

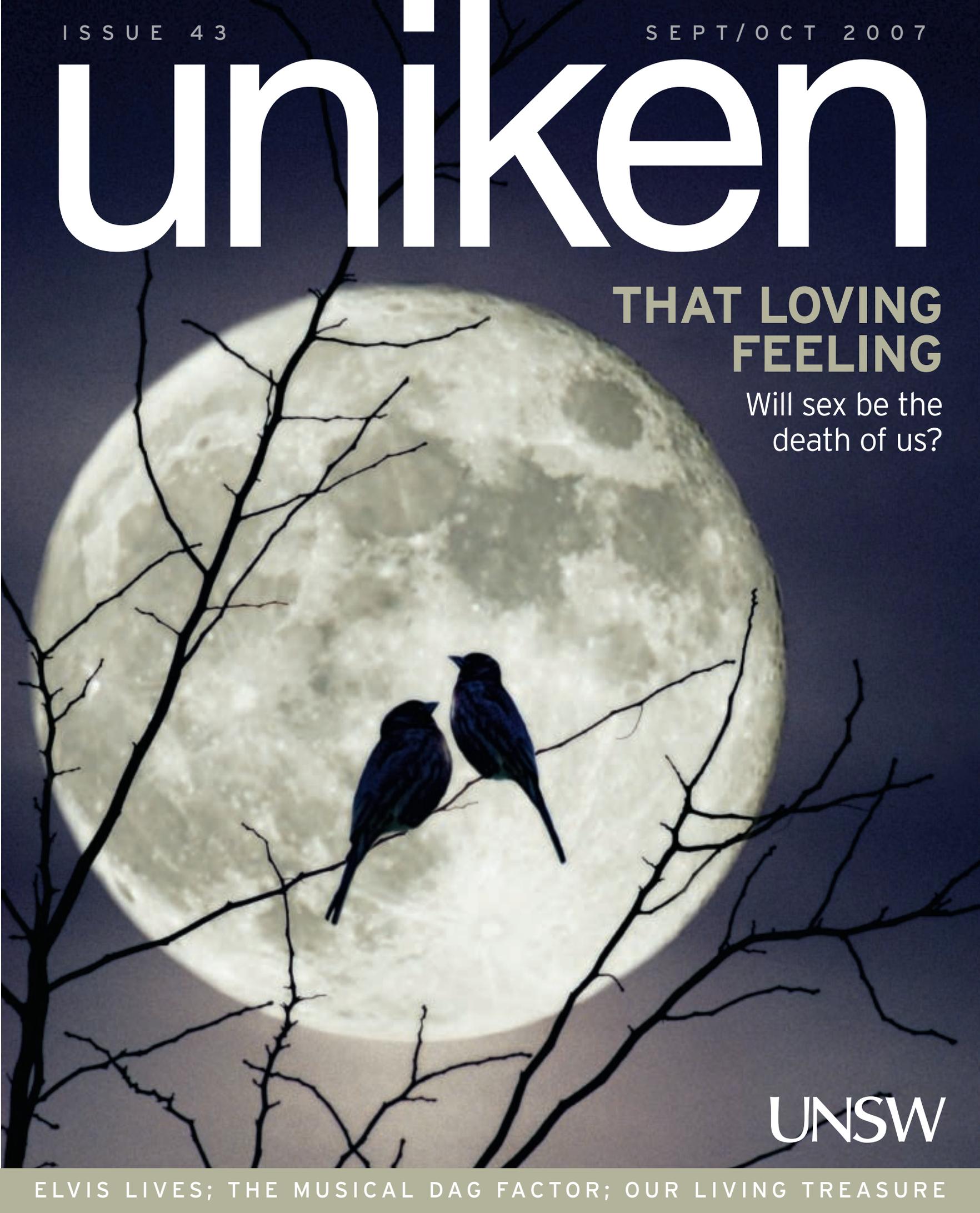
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uniken

**THAT LOVING
FEELING**

Will sex be the
death of us?



UNSW

ELVIS LIVES; THE MUSICAL DAG FACTOR; OUR LIVING TREASURE

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Five minutes with ...



Susan Trent, Gasbag Studios

New Zealander Russell Lowe, a lecturer in digital architecture, moved to Australia and started in the Faculty of the Built Environment six months ago. He brought with him a collection of tattoos and a love of old motorbikes.

Is there symbolism behind your tattoos?

My tattoos are mostly about family. I have my family name and my father's, grandfather's and great grandfather's initials. In New Zealand you see Maori's with swirling tattoos on their forearms which express their genealogy. Mine are the pakeha (white) version of that.

My first tattoo (he has four) was my then-girlfriend's name. She is now my wife. When I got that one nearly 10 years ago my father said I had branded myself. It really played with his head when I got his initials!

Did they hurt?

When they are going over the bone it hurts like hell, but the meaty bits don't hurt. They just tickle. You should try it.

How have your first six months at UNSW been?

I'm loving it. People here are really nice and they are confident, which is important to me. Confident in their own ability and happy for me to get on with what I want to do.

What research are you working on?

My research revolves around re-purposing computer gaming technology. I take technology meant for computer games and use it for other things, in this case designing architecture and the urban environment, but it could be anything that involves interaction. The biggest difference between using computer-game technology and traditional digital design is that we are constructing things in the world as we are experiencing them.

How are you finding life in Sydney?

The last six months have mostly been about work for me. But I am starting to get out and enjoy living here. I have bought a Harley Davidson and am basically just riding it from beach to beach. ■

NCHECR turns 21

UNSW's National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research (NCHECR) was feted by around 500 supporters, including Justice Michael Kirby, at an event marking its 21st anniversary.

Justice Kirby praised the dedication of the researchers, including Director, Professor David Cooper, the Centre's inaugural director.

Professor Cooper suggested that the Centre's success is in part due to its flexibility, with researchers addressing the epidemic "from molecules to populations".

"We hope that HIV research will, by definition, do itself out of a job. But we all recognise that a long-term view is necessary before we can consider HIV at least to have been tethered, if not tamed," he said.

Other speakers included UNSW's Vice-Chancellor, Professor Fred Hilmer, Mr Bill Whitaker, treatment and research co-convenor of the National Association of People Living with HIV/AIDS, Jane Halton, Secretary, Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, and Professor John Kaldor, Deputy Director of the Centre.

The event coincided with the International AIDS Society (IAS) Conference, of which Professor Cooper was the Co-Chair.

Accounting No. 1

UNSW's accounting research has been ranked first in the world by the international journal *Accounting and Finance*.

Of the 1,087 ranked academic institutions, UNSW advanced from a world ranking of seventh for the period 1991-1997, to first in 1998-2005. For the extended period 1991-2005, UNSW ranked second in the world.

The ranking process was undertaken by authors from the United States and Hong Kong, and was published in the June 2007 edition of the journal.

Professor Wai Fong Chua, Acting Dean of the Australian School of Business said: "Our performance in the *Accounting and Finance* research reinforces a number of prior benchmarking studies that demonstrate we are one of the two leading Accounting Schools in the Asia-Pacific region. Leading academics in North America, Europe and Asia naturally choose to partner with us because we're recognised as having the best academics and research."

International design collaboration

Staff and students from the Faculty of the Built Environment (FBE) and the Gifu Academy of Forest Science and Culture in Japan are working together on projects which focus on using timber in architecture and design, while managing it as a sustainable resource.

A group from Japan recently spent two weeks at UNSW including a successful four-day

field trip with local students to Ulladulla on the south coast to look at state forests and their operations.

According to Peter Murray from the FBE Architecture Program, "The focus of the program and our design project is on developing an appreciation of timber as a sustainable material resource, its potential use in architecture, and in the resolution of the timber structures and construction of the students' design proposals."

The UNSW students and staff will make a reciprocal visit in the September mid-session break. According to Mr Murray "These visits and associated field trips have formed the core of an ongoing relationship which provides an extraordinary educational experience while also building social, cultural and professional bridges," says Mr Murray.



For the record

"It's like using knowledge about rainfall in Britain to explain rainfall in Spain."

Professor Andy Pitman, Faculty of Science, on the NSW Government building a desalination plant in Sydney based on rainfall in Perth - Sydney Morning Herald.

"He has less protection than if he was actually charged."

Professor George Williams, Faculty of Law, on the case of accused terrorism supporter Mohamed Haneef - Sydney Morning Herald.

"Women have started working and men haven't really started doing more in the home."

Dr Lyn Craig, Social Policy Research Centre, on her finding that women who do the bulk of the housework are less likely to have more than one child - Sydney Morning Herald.

"Even a High Court judge, Michael Kirby, is unable to obtain pension rights for his partner of 38 years equal to those his married colleagues enjoy."

Dr Sarah Maddison on a study that found that gay couples are legally disadvantaged - The Age.

"This might give us an idea of just how robust you'd have to build a beach swimming net to stop a Great White Shark getting through it."

Dr Stephen Wroe on his research into the "bite force" of sharks - Courier Mail.

"If I asked a group of 19-year-olds what piece of music they would find daggy, they would pick something like Barry Manilow or Barbra Streisand, but 50-year-olds might think it's great."

Dr Emery Schubert on what makes people consider music daggy - Canberra Times.

Teaching everyday physics

Physics is not an esoteric discipline, at least not the way Professor John Smith teaches it. By **Erin Rutherford**.

Associate Professor John Smith from the School of Physics often involves alcohol and ice-cream in his classes - but it's all in the name of science.

In Professor Smith's labs, students can study the Marangoni Effect (mass transfer driven by surface tension) by observing the 'tears of wine' that form inside a wine glass.

And making ice-cream? It demonstrates the concept of non-equilibrium vitreous mixtures.

Professor Smith's "Physics in the Kitchen" interludes in lab classes relate the scientific theory students learn in lectures to everyday applications, answering that age-old student question: but why is this relevant? In recognition of his innovative and engaging teaching methods, Professor Smith has been awarded a Vice-Chancellor's Award for Teaching Excellence not once but twice, in 1991 and 2006.

"It's a great way to show students that physics is not an esoteric discipline," says Professor Smith. "Physics happens all around us in everyday circumstances."

Students are also challenged with tasks involving teamwork and problem-solving. One assignment involves student teams measuring the physical properties of various food items as a consulting task. Another involves measuring as many physical properties as possible of a quite complicated object - the so-called "Alien Artefact".

Professor Smith, who has been teaching at

UNSW since 1984, says flexibility and the ability to adapt to a variety of teaching situations is very important in securing a connection with students. "Your approach must be different when addressing a lecture hall with 400 students in it to the one you adopt when teaching smaller labs, where you can customise feedback to students and personalise your teaching," he says.

Professor Smith is working with his colleague Professor Joe Wolfe, another multiple teaching-award winner, on two ARC-funded projects on the acoustics of singing and on how to improve wind instruments.

When he's not teaching, Professor Smith plays the double bass with several amateur orchestras, including the UNSW Orchestra. "It reminds you what it's like to be a learner." ■



Professor John Smith, testing the acoustics of wind instruments.

Susan Trent, Gasbag Studios

UNSW honoured by Carrick Awards

The Carrick Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education honoured 29 UNSW staff members for their services to student learning in a ceremony on Tuesday 7 August 2007.

The Institute has awarded UNSW a total of nine Citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning as part of the 2007 Australian Awards for University Teaching.

The Carrick Citations are part of the Australian Government's expanded program of national awards designed to recognise and reward teaching excellence in the higher education sector.

The citations are granted to people who have made a significant contribution to the quality of student learning in a specific area of responsibility over a sustained period, whether they are academic staff, general staff, sessional staff or institutional associates.

"I am delighted to see the commitment to student learning by UNSW staff rewarded, both personally and across the board for UNSW, in such a public way," says Professor Richard Henry, Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic).

For a list of the UNSW staff members recognised in the Citations, please visit the Carrick Institute website at: <http://www.carrickinstitute.edu.au/carrick/go>.

Teaching the teachers

According to Sue Starfield, Director of the UNSW Learning Centre, the changing demographics of higher education and the need for greater accountability and support for research students have changed the nature of the relationship between students and their academic supervisors.

In an effort to help academics adjust Sue, who is also a Visiting Fellow in the Department of Linguistics, and her colleague Brian Paltridge have written, *Thesis and dissertation writing in a second language: A handbook for supervisors*, a guide for all supervisors working with undergraduate and postgraduate non-native-speaker students writing a thesis or dissertation.

"The relationship of supervisor to student has traditionally been seen as one of apprenticeship, in which much learning is tacit, with the expectation that the student will become much like the tutor," Sue says. "Current changes have rendered this scenario both less likely and less desirable."

Shining achievements in photovoltaics

UNSW's ARC Photovoltaics Centre receives support and recognition from around the world.

By **Dan Gaffney**.

For more than 25 years, the ARC Photovoltaics Centre of Excellence at UNSW has led the world in the science and technology of converting the sun's energy into electricity using silicon solar cells.

In that time, its achievements in research, development and commercialisation of silicon solar cells have been without peer. Led by Professors Martin Green and Stuart Wenham, the Centre of Excellence has held the world record for solar-cell efficiency and licensed its technology to solar-cell manufacturers globally.

UNSW benefits from the commercialisation of the Centre's research through licensing fees, royalties, and equity stakes in manufacturing companies that have earned millions of dollars for the University.

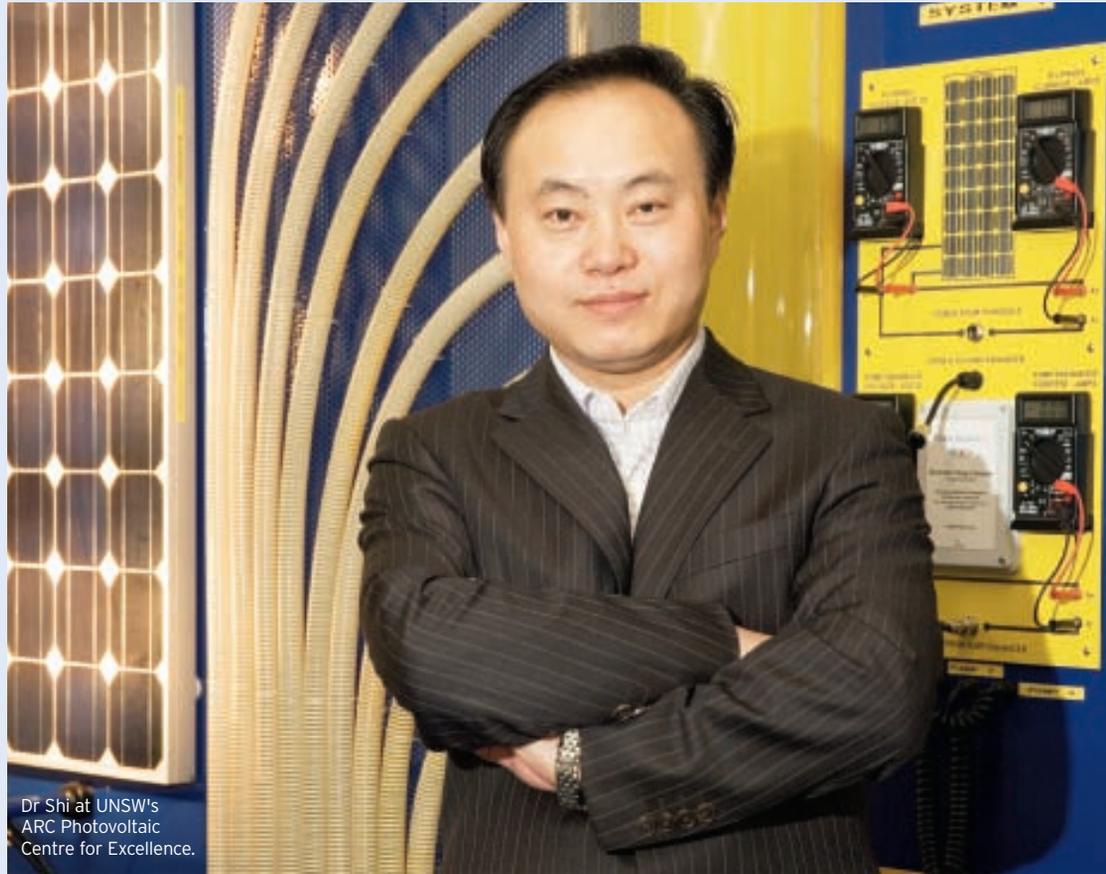
The Centre has joint research and business agreements with leading developers and manufacturers of solar technology across Asia, the United States and Europe, including companies such as BP Solar, Suntech Power Holdings, E-Ton, CEEG Nanjing PV Tech, Toyota and JA Solar.

In July, Suntech and UNSW signed a three-year agreement that will see Suntech sponsor up to 30 Chinese students and Suntech employees to study a Masters program in photovoltaics at UNSW.

"Our relationship with Suntech continues to be fruitful in many ways," says Professor Wenham, the Centre's Director. "In 2006, Suntech's CEO and Chairman Dr Zhengrong Shi generously donated \$1.5 million to UNSW to support its ongoing photovoltaic research. In April this year we signed a research agreement with Suntech affirming our commitment to jointly develop an innovation that could further boost solar-cell efficiency.

"If this proves successful NewSouth Innovations (NSi), the University's commercial arm, will start to receive royalties from Suntech in 2008 and also have the right to license the technology to Suntech's competitors, who rightly view the company as a global leader in solar technology manufacturing. In short, whatever works well for Suntech is seen as a good thing for the solar-cell technology market."

The agreement follows earlier collaboration by UNSW and Suntech of "semiconductor finger" solar-cell technology. The technology surmounts a major limitation of "first generation" solar-cell technology by boosting



Dr Shi at UNSW's ARC Photovoltaic Centre for Excellence.

“Whatever works well for Suntech is seen as a good thing for the solar-cell technology market.”

lower-grade and poor-quality silicon wafers to increase their conversion efficiency.

UNSW's positive commercial relationship with Suntech is echoed in its other commercial relationships. For example, last year two companies with strong links to UNSW's Photovoltaics Centre of Excellence made their market debuts: Trina Solar listed on the NYSE and Solarfun Power Holdings listed on NASDAQ. In February 2007, JA Solar listed on NASDAQ and in May 2007 CEEG Nanjing PV Tech listed on the NASDAQ. JA Solar is also to be a partner in the Centre's 2008-2010 program.

The combined market capitalisation of these companies is above \$14 billion and their combined 2007 revenue is expected to exceed \$2 billion.

In March, NSi signed a \$1.7 million licensing agreement with Taiwanese solar-cell manufacturer, E-Ton Solar Tech that included a collaborative research program to develop two of UNSW's latest high-efficiency solar-cell technologies for commercial production. E-Ton is a rapidly growing solar-cell manufacturer specialising in high-performance products.

In the same month, NSi signed a \$1.4 million licensing agreement with CEEG Nanjing PV Tech in China. The agreement includes a collaborative research program to adapt UNSW's world record holding PERL solar-cell technology to suit large-scale commercial production.

"Each of these business deals are valuable and will see funds flowing back to UNSW," says Professor Wenham. "They mean we can employ more staff and, most importantly, expose our staff and students to the hands-on technical experience of manufacturing." ■

Support for Indigenous students

New funding for Indigenous programs provides a wealth of opportunity.



UBS funds Indigenous programs

Global financial services firm UBS has signed an historic agreement with UNSW to support Indigenous programs.

Under the agreement, UBS will invest \$1 million over four years to enhance all of the programs run by Nura Gili Indigenous Programs with a highlight upon the Indigenous Winter School, which will be expanded to accept 150 students over the next three years.

It is the largest corporate donation ever given to Nura Gili.

The Winter School is a residential pre-University program that assists Indigenous students in Years 10, 11 and 12 in preparing for tertiary study.

“Nura Gili is very excited at the prospect of developing this relationship with UBS,” says Nura Gili Director Professor Sue Green.

“The Centre is committed to providing young Indigenous people with the skills and support they need to consider tertiary studies as a pathway to professional careers, which in turn will provide them with the qualifications they require to work within their communities and with other Indigenous communities. In the past, we have not had the resources to cater for the demand from students.”

Nura Gili offers a range of pre-University programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. In addition, the Centre offers tutorial assistance, administrative and financial support, scholarships and cadetships assistance, and accommodation assistance to Indigenous tertiary students. Undergraduate and postgraduate Aboriginal studies courses are also coordinated through the Centre.

Since its establishment in 2002, the Indigenous Winter School has grown from hosting seven students to 121 this year. In that time, Indigenous student enrolment at UNSW has almost doubled.

“Nationally, the retention rate for Indigenous students is at two-thirds of that for non-Indigenous students,” says Professor Green. “At UNSW, we now have a situation where the retention and graduation rates for Indigenous students are the same as for non-Indigenous students. This partnership will build on the significant achievements of Nura Gili to date.”

- Erin Rutherford

Art exhibition creates scholarships

The annual Shalom Gamarada Art Exhibition held at the University’s Shalom College was again a spectacular success, with more than \$850,000 worth of art sold from some of Australia’s leading Aboriginal artists, including Bill Whiskey, Shorty Robertson and Judy Napangardi Watson.

Proceeds of the sales will go to providing three more residential scholarships for Indigenous medical students in 2008, with the aim of increasing the number of Aboriginal doctors and improving health outcomes in Indigenous communities. Shalom offered its first such scholarship in 2005, and has since assisted 11 Indigenous students. Six are currently on degree-length scholarships.

The exhibition was officially opened by patron and NSW Governor Her Excellency Professor Marie Bashir and Mark Leibler, the Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia. The welcoming ceremony was performed by some of the University’s Indigenous students, many of whom are Shalom Gamarada scholarship holders, and academics.

Two panel discussions followed the exhibition: the first on investing in and collecting Aboriginal art; and the second on Aboriginal health. Her Excellency the Governor attended the second panel, contributing to the discussion from her personal experience and from her role as professor of psychiatry.

The initiative is the result of collaboration between the Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit, Nura Gili Indigenous Programs and the Shalom Institute. ■

- Steve Offner

Associate Professor Lisa Jackson Pulver, director of the Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit (front left) and Associate Professor Sue Green, director of the Nura Gili Centre for Indigenous Programs (front right) with the University’s Indigenous health students.

Celebrating a new beginning

An Indigenous exhibition marks the opening of an art centre in Papunya.

By Tracey Clement.

Just about everybody in the Australian art scene has heard of Papunya. In 1971, school teacher Geoffrey Bardon was posted to the remote Northern Territory settlement, about 240 km north-west of Alice Springs. With his vision and enthusiasm as a catalyst, Papunya became the birthplace of contemporary Aboriginal art.

What is less well known is that since the mid-1970s, Papunya has not had an art centre of its own. While art centres in neighbouring communities have thrived in the wake of Papunya's pioneering efforts, Papunya itself has been without adequate facilities for more than 30 years.

Things are poised to change. Papunya Tjupi is the name of the settlement's soon to be realised art centre, an initiative of the artists themselves. Before the centre even has a physical location, the Papunya artists are having an exhibition, *Papunya Tjupi: A New Beginning*, at COFA's Ivan Dougherty Gallery.

In *Papunya Tjupi*, paintings and prints showcase the depth of talent in Papunya. The exhibition spans several generations and includes well-known senior artists like Long Jack Phillipus Tjakamarra and Michael Jagamara Nelson, alongside emerging talents. Long Jack Phillipus was one of the first Papunya Tula painters. In *Papunya Tjupi* his three daughters exhibit beside him, continuing tradition. In fact, most *Papunya Tjupi* artists have familial links to the original Western Desert movement.

Even though some of the Papunya artists are already internationally acclaimed painters, they are keen to extend their skills and to expose the next generation to new media. With this in mind, Michael Kempson, COFA's Printmaking Coordinator and Director of Cicada Press, organised printmaking workshops for the Papunya artists in October 2006. In May 2007, COFA graduate students Kasumi Ejiri and Simon Taylor conducted additional workshops. This ongoing artistic collaboration with COFA has produced the stunning prints on show in *Papunya Tjupi*.

According to the exhibition's curator Vivien Johnson, the *Papunya Tjupi* artists want an art centre to encourage painting and new media arts, "So that our children will know their stories, but also so our children will have an occupation for their future." ■



Honey Ant for Papunya 2007 by Beyula Napanangka, 61 x 55 cm, Acrylic on linen canvas

Image courtesy of Beyula Napanangka

Journeys with the Black Dog

"You could give up but you won't because as well as having a bio-chemical imbalance in your brain, you also have a remarkable resilience in your soul ... and four magic words that keep you going - This too will pass. It might not be this afternoon, or tomorrow, or next week, but this depression WILL pass and you WILL survive it."

So goes one of many inspirational stories of overcoming depression in a new book edited by Tess Wigney, Kerrie Eyers and Gordon Parker, all of UNSW's Black Dog Institute.

Journey's with the Black Dog is a collection of tales from those who have suffered or continue to suffer from a condition that afflicts many Australians. It charts the process, from onset to recovery, and answers one key question. Can everyone expect the same positive outcomes as the famous writers who have overcome the beast? The book reassures us that yes, it is possible.

"When the depression finally lifted, I felt a new sense of self. It was a different me that emerged from the cocoon of darkness. It took a while to get there, and it wasn't easy ... I learnt a new lifestyle that is a great foundation for the rest of my life - good times and bad. I learnt about my inner strength and resilience, about how simple things in life can sometimes be the most powerful ... One day you will look and see that the black dog was just a shadow in your life. Like a shadow, you have to look back to see it - so instead keep looking forward."

Journeys with the Black Dog, Allen and Unwin, is available in book stores and through www.blackdoginstitute.org.au. All royalties support the institute's Consumer and Community program. ■



The “beauty” genes that help some species attract mates have deadly consequences. Yet human hormones may just inject new life into crumbling relationships, as two separate studies show. By **Dan Gaffney**.

Will sex be the death of us?

Corbis Images

Some of us sing, some of us dress up, while others get tough. It's a jungle out there and we do it with one thing in mind - finding a mate. But what cost does putting on a show have in our later years?

Dr Rob Brooks, the founding Director of the newly formed Centre for Evolution and Ecology at the University of New South Wales, has a passion for understanding the how and why of sexual attraction and evolution.

“One of the most expensive things that organisms do is attract mates and reproduce with them,” says Dr Brooks.

“If you want to invest a lot into reproduction that comes at a cost to your survival.”

Dr Brooks observed this link between living fast and dying young, while studying guppies in 2000. He noticed that the offspring of the

prettiest males died much earlier than others.

According to Dr Brooks, it has everything to do with the competition between individuals to reproduce, before the effects of ageing take hold.

“As we age there are all sorts of genes involved that can have late-acting side effects. This includes genes that make you very attractive and shunt a lot of energy into helping attract a mate, but have a cost that is only exacted after you reproduce,” says Dr Brooks.

“Such genes cause the deterioration of the individual, but don't necessarily come at a huge cost to evolutionary fitness if being attractive has allowed the individual to pass the gene to lots of offspring before the side effects kick in.”

SEALED SECTION



Dr Brooks believes understanding the role of ageing within evolution is a rich field of research. "There is so much yet to learn about how natural selection shapes patterns of ageing," says Dr Brooks.

The Centre for Evolution and Ecology plans to explore the relationship between ageing and natural selection, complementing other research groups within the University currently studying ageing from social, economic and biomedical perspectives.

"One of our priorities is looking at the fundamental biology of why do we age, what does it mean to age, why does it happen, and types of interventions that might be successful to prevent it?" says Dr Brooks.

"Evolutionary researchers at UNSW are looking at ageing from the mitochondria (in our cells) right through to the role of sexual behaviour."

The Centre will also examine the differences in ageing between males and females.

“If you want to invest a lot into reproduction that comes at a cost to your survival.”

"Our researchers are looking at the question of how males and females age at different rates. Why do we get different types of late onset diseases, or why we have different expected life spans," says Dr Brooks.

Another area of research at the Centre is evolutionary eco-toxicology - examining the role of pollutants in evolution and ecology.

"We want to examine how the toxic pollutants that occur in our waterways, influence the evolution of organisms, including invasive species," says Dr Brooks.

The Centre aims to build the University's already excellent research reputation at the interface of Evolution and Ecology by drawing together researchers from various schools.

"Different disciplines have often solved similar problems in different ways. Something that is a problem for a particular discipline now, might have been solved but in a different and hard to recognise way," says Dr Brooks.

Dr Brooks says the Centre will also be a "training ground" for a new wave of scientists that better recognise the need to work in a cross-disciplinary fashion.

"Student training is a really important part of this business. The biggest benefit of this is being able to draw upon the strengths of a number of different departments in educating students," says Dr Brooks. ■

Unleashing the love hormone

Couples who've considered counselling to improve their relationship have joined a UNSW study testing whether a so-called "love hormone" can help relationships by boosting empathy and communication.

The free trial, which began last month, involves five assessment and counselling sessions by psychologists at the UNSW School of Psychology. The clinic is running assessment trials for heterosexual couples who've been together for at least two years and feel they need some help to improve the quality of their relationship.

Eligible couples will receive four therapy sessions involving assessment and specific suggestions on how they can enhance their relationship. A final assessment is then conducted six weeks later.

Half of the couples in the trial will receive oxytocin, a naturally occurring hormone known to enhance sexual pleasure, assist childbirth and promote milk production during breastfeeding. The hormone is released by the brain's pituitary gland in response to physical contact such as hugging and being massaged.

Participants receive the hormone in the

form of a nasal spray, according to Dr Adam Guastella, a clinical psychologist who is leading the novel study.

"We will be testing whether oxytocin influences the counselling process by assisting couples to improve their communication and empathy skills in the therapy room," says Dr Guastella.

"Research reveals that oxytocin can enhance one's ability to notice and correctly interpret emotions in others. The hormone appears to promote trust and to encourage socially cooperative behaviour in humans - attributes that may improve the processes and outcomes of couples' counselling.

"Relationship satisfaction is without doubt one of the most important things to an individual's happiness. Couples can fall into certain types of communication patterns that seem to be particularly detrimental to relationship satisfaction.

"Couples can get so entrenched in these patterns they don't know where to start to make positive changes. For couples in the mild to moderate distress range, a five-week assessment and feedback program has been found to be just as effective as longer-term therapy." ■



When the lights go down ...

Safe sex flies out the window in the backrooms and bathhouses of the gay world. By **Steve Offner**.

Associate Professor Juliet Richters is interested in sex. Not sex as symbols, ideology, or politics – the usual preoccupation of the academic sociologist – but sex at the micro-level: all the practices and interactions in their tangible and often embarrassing detail.

As the co-author of *Doing it Down Under: the Sex Lives of Australians* – compiled from the largest national telephone survey on sex ever conducted in this country – Professor Richters has a better insight than most into what we get up to in our private lives. It might all sound salacious, but sex is a physical reality – and there are important health issues to be considered.

One of Professor Richters' fascinations is homosexual sex and, in particular, the casual and often anonymous encounters that take place in sex-on-premises venues – the commercial saunas, bathhouses, and backrooms of the gay world.

It's an unusual tack for an academic who, as a woman, is excluded from the very places she hopes to know. But for Professor Richters the potential public health benefits that come from her work more than make up for any logistical, or political, problems.

Having academic permission to talk about things that are taboo is one of the benefits of working in the School of Public Health and Community Medicine and, previously, as a researcher at the National Centre in HIV Social Research.

Professor Richters' study, 'Through a Hole in a Wall: Setting and Interaction in Sex-on-Premises Venues', recently published in the journal *Sexualities*, looks at the power of setting to influence what gay men do in sex venues. It looks at the spaces, the lighting and the physical objects that enable or constrain certain sexual acts. It may seem "ploddingly practical", to focus on such concrete details, Professor Richters says, but physical surroundings have a profound effect on sexual practice, and that's vital information for public



Getty Images

“If you're groping around in the pitch dark it's very difficult to ensure that people are having safe sex.”

health officials trying to reduce the incidence of HIV and other sexually transmitted infections.

Through open-ended interviews with 30 gay men in Sydney, Professor Richters discovered that suppressing normal social cues: clothing in saunas, sight in dark rooms and conversation in almost all venues, encourages practices that could not happen elsewhere. Inhibitions are reduced: the spaces are considered 'safe'; patrons are protected from the risk of violence or intrusion from outside; and by definition all those present are willing sexual actors. The low light and warmth of the venues, Professor Richters says, is reminiscent of the bedroom.

"But even here you can still be knocked back for sex," she explains. "That's why dark rooms

are particularly attractive; completely pitch black rooms where you go in and grope your way around the other guys, and it doesn't matter what you look like."

"And that's a real worry to health promotion people because you should be able to see what you're doing; you should be able to find the dispenser box with the condoms and if you're groping around in the pitch black it's very difficult to ensure people are having safe sex."

While this information adds to the academic understanding of sex as social interaction, for Professor Richters the basic public health issue is the priority.

"People psychologise sex a lot: they talk about what people fantasise, about problems in relationships. But sex is also about what people actually do with people they've only just met.

"You can identify things that are problematic – and one absolutely definite health promotion recommendation you would make from this is that you have to have condoms available from boxes throughout sex-on-premises venues and that they've got to have lights on the boxes."

But isn't that obvious? "Well, yes! And that's the point I'm trying to make with my approach: the biggest breakthroughs are often made by simply paying attention". ■

Health and the city ...

Why our suburbs are making us sick. By **Victoria Brown.**

Urban planning came into existence to improve people's health. But now, according to Associate Professor Susan Thompson from the Faculty of the Built Environment, the suburbs, initially believed to create a healthy lifestyle, are making us unfit and lonely.

"In the late 19th century there was an urgent need to move people out of the polluted and crowded city slums," Susan says. "It is ironic that the historically 'wholesome' suburban form is now being blamed for contributing to health problems as diverse as obesity, heart disease and depression."

According to Susan the problem is sprawling suburbs which have grown so big that people live a long way away from their work, shops, services, friends and family.

"It is just too difficult for most people to find the time to walk or cycle to shops, public transport or schools," she explains. "Time pressures also mean fewer opportunities to get to know neighbours, making it harder to create a sense of community."

Susan maintains that the importance of daily physical activity cannot be over-emphasised. "Exercise helps to protect us against many serious physical and psychological diseases yet the suburban form encourages car dependency. Distances are too far for walking or cycling so residents are left with little alternative but to drive."

The long commuter distances that people

accept in order to afford the Australian dream of a house and backyard are a major part of the problem. Sitting in a car for hours each day is unhealthy. Fumes pollute the air and being delayed in traffic is stressful. So too is having little time in the day to help out with children's activities and other family commitments.

"Our urban design does not make it easy for people to be active," Susan says. "Indeed, much of our design is oriented towards the car user - just think of those large shopping centres which are very difficult to get into if you are on foot!"

"Despite all of this, it is too simplistic to lay all the blame on the suburbs. Consolidated urban development also has issues such as lack of open space, diminished local food production, and adverse environmental impacts associated with increased energy use common in large apartment buildings."

Although she acknowledges that there is no easy solution Susan says: "The healthiest kind of city is one of mixed land use - where business, schools, shops and a variety of housing are close together, making it easier for us to get from one to the other."

An added benefit of a city plan that encourages exercise and community is the promotion of sustainability. "Put quite simply, a safe and sustainable city is a healthy one. If our neighbourhoods encourage us to walk we will be out and about more often, providing the best chance for a healthy and happy life!" ■

A park for the people

For the last 30 years the NSW State Government has been acquiring land in Western Sydney that now forms a parkland of some 5,500 ha - 25 times the size of Centennial Park.

The Western Sydney Parklands is the research focus of Dr Nancy Marshall and Associate Professor Linda Corkery from the Faculty of the Built Environment. They are working with the Department of Planning to understand how people value open space in general, and the Western Sydney Parklands specifically.

"Most people have a very conventional idea of a park," Nancy explains. "This corridor of parkland is different. It includes a diverse range of facilities such as Sydney's International Shooting Centre, Prospect Reservoir, Eastern Creek Raceway

and market gardens. People will need to broaden their understanding of a park to really appreciate this parkland."

Linda says: "Our project is looking at how people currently use open space in their locales, how park use enriches their lives, their awareness of the Western Sydney Parklands, and what they want from a park."

Marshall and Corkery's research thus far indicates that while parks are valued by most people for obvious environmental and health reasons, they also have cultural, social, aesthetic, educational, economic and spiritual values. "Our research will help the NSW Government and the Parklands Trust understand how that public's appreciation may manifest itself once the Parklands are further developed," Linda says.

Hepatitis C vaccine just years away

A new UNSW initiative gives hope to those at risk. By **Susi Hamilton**.



A drug user using a safe injecting facility

NewsPix

Within three years, UNSW researchers hope to be testing potential vaccines for hepatitis C.

The researchers in the UNSW Hepatitis C Vaccine Initiative plan to test potential vaccines developed by other Australian scientists and international pharmaceutical companies using two cohorts of people at high risk of infection - injecting drug users in prisons and in the community.

"There is no comparable research program anywhere else in the world," says Professor Andrew Lloyd, who is the Chief Investigator of the initiative and the head of the Centre for Infection and Inflammation Research at UNSW.

"Drug companies are looking for research groups who can test their candidate vaccines," he explains. "Because this initiative is a consortium of individuals with complementary expertise, we hope to be the natural choice for any trial."

The initiative is cross-disciplinary, bringing together three key researchers: Professor Lloyd, a clinician-scientist who has been tracking hepatitis C transmission in prisons since the virus was first described in the early 1990s, Associate Professor Dore, head of the Viral Hepatitis Clinical Research Program at UNSW's National Centre in HIV Epidemiology and Clinical Research (NCHECR) whose expertise lies in epidemiology and clinical trials and Associate Professor Lisa Maher, a public health researcher and head of the Viral Hepatitis Epidemiology and Prevention Program at the NCHECR.

Other institutions and researchers involved in the initiative include the National Centre in HIV

Social Research, the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre, and virologists from the Faculty of Science and Prince of Wales Hospital.

According to Professor Dore: "Hepatitis C has not carried the same weight as HIV in terms of advocacy and part of that is aligned with key behavioural risk group, as it is most commonly contracted in Australia through drug users sharing needles."

"Community engagement is crucial," Professor Maher says. "Identifying and understanding the social and cultural drivers of risk and protective behaviours is a key part of

“The problem is growing exponentially.”

the initiative. At the end of the day it really doesn't matter how effective any prevention technology is - whether it's a vaccine or a condom - if it's not acceptable or accessible to the target group.

"For instance, we've had a safe and effective vaccine for hepatitis B for more than 20 years, but we have very poor uptake and completion rates in injecting drug users - perhaps partly because it requires three doses over six months.

"Our research might suggest that drug companies may need to work harder to develop a single dose vaccine, or that we might need to offer incentives to encourage uptake and coverage."

Three percent of the world's population is infected (including 260,000 Australians) and the majority of those have chronic infection. That infection, if it is not treated, can ultimately be fatal. It also causes liver problems including cirrhosis, liver failure and cancer.

As if those facts were not sufficiently compelling, hepatitis C is already the leading cause of liver transplantation in Australia and will cost the government \$250 million over the next five years.

"As many as 50 to 60 percent of regular injecting drug users have hepatitis C infection," says Professor Dore. "Heavy users might use around 500 needles a year and in all likelihood, they would share needles on a few occasions, so the risk of infection is considerable."

The scale of the problem isn't the only challenge.

"Unfortunately, hepatitis C happens to be a virus which has a very high mutation frequency," says Professor Lloyd. "It replicates very rapidly with billions of new viral particles every day. They mutate a couple of times each day in every infected individual.

"That's a problem because it's a moving target for vaccine development," he observed.

The initiative has been designed to provide a framework for testing of vaccines, specifically to ensure that more than one candidate can be tested - with any luck, making it an effective vaccine program target within reach.

The UNSW Hepatitis C Vaccine Initiative has been established using \$2.8 million from the Vice-Chancellor's Strategic Priorities Fund. ■

A life in aviation

Len Sales has spent the last 60 years with his head in the clouds. Now he is teaching UNSW students about the joys of flying. By **Dan Gaffney**.

Eighty-three-year-old WWII veteran and aviator Len Sales fell in love with the idea of flying as a young boy.

During the 1930s he and his father attended the annual Royal Air Force (RAF) air shows at the historic Hendon Aerodrome, North London, where Len marvelled at the daring aerial feats of British fighter planes like the Bristol Bulldog and Bristol Fighter.

In September 1939, British PM Neville Chamberlain declared war on Germany and two years later 17-year-old Len enlisted in the RAF. For the next four years he flew bombing flights as a wireless operator with the No. 37 Bomber Squadron out of Italy, Egypt and Palestine until the war's end.

Before Len's enlistment, Britain was on the military defensive, following German advances in Europe and the collapse of France. In the Battle of France of June 1940, the RAF's losses were appalling: nearly 1,000 aircraft destroyed, 320 pilots killed or missing and 115 pilots taken as prisoners of war. In the ensuing Battle of Britain from August 1940 to May 1941, the RAF lost another 1,023 fighter planes and 524 bombers.

"In the long run, nearly two-thirds of the men who took to the air never returned," says Len, who also flew 30 bombing raids over Italy, Yugoslavia and the Middle East in four-engine Avro Lancasters and twin-engine Vickers Wellingtons.

"For me, bombing raids would bring up feelings that ranged from great excitement to sheer fright, and I always took it hard when I heard that friends and colleagues had been shot down and killed in action.

"I suppose we became hardened to these losses - it was a way of life and we accepted the prospect of death as an unavoidable hazard of duty."

As a radio operator, Len was next in line to take over gunning duties if an air-gunner was killed in action. "Thankfully, that never happened and I've lived long enough to tell the tale," he says.

He did have a few close calls, however. He escaped injury in 1943 when a bomb-laden Wellington he was aboard crashed and caught fire on take-off. In 1962, he escaped injury once when a Super Constellation he was navigating crashed on take-off in Mauritius. "We overshot the runway and the undercarriage collapsed, resulting in the fuel tanks on the wings catching fire and blowing up," says Len.



Len Sales

Susan Trent, Gasbag Studios



Getty Images

“It was a way of life and we accepted the prospect of death as an unavoidable hazard of duty.”

"We managed to get everyone off pretty safely with a few broken legs being the main injuries."

Retiring from the RAF in 1946, Len did further pilot training and was a navigator and senior radio operator for the start-up carrier Malayan Airways.

Demand for air travel started to boom in the post-war period and Len flew twin-engined Airspeed Consul aircraft between Kuala Lumpur, Ipoh, Penang, Singapore, Saigon, Bangkok, Penang, Medan and the Borneo Territories.

Joining Qantas in 1954, he settled in Sydney and for the next 35 years flew or navigated on DC-3s, DC-4s, Viscounts, Constellations, Super Constellations, Boeing 707s, 727s and the 747 Jumbo series.

For the past decade he has headed UNSW's airline transport pilot's licence (ATPL) program. The ATPL provides provisional qualification for

people who want to fly as a pilot-in-command of a multi-crew aircraft.

"The program covers advanced theoretical study in advanced aerodynamics, air law, advanced navigation, performance, loading, flight planning and meteorology," says Len.

"To be issued with an actual airline transport pilot's licence, graduates of the program need to log at least 1,500 flying hours, with specified time as pilot-in-command. The program is highly respected within the aviation industry and our graduates go on to fly with Qantas and international carriers around the world."

A father of three and a grandfather of six, Len isn't content to sit around on weekends playing grandad. "I'm a member of the State Emergency Service in the Ku-ring-gai area. I love it and it keeps me young," he says with a twinkle in his eye. ■



Rosemary Rayfuse

Race for the Arctic

Russians put a flag on the seabed and trigger an international race for the North Pole.

By **Victoria Brown.**

On 3 August 2007 Russia planted a flag on the seabed under the North Pole. This action was far more than just an impressive display of seamanship.

“The days of gaining territory by planting your flag in the ground are long gone,” Rosemary Rayfuse, an academic in the Faculty of Law, says. “What the Russians have done is a purely symbolic gesture. But it does make a serious statement.”

It is a statement that has signalled the start of the biggest challenges to international security since the Cold War ended.

Under the 1982 United Nations Law of the Sea Convention, every coastal state owns the continental shelf, including the resources on or under it, out to 200 nautical miles (nm). Where the shelf physically extends beyond 200 nm, the Convention allows coastal states to claim the shelf out to the extent of its natural prolongation.

“Where the continental shelf ends, however, is a very contentious issue,” Rosemary explains. “The Russians claim that the seabed under the North Pole is part of the natural prolongation of their continental shelf, a claim the other Arctic countries dispute. Denmark and Canada say it’s theirs, while the United States says it is not geomorphologically continental shelf, which makes it deep seabed and property of the international community.”

According to Rosemary, Russia’s actions are motivated by the desire to control the resources that are under the Pole, which are believed to include up to 25 percent of the world’s undiscovered oil and gas supplies as well as seabed and sub-seabed minerals and genetic and biological resources on the seabed.

Rosemary explains, “As the ice melts due to

“The ... dispute is going to be a major international security challenge with old Cold War rivalries being played out ...”

global warming it is becoming physically and commercially viable to access the resources in and under the Arctic Ocean. In addition to hydrocarbons and minerals, there is evidence that fish stocks are moving north into newly warmed waters. New shipping passages will also open up as the ice disappears. All of this means a scramble for control and access among the Arctic countries.”

Another reason is that the Law of the Sea Convention specifies that all extended continental shelf claims need to be lodged by May 2009.

“The ice opening up isn’t necessarily a bad thing,” Rosemary says. “But legal regimes need to be put in place to ensure commercial and other activities are conducted without damage

to the environment or threat to human safety.”

And it will be necessary to delimit the international boundaries of the extended continental shelf. According to Rosemary, “Given the countries and interests involved, the continental shelf dispute is going to be a major international security challenge with old Cold War rivalries being played out on and under the Arctic Ocean. We need to devise legal solutions before that happens.”

The developments in the north have massive implications for Australia. According to Rosemary, “Australia claims 42 percent of the Antarctic but our claim is not recognised by other countries. As Antarctica warms, as soon as it is commercially viable, everyone will want to access the resources there and we will have a great deal of trouble stopping them. There are lessons we can learn from the situation in the Arctic.

“The international community now has great opportunities to act in a proactive and precautionary manner to ensure adequate legal mechanisms are in place in advance of environmental, territorial and security concerns rearing their ugly heads.” ■

Climate change initiative

The International Law and Policy Group and the Australian Human Rights Centre have launched an Initiative on Climate Change Law and Policy within the Faculty of Law.

The initiative aims to provide a framework for inter- and cross-disciplinary research on policy and regulatory developments to address climate change at both the national and international levels.

In addition to attracting research grants, post-doctoral research fellows and PhD students, the initiative will also create the opportunity for the development of courses on aspects of climate change law and policy and will complement the work of the UNSW Climate Change Research Centre.

Great White's mighty jaws revealed

Scientists are using the structure of the shark's skull to try to understand its feeding behavior. By **Dan Gaffney**.

Scientists using sophisticated computer software are assessing the "bite force" of a Great White Shark.

The research will reveal unprecedented information about the creature's feeding habits by analysing new anatomical and biomechanical data from the shark's skull and muscle tissues.

Trapped off the Central Coast, a 2.4-metre male Great White (*Carcharodon carcharias*) was recently imaged inside a computer tomography (CT) scanner that generated three-dimensional pictures of the shark's internal anatomy.

Using novel imaging and analysis software techniques developed by a research team from UNSW and Newcastle University, scientists have simplified the scan of the shark's skull, jaw and muscles into hundreds of thousands of tiny discrete, connected "finite elements".

Shaped like tiny three-dimensional triangular prisms (tetrahedrons) these elements contain a host of coded data about properties of the shark's tissue.

Using a technique called "finite element analysis" the researchers will be able to "crash test" the shark's skull and jaws under different scenarios inside a computer. This will reveal in new detail the complex set of structural and mechanical stresses and strains on the shark's skull anatomy and muscles.

By examining how the Great White's digital skull holds up under various conditions the team can determine what sort of forces and behaviours it's best adapted to handle, and examine competing hypotheses about its feeding behaviour.

"Almost nothing is known about bite force and skull mechanics of Great White Sharks," says UNSW scientist, Dr Stephen Wroe, an expert on carnivore evolution who has helped pioneer new techniques revealing the feeding habits of flesh-eating animals such as the Sabre-toothed tiger (*Smilodon fatalis*), the African lion (*Panthera leo*), the marsupial lion (*Thylacoleo carnifex*) and the fabled Tasmanian tiger (*Thylacinus cynocephalus*).

"The new information will allow us to predict the strength of the shark's bite and relationships between its skull architecture and its feeding behaviour," he says.

"Until now all that's known about cranial mechanics among sharks has come from relatively unsophisticated experiments. Although bite force has been measured in some living Great Whites, there is no way of knowing whether the bites these individuals have produced are anywhere near the maximums that they are capable of.

"Our methods allow us to generate accurate maximum bite force estimates, but this approach



Dr Stephen Wroe

Steve Pearce

has many other advantages over more conventional methods."

The new techniques developed by Dr Wroe and his colleagues, Col McHenry and Phil Clausen (University of Newcastle) and Karen Moreno (UNSW), means they will be able to compare the bite force of the Great White with a host of living and extinct carnivores, establishing a broader comparative "league-table" of the most powerful biting hyper-carnivores known to science.

Presently, the extinct marsupial lion, one of the greatest carnivores to roam Australia, holds number one position as the most powerful biter for its size among mammals - living or extinct.

University of Tampa shark biologist Dan Huber is working with the Australian research team to learn whether sharks such as the Great White are responsible for damaging submarine cables and communication systems on US Navy submarines.

Dr Huber performed a dissection on the Great White in Sydney in July. He works closely with the US Navy, providing advice about marine life that bite and damage submarine cables and towed acoustic arrays that navy vessels rely on for acoustic surveillance and communication.

The bite force analysis and tooth signature data taken from the Great White specimen will add to scientific understanding of how to protect both navy and civilian communication systems. ■

“Almost nothing is known about the bite force of the Great White Shark.”



A laugh a minute

“The most exciting thing is discovering how much the analysis of comedy (if we can stop laughing for long enough to think about it) can tell us about ourselves,” says Dr Lisa Trahair of her research into the work of the great comedians of the early 20th century.

“Comedy has been of interest to philosophers since Aristotle, but its significance as an aesthetic form has often been downplayed in favour of tragedy in literature and theatre, and beauty and the sublime in art.”

Dr Trahair, who works in the School of English, Media and Performing Arts, is currently researching the cinematic comedy of Mack Sennett who is most well known for his silent slapstick films featuring the Keystone Cops. An actor, director and producer, Sennett is now considered to be one of the three greatest innovators in the early development of American cinema.

Through the films of Mack Sennett, as well as Buster Keaton, Charlie Chaplin, Harold Lloyd and the Marx Brothers, Lisa is utilising Freud’s and Bataille’s perspectives on philosophy, comedy and laughter to look at early cinema’s exploration of sense and nonsense.

“I’m hoping that my study of Sennett’s Keystone comedies will contribute to a better understanding of how cinema initially incorporated and modified pre-cinematic performance traditions, how the specificity of



Image courtesy of Lisa Trahair

this comic aesthetic can be understood by existing theories of the comic, and how it demands a rethinking of these theories,” Dr Trahair says.

Along with her partner investigator, Professor Jim Davis at the University of Warwick, she received an ARC Discovery Grant

from 2004-2006 for a project on “The Staging and Framing of Comic Performance in the Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries”.

Her book, *The Comedy of Philosophy: Sense and Nonsense in Early Cinematic Slapstick*, will be published in October by Suny Press.

- Victoria Brown

“Dag factor” predicts music preference

The degree of emotion we experience colours our perception of songs.

Music that expresses more emotion than that felt by listeners’ is likely to be unpopular or “daggy”, according to new empirical research.

Published in *Psychology of Music*, the research reveals that music is considered more enjoyable when its emotionality closely matches listeners’ degree of emotional response.

“The smaller the gap between people’s ‘felt’ emotion and music’s ‘expressed’ emotion, the more they enjoy it,” says the study’s author, Emery Schubert.

A music psychologist, Dr Schubert refers to this difference as the “Differential Affect Gap” - or “DAG factor”.

“The DAG factor is a new quantitative predictor of people’s emotional liking for music,” according to Dr Schubert, who says it could explain why some people dislike Barbra Streisand’s music, for example.

Dr Schubert has done prior research revealing that people who expressed dislike for Streisand’s music rated it as having a high degree of emotionality compared to their own emotional response.

Until now, people’s like or dislike for particular music has been viewed by some social psychologists as a proxy for belonging to a particular social or age demographic. According to this view, people of one

subgroup (like teenagers) will express dislike for the music of a non-peer group (like parents), as a way to establish and maintain their subgroup identity.

It’s an idea that has been used to control group behaviour. For example, young “hoons” were successfully discouraged from meeting at a car park in a Sydney suburb by playing Barry Manilow music through loudspeakers.

However, this social psychological phenomenon is difficult to measure. By contrast, the DAG measure may provide new insights into understanding how people relate to music. ■

- Dan Gaffney

Cut and paste pop culture

Pixel Pirates take on the copyright cops in a stunning video work by a UNSW artist.

By **Mary O'Malley.**

PhD student Dan Angeloro's first video work boasts a cast that most Hollywood directors would covet. Elvis Presley, The Hulk, Batman & Robin, Michael Jackson – even Moses makes an appearance.

Pixel Pirate II: Attack of the Astro Elvis Video Clone is an hour-long narrative remix video constructed from samples pirated from over 300 film and music sources.

Containing no original audio or video footage, it's the work of Dan, her sister Dominique and fellow artist and techno-whiz Sam Smith.

The work is a sci-fi/biblical epic/action movie with a subplot of troubled romance. It's the year 3001. The ancient art of remix is being oppressed by the evil tyrant Moses and his Copyright Commandments. Meanwhile, in a secret base-camp on the moon, a team of Pixel Pirates plot to overthrow Moses via their latest scientific discovery: video cloning.

Their plan: travel back to 1955, abduct Elvis and bring him back to the future. Cloned Elvis is then sent back to 2015 to assassinate Moses, altering the course of VHS history. But first the Elvis Clone must face-off against the Copyright Cops and every action hero that MGM can throw his way.

Since its debut on the Sydney big screen in 2006, the work has played in Prague, Berlin, Hamburg, Bangkok, Beijing, Edinburgh, San Francisco, Melbourne and back in Sydney and has become a cult-movie classic.

"Many of the existing academic approaches to audio-visual remix culture have attempted to understand sampling as a form of quotation," says Dan of the philosophy that underpins her thesis, supervised by Dr Jodi Brooks in the School of English, Media and Performing Arts.

"However, such text-based conceptual models are inadequate to deal with the time-based nature of audio-visual sampling and the mutability of the digital source. Instead I offer an account of audio-visual sampling that draws on the conceptual framework of audio remix cultures such as hip-hop."

Dan says the work highlights the "very tenuous relationship" contemporary remix culture has to the law.

"The vast majority of sample-based practices are conducted illegally," she says. "Critiquing copyright law is an important aspect of the video component of my thesis.

"Australian copyright law was amended last year to allow for unlicensed sampling practices that are used for the purposes of parody and satire but the degree of coverage that this exemption offers to remix artists remains to be seen." ■



A scene from *Pixel Pirates II*

“The vast majority of sample-based practices are conducted illegally.”



Germans have the last laugh

A new symposium showcases the playful side of the Teutonic psyche.

By **Steve Offner.**

Martin del Amo in action.

Heidrun Löhr

“It’s become a joke that Germans have no humour,” laughs Martin del Amo, one of the performers in UNSW’s upcoming symposium, *Ta(l)king Pleasure in German Culture, a Day in the Dialectical Playground*.

“But in Germany, of course, there is a booming industry of comedians and from the beginning of last century there have been major German comedians and comics.”

The darkness of Germany’s modern history only fuels the anti-humour prejudice, the German-born performance artist says “and I’m sure the misconception is an issue the symposium organisers want to get to the bottom of.”

Coinciding with the German Cultural Month in Sydney 2007, GerMANY FACES Australia, the symposium is a joint initiative between the School of English, Media and Performing Arts, the Goethe-Institut, the German Consulate General and the German-Australian Chamber of Commerce.

Participants will use German theatre, performance, film, media, literature, popular culture, music and visual art - specifically the works of artists such as Bertolt Brecht, Walter Benjamin, Alexander Kluge and Pina Bausch - to trace how the figure of the child and the metaphor of the playground have been evoked to create new ways of seeing the world, and thereby inspire cultural change.

Rounding off the day will be an evening of

entertainment in the lo Myers Studio where contemporary Australian performers including del Amo, Paul Gazzola, Regina Heilmann, Heidrun Löhr and Jeff Stein will present a series of short works.

Su Goldfish, manager of the School of English, Media and Performing Arts’ Creative Practice and Research Unit (CPRU), says the school will continue its collaborations with outside organisations such as the Arts NSW-funded Critical Path to harness the creative talents of visiting artists and facilitate research at the postgraduate level.

“Collaborations like these are a rarity at the University level, yet they create so many opportunities in both directions,” she says.

For Martin del Amo the most exciting thing about his time at UNSW is watching his students benefit from the mix of theory and practice, and the creative exposure to working artists. Del Amo, who has just completed a two-week residency at CPRU, is leading a workshop course at the school that allows students to devise and stage a production from scratch.

“The workshop’s working title is ‘Just Add Water’. I had those instant soups in mind where you have those powdery substances and you add water and in minutes you suddenly have vegetables and meatballs,” he says.

“It’s an interesting metaphor for what happens in our process: you start with nothing

and then by adding bits and pieces gradually you come up with a whole working production.”

The staging of the German symposium was a happy coincidence for the German artist. He says many German performers realise that being serious is not the only way to come to terms with the tragic events of modern history.

“You can’t deal with things that are incredibly serious only in an earnest way. To be able to shed light on events you have to have some sense of a light touch, to be able to make it accessible to people, and that’s where playfulness comes in,” he says.

“Getting to the core of something that is not inherently funny or has a political agenda attached to it, but at the same time not having it too bleak so it wears you down, is the challenge. That’s where humour comes in.”

The inter-war years of the Weimar Republic was the period of history that has inspired del Amo’s contribution to the symposium.

“Historians describe this period as ‘the dance on the volcano’. Everyone thought the world was going under anyway so why not have fun.

“It was a very morbid sense of pleasure, of decadence. Culturally it was an incredibly rich period where lots of interesting artists were working, though unfortunately, that came to an end with the rise of the Nazis.

For more information go to http://www.arts.unsw.edu.au/news/conferences/dialectical_playground/index.html ■

She's a treasure

Liz Williamson, a master weaver and academic at COFA, has been declared a Living Treasure. By **Tracey Clement**.

The Living Treasures: Masters of Australian Craft project recognises an exclusive list of world-class senior artists. Liz Williamson has been included as an acknowledgement of her 30-year career in textiles and her ongoing passion and dedication to her craft as an advocate, educator and artist.

As well as being a master weaver, Liz is the Coordinator of Textiles for COFA's School of Design Studies and, even after three decades, she is still excited by textiles.

"I am continually amazed by what I can do with weaving. It is incredibly fascinating to shift traditional areas and explore new things," she says.

The Living Treasures series was initiated by Object: Australian Centre for Craft and Design, and Craft Australia. The project follows the lead of the Japanese model, established in the mid-1950s, which honours the skills of master craftspeople and the intangible, yet invaluable contribution that they make to culture.

As part of the Living Treasures series, a monograph will examine Liz's influences, look at her past and celebrate her career so far. She will also have a major solo exhibition of new work at Object Gallery in late 2008. Her new work will continue her ongoing exploration of the intersection between traditional methods and innovative textile techniques.

"I am continually amazed by what I can do with weaving. It is incredibly fascinating to shift traditional areas and explore new things."

This creative collision between old and new can be seen in Liz's intensive studio-based research into the process of darning. She has long been fascinated by the structure of cloth and the way in which it absorbs memories and records experiences through wear, tear and repair. While traditional darning is meant to be invisible, Liz draws attention to this process and celebrates it.

"The very act of darning transforms the character of the cloth as the darning threads are interwoven into the fabric; they impact and distort the surface becoming visible, like an embellishment or decoration on the garment," she says.

For her 2006 exhibitions, *Visible Darning* and *A Visible Thread*, Liz created Jacquard

woven wall hangings in which the patterns and textures of darning were woven directly into the cloth and deliberately highlighted.

Liz is currently on special study leave from COFA and is creating new pieces for her 2008 *Living Treasures* exhibition. She has also just received an Australia Council grant to enable her to extend her research and exploration into a new series of wearable Jacquard woven wraps and scarves.

While in the studio, Liz is also completing pieces she designed for the recently unveiled refurbishment of the drawing room in Government House, Sydney. She was one of several well-respected Australian craftspeople and designers who were commissioned by the Historic Houses Trust of NSW to be involved in this prestigious project. Liz designed upholstery fabric and unique cushions for the room. Even though her signature style consists of a dark, muted palette of deep blues and purples, in this project Liz has used rich golds, warm reds and beiges.

As she explains, "I did a lot of experimentation with colours and with traditional plant dyes like cochineal and madder. It's been an exciting challenge and positive impact on my studio practice."

She may be a Living Treasure, but Liz's work remains vital and dynamic; she continues to learn and push the boundaries of her craft. ■



Howard's NT plan undermines democracy

On Thursday 21 June, in response to the "Little Children are Sacred" report, the Australian Government announced broad-ranging emergency measures, ostensibly to address child sexual abuse in the Aboriginal communities of the Northern Territory (NT). These measures included welfare reform, compulsory health checks, the acquisition of townships through five-year leases (including payment of just compensation) and the scrapping of the permit system.

The legislative package was pushed through Federal Parliament in August with almost negligible opportunity for public scrutiny. With control of both houses of Parliament, the Federal Government released the amending bills to the Opposition only 24 hours before they were due to be passed. They neglected to consult adequately with Aboriginal people of the NT, including land councils, and deliberately disavowed Aboriginal leaders who travelled to Canberra to meet with them.

The complex and surreptitiously rushed legislation undermines the integrity of our democracy and continues an historical trend in Australia of providing band-aid solutions to the complex trauma and chronic illness that exists in Aboriginal communities.

For some years now, public commentators have been noting a silencing of dissent in Australia and this has never been more apparent than in the wake of the Federal Government's emergency response to the NT report. There has been an insidious tenor creeping into public debate that if you critique aspects of the NT plan, this equates to wanting Aboriginal children to suffer. This logic is deliberately divisive and if it is sincere then it is politically naïve. It is insulting to the great and many Aboriginal women and men who have struggled over the past three decades to have state, territory and Federal governments seriously address the problems of family violence; child sexual abuse; alcoholism; overcrowding; and under-funding of health, housing and legal services in Aboriginal communities.

In fact, for over three decades Aboriginal women have been at the forefront of raising awareness of the serious problem of violence and sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities. The failure of Aboriginal women to gain serious traction on this issue, whether in the media, among policy makers or political representatives, raises serious questions about the difficulties Aboriginal women and in fact,



News pix

“It would be inconceivable for Indigenous peoples not to question the timing of this intervention.”

Indigenous peoples face in contributing to public policy and influencing the democratic process in Australia.

As Aboriginal people we live in a Western liberal democracy as 2 percent of a 21 million polity. Recently Noel Pearson described us as "lepers of Australian democracy". This is not a novel revelation, just a realistic observation about the difficulties Aboriginal people face in effecting change. The representative configuration of our democracy permits only limited citizens' participation in decision-making and a manifestation of this is a public policy culture that generally focuses upon the greatest good for the greatest number.

Evidence shows that Aboriginal people have lobbied the Federal Government to act across a broad range of areas including law reform, funding for health services, legal services, healing and treatment centres and increased funding for community justice initiatives. There has been inaction if not outright hostility by the Federal Government to Indigenous issues for well over a decade. Thus, it would be

inconceivable for Indigenous peoples to not question the timing of this intervention.

Moreover, in addressing child sexual abuse, the legislative package includes acquisition of Aboriginal land, with prohibition of Aboriginal law and the permit system, despite there being absolutely no evidence-based research to support a causal link between Aboriginal land rights and child sexual abuse.

In fact, an evidence-based response by the Federal Government would instead emphasise the salutary influence of consultation with Aboriginal people and the imperative of fostering a sense of ownership over solutions. Few Australians are aware that many Indigenous policies and programs are devised without adequate input from Aboriginal people themselves. Evidence-based research shows that Indigenous peoples must be included in devising solutions to difficult, intransigent problems and best practice reveals that very few policies and laws are effective if Aboriginal people are not consulted.

In the broader context of Australian history, recent developments confirm that 219 years after first contact, Australia remains exceptional among affluent Western democracies in remaining utterly incapable of comprehending the true genesis of disadvantage and trauma in Aboriginal communities. ■

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