**Transcript of the panel Intersections between Live and Digital Forms**

**[10 second jingles plays the sounds of a phone Incoming Call]**

**Emily Sexton**: Hi there, my name is Emily Sexton and I am the Artistic Director of Arts House. In February 2020, Arts House gathered three leading Australian artists into a conversation staged as part of the Australian Performing Arts Market in Melbourne.

This conversation and all our works takes place in the traditional lands of the Kulin Nation. And I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. Sovereignty was never ceded.

**[Start of Panel]**

**Emily Sexton:** Today we're talking about a new field of practice that Arts House is exploring. And we're doing that in partnership with Campbelltown Arts Centre who are based in Western Sydney.

We have been looking very closely at the intersection of live and digital forms and what that can mean for new partnerships, for touring, and residency approaches. To briefly introduce these great people I am joined with.

There is Amrita Hepi on the end, her mission as an artist is to push the boundaries for intersectionality and form. And to make work that establishes multiple access forms through allegory.

Angela Goh next to her, Angela Goh dance practice considers the body in relationship to commodity, materiality, technology and feeling.

And Emile Zile's work next to me, utilizes site specific performance, portraiture and film making to capture the traces of humanity living an accelerated digital culture. I have as you can see some amazing thinkers today.

I wanted to briefly position us in the kind of technology that our relationship to it, were talking about. I think we have, well we are exploring what these artists are exploring moves well beyond phones in a theatre show, I would like to put the category in the things we are not really talking about today even though that might happen. We feel like the application of digital now ranges from the tool to a social environment to a regulatory framework, a fashion, a system of surveillance, an education setting, and all sorts of different contexts.

The relationship between live and digital is of keen interest to pop culture. We are not in our beautiful but niche contemporary arts circle, we are not on the front here. We are talking about the way Beyoncé is creating a huge live spectacle at Coachella and also at the same moment creating that film for Netflix.

We are talking about how punch-drunk theatre latest work is an immersive TV drama, which is this new commission with Jude Law called the New Day. We are also interested in how podcasts become live events. Contemporary art circle do have some interesting examples, we have been looking at art space galleries, 52 artists / 52 actions which took place on Instagram a couple of years ago. We have also looked at the e-news video commission site U R THE PROTOTYPE which came out of Sydney and commissioned some beautiful new videos from leading artists.

There are things that are vertical TV shows that take place only in Instagram stories; the ABC put one out, the Australian Broadcasting network called *Content*. They take place solely on a vertical phone.

There is a Festival in Vancouver called FOLDA, the Festival of Live Digital Art. There are live streaming performance services platform like HOWLround. We have been in dialogue with a lot of these kinds of contexts and that is what we are hoping BLEED, which is our new festival will both profile as an area of practice but also shine a big light on the new psychologies and the social interactions and the systems that are emerging from all these new kinds of ways of working.

To bring in our artists, I want to ask whether your work is about technology or if its created in a technological world. Angela, you might like to start

**Angela Goh:** I wouldn't say it's about technology. Like technology is not a subject matter necessarily in the work. Perhaps, whilst my work is not about technology and doesn't necessarily feature technology and it isn't new media work by any means. If it has technology or machines in it, they are quite often extremely low fi. Sort of like low fi fiction or something. But I think possibly in my work you can sense the presence of technology or this invasive presence without having to see it or speak about it. And I think that may also reflect the world that it's made in and the world we are living in.

**Emily:** Emile this has been an evolving area of your work in a lot of ways, would you say technology has been the focus what you have been trying to do or that's just been the water in which you've swum?

**Emile**: Similar to Angela, it’s certainly a place, where we inhabit, we inhabit a trans-temporal a trans-spacial world where we are communicating with our phones as we speak right now across the world. It is just acknowledging that as a base level space to begin and making work from there.

And what draws me to this kind of work is language and the deformation and mutations of language.  And the way language can mutate and evolve, I think this is the main fascination for me with technology. We are searching for meaning and often not finding it. And what is sold to us is the happy Californian positivity of online technology and I think were much more fallible and broken than that as people

**Emily:** Amrita what is your perspective?

**Amrita Hepi**: I think more and more I have been beginning to think about technology as something that exists not as necessarily as a digital framework but also as something that exists or has always existed. I've been really interested in looking at low fi technology to work with such as Alexa. But I also think about technology and things like the Internet, I like to think about them in prior ways or ways that humans have always been doing them for example agriculture as an idea of technology.

The ways that things are shared as an idea of technology, the way I guess, and not necessarily landing in this contemporary space but thinking about how there has been ways we have pioneered technology through different knowledge systems such as First Nations knowledge systems and how that then is translating and mutating and becoming something that is different.

When I think about my work it’s definitely in response to that, and I agree with Emile is saying, yes. Language is to use a Judith Butler, its supreme and fallible and it becomes an allusion sometimes. But its also where we are held to a word in some ways. Maybe technology in some ways holds us to that word as well as ourselves. So its an interesting space and a fascinating one, one of spectacle. And I think in the work that I make it’s a device, its not just a thing to respond to.

**Emily:** Angela, you've recently introduced me to the words 'virtual co-presence'. Virtual co-presence is the idea, say when something important happens like an election or something is happening the real world or so called all at once. We’re also experiencing that together via our phones. An election is a good example, we are all kind of watching it together in real time but also having conversations with our peers and our friends all over the world what is happening and we can deal with those two things in the same moment. In fact, its kind of fun.

 I guess I want to share that concept with you all. And some people would say Amrita that you are an influencer and I don't use that term derogatory cause I feel like that's a cliché but tell me a little bit about what it means to have an audience online as well as an audience in the real world. And how does it shape you?

**Amrita:** Well I think the cultivation of that audience is the key thing. Because that was cultivated by live performance and that is the reason I cultivated an audience was from running pop culture classes in nightclubs around the country and that's how I built a platform.

And that was before I remember as I was doing that, I was taking the choreography from a Beyoncé or a Rihanna or a Justin Bieber clip and teaching it in nightclubs. Then those dance class would have sold more successfully than a lot of shows I would have done. We would sell 75 tickets and then we would be running 4-5 classes a night. It was over 3 consecutive nights at The Toff (Melbourne)and in Sydney at a nightclub called GoodGod.

That was the cultivation of an audience in a live thing but it was under the guise of you know a lot people that were coming into the class were like 'I have never done a dance class before, I don't do dance, I don't go see dance, I don't dance, I don't dance, I don't dance'.

But the touch point there was being able to see something that was saturated in the image, the in point. So from there it turned into an online community. How do we reach different, how do we have different access points to audiences?

I also remember doing this classes and another artist saying to me, 'you know, it will really impact your serious dancing and you will never, is that what you really want to be known for, teaching dance classes in an night club after doing contemporary dance? And I was like 'yeah maybe, and that would be okay'.

It kept a captive audience and I realised I could say things. We could sign an online petition before you were able to purchase a ticket to the class. I could use it or raise money for things. I could use it too talk about things and promote people in the direction of things. So anyway, it kept an online presence and influence. But I think it was important to establish that first live and then online and then others through that.

**Emily:** What do you Emile think about this idea that we are both isolated and together? What does that mean for art?

**Emile Zile**: I think this idea of news psychology sort of moments we inhabit, we are inhabiting this more and more. This co-evolution with these dopamine releasing machines that we hold in our hands and we use all the time is kind of deeply intimate. Its one of the first things we do in the morning and in the evening as we all know. I think looking at a kind of neuro chemical interpretation of this stuff is also important.

Were also just using these things to release dopamine and were not actually interested in the issues a lot of the times. It’s more of an outrage response and a kind of intimacy response.

I think there is interesting territory and I know Amrita is working on a chat bot project, Lillian and I have worked on a chat bot project before which kind of didn't go anywhere. That's going to be new coming up around digital intimacies and this kind of chat bots which where utterly okay with to feed us emotional sustenance and I also downloaded this app, you should download it as we talk called Botnet. Which is a social media platform inhabited by bots. Nobody else and yourself. So you can talk to it. Ask it questions. You get thousands of likes and responses. There is nobody there.

Just bots.

[Audience Laughter]

**Amrita**: You get such good responses.

**Emile**: That's an example of these new digital intimacies and digital psychologies, these new digital new forms of brains.

**Emily:** Angela, one of the things I do love about conversations is that you have a critical lens on these kinds of shifts. What do you make of this world in which we're getting our hits from bots, is it good, is it bad, is it not that binary?

**Angela Goh**

I think it's good and bad. Possible neither? And it just requires a kind of criticality and that requires certain of distance or perspective which is narrowing and narrowing. When I think about the world, I think there is so many huge problems. And they are problems on a planetary scale and they require planetary solutions but not maybe solutions because that's not possible. Btu they require planetary theory or something. Technology will be a tool that we need to use.

 Anything that we can use, we need to more with technology and be further from it at the same time. And maybe that's about how and why it can be implemented and what it is used for.

In terms of digital and digital space, I make work that happens in theatres, sometimes in galleries and sometimes in an online space. I am not necessarily interested the technological possibilities of those different spaces but more so the types of attention they can provide.

When you sit in a theatre, there is a different type of attention that's possible as opposed to wandering through a gallery, you don't know where the beginning or ending is, you choose your timing, you choose your focus. In an online space, attention is somehow fucked but interesting in some kind of way because its like extremely fragmented and this is kind of a way to somehow that is interesting to me about how does time and attention function in a fragmented way like this?

We've become very comfortable with the amount of fragmentation of attention and focus. This is kind of maybe a larger problem in terms of collectivising in terms of being able to reach solidarity beyond differences. I think that the thing that technology is doing to us that is going to be a down for all, whereas I think if we kind of zoom out and have a perspective on this kind of things, into a kind of planetary scale of computation of how to look at the world then that will provide something. So in some ways

I think things are good, things are bad, its complex and its also about like can we get past this dopamine hit as individuals to a kind of larger thing.

**Emily:** I was thinking about an article I read that is an extrapolation in that shift of attention that you're describing. It was explaining how through the history of radio and television, we have gone from the schedule to the stream. If you think about the way we curate, I am talking about the programmers in the room, we work on schedules. The show starts at 8pm etc but actually the way that people and ourselves are operating has much more agency with it and it operates in a steaming context in which whatever you want to happen can happen right now.

That has thrown up enormous questions for me, what is the right or appropriate way is to curate into an environment where people can have the agency to choose what they are doing and more than that generally, programmers of theatre and makers of performance just the volume of competition we have to get people into our spaces at all when what they have in their pockets or on their couch is of a greater quality than they may have had before if what they want is visual stimulus.

Arguably they had competition from books and they had competition from each other about story tellers. But it’s a dense environment in which we are trying to create attention for ourselves. So one of the things we've really enjoyed in working with these artists and with others is this kind of criticality as Angela says and what that experience is for us.

To just shift it a little bit to the right. Emile you have participated in a series of digital residences. Can you tell us what that is and what was interesting about it and what didn’t work?

**Emile:** Yeah there was a digital arts residency organised by Tom Wills in England, I think the idea of digital residencies is quite complicated and I didn't quite buy it and I don't think I still buy it. In the sense it’s very like the proximities that is part of a residency program is not really translated to this global reach of internet.

 I did have some trouble with it. I always think about land when I hear acknowledgements of country and I also think about network conditions and where is your data hosted?

 It also makes me think about this residency program of like where is this residency physically located. Is the residency in the data centre storage centre in Albuquerque, New Mexico? is this where I am doing this residency? Am I doing it in this undersea cable going from Amsterdam to New Jersey? Is this where I am doing this residency?

This idea of where is your data hosted as part of an acknowledgement of country. Like where is Arts House data hosted? I find these ideas of physicalizing the network and trying to understand where your data is because it does sit somewhere which is an interesting link to the residency idea

**Emily:** I wonder what you all think about this idea of the placelessness that the internet purports too. Amrita do you have thoughts on that?

**Amrita:** I have been thinking more about I guess how stories are told, changed, formed and kept. And what the possibilities are around this kind of potential for this idea of digital sovereignty.

Yes there is like a placelessness, but there is also I think the potential to very much like in the placelessness create this idea of the place. I am thinking about this and I am mostly thinking about, when I am talking about place, I am thinking about this pocket of the internet that exists in place, that exists in specifically Koori and Maori memes and this idea of blackness specifically  related to the East coast of Australia in Indigenous humour.

That is like, this definite place. And its a definite expression of trying to find like this, I guess, sovereignty through this humour and it creates maybe not exactly a landing of physical land but it has this corner of the Internet that grows and grows.

I am also thinking about with archives and song lines, how do they change in a digital format? With things like certain dances and with this idea of keeping knowledge is that something that we implement digital technology in? Or does it stay in the technology of the body forever? And that is something I think maybe tantamount. I am not sure

**Emily:** I’m not going to remember of the name of the project but I did hear Clothilde Bullen, who is a fantastic curator at the MCA in Sydney, talk about a strong exhibition she did, not sure if you remember the artists

**Amrita:** Mawurndjul

**Emily:** Yes. Where the component of the

**Amrita:** Bark?

**Emily:** Yes where the digital language component of what she was able to do with that local community and also record online was a real source of pride

**Amrita:** Totally

**Emily:** So of course there are opportunities

**Amrita:** The access points of language and changing and sharing. Yeah, and there is what shouldn't be shared in a broader scale? What do we keep to ourselves and what do we keep in the present of the life or the realm of the real.

**Emily**: One of the motivators for any of us to explore another way of working between for us its between Melbourne and Western Sydney with Campbelltown Arts Centre, its obviously the requirement to shift the way we use carbon. I'm wondering for each of you what the relationship is to an adaption or a new way of practicing of work in an environment that is collapsing and the role of technology and digital experiences and digital lives

**Angela**: The internet is like a material that like Emile says is housed in data centres that are like really hot. And they need constant cooling and use water to do that and electricity to do that. And there is a tonne of them and there is like, the Internet, the cloud has a real substance.

And I think in some ways this kind of conversation how to do shift to a digital residency so we don't have to travel is kind of naïve in a kind of dangerous way. The information and communication technologies have a bigger carbon footprint than the entire aviation industry. So to think in terms of like just purely environmental things, I think it’s not a solution, I don't think its an answer.

I think its far more complex than shifting from you know the individual experience, I can see a plane take off, I can see how much its uses, to this like experience of using the Internet where you feel like you're not using anything but actually you are, in an intense way. The entire sort of network, the actual network, the web is the thing we experience but the network is the thing that has a materiality in the world.

And I think yeah, it’s hard to know because both things are very bad for the world. Obviously flying is a bad thing to do for the world but also uploading streams of just irrelevant shit to the Internet is also not a good thing to do for the world in multiple ways.

[Audience laughter]

But there is something about that, that is far more complex than just being we can save the world by doing this, and its also about what we lose when you do that. Because its so important to be together in a way that isn't, I mean, its hard to be together without all these interfaces such as social stuff and whatever but its important to be together without this interface of technology. Especially in a social way, which can be quite damaging? So I think that is something that is impossible to grapple with

**Emily**: I wanted to equally share and get people's perspectives on, I guess particularly were in an international conversation right now. That there is a cultural difference across the internet, there are cultural contexts working all the time that operate quite differently.

And so, I guess I am interested particularly Angela, you've been working a lot between Taiwan and here and your collaborator is Taiwanese,

Amrita you mentioned specific pockets of the Internet that are different kinds of comedy for different kinds of communities.

There are also other also kinds of ways that things are read and not read between specific communities that survive from the translation from the real to the digital one.

Do you, Angela or Amrita have a perspective on that one?

**Angela**: One of the most real differences between here and Taiwan is the language, things that are typed in Mandarin or English. Facebook or whatever platform does this thing that translates which is about what gets lost in that.

Or how it becomes like computationally poetic or something. But I think culture that is cultivated in the real world transfers how things communicate online and vice versa. Sometimes now I think what online communities you're in as to how you communicate together and what sort of languages you're using.

So now it’s not only things that are cultivated in the real world that gets translated online but it also happens the other way around which is somewhat interesting. Especially how those things come together across distances?

But then things are also different where you are, if I log into TikTok in France versus in Australia versus in Taipei, I get that completely different content.

**Amrita:** Yeah the algorithm for the location and who is close

**Angela:** It’s better in Taiwan! The Australian ones aren't so good.

**Amrita:** Yeah, I was thinking about where is the pocket in the international thing. So I guess it opens up to this autonomy, choice, what you want to look at. How deep into the international sphere of things do we want to go?

Talking about location, I remember when Enoch and I were making the work for REEL/REAL. He said 'do you have tinder or hinge? Because I am getting people from Grindr to watch, I am telling them to watch, just do it! Its audience Amrita!, and its people who are in the community because they are close!

[Laughter]

Because it’s streamed by Facebook. Again this sounds bleeding obviously and you would have this Ang. International networks that become a pocket that is about the like live experience but is also about doing something like dance work. You see connected in these pockets of the Internet that then breed their own language of sharing, I guess, like residencies, artist experiences. I mean even TikTok in Townsville versus in Melbourne is real different.

**Emily Sexton:** And that marks the conclusion of our introduction to BLEED and some of the key questions we are considering as part of the Festival. Thanks for the arts house for producing this podcast and in particular to Samira Farah for editing.

From June 22 you can head to BLEED.ONLINE DOT NET and see Emile Zile collaboration with Lillian Steiner and Angela Goh collaboration with Yu Shi Shin and a whole lot else besides.

BLEED is a project conceived and presented by Arts House as part of the City of Melbourne and by Campbelltown Arts Centre as part of the City of Campbelltown. It’s supported by the Australia Council of the Arts.

Thank you for listening and we hope to see you online, soon.

[Applause]