

The Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader  
Edited by Stella Brennan and Su Ballard  
Designed by Jonty Valentine  
© 2008 the artists and authors.

All rights reserved. Apart from fair dealing for the purposes of private study, research, criticism or review as permitted under the New Zealand Copyright Act no part of this publication may be reproduced without permission.

"Internet; Environment" copyright © Julian Priest 2007, GNU General Public License.

ISBN: 978-0-9582789-9-7

A catalogue record for this book is available from The National Library of New Zealand

Title: The Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader  
Author/Contributor: Brennan, Stella (ed); Ballard, Su (ed)  
Publisher: Aotearoa Digital Arts and Clouds



Aotearoa Digital Arts Trust  
[www.aotearoadigitalarts.org.nz](http://www.aotearoadigitalarts.org.nz)



Clouds  
PO Box 68-187, Newton, Auckland 1145  
Aotearoa New Zealand  
[www.clouds.co.nz](http://www.clouds.co.nz)

Every effort has been made to trace the copyright holders of the illustrations reproduced in this book. Unfortunately, this has not been possible in all cases. The editors and publisher would be pleased to hear from any copyright holders whom they have been unable to contact and to print due acknowledgement in subsequent editions.

Unless otherwise noted, all images are reproduced courtesy of the artists.

Editing a book takes a long time, and many people have helped along the way. Stella and Su would like firstly to thank the authors and artists who have contributed to this book, and the institutions and individuals who shared their image archives with us. We would also like to acknowledge the work and support of the following: Nova Paul, Leoni Schmidt, Col Fay, Khylla Russell, Justine Camp, Letitia Lam, Pam McKinlay, Geoff Noller, Sarah McMillan, Robert Leonard, Melinda Rackham, Mercedes Vincente, and Gwynneth Porter, Deborah Orum and Warren Olds from Clouds. And of course, Jonty Valentine for the hours spent in design. Thanks also to the ADA community, and especially to the other ADA trustees, Janine Randerson, Douglas Bagnall and Zita Joyce.

Thanks most of all to our families: Nathan, Moss and David.

The *Aotearoa Digital Arts Reader* would not have been realised without the support of AUT University, Otago Polytechnic and Creative New Zealand.



# Real Time, Virtual Space, Live Theatre

Helen Varley Jameison

Part of what makes theatre magical for me is its liveness: what I'm seeing on stage is happening now and only now, in this precise 'real time' moment and in the presence of these specific people. It's a shared experience that can't be captured or recorded, never to be repeated exactly the same. In today's digitised, mediated, sampled, recombinant and remixed world, the truly live is an elusive and precious thing. 'Real time' is also elusive. Similar to the theatre concept of being 'in the moment,' real time exists in real life but too often gets lost in our obsessing over what's past or yet to come. Furthermore, real time in the virtuality of cyberspace is both meaningless—for time itself is something quite different in cyberspace than it is in real life—and simultaneously the only way to speak about time; the current moment is all there is.

What does it mean to make live theatre in real time and virtual space? How do we do it and what *is* it? Is it still theatre because of its liveness—or is it not theatre because of its absences? Can a physically absent performer have presence? These are some of the questions that underpin my artistic practice in what I call 'cyberformance.' By cyberformance, I mean live collaborative performance that uses Internet technologies to bring remote performers together in real time; the audience can be online and remote, or in a proximal space. Cyberformance is a form within the wider genre of networked performance, which includes any live performance event that involves some form of networking. This can include computer networks (via the internet or local networks), mobile phone networks, GPS devices and motion sensors, as well as feedback loops between devices where there may be no human involved.<sup>1</sup>

Artists were creating networked events long before the Internet came into being—via shortwave radio, telephone, fax and satellite technologies, and even the good old postal system. Although most of what's been documented was initiated in the northern hemisphere, New Zealand wasn't entirely out of the loop. Our geographical remoteness, along with our 'early adopter' attitude to technology, made Aotearoa attractive to international artists looking to extend their performances to the furthest reaches. In the mid-80s, American sound artist and event-maker Charlie Morrow organised *Radio Solstice*, a series of networked events which brought together real time participants from North America, Scandinavia, and New Zealand—where Phil Dadson led a group of drummers in the Maungawhau crater in Auckland.<sup>2</sup> Morrow gathered musical contributions from around the globe via shortwave radio, mixed them in real time and re-broadcast the result from his New York studio. Although the remote contributors couldn't communicate with or hear each other, their performances were simultaneous and part of a single live event.<sup>3</sup>

Another early networked project was *Burntime*, an interactive exhibition based at Artpace in Auckland in 1991. Visiting North American artists Cheryl Casteen and Charles Flickinger invited local artists and the public to join in a five-day international art exchange during which participants' art work was transmitted and received by fax and telephone. A speaker phone facilitated the

1. I exclude online gaming and social networks from my definition of cyberformance because although they can be described as a form of networked performance they are not primarily undertaken for an audience or as an artistic activity.
2. Phil Dadson, email communication with the author, May 2007.
3. Scott Westerfeld, "Charlie Morrow Alarums and Excursions," *TDR* (1988 – ) 34, no.3 (1990): 129 – 47. See also Jerome Rothenberg, Charlie Morrow, and Richard Schechner, "Making Waves: An Interview with Charlie Morrow," *TDR* (1988) 34, no.3 (1990): 148 – 58.

exchange of music, story and an inter-hemisphere jam session between musicians in Auckland and Washington DC. Reviewer Julia Stoops wrote that "the group psyche blossomed through a sense of joining and of union. There was the thrill of emotionally touching people on the other side of the world at that very second."<sup>4</sup>

Live performances were broadcast over the internet from New Zealand as early as 1994, when Richard Naylor webcast the Tawa Schools Music Festival from the Michael Fowler Centre in Wellington; it was seen and heard in a dozen countries.<sup>5</sup> At this time the World Wide Web was in its infancy; using the Internet as a broadcast medium was pioneering, and as far as I have discovered there was only one New Zealander engaging in networked performance of the kind that I call cyberformance. This person is only identifiable via a .nz email address in the programme of the first documented online performance, *Hamnet*, which was staged in an Internet Relay Chat (IRC) channel in 1994 and led by American theatre academic Stuart Harris.<sup>6</sup> The eighty-line script bore some resemblance to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, with the addition of spirited word-play, IRC jargon and contemporary references. The cast was largely based in North America, with a few international participants including the mystery New Zealander. Harris cast the performance half an hour before show-time, and the debut was interrupted when a lightning storm took out a key player's Internet connection (apparently the second performance went more smoothly).

Online networked performance continued to evolve during the 1990s, mainly led by northern hemisphere practitioners: *The Plaintext Players* further developed the art of IRC performance, and *Desktop Theatre* staged theatrical interventions in the online chat environment The Palace.<sup>7</sup> Developed as a 2D graphical chat environment, The Palace allowed users to create their own unique visual avatars, speak aloud with Text2Speech audio, and create their own Palace if they had access to a web server.<sup>8</sup> The degree of customisation, the user-friendly interface, and the possibility of adding your own scripting made The Palace very appealing to both social chatters and online performers. I discovered *Desktop Theater* and their work in The Palace in 1999 and thus began my adventures in cyberformance. I was living in Scotland at the time, and would regularly get up at 3 or 4am to join the group's 'dreaming' improvisations, collaborating with players in Europe and the USA. I discovered a whole new kind of performativity in my fingertips, and became fascinated by the Internet as a site for live performance, creativity and imagination.

As a theatre practitioner, I was curious about the relationship between cyberformance and live theatre: I was interested in the immediacy and 'presence' of the remote performers, and the potential it offered for recontextualisation. I had the opportunity to experiment with this in 2001, when I collaborated with director Jill Greenhalgh on her performance installation project *Water[war]s* at the Transit Festival of Women's Performance (Odin Teatret, Denmark).<sup>9</sup> I presented a cyberformance element as part of the larger work, with Adriene Jenik and Lisa Brenneis of Desktop Theater. Our audience consisted of contemporary theatre practitioners who had never encountered anything like cyberformance before; some were amazed and intrigued, while others were outraged that this could be presented as 'theatre'. Aside from causing a small storm of controversy, I learned that many in the audience were captivated by my

4. Julia Stoops, "Burntime: Communication between the Hemispheres," *Art New Zealand* 60 (Spring 1991): 3.
5. Richard Naylor, email communication with the author, May 2007.
6. Stuart Harris, Gayle Kidder and the Hamnet Players. "The Hamnet Players: An Archive," 1993. <http://micro5.mscc.huji.ac.il/~msdanet/cyberpl@y/hamnet-index.html>
7. Plaintext Players. <http://yin.arts.uci.edu/~players/DesktopTheater>, <http://www.desktoptheater.org>
8. The Palace was developed by Communities.com from 1995 to 2000 as a free graphical chat application; although the software development has ceased, the 'Palatian' community continues to exist as a social network.
9. <http://www.themagdalenaproject.org/waterwars>

own ‘performance’. I hadn’t actually considered my physical presence part of the performance—I was sitting at the side of the stage with my laptop, mediating and contributing to what was happening on screen, blissfully unaware of being observed as a performer. Laptop performances are often dismissed as visually dull and performatively boring, yet the response of my theatre colleagues suggested that this doesn’t have to be the case. The unconscious intensity of my focus, and the sense of anticipation as I typed and the audience waited for the result, created an engaging performance in itself. This experience led me to consider the actual integration of cyberformance into live theatre.

I first explored this idea in *the[abc]experiment* (2001 – 02) and from that project, formed the globally dispersed cyberformance troupe *Avatar Body Collision* with Vicki Smith (NZ), Karla Ptacek (UK) and Leena Saarinen (Finland).<sup>10</sup> Without ever meeting physically, we have collaborated on ten shows using a variety of technologies and presented our work at festivals and conferences around the world. Some of our shows have been staged in a physical space for a proximal audience, with one or more of the group present in the same space, while other shows have been created and performed entirely online, for an online audience.

<Ru> Vi.  
 <Vi> yes  
 <Ru> How do you find Flo?  
 <Vi> She seems much the same  
 <Ru> ...  
 <Vi> oh!  
 <Vi> has she not been told?  
 [...] {lovely head movement Ru}  
 <Ru> God forbid  
 [...] {flo enter smoothly and slide on, good side}  
 <Ru> Holding hands... that way  
 <flo> Dreaming of... love  
 [...] {Ru pick up your cues}  
 <Vi> Flo  
 <flo> Yes  
 <Vi> How do you think Ru is looking?  
 [...] {lovely turn Flo}  
 <flo> One sees little in this light.  
 [...] {Vi cross AFTER Flo’s line}  
 [Vi] { ...}  
 <flo> Oh!  
 <flo> Does she not know?  
 <Vi> Please God not.

The above is an extract from a rehearsal of Samuel Beckett’s dramaticule *Come and Go*, which *Avatar Body Collision* performed at the 070707 UpStage Festival (2007). In a break from our usual devising process, we chose to experiment with the translation of an existing stage text to the virtual stage, and Karla took the role of director. The director’s comments are prefaced by [...] and interspersed among the performers’ lines, curly brackets showing that they are ‘thoughts’

10. <http://www.abcexperiment.org>  
<http://www.avatarbodycollision.org>

1: Avatar Body Collision, *Logging With the Lololols*, cyberformance at Virtual Minds Congress, Bremen, Germany, 2004, stills from video by Lola Castro Ruiz.  
 2: Avatar Body Collision, *swim—an exercise in remote intimacy*, cyberformance, 2007, stills from video by Suzon Fuks.



fig. 1



fig. 2

rather than spoken aloud. For this performance we worked in UpStage, a purpose-built software for cyberformance that we developed with digital artist and programmer Douglas Bagnall.<sup>11</sup>

UpStage came about through our desire for a single application with which to devise and perform online, that would also be easily accessible to a wide audience. Initially, Avatar Body *Collision* worked with free chat applications including iVisit (an online audio-visual conferencing application) and The Palace. These and other applications that we investigated were designed for ‘safe’ social chat rather than live theatrical performance, which inevitably meant that we reached limits where the software would not allow us to do what we wanted artistically. Despite these limitations, we created four shows using iVisit and The Palace before developing UpStage.

Three of these shows included a live stage component—one or two performers in front of a proximal audience, while the remote performers appeared on a screen at the back of the stage. The on-stage performers become mediators (as I had been in *Water[war]s*) as well as performers. In *Screen Save Her* (2002), Karla appeared on stage as BP, a sales rep. for a gene-stealing multinational biotech corporation, promoting the latest in body enhancements and dressed in a costume comprising a giant tongue with a head-dress of eyeballs. The densely layered plot was structured as a game in which BP eventually entered the screen as an avatar in The Palace, monitored by three mysterious women in web cam windows (neatly reversing the usual surveillance set-up). Proximal audiences at the two performances were guided by BP’s character on stage, and saw the remote performers via Karla’s projected laptop screen.<sup>12</sup> It was not possible for online audiences to see the performance, as they would miss important on-stage elements, as well as be unable to replicate the ‘screenography’—that is, the precise arrangement of the various application windows on the computer desktop.

The same format was used in *swim—an exercise in remote intimacy* (first performed in 2002), this time with myself on stage and the other three colliders appearing remotely.<sup>13</sup> Inspired by our experiences of online relationships, we used swimming as a metaphor for reaching out to distant lovers. Myths and legends featuring lovers separated by water enabled us to tap into the universality of separated lovers—the technology may have changed since the days of Hero and Leander but the essence remains the same—as well as provide the audience with recognisable stories and signs as entry points into the work. My character was a mix of technician, spiritual medium and cyber-lover whose physical presence acted as a conduit for the appearance of the remote performers before the proximal audience. Once again, it was not accessible to an online audience.

These performances and *Lagging With the Lololols* (2004), in which both Karla and Leena were on stage, are unarguably ‘theatre’ as they were presented to a proximal audience in a physical space.<sup>14</sup> The projected computer desktop extended the stage area into the ethereal territory of cyberspace. The real-time presence of remote performers was framed by software interfaces and mediated through webcams, avatars and computerised voices. *Lagging With the Lololols* has been the only performance where we’ve had NO technical problems (such as lag or freezing of an image) and afterwards, the audience asked why we risked the live online element. The show had been so ‘perfect’ that they had trouble believing that the webcams weren’t prerecorded video. I’ve had the same feeling

11. <http://www.upstage.org.nz>

12. Performed at the 12-12

*Time-based Media Festival*, Cardiff, and Riverside Studios in London, May 2002.

13. Swim has been performed at *Medi@terra*, Athens, December 2002; *ANET Festival*, Belgrade, December 2002; *Magdalena Australia*, Brisbane, April 2003; *City of Women*, Ljubljana, October 2003; *Eclectic Tech Carnival*, Belgrade, July 2004; and the *NZ Fringe Festival*, Wellington, February 2005.

14. *Lagging with the Lololols* was performed at the *Virtual Minds Congress*, Bremen, May 2004.

watching other shows when the technology has been so good that it could be a live feed from the next room, not coming from thousands of miles away via the inherently unstable network of computers, routers and cables that makes up the Internet. An awareness of the liveness and tenuousness of the medium is important as it makes the audience complicit in the risk the performers are taking. *Belonging* (first performed in 2007) includes a scene in which the UpStage text chat window is projected onto my body and represented on the online stage via my web cam; audience members have commented that seeing their own chat contribution appear in my web cam avatar reinforced the immediacy of the performance.

Avatar Body *Collision* doesn’t strive to make work that appears to be ‘perfect’, and *Lagging With the Lololols* taught us the importance of visible blips, delays and glitches. There are huge risks in performing live over the Internet, and despite rapid improvements the reality is that the Internet in 2008 is still an unstable environment. Even on the best broadband connection, you can experience lag. Even with a brand new web cam, your image can unexpectedly freeze. Even if you ensure that all the components at your end are as high-spec as possible, there are many other variables that are beyond your control. And power cuts do happen! But this is exactly the magic of live performance, of the relationship between real life and real time: whatever happens becomes part of that unique performance. Just as the lightning’s interruption is now a feature of the first performance of *Hamnet*, technical glitches are part of the fabric of cyberspace.

The move to UpStage and the expansion of our audience to anyone with an Internet connection and a web browser has increased the variables enormously. Every different combination of hardware, operating system, browser and Internet connection creates a specific environment in which someone is receiving our performance. That we can be pretty sure that an UpStage performance should be more or less the same across such variables is an enormous achievement in itself. We still run into some interesting discrepancies, such as particular stages inexplicably loading faster in some browsers than others, but with the release of UpStage V2 in June 2007 we have ironed out most of the idiosyncracies and achieved a much more stable platform.

The launch of UpStage V2 was celebrated with a two-week exhibition at the New Zealand Film Archive in Wellington and a one-day festival of performances, the 070707 UpStage Festival. The festival featured thirteen performances created and performed in UpStage by artists from around the world. Most had already had some contact with UpStage through the workshops and open walk-throughs that we have been holding since 2003, but for all it was the first time they had presented their own UpStage show to the public. For some, such as puppeteer Rebekah Wild, it was their first experience of creating in the digital environment. The shows were presented on Saturday 7 July from 2.30pm to midnight NZ time, live online and screened at the New Zealand Film Archive. Two had a proximal element: *The Best Air Guitar Album in the World Vol. II*, with Anaesthesia Associates ‘lap(top)synching’ at the Film Archive in Wellington, and *the old hotel*, with an audience and web cam performer on-site in London. The London audience were treated to breakfast, as it was 9.30am (8.30pm in New Zealand). The multiple time zones, which extended from Vancouver right around the globe to New Zealand, made programming the festival a challenge; but this is cyberformance—real time is the only time.<sup>15</sup>

15. 070707 performers and crew were located in the following countries and time zones: New Zealand (Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington and Dunedin), Australia (Brisbane), Finland, Serbia, Croatia, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK, Canada (Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal) and the USA (New York).

The possibility of playing simultaneously to a remote online audience and a proximal audience has led me to consider the *intermedial* audience—a potentially new form of audience existing in-between the online and the proximal, in the liminal time and space of cyberperformance. Avatar Body *Collision* has begun to explore an engagement with this audience in two recent works, *Familiar Features* (2006) and *Belonging* (2007). Both works can be viewed online as well as proximally, with interaction between performers and audience as well as between the audiences. I am interested in what points of commonality there might be for the separate audiences; and how the online and proximal audiences might interact. Without devolving to a variant of the chat room, what kind of performances can we create in UpStage that engage the intermedial audience?

Some of the 070707 performances continue to explore these ideas. During September 2007, *the old hotel* was re-staged in London for Cherry Truluck's Master of Arts, and *Please Stay Alert At All Times* was performed at Manchester's Green Room.<sup>16</sup> Both performances had proximal and online audiences, and for both I was in the online audience. As an online audience member, it is difficult to get a sense of the proximal audience unless they are shown on web cam or identify themselves in the text chat; however the knowledge that they *are there* impacts on my experience of the online performance. I may be sitting in my bed at 6am with my laptop and coffee, immersed in what is playing out on the screen in front of me, but I am conscious that there are people on the other side of the world having a shared experience in a physical space, and that at least some of their experience is interconnected with what I am experiencing.

As a cyberperformance practitioner, I relish any opportunity to step into the audience role (although it's impossible for me to see it as someone who is new to cyberperformance), and in this respect the 070707 festival and ongoing performances are invaluable. As well as UpStage performances, I also attend performances in Second Life, the Visitors' Studio, web cam performances and proximal events that incorporate Internet technology.<sup>17</sup> The Plaintext Players still exist and are now creating work that integrates online and proximal elements, and Desktop Theater's Adriene Jenik is employing networked technologies in her recent large scale *Spec Flic* events.<sup>18</sup> An archive of networked performance is maintained as part of Turbulence.org's Networked Performance Blog that also links to current networked performance (in the broadest possible sense) happening online and around the world.<sup>19</sup> The Internet, wireless and mobile telecommunications, sensor technologies, Geographic Information Systems, ubiquitous computing, online social networking platforms and multiuser environments such as Second Life offer a wealth of live performance, music, storytelling and installation events involving geographically distributed participants.

Evidence of similar growth in artists working in the field of networked performance in New Zealand is harder to find, but it is there. Dancer/choreographer Becca Wood is experimenting with choreography for geographically dispersed dancers, using software such as iVisit to link dancers in New Zealand and the United States. As part of his doctoral research, cross-media artist Dan Agnihotri-Clark has curated collaborative events that explore (among other things) the indeterminate nature of networked performance.<sup>20</sup> Agnihotri-Clark is also using UpStage as a creative platform with Anaesthesia Associates,

16. *Please Stay Alert At All Times* and *the old hotel* were devised and performed by Truluck, Fuks, Bryce and Cunningham. <http://www.cherrytruluck.co.uk/>  
 17. Second Life is a commercial online virtual world. <http://www.secondlife.com>. Created by London-based Furtherfield.org, The Visitors' Studio is a real-time audio-visual collaborative platform. <http://blog.visitorsstudio.org/>  
 18. <http://www.specflic.net>  
 19. <http://transition.turbulence.org/blog/index.html>  
 20. <http://www.intimacyandinyer-face.net>



fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5

3. Anaesthesia Associates (Daniel Agnihotri-Clark and Paul Bradley). *The Best Air Guitar Album in the World Vol. II*, screen shot from cyberperformance in 070707 UpStage Festival, July 2007.  
 4. Rebekah Wild and Vicki Smith. *Baba Yaga*, screen shot from cyberperformance in 070707 UpStage Festival, July 2007.  
 5. Marcus Williams (NZ) and Martin Krusche (Austria). *International Smoke-In*, 2009, with participants Dagmar Eberhardt (Graz, Austria), Monochrom (Vienna), Dagmar Kase (Tallinn, Estonia) and mattheu & molnick (St. Gallen, Switzerland), networked performance, ADA 'Emerge' Symposium, Otago University (<http://www.van.at/how/cy/iso/smoke/index.html>). With its contested cultural dimensions and additive biological effects, the act of smoking a cigarette becomes vehicle for exploring the possibilities of physiological connection and emotional resonance under highly mediated conditions. The *International Smoke-In* created a sensation of networked bodily connections through a synchronous cigarette break shared over the Internet

as are other New Zealand artists including Rebekah Wild, Liz Bryce, Gabi Schmidberger, and Vicki Smith and myself from *Avatar Body Collision*.<sup>21</sup> Marcus Williams has examined the presence of the virtualised body by exploring ‘limbic resonance’ in highly mediated environment. His *Smoke-In* works give a sense of presence as smoke seems to flow from a body in one distant location to another. Events such as Interdigitate and the ADA symposiums provide opportunities for the presentation of live digital performance, although networked performance or cyberperformance have yet to feature greatly in their programmes.

Steve Dixon has suggested that digital performance peaked during a ‘golden age’ in the late 1990s and this seems to be true at least quantitatively, but it begs the question, why?<sup>22</sup> It could be partly that the speed of technological development has failed to keep pace with the imaginations of theatre makers; certainly the actuality of immersive 3D technologies has yet to live up to the hype. But forget for a moment the popular obsession with the latest high-tech cutting-edge rich-media prophesies, and look at what many of us have in our offices and homes—we have such a lot of technology to play with. Today’s online social networking spaces and tools are as “ripe for dramatic play” as the IRC channels and Multi-User Dungeons of the early 1990s.<sup>23</sup> Cyberperformance is lo-tech wizardry that uses accessible tools to playfully interrogate complex notions of time, space and presence— notions that have undergone a massive change since the very first telephone call was made.<sup>24</sup> Having accepted that we can speak in real time with someone on the other side of the world, it seems a small step to accept that our presence in the liminal territory of cyberspace can be ‘real’ or solid. There is always a curiosity to know where people physically are, what time it is there and what the weather is like. Asking these questions of those connected to us gives us a shared sense of being simultaneously present, in some way, in multiple other places. For example, I can give a workshop in Romania, attend a meeting in Amsterdam and watch a performance in Brisbane all in the same day and without leaving my house in New Zealand.

The blurring of disparate time zones by events such as attending the premier of a performance the day before it happens disrupts the certainty of measured time. It may be almost tomorrow, but my audience are still staggering through today and yesterday. Somebody’s got to get up in the middle of their night. Cyberperformance exists outside the clock, in a chunk of time shared by all the participants. The shared moment is real time, the venue is a virtual space, and the result is live theatre.

21. Rebekah Wild presented *Baba Yaga* at the 070707 UpStage Festival; Liz Bryce performed in *Indigenous Maniacs* (2006) and *the old hotel* (070707 UpStage Festival and other performances); Gabi Schmidberger performed in *Indigenous Maniacs* (2006) and *Ophelia\_machina* (070707 UpStage Festival).

22. Dixon defines digital performance as “all performance works where computer technologies play a key role rather than a subsidiary one in content, techniques, aesthetics or delivery forms.” Steve Dixon, *Digital Performance: A History of New Media in Theatre, Dance, Performance Art and Installation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007).

23. Adrienne Jenik, “The Early Years of Desktop Theater,” *Riding the Meridian* 2, no.1: Women and Technology, 1999. <http://www.heelstone.com/meridian/>

24. The phrase “lo-tech wizardry” to describe cyberperformance was coined by Vicki Smith in 2001.

## Centres and Peripheries

Vicki Smith and Adam Hyde

Living mostly on the West Coast of the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand, Vicki Smith works with two clusters of schools where technology assists in teaching, as well as in social and cultural collaboration. Vicki is a member of *Avatar Body Collision*, an online performance troupe who devise, rehearse and perform using a variety of Internet technologies.<sup>1</sup> Adam Hyde is based in Europe. An artist, educator, tactical media practitioner, streaming media consultant, and sometime curator, Hyde’s projects have placed him on most continents, including the Antarctic and pervade the online world. For both Vicki and Adam, their most constant address is an email one.

In March 2005 Adam Hyde (along with Honor Harger, Zita Joyce and Adam Willetts) hosted re:remote Auckland, a symposium featuring on-site, online and pre-recorded presentations analysing how digital technologies augment collaborations across geographical and cultural distance. Artists and commentators presented from London, Newcastle, Helsinki, Rotterdam and Sydney. Participants from around New Zealand attended both virtually and in person to share their work.

re:remote Auckland was the first in a series of conferences designed to explore what it means to be remote in an electronic art world. Are there ‘centres’ and ‘peripheries’ within a world increasingly bridged and mapped by digital technologies? Can technologically mediated communication ever substitute for face-to-face dialogue? Is geographical isolation a factor in contemporary art production? Is remoteness a relative concept? The conversation documented below reflects on these questions, negotiating issues of presence, liveness, communication and connectivity.



fig. 1



fig. 2

1. <http://www.avatarbodycollision.org>. The *Colliders* are four women who met online in 2001, forming *Avatar Body Collision* in 2002. They are a collaborative, globally distributed performance troupe who live (mostly) in London, Helsinki, Aotearoa/New Zealand, Australia and cyberspace. They devise and rehearse online, using chat software that is cross-platform and free to download. For a discussion of *Avatar Body Collision* and its projects, see the preceding essay by Helen Varley Jameson.

1: Adam Hyde, DIY radio workshop, WAVES Festival, Riga, Latvia, August 2006.  
2: Students at South Westland Area School Harihari attend a *kapa haka* lesson delivered by Maori performing arts students at Northland College, Kaikohe. The SWAS students learned *mihī, waiata* and *karakia* while the Northland group achieved tutoring credits, video conferencing via the Ministry of Education NZEDNet Bridge, 1 October, 2007.