

six conjectural modules

six conjectural modules was a six month open exhibition-installation-performance project coordinated by Sandra Bridie in Tower Studio at Queen's College, Melbourne University, which ran between September 2002 - February 2003. The program entailed collaborations between a range of practitioners who created new works on-site at Tower Studio. Artists participating in **six conjectural modules** utilised the Tower Studio as workshop, laboratory, rehearsal and exhibition space exploring ideas, media, space and personalities in collaboration.

In **six conjectural modules** six artists - practising in photography, installation, research, painting, performance, sound/text and public art were invited to 'curate' a one month 'module', collaborating with artists working outside their own field of endeavour. Co-ordinators; Sandra Bridie, Peter Lambropoulos, Tamara Marwood, Cynthia Troup Angus Blackburn, and Ian Whittlesea, were encouraged to take conjectural leaps and explore terrain beyond that of their usual practice, familiar materials, collaborative partners, disciplines, and conceptual frameworks. The program thus presented an opportunity for rich cross-fertilisation of disciplines within the arts as well as providing opportunities for exchange between regional and international invited artists.

Audiences to Tower Studio were witness to a range of activities, such as; the development of projects, documentation, screenings, filming, editing and collaging actual film stock, text-work, videos, music performance, book throwing, performance art, interviews with artists, a 'live-in' fictional artist crocheting, and the production of a 'cake core sample'.

As co-ordinator of the project, Sandra Bridie was present at Tower Studio as archivist, utilising a corner of the studio to document each module as it took place. Documentation recording **six conjectural modules** was via video, slides, photo, recorded and transcribed interviews with co-ordinators and participants.

When the studio is open to the public, Sandra moves to the other half of the studio to sit and crochet. When people visit the studio, Sandra is happy to talk to them about the rugs she is making.



module number one: *The Artist and the Writer*, Sandra Bridie and Andrew Preston

The artist and the writer
Sandra Bridie and Andrew Preston

During this module, Sandra Bridie and Andrew Preston set up the scenario of a fictional artist performing a 'live-in' residency at Tower Studio. This 'ambient performance' involved the artist carrying out her day-to-day domestic tasks and executing her artwork – crocheting woollen rugs designed 'after' the colour exercises of Bauhaus master, Johannes Itten.

On one side of the studio were domestic props such as; bed, lamp, toiletries, makeshift kitchen with stove, etc. and on the other side of a partition was the 'performance space' where Bridie would be seen making her rugs by a bemused public. The fiction was that Bridie, trained as a nurse then became a successful painter, then, after losing faith in her art career, she returned to nursing but found herself making these Itten inspired rugs. The fictional artist's objective with this live-in performance/residency is to see if she can pick up the threads of meaning in her art career on her own terms whilst also testing her audiences grasp of what an art work is, is it merely the object or can it open up to incorporate the making of the object? Thus, the 'artist' Bridie sees herself in this 'residency' as interrogating assumptions of values in art such as the schism between; object/process, high art/craft, and male/female-designated artworks.

The 'writer' Andrew Preston was positioned in this work with his small desk to one side of the studio. His function here was that of the literary convention or device of the 'narrator' as seen in novels or movies, but also as documenter of the artist and her work. Such a 'narrator' frequently interprets the events that befall a protagonist with privileged knowledge and can relate with certainty all that will unfold. Preston utilised his 'writers' omniscience' to manipulate the audience's understanding and sympathies toward our artist/protagonist through his texts. Preston's daily task during September at Tower was to write a text on the artist. As if studying the artist/protagonist from a series of alternate viewpoints, himself moving through a number of writerly guises and degrees of sympathy/antipathy towards the artist, the writer's postings of text on the wall over the month mutated stylistically. Preston's texts moved through poetic contemplation, dialogue with the artist, harsh criticism and humourous dismissal of the artist's activity, with samples of writing that included the sympathetic review, the hostile review, photo-texts, short fiction, dialogue and philosophical banter.

TRANSITIONAL PLAY UNIT

PETER LAMBROPOULOS & DR WARREN HARMER

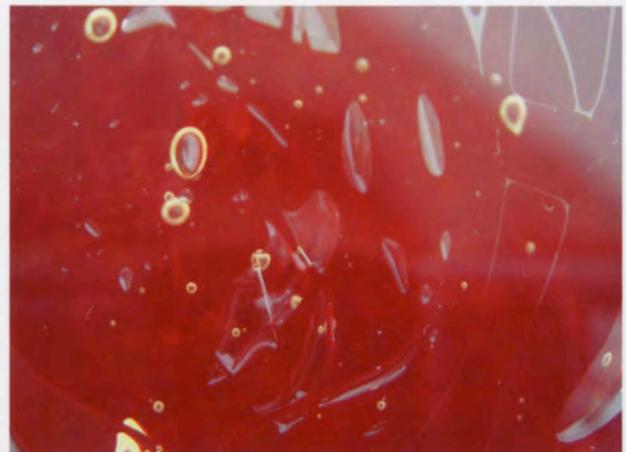
CAKE CORE SAMPLE

DAY ELEVEN - 31/10/2002

PRACTICALITIES



UNEXPECTED TRACES



VISITORS



module number two: *Transitional Play Unit*, Peter Lambropoulos and Warren Harmer

Transitional Play Unit

Peter Lambropoulos and Dr Warren Harmer

In *Transitional Play Unit*, Peter Lambropoulos invited chef/scientist Dr Warren Harmer to collaborate with him on a series of experiments with materials to create a 'Cake Core Sample'.

Devised in an atmosphere of fun and childlike investigations using appealing and mismatched materials such as acrylic paint/lolly bananas, jelly and silver cake decorations, wax/cake sprinkles, resin and sequins for their 'samples' Lambropoulos and Harmer set themselves the task of daily creating a sample layer to construct a 'core sample' in a Perspex tube, which was filled with over 20 sample layers by the end of their residency. This activity was accompanied by documentation of the process as well as devising several 'virtual' core samples by means of digital technology realised for the viewer in a series of digital prints.

The two artists worked hard in a manner of fun investigation as a child with a new crystal, or test tube set. For Warren Harmer, the residency opened his eyes to the possibility of creative pursuits without a necessarily functional 'output' or 'outcome'. The core sample created was a series of microcosmic environments or landscapes in a tube. The cake sample tube was by nature a temporary work with the fugitive ingredients inside gradually decomposing into a compost-like goop.

Layers in the 'Cake Core Sample'

- 1 sandstone paint with lolly bananas,
- 2 plaster base with red paint and iron filings.
- 3 white chocolate that we melted with different coloured crayons
- 4 gelatine base with blue food colouring with glass
- 5 liquorice allsorts with green plaster
- 6 two layers of coloured sugar crystals layered with silicone gel
- 7 red food colouring and dry plaster powder and dripped in yellow food colouring
- 8 fruity tealeaves, "strawberries and cream"
- 9 four packets of birthday candles
- 10 dyed moistened tapioca squiggles on car washing sponge, and dripped down blue food dye
- 11 white paint, which oozed down the side of the sponge into the tapioca
- 12 yellow wax
- 13 green and white wax
- 14 white candles and crayons placed vertically and silver sequins
- 15 Plaster of Paris mixed with blue, green and yellow jelly crystals
- 16 blue wax and tissues
- 17 marshmallow, black sugar confectionery and red wax
- 18 orange dollar fives
- 19 clear polymer resin poured over glass pieces with shimmering large green sequins
- 20 Expandofoam and a disk of Mylar in between the resin and the foam to stop seepage.
- 21 dried blue dyed tapioca flakes crushed up and then with a crimson wax poured over the top



module number three: *Regional Conjecture*
Tamara Marwood, Todd Baxter, Megan Beckwith and Jacques Soddell

Regional Conjecture

**Bendigo artists: Tamara Marwood, Todd Baxter,
Megan Beckwith and Jacques Soddell**

Regional Conjecture consisted of a collaboration between four artists; Tamara Marwood (curator, visual artist), Todd Baxter (visual/performance artist), Megan Beckwith (dancer/choreographer) and Jacques Soddell (sound artist) who collaborated on a hybrid performance work thematically based on the subject of weather as it impacts on regional communities in flood and drought.

Tamara Marwood created projections for the performance via scanning objects such as grasses and fabrics which, when scanned, gained the appearance of land and sky scapes. Tamara used the opportunity of the residency to acquire a new set of skills, having never previously worked in the area of digital technology. As such she programmed the scanned sequences through the rudimentary program 'Power Point'. These were projected onto the 'bubble' that dancer Megan Beckwith was contained within.

Todd Baxter created; a backdrop for the dance performance, a performance piece, an installation of fibreglass model weather stations, which were hung above the stairwell that leads up to Tower Studio as well as a playhouse-sized fibreglass weather station on the lawns outside Queen's College. For the performances of *Regional Conjecture*, Baxter created a mythic weather god, with a sheep's head and dressed in a lab coat. This creature began his performance in the weather station on the lawn and drew the audience with him up to the Tower Studio for the dance/projection/sound component of the performance.

Megan Beckwith choreographed a dance sequence performed in part in a plastic bubble based on the design of Baxter's weather stations. Beckwith began the dance inside the bubble, struggling with the elements within, and emerged into the Tower space.

Jacques Soddell composed a sound piece from weather reports, Internet connection beeps, synthesised music and recordings of weather sounds from thunderstorms to bushfire. This piece began quietly and built up to a dramatic crescendo and shaped the pace and form of the overall performance.



module number four: *Clatter*, Cynthia Troup and Louise Curham

module #4

December 4–January 4 2002/3

Clatter

Cynthia Troup and Louise Curham

Clatter was a work for text, film projection, installation and 'ambient performance' devised in over the four weeks of the residency by filmmaker Louise Curham and writer/performer Cynthia Troup. The artists' initial impulse for their work was the site of the Tower Studio itself, an impulse, which developed into an exploration of the notion of the invention of tradition, focussing on Initiation Week at Queen's College.

The artists brought to the Tower Studio a concept of their work derived from initial research into Queen's College. Once installed at Queen's the artists entered tightly collaborative phase, which included archival research, interviews with members of the College community and the accumulation of imagery in film and photographic form. At this point, an initial structure was settled upon, involving the creation of five text and film stations around the Tower. As this phase developed, the collaboration uncovered some parameters for the material - a quasi-fictional character central character and a sense of the trajectory of the work from figuration to abstraction. In the second phase of the project the work shifted into a creating specific elements of the work - film, text, sculpture, installation and performance where the artists drew on their individual practices to create the elements. The third phase was the presentation of the work, devised as two open studios, an evening event late December and a daylong open studio at the end of the residency. Both were offered in a spirit of experimentation. The presence of an audience was pivotal to understanding this kind of work as its accumulative effect fell between installation and performance.

In the first open studio (7.30 to 10pm Fri 20 Dec), visitors encountered a minimalist space with a series of five groups of texts pinned at intervals around the walls. Projectors trailing long loops of film up into the space of the tower were running with daylight rendering the images illegible in the early part of the evening. As the light faded out of the space, the images came up, with the text falling within the frame of the images. The soft sculpture work of 'rock'-like shapes made from old flannel pyjamas included sound elements of the early morning reveille of the freshmen by the seniormen and feet pounding up the stairwell. A miniaturised version of Miss Shaw's office was installed in the closed-off stairwell in the space, accompanied by an incessant slow typing sound. Miss Shaw herself was present, mingling with visitors who were invited to enjoy a version of the senior men's sherry party, based on the drinks party the freshmen would have been welcomed to upon their return from the cemetery run - lamingtons, sherry and iced tea.

At the second showing (10am to 10pm, Jan 4 2003), the space had more the air of a studio than the pristine minimalism of a contemporary gallery space we aimed for in late December. Work areas and tools were left visible in the space. The film loops, by now better resolved, were visible as very small images on organic looking rear projection viewing structures. The 'rock' field had become a projection site, with two sets of images projected across it as darkness made them legible. The three wall projections were better resolved in terms of their content and placement in the space.



module number five: *Conjectural Procedures*, Angus Blackburn and Jason Keats

Conjectural Procedures
Angus Blackburn and Jason Keats

Performance artists, Angus Blackburn and Jason Keats created an installation/performance work at Tower based on their research into the studio's initial function as a library. Attracted to the failure of this previous function of the site - the library only operated for a decade due to inherent environmental problems such as excessive exposure to light as well as rain leaks through the roof thus producing sun and light damage as well as water damage to valuable books - the artists employed cancelled library books as the principle material for their installation and performance work at Tower. These books were 'mistreated' in all manner of ways; the artists created a series of installations from strewn and piled books as well as creating 'wet book sculptures' and folded paper sculptures from torn pages as well as throwing the books from out the Tower Studio windows and across the room. Each day was broken up into 'making' and 'doing' sessions. In the 'doing' sessions, the artists devised physical performances throwing the books to the extremities of the studio in different configurations. The entirety of the residency was recorded on an antiquated surveillance video camera, which was positioned in a different location in the studio each day.

The final performance/installation involved; five video monitors displaying edited material from five different days activities by the artist, these monitors were supported on various arrangements of books, the book sculptures and a performance of book throwing. The very physical performance comprised of seven times seven-minute actions, finally building up to the artists throwing the books up until they hit the high studio ceilings.

The actual performance on January 30 required extensive rehearsal by the artists whilst still allowing for a space for error, many viewers to this event found the physicality of Blackburn and Keats' presentation enthralling and edgy.

The success of this collaboration has led the artists to devising future performance and installation works together.



module number six: International Module, Archipelago, Ian Whittlesea, UK

Archipelago
Ian Whittlesea, UK

During February at Tower Studio, UK artist Ian Whittlesea created a slowly accumulating installation of paintings evoking a fictional archipelago. Whittlesea started out by placing blank stretched canvases on twelve small flat student desks in the studio to work on during his residency.

Each day Whittlesea meticulously painted a word painting - the single word denoting a fictional island taken from books the artist had read from childhood onward beginning with 'The Secret Island' by Enid Blyton (SECRET) and 'Treasure Island' by RL Stevenson (TREASURE) and moving on to such works 'Utopia' by Thomas More (UTOPIA) and 'Don Quixote' by Cervantes (BARATARIA). Each word painting was a different colour with the letters of the island word painted white, the particular text derived from an outdated Helvetica font.

The sparse installation of eleven finished text-paintings sitting on their small sand coloured desks on the blue-grey floor of Tower Studio created an archipelago of island works to be circumnavigated by the viewer.

The resulting installation was spacious and contemplative, where the island works were accompanied by a display of the original loved books from Whittlesea's own collection.

Texts used:

- SECRET ('The Secret Island', Enid Blyton, 1938)
- BARATARIA ('Don Quixote', Cervantes, 1604)
- EREWTHON ('Erewhon', Samuel Butler, 1872)
- PALA ('Island', Aldous Huxley), 1962)
- CORAL ('The Coral Island', R.M. Ballantyne, 1858)
- UTOPIA ('Utopia', Thomas More, 1516)
- DESPAIR ('Robinson Crusoe', Daniel Defoe, 1719)
- TREASURE ('Treasure Island', Robert Louis Stevenson, 1883)
- LAPUTA ('Gulliver's Travels', Jonathon Swift, 1726)
- AEOLIA ('The Odyssey', Homer, 9th Century BC)
- THANASIA ('Riallaro, the Archipelago of Exiles', Godfrey Sweven, 1901)