MARCS Auditory Laboratories is the recipient of a new $3.4m grant entitled From Talking Heads to Thinking Heads: A Research Platform for Human Communication Science.

The project is funded by an ARC Thinking Systems Special Initiative grant to UWS Chief Investigator, Prof Denis Burnham, Director of MARCS Auditory Laboratories for the five year period 2006-2011.

The goal of this project is to improve human-machine interaction by establishing a new generation Talking Head, a Thinking Head that learns from its interactions with humans. Outcomes will bear on human-machine communication, telecommunication, e-commerce, and mobile phone technology; personalised aids for disabled users, the hearing impaired, the elderly, children with learning difficulties and on foreign language learning; and will facilitate the development of animation in new media, film, and games.

Beyond such ends, the Thinking Head will also serve as a research platform — a tangible focus for motivating and integrating exciting developments in programming, visual graphics, voice synthesis and recognition, dialog systems, and performance art.

The research team from UWS include: Prof Denis Burnham, A/Prof Kate Stevens, Prof Chris Davis, Dr Takaaki Kuratate, A/Prof Jeesun Kim, Dr Garth Paine, Dr Christine Kitamura and Stelarc.

Researchers from other institutions include: Prof Robert Dale (Macquarie), Prof David Powers (Flinders), Prof Michael Wagner (University of Canberra), Prof Alan Black and Dr Tanya Schultz (Carnegie Mellon), Assistant Prof Jörg Buchholz and A/Prof Hans Heinrich Bothe (the Technical University of Denmark), and Dr Sebastian Möller (Berlin University of Technology).
Hybrid Arts

33˚ south is a collaboration between Sarah Waterson and Juan Salazar from the School of Communication Arts. It is an audio-visual installation that maps Sydney on to Santiago using a custom made data mapping system and database.

Sydney and Santiago (Chile) both lie on the parallel 33˚ south. Both cities are post-colonial urban spaces, with complex cultural and political histories. This project aims to juxtapose these two apparently unrelated urban spaces by collapsing their histories and geographies into a new, imaginary and virtual place with its own narratives of place and belonging. This project is a collaboration between a new media artist (Waterson) and a visual anthropologist (Salazar).

Using video and audio data from both locations, Sarah and Juan aim to create a heterotopic space, an indeterminate space based on real and imagined information. This is developed through a mapping and visualisation system that generates video-audio scapes for projection, geo-referenced to both cities. The imaginary cityscape will exhibit its own histories, futures and narratives, blurring the distinction between material spaces and imagined spaces. This project is about the city as a virtual body with narratives of mobile geography and the imaginary. It will result in a prototype installation for exhibition at Casula Powerhouse (Sydney), July 2007.

Books

In OCEANS OF LOVE, Melanie Oppenheimer traces the life of an intrepid and extraordinary young Australian woman who, in 1915, went to nurse on the battlefields of a war half way around the world. Based on an extraordinary collection of letters written home to her family (signed ‘oceans of love’), this book is a witty and evocative reminder of a remarkable period in history from the perspective of an Australian girl from the bush.

At the outbreak of World War 1, Narrelle Hobbes was the matron of the remote Brewarrina hospital in north-western NSW. Keen to be an active participant in the war, Narrelle, aged 36, travelled alone to London in March 1915 to join Queen Alexandra’s Imperial Military Nursing Service Reserve (QAIMNSR). By May she was in Malta nursing the sick and wounded from Gallipoli. She later nursed in Sicily, India and Mesopotamia (now modern day Iran/Iraq). The Mesopotamia campaign, fought between the British and the Turks, is one of the largely forgotten theatres of the war. Narrelle spent ten months in Basra and later Amara, on the Tigris River, nursing casualties and patients with appalling diseases such as enteric fever, dysentery, typhoid and cholera. After becoming sick she spent six months recuperating in the foothills of the Himalayas at the remote hill station of Binsar in Uttar Pradesh.

Out now with ABC Books

In KAY ANDERSON’S provocative new account, she argues that British colonial encounters in Australia from the late 1700s with the apparently unimproved condition of the Australian Aborigine, viewed against an understanding of ‘humanity’ of the time (that is, as characterised by separation from nature), precipitated a crisis in existing ideas of what it meant to be human. This lucid, intelligent and persuasive argument will be necessary reading for all scholars and upper-level students interested in the history and theories of ‘race’, critical human geography, anthropology, and Australian and environmental studies.

Out now with Routledge.
Feature

Byron Bay Writers’ Festival

According to Professor Ien Ang, of the Centre for Cultural Research the world really is in a state of transition, and we don’t know where that’s going. In a few decades from now, 2030, the world will be extremely different from what we’re experiencing now, and Australians better start thinking about that. We have to think, for example about the environmental crisis; global warming is being talked about all the time, but I think what we see in Australia is still extreme indifference to that — that’s one thing. Another is the ageing of the population, mentioned a lot by policy makers, but what kinds of implications does it have culturally? Then there is the world of economics. What we will see in the coming few decades is a huge rise of both China and India as major economic superpowers that will change certainly the Asia-Pacific region... not just the economic dynamics but also the cultural dynamics.

Political issues: international relations — will we see an undoing of United States dominance? I’m not sure... Will there be more terrorist attacks? I think that’s a major issue — the fact that Australia has not experienced a terrorist attack on its soil is part of the “lucky country” idea, but at the same time it might also lull us into a sense of safety that is unwarranted.

And then of course there are the technological changes — the internet is going to change our way of life even much more than it has now, and it will definitely have major implications for the arts. We really need to think about those things when we think about Australian culture and the way in which we live our lives. I think these are questions that are much broader than just questions of national identity. Identity is important, but identity can only be looked at these days in a global context.

Dr Diana Blom from the School of Communication Arts has been re-elected to the board of the International Society for Music Education for another two years. The next full Board meeting will be held in Bologna in July 2007. She is also on the ISME Publications Standing Committee.

CD Release: PARALLEL LINES by SynC

SynC is Michael Atherton (ancient and contemporary acoustic instruments) and Garth Paine (electronics). Both musicians have extensive histories as composers, performers and academics. They have both published and performed original works internationally, and through SynC, are endeavouring to extend their compositional province to explore more fully the potential of a live acoustic and electronic ensemble.

In so doing their investigations delve into contemporary approaches to musical Composition and Performance. Focusing on the interface between acoustic and electronic music. SynC is an experimental ensemble for acoustic instruments and live electronics, including the processing of live acoustic input, cross-synthesis and synthesis artefacts. This composition/performance collaboration seeks to contextualise ancient and modern musical languages within a single form. It does so by utilising ancient and contemporary acoustic musical instruments (e.g. oud, hurdy-gurdy, gongs, marimba and percussion) as the sonic foundation for complex live electronic processes, which generate a vast array of timbral environments, responsive to the acoustic input, but simultaneously independent. This exploration seeks to re-contextualise the acoustic instruments, whilst also grounding the live electronic sounds within a rich musical heritage.

This musical practice engages with discourse around notions of composition and performance, particularly, how these can be defined as potentials rather than as fixed inscriptions, and how within a computer music/software based environment, the notions of instrument, composition and performance become blurred and possibly take on new meaning. SynC also engages with new approaches to musical instruments, focusing on electronic music and New Interfaces for Musical Expression. Drawing on the control apparent in acoustic instruments, this innovative approach to the integration of electronic and acoustic music is unusual, as the development of new instrument interfaces is usually driven from a technological rather than the player’s perspective.

This exploration is manifest in Garth Paine’s use of a Wacom Drawing Tablet as a multi-dimensional control surface for live performance, allowing him to discard the constraints of the laptop musician, always hidden behind a screen, and take his place as a musician on the stage. Techniques for computer-driven percussion instruments that utilise Chaotic and Fractal patterning have been developed with Michael Atherton, and can be heard on Track 4, Aletryomancy.

Does Australia need a cultural policy?

Professor Ien Ang (ARC Professorial Fellow and member of the Centre for Cultural Research) contributed to a Byron Bay Writers’ Festival discussion on Australian Cultural Policy.

The panel discussing the need for a cultural policy. Left to right: Lisa Anderson, John Harding, David Throsby, Neil Armfield, Ien Ang.
Conference News
SELF at Prestigious International Conference

The 4th International Biennial SELF Research Conference was recently held at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor (July, 23-26). Entitled: Self-Concept, Motivation, Social and Personal Identity for the 21st Century, the conference attracted participants from around the world, including recognised leaders in many fields relating to the conference theme.

Keynote addresses were provided by luminaries such as Albert Bandura, Edward Deci, Jari-Erik Nurmi, Roy Baumeister, and Herbert Marsh. The quality of the Keynote addresses was matched by nearly 200 other presentations exploring self, identity and motivation from a range of theoretical perspectives, using highly sophisticated research methodologies, and framing applications for topics as diverse as academic achievement, bullying, coping and resilience, society and culture, workplace performance, moral engagement, attachment to others, self-regulation, language acquisition, and physical health and well-being. In all these presentations the critical role of self and perceptions of self was clearly highlighted—demonstrating the cogency of self and self-related constructs to substantive outcomes that most professionals and researchers consider central to enhanced human functioning and positive well-being.

One notable feature of the conference was the outstanding contribution of SELF Centre HDR students and staff to the academic (and social!) life of the conference. Every SELF Centre student presented at least two first-author papers at the conference, with many students also being co-authors on other presentations. Each SELF Centre academic presented at least two first-author papers as well as contributing to numerous student papers.

Upcoming conferences
Aboriginal Studies: Making the Connections
Thursday 2nd and Friday 3rd November, 2006,
Bankstown Sports Club, 8 Greenfield Parade, Bankstown
ASA (Aboriginal Studies Association) conferences are well known for interactive workshops and practical strategies; sharing resources and best practice; the latest research; and, networking, contacts, and learning.

Connecting schools and communities; Engaging Indigenous learners; Practical teaching resources;
Results of recent research: Ideas that work in teaching and learning at all levels. Heaps of display space.
Inspiring keynotes Linda Burney MP, Rhonda Craven, Paul Hughes, Andrea Harms (Dare to Lead), Patrick Dodson and more; Aboriginal education forum; Elders sharing circles, community capacity; HSC Aboriginal Studies and much more.
Dinner speaker: Warren Mundine; MC: Dave Ella.
A must for educators and researchers who are committed to making a difference.

School of Education HDR Student and Staff Research Conference
Saturday, October 7 Bankstown Campus
Keynote Address: Professor Joanne Reid, Charles Sturt University, Chair of the AARE Doctoral Thesis Award Committee.

The theme this year is Engaging Research. Drawing on the university goal of engagement, the conference aims to explore a range of staff and HDR student research that has a broad focus of engagement: community, disciplinary and professional. Equally, the theme of Engaging Research relates to showcasing innovation, and providing a forum in which students and staff can share ideas, make connections and engage in discussion.

The following workshops will be available for staff and students:
Community Engagement: Professor Margaret Vickers.
Transgressive Methodologies: Dr Sue Gannon & Dr Catherine Camden Pratt.
Discourse Analysis: Dr Sue Saltmarsh.
Introduction to NVivo: Eira Sproats.