

## **The launch of RealTime on TROVE: Speeches**

The following dialogue and speeches are in the order of presentation on 17 April, 2019 at the UNSW Library Exhibition Spaces.

### **The Editors dialogue with RealTime Virginia Baxter & Keith Gallasch**

#### **Virginia and Keith standing at a case displaying open copies of RealTime.**

K: Welcome to you all. It's our turn now to Dialogue with RealTime.

V: Oh no!

K: What?

V: There's a typo!

K: Where?

V: There.

K: Omigod. Fluxus with a K!

V: Forget it. It's now an archival typo.

K: Lovely to see you all here...so present, in real time.

V: Yes, can feel the 'liveness.' It's practically primal.

K: Yes. It's so real it borders on the virtual.

V: 25 years of actual real time. Could be a long night.

K: If I might sum up, a 25-year socio-political-artistic paradigm shift captured on the pages of a free magazine .... Too much?

V: No, I think it's about right. So, what do you want to say to RealTime?

K: RealTime, you changed us. You changed us from writer-performers to editors, to publishers, to reviewers. We'd been reviewed ourselves for 20 years, so we knew what that was like. Suddenly we were seeing performances and exhibitions 2, 3, 4 times a week mostly on the nightshift and then translating the experiences into thousands of words and editing a zillion others. It was a new way of life.

V: Actually, it was the art that changed us. In 1994 art was taking big risks, and we wanted to celebrate that by founding a magazine that we wanted to read, one that would spread the word that art was changing and changing the way we experienced both art and life.

- K: It was you, RealTime, that took us forensically close to this art. That's what changed us. You gave us the time, the proximity and a task to reckon with to convey that change and the thrill of it. We made RealTime and then RealTime made us.
- V: And would you say the RealTime experience did us a world of good?
- K: Well, yes, the privilege of witnessing so much, so often, so near and so far afield. It was an education, exercising the mind, all that sharpening of the senses.
- V: And the 'symptoms' of this ... "critical wellness?"
- K: Well, for instance, I learned a lot about my own body via bodies I hadn't seen before. Bodies were big in RealTime in the 90s.
- V: Yeh, all those unruly bodies—brash, uncertain, trained, untrained, Indigenous, refugee, able, disabled, post-human, ill, cyborg and trans, bodies Butoh-ed and Body Weathered.
- K: All that relativity is very healthy. Takes you out of yourself and into yourself.
- V: Time was big. Real time, durational, fractured, disconcertingly discontinuous time. Works that took minutes, others days. Some are still going.
- K: Learning to be patient, to be attentive, fighting boredom, moving beyond irritation, entering someone else's time...Talk about self-improvement.
- V: It was risky sometimes. You can get caught, suspended in time; stranded halfway between some invisible world and the present.
- K: It was liberating, this other-real-time. Dug out of the rut of cozy linearity. Did you know "linearity" rearranged reads "in reality"?
- V: I did not know that. So, you might say, Keith, that seeing this art, translating it into words brought us to our senses?
- K: Ah, the senses, they got very real. Touch, sight, smell, hearing all amplified or in some works, switched off, making us ultra-alert or temporarily disabled and newly abled. Slowly absorbing other people's states of being. Sometimes good for developing empathy.
- V: Do you remember when long, total blackouts were the thing? Ushers in night vision goggles rescuing the claustrophobes?
- K: Remember, you held my hand in the dark until that kind of blackout went out of fashion. Thanks for that.

- V: All that being in-the-moment was ultra-big: improvisation, the NOW. Then, the ecstatic—big in Melbourne apparently.
- K: I've been an 'ecstatic' reviewer of certain shows but I've yet to have a truly ecstatic arts experience. I did see a dancer perform in a trance, and a shaman at midnight in a Korean Mime Festival with the audience stuffing her costume with bank notes. RealTime, you took me there.
- V: For me there have been so many little ecstasies, euphorias not to mention moments of sheer strangeness. I was totally convinced by that Norwegian performer who gradually disappeared herself, the theatre and the audience, just with words.
- K: Unreal. Actually, over the decades, the audience has become very real. Game playing, one on ones, embracing strangers, generating oxytocin, accepting a drop of an artist's blood served in a scone, giving bondage a shot. The performative audience.
- V: A new reality.
- K: Reality – what a concept!
- V: A bigger reality. Asia, different abilities, Indigeneity, identity, art from the suburbs, from the regions; all growing exponentially, suffusing the pages of RealTime.
- K: And microscopic life transposed verbatim into the theatre of fact checking.
- V: Artists grabbing hold of the digital, making the virtual palpable and performers integrating it into the real. First came the dancemakers and then pretty much everyone else. An amazing time for RealTime.
- K: Allowing our biorhythms to be digitally transformed into art. In a hospital foyer.
- V: That one did me some good, I think.
- K: The VR one about chronic pain where I was swathed in barbed wire and had a nail driven through the palm of my hand. Alarming, but I liked it.
- V: Eeuw! Very timely. You know what was happening? We were being hybridised. Audiences, reviewers, all hybridised. We were real; we were virtual. We were not who we once were. Our psyches, our senses, our bodies were mutating via multimedia, intermedia, cross-art, inter- and multi-disciplinary works. They compelled us to live out an interplay of forms, experiences and worlds, sometimes all in a single work.
- K: Try putting that into words? Not easy. But sweating over a hot Mac reviewing mind-bending works in an increasingly discombobulating reality, could be therapeutic. Thank you RealTime.

- V: Some of you might have noticed that Keith and I were often among the last to leave our seats after a performance. For me, that moment of finding your way back through the half-light to the real world is to be savoured. Ideally, it leads into that responsive loop that is reviewing, finding the words to share the experience with others.
- K: Sometimes we got lost in the dark, on the precipice of some elsewhere.
- V: A great unravelling, total fragmentation, glorious disorientation.
- K: Lingering over lush surfaces. Lost for words, aching to respond, to what just happened.
- V: Not jumping to conclusions; not rushing to judgement, entering the eternal loop.
- K: Embracing the work, taking it home, letting it in, like a lover or Alien!
- V: Exercising the mirror neurons. Dancing the dance. Writing the dance.
- K: Keep talking to the work, talking to myself. What happened to me this time? Is it still happening?
- V: Wrangling art into reviewable shape while staying true to it, before the conversation between self and work, between self and self is released into the world.
- K: Joining word of mouth and other osmoses, to reach the ear of the artist to suggest just what that avatar of theirs might have been up to in the dark.
- V/K: What was that?
- V: 25 years of tough but unalienated labour.
- K: Doing our bit for cultural sustainability in the face of escalating neoliberalism.
- V: Hard but joyous and collaborative and totally fulfilling. Thank you RealTime. We made you but you made us.
- K: Just as Martin, Lee & Mirabelle and Vicki made us and made RealTime.
- V: And all those other makers—artists, writers, photographers, fellow staff, Board members, supporters and readers
- K: And those archive makers, UNSW Library and National Library of Australia, for facilitating the Great Loop Forward that is the RealTime Archive that Sarah Miller will launch tonight.
- K/V Thanks RealTime.

## **Martin Borchert, Librarian, UNSW Library**

I'd like to welcome you to the library and also to this UNSW Library Exhibition Space. I'd also like to acknowledge the Indigenous owners of this land and pay my respects to their elders past and future and all Aboriginal people who are here tonight.

I'd like to speak about the In Response: Dialogues with RealTime exhibition first. This exhibition is very important to the library and to UNSW because it's the first time that we have worked with faculty and artists in this space. I'd like to thank Erin Brannigan (Senior Lecturer, School of Arts & Media) and all the artists and Jackson Mann (Curator, Special Collections & Exhibitions, UNSW Library), for working together on this. It's been an interesting concept for us, a bit of an experiment really. It's a new space and this is the first time we've had this kind of artistic work in the space.

I'm really interested in the library being part of working in the 'glamour' area (AUDIENCE LAUGHS) and bringing all those areas together—you know what 'glamour' is. So, I think that's the future for our library and I'm really committed to this library supporting the humanities, arts and social sciences as much as the sciences, technology and engineering. I think that's really important.

I want to again acknowledge the work of Erin Brannigan. So much work has gone into this exhibition. I've tried to look at everything in here. It's amazing in terms of the diversity and the thought that has gone into the exhibition and also her work with the artists in a curatorial sense. I tried to do a room at a time and I found it was about an hour to an hour and a half per room, plus what's in the open space is another hour. It's a challenging exhibition. I think you need about five hours to take in the total experience. Importantly, I also made a point of attending each of the artist talks.

This exhibition has, I think, created a lot of knowledge around RealTime magazine and I think we've also been able to add that into the knowledge management systems and repositories that we have—to add value to RealTime. Also the Research Reporting Unit. Vanessa Crosby's been working with Erin on adding this as a non-traditional research option to the university's output. I'd also like to acknowledge Robyn Drummond (Director, Information Services). Robyn was involved in the initial discussions around the project working with Virginia and Keith, along with Erin. That was really important because you need the vision at the start to make these things happen. I'd also like to acknowledge the Repositories Team and Maude Frances (Director, Scholarly Communications and Repositories). Really great work. We've put all the work from the exhibition into our repository. It really has been a privilege to work with Erin and all the artists—Martin del Amo, Vicki Van Hout and Henrietta Baird, Lee Wilson and Mirabelle Wouters—and to capture all that information and add value.

The second thing I'd like to talk about is the digitisation of RealTime's print editions and the creation of the archive. One of our goals in the library here is to create a distinctiveness about UNSW in the works that we produce and that we're involved in. Something has happened with libraries recently. This (Exhibition Space) was (once) allocated to our print collection; here we've re-created it as a space for discourse. A lot of libraries have the same

levels of online information, but we really want to create a distinctiveness in the way we work with faculty in particular in creating a uniquely UNSW selection.

It's been over a year we've been working to create this archive and we've been pleased to work with Open City, the publishers of the journal and also the National Library of Australia. We could not have done this work without all of the partners. I'd also like to acknowledge the work of Caroline Wake (Senior Lecturer in Theatre and Performance, School of Arts & Media). Caroline was very instrumental in the work we've been doing and also working with Keith and Virginia. There's been a lot of work to do with copyright on this project and it's been a technicality but it's a reality for libraries. Megan Saville (Director, Teaching Services & Academic Engagement) I acknowledge all your work [mediating between UNSW Library, Open City and the NLA. Eds]. And Dr. Hilary Berthon, Assistant Director of TROVE Outreach at NLA, I'd like to acknowledge her work as well.

The National Library is hosting the archive for us and UNSW is hosting all the information about the exhibition, which adds value to it. So together we've been able to make an archive of all of the print collection 1994-2015. It's pretty amazing and in a way it gives RealTime a second life and, I think, encourages engagement with it. In the first edition in June 1994, the editorial announced that RealTime "opens up the possibilities for writers and artists everywhere in Australia to contribute to the spread of information and ideas across artforms and distance." I think this archive really achieves that and it's a long time since the journal started so it's nice to re-visit that mission.

And finally, I want to propose a toast to RealTime. So please charge your glasses. Long live RealTime with the archive! Last of all, I'd like to address something that Vicki Van Hout said tonight, that it's important to be earnest. And that really resonated with me. I think it's really important for us in the arts and social sciences.

### **Tony MacGregor, Chair of Open City, publisher of RealTime**

Greetings friends. I've had nearly 25 years of involvement with Real Time—many of them as chair of the management committee of Open City, which is actually the company that published Real Time. This is probably one of my last formal outings in this capacity—appropriate I suppose—I will live in on in the archive, a small footnote in some yet to be written history of Australian performance. It has been a real pleasure for all of us who have been on the Open City board to be able to support in some small way Keith and Virginia and Gail and all the others who have made Real Time fly these past 20 odd years. Open City was set up in 1987 by Keith and Virginia as a company dedicated to collaborative exploration of the possibilities of performance, but was always rooted in the sensibilities of its founders. I think it's important to remember that Real Time was—is—an artists' project.

My task this evening is really to say thank you to everyone who has made this archive project possible. But before I do that, a couple of brief observations on the archive itself. I know Sarah Miller will talk about the importance of the archive as she metaphorically cracks the champagne bottle to launch this thing. I won't steal her best lines. But I am in the process of reinventing myself as an historian—and I am in love with archive.

You will not be surprised that my first reference is to Jacques Derrida—after all no Real Time event would be complete without at least a passing reference to French critical theory. And it's no coincidence that in June 1994—more or less at the same moment that Real Time was first published—our old mate Jacques D gave a lecture on the nature of the archive at a symposium in London called Memory: The Question of Archives (Quell surprise, non?). That lecture was the foundation of Derrida's 1995 book Archive Fever. You will be relieved to know that I am not about to undertake an exegesis of Archive Fever for you. But take it from me, in Archive Fever, Derrida argues that archives both shape and reflect the way we think, the way power is structured, the way we imagine ourselves, and that archives are changing, no longer vast libraries of documents recording the machinations of the powerful. They are becoming—must become—porous, heterogenous accumulations of multimedia. The archive can no longer be made of paper, but as we see around us is made up of all sorts of stuff. And, as the performances of Martin Del Amo, Branch Nebula and Vicki Van Hout over the past few months have eloquently demonstrated, the archive is often stored in the body, written in the flesh.

One other snippet of archival wonder. I have been looking at the work of the Australian writer Randolph Stow. For decades Mick Stow wrote regular letters home to his mother from wherever it was he was living at the time: the Kimberley, New Mexico, Essex. I found many of those letters when I was going through the boxes of his papers at the National Library (one of our truly essential, and wonderful, cultural institutions). It feels very icky, going through someone's private papers; Stow was a deeply private man, and I felt embarrassed and uncomfortable reading his letters, the more so as I knew him and respected his reticence. Archives are not dead. They make you feel things. The letters were mostly still in the blue airmail envelopes in which Mick had posted them. I noticed that on nearly all these envelopes his mother had scrawled lists of names and times. It was very

odd. Then the penny dropped, these were horses' names, and race times: Mrs Stow was clearly a betting woman, and between reading her son's weekly letters, she noted her picks for the 2.15 at Sandown or the 1pm at Flemington. Realising this gave me a laugh out-loud thrill—and an instant sense of intimate connection to this woman who I never knew. I imagined her carefully putting her son's letter back in its envelope, and then picking up the form guide and picking her bets for the day, noting them on the piece of paper closest to hand. A pragmatic and frugal woman. Archives bring alive the margins of history, not just the main page.

All the more reason to be grateful for the fact that the RealTime archive preserves the physical magazine, the feel of it, the advertising—the whole thing—as well as the digital version.

So, I want to note Open City's profound gratitude to UNSW Library for initiating the partnership with the National Library of Australia that has digitised and archived on NLA's TROVE website the complete Real Time print editions 1994-2015. This was a time of remarkable transformation in the arts—a time of experimentation in forms of interdisciplinarity and hybridity—and the archive preserves the creative documentation of this flourishing, most of it far from the so-called 'mainstage,' by a highly responsive small team in Sydney and a network of writers—many of whom were also arts practitioners—across Australia and internationally.

In supporting the archiving of RealTime the UNSW Library and NLA have recognised and celebrated a unique publication ranging across the country and bringing artforms together—there is no current equivalent. We thank them for their commitment to nurturing the cultural history of Australia, not just in this instance, but in an ongoing, and generous manner. Without you, we'd be stuffed. (That's a technical term.)

A profound thank you to the Australia Council and the artists who peer-assessed the RealTime grant applications and provided for continuous support for RealTime from 1994. You are clearly wise and generous people. Thanks too to the Australia Council in particular



for supporting Keith and Virginia and assistant editor Katerina Sakkas and many contributors as they wrangled the archive into shape over the course of 2018.

As important as Keith and Virginia have been to the making of Real Time, it has always been a collective enterprise. Keith and Virginia have been supported in the office by a roster of dedicated editorial and administrative workers—the great majority of them artists or writers or musicians in their own right. In recent years Katerina Sakkas, Felicity Clark, Lauren Carroll Harris and Lucy Parakhina were great mainstays of the magazine along with Gail Priest, who although she left to pursue her career as an artist in 2014 [after joining RealTime in 1997], still provides invaluable support and ready advice with her considerable knowledge of the archive.

And of course none of this would be possible without the work of the writers and the artists about whom they have written: hundreds of writers, many photographers, thousands of performances. A web of connections, a discursive matrix that criss-crosses the country from the inner city to the bush and reaches around the world. That's what is being archived, and celebrated here.

I'll go back to the archive for the final word. In 2004, for the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary issue of Real Time, I wrote this:

“In RealTime, art can still be understood as a gift, not only as a commodity. Like much of the work they write about, Keith and Virginia, and Gail, have served an idea, served an ideal even, an ideal of the work of art as a way of engaging with the world, as a vehicle for satisfying undying curiosity, for, perhaps, speaking about what might be true, or at least, of speaking about power. RealTime—and its editors and writers—have done more than serve a community, they have, in so many ways, made it. That is their gift to us (readers, writers, makers, audiences), and I thank them for it.”

And thanks to the creation of this archive, history will thank them—and you—for that gift and all that it has meant to the arts in Australia.

**Jeremy Smith, Director Community, Emerging & Experimental Arts, Australia Council for the Arts**

Thank you Erin for your introduction, and thank you to the earlier speakers for your generous words, and of course each of the artists—Mirabelle, Vicki and Martin—for the lovely gestures you've each offered to the Real Time legacy through your presentations this evening.

I would also like to acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation as the traditional custodians of the land where we meet today, and also pay my respects to the Whudjuk people of the Noongar Nation, the lands now known as Perth where I was born and raised, and lived until only three years ago.

I'm speaking tonight as a representative of the Australia Council for the Arts, and in doing so, feel a little like a fraud, as someone who has only been at Council for a little over three years; that represents a mere blip on RealTime's historic radar. However, on that note I acknowledge presence of my colleague Andy Donovan, a significant contributor to this relationship and indeed the contemporary and experimental arts sector over many, many years.

Earlier this week, I was talking to a colleague from the Community Arts and Cultural Development sector about the importance of legacy in the arts. Later, in thinking about this speech, I reflected on the legacy of Real Time and how it traverses the Australian arts sector, artists and arts organisations, audiences, arts journalism and arts review and critical writing. It is pretty significant.

Real Time commenced in 1994, and that's when the Australia Council first provided support and Real Time released its first edition. In 1994, I was a 17-year-old Year 12 student failing his TEE exams back in my hometown of Perth. The following year I commenced the Lighting Design course at the WA Academy of Performing Arts. I remember picking up my first copy of Real Time in the foyer of PICA, where our next speaker Sarah Miller—who I would first meet around this time—was Director at the time.

Several years later, as a practicing Lighting Designer, it was a review in Real Time which was and remains one of the first and only times that acknowledged—luckily in a positive manner—my contribution to the production as a lighting designer.

And I think that's what set Real Time apart—its editors, writers and contributors saw and considered elements others didn't. It was as if they were always searching for new ground and looking beyond the horizon—the as yet unseen. They saw and wrote about the new aesthetics and hybrid forms, the delights for us audiences long before others, helped promote and increase our enjoyment, cultural literacy, plus stimulated collaborations and conversations

.

Importantly, they also placed artists based in Australia on the world map.

As I earlier mentioned, the Australia Council has been an accomplice and ally of Real Time since inception. Obviously as a funding partner since 1994, but Council has also directly commissioned Real Time to produce and distribute several special publications.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the crucial role Real Time—especially Keith—has played as a critical friend of the Australia Council and playing a humble and eloquent, yet highly instrumental role in highlighting the Council’s ‘mistaken’ arts practice restructure in 2004 and 2005.

Robust relationships are built on foundations of trust and openness, and willingness to offer and receive feedback. It is indeed a robust relationship that endures—and indeed continues to thrive afterwards—a headline in the 23 September 2005 edition of the Sydney Morning Herald: “Critic blasts Australia Council for leaving too many artists out in the cold,” with the opening line “The arts are an ecosystem and artists are like slime mould, says the cultural critic Keith Gallasch. This, science confirms, is good because slime moulds can turn themselves in to new shapes for survival...” It continues, “Gallasch believes there’s a new omnivore threatening the ecosystem: the Australia Council for the Arts...”

Without that diplomacy, advocacy and critical commentary—and the united front of many others—who knows what the future would have held for two arts practice areas, emerging and experimental, I currently oversee on behalf of Council. But on a more serious and truly sincere note, as most in this room will know, the Australia Council’s decision-making operates on an arm’s length peer assessment process. So underpinning that funding partnership since 1994 has been the endorsement and praise of countless numbers of peers from around the country who have validated the continued support of this crucial part of our ecosystem. That alone speaks volumes.

Over time, the Australia Council has become one of many accomplices, partners and allies of Real Time. Tonight we celebrate the foresightedness of the UNSW Library and the National Library of Australia to join the stable, bringing with them new lifeblood and longevity to the Real Time legacy. Thank you to both of these organisations: your vision acknowledges the 25-year breadth of Real Time’s coverage as a vital ingredient in the cultural history of Australia, and significantly, the importance of TROVE in providing easy access to this archive for all Australians.

I also know for fact, after a recent overseas trip, that there is eager anticipation and appetite for this archive internationally. Two arts workers who I spoke to in Singapore earlier this month—who both attended the 2018 Liveworks Festival by Performance Space—rated the Real Time in Real Time forum (October 2018) as one of the greatest things they had been to in a long, long time. They then said Keith and Virginia need to get to Singapore ASAP and teach their sector a thing or two. So, guys, while one chapter is ending, I have a feeling another is just starting—or as Virginia so beautifully put it earlier tonight when referencing the launch of the TROVE archive: “This isn’t a full stop, rather a dot, dot, dot...”

It is very sad knowing there is now no across-the-arts, national magazine of the RealTime kind. One that embraces all kinds of performance, media and visual art, First Nations art, film, artists with disability, regional art, all under one cover. This makes tonight’s TROVE archive launch all the more important—it will remain as an example of what can be

achieved. And hopefully one day, in its preserved state, may serve to inspire future publishers with a national vision.

I have already started to see pockets of the contemporary and experimental arts sectors—organisations and independent artists—responding in small, unique, considered and important ways to fill this void. I genuinely hope this continues.

It's never an easy decision to call time, and to windup. It takes bravery. I commend Keith, Virginia, the Open City Board and all of the contributors to Real Time for 25 years of bravery, courage, fierce articulation, wisdom—and change.

On behalf of the board and staff of the Australia Council for the Arts—thank you and congratulations one and all.

### **Professor Sarah Miller OA**

Good evening everyone, and thank you for your introduction Erin. It's such a privilege to be here to speak a little tonight about the treasure trove that is RealTime. I want to begin, however, by acknowledging the Gadigal of the Eora nation, the traditional and spiritual custodians of the lands we meet on tonight, and to acknowledge Elders past, present and emerging. I wish to acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded.

I first met Keith and Virginia sometime in the mid-1980s when they moved from Adelaide to Sydney and created the multidisciplinary performance group Open City. From 1987 to 1996, Open City was one of the key ensembles working out of Performance Space. Ostensibly casual and chatty, but meticulously crafted, their work was distinguished by their collaborations with artists from a range of art form backgrounds, specialists from other disciplines and industries, and dealing with the politics of the everyday. Does this sound familiar? As Open City, their work at Performance Space largely crossed over with my tenure as Director, so I had the privilege of seeing pretty much all of their work, even writing about Photoplay (1988) for Art Almanac, a long running gallery listings journal.

It was a fabulous, frustrating, and generative time. At the frustrating end, funding bodies and mainstream reviewers often struggled to understand what it was that artists working at Performance Space were trying to achieve. A common perception was that artists wilfully misunderstood their own practices and artform conventions, and were simply failing by refusing to conform to a bunch of fairly prescriptive ideas

about what constituted real art, real theatre, real music, or real dance for instance. These discussions informed Performance Space's approach to practice, and when I say Performance Space, I'm actually meaning the artists, ensembles and companies invested in what I might describe as performance in the expanded field. Practice became increasingly intersectional. Key to the development of Performance Space and the artists and companies that made it so distinctive, was an increasing engagement with Indigenous artists, practitioners from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, queer and differently abled practitioners.

So it is really no surprise that Erin's curation of *In Response: Dialogues with RealTime* with its artist installations, performances, catalogue and online content, draws on key practitioners associated with Performance Space: Martin Del Amo, Branch Nebula and Vicki van Hout. Congratulations to Erin, who in consultation with Keith and Virginia, has generated a wonderful performative model for keeping the archives alive, the dialogue going and giving artists a voice.

In 1993, the Australia Council's Drama Committee, set up two key initiatives that facilitated a new way forward for artists and arts workers. The first was the establishment of the Hybrid Arts Committee—later the New Media Arts Board, now the Emerging and Experimental Arts Fund—which provided dedicated funding to artists whose work sat outside conventional parameters.

The second was a call for EOIs to establish a new performing arts publication. At the time, there were at least six dedicated visual arts journals, but following the demise of *New Theatre Australia* (and *Spectator Burns*), nothing that engaged in any considered way with the performing arts, and certainly nothing that understood contemporary practice as interconnected. Open City submitted a successful tender, and in 1994, *RealTime* emerged as a free national arts publication. I can still see that first cover with Angharad Wynne Jones with her bow and arrow. It was a massive achievement for two theatre makers with really no experience in publishing and was passionately welcomed by artists and readers across the country. Its success saw Open City securing ongoing funding, with *RealTime* consistently growing in print numbers and distribution reach, peaking in the 2000s with 56-page tabloid bi-monthly editions, 27,000 copies delivered to 1,000 locations across Australia, all on

the smell of the proverbial oily rag. As if that wasn't enough, in 1996, Keith and Virginia established the RealTime website, publishing online reviews in response to Barrie Kosky's 1996 festival. From that year on every bi-monthly print edition was also published online, reaching a greater range of readers, some 35% of them overseas. In 2009, an online producer was appointed to deliver more frequent emailed editions, paving the way to sole online weekly publishing in 2016-17.

From the outset, RealTime was national and inclusive. From the outset, it was multidisciplinary. And from the outset, it sought to establish a context whereby the work was engaged with on its own terms. At times, this could be a struggle for writers, but Keith and Virginia were very clear about rejecting the kind of hostile and combative criticism that distinguished so much mainstream reviewing throughout the 1980s and 90s. I mean what do you do with that stuff? Either artists were so demoralised that they even stopped making work, or they were so angry that they couldn't hear what might have usefully been said. Keith and Virginia didn't just establish a publication, they encouraged an experiential approach to writing and thinking through and responding to practice that emphasised what they have described as "constructive criticism from a position of considered subjectivity."

Critically Keith and Virginia have also developed a network of writers across Australia, training and mentoring writers from many backgrounds, but importantly encouraging artists as writers, in the regions, the suburbs, and capital cities, ensuring a diversity of voices to respond to the plurality of practice. Through advocacy, editorial, essays and commissions, and their extensive network of writers, RealTime and its affiliated projects represent an unstinting commitment to this country's arts ecology. Australian writers travelling to overseas arts events provided RealTime readers with an international perspective. Only in RealTime could coverage of innovation of this scope and across the arts be found under one cover, alerting local artists to the work of their peers across Australia and beyond.

RealTime has been a massive project tracking, mapping, reviewing and recording Australia's changing arts and cultural landscape. RealTime has encompassed the formative and emergent (including the role of tertiary education in developing future generations of artists, creatives and professionals), independent artists and makers,

as well as mainstage and large-scale works. While RealTime was particularly interested in performance (live art, experimental theatre, dance, music, sound), it engaged increasingly with the experimental and 'performative turn' in photomedia, film, video, installation, interactives, and intermedial practices responding with generosity and rigour to the work that Australian artists were making.

But that's not all! Through RealTime, Keith and Virginia have also published video interviews and books, and been acute and perspicacious commentators on arts policy and funding. As such, the importance of the archive they have built is inestimable.

And I haven't even mentioned the review writing workshops. From 1995-2017 RealTime received 35 commissions from international and local art festivals and arts organisations in London, Bristol, Vancouver, Jakarta, Singapore and Lyon, every Australian capital city and Darwin, Bendigo, Cairns and Albury to run review-writing workshops or reviewing teams, often publishing daily online. These were variously conducted by Keith, Virginia and Associate Editor Gail Priest as well as by music reviewer Matthew Lorenzon in 2015-17.

Their generosity, passion, hard work, and tireless commitment to artists and all aspects of art practice is unparalleled. Of course, they have worked with great people over the years, and here I really want to acknowledge Gail Priest—another legend.

I've spoken for much longer than I should have, and even so I haven't sufficiently detailed the incredible impact of RealTime over its quarter century history. It's wonderful to know that the unique cultural record that is RealTime won't be lost, and so I want to gratefully acknowledge the University of New South Wales Library which has championed the preservation of RealTime in particular, Martin Borchert, whose leadership has seen the UNSW Library partnering with the National Library of Australia, who likewise recognises the importance of RealTime, to place the archive on TROVE. I can't resist the pun: it is indeed a Treasure Trove, and so wonderful that it will be widely and enduringly accessible online. The support of the UNSW and the NLA makes the TROVE RealTime archive an invaluable resource for Australian

artists' sense of their own and their collective histories, for inspiring students and emerging artists, for providing rich material for researchers and arts historians, as well as anybody curious about what happened.

Complementing the TROVE archive is RealTime's upgraded website which includes more writing, many artist interviews on video, video art, sound art, art travel advice and other RealTime publications. It's a treasure chest of art insights and experiences.

Nevertheless, I have to say that I really miss RealTime. It has been an essential part of my life for 25 years, and I know that's true for everyone here tonight. There really aren't the words—which is why I've used so many—to thank Keith and Virginia for their commitment, passion, rigour, tenacity and hard work, and above all for putting artists and their work front and centre. I'd like you to all put your hands together for the fabulous Virginia Baxter and Keith Gallasch. Absolutely mammoth achievement.

It gives me enormous pleasure to declare both the TROVE Archive of the RealTime print editions 1994-2015 and the RealTime website up and running.

### **Thanks from Keith and Virginia**

We wish to express our heartfelt gratitude:

To Sarah Miller, friend, writer, supporter and a great facilitator of art that makes a difference, in the field and in education, for launching the TROVE archive of RealTime.

To Martin Borchet and the UNSW Library staff and to Dr Hilary Berthon and the National Library of Australia for recognising the cultural and historical value of RealTime.

To Tony MacGregor, Open City chairperson, collaborator, broadcasting innovator and friend.

And to all our board, Tony, John Davis and Phillipa McGuinness who are here tonight, and Julie Robb and Urszula Dawkins, for the depth of their understanding and support.

Thanks to Jeremy Smith of the Australia Council for your kind words and tireless commitment to community, experimental and emerging art

To former staff of recent years, Katerina Sakkas, Felicity Clark and Lauren Carroll Harris for their commitment and passion.



To our designer Graeme Smith, to webmaster The Mighty Wonton and our online producer in London, Lucy Parakhina.

To the Guardians of RealTime, Caroline Wake, Erin Brannigan, Katerina Sakkas and Gail Priest, particularly to Katerina who worked tirelessly with us on the archive in 2018 as Assistant Editor.

And above all thank to our dear, impossibly multiskilled and talented friend Gail Priest, who left RealTime in 2014 (having joined us in 1997), but whose knowledge of the archive, advice and ongoing help are invaluable.

Enormous thanks go to Erin Brannigan and the UNSW School of Arts and Media. Erin played an instrumental role in this archiving of RealTime and conceived and curated this wonderful exhibition, *In Response: Dialogues with RealTime*, in collaboration with Jackson Mann of UNSW Library.

To all those who have contributed to RealTime over these many years—writers, readers, supporters from across Australia and beyond—thanks for being part of the epic making of an intensely memorable, very much alive archive. #

