MAPPING TANGIBLE AND INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE: THE SPLINTERS ARCHIVE PROJECT

GAVIN FINDLAY

You can't have the wildlife without the jungle.

Bruce Keller, 1991

For a few dazzling years in the early 1990s, many eyes in the Australian theatre world were turning to Canberra. The centre of attention was a brash young company called Splinters, recommended to those of us then working at The Performance Space by the late Bruce Keller, who had been working in Canberra with theatre-in-education company Jigsaw. Splinters was arguably the most remarkable and influential, truly home-grown artistic venture that Canberra has produced. It grew from the local (counter-)culture, and arose in and around the national government, the cultural institutions and the embassies of many nations that the city was designed to serve. The company's meteoric rise to national prominence in the early 1990s has not, to date, been documented and shared with the community that nurtured it, and its astonishing works and techniques deserve to be made available for overdue critical analysis.

Renowned for large outdoor spectacles, site-specific performance and transgressive, cutting-edge theatre, Splinters produced more than twenty works that played at theatres and festivals around the country between 1985 and 1998 and provided a springboard for many individual artists and a number of successful other companies. Very little literature about the company existed until this project began: there was a partial entry in the AusStage database and couple of mentions in Geoffrey Milne's *Theatre Australia (Un)limited*.[1] The dispersal of the key Splinters players and of the company's records and artefacts after 1998 had meant that no proper record of the company's works was entered into collecting institutions or gathered to make it accessible to academic study.

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It is impossible to convey in a few words what Splinters was about, or to capture the essence of its many, often huge and chaotic, performances. In its heyday, the company became known as Splinters Theatre of Spectacle, which highlights its trademark: seducing and overwhelming the audience through bravado, trickery, enticement and sheer audio-visual power. In order to begin to do justice to the work after so many years, a new approach to presenting the archival material is called for. David Branson, Patrick Troy and Ross Cameron founded Splinters in 1985, with another key member, Stuart Vaskess, joining the following year. It began as an anarchist collective but, even as it became professionalised, retained an open structure: well over a thousand people performed with the company over the years, including hundreds of young performers fostered by Splinters members working as tutors. Several key members were sculptors, painters and photographers trained at the Canberra School of Art. Musicians in the group played in many bands, some of which have gone on to national and international success. In addition to the theatrical performances, Splinters ran regular cabaret-style events in pubs and later established a training arm, the School for Performance Investigation and Training or SPIT. In 1993, Splinters even received an unprecedented commission to produce a spectacular for the many thousands at that most bogan of events, the Summernats National Street Machine Festival.

A brief tabulation of some of the company's most notable achievements provides signposts of the impact of the group in Canberra and around Australia in the early 1990s:

- *Cathedral of Flesh*: Old Adelaide Gaol, Adelaide Fringe Festival 1992; named Best Promenade Theatre of the 1992 Festival and Fringe by the *Adelaide Advertiser*;
- *Guardians of the Concourse*: commissioned by Robyn Archer for the 1993 National Festival of Australian Theatre;
- *ICON*: commissioned performance for the 1993 Sydney Opera House 20th Anniversary;
- *25 Years of Performance Art in Australia*, 1994: commissioned performance for the opening of the exhibition curated by Nic Waterlow at Ivan Dougherty Gallery, University of New South Wales;
- *Village of Captive Souls*: 1994 tour to Wagga Wagga, Cootamundra, Deniliquin, Hay and Albury (all New South Wales), supported by one of the first Playing Australia grants;
- *Faust*: 1995 commission for the Australian National University 50th Anniversary, including an original score by Larry Sitsky;
- *Mysteries*: 1996 commission to produce the closing ceremonies and final season of theatre for the original Canberra Theatre Centre Playhouse.

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DAVID BRANSON IN REHEARSAL AS BAAL. STREET THEATRE STUDIO, CANBERRA, 1998. PHOTO: 'PLING.

It is arguable that Splinters dominated Canberra's artistic life as no group of artists before or since has done, or is likely ever to do again. The impact and spirit of Splinters can still be discerned in Canberra, even though almost all its core members have left to pursue careers elsewhere. Companies and artists that had their origins in Splinters include Snuff Puppets, Red Cabbage Collective, The Village Festival, Temple State/Spectacle Art Inc., Mikelangelo, CIA, ODD Productions and Triclops International.

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Tragically, David Branson died in a car accident in December 2001. His legacy was recognised by the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government through a tribute delivered by the Minister for the Arts in the Legislative Assembly,[2] and subsequently the naming of a street after him in the suburb of Dunlop. Fortunately for posterity, Branson kept everything: reviews, scripts, production notes, posters and handbills, photographs, videos, office records and more. An extensive archive, the David Branson Papers,[3] was created in 2010 at the ACT Heritage Library. This rich archive presents a unique opportunity to make the work of Splinters accessible once more, and to make possible an assessment of its impact in Canberra, both in terms of theatre practice and the broader cultural life of the city.

In theatre terms, Splinters was most strongly connected to the group of important experimental performance companies that arose around Australia in the 1980s and introduced many new techniques and approaches. Groups such as The Sydney Front, Open City, Entr'Acte and Sidetrack Theatre explored collaborative, cross-art form approaches, making use of any and all artistic media and techniques. They drew strongly on the parallel tradition of performance art: that is, visual art made on the human body. This movement questioned the notion of representation by the performer, explored non-narrative approaches to theatre, and often took a deliberate stance against conventional theatre even while having many elements in common with it.[4] A number of intertwined strands grew out of this, such as physical theatre, hybrid theatre, site-specific performance and new media performance. The vitality of the period is evinced by the creation by the Australia Council of a Hybrid Arts Committee in the 1990s and later the creation of a New Media Arts Board.[5] Nowadays, the term 'post-dramatic' is the accepted term to describe these approaches, which continue as a practice largely separate from conventional drama.[6]

In Australia, this movement converged in Sydney at The Performance Space founded by Mike Mullins in 1981. Having a gallery space as well as a theatre allowed unprecedented and exceptionally fruitful cross-fertilisation between performance art and theatre. Successive seasons there by Splinters in 1990–92 brought the company to the attention of these leading companies, which quickly recognised the young group's dynamism and fearlessness. Significantly, the period also marked the rise in availability of the portable video camera, meaning that tools for visual documentation of theatre became affordable and accessible.

Splinters was pre-eminent among a younger, anarchistic second wave of performance collectives that included the Post Arrivalists in Sydney and Imagineers in Melbourne. The meeting of the three groups at the 1992 Adelaide Fringe Festival catalysed an exceptional creative outpouring in the following years. While Splinters enjoyed a vibrant artistic exchange with the more established companies through The Performance Space, the relatively primitive state of electronic communication at the time meant that correspondence was still mainly by post. As a result, contact was just as frequent

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and vigorous with significant overseas companies that had even more in common with Splinters, such as Dog Troep (Netherlands), Mutoid Waste Company (UK) and Survival Research Laboratories (USA).

Splinters benefited from a remarkably fertile creative environment in Canberra in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1981, Joe Woodward and David Bates, now the owner of The Famous Spiegeltent, founded PITS (Pie In The Sky), a cabaret theatre-restaurant producing commercially oriented shows to subsidise deeply experimental and provocative work. PITS was a magnet for Troy and Branson, who snuck in to see shows while still under legal age. Carol Woodrow had founded Canberra Youth Theatre in the early 1970s, then Reid House Theatre Workshop and Jigsaw, and next, Fools' Gallery, a touring vehicle for powerful feminist theatre in the mid-1980s. These companies fostered local talent and brought many professional theatre workers to Canberra, including leading physical theatre artist Stephen Champion and Renald Navilly of Tango One 60, both of whom collaborated significantly with Splinters.

Alongside these are names such as Grotesqui Monkey Choir and Red Weather, and Don Asker's Human Veins Dance Theatre, later to become Meryl Tankard's company. These companies produced distinctive, visceral and intelligent work which inspired the emerging Splinters artists. The intellectual aspect of the Canberra scene is epitomised by Boris Kelly and Monica Barone's People Next Door, which also worked extensively with Neil Roberts to explore the boundaries between the visual arts and theatrical traditions. Barone had started out in Canberra Youth Theatre, as had Roland Manderson who later directed that same theatre from 1991 to 1997 and was director of the first Canberra Festival of Contemporary Arts in 1999. The community was also blessed to be home for many years to Peter J. Wilson's world-class puppetry and visual theatre company, Company Skylark, formerly Skylark Puppet and Mask Company.

THE SPLINTERS ARCHIVE PROJECT

The Splinters archive project grew out of a deep personal desire to ensure that the cultural heritage of Splinters was made available to new generations of Canberra artists as a part of the 2013 Centenary of Canberra celebrations. If this heritage genuinely represents a significant local cultural phenomenon, can its widely dispersed threads be gathered and presented in such a way as to make it viable and meaningful today? Would it be potent enough to engage and inspire younger artists, or is it only of historical interest?

The first step, clearly, was to locate and collect the Splinters artefacts and ensure that the material was properly and safely stored. Antoinette Buchanan, Head Librarian of the ACT Heritage Library, was in no doubt of the significance of the material and offered to create an archive there. Coincidentally, Joel Swadling, a friend of the Branson family, had

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SPLINTERS, *FAUST: THE HEAT OF KNOWLEDGE*. INSTALLATION PERFORMANCE BY ACME, 1996. PHOTO: 'PLING.

decided to undertake a biography of David and has become a vital part of the research team for this project, putting in countless hours in the arrangement and description of the Branson Papers.

Around the same time, I published two articles in *RealTime*, Australia's critical guide to international contemporary arts, about Splinters and its milieu.[7] Equally fortunately, the articles caught the eye of Robyn Archer AO, who published an article in response.[8] Archer is presently Creative Director of the 2013 Centenary of Canberra but had also commissioned one of Splinters' most memorable works, *Guardians of the Concourse*, for the 1993 Festival of Australian Theatre. I put it to her that it would be tremendous to be able to bring back Splinters and the many other ex-pat Canberra artists for the year-long Centenary celebrations. She had already had the same idea. I am now exceptionally honoured to have her as a member of my supervisory panel. I proposed to Archer that I would work with others to produce an exhibition and documentary film in time for the Centenary, as well as try to bring former Splinters artists to perform again in their hometown alongside the exhibition. It was then in the matter of preserving video and audio that I sought advice from Dr Jeff Brownrigg of the Donald Horne Institute of the University of Canberra, and formerly the National Film and Sound Archive, who, fortunately for me, saw the potential of the project and offered me the opportunity to undertake a PhD in Cultural Heritage under his guidance.

A crucial early stage in any archival heritage project is to establish the significance of what is to be collected. For Splinters, this can be established in at least two domains: the cultural significance to the Canberra community, and its significance in terms of

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Australian theatre practice.

> Significance means the historic, aesthetic, scientific and social values that an object or collection has for past, present and future generations. Significance refers not just to the physical fabric or appearance of an object. Rather, it incorporates all the elements that contribute to an object's meaning, including its context, history, uses and its social and spiritual values.[9]

As the project has unfolded, it has also become apparent that this project sits at the intersection of exciting and rapidly evolving areas of research that, in combination, may have the potential to solve some thorny problems that have defied researchers for years. The definition by UNESCO of 'intangible heritage' is primarily aimed at the preservation of indigenous cultural practices that have limited written records.[10] The definition, crucially, recognises the performing arts as a major element, although as eminent anthropologist Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett has noted, the UNESCO programme for the performing arts is inconsistent and needs considerable refinement in light of changing technologies and practices:

> The most recent model seeks to sustain a living, if endangered, tradition by supporting the conditions necessary for cultural reproduction. This means according value to the 'carriers' and 'transmitters' of traditions, as well as to their habitus and habitat. Whereas like tangible heritage, intangible heritage is culture, like natural heritage, it is alive. The task, then, is to sustain the whole system as a living entity and not just to collect 'intangible artefacts'.[11]

A primary aim of the UNESCO programme is to highlight exceptional living systems of cultural heritage that are endangered, in the way that natural and built heritage are similarly designated for protection, preservation and restoration. This brings to mind the concept of the ecosystem, the interaction between living and non-living elements in an environment. The term 'ecosystem' has gained currency among arts policy-makers, with the theatre ecosystem described by the Australia Council in its recent *Theatre Sector Plan 2012–14* as:

Cultural and Artistic Capital:

- cultural identity;
- social engagement, reflection and enrichment;
- canon of Australian works;
- nationally and internationally significant artists and companies.[12]

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Clearly, theatre practice and theatre studies are already parts of ecosystems of living cultural heritage. Surprisingly, however, for a field with such a long history, research into the experiences and reactions of audiences to theatre is relatively limited.[13] It is important to distinguish here between specialised research into audiences and the extensive literature on the art of making theatre, which is mainly focused on the technique of the writer, actor, director and other practitioners in expressing the text and the use of the stage. We also have the extensive corpus on dramaturgy, devoted to shaping the elements of theatre, which has crossed over into sociology, phenomenology and ethnography. Dramaturgy is very much concerned with how performance will be perceived by the audience, but does so rather through reflection by the dramaturg as a witness to the creative process, with particular reference to the locus of the performance, ideology and social relations.[14]

The literature on documenting theatre using film and video is also sparse, although it has grown since Gay McAuley articulated the issue in the 1990s.[15] The standard condition of most theatre companies' budgets is that documentation is not the highest priority. As McAuley later noted, documentation of theatre is also problematic because the mainstream theatre profession has historically believed that mechanical reproduction of theatre performance is not valid. Actors and directors at the top of the mainstream profession believe that video simply cannot fully capture the experience, or that it somehow undermines theatre artistically, dispelling the illusion – like peering behind the curtain of The Great Oz. Many believe that the currency of their professional reputations may be damaged or devalued by allowing the viewing of anything other than the most polished product.[16]

The low priority given to documentation by the mainstream theatre profession, combined with poor resourcing, has contributed to the relatively low profile of theatre documentation in collecting institutions and in government policy and funding. As a result, there is no national repository for theatre film and video, such as the dance collection at the National Library of Australia. A senior staff member at the National Film and Sound Archive, when pressed, admitted that theatre video is part of its charter, but at the very bottom of its list of priorities. Inadequate documentation of Australian theatre practice limits academic investigation and makes it less likely to be represented in the curricula of teaching institutions compared to canonical European and American work. To add to the quandary, the worldwide transition to digital storage means that there is a pressing need – with considerable expense – to transfer older analogue film and video to digital format.

Post-dramatic theatre practitioners have no such reservation about documentation of performance and process; indeed, they regard documentation as integral to the creative process,[17] given that much of the work is made as 'one-off' events, or is site-specific and generally not made with any intention to enter into theatre repertoire for performance by other artists in other places. Only a limited number of doctoral theses on the work of Australian companies making post-dramatic theatre have been completed to date,[18]

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although this situation is changing now that key artists of the period, such as the Sydney Front's Nigel Kellaway and Clare Grant, are in teaching posts and undertaking their own doctoral research.

THE INTANGIBLE IN THEATRE

So I come to the central question of how best to deal with the intangible heritage of theatre: what are the best ways to preserve and articulate the meaning created among the audience and community, given the ephemeral nature of theatre, and to understand the effect that theatre has? In simple terms, what is so important and unique in theatre compared to other artforms is the nature of the interactions: the intangible exchanges between the performers and the audience. Practitioners commonly describe it as an exchange of 'energy'. Certainly, as a performer, mainly of music, I know that performers constantly seek the elevated state produced by the sight and sound of the audience, which is the complement of the elevated state produced in the audience by what they see and hear. Of course, each performance of a work of theatre is made unique by how it is performed. How 'special' a performance is, above and beyond the script and the *mise-en-scène* and the music, is a function of that interaction. It is that interaction which is prized most highly but is at the same time the most difficult thing to document.

Add to this the complexity of audience members' individual understandings of the signs and signifiers of theatre, their empathy with the experiences of the humans before them, and the sheer physicality of what is an intensely social experience, and you have *shared experiences of meaning*. This is the extension of the performance into – and ultimately through – the audience to their world beyond, where the words and movements and feelings conveyed by a performer reach out and, together with the audience, make an intangible thing that has a unique meaning for that group of people sharing the same place and time. Film can't do that; the performance is fixed and the actors are not there with the audience. Music and dance do produce something very similar, but in a far more abstract way, with the meaning conveyed without words.

What Splinters explored to great effect was taking this exchange even further by dissolving the separation between performers and audience, by taking theatre out of conventional spaces, by making the performance space their own, by performing in and among the audience and, at its most powerful, by making physical contact with them. Splinters called this 'Crowd Theory': physical manipulation of audiences. It was highly confronting – sometimes even literally making audience members sick – and hugely exhilarating. In a landmark performance, *Flowers of Gold/Bezerkii Carnival* in 1992, at the old Kingston Bus Depot, the musicians struck up a mad waltz and the sixty-odd performers suddenly turned, grabbed an audience member each and began waltzing with them. The theatre critic from the *Canberra Times*, aghast, backed against a pillar and

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SPLINTERS – *FLOWERS OF GOLD/BEZERKII CARNIVAL*. OLD KINGSTON BUS DEPOT, ACT, 1992. PHOTO: KATHERINE PEPPER.

refused to dance – but afterwards penned a highly favourable review.

What Splinters ultimately created in Canberra was a *community of shared meanings*, a most powerful intangible cultural heritage that deserves to be preserved. In thinking about how to capture and present this heritage, I have been especially drawn to the recent description by Rogiers and Truyen, in *New Heritage: New Media and Cultural Heritage*, of a threefold framework for more meaningful and nuanced representation of complex historical subject matter though digital media. The traditional approach of locating objects in time and space is now able to be combined with a third dimension of *community*. As they put it, 'Historical actors cannot be understood in isolation from ... their role in the cultural practice of a certain group'.[19]

THE SPLINTERS INTERACTIVE THEATRE ARCHIVE

The primary focus of the archive project is to develop a methodology to combine tangible and intangible heritage elements of the Splinters legacy and to present it for the 2013 Centenary of Canberra programme, including an exhibition, performances and interactive web-based archive. The features of Splinters present many challenges for the archivist and curator: the company's open structure and huge number of performers over the years; the material and mechanical components of the work, including unique theatrical props and sculptural works of note; and crucially, the presence of a number of photographers and film, video and sound artists in the company, which meant that nearly everything the company did was recorded. This wealth of material presents a unique opportunity to create

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a social history as well as a documentary record and platform for further study. There are also interesting technical problems to be resolved, such as the location and access of the resulting archives – possibly split among several institutions, due to the range of media – as well as questions of intellectual property deriving from a collective.

This project will not attempt to fully describe or assess the diverse and striking range of the company's work in Theatre Studies terms but, rather, will endeavour to make the case for the work to be studied by new generations of practitioners. In any event, that task is huge; indeed, part of Splinters' significance was the sheer volume of work that its creative force produced. Neither will the outcome be, at least in the short term, a history or biographical interpretation of the company. It will instead take a cultural heritage perspective, interested in the longer-term effects of a theatre group and its work on the community it lived in – especially given that the work was made, in Splinters' case, in response to daily living and as an attempt to create an alternative to alienation and the spectacle of modern life, such as described by the Situationists,[20] whose work influenced the company.

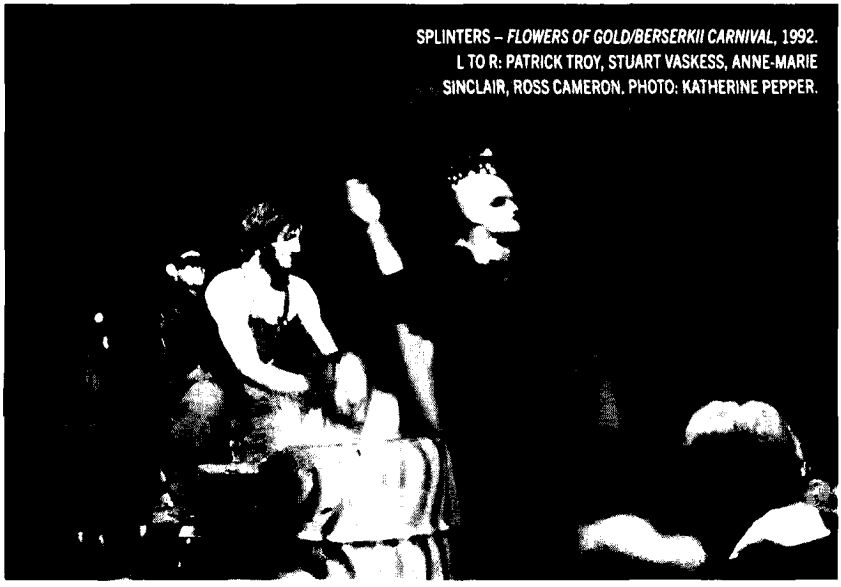
Digital technology is revolutionising heritage and humanities scholarship by questioning the primacy of the object and the role of historians and curators in guiding the interpretation, at the same time as providing huge potential for enhanced experiences and exploration of archives.[21] An interactive archive website, using the new open-source OCCAMS tool being developed at the Digital Humanities Hub of the Australian National University, will source and analyse participant and audience responses to the archive and its public presentations to create an ongoing resource for scholars and enhanced methodology for theatre archives. New digital humanities tools such as these are allowing previously inconceivable ways of organising and analysing humanities and social sciences data, including heritage data.[22]

ORGANISING THE DATA

The interactive website will form the centrepiece of the ongoing project. The plan is to digitise and put online all Splinters photographs, video and audio and to encourage people to comment and reflect on their experiences of the work, as participants and as audience members. In this way, the meaning of the work to people can agglomerate into a significant body of data that can be further explored, to provide a platform for, as Kirschenblatt-Gimblett puts it, 'a model for thinking about intangible heritage as a totality, rather than as an inventory, and for calculating the intangible value of a living system'.[23]

Dr David Carlin of RMIT, lead researcher of an Australian Research Council-funded video archive project for Circus Oz, introduced me to the concept of *folksonomy*; that is, providing a freeform language of 'tags' that viewers can apply to the online material,

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SPLINTERS – *FLOWERS OF GOLD/BERSERKII CARNIVAL*, 1992. L TO R: PATRICK TROY, STUART VASKESS, ANNE-MARIE SINCLAIR, ROSS CAMERON. PHOTO: KATHERINE PEPPER.

which then lends itself to analysis. The Circus Oz team is developing a taxonomy of circus performance, breaking down and labelling the components of performance by types of movement and their context.[24] The Circus Oz project is intended to provide a system for utilising previous performances in modelling and prototyping new performances, but the general principles are similar to the intent of this project in allowing archived performance to be explored and analysed by accumulating input from performers and viewers. These kinds of techniques can allow the shared experiences of the past to be joined up once more, to map, explore and describe the community of meanings.

The Splinters archive project has already been awarded a Heritage Grant by the ACT Government for digitising the video material. This will be completed in the near future, allowing the project to move into the next phase of preparing the dedicated website that will start to put structure around the visual information. In the interim, a Facebook Group page has been created with a limited selection of photos and videos, which has over 200 members and is already proving fruitful for crowd-sourcing historical data, reminiscences and allowing members to post their own photos. Bringing all of this together in 2013 will be a challenge, but just like a Splinters work, an important intent of the research is to design and facilitate a structure for others to create inside. The process will produce new material to add to and enrich the archive and, hopefully, validate the proposition that an archive enhanced in this way can indeed preserve a living ecosystem of tangible and intangible cultural heritage.

The website will complement public events showcasing the work of Splinters. Key Splinters members are returning to Canberra to create a new work, in collaboration with

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students and emerging Canberra artists, entitled *Splinters Reconstructed: Babylon*, at The Village Festival for the Centenary of Canberra in Glebe Park on 21–24 March 2013, to be documented and added to the archive. An exhibition, Massive Love of Risk: The Art of Splinters Theatre of Spectacle, will be presented at the Canberra Museum and Gallery from 28 September to 8 December 2013, including works on paper, photos, video installations, artefacts, audio recordings and screenings of edited video material in the Theatrette. Audience responses will continue to enrich the website data content. The performance components are being co-curated and produced with The Village Festival, including Splinters members Stuart Vaskess, Rebecca Rutter and Louise Morris. The exhibition will be curated in partnership with José Robertson, an early member of Splinters who has worked as a curator at the National Film and Sound Archive, the National Gallery of Australia, and the National Portrait Gallery in London.

The Splinters Interactive Theatre Archive, being web-based, will take advantage of the endless possibilities for dissemination that this provides, including for national and international extension. The research has already begun to identify and interact with the community of potential users during planning and research for the project, making it all the more effective once it's out in the world. Although plans are in the formative stage, there will be a targeted strategy for engagement with drama teachers and students. Arrangements are currently being made with the Australian National University for permanent hosting of the digitised material, in addition to permanent storage of the artefacts at the ACT Heritage Library.

Originally, it had been planned to make a video documentary in the conventional sense. As the research has evolved, and through dialogue with former Splinters members, it has become apparent that while such a documentary could be desirable, it is much more in keeping with the nature of the work to explore the possibilities of Lev Manovich's 'soft cinema', also known as 'database cinema'. Here the paradigm of the database replaces the syntagm of the narrative in order to allow a free exploration of subjective experience by the viewer.[25] Carl Looper, Splinters member and videographer of much of the footage in the archive, wrote most succinctly:

> A website is the perfect vehicle for database cinema. That's what I'm thinking. It can start in disarray, as I imagine it is now, but where we evolve it, attaching tags (names, ideas, context, etc.) to shots (or moments) we discover and which custom search engines can then recover. As the video becomes more annotated, various algorithms and filters can be developed to invoke particular idiomatic journeys through the database. If nothing else, it just becomes something for finding shots to use in the doco. But it can also evolve into a work in its own right, a virtual reality that can be navigated endlessly.[26]

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SPLINTERS – *UTOPIA/DISTOPIA*, SPRINGBANK ISLAND, ACT, 1995. PHOTO: 'PLING.

FURTHER RESEARCH

The response to papers on this project presented at theatre studies and museums sector conferences in 2012 has shown clearly that addressing these issues is necessary and timely. At the most recent conference of the Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies, for example, Brad Haseman, Dean of Performing Arts at the Queensland University of Technology, called for standardised documentation formats for practice-based PhD research in the performing arts. The methodology that the research will produce could easily be adapted to create a platform for such a standard.

Recently, too, Sydney academics Tom Burvill and Mark Seton, in developing the video archive for Sidetrack Theatre, have confirmed that issues of intellectual property and access usage remain an impediment to adequate documentation as much as do the technical difficulties of capturing the work.[27] This work has been extensively supported through the long-standing Australian Research Council-funded AusStage national performing arts database project. Drawing on the many years of work on theatre video documentation by Russell Emerson, we have begun to map out a possible joint research project, ideally under the aegis of AusStage, to continue their work with the aim of gaining industry acceptance for a national code of practice for theatre documentation covering preservation, intellectual property, technical standards and access.

Making video of theatre performance and process has its limitations, but it is self-evidently still the most practical tool we have for documenting live performance, even if significant parts of the mainstream profession still have strong reservations about its use. The task is not made any easier by the lack of resources for video documentation and archival storage in Australian theatre, the morass that is Australian copyright legislation, or the lack of a national repository for theatre video. In the absence of political will and institutional resources to create one, this project will hopefully point the way to a solution based on the concept of a distributed national collection using digital storage resources

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being made available through the current digital humanities boom. Ideally, this will lead to a stronger alliance of institutions prepared to dedicate more resources to improving the state of theatre collections and how they are utilised. By using practical, open-source tools like OCCAMS in combination with the AusStage database, any theatre company will be able easily to store material online, index it and make it accessible.

CONCLUSION

In order to fully understand theatre in intangible heritage terms and to develop strategies to better preserve it, we need to better understand what it is that brings audiences to it, and what audiences bring to it: how theatre affects and changes the communities over time and the ways, therefore, that it builds and sustains cultural capital. In other words, we need to map, describe and analyse the entire ecosystem of theatre: not just the work and those who made it, but the context in which it was created and the ongoing interactions between the company, its audiences and the wider community, and the physical spaces in which the work occurred.

By presenting the exhibition and performances, it is hoped that sufficient interest in Splinters will be (re)kindled to stimulate engagement with the data-gathering aspect of the interactive website. This will enable testing of the key propositions of the project:

- Is the work of Splinters indeed significant enough to warrant making it accessible and useful to new generations of theatre students?
- Can the practice of theatre documentation be improved using new technologies to make it more practical, and enable mapping and exploration of the whole ecosystem, including longer-term impact of theatre on the community and the meanings it creates?
- By combining tangible and intangible elements of theatrical heritage in this way, is it possible to stimulate the community to re-engage with the work and encourage the new generation of artists to take up its approaches and methods?

Most of all, as many have hoped, a big step forward will have been taken to ensure that the unique and remarkable Splinters Theatre of Spectacle gets the continuing recognition it deserves and inspires new generations of Canberra artists.

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An earlier version of this article was the recipient of the Veronica Kelly Prize for best student paper at the annual conference of the Australasian Association for Theatre, Drama and Performance Studies, Queensland University of Technology, July 2012.

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NOTES

1 Geoffrey Milne, *Theatre Australia (Un)limited: Australian Theatre Since the 1950s* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004) 314, 371, 397.

2 Legislative Assembly for the ACT, 2002 Week 1 Hansard (13 December) 284. Online: http://www.hansard.act.gov.au/hansard/2002/week01/284.htm (viewed 1 December 2012).

3 Libraries ACT, HMSS0233, David Branson Papers. Online: http://www.library.act.gov.au/find/history/search/Manuscript_Collections/David_Branson (viewed 1 December 2012).

4 Peggy Phelan, *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012) 146–92.

5 Sarah Miller, 'Hybrid Art: Cultural Diversity', in *Repertoire: A Guide to Australian New Media Art* (Australia Council, 2003) Online: http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/34097/05_hybrid_art_cultural_diversity.pdf (viewed 1 December 2012).

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