

Volume 4
FREE

I Was Real—Documents

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FOLDBACK

Jenny Holzer/Wendy Houstoun

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.

The giving of thanks

Keith Gallasch

In a week of great dancing and music (including Gerard Willems' virtuosic pianism in Nigel Kellaway's *This Most Wicked Body*), the 1998 Adelaide Festival moves triumphantly to a conclusion to be enacted in the sharing of Gay Bilson's *Loaves and Fishes* and the worlds of music to be visited in *Womad in the Vales*. It's been a festival of many strange and rich experiences. As several readers have commented, this is a great change from the mythology and sometime actuality of there only ever being one great work per festival. There has been near unanimity of admiration for *La Tristeza Complice*, *Songs of the Wanderers*, *Carmen*, *The Waste Land*, *Masterkey*, *Box the Pony*, *Va Yomer*, *Va Yelech*, *Haunted*, *Daunted & Flaunted* and *I Was Real—Documents*, and enormous and sustained debate over *Snakesong/Le Pouvoir*, *The Seven Streams of the River Ota*, *The Architect's Walk*, *Burn Sonata* and *Who's Afraid of Anything?* But even the most successful works were submitted to the closest of scrutiny as these pages have revealed. The music program was

brilliantly curated, a fresh view of major and neglected forces in twentieth century composition, and of an instrument, the accordion (see Ross Bolleter's essay in the Festival Souvenir Guide) that proved itself many times over from Lechner and Klucevsek to its mellifluous and integrative role in the Zender-Schubert *Winterreise*. Music as theatre manifested itself in too many ways to list here, but reaches its apotheosis in Heiner Goebbels *Black on White* (the act of playing simply and impressively, choreographed with light) and Giorgio Batistelli's *Experimentum Mundi*, both opening as we go to print. Sound marked out its increasingly significant space in the work of Hans Peter Kuhn for Junko Wada and his much admired *Over the River* installation, the Akio Suzuki concert, and the sound designs by Garry Bradbury for *Burn Sonata* and Paul Charlier for Stalker's *Blood Vessel*. New media arts celebrated both their history and arrival in ANAT's *FOLDBACK* anticipating the shape of things to come. And of course, there was RealTime. It's been a great experience, writing on the run, meeting artists and readers, picking up writers on the ground from here, interstate and overseas and enjoying the sight of festival-goers reading their RealTimes before and

RealTime
<http://www.rtimearts.com/~opencity/>

after shows or calling in for rare copies of Volumes 1 and 2 and passing on their appreciation for the writing that voiced their feelings or took them in new directions and to works they might not otherwise have embraced. It's been an ideal festival to write for, as a home away from home and as an artistic and political challenge, where well-attended lunchtime forums have proven the very real potential for the flow of ideas and debate emanating from a festival with clear themes and preoccupations. Our thanks to Robyn Archer for inviting the RealTime writing team to her festival.

RealTime 24 (April-May) will be on the streets from March 31 surveying the whole festival and, in particular, late-breaking works by Giorgio Batistelli, Heiner Goebbels, Meryl Tankard, the Balanescu Quartet and others, with comment on Artists' Week and a range of visual arts exhibitions.

What I have written

Virginia Baxter

Haunted Daunted and Flaunted

Wendy Houston

The Price Theatre, March 10

Jenny Holzer, Artists Week Keynote Address
Adelaide Festival Centre, March 11

One of the problems of writing about performances is the difficulty of not taking in the dark. The disruptions it causes to other audience members, its potential to distract the performer, not to mention your own thoughts are all reasons for avoiding it. At the beginning of the festival I bought a pen with a light in it but it's March 12 and I haven't used it. Anyway, while you're writing something down, you risk missing something else. The other difficulty is actually deciphering the notes you make afterwards. It's like trying to remember dreams. The only words I wrote at the conclusion of Wendy Houston's *Haunted Daunted and Flaunted* were her final ones. I don't know why I felt the need to write them down. I think endings in the theatre are given way too much importance, like nothing else happened up to that point. I smiled when Hans Peter Kuhn said in the Forum on Tuesday March 10 that he and Junko Wada worked for a set time on *Who's Afraid of Anything?* and when the time ran out, the work was complete. If they had had more time they might have come up with something entirely different. So much for endings.

Anyway the words I thought I scrawled on my program after Wendy Houston's performance were "You can hear the human sound we are sitting here speaking" but when I looked at the scrawl I found "incsethehunanoisewersittinghermak" or "I can see the human noise we are sitting here making". A friend said she thought she heard something about "cities" which just goes to show how imprecise are the twists and turns of memory—more or less the territory that Wendy Houston is probing in this remarkable work.

"I am awake in the place where women die." (Jenny Holzer)

After a festival full of words, my notebook holds a collection of such sentences—impressions, paragraphs scratched over drinks after performances, addresses, snatches of sudden poetry, cavesdroppings, meeting points, restaurants, snippets that I have carried around in my head until I could find a place to write them down, headlines (like the one that appeared the day after the Barbara Hanrahan book was released—"Diary from the Grave" and Friday's mysterious "Drug Dog in Limbo"). At this stage of the festival there's an impulse to make connections so today Jenny Holzer and Wendy Houston meet on the page.

In note form, Jenny Holzer reads: Repressed childhood/desire to paint 4th dimension. Art school—attempts reduce daunting reading list distilling books to sentences. Public posters/inflammatory essays/truisms. (I almost broke my rule and stood up at question time to tell her about Ken Campbell who when he was in Sydney a few years ago performing his show *The Furtive Nudist*, spent days at the Museum of Contemporary Art writing a list of questions to which Jenny Holzer's statements might be the answers). Now installations. Latest work *Lustmord*—installations of words taking in whole body experience (where the eyes go). Words backwards/forwards/ reflected, juxtaposed with human bones to be picked up and read. "Resorted" to writing, she said, because there are many places it can go but it doesn't come easily. Of the many sentences in her presentation I wrote down this one which came from a friend who was assaulted by a policeman: "When someone beats you with a flashlight, you make light shine in all directions." Nowadays—romantic inclination—writing text on water—as light—from multiple

perspectives. In *Lustmord* she writes as the perpetrator, the victim and the observer.

Wendy Houston too is all three. Before she enters, a voice from the speakers announces some violence has been perpetrated on a woman. The voice appeals for witnesses, tells us that an actor will recreate the incident. The work is inspired by the BBC's *Crimewatch*. True to life and art after this, my memory of the precise order of events is not sharp. Well, I have sharp memories of incidents. How sharp? Very. Particular movements? No. I'm not a dancer but I'd like to be. Details, I don't ... wait a minute, I remember a sequence where she took us through her dancing life by decades, going way back to the foetal position in 1969. I remember fragments of movements shaking her body. What kind of movements? Well like I said, I'm not a da ... but they were unpredictable, unfamiliar, beautiful, no wait, wait, some were memories of other choreographies. I remember there was a Swedish bell dance she had learned which turned out to be incredibly useful, and I agreed with what she danced, sorry, what she said about jazz ballet and the Celtic dance revival. But that makes it sound satirical which is not what I meant to... What do I mean to say Well the subtlety of... How? Well I remember she said she spent a year moving in two dimensions and how funny she was. No that makes it sound ... There was much more. How much? Like I said, all I have is fragments, commentaries on her own body. She let us into her body and showed us her fear. That's what I said, fear.

Wendy Houston is from Manchester, I think. Holzer's crisp monotone is US mid-West. She is dryly witty, measured and fluid in the flesh. The words she exhibits electronically are sharp, sometimes savage. Sometimes the two collide. When someone asks her to explain what she means by "Protect Me From What I Want" she laughs and says "I don't think I can". Wendy Houston's text is continuous, reminding us just what a physical act speech is. Unlike much dance using the spoken word, it is not segregated in patches, or voiced-over, or used for interruption or pause. Words are inseparable from her body. She doesn't enhance them with movement. They are partners. She does little more than speak them as she dances (no mean feat)—speaking of which, how Wendy Houston's bare feet show the shape of a dancing life. And this work could not exist without the

words. Without them the wonderful sequence of visual jokes ("Two small movements go into a bar") would fall flat. The argument from people who don't like the idea of dancers speaking is that dance has its own meaning and words get in the way. In Wendy Houston's hands, feet and neck, the meanings of both words and movements begin to open up. And like Jenny Holzer, in this performance Wendy Houston plays victim, perpetrator and observer.

On an earlier page of my notebook is one of my first festival experiences, *La Tristeza Complice*, and as I flip the pages, Les Ballets C. de la B. become the bodies of Jenny Holzer's "It takes a while before you can step over inert bodies and go ahead with what you were doing." I wish she had seen those bodies dancing.

Sacred documents

Linda Marie Walker

I Was Real—Documents

Saburo Teshigawara & KARAS
Playhouse, March 11

Why do people begin to cough during silences; do they wait for silence. Why do they want to be heard; are they really coughing. No wonder Saburo Teshigawara includes coughing in this work, *I Was Real—Documents*. It does define a space, small and sudden, where others can't be. It marks terrain, which is communal, and yet exclusive, like the "sshh" does.

And, you wouldn't believe: I sat next to Richard Margetson again. At the end of the performance he said one word: "awesome". It was a good word.

I was a little anxious about seeing this show. I'd seen it in London and loved it. Here it was even better. I was closer for one thing. But, there was something else, something extra that is difficult to describe: perhaps 'tougher' hints at it. Something that defied exhaustion, or passed borders, or dissolved desires.

The work is composed of several distinct parts or movements (like music), which flow into one another. These are bracketed by a beginning which is dark and slow, and an ending which is light, brief, and strangely, falsely, idyllic. Teshigawara uses air, air as material, to make space come about for the body, sculpting it with a relentless and often frantic style of dance that is so full of detail and nuance that it saturates the gaze.

Looking changes as one understands that 'air' cannot be owned, that it, here translated into 'moving' is free. Space itself dances; breath is the material of the constant present and the tense and tension of this fact, as force, creates the next moment (or gives it reason to arrive, as 'thing', new and surprising). The bodies of the dancers are distinct and alone on the stage. There is only one time when they touch each other, and then it's as if, in brief closeness, they establish separation by voice, by calling, screaming. In this particular movement or 'document', where the voice is amplified, and at once beautiful and painful, it's clear that every cell of the body holds memory, and as the body pushes its limits, by repetition and commitment to detail — that in some sense is only the extraordinary possibility of every lived second — the idea of air and breath is put into doubt. I mean, the idea of what each is, as space and time, as language, is questioned. These 'documents', as they are shown, side by side, are themselves archives, and are, overall, from another larger archive. Each body, in its isolation, in its knowledge of being only itself, carves a world that is complex, abstract, and delicate.

Teshigawara himself, dressed in white and then black, is compelling; he draws one directly into the dance, to where he is, into his bare fluid aesthetic, into the body he makes for you. Emio Greco is stunning, I hope I don't have to wait another twelve months to watch him dance again.

Perhaps seeing *Documents* in the Playhouse, where I was closer to the dancers, made them more 'real' and intense. And the experience was overwhelming. I've hardly touched the surface of the work, I've not mentioned the sound, which is a dimension in its own right, or the costumes, or the projections, or the ...

These 'documents' pay respect to what it is to be human and to remember and to breathe; and this 'is' makes nonsense of wanting to re-define the word 'sacred', of wanting to loosen it a little here and tighten it a little there. It too 'is'.

Cultural whore

Gail Priest

Paris Musette
Lounge, March 9

Every night a wedding, Hari Krishna
Elder Park, March 9

I walk the streets of Adelaide—my feet aching and blistered, the hem of my frock drooping like the thirsty flowers on North Terrace. I scan the throngs around me. I am lost, I am searching ... I am in pursuit of a cultural root.

Fourth generation, anglo, white—I want to say trash, but even that is borrowed from Hollywood pop. Festivals are made for people like me. A smorgasbord of traditions more fascinating than my own, to pine over, fantasise about.

I try the Lounge at cocktail hour. Paris Musette—guitar, double bass and two button accordions. I fall into a flight of fancy, I see Piaf, Le Chat Noir, Hemingway. I commit wild and brutal acts under the influence of Anise. My reverie is broken as I look at the bar in search of Pernod, its sad substitute. As the musicians whirl through the tiled cafes of Paris, waltzing, tango-ing, I see disturbing images of the old time dance band featuring the accordion at the Blacktown Scottish Society. I see myself performing the Pride of Erin and the Canadian Threestep with some fat old man with damp armpits and beery breathy. My Sartrean fantasy is lost.

I attend a Hari Krishna wedding in Elder Park. I see flowers and joy, and a faith so tangible it floats like the incense. I see a youthful anglo couple choosing to be joined, very publicly, in a ceremony and tradition from continents away. The symbolism is simple and fulfilling. They smear vermilion on their palms and join them with a garland; the wife takes seven steps on the husband's hands symbolising strength, power, happiness, spiritual wealth; the tails of their robes are tied together and must not be separated for seven days to allow the marriage to become strong. Finally the whole crowd is asked to bear witness and make a sacrifice to Krishna. As the crowd is chanting, and the jubilation of the Krishna consciousness is kicking in—chant Krishna and be happy the priest tells us—I hear, wafting in on the dusk breeze, the sound of the bagpipes and drummers over in the Torrens Parade Ground, having their Monday night practice. Again, an image of the Blacktown Town Hall, every first Saturday of the month—the barn dance, the warm Fanta, the Cheezels.

A culture, a tradition? Well no, there is no Scottish heritage in my family. I see that my parents also tried to invent a cultural heritage

themselves. My direct heritage is Sponge, soaking up the influences around me, longing to be the other and eternally being disappointed in my own banality. My heritage is that of the spoilt, middle class white girl, who's been told all her life she can be whatever she wants to be. Conclusion? I have none. I cringe. I am not correct. But as a sponge my options are open, and my fantasies unfettered. What more can I ask?

A profane blessing

Kay Schaffer

The Waste Land

Royalty Theatre, March 7

I had a professor at university, a Mr. Thompson, who thought that *The Waste Land* was the greatest poem of the twentieth century. When he tutored me in Modern Literature as a second year student at Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania in the late 1960s, we spent a month on T.S. Eliot, devoting three weeks to a careful reading of *The Waste Land*, reading aloud, parsing each line, and annotating the text with notes alluding to the poem's many classic references.

And so it came to pass that my partner and I returned to my office last Saturday evening in search of the old university text book so that we might read together both the poem and my 20 year old American emendations before proceeding to the Royalty Theatre to hear Fiona Shaw deliver her version of Eliot's classic poem.

Shaw's *The Waste Land* is clearly not the *Waste Land* of Mr. Thompson; her audience far removed from that 1960s US university classroom. I had been taught to read the poem as a lament for lost insight brought about by the shallowness of twentieth century life. Mr. Thompson led us through Jesse Weston's book *From Ritual to Romance* and Fraser's *The Golden Bough*; through the Bible, Classical, Medieval, French and English literature into the drama of Webster, Middleton and Shakespeare; through the Indian teachings of the Upanishads, Buddha, the prophets and Christ, the quests of the Fisher King and Perceval in a search for meanings foreclosed by the monotony of modern life. Surely an intellectualised approach, it promised that "rain" (rebirth, redemption and salvation) would come again when meaning returned to our lives. Eliot's hope of humanising the times with a return to classical erudition was

not what the future had in store, nor what Deborah Warner's direction of *The Waste Land* conveyed to her contemporary audience.

Shaw's performance was physical, tangible, as it unraveled those wasted lives in the desolate theatre. I was in the third row, centre, with nothing but a low table between my seat and the stage to impede my view of the actress in performance. I had her masterful performance as Richard II in my mind; but this was no Richard. Rather a deceptively fragile looking woman in a simple black dress who transformed the poem from a whisper to the raging of Hieronymo's mad engine, as Eliot saw himself in the last lines of the text. She moved about the stage, drawing long shadows on the curtained backdrop, at one point sitting on the edge, barely an arm's length in front of me, her spittle arching to within inches of my body. Shaw underplays the classical allusions, choosing instead to flawlessly render the contemporary figures and voices of the poem: the aristocratic Marie of the opening lines, the lost lovers in rat's alley, the toothless woman of reduced circumstance in the London pub, Madame Sosostriis and Mr Eugenides, the blind Tiresias and the wailing Rhine river nymphs. Her voice rose in a deafening crescendo enlisting the roaring "DA" of the thunder at the outset of the final section of the poem. The performance was spell-binding, captured by Eliot's words but commanded from the inside stage of her compelling, contemporary reading.

At times Shaw's performance conveyed a nostalgia for a lost past, a longing for a more noble foundation for life and meaning no longer within our reach. But in this instance the longing was muted by the voices of characters caught in the mundane present and capped by hopelessness about the future. As in Baudrillard's simulacrum, the classical allusions of the poem were all but lost on the audience, sidelined by the performance, mirrored but darkly in faint traces from elsewhere: that old Shakespearian rag reduced to a ragtime reminiscent of Lisa Simpson's playing the saxophone; a culture far removed from the classics; the rape of Philomel reduced to the vulgar jug, jug, jug and the lurching of the indifferent, sexualised body, caught in a meaningless act, to be ended quickly. A kind of hopelessness here, caught in a web of modernist excess.

The final cries of agony from "What the Thunder Said" reverberated through the theatre; thunderous pain finally surrendering to the Buddha's doctrines of gentleness and the wisdom of the Hindu Upanishad: Datta (give); Dayadhvam (sympathise); Damyata (control). We received Shaw's final bow and blessing, "Shantih, Shantih, Shantih", in a space which paralleled the endings of *Seven Streams* and *Songs of the Wanderers*. Except here there was less of the sacred; more of the profane. A subdued, and I suspect mostly puzzled, audience returned to the night. Mr. Thompson would not have approved. But then times have changed.

Redemption, of a sort

James Moss

The Waste Land

The Waste Land is credited to T.S. Eliot, but it is the end-product of a considerable editing job by Ezra Pound who reduced it to one fifth of its manuscript length, changing it from 'e does the police in different voices' to the gnostic text that has continued to haunt generations.

Not all of this work in its five sections has aged with equal equanimity: some of it is appallingly, toe-curlingly, self-consciously, existential; some of it is downright clumsy (Eliot's appropriations of Pope and Marvell are without finesse); and much of it is inexplicable. But this work lives on and there has never been anything quite like it, somehow.

Its survival in spite of its self-consciously avant-garde recalcitrance may be down to the fact that it has much of the character of post-modern literature in its breadth and range of quotations and in the discursive nature of its writing about writing.

There are few extant recitals of this work; *The Waste Land* is invariably studied, as text, and even Eliot's own recording of the poem in a deadpan trans-atlantic monotone sounds so much like reading the poem to oneself.

Thus, while fancying myself as something of an aficionado of *The Waste Land*, nothing prepared me for the emotional experience of watching and listening to Fiona Shaw's rendition.

Startlingly so, she began at the beginning; the first words enunciated from out of a dark stage were not the famous

opening lines: *April is the cruelest month ...* etc. Instead Shaw names the poem—"The Waste Land" (for a horrible second I thought she was going to add, "by T S Eliot"—but of course I should have known better), and in so doing she says something infinitely more complex about authorship, both acknowledging the work and its iconic place in cultural lore, while simultaneously making it clear that nothing about the poem and her recital of it should be taken for granted.

And then another announcement: "The Burial of the Dead", this being the title of the first of the five sections of the poem. This scrupulous fidelity to the entirety of the text set the tone for what followed. With audience anticipation at fever-pitch she then launched off into that roller-coaster of a ride that is this crazy poem, in which the foibles enacted beneath the walls of Troy, Thebes and Carthage are reconfigured within the context of the great drought of modern(ist) meaning.

Female characters and feminine voices abound in this work, an aspect of *The Waste Land* which becomes particularly apparent via the agency of Shaw's recital. Eliot (likewise Pound) was not enthusiastic about the redemptive aspects of sexual encounter, and female ennui is at its most disparaging in this far from blokey account of collective neurosis.

Suitably minimalist in its props and lighting the entire focus of the production centres on Shaw's performance which is all the time creating a tension between the expressive demands of her craft on the one hand and the appalling sense of psychic annihilation that permeates the fabric of this rambling epic.

Not a long production, about forty minutes from go to whoa, although I felt Shaw could have milked a few minutes here and there, especially in the final section, "What the Thunder said". However, in perusing my edition of *The Waste Land* there is barely a full stop in this section of the poem, with few notated pauses even between the sub-sections (or stanzas), indicating perhaps a crescendo as the work comes closest to a kind of redemption.

But there is a code of sorts, spacings between words or phrases that act as surrogate punctuation which this production chose to read otherwise, causing a running

together in parts and a subsequent cacophony of an already overwrought symbolism. Perhaps that was the intent.

The overwhelming impression left in this writer's mind was of the crazy love shown by Shaw for the poem. To me it's a poem comprising best bits and dumb bits, and there's plenty of both, but to listen and watch Fiona Shaw in action was as close to a kind of cultural ecstasy as I've experienced for a long while.

Playing for real

Keith Gallasch

This Most Wicked Body

Nigel Kellaway

Odeon Theatre, March 11

The dark. Again. Then the dinner-suited upper body of a man hovers in the distance above a grand piano. Glimpsed through a fine curtain he looks like a ventriloquist's dummy, though an unusually elegant one, in white-face, awkwardly held, voice masked in stilted refinement. Will Leda in blonde wig and Calvin Kleins appear out of the dark, fuck him silly and discard him? It's possible. This seems the same universe of dark deeds, lies and evaporating truths we lived in *Snakesong/La Pouvoir*. This man would have something to say about being wounded and discarded. It's his birthday, he's noticed a patch of dead skin (the long dying has commenced), he speaks as if past his sexual use-by-date, lust preoccupies him (sex has become the imagining of the pornographic camera angle on his own engagements), outbursts suggest betrayal and recrimination, he's suicidal ("My last performance!") in the nicest way (pretty as a picture, *en pointe*, hanging by one hand from a noose, twirling slowly to the romantic piano) and announces to his captive confidante-audience: "I am totally cold". There's no mistaking it, this queen is a close relative of *Snakesong's* Queen bewailing her loss of emotion, swinging between authority and panic, peering voyeuristically into a world of sexuality she no longer inhabits. But the audience for *Wicked Body* is implicated in very different ways from *Snakesong*. For every apparent truth demolished, for every lie revised, the real constantly asserts itself, even when the plug is pulled. This man is playing himself, however much he quarrels with Identity (his own, the whole idea of It). He invites one of our number to join him onstage for the whole performance for a very real meal prepared by a very real and leading restaurateur, Gay Bilson (stage left) and

served by Joel (who *is* Joel Markham) and the work magically lit and stage managed by Simon (who *is* Simon Wise). Wine is drunk, cigarettes smoked and oysters tongued as Nigel ogles and confides in his unsuspecting (but very accommodating) guest—on this night a 30 year old man celebrating his wedding anniversary. Will he ever be the same? Real-er than the rest is concert pianist Gerard Willems, sublime master of Beethoven sonatas. He offers no mere accompaniment (though his playing is sometimes spoken through and his first curtain call shockingly denied), giving us complete works with astonishing focus (remarkable given what is going on about him) and beauty (amidst all that other contested and angst-ed over 'beauty' of the man-woman). As soon as it happens, you recognise the inevitability of the penultimate scene, the Willems-Kellaway piano duet (the latter initially on his way offstage for a piss): a coalescence of beauties, with Kellaway now focussed on the partnership, emptied of cynicism and rage, a moment of refuge before the work's final burst of bewilderment and pain and its dying fall. Concert and performance merge as almost equal partners, an astonishing synthesis of performative realities. Although never said, *This Most Wicked Body*, is therefore also about music, most blatantly when dinner table intimacies are interrupted by a massive wall of light and a recording of a boy singing Bach. Kellaway screams as the passage repeats, "This is nothing to do with me. We're here to be pure. I wanted it to be secular, now we have Bach and the singing of little boys". In a festival of great synchronicities, *This Most Wicked Body* is no mere companion piece for *Snakesong/La Pouvoir*; it extends that work's dark vision and stands masterfully in its own right.

Falling together, falling apart?

Brad Haseman

La Tristeza Complice, Ballet C. de la B.
Snakesong/Le Pouvoir, Needcompany

I was intrigued by Keith Gallasch's comment in his response to *Tracking Time* (Real Time, Volume 2), "I see shows that fragment (but fall together)", and began wondering why it is that some shows "fall together" while others "fall apart"? As linear, narrative based forms of theatre are relegated to the margins, work composed of fragments, hopefully made up of the Barthes-like "electrifying fragment that

seizes and ravishes the imagination" set the poetics of the festival.

Electrifying fragments have been everywhere in Adelaide this week. Intensely watchable, they command our attention, whether through the humour of *Snakesong's* parodic playfulness, where you stand to eat, die and reawaken, or in the swirling sense of the bizarre as the transvestite (as dog) undresses the singer in *La Tristeza Complice*. These and more, as intimacy, horror, embarrassment, delight and erotic desire, create tensions which have to be resolved.

Fragments alone though are not enough. For if fragments are to "fall together", then what will ensure that, suspended and free-falling, they will land in the same drop zone? What forces for cohesion work on the falling particles? Once more the imagination comes into play, needing to be "seized and ravished", not just by the specific moment of the fragment, but by the work as a whole.

As fragments disappear, but linger and accumulate before us, it is the imagination which struggles to understand that these disparate fragments are not random, but comprise a larger, fictional world which can be only shadowily grasped at any time. The imagination seeks coherence in the indeterminacy, drawing on memory and projection to trace the logic(s) of the fictional world being represented. In this way we can sense the twin worlds in *Snakesong*, "one thousand times ten thousand years" apart and framed by the Leda and the Swan myth, and the place at the end of the world inhabited by *La Tristeza Complice's* pathological outcasts.

However, imagination, together with our conceptual capacities, also seeks and expects to find some order to the form with which it is engaging. As we encounter the work, imagination attends to the present, scans backwards and forwards, and seeks connective patterns, including repetition and recurrence, to secure the overall structure of the work. For all its decentering uncertainty *Snakesong* comes to us as a prologue followed in two parts, a familiar theatrical pattern to help stabilise the assault on our senses. Similarly *La Tristeza Complice* works through the familiar enough pattern of accumulation, as solos, duets, trios and larger group work provide some reassurance within the fearful chaos.

The best works in this festival (those

which have 'fallen together' for me) have been ambiguous, confidently showing off their indeterminacy. But for all that, my imagination is still able to work. In the gaps (not holes) created by incompleteness and incongruity, my imagination is not confounded and frustrated; rather it is able to apprehend the sense impressions of the work and make them sensible.

In the acting

Richard Murphet

The Taming of the Shrew

Shakespeare-In-The-Park

Botanic Gardens, March 11

Tucked at the base of a sloping lawn in Adelaide's Botanic Gardens, is a show which is officially part of the festival but which seems remote from the heady fare gathered around the Festival Centre. *The Taming of the Shrew* is the latest of the Glen Elston Company's Shakespeare-In-The-Park productions and it's been playing to large houses in Melbourne and Adelaide. I would venture a guess that it draws a wider cross-section of the Adelaide populace than any other show at the festival. In this it's no different from any of this Company's Shakespeare shows over the past decade.

What's the secret? The outside setting? Yes. A warm night, a bottle of wine and mineral water, a comfy cushion, even a picnic hamper. As John Rodgers asserted at the Festival Forum on alternative sites for music, we do need to challenge the effect which the concert hall or theatre have on audience reception of the work. *The Shrew's* garden site enforces a presentational performance. The complexity of language and subplot gets lost in the bushes. (Overheard comment: "I can't work out what they are saying but their faces are amazing"). All attention in fact is thrown on to the acting.

Which is the other factor of the continued success—the actors. The audience watches not so much the play and its characters and themes but a company of working actors focussing their performances completely upon us. Michael Goldman wrote in *The Actor's Freedom* that it was the job of the playwright to write roles that allow or demand that the actor fly. That's extreme. But it's an interesting perspective that it is not just the actor's task to make *Hamlet* come alive but that it is the function of the role 'Hamlet' or 'Kate' (or 'The Queen Mother' in *Snakesong*) to provide for

an audience the thrill of an extraordinary performance. That that is the immediate hit.

Not that there's any 'flying' in *The Shrew*. This is a group of journey-men and women making a creaky old play work for us as best they can given the circumstances. We love them for doing it. They are not helped by the direction which has little sense of the rhythm of the drama and even less sense of the levels of irony it contains or of the political thorns along the way. There is a sameness of tone, pitch and tempo that finally becomes tedious. But here before us is a band of players, like a medieval troupe: the masters of the art like Evelyn Krape, Ernie Grey, Phil Sumner, drawing focus with ease, expending little unnecessary energy, their timing innate, still loving the game; those with some experience under their belt like Michael Fry, building his encounters with detail and generosity, his inventive energy never relenting; and the apprentices like Felicity Price, who has just joined the cast as Kate's sister, Bianca. Price had three days rehearsal and has been able to construct her role (a refreshingly feisty Bianca) on the run, around the work of her fellow players. "Do you and Nadine Garner (Kate) talk about your connection as sisters?" I asked her afterwards. "No, we talk about how to make a scene work."

What am I saying here? That when I look back on this festival it is the extraordinary and diverse ensembles of performers that I will remember. The black figures of the Itim Ensemble like constantly shifting letters writing on the white stage cloth the emotional history of the mythical beginnings of their people. The astonishingly versatile Ex Machina, transforming roles with such consummate ease, in their multi-plotted Nippo-American saga, that the most amazing illusion in this play of illusions was that there were only nine performers facing us at the curtain call. Les Ballets C de la B discovering the dance of society's rejects, not as an act of social therapy but with transcendent anarchy and hilarious anxiety. Needcompany working constantly from a place of no centre, hovering around taboos still so hot that as performers they could only either be there with full raw commitment or be hardly there at all.

The directors' presences could be felt in all these pieces (with the exception of *The Shrew*). Despite Alain Platel's self-effacement in his Forum, we don't doubt the importance of that vision and compositional

force. But the exciting thing about all these companies is that they have shown us actor/performers who are also makers, artisans, craftspeople, who grapple with difficult ideas and impossible challenges (The Bible?!) and grab the responsibility to create new theatre.

"First, I give the dancers an idea," says Saburo Teshigawara. "The question is how they digest the idea and feel it." And *do* it, Saburo, just how will they *do* it?

Dual journeys

Gail Priest

Blood Vessel

Stalker

Elder Park, March 9

We cannot fly, we can only dream ... *Blood Vessel* is a hauntingly beautiful dream. In residence in Elder Park is an awesome metallic creature, part sailing vessel part bird. It towers above the audience containing secrets and hidden contraptions of torture and joy. The performers inhabit this skeletal vessel, shimmying up and down and around it with agility and grace.

Blood Vessel is a ship of fools, floating on the seas of an 18th century Blakean imagination in search of knowledge or dominions. The clownish Captain and epileptic Deckhand bicker and fight in circular and symbiotic power struggle. The Scientist keeps his treasures including an Automata locked in a chest, letting her out every now and then to bask in her beauty and be inspired by her naivety. But a new treasure tumbles into their midst, a creature of myth and magic, part human, part bird. The dark side of human nature overcomes them as the Captain steals the gift of flight from Icarus and the Deckhand throws the wheel overboard. As the ship founders, the two oppressed creatures, Automata and the wingless Icarus climb to the top of the ship, pitifully reaching for the freedom of the sky. Icarus cries "Don't be distracted by the stars" and there is no chance of that as the piece winds to its pyrotechnic and heart-stopping conclusion.

Just as the characters long for the sky, so do the performers. They seem most at home on the scaffolding, flinging themselves from great heights and bungee jumping. There is breathtaking work by Beth Kayes and David Clarkson on tissue, long flowing silks wrapped around the body. This device creates sensuous, delicate shapes and appears

to offer greater freedom of movement than other aerial mechanisms. However, Stalker (formerly a company of stilt performers) is yet to find its performance language on the ground—relying on clownish slapstick, they appear a little lost, like the wingless Icarus.

The driving force of the work is the murkily atmospheric soundtrack by Paul Charlier—ranging from very European melodic sections of velvety accordion and violin, to soundscapes of throbbing, beating wings, snatches of text from flight recordings and eerie echoes of gulls taking flight. Combined with watery projections of an eclipsing moon, and film excerpts of the glorious wings projected onto the sails, the very structure begins to come alive.

Stalker does the outdoor spectacle with skill and creative daring (something poorly lacking in Sydney and Perth Festivals' Titanick). Their search to discover a new language for themselves, without stilts, will be a fascinating even controversial journey to watch, in both the development of this work and future projects.

Prayer-drama

Keith Gallasch

Uttarpriyadarshi

The Chorus Repertory Theatre

Amphitheatre, March 7

The sense of prayerfulness that pervades Cloud Gate Dance Theatre's *Songs of the Wanderers* is also felt in *Uttarpriyadarshi* but here it is explicit, the drama told through prayer (the Noble Eightfold Path) and by monk-ish storytellers. It opens in the darkness with a powerful male humming spreading up and out into the curve of the Amphitheatre. Once again in this festival, darkness prepares the audience for an unusual experience, though a holy one compared with *Snakesong/La Pouvoir's* grim insights or *I Was Real—Documents'* interiority. But don't assume they're that different.

Priyadarshi is a triumphant warrior-king returning from war to find not welcome but the unbearable wailing of the widows of his dead soldiers and the raucous laughter of his detractors who declare him lonely. His solution is to create a Hell for his foes and to appoint Ghor, "the wanton destroyer", as Lord of Hell. Ghor's manifestation of the dark side of the king's personality is echoed in actors of similar stature, powerful guttural vocal delivery and huge energy. Having

unleashed this monster, Priyadarshi is inevitably obliged to defeat Ghor in order to come to terms with the evil that is, in fact, his own. He will be tortured in his own Hell by Ghor and he will survive, but not as hero, but as one inspired by the Buddhist calm and resolution of the Bhikshu on his lotus. Ghor evaporates.

This outline of the narrative belies the particular theatricality of *Uttarpriyadarshi*. For all its visual (the victory parade on elephant, the ribbon-rivers of blood) and physical power (the demonic clog-dancing of Ghor and his warriors; the story-tellers trapped by their own staffs at Ghor's magical gesturing), it is the act of telling and its prayerful musicality that pervade the work, making *Uttarpriyadarshi* a festival relative of *Va Yomer. Va Yelech* and *The Waste Land* as a classic text delivered in speech and, from time to time, richly embodied in image, performance and music (the brass roar of the elephant, the flute and small percussion of grieving). More than that, text (a modern rendering by an Indian poet of an ancient story) is intoned and chanted and, in the case of the protagonists, uttered with raw strength or, from the Bhikshu, with a strongly projected and poetic clarity. The company's vocal power is one of its most striking attributes, and it has the capacity to chill, for example in the shrill, rapid ululations accompanying the arrival of Ghor.

Although the work feels singularly traditional, it is in fact the result of over twenty years of drawing together of traditional dance, martial arts, musical and story-telling elements from Manipur (a small state in north-eastern India it is the home of director Ratan Thiyam and his company) and a modern theatrical sensibility. (The only odd moment in the production is a calculatedly modern one—a Hell with guillotine, garrote, electric chair and hanging-noose—which is bizarrely cute). This synthesis and the considerable body of work behind it yields a distinctive playing style and performers with enormous focus, in their bodies and in their voices—voices as part of their bodies: "you have to create a sound of your own, you have to create your own space", says Ratan Thiyam of the performer. He also says, "the spoken word is more important for its aural power than for the actual word" (Adelaide Festival Souvenir Guide). In *Uttarpriyadarshi* both the word and its power are realised as prayer-as-performance, their visual equivalent realised

in the final image of the king released and his vision of golden Buddhas.

Mixed Marriage

Diana Weekes

Winterreise

Zender-Schubert, Ensemble Modern, Adelaide Town Hall, March 10

This *Winterreise*, 'a composed interpretation by Hans Zender', is an important work. It was an important event and I wanted to be there. I was hungry. But I came away realizing that I had gobbled up a beautifully presented meal consisting of a choice piece of filet steak, cooked to perfection (medium-rare for me), drizzled 'artistically' with a hot satay sauce, served with glazed carrots and sweetcorn, and garnished with—no, not coriander—mint! It looked (sounded) fantastic; but it didn't altogether taste (feel) right, even though some parts were simply delicious. And to tell you the truth, I'm still a bit peckish.

Speaking with Fiona Shaw after her final performance of *The Waste Land*, I became aware of her frustration at not being able to 'hold' the midnight audience to her own satisfaction. I made the gratuitous comment that they were mostly young people, many of whom probably didn't know the poem in detail, if at all. 'Oh' she said, 'I much prefer that'. Having performed the *Winterreise* quite recently, and knowing the original score in detail, I'm not sure that I was as vulnerable to Zender's virtuosity as he would have liked. But it was definitely an inspired interpretation rather than a re-write, and Hans Peter Blochwitz gave a stunning account of the songs, mostly in their original version.

The 'composed' introduction to the work is marvellous. The fractured, rhythmic monotony of the repeated notes preserves the mood and serves not only to introduce the individual members of the cast, but to display their combination palette of primary sounds. At the same time it creates spatial tension (some of the players enter from the back of the hall) and a tangible musical dialect. Prised away from prejudice, we are promised a rare glimpse of Schubert through an exciting, twentieth century looking glass. In the first song (*Good Night*) we are accosted by a minor outbreak of the Weill-Lempe-Eisler cabaret style, where the tenor definitely topples from his pedestal and clutches a hand mike, and by the second (*The Weathervane*) the wind-machines are in

full swing. For the third song (*Frozen Tears*) the marimba is a perfect choice, but the democratic division of melody notes between various instruments seems unnecessarily cumbersome for such a simple text. In number four, *Numbness*, we are introduced to the musical 'false start', a complex layering effect, stunning in its own way, and perhaps in keeping with the idea of emotional paranoia, but rather at loggerheads with Schubert's concept of urgent, forward driving triplets. As for the famous *Lime Tree*, I'm afraid on this occasion I, for one, found no rest. And so it went on.

My personal favourites were *On the River*, *Last Hope*, *The Signpost*, and *The Phantom Suns*, all of which seemed to amplify rather than dispute Schubert's original musical intention. In terms of the instrumentation, we heard echoes of a genuine salon orchestra (palm trees and all), the Salvation Army Band on a bad day, Hoffnung at the Proms, and the sound track from Penelope Keith's *Partridge in a Pear Tree*. Visually, of course, we had Haydn's *Farewell* (or was it Melba's, since they all returned?). The trouble was that, as with the compositional techniques, it all seemed rather random, repetitive. Less than halfway through the cycle the special effects were almost exhausted, simply (it seemed to me) for want of a more disciplined approach to the individual songs, perhaps even a greater respect for the transient intensity and temporal dimensions of this huge psychological drama. It was all a bit too busy, intellectual, noisy.

In 1974 Harry Goldschmidt wrote a paper in German about the order of the Heine songs in Schubert's *Schwanengesang*. He gives evidence to prove that before he died, Schubert proposed to his publisher that these six songs should be published "separately, and in a different order". He then makes a strong case (on the basis of textual content, key-relationships, musical symbolism etc) for presenting them in what he believes to be the original order, the order in which they were written. As it turns out, this is also the order in which they appear in Heine's own collection, where they are numbered 8, 14, 16, 20, 23 and 24 respectively. Schubert selected the songs himself, and then manipulated his musical language so as to ensure credible narrative and emotional continuity.

I can't help wondering whether Zender

might have been more successful had he taken a leaf out of Schubert's book, and interpreted only a discrete selection of songs, rather than the whole cycle. Either this, or use his musical effects more sparingly and to greater effect. Whatever the case, I feel I've been given the ingredients to put together a very hearty meal, and even if I'm still hungry, at least that way I know I'm alive.

Seeing that festival sound

Keith Gallasch

Over the River, installation

Hans Peter Kuhn

Elder Park, February 27 - March 15

Passion

Australian Art Orchestra

Elder Hall, March 7

Birth of the Modern

Adelaide Symphony Orchestra

Adelaide Town Hall, March 9

Winterreise

Zender-Schubert, Ensemble Modern

Adelaide Town Hall, March 10

Black on White

Heiner Goebbels, Ensemble Modern

Festival Theatre, opens March 12

When watching the Ensemble Modern perform the Zender-Schubert *Winterreise* (with its constellation of references across musical history emotionally and wittily celebrating the Schubert masterpiece's lineage and its modernity), I'm thinking these are the same performers we'll see in Heiner Goebbel's *Black on White*. They move with ease about the concert hall, changing the dimensions of our listening experience. I suddenly wish I was sitting in the middle of the stalls instead of the dress circle so I could experience these new spaces from an ideal point (probably the tenor's). Nothing new, I can almost hear the press gallery irritatedly scratching in their notebooks. But it is done with a persistence and sustained seriousness that opens out the songs, sometimes quite literally, sometimes symbolically, tracking and placing the Wanderer, though he, the singer, never moves from beside the conductor. His interior world expands and contracts, musically. Sometimes I shut my eyes to hear the spaces generated, shutting out the sight of the audience and the movements of the performers. Then I have to open them to see

what is making that music, *that* 1998 Adelaide Festival sound. Of course, it's an accordion, but not always obviously so, framing movements with the warmth of a small organ, or climbing to the top notes with solo elegance and grace. One whole movement vibrates as if emanating from the bottom end of the accordion, strings and percussion rumbling and rasping over long notes with delicacy and empathy. Of course, I open my eyes at hearing the Modern invoked, including Eisler (and Brecht as the tenor 'speaks'). It was only the night before in the same hall that the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra and David Porcellijn played us Berg and Schoenberg. Poet and novelist Tom Schapcott tells me (I hope I've got the words right) what he had seen in the Schoenberg Piano Concerto: "It was sad. A room full of 18th century mementoes and the glare of a Hollywood swimming pool through the window". That's what he heard. The Alban Berg Violin Concerto seems even sadder than ever given not only the carefully lyrical interpretation by Corey Cerovsek but also the physical lilt of the performer suggestive of an earlier generation of violinists (some were offended he encored with a Kreisler, but, other than the inevitable breaking of the mood of Berg, it didn't seem surprising, if you *looked* at him). The Eisler concert made *The Advertiser* reviewer see red. Some of us heard something else.

A German acquaintance at the Australian Art Orchestra's account of Bach's *St Matthew Passion* loved watching Paul Grabowsky alternating between the rhythmic being-there of his conducting and his piano accompaniment for the singing in between the five movements (each created by one of the members of the orchestra). He delighted too in the pleasure of hearing the Bach, losing him, and suddenly re-discovering him, describing the work as being made up of "free jazz, 30s and 40s big band, and music that was exhausting". Seeing is hearing, or is hearing seeing, in Hans Peter Kuhn's *Over the River*, an associative adventure for the watching listener, involving the transformation of space by sound. The large squares of pure colour lined along the river bank are constants: the sound bites, with their sustained silences in between, emerge suddenly, drawing the colours into lines and blocks and clusters as your eyes chase your ears chasing the sounds. One of our writers expected to hear the Kodaly theme from *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. The ghosts of Goethe and Kandinsky murmur

colour and soul amidst the water hens and ducks. Will the Adelaide City Council purchase *Over the River* as a permanent installation? It looks and sounds like it belongs. In the distance ... the lovely wheeze and hum of an accordion in the Squeezebox.

Polka Dots, Hayseeds And All That Jazz

Diana Weekes

Recital

Hans Peter Blochwitz (tenor)
Adelaide Town Hall, March 8

Bach Back

John Rodgers
Queen's Theatre, March 8

Lincoln Centre Jazz Orchestra

Wynton Marsalis
Festival Theatre, March 9

Three young men have come to this festival with 'demystification' writ large in their minds and hearts. When a tenor walks on to the Town Hall stage wearing the customary tails with a (loud) polka dot bow tie and matching (wide) cummerbund, you already know he's broken the mould. Handsome and beguiling, Hans Peter Blochwitz exudes the kind of charm that even he can't resist. Chatting at length about his aim to "knock the lieder recital off its pedestal", he intends to put the music first, and he means business. The folksongs of Brahms and Britten, he says, have much in common; their detailed artistry all the more conspicuous since the material is not original. The same goes for Zemlinsky, whose vocal music is relatively unknown, but deserves greater attention. Having stumbled (seductively) through a brief synopsis of the songs' narrative content, it was a case of *when the pie was opened, the birds began to sing*.

His is a simply stunning voice: warm, uncomplicated, and consistently pure in timbre even in the upper reaches. It was somehow like hearing a melodic poetry reading—effortless, sensitive, simple. The minutest nuances of thought and feeling were communicated with utmost clarity; nothing was forced or over-dramatized. Lieder at its very, very best. Ueli Wiget (who, if you haven't heard already, looked like the reincarnation of Schubert at the keyboard) was an equally compelling and colourful musician, although in the Brahms

he was often a whisker behind, a tad too self-effacing and indistinct. He hit his straps in the Zemlinsky, where the duo blossomed into an ideal partnership. My friends thought the Britten best—"bloody marvellous", in fact.

As for *Bach Back*, the candles were a dead giveaway. Take a rustic setting, complete with wooden packing case, and cross it with an altar, and you get the picture. Why not paraffin lamps? Well, because you don't worship with paraffin lamps, and there would be a little less to demystify. Shades of the *Cave-Inns*: Rodgers' opening line ("Jus' so as you know wen to klap and wen to walk out ...") set the tone. The option turned out to be more significant than we realised. Come in spinner, but they didn't. After the first piece, which 'had' the Bach, he promised to "reach into his violin" (and, as it happened, up to the hanging mike) and play uninterrupted until interval, after which he would do something "with a bit more humour".

Hey diddle diddle the cat and the fiddle—well, 'play' he did. The packed house, including some high profile musos, sat stunned in silence as this Paganini of the Prairies (billed as "Australia's best kept secret") took the mickey out of Bach, 'authentic' art, contemporary music, compositional technique, the act of performance, the environment and the audience itself. It was the funniest thing since Sandy Stone's pop-up toaster. I left at interval—a combination of genuine fatigue and the knowledge that, if the program became any more humorous (although no-one was actually laughing at that stage) I would have become audibly paralytic on the outside. I was already more fragile on the inside, for such is the power of great satire. A serious swindle superbly wrought by a serious cynic.

Which leaves only *Little Boy Blue*. Is it even possible to fully appreciate the aspirations, achievements and ambitions of a Wynton Marsalis? In his role as conductor and soloist with the Lincoln Centre Jazz Orchestra, he is surely at the top of the tree, surrounded (he announces proudly) by "some of the world's greatest musicians". And when the band strikes up, you not only believe it, you suddenly sense that demystification of the practical variety is paid for in blood, sweat and tears. The program tells us that they "spend a great deal of time preparing the concerts ... so that the

audience can enjoy the actuality of jazz at its very best, with no excuses and no fumbling". Make no mistake, it doesn't come any better than this: fabulous arrangements, superb sound, sensational solos. They sang, laughed, cried, made love, got angry, acted up, argued, screamed, whispered, amused themselves and each other, in short they bared their souls in the genuinely creative act that is summed up in that one little word, jazz. To demystify on this level is to transcend reality by breaking barriers, by expanding boundaries from within, by realizing potential, by celebrating the now. It is to be profoundly and utterly alive and human. Simply unforgettable.

Virtual encounters

FOLDBACK

ANAT

Ngapartji Centre, March 8

A sizeable fold gathered at the very smart (or 'bourgy', depending on your perspective) Ngapartji Centre in East End Rundle Street for *FOLDBACK*, the day long forum on media, techno-sound and screen culture, organised for the festival by ANAT (Australian Network for Art and Technology). Richard Grayson gave a user-friendly welcome invoking the 10th anniversary of the other summer of love—"the famous event in south-east England, where techno ecstasies transformed the urban psyche of hyper-decay and escalating pan-capitalism into trance and psychedelic experiences"(ANAT newsletter)—stirring British memories of driving minis through Essex out of our gourds, on the lookout for parties we could never find. Paul Brown who actually found the party, stirred some of the same nostalgia in his account of the slow emergence of multiple media practice as 30 years on the fringe, citing rampant conservatism behind the form's status in the artworld as part of a global *salon des refusés*. There was some sense in this hankering that "legitimacy" meant legitimacy in the visual arts world which suggested perhaps a narrower engagement with the arts than expected. This was contradicted in subsequent sessions that demonstrated the vital relationships between new technologies and writing, sound and performance. A very writing-based day all round, though not always good writing.

Cyberwriter Mark Amerika re-traced his steps from underground artworld, performing "acts of voluntary simplicity", his swerve into publication with his cult hit *The*

Kafka Chronicles, which hurled him unwittingly into the public sphere and then onto the digital overground. While he was busy collapsing the distance between author and reader, his online publication network (www.altx.com) was attracting the attention of international money marketeers. Like a lot of the international guests at this festival, Mark Amerika seems to be able to pat his head and rub his tummy at the same time. He may have achieved some fame and a little fortune as web publisher, but he's still addressing the frictions between electronic art and writing. His writing-machine (*GRAMMATRON*) still grapples with spirituality in the electronic age, asking questions like "Who are I this time?" (www.grammatron.com).

ANAT's first executive officer, cyber-artist Francesca da Rimini took some of her own advice (Quick! Question everything) rudely interrupting her own spoken text with others emanating from her cyber pseudonyms gash girl, doll yoko and gender-fuck-me-baby.

In **water writes always in *plurals* Linda Marie Walker and Teri Hoskin, from the Electronic Writing Research Ensemble, linked up live with Josephine Wilson (WA) and Linda Carroli (QLD) who have all been part of the first joint ANAT/EWRE virtual residency project writing together online to create a work entitled *A woman/stands on a street corner/waiting/for a stranger*. Duplicating the act of writing for a live audience was an interesting if slow process, producing some nice accidents of speech; the odd poetry of phonetic translations; the Simple Text voices reproducing the typos; suggestive intervals between writing and spoken text. You can read the piece on <http://va.com.or/ensemble/water>

Programming Linda Dement after lunch was a brave move. Still, it was soothing to hear a soft voice in the dark still in love with the possibilities of technology for realising her expert if sometimes gruesome images. You would expect a sustained sequence of bloody bandages accompanying a diatribe on censorship to empty a room but here the pleasure of seeing the work of this former fine-art photographer projected on such a scale and in such vivid detail held too much fascination. Me, I spent a lot of time looking at the floor. Afterwards, diatribe met diatribe when a man in the crowd accused Linda Dement of male-bashing, citing "the situation in the former Yugoslavia" and then

"all of history" as reason enough to censor, presumably, any statements along gender lines.

No wonder the cheery Komninos Zervos with his *Underground Cyberpoetry* received such a warm response after this error type-1. This CD-ROM was produced while Komninos was ANAT's artist in residence at Artec (UK) last year. Using performance-poet delivery and adopting an assortment of streetwise London personae, Komninos playfully navigated his word animations. The screen looked like a spin dryer, words tumbling as Komninos moved among us. The performance potential of multimedia works is really only beginning to be explored in Australia. Outside groups like skadada in Perth and Company in Space in Melbourne, we don't see a lot of performance engagement with the new media. It's an area that ANAT clearly see as important.

nervous_objects is an eclectic, accidental experiment in internet artistic collaboration. They met at ANAT's 1997 Summer School in Hobart and have continued to collaborate online, in locations as remote as Perth, Woonenong and New York City exploring notions of realtime internet conferencing and manipulation of artistic pursuits in virtual and physical space. In their first project *Lingua Elettrica* (<http://no.va.com.au>) at Artpace created for ISEA 97 they built an interactive website and publicly destroyed it. In a day otherwise free of technological accidents, nervous_objects encountered a few, making it sometimes difficult to decipher their precise intention. Their calm in the face of calamity produced a nicely laid back form of Ozzie subversion.

The stakes lifted when Stevie Wishart entered. Not an accordion in sight but improvising with that mediaeval hurdy gurdy and live electronics she extracted an amazing array of sounds and tones. Real Audio was streamed from Sydney and mixed as it came through. As Stevie played, Jim Denley navigated the new CD-ROM track created with Kate Richards from Stevie's new CD.

In the energetic Q and A session, Mark Amerika brought up the need for new writing about multiple media, citing the likes of George Landau and Gregory Ulmer as critics who practice what they preach and engage with the work on its own terms. Chair of the New Media Arts Fund, John

Rimmer, asked just how much technical difficulties (lags, delays, congestion) are intrinsic to the work and how they might develop given more bandwidth. For nervous_objects, if it gets too fast, too polished it's not interesting anyway. There was some discussion of Garry Bradbury's score for *Burn Sonata* using pianola and digital technology. When someone in the audience thanked nervous_objects for sharing their process. Garry Bradbury begged to differ, accusing them of utopian dreams of machines generating ideas. The nervous_objects said it was something that pushed *them* and *they* certainly didn't expect the machines to generate ideas. Working with content issues was what they were doing. Afterwards we all repaired to the Rhino Room for the launch of the new *Dislocation* CD by Zónar Recordings (see Linda Marie Walker's *13 Essays: Regrets*)

The *FOLDBACK* forum and the New Media Arts stall at this years Performing Arts Market reflect a growing confidence in the possibilities of multiple media and the different ways artists can work within it.

RT

13 Essays: Regrets

Linda Marie Walker

mir'ror - writ'ing, no. Writing reversed from the usual order, as if seen reflected in a mirror: sometimes indicative of aphasia or nervous disease.

Joseph Kosuth, "One and three mirrors", in *pure*, Art Gallery of SA

1. I've wanted to say (to write) things other than I've written in the first three issues. Like about writing, for instance, and language, the language of writing. I mean, the language we use to write of writing, not the language we use to write about something, like theatre or performance or music or visual art – and that might be called 'criticism'.

2. Arriving early for *Carmen*, the sun shining, the air warm, I wandered down to Elder Park and came across a groom waiting for a bride, in the rotunda. There was to be a B'hai wedding. Everyone standing around, keeping an eye out. And then she arrived in a purple Kombi-van. The music was Dean Martin singing, "Everybody loves somebody sometime". It was so right and funny. Nick Mount standing nearby was very impressed by the van's paint-job. Just as the MC introduced

the celebrant I had to leave. It was a moving few minutes. At the top of the steps the groom kissed the bride's hand.

3. I like to sit in the theatre early. When there's hardly anyone there. And watch as the place fills up with frocks and suits and perfume. It's amazing. Suddenly every seat is taken and the space buzzes as if home to swarming bees. And you know that very soon silence will fall. It's an exquisite gathering, a community. The lights dim, the red velvet curtain rises.

4. At this exact moment I wish Gabriel Gbadomosi was here. He was one of the RealTime writers in London (at LIFT97). His attention to the details of performance, and then to the writing of it, were extra wondrous comfort, for me. I wish he was seeing all that I am seeing. I wish you could read what he would have written.

5. There's a terrific, modest, exhibition at the Nexus Gallery, Lion Arts Centre, called *Defiling the Object*, of concise and discrete sculptural objects. There are twelve local artists, including two who are also in the Adelaide Biennial (Fuller & Adil).

6. The Colin Duncan work in the Adelaide Biennial that I mentioned earlier (Volume 2) is titled *Sleeplessness*.

7. Did you hear, on ABC radio, Stephen Whittington (Adelaide musician, composer) play the wonderful repetitious, piano piece by Guy Klucsevsek. It was wonderful.

8. It seemed critical, 6pm Monday, to have a Parisian experience at The Lounge. And they come onto the stage, looking French. The sound is round and mellow. This is the first time since my childhood I've heard guitars with accordions. I am delighted. This is Paris Musette. To say what a sound is, is almost a crime, but Paris drifts amongst the tables. They play a waltz. If only Brice Canyon was here. The waltz is fast, decorative. There's a tall man standing at the bar, youngish, obviously French, I think, a dark suit and dark t-shirt. Handsome. A woman passes in a black dress with white spots. The guitarist sings, that dragging voice, as if behind the beat, slightly. Short pieces, so far. Musette means 'fusion', the guitarist says (or, this is what I hear); the bringing together of

various styles and loves of music. Why does this music sound so romantic: springtime in Paris, rain, a thin warmth, soft light. The accordion moves through different rhythms with an ease that is unique. The sudden slowing and speeding, while maintaining the time signature. The notes sharp and brittle, and then drawn to the limit. Is there another instrument that notes tumble from so freely, so generously, like cross-breezes, sudden shade. Gypsy music, rich, circling, black, embracing, thick, and then thin, just bass and guitar, then bass alone ... They came to play for us. Edith Piaf to finish, a song she'd sung.

9. I think that what distresses or distracts me about the Adelaide Biennial (AB) is space. Of course, I enjoy some works more than others. It's very personal, but personal in terms of attachment, to the difficult pleasure of visual arts, to its complex and various appearances. Still, the works are performative, they are within surrounds. I am so tempted to reserve, or temper, or censor, my discomfort with the overall 'look' of the show. It's to do with breath, with breathing space. With a type of repose I suppose. It seems unfair to talk quickly about an exhibition, to carry around an inner dialogue, "chatter", a worry, when this suggests a need to reflect, to wonder what one missed, how one was/is making sense. This chatter fills thinking-space with snippets of regret. So that the "chatter" I referred to, again earlier, in regard to the AB, began to more clearly fasten itself to 'space', to lack of space, to how something is seen, how this that is seen is then considered, how this consideration is primary to the process of sense. And how when space is crowded, like my own "chatter", then breath is constricted and time crushed/rushed, and the object, or matter, before one is lost somehow. That's all, an unfolding is prevented. It brings home clearly the idea of an architecture of display, that although needing to be resisted (the work is the work nevertheless), must/could at the same time be responsive, generous to the work, ensuring that work is attended, or potentially attended. All of this to say, as if a preface, that each work exhibited, and the event overall, requires my return-visit. Last night after the Wendy Houstoun show, *Haunted, Daunted and Flaunted*, it was agreed, amongst the women I sat with, that it needed to be watched again. We tried to piece it together, to connect it

to other narratives. It's this wondering that is so important to the visual arts, a kind of slowing to re-work, re-view, re-peat. And even this morning, another conversation between Virginia and myself, so as to go over this scene and that: what did that gesture intend, did it relate to ... It's the re-telling from memory, the making of something once more, that has me pause, and re-trace the "chatter"—wherever it occurs.

10. I'm still worried about 'bones', in Jenny Holzer's *Lustmord*. There seems no difference, in terms of honour, whether they are used for art or science, someone says. I agree. But this doesn't seem the issue, it's more that they were 'bought'. It makes a difference to me where they came from. It matters to how I read, if to read is an ethical practice, which was indicated by the panel at the Mercury Cinema on Monday evening. I find knowing more difficult than not-knowing. Not-knowing keeps me from the 'gap' where I can 'work'. It keeps me anchored to a spot. The awful reality begins when I know what it is that is there, before me. Then art becomes (for me) so much richer and open, so much more related to the multitude of social/political domains implicit in what it is to 'use' this material and not that. Bones are not neutral, they do not signify the 'general', they are not metaphors. They are imbued with specific memories. This is perhaps why there is noise, shuffling, around them, they require/deserve speech. And they cannot be co-opted by others for their own purpose. The very thing of them is that they are no-one else's bones, except whose they were; they are from the archive of the unanswered-cry of 'this' woman, and 'this' child, and 'this' man.

11. What did Joseph Kosuth say? Something very important. Something about the necessity for the artist to retain some control (that's not the correct word) of an artwork's meaning. Toward the end of his keynote address (Tuesday) he told a story (he is a story-teller, this role is cultural, archival, it contains the joy, the enthusiasm, of being part of a community, and this community might seem small, limited, but it contributes, let's believe, to the overall fabric of what it is to make sense, or to question meaning as meaning is produced and named 'reality') about agreeing to do an installation at the Miro Gallery (in Spain) and how he wasn't too

keen on Miro's work, but spent several months researching his work, reading his writings about intentions, instead of the critic's or historian's, and how this made him much more appreciative of the work itself. He began to like Miro. This seemed to summarise his paper: that the archive, the record, as devised by the figures of 'authority', those who propose the meanings of art, is opposed to the art, somehow (who knows why); to the intentionality of the art, of the artist. Now, this doesn't mean that the artist can determine the meaning. No. In fact, it's quite another order of understanding, of definition: whereas 'intention' seems to mean "this is what the artist meant"; it means instead, 'inquiry'. Here, 'intention' equals (and undermines) 'inquiry'. Because, inquiry is ongoing, and not about outcome. It's about language. Kosuth wants us to know the 'matter' of his archive. And he wants us to know it his way. He evoked Walter Benjamin several times, and for good reasons. Benjamin wrote: "... the storyteller is [someone] who has counsel for his readers ... afterall, counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding". ("The Storyteller", in *Illuminations*)

12. Mark Amerika spoke at *FOLDBACK*, the event organised by the Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT), and held at Ngapartji Multimedia Centre on Sunday. Amerika runs the large web-site called Altx (www.alth.com/). *Grammatron* is his massive new on-line novel, and he read from it—as well as told us jokes about corporate sponsorship—while demonstrating it live. His investment in a hypertextual style of writing is both whole-hearted and critical. I found him in the Botanic Cafe reading Milorad Pavic's *Dictionary of the Khazars*. He read me a section that outlines (in 1988) a hypertext agenda. Of course, it is well known that this multiple-path way of constructing narratives is perpetual. It might be though that something quite uninspiring occurs, I'm not sure. This potential for constancy, without relief, without long and short silences, means, in most cases, or so it seems, relations to other forms are forfeited, like music, like tone, rhythm, beauty. But then all of these are changing.

13. Late in the afternoon Zónar

Recordings (co-ordinated by Brendan Palmer) DJ-ed their CD *Dis_locations, Incestuous Electronic Remixing*. It reminded me of sitting in coffee-shops, and especially the ICA Bar, in London, where this type of music is played at a particular level. That is, it's not loud, but it creates a backdrop that is both fascinating and distant. At Ngapartji the music was played loud. I liked this, it took me over. The layering that happens directly relates to contemporary philosophy as written by Deleuze and Guattari say, or the literary/autobiographical work of Hélène Cixous. It's a spatial sound-practice that operates both on the surface and below it. The poetic of it appears hard and sharp but is quite the reverse. It has an improvisational sensibility that is disconcerting but not disturbing. I love this endeavour. It's a type of telling that has great evocative strength, and a spreading-out that touches the physical and emotional body.

**RealTime 24 will appear on
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Black on White
Experimentum Mundi
Possessed
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opencity@rttimearts.com**

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