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RealTime is a live-in festival writing ensemble creating four editions (one every four days) in print and on-line, responding to shows, exhibitions, forums, festival themes and debates. RealTime on-site was initiated at the 1996 Adelaide Festival and its team of artist-writers invited to LIFT 97 (London International Festival of Theatre). We now return to Adelaide as part of the official program of the 1998 festival.

## End and beginning

### Keith Gallasch

Needcompany, Sydney Symphony Orchestra, Les Ballets C. de la B., Itim Theatre, Otto Lechner, Guy Klucevsek, *The Waste Land*

Almost (but feeling nowhere near) halfway through, the festival is about to unleash the second of its three mighty waves which committed festival-goers ride with relish, abandoning themselves from time to time to the depths, resurfacing, ready for more, and more, and more. *Seven Streams, Va Yomer, Va Yelech, Burn Sonata, La Tristeza Complice* and *Hungry* complete their runs. Pause. Enter Needcompany with *Snakesong*, the first-night audience quietly leaving the theatre, brow-furrowed, private, "see-it-to-believe-it" passed mouth to ear to mouth. Enter, one night only, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra bird-singing and thundering Messiaen-ic salvation to an unsuspecting audience (what, no strings!). Magnificent silences transcendently suspend time and yet are alarmingly suspenseful. Sofia Gubaidulina's massive spiritual *Offertorium* is played by violinist Michael Dauth with every risk embraced from rasping dark altercations with orchestra to a final and sublime near-tearful tonal union. This was a night of enormous sound, rough-edged, sometimes barely formed, cautious in the Messiaen (a touch low church), but all the more theatrical for it. The sight of brass and percussion at the very back of the giant stage and Edo de Waart at a great distance

downstage for the Messiaen, or the two sets of four brass players either side of the stage for the Gabrieli amplified this theatricality and the special offering of a rare and remarkable piece of orchestral programming. As sublime (in the now multiple meanings of this restless adjective/noun) were the brief appearances of great accordionists at The Squeezebox. Otto Lechner turned orchestral with a driving, emotional account of The Police's *Walking on the Moon* after a sinewy dancing rendition of *Caravan*. Guy Klucevsek performed a Burt Bacharach set including a virtuosic *This Guy's in Love with You* entirely in high, sweet, slowly paced harmonics and a massive organ recital rendering of *Wives and Lovers*. Accordion-ophiles were rapt.

If the spirit is moved on these musical occasions, the power of spirit as Word is, as Robyn Archer always intended, everywhere, from performance to forum debate to visual art installation. The paranoia about the demise of the word with the rise of visual and physical and techno-theatres (and the endless combinations and permutations thereof) has surely been shown to be empty. That the word finds a new place in performance, that it is not pre-eminent, that it does not always drive the whole work, that much is certain—it co-exists and engages with other languages. *La Tristeza Complice* is no less a great theatrical experience for being spare of word, nor is it simply (or complexly) a dance piece. However, the Word in *Va Yomer, Va*

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*Velech* does drive a work that embraces a range of contemporary performance strategies. But the Word here is not simply received, it is arranged, re-arranged, repeated, embodied and re-embodied, just as it is, in other ways, in *The Waste Land*, made public, given voice, a voice rising out of the whole body, a choral voice (the shared voices of *Va Yomer*, the many-voices-in-one in *The Waste Land*, the transcendent unison in Hildegard's *Canticles*). This making public—as so obviously opposed to the private and personal reading—of sacred and secular canonical texts and this giving the word to the body to speak and display yields great and new drama ... and anxieties. The sacred is not only content: it can come in the most alarming forms. For example, to quote from the Festival Souvenir Program, "What does the listener make of music that is sensual, erotic even, restless, ecstatic, apocalyptic—the sacred entwined with the apparently profane?" The Word is with us but is being newly spoken. Now for the next wave: Needcompany, Cloud Gate, Junko Wada, Leah Purcell, India's Chorus Repertory Theatre, Tyler Coppin (as Robert Helpmann), Stalker, The Australian Art Orchestra, Eisler's *Die Massnahme*, ANAT's FOLDBACK and the CME-Kosky *Voice, Jam & Videotape ...* and more. And a third wave to come.

## Plainsong Personified

Di Weekes

*Canticles of Ecstasy*

Hildegard von Bingen

St Peters Cathedral, March 2

Hildegard von Bingen (she turns 900 this year) was an extraordinary woman indeed. Of noble birth, well educated, theologian, mystic, writer, composer, naturalist, and dedicated correspondent, she certainly earned her claim to fame. The program presented by Sequentia's vocal ensemble Vox Feminae included two of her Symphoniae: *Songs to Maria* and *Songs to the Saints*. These compositions were preceded and interspersed with a Processional and Polyphonic verses of the Nativity (two sets) written by her Benedictine colleagues in Aquitaine and which, according to the program, represent "some of the most radical contemporary music of the 12th century".

The term plainsong (*cantus planus*) first appeared when this highly elaborate melodic

art-form needed to be distinguished from the new *musica mensurata* music which involved harmony, and therefore needed to be measured. According to the authorities it reached its peak very early (around the turn of the 7th century) and after the 12th century received few important additions, although fresh developments in the 9th and 10th centuries saw the introduction of tropes, proses and sequences. A study of mediaeval ecclesiastical music with its Latin texts, theological context and ancient modes (complete with reciting notes and finals) is no mean academic feat. To specialise also in the execution of such esoteric music (there was no Latin word for 'performance' as we understand it today), to recreate the monastic ritual, to rediscover its artistic merits by comparison with previous and contemporary literature requires not only rigorous scholarship but impeccable vocal technique, a homogeneous sound and above all uniformity of stylistic intention.

In accomplishing all of the above, the members of this ensemble have certainly justified their reputation in the related fields of musicological research and 'authentic' (informed) performance practice. But they are by now also famous in quite a different sense; their recordings have reached the number one position on the classical charts in France and Australia while remaining in the top five in Europe and North America. Given the City of Churches' strong involvement in the choral tradition, and the exposure given to the group by ABC FM (Christopher Lawrence's "swoon sections" included!), small wonder that St. Peter's Cathedral was literally jamb-packed.

If the venue was ideal, the words "perfect intonation" gained new meaning during this performance. (I mean, they performed an encore which ended in unison, and only one voice was heard. Simply stunning.) Here were six women in the prime of life, elegantly gowned in various shades of black, purple and dark blue (The Quink Ink Girls?), looking perfectly relaxed, executing mediaeval plainsong—reading from neumes, not modern notation—with a confidence and freedom which was totally unnerving. These were not solo voices, but a perfectly matched vocal, dare I say, instrumental ensemble. The performance was spacious, free, agile. Unmeasured maybe, but totally disciplined. When the music was most demanding they simply upped the eye contact and hey presto, they connected. For

example, towards the end of the program we heard the Aquitaine *O Maria, Deu Maire*, a composition in Occitan (the language of the troubadours) which was considerably more melismatic and intricately contrapuntal than anything which had gone before. They had every phrase nailed to the last cubic millimetre of lung capacity, which is pretty precise.

For most of the performance (not all) I followed the English translations in the program. We didn't have the Latin text in its entirety, but we were given some key words like *casu* (fall), *malicioso* (evil), *aurora* (dawn) or *erigendum nos* (raise us up). At times I thought the melodies were quite programmatic, especially in Hildegard's works. It wasn't hard to recognise the Dorian and Ionian modes and, with some intellectual effort, I think I almost managed to appreciate the difference in style between Hildegard's compositions and those of her contemporaries. But I spent the rest of the evening wondering about the rest of the audience, many of whom had no program, or if they did, weren't following the words. Why were they there? What had they expected? Did they really understand this music? I mean, how could they?

The answer is simple. They were in a trance-like state. They were meditating, drifting in some bygone, Byzantine space, floating in the freedom of melodic line, bathing in the purity of sound, basking in exotic modes. They were getting their spiritual fix through musical massage. Perhaps some were also putting faces to names, paying homage to the recording artists whom they have learned to love. As far removed from the scholastic and musical mindset of Vox Feminae as the peasants of Rupertsberg were from the lifestyle of the Abbess Hildegard. But just remember, it was Hildegard herself who wrote: "Then it pleased the king to raise a small feather from the ground and he commanded it to fly. The feather flew, not because of anything in itself but because the air bore it along. Thus am I ..." And so are we, under the powerful spell of her plainsong.

## Imagine: an archive of sorrow

Linda Marie Walker

*The Waste Land*

Fiona Shaw

Royalty Theatre, March 3

*Carmen*  
La Cuadra de Sevilla (Spain)  
Festival Theatre, March 2

*Lustmord*  
Jenny Holzer  
University of SA's Art Museum, March 3

Upstairs at the Art Gallery of SA there's an exhibition called *pure*. It's special ... perhaps I should say "beautiful". It's a place here—the careful attention to its overall ambience has made it that—and everywhere too, in the sense of being timeless, as memorials can be.

Virginia Baxter and I had a conversation walking back from *The Waste Land* to The Squeezebox – passed the cool blue light under the steps of Police Headquarters and down King William Street, stepping over the vomit outside the Town Hall (I hear Fiona Shaw say, "Flowed up the hill and down King William Street"). The audience laughs—about the desire to live in a 'cared-for' world.

We wondered why ugly buildings are built, why public spaces are often sad. We wondered why it wasn't common knowledge that everything touches and is touched by everything else. This is what Fiona Shaw makes clear in her reading of *The Waste Land*. This is what is so curiously archival about the work; not those much talked-of references, but it itself, now, is an archive, and is re-addressed by her. Its resonance is changed, re-arranged, and returns to us, slightly displaced. Its sense and limit (its state) affirmed as alive, forever.

This, displacement, is critical to the internal fire of this festival. Whereas elsewhere in this issue ('Will anyone arrive'), I felt sorrow all around, a few days later, and after much talking and sitting and walking I feel instead that I've been drawn to the edge of an archive—one that is dishevelled, traumatised (matters are surfacing, the dead rising)—of wounds and shocks ("My nerves are bad to-night ...", wrote Eliot).

(This is the trouble with, and joy of, immersion in an event, this over here starts looking toward that over there, and before you know it there's a relationship; this and that shack-up.)

The displacement is, in the main, conceptual. The 'thing' remains as it was,

but the space around it alters.

Hal Foster (a keynote speaker at Artists' Week) writes of this shift being "from reality as an effect of representation to the real as a thing of trauma ..." (*The Return of the Real*).

*pure* is a corner of this archive (an archive of sorrow; this is what I've come to call it, momentarily), where one can wait with trauma, one is in trauma's company, quietly, calmly. And this is sweet respite from the "chatter" (as I've heard it called) of the *Adelaide Biennial*, installed directly below, where works which invite your time are jostled by other's determined to strike you (but, please see Colin Duncan's, it is so finely realised).

*Carmen* too addresses the archive. The director, Salvador Távora, tells us of a *Carmen* unlike the one known to us. This one is strong, sensual, bold, and not killed for this, but for the love and freedom these lead to. The woman still dies. But there's a difference. And the difference makes all the difference, it alters not only the story, but the how and why of stories. The huge sound of the bugles and drums is meant to permeate our deadness, to make us reconsider. The sound pushes against the walls of the Festival Theatre and seems to mock Eliot's lines:

*He who was living is now dead  
We who were living are now dying  
With a little patience.*

As Toni Morrison told us in *Beloved*, you can't keep bad death in the ground.

Trauma carries sorrow, fury, and misery. Jenny Holzer's exhibition, at the University of SA's Art Museum, North Terrace, conveys this vividly, relentlessly. I intended noting down one or two of the sentences flowing down the LEDs, mostly in red, as I recall, but didn't, couldn't. To take them away seemed another act of violence. The bones and teeth laid out on the wooden tables, some with metal tags, all scrubbed clean, looked so innocent and unharmed, sort of gloriously and simply themselves, you could pin one to your lapel. Their deathly pallor overseen by the unthinkable, acts not dared imagined (in the real of time). It is difficult to stay in the room reading, near the bones, the bones of 'lustmord', sex-killing. This is not a question, but: how does it come

about that people do this to one another. (Fiona Shaw sits there, on the dark stage, in the broken-apart Royalty Theatre, all restless and twitching, alert to each far sound:

*'What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?  
I never know what you are thinking.  
Think.'*

Here, in *Lustmord*, it is clear, the Archive, the repository, or in other words 'order', is impossible. And yet, and yet, an archive of sorrow (a quality which is here and everywhere, and nowhere 'housed') exists, intangible, breathless, in the ordinary gatherings of words which say what was what, and who was who, over and over. These are evil gatherings. Language holds us, all bits and pieces, coming and going: shame and fear.

The conversation with Virginia had something to do with 'evil gatherings', with thinking the world an archive, and each tiny empty and filled space an archive too. This would make seeing and believing difficult, of course. But what the hell, it seemed a good idea. And everything I see in this festival confirms this.

## Towards the 2000 festival—two possible contributors

**Anne Thompson**  
*Magnetic Motion Capture*  
Chrissie Parrott  
Ngapartji Multimedia Centre

Enrique Vargas  
Masterclass & Workshop Series  
Flinders University Drama Centre, March 2-7

In 1996 Chrissie Parrott was awarded a Research Fellowship by Arts WA. The research she undertook focuses on the use of Magnetic Motion Capture Technology in choreographic development and teaching methodology. This technology enables dance to be recorded as three-dimensional in three-dimensional space. Apparently, Merce Cunningham has been using a similar system to record and choreograph his dances for ten years.

So, how does it work? The moving body wears a suit with ten to twenty sensors, all hooked through a single server worn on the sacrum. These sensors

'sense' the magnetic field produced by the body and are thus able to determine its position in space and track its motion. The data is transformed by the software program into a pattern of spheres. A skeleton—which connects the spheres—is 'found', or created, within the program. A wire frame is then modelled around the skeleton as physical outline of this now virtual body. The frame is then transformed by a graphic animator into a 'flesh-and-blood' character by digital, as differentiated from photographic or video, means. Finally, a three-dimensional environment is created.

Parrott opened her lecture—in which she outlined the findings of her research so far—by recalling Muybridge's attempt to record motion using high-speed photography in the nineteenth century. His sequences of photographs show bone and muscle positions against ruled backgrounds. As another century draws to a close, another attempt is being made to capture the motion of the human body—with Parrott offering us a demonstration.

I found the deconstruction fascinating, the body as free-floating, rotating spheres and the body defined as a skeletal and muscular wire cage around these spheres. As we watched a phrase of movement performed by this caged body over and over, I felt my body learning the moves, kinesthetically engaging with the virtual image. I felt the benefit of this technology as a tool in the process of recording and learning dance.

And at the same time I found myself wondering to what end. I pondered the fact that bodily labour, including the labour of dancing, is erased here. We sit in front of a screen. What will our bodies become? What will we become if we are shaped by our actions? (I loved the bodies of the women in *Masterkey*, tenderly shaping themselves around the bodies of their love objects/lost children and daily activity—actively directed at the world.)

Another application of Magnetic Motion Capture Technology, Parrott explained, is animation created from the moving body. This includes instantaneous animation, where the movement of the body produces the animated image. As illustration, Parrott introduced us to a popular virtual female

character with huge, solid breasts and erect nipples. I was intrigued, even alarmed, by those same nipples appearing on the body of the virtual dancer, marking her as female. The politics of representation seem a pertinent area of investigation here given that the aesthetic produced by this system so far is the same as that which appears in video games. It is graphic and, to me, over-determined. The motion of these characters becomes secondary to the loudness of the visual statement.

But this recording of the body as composed of sites of motion, now there is a poetry in that. Yet I am suspicious of my own love of the representation of 'pure' motion. What is denied and erased in this construction of a neutral, moving body is, of course, the mix of gender, race and the imprint of habitat, all that colours and determines individual difference. I wondered again how performance can resist or work in interesting ways with the 'ideal', with our fantasies of our bodies as coherent, desirable to others, and beyond weakness and decay?

In what seems like a world away from the bodies sitting looking at a screen at Ngapartji Multimedia Centre, Enrique Vargas investigated a dramaturgy of the senses in a darkened studio at Flinders University. The subject of his performance research is how to create a sensorial theatre, a sensory journey for an audience which will evoke memories and desires embedded in the body. The experiences he shaped in the workshop were disquieting, comforting and erotic, an intense experience of being a sensual body. Vargas spoke of his performances as experiences which emerge from and shape darkness and silence—and who we are in these elements.

These two research projects frame the body in radically different ways. Parrott's screen body is animated by, and replaces, the living, moving body. It does not desire, grow tired, become cold or hungry. It does not wear out, or get arthritis. Vargas' body, however, senses, feels, remembers and desires. The traditional binary of Western art dance lurks behind these two endeavours—the classical or Olympic body unfettered by gravity and desire, and the carnal, everyday body subject to gravity and time.

## Handmade tales

**Maryanne Lynch**

*Stories of Faces: Faces Telling Stories*  
Horta Van Hoye  
Little Theatre, March 3

Horta Van Hoye makes magic with paper. Screwing it up, twisting it around, rolling it over, and Hey presto! An old woman, a timid suitor, the Holy Family and ... a donkey! A donkey? Yes, and a chook too, broody as all hell and out to get a quiet moment or you better watch out. Horta Van Hoye makes faces and tells stories, all with a roll of butcher's paper and a few rubber bands. The children in the audience, large and small, love it and love her, this rolypoly Belgian artist in the grey dustcoat. In sixty short minutes, she presents us with a series of tales and a set of figures, muttering in a mixture of French and English and playing up to the audience like a complete ham, but always with that twinkle in her eye.

Horta Van Hoye is a storyteller. A different type of storyteller from others whose works I've seen in the festival, but no less a storyteller. A simple sentiment, a moral drawn, a joke or two; ooh aah! She tells her stories as if they are fables or fairytales, and perhaps they are. The only disappointment is that most of her paper figures are ready-made and so we miss out on watching the magic at work. Normally, it's not seeing the sleight-of-hand that makes a trick work. In *Stories of Faces*, however, the moments when Horta Van Hoye and the paper move into active relationship are wonderful—but alas, too few. Even so, there is enough magic to carry away with us, to carry like a single precious sheet of handmade paper.

## After hunger

**Keith Gallasch**

*Hungry*  
Deborah Leiser  
Price Theatre, March 2

I was intrigued to be at *Hungry* with a largely Jewish audience on its final full-house night after a brief and successful festival season. It was an audience that this show was partly designed to address, about the issue of women's role in ritual in Jewish culture in Australia. The more liberal repositioning of American-Jewish women in the USA is reported (a set of voiceover letters from a female friend in New York) and a more liberal future is projected for Australian-Jewish women at the show's end.

The presence of an American cantor, Janece Cohen (who lives in Sydney), a Torah as set (corrugated iron, and increasingly inhabited and possessed by the writer-producer-performer Deborah Leiser), computer-generated images of Hebraic icons and letters, and a thematic construction echoing the unfolding of Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement) evoke, in no uncertain terms, a ritual that a woman soon makes her own. But it's more complex than that, as the friend in New York embraces traditional cleansing rituals which entail increased constraints on contact between men and women and define the female body as impure, and as the pull of male-led ritual tempts her once more.

*Hungry's* a show I've had an on-off association and fascination with, working with Deborah several years ago to lay its foundations—research, biographical quizzing, worrying at a possible Yom Kippur construction for the envisaged performance. That process took us through a parallel pregnancy and the birth of Deborah's son. After that, she worked with director Tanya Gerstle to create the work and premiere it at Sydney's The Performance Space in 1996. In the recent preparations for the Adelaide Festival and Melbourne Playbox seasons, I visited rehearsals as an 'outside eye'—and especially ear—attentive to the text, which is but one of a number of equally balanced elements in this performance. And, once again, *Hungry* struck me as an essentially gentle work, quietly persuasive, much in the way that Kooemba Jdarra's *Seven Stages of Grieving* is lyrical, delicate and intimate.

Appropriately the *Hungry* audience is deeply attentive, occasional murmurs of explanation or surprise breaking the surface (very Jewish, says Deborah), a few tears each night; a prayer joined in and completed, Deborah recalls; a curious and eager gathering around the Torah set at the end of performances. At the end of a London performance of *Seven Stages* (for the London International Festival of Theatre—LIFT 97), a member of the audience asked director and co-writer Wesley Enoch (with performer Deborah Mailman) why there was no anger in the show, given the injustices perpetrated against Australian Aboriginals. Wesley replied quietly, "Who do you want us to be angry at? You?" This is not to say that either work is without great feeling or moments of passion, rather that they are essentially contemplative with their interplay of media and various forms of address, the absence of

overall narrative (and the presence of a plethora of small resonating narratives) and require open listening and an enquiring eye. (Red Shed's Tim Maddocks spoke eloquently in the Tuesday festival forum about the need not only for writers and directors to create spaces for their audience but for audiences to willingly enter those spaces or "gaps" as he called them.)

We discuss the show after it closes. Deborah feels the audience response was always very warm—and very emotional, adds Tanya, who is taken by a predominantly older audience venturing to see a contemporary performance work they might not usually approach, but accepting it on its own terms because of their interest in the subject and the power of experiencing a familiar ritual not in the synagogue but in the theatre, and performed by a woman. As Deborah says in the Wednesday forum, "the theatre becomes the sacred place it should be", even though "I'm performing a transgressive act"—she dons the shallit, the sacred shawl, and recites prayers. Certainly, the presence one night of a group from Adelaide's Reformed Synagogue with their American female rabbi makes for a more sympathetic audience than some in Sydney where the work was controversial.

Deborah reports hearing from Janece that an eighty-year-old man enjoyed the form of the show and declared that Deborah "had such a good body"—not a sexual comment but approval for Deborah's strength as she climbs and swings from the Torah set. "What he meant by that was he liked the physicality—Jews aren't expected to be physical. The Jewish audience love the physicality, they like the visual elements." More difficult to assess, though, is the non-Jewish response to the work. Prayers are not translated. References here and there are bound to be unintelligible. However, the sacredness of the moment, Deborah thinks, seems to be felt. It's in the beauty of the cantor's singing, the rhythms of the prayers, the projected images, the candles and ethereal pinks and blues of the lighting. And the issues are presented directly from time to time—and they're about the hunger for spirituality that can be fed by ritual. "The unconventional form is probably the best way to deal with this material, it makes the whole thing more like a ritual."

## An other Ethiopia

Sophie and Peter Bishop

*Circus Ethiopia*

Her Majesty's Theatre, February 28

"Will there be any animals?" asked Sophie, my seven-year-old daughter, as we sat watching the large ensemble of young people dancing on stage to electric sounds of Ethiopian rock. "Er, no, I don't think so." "Why are they all African?" "That's where they come from."

Sophie liked all the other kids in the audience and was particularly impressed with the equal split between girls and boys in the circus. She was less impressed with the large man who sat in front of her just before the show began.

Was it a rock concert with dance, acrobatics and juggling—or the other way around? It was certainly skillful but definitely not slick. More of a street sense about it. A few rough edges, mistakes, things dropped, a fall, a trip, but easily retrieved through a smile and enthusiasm. These all added to the feeling of participation by the audience, although when "volunteers" were co-opted, Sophie and I clung to each other to avoid being snatched.

"Are the kids forced to do it?" asked Sophie, wriggling and slumping in a theatre seat not designed for kids. I was worried. Media stereotypes of underprivileged and oppressed Africans passed through my mind. Just what had she been watching on TV? Perhaps school was to blame? "Why do you ask?" "They are all working so hard!", was her casual reply as she eyed the youngest members who seemed around her age. "I think they enjoy it. Wouldn't you like to do it?" Sophie was unsure about that level of discipline. Fair enough. "I expect they don't go to school. They wouldn't have time." "I think they do some of it at school."

My five-year-old son was waiting outside and grabbed us as we appeared after the show. "Did anyone dress up as animals?" "No! Of course not," said Sophie impatiently. "But it was really good. Really fantastic."

## Will anyone arrive

Linda Marie Walker

*Tracking Time*

Parallelo/Doppio Teatro

Adelaide Railway Station, February 28

*Masterkey*

Mary Moore

Space Theatre, February 28

It happens: a theme emerges, unexpected, personal, perhaps too quickly. Robyn Archer warned us of this, except I don't recall she warned about 'sorrow'. And it might be named otherwise. This sorrow is patient. It will do you in. It's necessary though, it's juice for the journey. And it also scorches the soul, dry as a bone. Waiting, waiting, feigning 'health', calmness. The half-light is always half-light, not romantic, not mysterious, it's 'half-light', half-life. A woman in *Masterkey* says, "I understand nothing. What did I miss. I go over and over these happenings". And this is the second to last scene! I wished it had begun here, because by now the lives of several women are over. All that's left is regret.

In *Tracking Time* someone says: "Remember to forget, always remember to forget." It's the same sense: forgetting is the entrance to another place. Well, it's too late. And these two works know this. They are conscious from the beginning that time will do its work; that time matters, time passes, time is grave. When one waits for passage, for the train, one is beside oneself with worry. Will it get me 'home'. Sometimes the imagined destination moves. This happens in *Masterkey*. The lives of the women in the one building are jeopardised by themselves, by their lack of care for destiny. And each of them knows this. This annoyed me. This nostalgia. This stagnant knowledge of willing choices. In *Tracking Time* the lessons of history are shared by men and women; language is used to speak the record, to mark place and time, to travel elsewhere. There are links to *La Tristeza Complice* in that a group of people find themselves together in one spot at the one time: the railway station. The melancholy of structures built for arrivals and departures is felt as soon as one enters.

*Masterkey* is beautiful to watch. I saw it through a fine mist, as if from far away. The stage design is spare, complex, a set of wardrobes open to reveal intricate living spaces, each telling a woman's life. They glide around the black space. Actors climb in one side and out the other. They work like a dream; places where women hide, repair, incubate.

In *Masterkey* and *Tracking Time* the soundtrack is crucial. There is no reason to

compare them, it happened though that I heard them one after the other. They are both present throughout the performance. In *Masterkey* sound dominates, it's a fully developed character. The Star, even. It narrates, it speaks for the women, it sets scenes. It tells you too much. In *Tracking Time* it also tells you, but is less imposing, more muted and woven. It has a similar role to the one in *Masterkey*. And one could wish that it made itself a little more known. It might be that the use of the voice, the actual sound of the words, in the *Masterkey* track is sometimes grating, as if tone is unloved. It's difficult to know now, exactly, what it is that 'feels' wrong. In *Tracking Time* the sound is more composed, more equal to the other components, more aware.

In writing this, so much is unattended: like the windows of the building in *Tracking Time* (how spatially powerful they were, eclipsing the installed elements), and the screen (where live and pre-recorded images were projected), and all the fascinating goings-on of 'real' passengers who stood at those windows and watched, unaware that we were watching them.

**Time and fear**

**Keith Gallasch**

*Tracking Time*

Parallelo/Doppio Teatro

Adelaide Railway Station, March 2

It helps to begin to understand—to make the journey with—*Tracking Time* if you've seen *Preludes to an Exile* (Adelaide Festival, 1996), if you recognise the sailboat masts atop the lockers in the main hall of the station, if you brush against the wall of elderly baggage (looking sadly uncollected) that frames the audience. The first work was delicate and interior, a kind of looking back in anticipation of loss. Its seductive movement was more gestured than actually danced, its music felt like it belonged to a place and a time, even though teetering on the edge of displacement. The new work is a rude shock. You feel like you're entering a familiar space, cupboards, baggage, a quiet entry through railway gates after contemplating lockers filled with clocks and bones that eerily transform the modern station into something elderly and surreal, even dead. But once you're up amongst the baggage a grimly modern world briskly and densely and noisily unfolds out of the smoke. A dancer-narrator lists international dates of death and exile from the recent past

to the present. This is the present, not the almost-but-not-nostalgia of *Preludes*, in this railway station, or any railway station, populated by young performers playing contemporary characters, dancing alone and in sudden groupings, brash or afraid or both, waiting to move on. This is the present of video projections (of this station, this performance, moving, frozen, time lost, recaptured on the back wall of the room). It is a present of simultaneity, a condition of always being on red alert, using your peripheral vision to save your life, your audience gaze distracted by real passersby and the performers suddenly appearing in the station's distance. It is a present of fear. A businessman reassures someone somewhere "Don't be afraid"—the phrase spreads like a meaningless litany because everything says, Be afraid!—the businessman himself stripped down to the brutal 'business warrior', the well-to-do kid in leather screaming, barely intelligible, her pleasure in "smashin' and burnin'", the Russian blackmarket cigarette seller whose grimly engaging monologue recalls a trade in human organs ("people liked my product ... very good, very clean") and his subsequent successful dealings in prosthetic limbs. It prompts a sardonic military dance by the whole company with those very limbs.

I'm reporting fragments. The ones that gathered and cohered and stayed and haunted. A lot else happened. A lot more. But I wasn't always sure what it was or what it said, even though week by week, year in year out, I see shows that fragment (but fall together). I was afraid, for a moment. I glimpsed, for a second, just how transitory the transit site is, however substantial the (railway station) site itself, the building, is. For the rest of it, I'm not sure what I was, or quite where I was, or what or where I was supposed to be. And where were the performers? In a room off the main hall of the station as if doing a theatre show—regardless of the installation (bags, lockers, boxes, video screen) and the station, which therefore became merely a set, a background, a frame, not engaged with. Ambitious dancing imposed on out-of-time bodies, narration and monologues and types sticking out, like relics from an education project, out of their depth, in something richer and darker ... but not visible. I wanted to get out of my seat. I wanted to be near the performers. I wanted performers to play to one of us while the rest watched. I wanted to be a long way away, like one of those passersby I suddenly envied. I wanted

a work that worked from the site, not from inside it, from one point. I wanted to track time with my body. Did I want too much? Did I give too little?

## Multiple And singular

### Di Weekes

*The Seven Streams of the River Ota*  
Ex Machina  
Thebarton Theatre, March 28

### Carmen

La Cuadra de Sevilla  
Adelaide Festival Theatre, March 1

Some of us, I noticed, began our festival fugue with a rather long subject, *The Seven Streams of the River Ota* on Saturday, followed by *Carmen* on Sunday (give or take *Flamma Flamma* as an optional prelude). A spectacular beginning, and a very thought-provoking sequence of events. Robert Lepage's seven-hour epic spans six decades, split neatly into seven cameos set in various well-lit corners of the global village. Continuity is maintained by a tenuous but credible narrative, supported by technical virtuosity and rendered more palatable by a diplomatic dose of well-timed, near slapstick comedy. Aside from the time factor, it makes other demands (multiple percussion, multilingual dialogue) and provides rewards (multifunctional set and multipurpose morality). The magnanimous New Age perspective magnified to multinational blockbuster status, with plenty of generic, cosmopolitan food for thought.

And then there was *Carmen*. Cut 'multinational' and insert 'nationalist minority'. Replace multiplication with simple addition and subtraction, and what you have is a production imbued with inheritance, a Royal Andalusian Show (horse and all), a tight theatrical concept grounded in centuries of artistic pedigree.

There is something inherently seductive about side-drums muffled for a few seconds by a house curtain and rising to a climax as the drapery is swept aside. Perhaps there is something even more seductive about men in military uniforms ranked on shallow rises blowing bugles in a chorus that would make you weep (or cringe). This is the bare, blatant sensuality of true theatre. "Out of tune"—who said that? (No valves, you understand, just the lungs and the lips!) And voices—"You call this opera?"—which seem to emanate from the pelvic region, voices

which wail, declaim and emote in a manner which relegates the blues to some less profound sphere of much more recent cultural history. Those who were shocked by the initial sound fell into a fatal trap and may well have wished themselves elsewhere on such a perfect Sunday afternoon. The rest of us either settled uncomfortably, or were comfortably unsettled by the emerging predominance of the Phrygian mode, the melodic contours of squealing brass, the persistence of snares and rim-shots, the rhythmic complexities and elaborate cascades from two slightly detuned guitars, and the rich harmonic overtones of the voices. One could only marvel at the perfection of the mix and match. If our expectations were initially pitched in the wrong key, they were soon transposed. We were suddenly forced into focus, our heartstrings adjusted until we were inescapably in tune with another world, another reality.

As for the dance, it is not just the spectacularly breathtaking precision of fancy Flamenco footwork, or the noble nuance of symbolic gestures belonging to the genre, for in this instance both are integrated with stylised choreography and inextricably bound up with the expressive phrasing of the accompanying musicians. Every detail of the story is enacted with passionate commitment, commitment of the kind that demands retribution as surely as night follows day, as completely as one generation follows and nurtures another. Here the psycho-sexual ego is drawn larger than life, the emotions not just amplified but mixed down, the narrative refined and self-perpetuating. At the same time (and almost imperceptibly) the wavering pitch, compelling modal cadences and trembling lower torsos form a three-dimensional echo chamber for our own insecurities, our fantasies, that tiny inner voice which bellows: "If only I could live like this."

In sincere appreciation of *Seven Streams*, one must marvel at the machinery that allows it to be realised: technical expertise, acting stamina, set design, visual effects, sound engineering, even funding and marketing mechanisms, in short, the tenacity and teamwork of an entire crew. Whereas in this particular dramatisation of the *Carmen* myth, the cumulative discipline and artistry of the individuals on stage simply overwhelm any political manifesto, and appeal directly through the senses to the very depths of the singular soul. For me, there was a world of difference.

## A day of words and bones: March 3

### Virginia Baxter

*Lunchtime Forum: The Rhyme and Rhythm Method*  
Piano Bar, 1pm

### Lustmord

Jenny Holzer  
University of SA Art Museum

### From the Freud Museum, Wild Talents

Susan Hiller  
Experimental Art Foundation

### The Waste Land

Fiona Shaw  
Royalty Theatre

1.00: Fiona Shaw is talking about the way that her version of *The Waste Land* extracts the people from Eliot's text. Always a problematic business, extracting actuality from art, people from words, as Fiona Shaw has discovered. While some Eliot fans find it a "help" to hear it, others have accused her of stealing "their" poem.

1.10: Deborah Warner is saying that theatre *is* the spoken word. No question about it, even though there might be only one word. Everything else is "choreography or something else". Well I had a question though, and, as usual, I didn't ask it. Like John McCallum once said, at these forums it's often more satisfying to wrestle with the question yourself. I say to myself, "Choreography" might describe Leigh Warren's *Parallax* but, I cleverly counter, it doesn't begin to account for *La Tristeza Complíce* which I would claim for a theatre, while not a theatre *of* words (though words are uttered). Performance. I agree with myself.

1.15: Deborah Warner has that confident British way of seeming to write as she speaks. You can almost see her well-shaped thoughts tracing themselves in the air. In this session, chaired by Martin Portus (who reveals to the visible chagrin of the panel that his favourite playwright is David Hare) her intelligence is barely stretched. She lazily intones: "At sometime or other, as someone moves through the air, a sound will be made." I write it down.

1.30: Red Shed director, Tim Maddock, is visibly thinking as he speaks about the hours of silence in *The Seven Streams of the*

*River Ota*. Warner improves on his phrasing with “a combustion of silence and image”.

1.45: Fiona Shaw is equally impressive with her “amm” nice turn of phrase, though she is stumped by a young man in the audience who asks whether she sees herself as separate from words, outside them. She answers more like an acting teacher than someone who otherwise speaks so eloquently of the embodiment of words.

1.50: Miriel Lenore has a nice Australian wry tone and is generous in her account of work on the “one play (she) knows”: *Masterkey*, adapted in a collaboration with Japanese novelist Masako Togawa and designer-director Mary Moore.

2.15 Linda Marie Walker and I are inside Jenny Holzer’s frightening installation *Lustmord*, a word which translates roughly (appropriately) from German as “rape-slaying” or “sex-killing” (see ‘This body, that place’ by Julie Ewington in the festival visual arts catalogue). Apparently there is no precise equivalent in English, which also says something. To get to the Art Museum we have to navigate the Alcatraz architecture of the City West Campus of the University of South Australia. “So cruel for thinking”, says Linda. It’s 36 degrees outside but inside gallery director Erica Green is feeling the cold. A minute in and I know how she feels. A horror story flickers across the LEDs, slides downwards and backwards into the floor. I place my first reading safely in the fictional frame—the words of some psycho thriller. “Her breasts are all nipple.” I move from the words to the bones laid out on tables—a spinal cord, femur, the tiny bones of the face, teeth. Are these bones real? They look real. So what is Jenny Holzer doing with other people’s bones? Well, as it turns out, shocking us into recognition of rape and torture in Bosnia, that war that we must somehow find words for, count bodies for, bone by bone.

Whose bones, do you think? says Linda as she leads me into the Experimental Art Foundation.

3.00: Susan Hiller’s *From the Freud Museum* a collection of ordinary objects—ceramic animals, small painted face masks become exhibits, boxed, labelled. Each vitrine presents the viewer with a word, a thing or object, and a representation from which multiple relationships are generated in the act of reading. This room makes me

nauseous. I find more interesting reading in the room with *Wild Talents*, Hiller’s video installation in which two screens display simultaneous images of children from iconic scenes in B-horror movies, encountering unexplained phenomena (a little boy dips his spoon into a bowl of soup, takes a mouthful, dips the spoon again and looks horrified as the spoon begins to melt). A small video screen in the centre bearing a crown of lights holds images of adult trances and possessions. I find it hard to leave.

4.00: Walking down Rundle Mall we are still talking about those bones and about the way Linda had heard that morning in the hairdresser’s about a neighbour who had that week in her friend’s words “topped himself” and how straightaway she wanted to know how. Precisely. To hear the words spoken for that otherwise shockingly silent and solitary act.

5.00: A bit of pub talk at the Exeter Hotel and I’m “tippin the elbow” (Stephen Kenny, solicitor for the Ngarrindjeri people in the Hindmarsh Island dispute told me that’s what they say when they see white people checking their watches).

6.00: At the Ngapartji Multimedia Centre, choreographer Chrissie Parrott is showing the bones of her research over the past eighteen months into Magnetic Motion Capture Technology. These days you can wire up your dancer in a suit with a ‘fanny-pack’ and choreograph her dancing body (live if you like) on a screen. Miles faster than key-frame animation, it’s somehow comforting to see just what time and effort it still takes to animate a body.

8.30: *The Waste Land* at the Royalty Theatre where the carpet has been taken up, the chandeliers covered with dust cloth and whole sections of the theatre ripped out which, I think it’s safe to say, most of the audience didn’t notice. Clearly, it’s a while since anybody has actually been to The Royalty—they thought the damage was renovation. Either that, or they know her so well, they’re comfortable sitting around in her skeleton. Fiona Shaw, in a non site-specific grey woollen jumper, hardly heeds Jean Kalman’s starkly beautiful lighting. She seems lit from within. Her sharp-eyed, bare-bones “reading” is a thankfully less emotionally charged performance than the version we saw on television recently. That seemed to intrude too far into the words which after all, dance to their own tune.

670 lines, 37 minutes later, Linda and I are walking past the bad public art on King William Street talking about architecture and public space and communalism.

10.00: Sitting on the step waiting for The Squeezebox to open, Gay Bilson is smoking a cigarette and thinking calmly through the logistics of feeding the multitude at *Loaves and Fishes* on the final night of the festival. The bowls are being made by a descendant of the original Mr. Bennett of Bennetts Pottery at Magill and he’s signed each of the hundreds of bowls with his initials JB. Someone suggested it should have been JC. *Loaves and Fishes* will be an act of generosity, a small miracle. For Gay Bilson it is “theatre of a kind, calm and modest, but theatre nevertheless”.

11.30: The harmonious accordion lines of Otto Lechner and Guy Klucevsek curl around our bones and into the air, fill the warm night and are beyond words.

In the first edition of RealTime “Is there no rest/There is no rest” was written by Linda Marie Walker

Next edition will appear  
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For more information about  
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