

Screen Ecologies - Art, Media and the Environment in the Asia-Pacific Region

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The Introduction is a topography to this very complex field of study, where artists, enthusiasts, inventors, activists, technologists, hackers, ecologists and scientists are all simultaneously responding to the climate changes of the technology industries and the environmental market place of human interactions. For some, this section will be sufficient. The complexities hinted are unraveled in eight chapters, taking cuts through the data and enabling the reader to experience from the inside the magnitude of our mediated effect on each other and the planet we call home. Though the interesting notion of SCOT (social construction of technology) is introduced, realistically we know the world is otherwise, that the biodiversity of which we are a part is directly affected by the abstract notions of 'growth' and 'profit'. Equally the core of that biodiversity remains unseen, at the micro level and in the sense of experiencing what the environment is, as opposed to our representations of it, real and imagined. Mediated idealism of the natural world across the Asia-Pacific regions affect attitudes:

to what is actually happening; to established cultural tradition from a time of regard for the land; to the incursion of globalised culture and to alternatives now past the use by date, such as bush walks and city farms as sampling activities in danger of skirting the issues. Investigations of ecological matters is here less about the physical and organic world, concentrating fundamentally on an ecology of practices now in the past and already becoming replaced.

The authors describe the context of unchecked neoliberal, neo-colonial corporate expansion at multiple levels, often destroying traumatised communities needing to reconnect with each other, with the natural world, with common interest groups, by using both traditional and contemporary means of communication. Technology and art practice at a social level is central to the manifesto; incubation of projects within communities of interest and communities of expertise as 'mobile publics' are a part of the principle. Though it is the work of four authors, (faculty members in the same institution in Melbourne, an omniscient 'we'), who have been published individually over the last decade, the writing style and presentation is curiously homogenised. Collaborations with other writers within the region are evidenced, but not directly in this volume. Australian new media artists were extremely active into the 2000s so do not receive favoured attention from the mid-decade onwards covered here; the authors have travelled widely in the SE Asian region and mainly reference the artists they encountered, local and visiting. The multidisciplinary practices evidenced are a valuable record of the energy and vigour of groups and individuals working with often limited resources. Mobility is key to images and messages circulated on phone networks, including those of disasters engendered by humans and delivered by the elements.

Several optimistic ways forward from the contradictions of technology usage and the impasse in the politics of climate are suggested as discussion points within media studies. The substantial gathering of material from the regions encompassing often conflicting histories and traditions illuminate directions taken by artists in experiencing global impacts of various kinds. The necessarily rhetorical tone gently implicates media artists, cultural producers and consumers in general in the exacerbation of changes in global climate patterns. Given a supportive context in the seminar room and the laboratory, the identifying or creating new directions, sites of practice and emergences will be aided by this evenly balanced volume.

Electronic gaming environments on various platforms are central to several of the discussions, including an amusing account of the Tokyo gamer who was deeply immersed in a digital earthquake when the real one happened all around him. Maintaining the present moment is a problem for studies in media of the kind encompassed here, and perhaps a hypertext version would deliver more effectively by being linked directly to the studios and exhibition spaces referenced in these pages. This is a more general observation for titles in this Series whereby analysis and discussion would gain a less cluttered writing space and thereby avoid the tendency of becoming an archival reserve.

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