

LESS TALK, MORE ART!
METRO ARTS AND A GEOMETRY OF ECHOES
Benjamin Knapton

Over the last three weeks our creative team have interviewed 40 people who were either integral to the development of Metro Arts or in some way connected to its artistic output over the last 40 years. The idea is to use this content to create a 40-channel video installation called *Ephemera* which will be located on the first level of 109 Edward Street; Metro Arts home for the past 40 years. At the time of writing, I only have a vague sense of what the final installation might be, but I know what I am searching for: firstly, to uncover stories from a small, yet broad cross section of people who have been connected with Metro Arts, and second, to understand more about the impact our activities have on a specific place and the impact places can have on us.

But how does this transfer into a video installation; an aesthetic form; a conscious arrangement of the given stimuli in space and time? Integral to answering this question is a desire for the final form of the installation to emerge as a direct result of the content of the interviews; a form that requires a type of sensuous understanding from the audience. This involves discovering ‘aesthetic attributes’ during the creation process – visual or sound-based characteristics of the artwork that directly correspond, resemble or relate to the content and ideas being explored. The approach is inspired by Metro Arts itself: a place where walls and stories and meanings are layered.

At the time of writing, the aesthetic attributes of the installation are emerging: some of the 40 TV screens that make up the installation will be leaning against walls and lying flat on the ground – an arrangement with attributes consistent with moving house, packing up or being in transit. We filmed the videos so they would be life-size and we’ve also shot in super high quality so the presence of the subject is as direct as possible, even occasionally ghostlike in their actualisation in the room. To add to this ‘presence’, many of the screens will be located at the average eyeline of the audience. We’ll also play with effects like adjusting the transparency of the images or transforming color, fading individuals in and out of screens and separating spoken words from the moving images of the subjects. These attributes seek to evoke a sense of time past and the multiple histories of the building – apparitions of people that once created there. I am interested in a polyphonic remembering; an intricate weaving of stories shared in both a verbal and non-verbal way.

As a result of this process the audience will hear ideas spoken by the subjects and then experience those ideas repeated multiple times through images, effects and sounds. The goal is to create layers of meaning, communicating with both the intellectual and sensual perception of the audience. Complimenting this approach is sound designer Lawrence English who is working on a bank of sound assets which draw out the internal sounds of the building, using them as elements to create the sound field – an externalisation of the interiority of the building.

Having a methodology for creation doesn’t necessarily lead to good art, but my hope is that the installation is felt as much as it is consciously understood. There is a sense of information overload with a place like Metro Arts, where any type of documentation, or capturing of experience, needs to succumb to the gaps, the imperfections, the biases and the ephemeral nature of ideas and memories. By transforming 40 interviews into aesthetic form perhaps we can stimulate the imagination of the audience and edge toward a deeper understanding of what a place like Metro Arts has meant, or could mean.