THE LIGHT ROOM
NEW MEDIA INSTALLATION AND PERFORMANCE

... transcending art
into the realm of poetics of technology...

Information Pack

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Hellen Sky…and her vision
For me new media is a language that can speak of memory and life journeys through the choreography of sounds, images and the body within an architectural space. It is a powerful medium

the light room is a unique and visionary work, conceived as both an interactive installation and a performance.

the light room is an illuminating scenography of the senses, integrating digital technology, performance, installation, music and text with 2D and 3D animation within ephemeral glass architecture. It has been applauded for its magical synergy of technology, live arts and architectural design.

A Company in Space project, the work was conceived and directed by Hellen Sky, with interactive design by John McCormick. the light room was developed over a three year period of collaboration with Australia’s leading artists from theatre, dance, music, architecture and animation, working with industry leaders in glass manufacture and engineering design: Pilkington (Australia) Limited; DMS Glass; Façade Technology; Meinhardt Engineering; Bose; RMIT University Interactive Information Institute.

the light room Creative Team: Architect Tom Kovac; Composer David Chesworth; Spatial Designer Simon Barley; Light and Image Designer Margie Medlin; Writer and Performer Margaret Cameron; Animator Marshall White, each have their own international profile.

the light room The Performers: Ros Warby, Rebecca Hilton, Michael Whaites, Alan Widdowson, Margaret Cameron have extensive histories through devising and performing their own original work and as performers in companies in Australia, USA, UK, and Europe, including, Deborah Hay, Twyla Tharp, the Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch, Stephen Petronio Company, Michael Clark, Jennifer Monson, Tere O'Connor, Lucy Guerin and Gary Rowe Company.

the light room had its world premiere as part of Melbourne Festival in Australia in Oct 2002.
the light room’s glass architectural set was designed by Tom Kovac and installed into the Melbourne Museum’s Australian Gallery. The Age opera reviewer, John Slavin, described the performance “as if being inside one of Giordano Bruno’s memory palaces”.

the light room uses architecture and memory as a place of beginning. How do we remember location? How do we reflect on life? The use of new technologies and virtual architectures resources the complex way our senses perceive both the tangible and imaginary worlds we simultaneously inhabit.

the light room exemplifies the integration of multiple artistic genres in a transcendent, technologically sophisticated environment.

the light room was exhibited by day as an installation where visitors to the museum could interact with the virtual worlds in the extraordinary glass house.

At night the light room becomes a fluid world inhabited by five characters. Choreography of image, movement, text and song refract and interweave. Biographies and cultural histories, reflected through architectural metaphors, slip between past, present and future taking us on an elusive filmic journey.

the light room was performed to critical acclaim, and was sold out after the first preview. More than 2000 people attended the installation. In 2003 the light room received three Green Room nominations in Dance and New Media for concept direction, performance, and interactive film and video.

the light room is available for national and international touring to contexts, which embrace innovation in performance, new media, architecture and installation. the light room exemplifies the integration of multiple artistic genres in a transcendent, technologically sophisticated environment.

the light room has a touring company of sixteen people. The glass architectural set is transported in two twenty foot shipping containers and can be assembled in a week. Full technical specifications, video and score cds, and reviews can be obtained by contacting company in space’s international representative for the light room, Kay Jamieson — kmj@bigpond.net.au
The working title Architecture of Biography became an important reference through three stages of collaboration. Collections and drafts, textural and architectural, formed frameworks and scores to be tested and further developed. The vision was to make a new media movement opera and an interactive installation where no one art form dominated. The innovative use of new technologies extends the inter relationship between the media of the body, image, sound, text, light and spatial design.

Biographies of experience, both real and imaginary, are recounted in spaces made from light and choreographies of all elements. The ephemerality of glass as structure and surface becomes a primary material – reflecting, refracting and embodying the multiple sensory nature of experience.

The collaboration with architects and engineers enables the design for the light room glass building to be a modular, independent structure allowing it to be reconstructed in a range of major sites and contexts including museums and large scale proscenium arch theatres.

‘The building, the light room, is personal, theoretical, cultural – a community. It is a place and a mind. It contains metaphoric zones that are analogous to the progression of a lifetime. It is a malleable space that reconfigures both physically and virtually.’

the light room – Installation — A number of interfaces are available to choose from, which allow movement, voice, and weight to alter and effect the virtual projected worlds. Polhemus tracking devices (magnetic motion detection) attached to hands convert movement to data; microphones translate voice to image; embedded detectors in the floor translate vibration and weight to image movement. Together this interaction shapes and alters images, lights and sounds within the virtual environments projected through the light room.
Founded by co-directors John McCormick and Hellen Sky, Company In Space has consistently pioneered applications of new technology to movement. Their groundbreaking works create dialogues between our visual, aural and kinetic perceptions. The projects have been presented as live performance installations, motion capture imaging, video and interactive virtual spaces that can be accessed via the Internet. The Company is based in Melbourne, Australia, and has performed in major inter/national festivals including: Melbourne Festival; Sydney Festival; Interact Asia Pacific Festival; SIGGRAPH and IDAT in the USA; Hong Kong Arts Festival; Downloading Down Under, Netherlands; New Moves, New Territories, Scotland. During the recent tour in the UK, the Company presented CO3 in the Manchester Commonwealth Games’ Culture Shock Festival at the prestigious Royal Exchange Theatre, in the Digital Summers’ Virtual Worlds Festival, the Arnolfini Live Arts Centre, Bristol, and Virtual Incarnations at the ICA in London. In 2002 Company in Space participated in new media events in the Shanghai Arts Festival and MDDF2 Monaco.

Hellen Sky | Co-Director Company In Space: Concept Direction and Choreography

Hellen is a director, choreographer, performer, and image maker. She was a founding member of Circus Oz; the Australian Performing Group and Founder /Artistic Director of Dancehouse, 1991 - 2001. Since 1993 she has been co artistic director of Company in Space, co devising and creating new work which has been performed nationally and internationally in a range of festival contexts. In 1998 Hellen won a Green Room Award for outstanding creativity in performance for Escape Velocity. In 2001 she developed Incarnate, a dual site performance with the Hong Kong Arts Centre for the Digital Now Festival, and directed Architecture of Biography, a multi-art form project seen virtually in the Works in Progress program of the Melbourne Festival 2001 and realized as the light room in Melbourne Festival 2002. Hellen's diverse experience in the performing and visual arts inform approaches to direction and conceptual development of new media works. Hellen explores the extension of the body’s relationship to space, site and virtual and physical architectures through interconnectivity of body data and telematic - dual sited performances.

John McCormick | Co-Director Company In Space: Interactivity Design and VR Environments

John is currently an artist-in-residence at RMIT’s Interactive Information Institute, researching live interactive performance over the internet and realtime virtual theatre environments. He has performed in China, Hong Kong and Taiwan, and has presented dual site telematic performances at Data Dancing (London), Downloading Downunder (Amsterdam), SIGGRAPH (Florida), MDDF2 (Monaco), Digital Now (Hong Kong). Currently his work centres around motion capture and allied means of enabling performers to engage in shared computer-enhanced spaces. He has taught at the Guang Zhou Modern Dance Company, Beijing Dance Academy and several international dance and technology workshops including the Dutch Electronic Arts Festival 2000, e-phos TRANSDANCE Athens 2001 and MDDF2 – 2002.
the light room — The Creative Team

Tom Kovac | Architectural Design : http://www.tomkovac.com
Tom received a Bachelor of Architecture and Masters of Architecture from RMIT University. He has taught, lectured and exhibited throughout Europe, Japan and the United States. Current projects by his office, Tom Kovac Architecture, range from building projects, experimental conceptions and digital environments to urban planning projects. He is currently working on several design projects internationally, including the Digital Design Gallery an Art Capsule, a showroom for UA in Federation Square Melbourne, the Trilogy Environment for the Non Standard Architecture exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, a proposal for a new World Trade Center to be exhibited in the USA Pavilion at the Venice Biennale and a Tea and Coffee Piazza project for Alessi. He is also Creative Design Director of Curvedigital a joint project between RMIT and the Melbourne Museum.

…the ephemeral, luminescent spaces of the future

the light room uses architecture and its spatial conception as a metaphor for life, a setting for real time performance and as an interactive installation. The primary use of glass conveys this subliminal and very powerful effect and transcends the qualities of the digitally rendered scenographic images. The translucency and liquid quality of glass is extremely well suited to use with this new technology. It is also an appropriate surface that can carry the ephemeral, transient qualities of digital light. The glass surfaces have made this unique futuristic stage structure a giant luminescent real time screen that captures filmic set-design and virtual reality worlds.

Margaret Cameron | Dramaturgy | Performance
Margaret is an accomplished actor, director and writer, whose original works are situated between performance art and theatre. Among her projects produced by LaMama Theatre, The Playbox Theatre, Dancehouse, The Deborah Hay Dance Company and ABC Radio, are: Calypso Wanted to Say!; The Mind’s a Marvellous Thing; Knowledge and Melancholy (short-listed for 1997 Victorian Premiers Literary Awards) and Bang! A Critical Fiction! Most recently she directed Mr. Phase for the Next Wave Festival. In 1998 she received The Gloria Dawn and Gloria Payten Fellowship and the 1998 Eva Czajor Memorial Award for Female Directors. Margaret has presented papers at forums, including The National Performance Conference, Ecologies of Practice (DIY) and the Eva Czajor Memorial Conference.
the light room – Creative Team

... the libretto, the dancer’s body writes in space.

Early in 1998 Helen Sky devises exercises to do with memory and witness. We are at Dancehouse in Carlton. We move, we are moved. We remember the movement and we write. This writing is distilled in terms of the schema - a journey of a lifetime - metaphorically recorded in architectural space from the simplest place of a point of light... to the table... to the room ... to the corridor... to the pier ... to the horizon. It is a process of ‘transmission’ – the ‘body in space’ communicating choreography and words. the light room is a very large project and has taken a number of years to arrive at its premier. Hellen Sky – co director of Company in Space, has pulled together an amazing team and offered us an opportunity not only to work with each other, but also to evolve as discreet artists in our own fields. The interconnectivity of new media makes it a ‘partner’ not a tool in exploring how we make visible the experience of the body in the physical world; how the body experiences architectural space and how it might experience virtual space. Technology is a new medium but to interpret it as a poetic of experience, rather than a replacement for experience, is a particular thing. I believe the light room is such a venture.


David’s distinctive compositions and installations have been performed and exhibited extensively in Australia and overseas. Major festivals which have featured his work include: Arts Electronica; Festival D’Automne de Paris; Edinburgh Festival; Melbourne Festival; Adelaide Festival; Sydney Biennale; SoundCulture; and commissions by Melbourne’s Chamber Made Opera and Opera Australia. He is the co-director (with Sonia Leber) of Wax Sound Media developing innovative public-art sound installations including 5000 Calls, a permanent ‘sonic environment’ for the surrounds of the Sydney Olympic Stadium for the 2000 Olympics. He is the artistic director of the David Chesworth Ensemble, whose first CD, Exotica Suite, was nominated for an Aria Award. The ensemble has performed at BAM Next Wave Festival in New York. David is a recipient of the prestigious Green Room Award for sound design for Life After George and has been awarded a Churchill Fellowship.

... the ambiguity of noise compositions

My approach to the sound design for the light room uses noise as a starting point and music as an anchoring point. Here I’m not concerned with philosophical definitions of noise, but rather with technical definitions: White, Fractal, Pink, Narrow band which all have different aural qualities. They each contain different arrangements of all possible frequencies. Noise has an ambiguous natural quality. It can be found in everyday sounds - surf, wind in trees, traffic, air conditioning, radio static, the atmosphere of the city. I set out to exploit this quality. My workshop/collaborative approach was to stimulate pockets of the performance space with noise. These noises were sculpted by me as a by-product of different visual, choreographic and text based responses. In this process different distinctive sounds started to emerge.

Nigel Frayne | Soundscape Electroacoustic Design Live Operation: http://www.resonantdesigns.com

Nigel Frayne has been involved in the software programming, system design and live mixing of the light room. His work combines a creative background in music as a bass player and technical experience as a sound engineer. Nigel has worked for over 10 years as a sound-scape and electro-acoustic designer in projects for Singapore and San Diego Zoos, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, the Australian War Memorial, RAAF Museum, the Melbourne Immigration Museum and Southgate promenade. He has collaborated over many years with David Chesworth on a number of projects including the 5000 Calls Olympic sound-scape and theatre works for Chamber Made Opera.

... the sculpted sound scape

the light room was an exciting and challenging opportunity for collaboration with a particular focus on the way sound defines performance space. The relationship between live performers, visual imagery, music, live operatic song and the spoken word is explored within a sonic architecture created from computer software and electro-acoustic design elements. Sound and image are used like memory trails, tracing the steps of the performance’s five main characters.

Margie Medlin | Image and Light Design

Margie is a media artist working in film, lighting and projection design, with an avid interest in developing film and video installations exploring the interrelations of dance and the moving image. Margie has been formally trained in lighting design, scenography and advanced computer applications for theatre design in the UK and also holds an MA in Interior Design from RMIT University. She has worked with Danceworks, Company in Space, Ros Warby, John Jaspers and Lucy Guerin, receiving a New York Dance and Performance Award (Bessie) for her lighting of Guerin’s Two Lies. She has presented a number of video installations including Elasticity and Volume and Mobility in an Artificial City. She was Artist in Residence at the ZKM Institute, Germany and at the Seoul Arts Centre in The Republic of Korea. Margie is a recipient of the John Truscott Foundation Award for Design.

http://www.resonantdesigns.com


http://www.companyinspace.com
Marshall White | VR Worlds Builder and Animator
Marshall has worked as 3D architect and builder of virtual worlds for Company in Space. He has been fundamental to the design of the aesthetic look of the light room virtual environments, creating a cross-media scenography that captures analogue rendered moving images of pre-recorded video footage populated with a variety of digitally built 3D objects.

Simon Barley | Spatial Design
Simon is Artistic Director of BAMBUCO, a group of artists and climbers brought together to create unique aerial performance construction events. Simon has been designing perform space and building site specific installations for some years, with an emphasis on exploration of aerial space. Simon studied bamboo construction following an interest in lightweight structures. After research in South East Asia and a period as a trainee scaffold at Kowloon Bay CITI in Hong Kong, he collaborated with Danceworks to produce a giant bamboo installation BRIDGE for the 1995 Melbourne Festival. BAMBUCO is based in Melbourne. Construction crews have been drawn from Australia, New Zealand, Netherlands, Germany, UK and the Philippines.

Ricardo Zorondo | Computer Interface Programmer
Ricardo has commercial experience in managing software development projects, and in designing and writing customised software for various companies. He designed API libraries for C/C++ programmers and COM developers. Ricardo was project co-ordinator and programmer on the children's game Alphaville - An Eco Adventure for the City of Moreland, and developed Speak Up, a multimedia language learning tool. He developed the programming interfaces for the virtual reality worlds of the light room.

... the computer interface programming
The software I developed utilizes Microsoft's DirectX Technology with an emphasis on Direct3D interfaces. This means 3D rendering, midi and sound facilities are all derived from customized objects derived from this technology. There are also interfaces developed using non-Microsoft software to interface the magnetic device that is used as the tracking mechanism for the performance. The data obtained from the magnetic devises is ultimately transformed into UDP messages that are then utilized as input messages into the virtual world. The virtual world itself is updated via the UDP stream, midi input and outputs and perhaps even the more conventional mouse/keyboard interface (as an extra option). The main world is generated via the interaction of an XFile system, Vertex Shaders, and on-the-fly primitive geometric drawings, all of which having been integrated via a customized object SDK that I have developed using Visual C++.

Vivek Aiyer | Computer Interface Programmer
After graduating from RMIT University in 2000 with degrees in Communication Engineering and Computer Science, Vivek Aiyer became involved with Company in Space as a technical/programming consultant, designing and developing the software platforms used by the Company in a number of their performances. He is currently employed at Nortel Networks as a Wireless Systems Engineer.

Alan Widdowson | Singer, Performer
Alan Widdowson is a London-based dance-maker, performer and freelance singer. He is a founding member of, and collaborator with, the Gary Rowe Company. He has been working with Company in Space over the last four years. As a singer he works mainly in early music and spends rather a large amount of time in church.

Michael Whaites | Performer
Michael is a teacher, performer and choreographer. He has worked in the field of contemporary dance throughout the past 20 years. He has performed with Dance North, The Australian Dance Theatre, Twyla Tharp and Dancers and the Tanztheater Wuppertal Pina Bausch. Most recently he choreographed a work for Leigh Warren and Dancers in Adelaide and performed at the Antistatic Dance Festival in Sydney.
Rebecca Hilton | Performer
Rebecca Hilton is a Melbourne based dancer, teacher and choreographer. She graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts and danced with Dance Exchange and Danceworks before moving to New York in 1987. She joined the Stephen Petronio Company with whom she performed, taught and toured the World for eight years. She also danced with Michael Clark, Jennifer Monson, Tere O’Connor and visual artist Mathew Barney among others. Rebecca was a founding member of the Lucy Guerin Company and appears regularly Margie Medlin’s films. Her own work has been presented in Australia, Germany, Switzerland, Argentina, Venezuela and New York City.

Ros Warby | Performer
Ros Warby is a Melbourne based dancer and choreographer who has been performing in the company of others, and developing and presenting solo work over the past 15 years. She has performed throughout Australia with Danceworks, Dance Exchange, Jude Walton, and Jenny Kemp and throughout Europe, America and Australia since 1996 with the Lucy Guerin Company and Deborah Hay, receiving a Green Room Award for Guerin’s ‘The Ends of Things’ in 2000. Ros’ own work has toured Australia and the US to critical acclaim, receiving Green Room Awards and nominations for solo performance, best production and best design. Her work has been supported by the Australia Council for the Arts, Arts Victoria, City of Melbourne and Portland Institute for Contemporary Art, USA. Ros is currently an Australia Council Fellowship recipient for 2002-2004.
The Age — Tuesday, October 22, 2002
Inside a palace of memories
OPERA : THE LIGHT ROOM
John Slavin

The element that engulfs you as you enter the performance space of the light room is darkness of the richest quality, punctuated by a revolving necklace of computer-enhanced worlds. Slowly, details emerge. There are glass screens to the right, a glass catwalk that diagonally traverses the centre and glass pulpits on which the narrator, Margaret Cameron, will explore certain memories, and where counter tenor Alan Widdowson will perform arias that interweave with the pastiche of natural and electronic sounds developed by David Chesworth and his workshop.

We are promised a scenography of the senses, but in fact the set is as coldly elegant as a corporate office where memorable visual effects are obtained by the reflections on the mysterious glass entablature of the audience and the spectacular digital light effects that play across screens and human bodies.

Gradually, themes emerge. A man, a dreamer, sits at a draftsman’s table. When he moves his hand, patterns of light appear on the table and are duplicated on the back projections. In one of the most beautiful effects, objects fall through a grid of black and white blueprints: a lemon, a brass plate, three French coins.

This is the way the imagination works. We are inside one of the Giordano Bruno’s memory palaces. The late Renaissance philosopher devised a scheme by which imaginary architecture could be used to store and retrieve memories by walking through the rooms. The work moves through certain phases associated with this central dilemma of modernity: the search for focus and identity, a lament for the temporal destruction of brilliant cultures and the reliability of memory. The work concludes with a stunning image of a woman, walking away into darkness, her body criss-crossed by digital light bands as though she swims through a luminous sea.

The Age — Tuesday, October 22, 2002
Dancing through space and light
DANCE : THE LIGHT ROOM
Company in Space, Melbourne Museum, Melbourne Festival
Hilary Crampton

In the light room, Company in Space presents a surreal architecture of glass where nothing bears direct scrutiny – a dreamlike wonderland for a futuristic Alice. Meaning and image dissolve or transform, evading capture. While dance, like action is only one element, this work is very much a choreography, a tantalising interactive arrangement of light, space, ideas, voices, actions and projections that take on a surreal journey. Our guide’s (Margaret Cameron) extended soliloquy meanders through memories of place and experience.

In a voice that soars above Cameron’s shadowy world dance-singer Alan Widdowson embellishes aspects of this journey, his hands gliding, his torso slipping over the transparent surfaces – invisible, but solid to the touch.

Dancers Ros Warby, Rebecca Hilton, and Michael Whaites, totter, gesture, fall and grapple - attitudes and behaviours change from tender care to competitive struggle, evading easy narrative interpretations. Margie Medlin’s projected imagery creates an illusion of material structures that dissolve into nothingness as the performers penetrate the forms reflected upon and through the transparent walls.

The constant stream of paradoxical images and ideas of this tantalising performance create repeated possible endings, but as in dreams, we are not to be released too readily. The journey appears to be completed, only to start again in a new direction. Hellen Sky’s concept of the light room has been brought to realisation by a group of outstanding collaborators. The performance is delightfully liberating for one’s imagination.
Art that’s light years
PERFORMANCE REVIEW : THE LIGHT ROOM
Australian Gallery, Melbourne Museum, Melbourne Festival

Ben Zipper

Strands of art, are plaited together like criss-crossing laser, are the endpoint of a three-year collaboration for Melbourne-based new media ensemble, Company in Space. The collaboration draws on dance, architectural design, spoken word, opera, music and digital animation. Each is balanced against others, such that none are treated as second-rate art forms employed merely to fill in space on stage.

The theatre space, within the geometric bowels of the Melbourne Museum, is a dark entity lit sharply by an architectural design of illuminated glass, multiple digital screens and spot lighting. A team involving VR world building, animation, linear 3D design and lighting composition has built a synthetic space where interactivity is played out seamlessly with both the performers and the large freestanding glass panels. Bodies and glass alike are projected, each shifting through degrees of visibility and presence.

Within this mesh, three dancers, a libretto opera singer and a spoken word performer articulate a series of sensory abstractions. Dramaturgist, Margaret Cameron provides narrative drive with her extraordinary voice, verbalising themes of time, space and transit. In an emotionally complex moment she cries “I have lost longitude, I have lost latitude, I have lost altitude”. The weight of emotion is intensified by Ros Warby, one of this city’s most astonishing dancers. Her choreography speaks of immense intimacy, her sinewy movements deepening the stories within Cameron’s monologue and Alan Widdowson’s libretto.

The high-tech interactivity of Company in Spaces latest work the light room and the synergy between the various artforms makes this one of their strongest works. Co Directors John McCormick and Hellen Sky have much to celebrate with this highly accessible, emotionally engaging work.

Magicians for the age of electronic artistry
PERFORMANCE REVIEW : THE LIGHT ROOM
Australian Gallery, Melbourne Museum, Melbourne Festival

Peta Tait Writer Critic, New Media Performance, La Trobe University.

I am sitting watching the light room, Australia Gallery, Melbourne Museum 19 Oct 2002, 8pm, and there is a digitally created pattern of words projected onto two of the numerous glass surfaces in the dark space in front of me. Where is that image coming from? While I am familiar with the technology that might be used to create this visual effect, the machinery is hard to see.

Company in Spaces, John McCormick and Hellen Sky, perform like magicians for the age of electronic artistry. I am always excited by the initial contact with the spatial environments created electronically by Company in Space because it is like watching an act of magic; I am never quite sure how it is done. A sense of wonder and technological teasing is an integral part of what these two electronic artists communicate with their work. The quick hands of the traditional magician with a trick like pulling a white dove from a black top hat morph into the computer programmer’s sleight-of-hand with a mouse. In the light room, the images on a screen of a gigantic red apple, a brilliantly blue cup and saucer and assorted coins materialise to give away the invisible presence of the electronic magician. The objects float downwards or hover in the space. These are not imaginary objects in imagined spaces. They are objects created with light like colour itself.

the light room started out in 2001 as an internet performance and became a fully-fledged theatrical performance in 2002. There are multiple glass screens receding across the space in booth and passage-way combinations, with a raked platform down the centre. Patterns and images of windows and libraries are projected across these surfaces as live performers in somnambulistic action, dance, sing and speak in their self-absorbed solitariness. The team working with Hellen Sky and John McCormick included Tom Kovac (architectural environment); Simon Barley (spatial); Marshall White (virtual reality); Vivek Aiyer and Ricardo Zorondo (computer programming); Margie Medlin (Image and Light); Margaret Cameron (text); David Chesworth (sound and composition); and performers Margaret Cameron, Ros Warby, Rebecca Hilton, Michael Whaites, and Alan Widdowson.
Productions by Company in Space reinvigorate the sense of extraordinariness from first encounters with new technology, those transforming moments when perceptual limits and restrictions dissolve. The group explore the intersections of virtual and actual worlds where the movements of virtual and physical bodies seem interchangeable. The interactivity is contained within their recent performance texts so that the audience watches them rather than activates them. McCormick and Sky and their collaborators are adventurers for the forthcoming millennium where technology engineers different kinds of geography for exploration.

McCormick and Sky helped pioneer cross-arts performance in Australia in what has become a rapidly growing movement of multimedia artists (Realtime No 51, 2002, www.realtimearts.net). Founded in 1990 Company in Space set out to experiment with interactions between computers, video cameras, performers and dancers relayed to other places at a time when conferencing with video images became viable but prior to the advent of the accessible internet. They have performed in theatres, art galleries and outdoor sites. Early shows include Signs of Life, Miles of Movement, Crush one and two, Tour, Interface. In 1993 Company in Space created Under the Sky, Tian Zhi Xai and the 1994 Ghost in the Machine won the Melbourne Fringe Festival ABC Radio National award for best cross-arts event. Subsequent shows include The Navigators in 1995, and Trial by Video, part one in 1996 and part two in 1997. From this point, the company’s annual productions belong to a cycle of a named work, which is performed over several years.

Company in Space first created Escape Velocity in 1998 inspired by the Mark Derby book for Melbourne’s Opera Centre with Simon Barley, Frank Dyker, Garth Paine, Marshall White and Luke Pither. Sky and Louise Taube dance live on the floor or suspended in harnesses working to an electronic soundscape within an installation of laser beams facing a curved wall (Rachel Fensham “Mediating the body: dance and technology.” Body Show/s: Australian Viewings of Live Performance, Amsterdam Rodopi 2000: 229-243). Moving images were projected around the dancers either images of them from overhead cameras, or pre-recorded. The light effects created intense blue, red and gold colours. The cycle of Escape Velocity continues on to the 1999 International Dance and Technology festival in Arizona broadcast with telematic ISDN to Melbourne, and the 2000 Star Alliance City Festival, in Hong Kong and telematic broadcast back to Melbourne.

In 2001 Company created CO3 in Melbourne referring to concepts of an avatar found in computer terminology. CO3 had Sky in a motion capture suit, a weighty leather suit, moving in slow motion in the auditorium of the theatre. On the outside of the suit was a metal rod structure hooked up to monitors and capturing her movement. On a screen were computer-generated animated figures activated by Sky's movement. As she moved her limbs, on-screen figures moved theirs set against a virtual world of houses and hills. At the same time the data of Sky’s movement was electronically transmitted to a performance in Florida. CO3 was part of the Interact Asia Pacific Multimedia Festival, and toured to the United Kingdom in 2002 including performances at the Manchester Commonwealth Games Culture Shock Festival). These are complex technological and artistic projects that build on the history of work. While each project is uniquely designed for the space in which it is set up, it unfolds out of previous works created by Company in Space.

Realtime — JAN FEB 03
FEATURE : MELBOURNE FESTIVAL
Keith Gallasch

Space is constantly and magically reconfigured in the light room, a reverie of recollection and protection, a theatre of sublime simultaneities and hectoring distractions, of remarkable transparency and numbing opacity.

Light, images, sounds and bodies are captured and refracted on and through the glass walls of a room as abstract as it is palpable, a hard-edged modernist construction made fluently contemporary by all that flows through it. Curiously, however, it is the word that dominates; sounds, images, singer and dancers come and go but the words flow on and on, ritually intoned throughout.

There is, similarly, a superfluity of images (some quite inexplicable), as if produced in fear of a visual vacuum. the light room creates astonishing spaces, evocations of the entwining of biography and architecture. “This could be a planetarium”, says writer-performer Margaret Cameron early on. She’s right. The very space where a table or a chest of drawers is mined for its associated memories, or litanies of everyday objects recited or their images projected tumbling through space, can transform into something cosmic: a glass jetty reaching into the stars, resonating with the analogy between the sea and outer space heard in the text.
Along this jetty in two key scenes, dancer Ros Warby moves, curling down and curving up, standing on one leg, reaching as if for transcendence. At the end of the work, she calmly surveys the universe from the end of the jetty (her view of it projected on the huge screen behind) before walking into lines of light and the stars, no mere fade, but absorption.

The constant sense of transformation is amplified by the passage of spoken text into song, aural parallels, (the wrap-around wash of flowing water), the tenor (Alan Widdowson) bending and curving a huge grid of light, the pulsing mutations of the music, and the way images, once seen, live on in other spaces as miniatures or distant reflections. The orchestration of the often beautiful filmed and computer animated images, text and movement is masterly dense.

Memory and the spaces we inhabit, from the domestic room to the stars are, like the light room itself, fluid and resonating with each other, suggesting a deep interconnectedness. In this planetarium of the memory, as in that of the stars, we can be awed or defeated by sheer volume. This makes the scene in which projections of a Renaissance library fill the room a reminder that the book is a form of memory. The renaissance also prized architecture as a mnemonic for life.

The Light Room is an impressing work, building on many talents. The dancers are their idiosyncratic selves. Michael Whaites provides a fluent dance of semaphoring as Margaret Cameron rummages through imagined drawers discovering even the first memories of sounds. Whaites and Rebecca Hilton tangle in a fast duet with sudden reversals of power, seemingly taking up the struggle for equilibrium enunciated in the text. Ros Warby’s idiosyncrasies and sense of interiority are best at exemplifying interaction with the space and its transformations. Cameron, always a fine writer, provides some excellent text.

Australian Architecture Construction Design

Glass takes the stage
18.11. 2002.

A unique collaboration between a Melbourne-based arts group, Company in Space, Pilkington Glass and DMS Glass recently resulted in one of the most visually spectacular performances of the 2002 Melbourne Festival.

the light room, at Melbourne Museum, showcased cutting edge digital technology and performance art, by integrating live music, spoken text and dance with video animation and an interactive set.

The high innovative set design, conceived by Melbourne architect Tom Kovac, is an outstanding example of ephemeral glass architecture.

Kovac said: “the light room uses architecture and its spatial conception as a metaphor for life, a setting for real time performance and as an interactive installation. A major component of the work is the physical environment made entirely out of glass. The primary use of glass conveys a subliminal and very powerful effect and transcends the qualities of digitally rendered scenographic images. The translucency and liquid quality of glass is extremely well suited to use with this new technology. It is also an appropriate surface that can carry the ephemeral, transient qualities of digital light”.

The glass surfaces have made the light room’s unique futuristic stage structure a giant luminescent real time screen that captures filmic set-design and virtual reality worlds.

Working collaboratively with Pilkington Glass and DMS Glass and engineers; Façade Technology, Meinhardt Engineering related industries, Company in Space was able to realise the full potential of an artistic vision.

Company in Space Director, Hellen Sky, said: “Through a three-year collaboration with some of Australia’s most accomplished artists we have successfully achieved a production that is a synergy of media. With our partners and sponsors, we have also demonstrated an exciting and innovative way of merging old and new technology.”

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