared, only dead people  
 no more disappeared, no prosecutions  
  
 the Chilean women of Calama  
 thrash through the sands  
 hunting their brothers  
 sons, husbands  
  
 the mothers of the Plaza de Mayo  
 white headscarves embroidered  
 cover their heads with  
 the names of the murdered  
  
 evacuation eradication  
  
 the Atacama desert  
 dinosaur fossils  
 a mass grave  
 a mummified Mayan  
  
 traces of bone  
 dissolved in solution  
 erased by the junta  
 (Smith, White and Dean)

The poem (which overlaps with *voice two* and *voice four*) subsequently cross-references the mothers of ‘the disappeared’ with the mother in *voice one*. Zoe Crossland’s article, ‘Buried Lives: Forensic Archaeology and the Disappeared in Argentina’, was influential on the writing of the poem. It discusses the ambiguous emotions surrounding human remains (the relatives need to find out what has happened to those they have lost, but when they receive the remains must face ultimate confirmation of death). The article also suggests the important role remains play as evidence of mass murder, and in individual and collective memory.

*Voice four* is in three sections that again hinge on transnational connections: the first section refers to instances of cooperation and disunity across nations from ‘tuning across nations’ to ‘the destruction of Westphalia’; the second section of *voice four* refers to the repression of creativity in the arrest by government agents of Syrian film maker Orwa Nyrabia; the third (performed in canon with itself) to the many fragile myths and illusions that come and go within western culture, some involving death and disappearance. The final section of *voice four*, which is about running away, is non-specific, but seems to relate to all the different stories of disappearing:

I ran and ran across fields and grass, tumbling and slipping, I ran leaving everything behind, stripped, saddened, bereft, alone, I ran looking only ahead, I ran and ran through grass, mud, glass, cement, rivers, oceans, I did not pause, I did not reflect, I ran through books, mirrors, fences, walls, cupboards, I ran across bridges, over the top of houses, through basements, overland, underground, I ran without breathing, without believing, without knowing, without looking back. (Smith, White and Dean)

The four voices intertwine as a voicescap of performed and digitally transformed speech, together with other sound sources, such as the piano flourish near the end of the piece. Voices weave in and out of each other, often changing position within the sound space, sometimes

partially ‘disappearing’ within each other or within sonic transformations of the voice. Sometimes two voices speak at once: the ear can to a degree separate them out, but a third text emerges out of their intersection.

In performance, loudspeakers are placed in the auditorium (two at the front, two at the back) so that the voices are situated at different points in space. The digital voices are also moved around the space from loudspeaker to loudspeaker. This movement projects and supports the thematic aspect of the piece, which interconnects death and disappearing in different places and overlays disparate subjectivities (the man contemplating the death of his mother, the mothers of the disappeared, the person needing to escape).

Although the piece includes acoustic instrumental sounds (such as near the end where piano sounds provide a wake-up call for the final section), much of the sound in the piece consists of sonic transformations of the voice. These seem voice-like even though they are emptied of semantics and of recognisable features of language. Greg White says of these processes, which he constructed, that they ‘present a clear sonic fingerprint of the performer while providing a less distinct association with the material performed’ (White 6). The effect is somewhat ambiguous. It creates both a personalising and ‘depersonalising’ of the voice – depersonalising in the sense of stripping the voice of words, personalising in the sense of retaining the ‘sonic footprint’ – and emphasises both the individual and collective experience of death. The voice transformations, reverberant but almost ghost-like, become a chamber in which other voices can make themselves heard.

Because of the ‘sonic spatialisation’ that is part of this work – whereby each voice is situated in a particular position in the audio spectrum but also moves in relation to that position and the other voices – each voice is localised but diffuse, singular but dialogic, acoustic but technologised. This interweaving and movement of the voices projects the inter-connected spaces and subjectivities that emerge within the piece, through the themes of death, repression and longing across national boundaries.

## Motions

*motions* (2014) is by Will Luers, Roger Dean and myself. Will undertook the image and coding, Roger composed the sound and I wrote the text. The piece is conceived as a multimedia web application, and optimised for swiping and scrolling on tablets and computers. *motions* can also be exhibited/installed in a gallery space if desired, and can be publically performed. It is programmed in HTML5/Javascript.

*motions* is transnational in focus, concentrating as it does on human trafficking and contemporary slavery. Human trafficking is an accelerating form of crime, and is a worldwide problem (Bales and Soodalter; Winterdyk; Perrin and Reichel; Farley; Lee *Human Trafficking*; Lee *Trafficking*). It is one of the darker outcomes of globalisation, the breakdown of the nation-state, and increasing ease of travel. It highlights the uncomfortable fact that the ideal of cosmopolitanism is not available to many people, and that travel can be coerced and may have devastating consequences. Human trafficking has many different faces, from enforced prostitution to societies where children from impoverished families are entrusted to wealthy relatives who sometimes exploit them. All these forms of trafficking appear in the text, though enforced prostitution is the most prominent. The piece alludes to forms of trafficking in Indonesia, Eastern Europe, UK, Australia, US, Africa, Vietnam and Thailand.

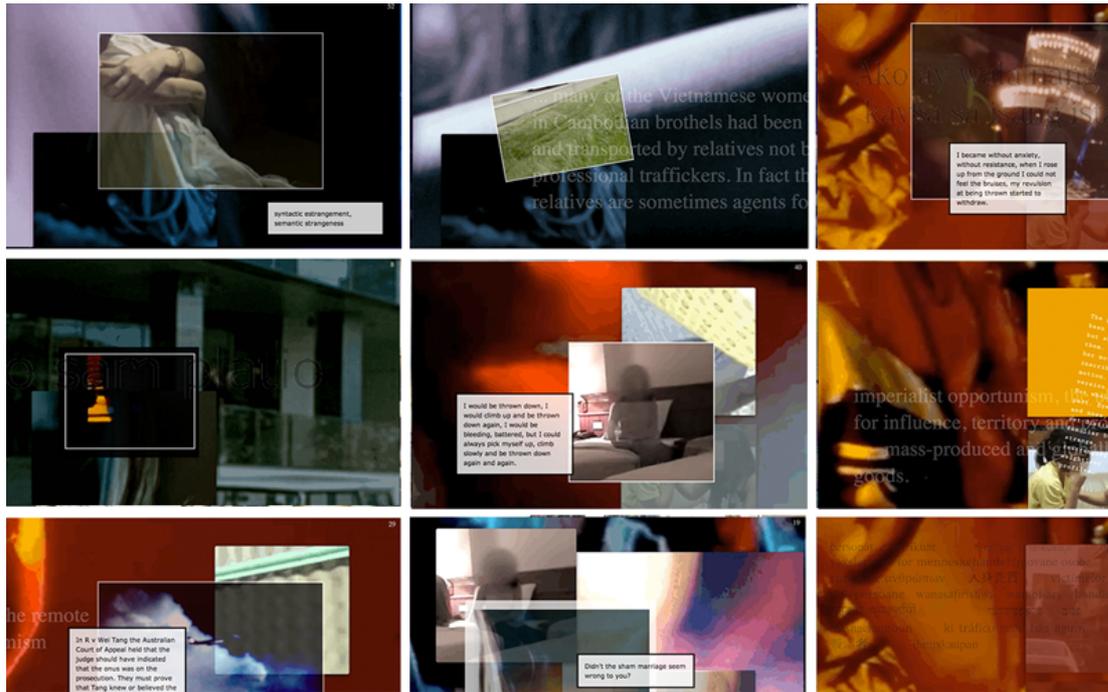


Figure 2: Screenshot from the front screen of *motions*

*motions* also uses several different languages, and employs various forms of deconstructed language as well as fragments of a constructed non-existent language:

alless vagney mylo unla lobofu. arflo funape nodren lesslava. exla foat prosam lalessfo  
 chokfo repi locor. sadrip myun maglu sawa lessla  
 (Smith, Dean and Luers)

These diverse kinds of language emphasise the ubiquity of trafficking across different cultures and subjectivities.

Some texts and images are programmed to occur each time the piece is viewed and in a particular order. But not every text and image fragment appears each time the piece is perused, and the juxtaposition, order and formatting of text, image and sound are different on each viewing. So successive readings of the piece will be similar, but will encounter considerable divergences. As I have suggested elsewhere (Smith, *Textual*), different versions of any new media work share a deep structure but have distinct surface structures. That is, the components of the piece – some of which may not appear in every rendering – will be arranged differently each time the piece is activated because they are programmed to be variable (surface structure), but the variability will have certain limits also determined by the programming (deep structure) (Smith, *Textual*). The text and image fragments are from different genres: documentary, journalism, poetry, narrative, fictocriticism and photography. These fragments are programmed to evoke both instances of slavery, and factual information about trafficking, but also the subjective experience of enslavement, rape and exploitation:

It wasn't exactly rape. For a rape to take place your breath has to feel it's at home, with a sharp sense of its rightful place.

But I wouldn't allow myself to be there, *here* was always *elsewhere*. I would step out of my flesh and raise myself to the ceiling. I would hang there suspended as if on a trapeze and I wouldn't look down.

Beneath others would enter and exit, I barely noticed.

When they had gone I would lower myself to the ground, hook myself onto my flesh, fastening the clasp on my head, my throat, my chest, my legs.  
(Smith, Dean and Luers)

Textual fragments, like this, that evoke the experiences of trafficking victims, are juxtaposed with visual images, ranging from still to looping images in the form of animated gifs (a gif is a graphic image with a small file size). The images often involve multiple superimpositions, and produce a continuum from the representational to highly abstracted blocks of colour. The more representational images include ones that suggest travel and motion; confined spaces sometimes closed in by gates or wire-netting; figures with blocked out faces often showing signs of distress; body parts, such as a woman rocking and hugging her knees or an enlarged open eye; scrubland landscape and environments that evoke the non-Western cultures from which some of the trafficking victims are torn.

Although *motions* has a transnational focus, prominent in the piece is the Wei Tang case in Australia. R v Tang in 2008 was the first conviction in Australia for contemporary slavery and is a landmark case (Kolodizner; High Court of Australia). The conviction was overturned by an appeal court and then reinstated by the high court, the decision centering on exactly how slavery should be defined. The text also refers to the case of Zoltan Kovacs and his wife Melita in Queensland. They were jailed in 2007 for holding a woman as a slave – Kovacs was also charged with rape (Schloenhardt and Jolly).

Sometimes textual fragments float in the background. These can be poetic fragments, but they are also extracts from more theoretical tracts that give variant, sometimes conflicting, perspectives on the narrative, poetic and documentary material. Particularly featured in the textual fragments is the work of George Ritzer, who argues that globalisation has two faces. The first of these 'glocalisation' – the interlocking of the global and the local, for example in locally produced goods and crafts – is more positive. The other, 'grobalisation' – the rise of multinational corporations, capitalism and imperialist opportunism – is more negative, this is the side of globalisation to which trafficking belongs (Ritzer *Rethinking*; Ritzer, *Globalization*). The work of Weitzer also appears as a floating text in some, though not all, iterations of the piece: he argues, controversially, probably indefensibly, that some feminist movements have exaggerated and exploited the activity of trafficking, and that 'abolitionist feminists' use the war on trafficking to stoke their own agenda: ridding society of prostitution (Weitzer 449).

Throughout the piece much of the text appears on the screen in short fragments sometimes drawn from longer texts: for example, some of the texts consist of fictional interviews that often appear as a single question or answer. Much of the text in black-edged boxes conveys narrative momentum, while other text may be more poetic, informational, meditative or tangential. The text is almost entirely written by me though highly influenced by, and often based on, the material I read.

In *motions* the sound consists of four sections that follow on sequentially though they also overlap: the interactivity of the reader, in addition, may increase the overlaps. These sections

can be categorised broadly as flight sounds, eastern European music sounds, train sounds and American musical sounds, all with varying degrees of transformation. However, in essence the sections are much more complex than those labels suggest, and there is some heterogeneity within each section. The train samples include a train moving off slowly, a train moving out of the station and a train going quite fast. The flight sounds are of planes taking off, landing and cruising, but also include internal plane sounds such as the seatbelt-on sound. In addition, these samples are treated: for example, they are granulated (granulation is a form of sound synthesis that involves splitting sound samples into small pieces, then layering them or playing them at different speeds, volume and frequency and in varied orders). The Eastern European music section is based on a sample played in Aksak Macedonian rhythm (Aksak rhythm is asymmetric and consists of rhythmic patterns such 2+3, 2+2+3, 2+3+3). There are also piano chords in this section that are atonal in recognition of Eastern European microtonal and atonal tuning systems.

The Americanised musical section has some connections with jazz, though it not a jazz improvisation as such. It utilises tenor saxophone multiphonics that are transformed, and also jazz-like drum rhythms. In some senses the Eastern European section and the Americanised section sharply contrast, but in other ways they overlap. The Eastern European section is centered on asymmetric rhythms and the Americanised section on symmetric rhythms. But the Americanised rhythm evolves out of the asymmetric rhythm and has a family relationship to it. Similarly, while the piano chords are mainly tonal, there are some microtonal chords that point both to Eastern European and Asian music. The jazz influence in this section also has an African American, rather than a Western, lineage.

There is an element of parallelism between the words and the sounds, because the sound sections play consecutively in the order delineated above, however this parallelism is always subject to modification. This is because interactivity has effects on the sound, usually causing the different sections to progressively overlap. Each sound section is triggered to start probabilistically once a particular screen has been reached. However, the user's interactions influence other algorithms that determine the starts, ends and overlaps of the sonic sections. These will usually become overlaid as the reader/viewer interacts with the piece, and create different word-to-music relationships on each viewing.

The sounds relate to, and are coordinated with, the words in a number of different ways. Most obviously they are illustrative, sometimes in a direct way, sometimes in a more indirect, emotive way. The flight and train sounds relate directly to the activity of trafficking (but train sounds are also reminiscent of other historical forms of oppression such as the holocaust). The Eastern European music relates to the background from which the trafficking victims come, but it also signifies, more indirectly, feelings of displacement and longing for the homeland.

In *motions*, the contrast between the Eastern European musical sections and the more Americanised musical sections, but also their interconnection, reflects the themes conveyed by the images and words of some of the more damaging effects of transnationalism and globalisation. It reinforces the two faces of globalisation that hover behind *motions*: increased communication but also increased crime, especially since real ease of movement is only for the privileged and the rich.

## Film of Sound

*Film of Sound* (Luers, Dean and Smith, 2013) is another collaboration with US video artist Will Luers and Roger Dean, made before *motions*. The very fact of collaborating with Will created a transnational focus, since many of the images (most obviously of the desert) are from American environments.

New media writing generally prioritises text and image over sound, see for example the Electronic Literature Organisation Collections One and Two (Hayles et al.; Borrà et al.). In these collections every work contains images, but many works do not have a sound aspect or contain sound that is subordinate to the words. In *Film of Sound*, however, sound was the driver of the text and visual images. Roger created two initial ‘guiding’ sound compositions, and Will and I began generating responses to them. This process was reiterated a number of times as we developed our materials.



Figure 3: Screenshot from *Film of Sound*

In *Film of Sound* the music, image and sound all involve heterogeneous, non-linear, elements continuously coming together and moving apart, reforming in other configurations. The resultant soundtrack consists of diverse constituents: algorithmically organised piano sounds (tonal, atonal, jazz); environmental sounds; embodied sound and electroacoustic sound. In performance the sound is ‘spatialised’ and uses four speakers. The piano (and other) sounds move between the front and back, creating an immersive sonic experience.

The text appears as text-image: layered, multi-directional and in colour. Though sometimes only partially and swiftly shown, some of these text blocks are repeated as the piece progresses. This means that different parts of a textual fragment can be read at different times, and that comprehension gradually builds, even while the sense of mystery persists. The words are not, with some exceptions, closely coordinated with the visual images, nor do they necessarily have the same tone. Rather, they convey an emotional undertow, a nightmare scenario of surveillance, claustrophobia, disorientation and decay, for example in the following fragment:

At first the boots were a threat, a reminder of surveillance. They came too close, the wall a spineless membrane. Then you started to need them, crave them. Punctuation of the sprawling night, grammar of dismantled senses. (Luers, Dean and Smith)

Such passages do not have an especially Australian aspect, but do resonate with the experiences of many Australian immigrants (refugees, holocaust survivors).

Throughout *Film of Sound*, two concepts of space intermingle: space as open, unfolding and

crossing boundaries, and space as confined, limited and prison-like. Spatial images, whether open, closed or ambiguous, abound in phrases such as 'unfields', 'fold away coastlines' or 'there were so many partitions'. This spatial complexity is reinforced in the spaces that feature in the visual images from desert to hotel room to swimming pool. It is also emphasised in Will's use of smaller and sometimes multiple frames within the larger overall frame, creating spaces within spaces. Time and space intersect in continuously transforming ways: images appear at dramatically changing speeds – sometimes so quickly they are barely perceptible.

The result is a dissolution of geographical and temporal boundaries that produces emergent meanings about migration, travel, confinement and memory. The images hint at a narrative trajectory – a sleeping man, an evening in a hotel room, and a journey across vast spaces. The words hint at disordered memories of violence, fear and repression, which may or may not be connected with the sleeping man.

## Coda

New media writing in Australia is a field in which sounds are not only represented in literary texts, but are actually incorporated into them. Such works form part of an experimental aesthetic that has tended to be on the fringe of Australian literary culture, but has historically been to the fore in less exclusively literary contexts such as the now extinct ABC program *The Listening Room*. Crossings between words and music can also produce various forms of cultural crossing. The work of *austraLYSIS* tends to have a cosmopolitan aspect, while being firmly rooted in the culture of Australia. Our synergies of words and music, together with our use of new technologies, produce miscegenated spaces that also have transnational trajectories.

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