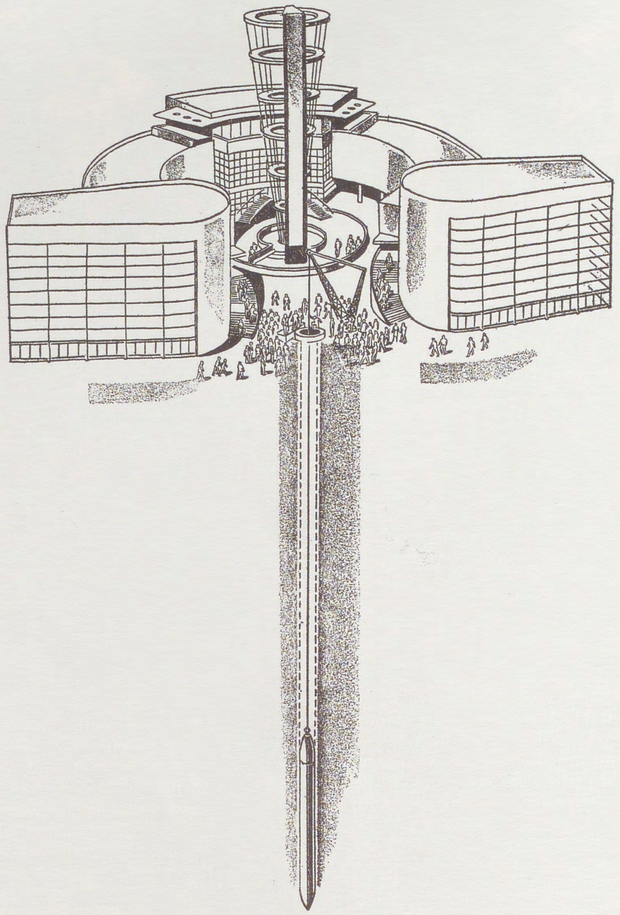


OPPOSITE The Time Capsule as illustrated in *The Book of the Record of the Time Capsule* Westinghouse Electric & Manufacturing Company 1938 [photo: Elvis Richardson]

COMMUNICATING WITH THE FUTURE

ARTISTS ARCHIVE 2005 ANNE KAY & JANE POLKINGHORNE MARGARET ROBERTS LISA KELLY JAY BALL ELIZABETH PULIE GARRY KENT ELVIS RICHARDSON VIRGINIA ROSS MARK HISLOP PAUL BORDER
BRAD BUCKLEY SARAH GOFFMAN JOSIE CAVALLARO SOPHIE COOMBS ALEX GAWRONSKI NELL HELEN HYATT-JOHNSTON BRUCE MCCALMONT MARIA CRUZ TONY SCHWENSEN TREVOR FRY LUKE PARKER
RICHARD SWINEY RON ADAMS GEORGE ADAMS CARLA GESCON LISA ANDREW MARK WILMARSH LISA ANDERSON DIANA WOLFARTH GIANNA WISE ELIZABETH DAY MARGARET GRAVILL ANNA PETERS SIMON
BARNEY RICHARD BABER SIMON PATTISON LUCUNG LUCAS HEIN BARBARA CAMPBELL ROSS HARVEY SIMON CAVANOUGH BEA A GEYER GARY SHIELD PHILIPA VITCH JENNY BROWN TIM HILTON
ROBYN BACKEN LAURA LAMARNA STEPHEN BIRCH BRONA IWANDZAK PETER JACKSON JUSTIN STEVENSON ANTHONY KELLY NIGEL HELLER ROBERT GALL HASTINGS DAVE CUBBY CHRISTOPHER
DEAN MACK BROWN KEN UNSWORTH PATRICK HAYNES IAN WILLIAMS DAVID GRIGGS JOHN WOOMS BARRY HALE KOJI RYUJI JOHN TONKIN CLEO LINO DA SILVA EUGENIA SOTO PETER SPILSBURY
ADRIENNE DOIG JANET LAURENCE LOCUST JONES NELIA JUSTO SHANE HASEMAN PRISCILLA DURNE MICHAEL LINDEMAN JOCK ALEXANDER NICKY BROWNE BRENT GRAYBURN HELEN PYNOR
MARJATTA KAUKOMAA KYLIE WILKINSON RUARK LEWIS JOE PSEGIANNAKIS ROSE ANN MCGREAVY VICTORIA LOBREGAT BILLY GRUNER DANIELLE COONAN JONATHON JONES ZANNY BEGG SALVATORE
PANATTERI JAMES ANGUS FIONA POLKINGHORNE LINDA GOODMAN DAVID HAINES JENNY TURPIN JANE POLKINGHORNE ANNE KAY

THE ARTISTS' ARCHIVE

ELVIS RICHARDSON

"IF YOU HAD ANY BALLS, YOU'D SAY 'OH, MY GOD, WHAT IS THAT THING?' THEN SCREAM AND CUT YOUR MIC."

In *From the Earth to the Moon*, a 1998 HBO mini-series based on the people and events of the first manned voyage to the moon, pilot Michael Collins made the above suggestion as to what Neil Armstrong should say upon stepping onto the lunar surface. The *Apollo 11* astronauts – Armstrong, Aldrin and Collins – apparently argued about who would make that "one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind". Neil Armstrong's role in the mission, and therefore his seating position inside the aircraft, meant that only he had direct access to the door; so that settled that argument. Watched by millions on television, the first man on the moon was an event whose entry into the public record was itself a public occasion. I am sure every bit of evidence of the *Apollo 11* has since been filed and stored in the official archives of numerous public and private organisations not to mention countless personal scrapbooks and shoe boxes. The momentousness of an event such as the moon landing demanded of those witnessing it at the time a kind of prophetic self-awareness for those who would be listening and watching in the future.

I remember in primary school my year three class made a time capsule. They seemed to be quite popular then. I remember nothing of the actual contents of the capsule or what it looked like or its intended date of unsealing. But I was in awe of the *idea* of a time capsule then and I marvel at it still.

This earnest yet edgy idea of time capsules excited me about participating in and then viewing *Artists' Archive* a multi-channel DVD project by Sydney-based artists Anne Kay and Jane Polkinghorne. *Artists' Archive* consists of 100 recorded video interviews with artists in and around Sydney made over a six month period in 2005. Each artist was asked to comment on:

1 their role as an artist
2 how they judge success
3 if social or political themes influence their art

one part of Kay and Polkinghorne's contribution to *Situation* (2005) an exhibition curated by Russell Storer that presented artists' collaborations and networks from Berlin, Singapore and Sydney. The *Artists' Archive* was initially inspired by Elizabeth Pulie's ongoing project in which transcribed interviews with artists are published in her intermittent zine *Lives of the Artists*.

According to its creators, *Artists' Archive* "came out of thinking about the trajectories of different artists' careers—how some artists are flavour of the month and then seem to disappear a few years down the track. One way to become aware of this was to record interviews with a whole range of artists and then, by putting the interviews away for a substantial amount of time, that process might become clearer."

Each video lasts for five or more minutes and to watch all 100 is a mammoth undertaking from which no casual summation is possible simply because of the vast differences in individual attitudes. What the *Artists' Archive* does is to put artists' diverse personal beliefs on the public record. Rising to the challenge of self assessment posed by the project, each artist bravely defines their experience and understanding of their own cultural and artistic identity, how they rate success and how they judge their impact on society. Not wishing to be seen solely as interviewers, Kay and Polkinghorne interview each other as well.

The enduring idea of the *Artists' Archive* project is its pre-purchased ticket for the future. It is both a time capsule and a resource for the public record. The *Artists' Archive* was recently purchased by the Museum of Contemporary Art and is now stored in a beige archival box with an official caveat that after 2007 it cannot be publicly shown again until 2016. Ten years is but the blink of an eye when it comes to time capsules, but it just might be time enough in an artist's career to read the writing on the wall.

The American electrical company Westinghouse captured the cultural imagination and really coined the term when they created the most ambitious modern time capsule for their pavilion at the 1939 New York World Fair. Using the company's own purpose-invented non-corrosive material Cupalloy, the 1.8 metre long cylinder was buried like a subterranean Noah's ark below their pavilion in Flushing Meadows, not to be opened for 5000 years.

In addition to the consistent formula of the three questions a visual continuity is created. Framed in medium close-up, each artist is seated in either their studio or their home. They talk to the interviewer who remains off-camera and their answers are, for the most part, presented in one unedited sequence.

The 100 interviews in *Artists' Archive* were displayed over eight monitors with content labels, headphones and seating as

The contents of the Westinghouse time capsule were selected based on their capacity to represent human (but really American) life as it existed in 1939. The Time Capsule contents included an

odd assortment of everyday items used by men, women and children; and scientific categories of fabrics, metals, plastics and seeds. Contemporary art, literature and news events were also included on microfilm along with instructions on how to build a microfilm viewer.

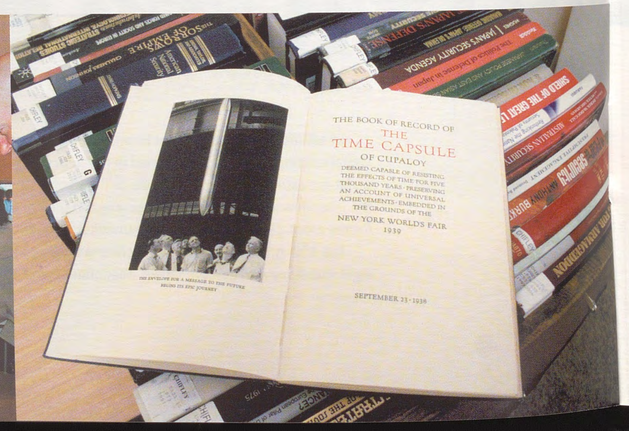
The Westinghouse capsule was a serious attempt to put together a message that had a chance of surviving 5,000 years. To ensure the capsule's eventual discovery, Westinghouse commissioned the publication of *The Book of the Record of the Time Capsule*, printed on archival paper with special ink; it and the Bible were the only books placed inside the crammed capsule. Westinghouse distributed the book throughout the world: to libraries, universities, national archives and even Tibetan monasteries in the hope of keeping the memory of the capsule alive until 6939, a copy can be found in Australia at the Chifley Library at Australian National University. The book describes the time capsule, its contents and its purpose. It explains exactly where it is, how to find it, how to build a metal detector to aid in the search, how to dig it up, how to open it and how to decipher the English of 5,000 years before. This sounds pretty funny considering most of us reading this probably don't know of its existence only 67 years later. And what's to stop someone in 4,000 years opening it anyway?

Artists Archive overcomes this potential disappearing act by creating is own self-referential archive, utilising the research convention popularised by Michael Apted in his ground-breaking documentary series *7UP*. Apted launched *7UP* in 1962 with the prophetic premise "give me a child when he is seven and I will show you the man". The *7UP* series chronicles the lives of fourteen English children via filmed interviews; the first at the age of seven. Apted returned to interview the children every seven years to see what happened with their lives. *49UP*, the latest instalment, was released in 2005. The idea that the fate of the adult would already be determined in a child of seven was a controversial stance in 1962, at a time when the theory of human development placed greater emphasis on environmental factors rather than genetic. The nature/nurture debate can seem a little quaint when viewed from the present, only a year after the Human Genome Project cracked the human DNA code expanding the debate again with astounding implications for our future.

There is an honest curiosity at the heart of the *Artists' Archive* project that becomes compelling when we begin to imagine what it could mean in ten years time. Just how will Kay and Polkinghorne's project build on its potential to speak to us from the future about the present?

TIME CAPSULE CONTENTS 1939 I. ARTICLES OF COMMON USE A. CONTRIBUTING TO CONVENIENCE, COMFORT, HEALTH, SAFETY 1 ALARM CLOCK 2 CAN OPENER 3 EYEGLASSES, BIFOCALS (BAUSCH & LOMB) 4 FOUNTAIN PEN (WATERMAN) 5 MAZDA ELECTRIC LAMP (WESTINGHOUSE, 60 WATT, 110 VOLT) 6 MECHANICAL PENCIL (WATERMAN) 7 MINIATURE CAMERA (EASTMAN, BANTAM K.A. SPECIAL F.4.5. LENS) 8 NAIL FILE 9 PADLOCK AND KEYS (THE YALE & TOWNE MANUFACTURING COMPANY) 10 SAFETY PIN 11 SILVERWARE - KNIFE, FORK, SPOON (HEIRLOOM PLATE, GRENOBLE PATTERN, BY WM. A. ROGERS LTD., ONEIDA LTD. SUCCESSOR) 12 TAPE MEASURE (KEUFFEL & ESSER) 13 TOOTH BRUSH 14 TOOTH POWDER IN SMALL CONTAINER 15 TRANSMITTER AND RECEIVER OF ORDINARY HANDSET TELEPHONE 16 WATCH (SMALL WRIST WATCH FOR WOMAN) 17 WESTINGHOUSE STERILAMP (BACTERICIDAL) B. FOR THE PLEASURE, USE, AND EDUCATION OF CHILDREN 18 BOY'S TOY - A MECHANICAL, SPRING PROPELLED AUTOMOBILE 19 GIRL'S TOY - A SMALL DOLL 20 MICKEY-MOUSE CHILD'S CUP OF PLASTIC MATERIAL (BRYANT ELECTRIC COMPANY) 21 SET OF ALPHABET BLOCKS C. PERTAINING TO THE GROOMING AND VANITY OF WOMEN 22 WOMAN'S HAT, STYLE OF AUTUMN, 1938 (DESIGNED SPECIALLY BY LILLY DACHE 23 COSMETIC MAKE [illegible] WO MINIATURE BOXES OF FACE-POWDER, LIPSTICK, ROUGE, EYE SHADOW) 24 RHINESTONE CLIP (PURCHASED AT WOOLWORTH'S) [illegible] OF MEN 25 CONTAINER OF TOBACCO 26 ELECTRIC RAZOR AND CORD (REMINGTON-RAND CLOSE SHAVER WITH WESTINGHOUSE [illegible] AND BLADES (GILLETTE ARISTOCRAT ONE-PIECE RAZOR, GILLETTE SAFETY RAZOR CO.) 29 SMOKING PIPE (DRINKLESS KAYWOODIE [illegible] LONDON) E. PERTAINING TO GAMES PICTURED AND DESCRIBED IN MICRO-FILE: 31 BASEBALL 32 DECK OF CARDS 33 GOLF BALL (KRO-FLITE, A. [illegible] FABRICS 36 ASBESTOS CLOTH (JOHNS-MANVILLE) 37 COTTON SWATCHES (JAS. MCCUTCHEON & CO.) 38 GLASS FABRIC SAMPLES (WESTINGHOUSE [illegible] SWATCHES (DU PONT AND CELANESE) 41 RUBBER FABRICS (LASTEX CLOTH, UNITED STATES RUBBER PRODUCTS, INC.) 42 SILK SWATCHES (JAS [illegible] METALS AND METALLIC ALLOYS: 44 HIPERNIK (WESTINGHOUSE) 45 ALUMINIUM (COMMERCIALLY PURE SAMPLE FROM ALUMINIUM COMPANY [illegible] ALUMINUM COMPANY OF AMERICA) 47 CARBON STEEL (ELECTRO METALLURGICAL COMPANY) 48 CHROMIUM (ELECTRO METALLURGICAL COMPANY [illegible] MANGANESE (ELECTRO METALLURGICAL COMPANY) 51 FERROSILICON (ELECTRO METALLURGICAL COMPANY) 52 FERROVANADIUM (ELECTRO METALLURGICAL COMPANY) 53 IRON (PURE SAMPLE FROM WESTINGHOUSE RESEARCH LABORATORIES) 54 MAGNESIUM HIGH-STRENGTH ALLOY (DOWMETAL, FURNISHED BY DOW CHEMICAL COMPANY) 55 MANGANESE (ELECTRO METALLURGICAL COMAPNY) 56 SILICON (ELECTRO METALLURGICAL COMPANY) STAINLESS STEEL (ELECTRO METALLURGICAL COMPANY 57 TEMPERABLE COPPER (CUPALOY, FURNISHED BY WESTINGHOUSE) 58 HIPERSIL (WESTINGHOUSE) 59 TUNGSTEN WIRE (FILAMENT FOR WESTINGHOUSE MAZDA ELECTRIC LAMP) C. NON-METALLIC MATERIALS AND SUBSTANCES: 60 AIRPLANE PULLEY OF LAMINATED PHENOL PLASTIC MICARTA-WESTINGHOUSE 61 ANTHRACITE COAL (SEALED IN GLASS, FURNISHED BY ANTHRACITE INSTITUTE) 62 ARTIFICIAL CELLULOSE SPONGE (E.I. DUPONT DE NEMOURS & CO., INC.) 63 ARTIFICIAL LEATHER 64 ASBESTOS SHINGLE (FURNISHED BY JOHNS-MANVILLE) 65 BEETLEWARE: A SPECIMEN OF UREA PLASTIC (WESTINGHOUSE) 66 CARBORUNDUM (THE CARBORUNDUM COMPANY) 67 GLASS WOOL 68

ARTISTS ARCHIVE OVERCOMES THIS POTENTIAL DISAPPEARING ACT BY CREATING ITS OWN SELF-REFERENTIAL ARCHIVE



Anne Kay and Jane Polkinghorn
Artists Archive 2005 DVD 100 hours

FAR LEFT Anne Kay and Jane Polkinghorn
Artists Archive 2005 Installation view
[photo: Vicki Irving]

LEFT *The Book of the Record of the Time Capsule* located in ANU Chifley Library. Elvis Richardson was the first person ever to borrow this book.
[photo: Elvis Richardson]