RealTime
Performance and the national arts April–May 1996

HER ABSENCE FILLED THE WORLD

Censorship
Adelaide Festival OnScreen

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RealTime 12 focuses on the 1996 Adelaide Festival and on the growing and complexly intertwined censorship and political correctness debates. RealTime was live, in print and on the web at the Adelaide Festival, the first we hope of many such experiences. However, for all the joy, the pressure on often under-developed new Australian works was depressing. Sarah Miller who saw new works at both the Adelaide and Perth Festivals argues that it's time we did something about this. She's not alone. Our standing at our own festivals is seriously weakened by works that need more time, more support and more exposure before they stand next to polished, mature works on the international festival circuit.

While you can find our Adelaide Festival report in one grab in the first half of this issue, let me guide you to the censorship debate. Colin Hood's exposé of the complexities and hypocrisies of the current film censorship regulations and procedures appears in OnScreen (p. 21) along with Peter Greenaway's observations about screen violence in an interview by Noel Purdon (p. 19). Elsewhere, Tracey Parry describes the alarm provoked by performer Alister Grant using Nazi iconography at cLUB bENT (p. 16). Barbara Bolt queries the gap between the disturbing content of Bill Henson's photographs and the rarefied language of the exhibition catalogue essay (p. 42). Shelley Kay grapples with Gregg Araki's The Doom Generation (p. 27). Virginia Baxter details Annie Sprinkle's performance at the Adelaide Festival for all those who haven't seen it but would like to comment (p. 9).

Our thanks to all of you who welcomed OnScreen so enthusiastically after its first appearance in RT#11 and to those readers and artists—local and overseas—who let us know that RealTime became a vital and integral part of their Adelaide Festival experience.

Another opening, another showdown

A cautionary tale from Sarah Miller

Australia's Federal Coalition Government elected on March 2 has promised, among other things, to establish a "Federal Arts Fund". No major is no doubt, to distinguish it from the Festivals Australia program established by the previous Government at regional festivals. The proposed fund is valued at $1.5 million over three years and it is unlikely that anything will unfold unthinkingly points to a major problem in the way Governments of either political persuasion address funds and arts activities in this country.

To approach it from another perspective, if we look at the major differences between the international touring work brought into Australia over the past three months, whether for the Festival of Sydney, Festival of Perth or Festival of the Adelaide Festival, they are blindingly evident. The first is the sheer amount of resources (money, material and last, but certainly not least, time) that precedes the presentation of any international performance or theatrical event in this country. The second is the concomitant lack of resources (time, money and materials) that go into supporting even the best funded Australian projects and companies, except perhaps the Australian Opera and Ballet.

This is so obvious as to be a truism but more than ever before, it highlights the fact that Australian artists and companies achieve what they achieve despite all the obstacles thrown in their prospective paths and that the ability to develop aesthetically ambitious and intellectually rigorous work in a sustained way in this country is still out of reach.

Emerging from a month long immersion into the Festivals of Perth and Adelaide, this is the clearest sense that I have. The point was brought home to me, again, during the Perth Festival but driven home by the extraordinary sophistication of form and rigour of a number of performance events at the Adelaide Festival—in particular, Hotel Pro Forma's Open Air Opera, Don Quixote, La Fura del Baus' MTM. Each of these productions displayed extraordinary technological and conceptual sophistication and precision, intellectual rigour and virtuosic performance skills.

Nonetheless, fascinated and excited as I was by much of the work I saw, I was also depressed and at times embittered by the recognition that each of the aforementioned events would then, too, work in a climate which fosters sustained development. Gaudemus by the Maly Theatre of St Petersburg has been developed and worked on six years; La Fura del Baus apparently only produce a new work every two years; The Vis A Vis company, while receiving a decent amount of infrastructure funding, received the equivalent of US $1 million in government support towards the production of Central Park (seen in Sydney and Perth). Australian born Lloyd Newson of DV8 has stated very clearly and high in the context of the condition of Australian arts funding, this country is incapable of supporting the development of even a part of one of his performances in one year.

Nevertheless, despite the brilliance and audacity of the aforementioned productions and despite the fact that many of them are not unfamiliar to us from the work of a few resident Australian artists and companies. The difference has not in greater talent or ability but in time, resources and not just financial but intellectual support. So it's perhaps appropriate to look at the two major new commissions produced for the 1996 Festival of Perth to illustrate just what it might take to really support the development of artists and the arts in this country.

Eironos (Another Place) was created by Canadian choreographer Michael Perreault working "in collaboration" with the Chrisse Parrott Dance Company. Perreault is renowned as a choreographer/ scenicographer of great visual sophistication and choreographic rigour and the work certainly demonstrated a determined aesthetic, high production values and virtuosity in performance. It was an extremely successful and well received production. Personally, I found it cliched and derivative (bald, grey city, alienation, people don't communicate—we cling to our urban certainties and if we're not careful a big atom bomb will come along and blow us all up). Beyond which I was particularly offended (being a 'politically correct' kind of girl) by the fact that whilst the blokes all wore sensible shoes and clothing to perform in, the women all performed in frocks and high heels. Needless to say at the end of the season not one of the women performing had escaped injury whilst the blokes were injury free. That's the trouble with political correctness; it's so easy to be distracted by inconsequential.

The point is not, however, whether I liked or disliked the production, rather to note that Perreault is a visiting choreographer is obviously far too silly to risk putting on a new work with new dancers in a festival context. His extremely successful solution was to transplant weekend workshops over several months with his own dancers into an antipodean workshop context. The six weeks rehearsal in Australian took place in situ, with lighting and sets, at Beale Warehouse. The rehearsal time in Perth was almost utterly given over to inscribing the music of the choreography onto the Australian dancers. Some additional choreography was created in Australia. However, basically, the Australian dancers were rehearsed into the work and to give credit where credit is due, the calibre of the dancing was high. Australian expenditure on the project was around $350,000—big money for this country—yet even this amount does not reflect the 'real' costs of this work in terms of the pre-production period in Canada.

The second major commission was Mimi by the Marrnega Company, a humans law and duty or alternately teased them or taunted them in the spirit world.

In the program, the Festival of Perth stated that the project had been in development for three years, thus generating a certain confusion with both critics and audiences. Certainly the 'idea' had been around for that time. Both Michael Leslie and Stalker have undertaken research trips to Arnhem Land to spend time with the Kunawinka people to ensure that their understanding and representation of their particular spiritual practices and beliefs was neither exploitative not misrepresentative.

In development terms on the other hand, the Marrnega Company, which was formed especially to undertake this project had six weeks rehearsal with much of that time being occupied in teaching the Aboriginal performers to walk on stilts. That left about two and a half weeks to realise Mimi as a theatre project, an almost insurmountable problem compounded by the site specific nature of the work. The company had one pre-production week to rehearse in the breathtakingly beautiful environment, an extraordinary rockface, in the hills to the east of Perth. Beyond which, the pressure to produce an 'authentically' Aboriginal work given the complex relationship between traditional and urban Aboriginal and non Aboriginal belief systems and values, created enormous stress for the company.

The performance outcome was perhaps predictable. The sites, the images central and visual, the execution of the Mimi spirits and their relationship to the land were beautifully evoked. The first fifteen minutes were extraordinary, then the sheer need to "make a show" took over and the work disintegrated into a kaleidoscope of images outstanding, then it is unlikely to be supported in the future. What might be the outcome of the company worked on this project for a year? What might develop were the company to keep working for ten years? Is it only in Australia that we assume the ability to resolve complex cultural and art form issues in six weeks?

Given the constraints on the arts funding dollar in this country it remains to be seen whether Australian artists and companies will ever get the time and resources they not only deserve but need if their work is to emerge from its embryonic beginnings and transform itself into the developed and sophisticated productions that we love to be excited by when they visit our shores.

With this in mind, what can an additional $1.5 million "to assist in developing and premiering new Australian works for inclusion in 'major' festivals ..." dispersed over a three year period seriously hope to achieve? You get what you pay for after all. Who's providing the advice to Government? Perhaps someone in government should take a look at the real costs involved in producing a "杰出 excellence" as well as the benefits to the broader community given the success of the 1996 Adelaide Festival. Is it not just box office returns? I doubt that the accommodation, catering and travel industries are complaining. Maybe it really is "time", time for a serious and considered overhaul of our arts and cultural policies. time to redistribute (restructure) arts funding—not in terms of historical precedent but creative development and merit—and certainly time to start addressing the real needs of the arts and cultural industries. What could be more economically rational after all?

Michael Slobodian
The transformed city

Keith Gallash at the 1996 Adelaide Festival

It’s pleasantly surreal to come home to a city I left ten years ago, a city I lived in and loved for forty years. A city now made ugly by bad architecture and inadequate town planning and made brutal by dereliction of social conscience, for me to find that city embraced by an artistic director of the Adelaide Festival, giving it coherence and a sense of community. Hills Hoists and pegs are inscribed across the city. A suburb has become a gallery, relatives who’ve never been to a festival venture out because they like Barric Kosky (he presents the weather on the Channel 9 News, forthrightly in The Advertiser), and Red Square with its towering shipping containers cradles all the post-show energy so often dissipated in earlier festivals.

The 1996 Adelaide Festival was the best I’ve been to; and I’ve been to most of them, from the beginning. The quality of the works, the thematic integrity of the programming, the sense of community developed between audiences and performers, the debates driven by the works, all indicated energy, purpose and ideas.

RealTime became part of the Festival’s energy, appearing in print four times and updating on the web, responding briskly and briefly to festival performances, events and issues. In this issue, writers Richard Murphet, Zsuzsanna Soboslay, Linda Marie Walker, Eleanor Brichill and Di Wecker summarize their responses to the festival and we reproduce a selection of the original contrasting responses.

Kosky’s festival was vast, there was simply no way we could cover all of it, let alone cover the Adelaide fringe given our limited resources. Even so, it was easy to sense and hear about the excitement and density of arts experience on offer in the East End of Rundle Street with its astonishing range of cafes, restaurants and bars (and to be developed), performance venues and galleries. There’s talk now of holding the Fringe annually, something encouraged by the East End traders and something welcome to those fringe players who found battling each other and the Kosky Festival for audiences just too much.

Festival and Fringe were two very different events, with Kosky taking on contemporary performance in its many manifestations and the Fringe beginning to show signs of change. While cabaret and comedy work still dominate and theatre works play second fiddle, the emergence of indigenous Australian performance and visual arts as a key fringe component proved timely and challenging. The free-market urge of Fringe festivals might have looked democratic in years gone by, but freefall into a huge, amorphous program is experienced as less than democratic by audiences and certain performers.

Here are three progress reports I lappedot in the heat(wave) of the festival moment after talkative nights at Red Square and up to three performances or events a festival day. If ever a festival was made for RealTime, this was it.

Tuesday, March 5

Gaudenasmus, The Malby Theatre of St. Petersburg, More and more in these books, more astonishingly multi-skilled performers, more ecstasy, more of the radical otherness that a good festival poses. Already it’s Saturday night. Already, and it’s only day two, you collage with festival familiaris, eyes unfocused, steps uncertain, not sure if they’re up to the Malby Theatre because they haven’t recovered from fully absorbed, quietly and alone reflected on Meg Stuart’s No Longer Ready Made. It’s still in our bodies, and we don’t want to let it go. (A businessman flew in, went straight to Stuart, tense, tetchy, restless....within fifteen minutes the dress rehearsal flowed out of him as if absorbed into the dancer with the shaved head his face moving in an impossible blur atop a stable signalling body). Even dinner’s not an issue, perhaps a stiff drink, but do you really want to talk apocalyptic—children’s play as life and death drive in a scarcity economy in Nits, the oscillating line between ecstatic (and questionable) mass life-force and individual pop-song love lament (made epic a la Nick Cave and Leonard Cohen) in Batheeva’s Anaphase, the out of sync couples in Meg Stuart, obsessive-compulsive, dystrophied, (drug-)shuddering but compassionate, dancing with the floor against an unforgiving gravity and the mess of everyday detachment, half pain half pleasure; all of these performers in all of these companies pushing the physical limits of endurance—in Meg Stuart you can hear the pained breathing like music—in all of them, bodies are tossed and propelled by strong tradition in Russian literature and at its most familiar and disturbing in Bulgakov’s The Master and Margarita. The steeply raked stage is a snow field that immediately swallows men, yields water, brass instruments, ballons. A parade ground manual of military nonsense is transformed into a stage with a string of frosts on the wire’. Young corporal bodies are crippled comically and painfully by formations and ‘at attention’ poses. Nothing breaks through the biggest gap is language, many of the conscripts coming from the outer reaches of the Soviet empire, without Russian, turned into clowns by the director. There are Jews and Gypsies. A frustrated would-be liberal argues: “You Jews incite an anti-semitism that is utterly foreign in us”. There are women whom the soldiers court and are astonished by in scenes of naive attraction, near rape, role reversal. A hair-washing scene resolves into a physical dance struggle with the soldier pulling at the woman’s long, wet rolled hair, she resisting with great (neck) strength—almost violent and all of it not disturbing for being only that. Romantic visions draw on Tchaikovsky’s opera of doomed love and death by duel. Igor Stravinsky:”Our Oreste; soldier and lover duet atop a flying grand piano.

The performance’s surrealism is fatalistic at every level, despite its being magical, rigorously physical, astonishingly sung and played (the whole company transforms into an expert brass band briefly). It ends with a death, a body sprawled, a bloodied face looking up and out and the audience responsibility has to be taken. (A sudden synchronicity: the only moment that demands to be seen generally in Image Aigue’s Nits, when a small boy could be assumed to be dead at that play’s end, if we are willing to see the consequences of the deprivations it is presented. His body is almost in the identical downstage position as the dead man’s in Gaudenasmus).

Gaudenasmus is a passionate work of jolly manic depression, but the hope in its unrealised, love is thwarted, a life is lost. The forces that control these lives are distant, a weepingly surreal, fatal, uncontradictable. Innocence becomes potentially evil but never consciously so. The old humanist dogma that “these people’s needs are negligible but their resilience, their humour, ‘blah, blah, blah’, is not going to get you through this evening unless you ignore what it’s about. There are moments of ecstasy and transcendence but these are undercut by a pervasive fatalism. However, the seed of individualism is there, a sort of back in the amorphous facade of totalitarianism. Gaudenasmus can be hard work, the volume of performance sometimes outweighing the material, the recurrent rhythms tiring and the surtitles competing with the intensely visual action for your attention—but better to have surtitles instead of ‘we don’t need the text because the work is about the human condition and we all know it’. This is not an old condition, this is about new state of mind held in dark check by an old empire.

Tuesday, March 12

The 1996 Adelaide Festival is just passing midway. A whole new round of performances are arriving as the first set are enjoying the interrogations they warrant and provoke. Questions about ecstasy as transcendent and as reductive, as spiritual, as totalitarian. The focus is about to be shared with the visual arts as Artists’ Week starts up and many of the questions already raised are not about to go away—as narrativity opens out to more possibilities, as audience involvement and engagement are tested visually (Onefo),
The women are physically and threat which keep you (and early the determine the narrative, but it is male emotionally strong and merime and by the London dance work, the promise of synthesis, and hybridity reduced to wrap around musique concrete, wrap around percussion, wrap around projections, musicians tucked up into the out of harm's way, designer Mary Moore's great sense of danger and challenge held in check. This is history held in check, rendered abstract, quantify instead, framed in and in two familiar modernist dance techniques. Red Shed's Station 2: Eye of the Other, over the years itself, and Red Regina make this an enquiring, epic and yet intimate festival.

Friday, March 15

In the final, escalating stages of the 1996 Adelaide Festival, a dance work that space re-written, the body scrutinised ever more closely. This festival drives curiosity, to look (at art) in other people's houses, at lives (Betontan, Fura dels Baus, Hotel Pro Forma, and Betontan but, like Richard Murphet in RealTime Adelaide Festival#3 worry at the page of female artists in their works. Betontan's wild, risky, naturalistic, sexy physicality in Know Your Enemy, the second of the shows, a potential pacemaker for the female body. These women are physically and emotionally strong and sometimes determined to the male. The audience was aware that keeps you (and clearly the women) constantly nervous. While the threat of violence governs this work, the 'reality of it against a woman in Betontan's first, less naturalistic, physically percussive show (the pummelled set was ideally inscribed) was disturbing. Even some passionate lovers of DV8 thought the narrow bandwidth of masculinity represented in Enter Achilles dated. The mix of admiration for and interrogation of these companies is one of the dynamics of the festival. Annie Sprinkle has provoked predictable and valuable debate, but one of the agent arguments encountered has been over the visual arts Compost exhibition of art works in private suburban homes. The objections include: the works have been inappropriately installed, the work system is in which the male body preserves, and the works have not been commissioned to respond to these very specific sites; too many paintings, not enough sculptures and installations representative of current trends. Curator David O'Halloran responds: the event is an innovative extension of standard curatorial practice (homes not galleries); that purchased art works 'disappear' into private homes (no artist control over where the works are hung); and that the works take on different connotations in their new contexts. As you'll see in Linda Marie Walker and Virginia Baxter's separate accounts of Compost, the event can be amusing, intriguing and insightful. Similar questions of intent and appropriation have been raised about the Whirling Derivatives (what were we really watching?) and the absence of genuine crosscultural discussion—forums focused essentially on forms and not their contents. Our relationship with the 'other' haunts us in this festival and I mean haunts. You only have to step back for a moment from the physical and visual seductions of this festival to see what a dark image of the world has been realised—the pain in Meg Stuart, the fear of scarcity in Image Aigue's Nifs, the fanatical cultural traps and despair in Maly Theatre, the sexual revulsion in Betontan's driven world: the idealised. Red Regina was dedicated to the complex choice in harmony, each lifting the other democratically against great strength, hovering as if in a dream, must descend into a world of murderous jealousy and infidelities (Know Your Enemy).

Molecular Theatre's Facade Firm, sometimes short on finesse and visually cramped in The Space, ironically and darkly conveys a portrait of individual oppression, the writer with his feather pen perpetually denied the very act of writing, reduced to reaching for the page, or scrabbling, or jabbing at his only mirror image. The appeal of early century Wirkkiewicz's near surreal vision to the contemporary Japanese artist up against social and economic pressures is evident. For the audience, the fourth wall is recommended, filled in with red screens and with time becomes an appalling ticking away of opportunity, oppression made beautiful with kabuki-influenced screen-play and, finally, with the line of a wall is gift-wrapped. Loss and oppression are made beautiful again in Hotel ProForma's Orfeo, the ultimate sensual example of this dynamic and the Festival's best work. Again denial is at work—as with Facade Firm, the audience is compelled utterly by the time frame of the work. For a very long time you peer into the dark as dimly lit figures. You can only listen. You learn to look with your ears and you begin to hear the pattern and groupings of voices shift across the space. Once you have learned and relished that, then you are given light and you look at a staircase frame and reframed by light and the movement of identically clothed and crowned courtly singers...and a lone dancer descending, ascending, descending into the underworld, sometimes appearing to float, sometimes dragged. Perspective is everything in Orfeo, a world closed, opened, flattened, beautified, a strengthening chiasm, a stairway to heaven, and finally, one that reaches out to take you—a barely voiced sigh solos with pleasure and alarm through the theatre. This is not Gluck's Orfeo, it resonates with that work but its vision is a darker less redemptive contemporary one. Orfeo is the Festival's most complete synthesis of the architectural and the ephoric. Once again though, this is no easy ecstasy. To sustain the pleasures of Orfeo read Michael's disturbing and richly imagistic libretto (in the highly recommended program against the sound and music compositions by John Cage and Bo Holten, the design and the lighting, it creates an otherworldly sense of right now and an alien then.

Within a few days from its conclusion, it's clear that Barrie Kosky has created the festival he envisioned and set a benchmark for future Australian arts festivals. Some have argued that there is a paucity of truly great works in the festival (equivalent, say, to the Frankfurt Ballet or the otherwise lacklustre 1994 festival), however Orfeo at least should put that concern aside and so should the thematic intensity of the festival, the power of art form collisions and collaborations, the willingness to look pain in the face, the achievements of Excavation and The Black Sequent Dress, the inspiration drunk by many, many artists from Meg Stuart, the Maly Theatre and Handspring's Woyzeck of high risk and Faustus the love song, and the constant debate over shows and issues. We are taking home a theatre of images in our minds and bodies, ecstatic and pained movement, images like the magnet and the spanner in the sky charcoaled on film and into us as Woyzeck's grimly apocalyptic vision possesses him, or the valley of the soul is entered via film in Jenny Kemp's The Black Sequent Dress and via sound, a bracelets that becomes ours in Elizabeth Drake's sound designs. This a reminder of how significant a role 'return to sound' has played in this festival, from The Listening Room in the Rotunda, to Art Zoyd and Pierre Henry and The Ethereal Eye and Excavation and in the boldest of the festival's considerable musical pleasures, the Bang on a Can All Stars, a rich, engaging embrace of the sonics of contemporary music a generation on, it seems, from the adventure initiated by the Kronos Quartet.

Coda: Saturday, March 30

After our final trip to the printer in Adelaide, I catch IARA's The Blue Hour and, drawn back by the power of the combination of puppetry and animation in Woyzeck on the Highwall, see Handspring's Faustus in Africa. This is a tour de force, a turn of the Woyzeck but shares with it director William Kentridge's charcoal animations (see cover photo) conjuring locations and alarming states of mind, turning old print advertisements surreal (a voracious typewriter swallows, amongst other things, an elephant and spits out the tusk) as the European fantasy of empire turns into a nasty reality. Handspring provide the closest thing to traditional theatre in the festival with their rich texts and the acting demands placed on the brilliant puppeteers, but like much of the festival it's a theatre of expanded means and vision. Back in Sydney, an exhibition of Kentridge's charcoal works, many of them from Faustus in Africa and remarkable animated films (on video) has just opened at the Annandale Galleries. Back in Sydney, the Australian Ballet rises to the great demands of William Forsythe's In the middle, somewhat elevated, comparing well with the Frankfurt Ballet version at the 1994 Adelaide Festival; and Gravity Feed's In the House of Skin at The Performance Space is a miracle of Australian performance deserving its place in future festivals. The festival rolls on.
The space between

Zsuzsanna Soboslay reflects on Adelaide Festival dance and performance

D'V8, Enter Achille (UK); Jenny Kemp, The Black Squash Dress (Australia); The Mercur City Theatre, and Suzy's Clastrobeba (Russia); Molecular Theatre, Facade Film (Japan); Ethereal Eye (Australia); Claire Mullen (ireland); Mahal (israel); Company Hildigarde, Inne (Australia/Bulgaria); Meg Stuart/Damaged Goods, No-One Is Watching (U.S.).

At edges such as death (illness, vulnerability, humiliation), one can cross a state of mind so different one doesn't know. The crossing itself can feel like dying... Adelaide Festival, 1996. Enter Meg Stuart, who knows about dying; her dance pieces are a long dangling that won't break. Held within a grid, tailed, snailed, prodded, sprawling, focused on restriction... Hamstrung, balanced, she dances pockets of need, building nothing. Enter The Burley Griffin, who suffer for their dream of Canberra as they try to construct a city by channeling into the over...

Enter Jenny Kemp's black-sequinned woman who slips in a cocktail bar and dies in front of the audience... And then, Enter Achille: a spectacular D'V8 dance piece by Lloyd Newson about the "labyrinth of male rituals", set in the ideal location for head turning, ear (holding), shoulder (shoving), chest (purging), bellies (sleeping), thighs (collapsing, smoking), knees (jiving), ankles (flicking), soles (crushing). A pub, of course: the terrorization of confusion in the disintegration of our camareaderie. But where is the hell?

The Greek Achilles could eat a hatred horse without indigestion—inurable, applied to his heel, where his mother, dipping him in the great river Styx for protection, had to hold him. This is a story of loyalty and betrayal, of a man coming to the revenge of his mate—yet it is still a story of war and action within war. The violation of the child by him with his mother, is the warrior's undoing but is also the very sign of his humanity and ungodliness.

Enter Achille is a sculpted work of incredible and ferocious physical skill. It also exemplifies every reason you might have for staying away from the performance: Vonitt, braun, competitiveness, the demeaning of women, hyperbolic Superwoman fantasy, and just plain showing off. These girls are heroes with great risk as much as objects of repulsion. We have to watch from the sides of the football field, and choose.

The dancers execute everything so well, from punch-ups to push-ups, from piss-ups to Petit Cheri. The last dance, which features a red hot rope act and fucking an organised plastic doll until the doll is slaughtered and the men shot dead. Where is the dealing with failure, the going through failure to find the unknown on the other side?

For its extraordinary physical skill and truthful observation of certain male rituals, this piece and its world of men remains safe. The audience loves it. "Just like real life," they say, when the finale is over and they begin their personal replays. Have they turned, or only mirrored the heel? Nothing is displaced in the realm. Superman's moments are affectionately sanitised but nonetheless survive as a means of enhancing and valorizing male culture from being pierced. Split-stage episodes (yobs on a building-site rig highstage whilst a man fades a rubber dollop dance; pub brawlies saccruering lowstage synchronised with Superman spanning a rig highstage) are then going very far beyond any limit. So does it not go deep enough: the staging exemplifies how far men will go to cope and protect each other from being pumped and changing something of what shows itself to the world.

So many pieces in this Festival reflect a male (and, to an extent, also a female) and/or mechanical drive to produce cultures of thrive on a given order and don't want to change. Facade Film, by Molecular Theatre, is a bizarre and relentless piece about Japanese cultural conformity, in men with suits and women pretending to be men in suits re-arranging view-frames, by order of The Firm. In a Kafkaesque way, The Firm is both an incorporation, and a prescription for behaviour, of what above all costs must be maintained.

The Mal Theatre of St Petersburg demonstrates in Clastrobeba how closely bound are architecture, distance, conformity and mystogyny across Russian history. It is a madhouse of meals becoming a narrative music, leaping through windows. Tubas examine a dead body which begins to sing. Does it matter to be alive? Does it make sense to ever fall asleep? I hear your heartbeat march through the curl of a marching hand. Keep marching...

This is a long entrapment. Rushed curtains ascend and descend on something that has always been. Men magically slapping up walls with desire; a rake grows from watering, but love itself does not grow. There is only either Pavlova, Pushkin, or vodka (right over, after, or between all things).

Malys physical work is excellent: all the great skills of Russian method and madness (athletic, stylistic power that captures the music and undertow of language) are here. This is music-theatre, dance-theatre, theatre-theatre where boundaries and borders, truth and lies become the same dance. But where are the attempts to show how things might be otherwise? Malys is a young company, Russias avant-garde: it is bleak of them not to explore the hope for another possible world.

Clastrobeba shows a pointed understanding of entrapment, Hildigarde of Melbourne (not Bingen) replicates it unwittingly. In Inje, a gaggle of village girls go with local male culture and practice hysteria whilst a single male figure holds their attention to ransom with knife cuts, slashes, whips and brakes. Through inviting us to partake of a sensory world of water, mud, blood, of clogged feet dancing, arguing where they be going, who they belong to? The piece's relentless tempo and shrill pickings of language are drowned by overactivity and uncertain focus, leaving the “hero” a thug and his women so ground into their cultural roles that their habits, actions, responses remain pre-ordained.

One of the Firm's most interesting pieces for example is that the work is crafted with a respect for stillness and the curl and pungency of words, and, whilst remaining within a heterosexually preclusive definition of female-as-object of the gaze, The Black Squash Dress yet still allows the audience to attempt to give voice to the failings of doubt amidst the quotidian struggle to continue. The ways men mess the point here are poignant, sympathetic, but very clear.

A different eye is exercised in The Ethereal Eye, a multi-levelled collaboration which aims at dancing and sounding an aesthetic vision whilst giving strange eyes on the physical plane. The Burley Grifflns' struggle is itself remote and removed (as unfortunately are the musical instruments!), and the dancers' bodies afool. This is certainly intended; yet, whilst looking after their "moving and rising, forming a changing", one also sees a certain uniform erectness of neck and pointing of arms which perhaps impedes the energy flow. I enjoy moments when Byron Perry's body interrogates the dance, instincitively bringing a subjective muscle into a turn, a whipping fraction of speed through arm or knee. There is also a crucial central segment where one by one the dancers, each describe a circle until another dancer joins in, as if shared inspiration multiples and divides and releases another and another shape that cuts and quenches the first. Here lie the possibilities of meeting, of construction architecture is, after all, not just an idea but within the performance itself and in relation to its subject.

The idea—as stated in the program—for a focus spatially on rather than political or biographical plane worries me. As Meg Stuart realises, space is political—although certainly it would not appear to be so Bardshe Dance Company's artistic director, Oshin Nahin, whose gloom statement—immediately dismissed by himself as a joke, a fabrication—about saving his autistic brother in America, is a child, shows words well-edited, like his dance, but dubious. Within a few minutes, the structure, shape and theme of Marahel's Madhman, I am sure, is lost to me beyond the starring harmer and a few smooth turns.

Time and space are marked in different ways by all these works punctured and lamended in, bogged and blundered into, slipped and pondered in, oiled and glossed through, spun over and around. So many maps of so many routes...the body's presence often missing. Theatre and dance bodies, as the difficult questions of the relationships between past and contemporary, cultural and emotional histories which are difficult to leave aside in the complex acts of watching. What enters? What exists? What has been the space between?

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Soundtracking

Keith Gallasch revisits a childhood cinema to revisit a silent classic

Murnau's silent film classic still amazes, with its abrupt, brisk editing, its vertiginous camera directions and its dramatic drive and complex villain. In the late 60's I watched a poor 16mm print at the WEA in the heyday of Adelaide's cultural capital under the direction of Eric Williams. Now here I am at the Thebarton Theatre where I once danced to The Clash, sang along with Elvis, and watched Pina Bausch's dance hall reverse Kontaktott. But before that, the Thebarton Town Hall was one of the last outposts of cinema movie crazy family would attend in the 50s twice, sometimes three times a week (and I'd go to the Saturday matinees well)—Woodville, Hindmarsh, Kilkenny, Crowdon, the Port, Semaphore, Alberton, in theatres called Odeon, Odara or Odeon Star; picture palaces of the old style or smooth late deco. This re-visit seems appropriate in a festival with themes embracing the city and architecture.

For some reason my movie memories at Thebarton fix on that strange western

Ride, Vaquero (1953) with Anthony Quinn as the baddy, his dirty feet filling the window seat, his gun in decline who last flies with his conscience. As with Nosferatu it's the villain who grabs you and into whom you read as much as you desire and as much as you are repelled by. Art Zoyd's live (much of it pre-programmed presumably) through-composed response to Nosferatu is in the tradition of popular French techno music—highly synthesised and sometimes fettles bass-driven, it's themed roots in 80's noise-as-motifs, a minimalistic insistence that is sometimes powerful.

On the other hand, there is a wearying literalness—sound effects, sweet themes for the heroine, conventional bursts of music for moments of horror, slow builds for suspense. These merely underline what is already at work in the film and while well within the tradition of composition for film, seem less inventive than such a film demands. At times the effect is enervating—the shift between a pulsing insistence (sometimes percussively ham-fisted) working counterpointally and a dull literalness. Jenny Kemp's work for example is that the work is crafted with a respect for stillness and the curl and pungency of words, and, whilst remaining within a heterosexually preclusive definition of female-as-object of the gaze, The Black Squash Dress yet still allows the audience to attempt to give voice to the failings of doubt amidst the quotidian struggle to continue. The ways men mess the point here are poignant, sympathetic, but very clear.

Running with or pushing along or pumping up the narrative.

Art Zoyd (France), Nosferatu, Thebarton Theatre.
Imperfect present continuous

Linda Marie Walker looks at the Adelaide Festival's visual arts programme.

I'm not keen on the Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia, hung in the elegant new wing. And this surprises me. In the recent past I might have thought 'yes! There's a burning desire to find and feel something, make it seem sad, and sort of redundant. A decided known quality, which is limp, rather than plastic. When did this happen, and how irritating this turn of events seems, how amazing even. Still, as always, there are great works to be found. For me these were Bronwyn Platten's, Graeme Andrae's, and Shae Breyndor's.

Alan Cruickshank

I know Platten's (the paper boat and the wall plate) from her solo exhibition at the Contemporary Art Centre (Adelaide) last year. There were other works that impressed me, hung with much care, before delicate and intense, and its fragile airiness survives here. Andrae's fly came in for extensive public descriptive knowledge to the painting (talkback). When I visited, fly was a square shallow perspex box on the wall with a thin layer of dead black flies (almost unrecognisable) along the bottom, and stains of blood, like smudged letters, all over the front and back, and shadowed onto the wall behind. Here, captured, they had dashed themselves/staved to death.

Breyndor's set of pale almost monocrome photographs and concave blank screens are smooth, resolute: declaring/persuading nothing: "a sort of ergonomics for the eye" (catalogue). There, together, as space, to be approached, engaged. And even though crammed, and very still in the 'noise', they left an aftertaste.

Nearby was Anne Graham's Off the Rail, along the concourse of the Adelaide Railway Station. This was an impressive venue. Commuters coming and going, the casino directly above. At night the row of tents glowed, their kerosene lamps orange beacons, and their exact symmetry wave-like. A film was being shown in one tent. People stood around, or sat and watched, ate soup, had a glass of wine. Several of us leaned against the railing of a high walkway, looking down, content to be mere spectators.

At the Experimental Art Foundation, nearby too, artists-in-residence Wendy Kirkup and Pat Naldi continued their collaborative investigations of street surveillance, begun in 1993 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. There was a gallery installation (Cross-Wind), a video in the bookshop (Search), and a TV broadcast. Each part of the project offered a way of linking perspectives: public became private, map became sound, walking became visual.

The gallery was dissected by lines. From a centre point these radiated outward, heading toward locations, their coordinates given on the wall. A cartographer has measured the metres from the gallery to the Adelaide University for instance. So this was an extended mapping of the surrounding byzantine and meditative female voices. The stark installation was replete with breath, with winds with fragments from opera. And although the body is watched via technology, invaded by law, the gift of sound was touching, that is, the body goes about its own mapping, regardless. A walk to any of the given sites would be unique, an unrepeatable text. The video, taken by police cameras, shows this walking body, as it passes. "We are no longer unregarded as we walk up Rundle Mall in search of clothes or cigarettes or coffee." (Richard Grayson, catalogue)

Compost was in the suburb of Norwood, close to the city-centre but dispersed enough to need a car or bike to set it all in one go. It was the most complex and time-consuming of the Festival's visual arts programs, sometimes taking people up to six hours. Here the process and the curators worked in private and public territories, as well as questions of intent and expectation regarding domestic decisions and governed desires. Time and distance was more demanding than the work, and the curators must have known this. Compost could be about "passage". As it was a tour of the exhibition. There was a Lecture Program, usually known as Artists' Week, a set of workshops (by Geoff Lowe, and by Christopher Snee), and a performance by Dopopo Teatro.

It is often difficult to be in the suburbs. And easy too, to take one's time, to re-scale one's hopes, and failure (here) sometimes indicates a type of already accepted (and re-played) behaviour. Compost was an experiment. Next time it will be different, of course.

Compost, the exhibition, points to an ongoing discussion among visual artists and audiences concerning spatial meanings. David O'Halleran, the principle curator about fifteen artists, and numerous artist works. An opportunity to see inside processes, to look at their things, to spot the art amongst furniture, objects etc, an excuse to stare at the whip over the door knob, and the little blurry print next to Street Theatre, Kunstliche Str雨re, Study, across from the Maria Kooi, cut-out women, Bitch. The precise lighting, sound, smell in which to view the artwork light, so fascinating as any 'performance' I have seen. The Anna Platten painting, Puppets, at Gertrude Street, in bright light, was so dramatic, luminous, that it was easy to isolate bits and pieces, as if the light allowed this. And then later, at Scott Street, in the audience nook, Haluloo, in soft light, beneath high coloured glass windows. The painting somehow a 'fit' with the windows. The painting a 'window' too. And both opposite. And someone was making a sandwich, someone else reading to two children.

The placement of the Howard Arkley painting, Ultra Kleen, of the kitchen in the kitchen at Beulah Road was acute, not just for the painting, but for the kitchen. The soft parts of the painting demonstrating how one sees the actual kitchen. Things in and out of focus. The curve of a real chair, echoing the painted one. The householder said the kitchen used to have lines on the floor just like Arkley's kitchen and the painting remained apart, yet entertained each other. Compost beat seeing art in the gallery (momentarily), it enlivened, re-organised, readings to such an extent that another logic began to play. Something complementary, and exceptional, a logic that isn't binary. Suddenly, one was through the front door, curious, is that 'it', a Steven Beam, sure, located, almost had always been there. Same with the Zikos spread/hanging. A huge covering, over the bed, in a small room. And one noticed the buttons and the glittering silver underside. And in the dining-room another couple of Beam's. The minder pointed them out. This is weirdly wonderful for a regular gallery goer, and welcome too, in a small way, the presence of an instructor with their stories of other visitors. Like the argument about the two parallel wooden bars by Tony Schwensen at Alexandra Street not crossing, and this meaning (therefore) 'nothing'. And how the minder was enchanted by them, as they were like a Japanese garden (and I agreed), "except for the metal stands ..."

And now and then a bit of gossip: apparently one of the Bram paintings was hung upside down. And one of the householders made a piece of art, "just last night" inspired by the Bram drawings, which he 'd mistaken for installation diagrams for the artwork yet to arrive, and hung it close to Regina Walter's great cats, Water.

Accumulating, gradually, during this journey/passage was the stuff of 'home', of being human, of being stranger, stranger of strangers. Like the moment one realises the enormity of the doll collection. AnTun possible moment because there were a dozen or more small grey concrete elephants (Christopher Snee, We are all elephants). A collection too. They looked so sweet and precious, not particularly, which one might have thought, but made distinct and spacious by their modest number.

Across the intersection, the villa's study, with hundreds of blades attached to the walls and shelves, and razors too of all ages, and Steve Wigg photographed in various male guises (Steve Wigg, Sharing rituals). The books were tempting, a little look into one of those slim volumes, with the risk of being cut.

Helen Fuller's glowing raincoat and work-lights hovering low over small painted boards, in the shed at Moulnden Street contrasted with the chromed rubber bin in the lounge. All the shed-work comes to 'this' the care for rubbish. A certain pride.

Back at Alexandra Street are the nine Post Office Paintings by Stephen Rush. They are about rubbish, huge narratives about the smallness of 'post office', of the office of posting. About what is left, afterwards, stacked one against the other.

Compost had a generative and generous joy, and engaged at ordinary and vulnerable levels. It took its name seriously, as composition, combination: the forming of something humbled and dense.
A vision exhumed

Keith Gallasch reports on Michael Kantor's Excavation of political and theatre history

Australian culture is not strong on apocalyptic visions, Our moderation is born of a benign fatalism with its mythologies of defeated explorers (You are an interesting attempt to add European visions to our local legends, The Last Man in the Desert, "A tale of death and advent"

The Kyngs' vision apocalyptically, through S's summers to the olfactory tenu of Westend breweries, hops, was an unremarkable experience. Perhaps after this festival of ecstasy and apocalypse we'll never be the same.

The Kyngs’ has much in common with the anonymous puppet company Handspring Puppet Company, Woyzeck On The Highground.
Not so ecstatic...but addictive

Di Weeke reflects on Scriabin, pianists and extra-musical affairs in the Adelaide Festival music program of my creativity...Nothing exists, nothing is created, nothing is really accomplished: all is play. And this play is the highest of real realities.

Clearly there is more to Scriabin than meets the ear.

In fact it's tempting to trace the sub-plot which emerges when one remembers that apart from his megalomania, mysticism and musical ideology (best expressed in his later works through an intensely idiosyncratic use of chromatic harmony), Scriabin was also a brisk pianist with an "extraordinary skill in novel pedal effects" (Groves's again). This is blatantly evident from his piano works in which are...taxing to the point of physical discomfort. One wonders how Scriabin the performer might have reacted to the youthful interpretations of Jonathan Sharr, the virtuosity of Michael Kieran Harvey, the mastery of Rodney Smith, the maturity of Geoffrey Madge, the dedication of Graeme Wright, and the assurance (arrogance?) of Geoffrey Landes.

For example one might well assume that, unlike the rest of the audience on this particular occasion, he would have roared with delight at McIntyre's wicked impersonation of the old Rossini, and that he would have laughed out loud (as I did, until heavily frowned upon) at the AIDS-musical impersonment of the Three Specimens for Solo Piano, of the raciest hyperbolic and alcoholic, and at all of which sounded exactly alike. He might have been less appreciative of Mr.

Virginia Baxter on the boundaries at the Adelaide Festival

For me the Adelaide Festival provided a synaesthetic experience—images and places merging, music and film, words and sound and light. Performances brush against one another and naesthesia reaches perfection in Hotel Pro Forma's Orfeo, a performance so sublime that dark becomes light, music becomes touch, and movements sound and light. Per* ormances follow one another and naesthesia reaches perfection in Hotel Pro Forma's Orfeo, a performance so sublime that dark becomes light, music becomes touch, and movements sound and light. Performances brush against one another and naesthesia reaches perfection in Hotel Pro Forma's Orfeo, a performance so sublime that dark becomes light, music becomes touch, and movements sound and light. Performances brush against one another and naesthesia reaches perfection in Hotel Pro Forma's Orfeo, a performance so sublime that dark becomes light, music becomes touch, and movements sound and light. Performances brush against one another and naesthesia reaches perfection in Hotel Pro Forma's Orfeo, a performance so sublime that dark becomes light, music becomes touch, and movements sound and light. Performances brush against one another and naesthesia reaches perfection in Hotel Pro Forma's Orfeo, a performance so sublime that dark becomes light, music becomes touch, and movements sound and light. Performances brush against one another and naesthesia reaches perfection in Hotel Pro Forma's Orfeo, a performance so sublime that dark becomes light, music becomes touch, and movements sound and light.

Annie Sprinkle is running a little late but finally greets us at 8.25 in flower print flanellette nightie and headphone radio mound. One person for the picture—carnival bedroom, lingerie and sex tools glued to the bed head shooting gallery. Carne ink. Dressing table draped with wigs and boas, a big mirror. Slide one. Annie begins the story of that part of her life she has made public. Her transformation from shy, boring and friendless Ellen to loveable prostitute and porn star Ann.

11.30 a.m. Composing in 37 degree heat, we jump at the offer of a ride from curator David O'Halloran escorting the jilted and dehydrated New York artist Dan Graham in his red Morris Minor on King William Road, Regina Walter's greyy pole sculpture Wabe buzzes in the corner of the kitchen. Time catches up with us as the rousing sing-songs in Adelaide overnight. Did you see, says Dan, the woman at the table was reading a copy of Australia: Women.

Annie doesn't tell us much about how her transformation occurred. It just did, as we will see later in photos of other converts. (Meet secreters, the new Am. Elect. Women. Meet Sa-man-tha) A gasp from the audience at the transformation of a middle aged professional woman into a Hausfrau takes me out of her career path. I can never concentrate on pie chart. Was it the height of the Empire State (minus the spire) she felled and several pint or litres of sperm she swallowed, a teaspoon at a time? I do remember the little grum from the audience as Annie stepped too close to the line. Small business people in the audience noted that soiled panties sell at $150 and up. She is a near parody of Dan Arbour and then poses spreadleg for some touchingly shy amateur photographers in the audience. ("I won't if there's no film in the camera.")

Portrush Road. Helen Fuller enters the zone exclusion of her dead father's shed, red herring ramrodt, and turns on the light, and then she is a little bit more interested in the way people are living. Something is missing, Annie tells us why she is interested about transformism and attention, and money because she didn't really know what else she wanted to do but how? And more recently, after dealing with the death of her father, a breast lump and cancer, she put on weight, grew her body hair, cut her fingernails and changed her life. Where did Ann come from? And why would anyone want to look like a Hustler pin-up? At the rectory, Stephen Wigg has taken over the study (Shaving Rituals). We've been a bit naught by here, says David O'Halloran. Then there is a situation in which the camera has been given his head. Razor blades arranged along the picture rail, among the books. I sit down for a minute in the rector's chair.

One more thing for the Festival. Annie lights candles and incense and greases up for her ritual orgasm as the audience should watch. The rabbis to assuage and freeing up sexual energy. Ecstasy over, urchers collect the rabbis in plastic garlic bags.

Annie Sprinkle's Ultra Luxury Tubs above a circular table covered by a frangipani tablecloth. I stand in the pantry with the air conditioner. The owner of the home doesn't want to change the tablecloth. It looks too good. Meanwhile, Howard Arkley has turned up at one of the houses and is using the phone in one of the rooms. As Annie Sprinkle hands her Aphrodisic Award to a 'real' Adelaide sex worker, she puts on a brave face to the life she's now parades for an audience who would.
Shaking complacency, banging on a can

Zsusanna Soboslay revels in the Bang on a Can Allstars concert at the Adelaide Festival

Ambient Bang, March 9, Playhouse;
Veriteque, March 11, Adelaide Town Hall; Louis Andriessen—Hout, March 12, El Filharmonic, The Ent

There is music in my body.

Sometimes I like to hear the familiar (as people do) or the unfamiliar (those who watch the routines accompanying the routine of limbs, the rhythms of my topped hands; more often (and perhaps surprisingly) I listen like the prod to dormant spaces, rendering them a voice or an ear. I appreciate the reminder I am not simply what I think am, but also an experimental propagandist.

Bang on a Can composer/creator Julia Wolfe says the group sets out to explore music that allows audience to ask questions. Irish bands—the music which regenerate. The three Bang concerts I attend certainly renew me.

Other pieces were virtuoso of restraint, of timbre, of conception. Philip Glass “Two Pages”—his first using the now familiar “associative” approach. Each page was always “the best way to clear the room”—was played without Glass’s characteristic overtones, leaving for a moment an empty space. The performance on the architectures of desire, need, patience, absorption, reception—an examination of which is more noise than music.

The reality of the instrument is so thoroughly questioned that when the stage clears for a solo, as in Ziporyn’s Balinese—impossibly, inscrutably, unanswerable, the soloist won’t be alone. The title plays on a cellist Beiser’s name (Maya: “illusion”); to watch Beiser play is indeed a question of reality, with 18 overdubbed levels of cello replicating and replacing the lovely hollow gorgeous voice. Beiser creates the voice of the strings, asserting its stringed quality—the foreign and familiar teasing each other in textures and assumptions. How many hands play this? As in Balinese music, there are ghosts and daemons dancing with her.

The highlight is near the piece’s end, with Beiser playing the simplest line, leaving virtuosic passages to the orchestra. He effect separates virtuosity from virtuoso, opening to the worlds hovering, squabbling, wending outside of the moment, rather than focusing on its wires and bones.

Similarly, in Ziporyn’s shorter “From Arcturus” for a passionate, embodied, plaintive work capturing the religious passion of Georgian chant, he solves the contradiction of choral participation for a solo voice instrument by overblowing to three tones, rasping and gasping and beating out low-note double notes. It’s amazing what this man asks of the instruments he writes for.

Player manufacturers in the program describe a melding with the instrument—a mediumistic notion common to musicians; instruments dissolve as the tongue dissolves food, transforming into a substance of the interior body. With what ears do we hear?

Steve Reich’s “Four Organs” (a piece where RS actually ensues on a new composition) attempts to render the composer and audience “equal in the process via the progressive pulling out of a single chord, is meant to make the room the space for a new sleeping dream for which one used to get a rap over the knuckles in primary school.

Berce’s two-musicians piece ("virtuosity with the smallest of means") pull sense from the balance. Based on a story by Kafka of a man so poor that he rides his empty coal bucket to the dealer to beg for coal, “The Bucket Rider’s” pure opening noise (tux and double bass) becomes the plainchant, like a tiny piano, cello and guitar until they sadly accommodate each other, holding hands in worn overcoats in the snow. I hear a sad and piti is a apology for “The Bucket Rider’s” pulse and the idea of perfection.

"Be just" is also based on a Kafka story, but this time on an instrument of torture (In The Penal Colony) which imposes a broken commandment into the skin by means of thousands of needles. (The prisoner, though ignorant of his sentence, may thus learn it bodily."

The piece has a latent theatricality which is as yet understood, and thus inscribes a sense of guilt for the unknown from within the bones.

During Writer’s Week the physicist Paul Davies referred to a theorem from his book on time: you can propel objects forward in time, but something here may in time itself may well be slowing down. Michael Gordon’s “ Industry" for solo cello crosses ears, but the cello line is cut from a different era (as precipitated by the industrial revolution) with sudden echoes (such as when machines are turned off for the day) and some nostalgic, striking up again.

Amongst this virtuosity, Tom Johnson’s hilarious “Failing” a tribute to Andriessen, the group’s penchant of playing “right wrong notes”—unimpeded by the idea of perfection.

Bassist Robert Black plays the double edge of accuracy and audacity, speaking about playing and speaking while a pie a where his name is frozen “tails to fail”.

In a lunchtime forum with Julia Wolfe, Michael Gordon, harsh Marshall Magazine and pianist Geoffrey Douglas Madge, there emerged an argument over those scores of programming contemporary versus classical works: who wants to hear what, what to play when, what with concern for the audience who may be “unrehearsed” for the new.

“Let them eat it”, he said.

Richard Galliano issued a reminder that “Evoking the past ... in the sense of a contemporary”, whether classical or modern. The greatest problem, as we see it, is in the polices of funding—having to fight for their validity.

A question from a schoolteacher on the floor: how do you “educate” people to listen to the “wrong” music. But the leaving school for me to begin to know this realm of inner and multiple validities, personal authorships, without which I couldn’t feel and accept these sculptures of such different densities, and without which I would keep living out the same structures and contours.

Long live banging on— but hopefully in less and less isolation.

The Allstars was born out of the Bang on a Can Foundation. A new and important marathon new music event in Manhattan’s Lower East Side. The event arrived "uptown" at the Lincoln Centre in 1994. See Nicholas Gabbard’s interview in RT190.

The seeing ear, the hearing eye

Noel Purdon experiences Pierre Henry & Son/Re at the Adelaide Festival

In the late 1920s, on the cusp of the advent of synchronised sound, filmmakers began to experiment with soundtracks and genres that reached their highest point with attempts to represent sound in the silent image by devices such as superimposition and, later, sound-on-film. The development of a sub-genre of documentary: the city portrait. Moscow, Osaka, New York. A cantered, manic Beckerman age. The city portrait. The era of the capsules of daily life. Driga Vertov in Russia, Jean Vigo in France, Walther Ruttmann in Germany. Noélas chronicle this emergence of the modernist city in images that were at once realistic depictions, lyrical experiences and experimental propaganda.

Pierre Henry has reconstructed the two most important features of this experiment, and brought them to consciousness by this, his addition of concrete sound. The result is that I can never imagine either film without his carefully researched and mixed musique concrete as soundtrack. When he learned that I had been able to attend only the performance of Berlin, he and his assistant Bernard Magrez were kind enough to provide me with a CD of the music for Verot’s film and cut it up with my video copy of La Belle et la Bete. Anyway the results were amazing, the principle difference being live participation during the performance, with Henry as the studio mixer, and the speakers placed so cunningly around the auditorium that we were no longer in front of the film but within.

Ruttmann’s Berlin, caught on one of the Weimar republic’s last days of late spring, assumes spine-shaking importance in Henry’s hands. Co-scripting with the great cameraman Karl Freund, Ruttmann’s soundscape music, like the Marsden Edmund Medes, reposing in the abstraction that had already characterised his painting. Along with many of the Weimar intellectuals, he subsequently fell into the arms of the Third Reich, for whom he made some of its most gloating propaganda films. The one such film celebrated the 1940 victory over France, a period in which Henry must have been a young man. The retrospection gives a frightening edge to Berlin’s final burst of fireworks, which start to sound, after their image has left the screen as dust. Meanwhile the pulsating city has awoken around us, birdsong beating in its linden tree avenues, and closed in glow of synapsed neon night. The suite for the Verot is even more inventive, like a pre-classic piece of programme music by Coppenr or Rameau. Eighty movements respect Verot’s own punctuation, without attempting to provide a mere soundtrack. Henry has rather chosen to imitate the Russian’s invention of the Cine-Eye and the pyrotechnics of his representation of sound, as split screens, multiple superimpositions and a mise-en-atyme showing the process of shooting, editing and projection, by a commentary of his own. The film audience find their seats to the drone of a sitar, sliding up and down as trikely as the camera which blows before them. Crickets bring in the dawn; meteoronmes create counter-rhythms. The circular rhythms of the group’s patron and film rolls is expressed by repeated sires, clicks and ripping trumpet solos. As the film rolls are expressed by using absolute silence, or unleashing an outburst of thrashing rock. Natural sounds are decomposed or decayed just as the film-maker decomposes the beats of his objects and locations. This is an exhilarating experience of seeing, hearing, feeling and thinking. Henry has said that the basis of his acoustic sculpture may be a sigh or a creaking door. What he has achieved here by his reconstruction of Ruttmann and Verot is the third term which music and film create at their most perfect: poetry.
Arriving
Virginia Baxter's initial experiences of the Adelaide Festival
Angels Margarit, Room 1109 Hilton, Hilton Hotel, Batsehava Dance Company, Anaphase, Festival Theatre
Check into our hotel. No greeting to speak of. A black feltboard with the word “Welcome”. Inside, I replace the hotel soap with the one I've brought from home. Turn on the television.
6.00pm. Check into Room 1109 at the Hilton International. On the way here the taxi driver tells me something has changed in Adelaide since we were here last. Standing behind our fourth wall, a line in the carpet at the threshold of the room, we’re in the anywhere of hotel rooms. Curtains drawn, this could be any time. Any city. Angels Margarit lies face down on the bed. The television leaks static. Welcome.
8.00pm. Seated in a row watching 20 bodies from the Batsehava Dance Company dancing in males in open greenats pulse a flailing wave along a line, the pulse echoes in the song we suddenly realise they’re singing, of last fling. The room is getting louder. The action is repeated. Like a blow ricocheting through a line. Two bodies contradict the pattern. One jump backwards onto his chair, another falls to the floor. The movement is repeated until for me it transforms to films memories of bodies thrown into open graves, falling backwards in ecstasy or laughter then back to Martha Graham’s contraction. Life and death. End of sequence. Welcome.
6.02pm Angels Margarit slides from her bed. She has already made her marks on the room, removed the cover from the bed and angled it to the wall. A few possessions are strewn on the floor. Her shoes, her Adelaide Festival postcards. She is here but definitely not at home.
8.15pm. The Batsehava dancers’ hands all fly off in one movement. Coats next, shirts, shoes, revealing the bodies they will wear from now on (and for the first of the Festival’s many shaved heads) rag-strapped, stripped to essentials for crouching, back arching, burn thrusting, dance with driving percussion. This is a virtuosic company. They sing complex liturgical music, play percussion (at one point making the utmost of plastic water dispensers for an apocalyptic storm). One of the dancers has a beautiful counter-tenor voice.
6.45pm. Anaphase. A cute dance in big pants is starting to irritate me when the houselights go up. Sprung! The dancers move to the auditorium. The band, about 15 women and lead them to the stage. It’s a mesmerising moment, the women in their pleated skirts shuffle dancing, caught in the light as dancers lift them into the air, fall beside them. The atmosphere is momentarily broken by laughter. A woman under a column slides up a woman’s skirt. Flashback to yet another festival, Perth, when La La La Humans Steps danced to the amplified heartbeat of a man in the front row. Who says nothing changes? Festivals change a city—especially one this.
To prove it. Angels Margarit in one simple movement changes everything. The generic hotel room is replaced by the immediate and real world of this city. Suddenly the site is specific. Two rows of air conditioners and water pipes are replaced by the sounds of voices and traffic outside the building, electric lamps fade in the soft 6.10 sunlight on the Adelaide Hills. Welcome home.
9.30pm. Minutes has passed. In the light the bodies finally reveal themselves in full. A standing ovation. An audience of hundreds fragments into twos and threes and fours. We shuffle dancing in march of time passing, sudden rushes of suited flailing bodies. All darkly lit to reveal the body in bits.
9.15pm. The Green Dress.
As well, there were only fragments of film and lovely use of light. When the woman talks to The Man about the dead body you realise that she stands close to him, and (she not) is before a red lit square, a little magic. And at the beginning of the woman turns to her fall, her shadow grows on the back wall. And there’s a voice-over. And lit glass shelves with tumblers, which remembers a film of a Roslynd Piggott painting, or... Instead of was that by someone else? And a train, moving back and forward, a space in which to be awkward, alone.
And that is the body-awkward, wanting a fluid walk, casual stance, easy sit, back to the beginning. Quick wit: pleasure, not terror (or vice versa), a moment forever, a landscape. It reminds me of Blanchet’s The Madness Of The Day, where he writes: “What work went on at the bottom of that earth! Who says it’s cold. It’s a bed of fire, it’s a bramble bush. When I got up I could feel nothing. My sense of touch was floating six feet away from me; if anyone entered my room, I would cry out, but the knife might not, absolutely not, if it could become a skeleton. At night my thinness would rise up before me to terrify me. As it came and went it insulted me, it terrified me. I had been certainly very tired.”
And thinking of film, I take this opportunity to pay homage to Marguerite Duras, who I wish I had recognized the woman and her fall. And know why it is necessary to look over and over at the same thing. In The Malady Of Death she wrote: “You take hold of the body and look at its different areas. You turn round, keep turning it round. Look at it, keep looking at it.”
The play/painting/film provides a plane upon which other dreams (mine) must drift. Otherwise the space, stretched empty and global, and the woman helpless. And this is not so, she’s full to the brim with words heard and heard, and what she hopes and desires.
Toward the end The Man says he’d go down to the beach, that he’d carry her all the way back up, and enjoy the “long slow journey”. But you imagine, even as she hears this, that she’s gone. The stage goes black, a tempest in a teapot, EXIT, glowing on either side. And EXIT is always a writing/reading cue.
The Black Sequin Dress, writer & director, Jenny Kemp; composer, Elizabeth Drake; designer, Jacquetta Evertts; lighting, Ben Colahan; choreography, John Hewer; Kemp; Helen Herbertson; performers, Margaret Mills, Helen Herbertson, Natasha Herbert, Mary Staremo, Ian Scott, Greg Stone, Scott Thompson.
11-RealTime 12—April —May 1996
Take hold of the body... and keep looking at it
Linda Marie Walker reflects on Jenny Kemp's Black Sequin Dress
The Black Sequin Dress is like a painting comes to life, or come to think of it, perhaps, become a dream as film (not a film as dream). A sort of uncinematic ‘film’ though. It’s not possible to know what the single image might have been (once). Probably any moment when the whole cast is on stage. This perhaps is why there are tedious moments; a tidy lecture on points and lines for example, and on single word, such like lists, it’s their saying (somewhat) that dispels them (the ‘spell’ of their, ‘spell’).
“A woman from the brick suburb, forty, exhausted, fed-up, dresses in a black sequin dress and goes to a night-club. She’s not sure how to move, walking in a calculation: “one foot after the other”. She has to talk her body into each step. She glances back, and falls to the shiny dance floor. This simple embarrassment collapse opens a crack in her (memory).
The woman is played by four 1950s men. The Writer and The Man, are cliches who undermine such an easy label. They do this through their willingness to hear and then talk, and through their response to something of or on about the woman. As when the woman touches the body of The Man, while he plays a game of chance. This moves him, quietly. And when the woman asks him to help her find a dead body, he agrees, without understanding. He takes her at her word. He recognizes her, both as she sees herself and as he sees her.
It’s true to dreams, true, but wait while they take-off somewhere unknown, yet resembling something, a formless surface say. This might be why I didn’t want to literally see ‘a skeleton’ or ‘the devil’s horns’ or ‘a model of molecules’. I could not dream past them. The bodies, there, in all their ‘workings’, were more than enough, densely ghosted.
16.10pm. Angels spins across the floor in a pattern that might convey torment, boredom, frustration, anger or just alone-ness. Her foot scoots in a line in the grey velvet carpet. She throws herself into a chair, hangs her head. She has that hotel room languour down to a fine art. This alone-ness of hotel rooms is familiar. There is no expression on her face to read and thankfully, no drama.
4.45pm. Anaphase. A cute dance in big pants is starting to irritate me when the houselights go up. Sprung! The dancers move to the auditorium. The band, about 15 women and lead them to the stage. It’s a mesmerising moment, the women in their pleated skirts shuffle dancing, caught in the light as dancers lift them into the air, fall beside them. The atmosphere is momentarily broken by laughter. A woman under a column slides up a woman’s skirt. Flashback to yet another festival, Perth, when La La La Humans Steps danced to the amplified heartbeat of a man in the front row. Who says nothing changes? Festivals change a city—especially one this.
To prove it. Angels Margarit in one simple movement changes everything. The generic hotel room is replaced by the immediate and real world of this city. Suddenly the site is specific. Two rows of air conditioners and water pipes are replaced by the sounds of voices and traffic outside the building, electric lamps fade in the soft 6.10 sunlight on the Adelaide Hills. Welcome home.
9.30pm. Minutes has passed. In the light the bodies finally reveal themselves in full. A standing ovation. An audience of hundreds fragments into twos and threes and fours. We shuffle dancing in march of time passing, sudden rushes of suited flailing bodies. All darkly lit to reveal the body in bits.
9.15pm. The Green Dress.
As well, there were only fragments of film and lovely use of light. When the woman talks to The Man about the dead body you realise that she stands close to him, and (she not) is before a red lit square, a little magic. And at the beginning of the woman turns to her fall, her shadow grows on the back wall. And there’s a voice-over. And lit glass shelves with tumblers, which remembers a film of a Roslynd Piggott painting, or... Instead of was that by someone else? And a train, moving back and forward, a space in which to be awkward, alone.
And that is the body-awkward, wanting a fluid walk, casual stance, easy sit, back to the beginning. Quick wit: pleasure, not terror (or vice versa), a moment forever, a landscape. It reminds me of Blanchet’s The Madness Of The Day, where he writes: “What work went on at the bottom of that earth! Who says it’s cold. It’s a bed of fire, it’s a bramble bush. When I got up I could feel nothing. My sense of touch was floating six feet away from me; if anyone entered my room, I would cry out, but the knife might not, absolutely not, if it could become a skeleton. At night my thinness would rise up before me to terrify me. As it came and went it insulted me, it terrified me. I had been certainly very tired.”
And thinking of film, I take this opportunity to pay homage to Marguerite Duras, who I wish I had recognized the woman and her fall. And know why it is necessary to look over and over at the same thing. In The Malady Of Death she wrote: “You take hold of the body and look at its different areas. You turn round, keep turning it round. Look at it, keep looking at it.”
The play/painting/film provides a plane upon which other dreams (mine) must drift. Otherwise the space, stretched empty and global, and the woman helpless. And this is not so, she’s full to the brim with words heard and heard, and what she hopes and desires.
Toward the end The Man says he’d go down to the beach, that he’d carry her all the way back up, and enjoy the “long slow journey”. But you imagine, even as she hears this, that she’s gone. The stage goes black, a tempest in a teapot, EXIT, glowing on either side. And EXIT is always a writing/reading cue.
The raw and the complex

Eleanor Brickhill surveys dance at the Adelaide Festival

Batsheva Dance Company, Malibu
Angels Margarita, Hilton 1109; Bontan, Every Word a Gold Coin, Tankard
Mae Stuart and Damaged Goods, No One is Watching; D'Ver; Achilles; Meryl Tankard's Australian Dance Theatre, Rasa.

In Adject-feyer euphoria mode, one struggles with such educated commentary as "God, did you actually think that! I had real problems there". In the matter of likes and dislikes, it's unclear whether pleasure is derived from art or society, but buffeted by the social undertow, it occurred to me that it's the act of satisfying this urgent need to express an opinion which first shapes our perception and the consequent credibility of a work. All of which says a lot about the importance of lower culture, and the meaning of lots of artists meeting to see who holds sway. It was delightful to find a confusing and properly post-modern diversity of responses in many theatre foyers.

There were evident themes: prying into the cracks of existence, dragging open old wounds, exposing humanity's sometimes fragile and secret secrets. There was a tendency to see hideous, possessed, sad, ugly, violent, obsessive things. If sometimes the violence and obsession is merely cultivated and glamour, expressing an evolving international aesthetic emptiness of anything except a formal identification with itself, there are also moments of rich substance.

In Batsheva Dance Company's Malibu, it was grateful for its wide aesthetic spaces. There was no requirement to submit to the ubiquitous glamour of black frocks and Docs encapsulating the entire aesthetic basis of the work. These apparently negative virtues invited a different awareness, a kind of grainy textured relationship between the performers surfaced. The silence of the dancers' boots on the floor and the first murmuring of a solo voice engendered a kind of breathless waiting. Vocal material seems to break, chosen for its particular sexual, intensity, the purity, restraint and passion of a single counter-tenor line. But the work was also full of contrasts and counterpoint: a motif of courtly containment and restraint out of which erupted the shrieking protests of women; the dancers' slightly stilted, overly polished, décor-extended gestures together with a different disorient movement energy; a feeling of calm contrasted with vocal and corporeal dishevelment. It was a raw, complex and articulate flourish.

I can't forget the famous hamster door, where the rolling topography of the dancer's body provides dangerously shifting surfaces for a tiny clumping animal; a densely woven trio, the dancers barely break contact; the counter-tenor who consequently dance while we feel his distorted song, a harsh fight of diaphragm and throat for air, close to uncontrollable sobbing, leaving Noi Domini where dancers form a plaintive cantus firmus for the soloist's exhaustingly percussive rhythmical body slapping.

Batsheva Company, Malibu

Good ideas occasionally fall short of being persuasive. One such is Hilton 1109 by Catalan dancer Angels Margarita, who invited a very select audience of ten at a time into her hotel room to watch what I interpreted as the confined ennui of a dancer on tour. A familiar flororum collects on the floor; postcards, aspirin, maps, empty glasses, biros, the eternal debris rising to the surface of the lives of itinerant performers, confirmed, waiting and preparing, a condition as much mental as it is physical. Her movement was too contained in place and in time, going over and over itself, drawn out of, but also recreating, that very experience. I wondered how a dancer could ignite the messages in the loaded and codified vocabulary. Even in that intimate setting she became a character rather than herself, as if the language she used protected her from the intimate scrutiny she had invited.

I ask questions about Slovenia to find out just what psychic space this stuff comes from. The work capitulates, if unintentionally, on its subject, its dancers ingeniously young, healthy, athletic and alluringly decked out in short red frocks, boots, and jeans for the boys, revealing a narrating identification and the absence of physicality. If the work springs from heartful awareness of violent social and political upheaval, an Australian variety sees only story-board brutality in the several rape scenes, people treated as commodities, the struggle to overcome in encroaching contagion, an over-dramatised woman-as-victim interpretation of childhood. Meanwhile, the set, a high metal wall, is clung to, clambered over, leaned against, pounded on, played around, and used with ingenuity as a backdrop to all the action. Scene changes dissolved one into another with hardly a blink. But moving 'as if', the dancers did not seem concerned with developing the context of their living in work, but with reducing human complexity to a level adequately served by soap opera.

Mae Stuart (via New Orleans, New York and continental Europe), with Damaged Goods' produced a meticulously developed study of internal emotional conflict with No One is Watching, touching on the allure of what is concealed in the depths of people, their relationships, and their secret lives. An old fat woman sits immobile on a chair as the audience enters. We see her back and the slack hangingfolk of her feet. The audience might be us, or the top of this, and indeed, no-one watched except in brief exploratory glances waiting for another more palatable story to begin. A couple entered. Rather than having a sense of duet, it was like seeing one flailing organism, sustaining hollow internal rites and injuries in an intense fight with itself. People started watching then.

Ingenuousness, loss of self, brutality and a fight for recognition were played out with an emotional texture of dense, immutable obsessions. It is this texture which became the vehicle for the human individualisation of chaotic unerased eruptions of desire, and taking the line of least resistance, no and amid the drone of machinery, memories, hopes, humour and fragments of stories that hint at whole histories of war and loss bubble to the surface in words, gesture and movement—just before sinking back into the landscape of repetition. And in their wake, they leave tautological systems, unanswerable questions, and a powerful mosaic of exile—not only exile from a homeland but also various states of being and internal exile as—so one of the Writers' Week speakers suggested, perhaps the dominant paradigm of twenty-first-century politics and life.

I found Preludes to an Exile resonant and thought provoking and Doppio Teatro's mix of community theatre and contemporary performance practice are exciting, bold and intriguing—a theatre of real possibilities for our multi-cultural society.

Preludes to an Exile, director, Teresa Cree; visual artist/designer, James Coulter; composer/soundsculptor, Robert Pettibell; choreographer, Leigh Warren; performers, Sarah Carranza, Barbara Mailen, Irene Tantis; Canny's Secondhand Furniture Store, Narwee.

Exile, inside and out

Noelle Janaczewska visits Doppio Teatro's Adelaide Festival Artists' Week Installation

I enter Canny's Secondhand Furniture store, walk between piles of tables, chairs, beds, wardrobes, suitcases, plastic, wood, fabric, vinyl, china and metal, and veer left and there's the installation. The chaos of the shop is arranged, orderly dispersed, still unmistakably a part of the emporium, but something else as well.

A line of benches supports tall, triangular structures that are neither ships' sails nor giant limbs of industrial looms, but tilt at both with all their implicit narratives of passage, migrant dreamings and factory sweatshops in suburban backyards.

Preludes to an Exile is a performance installation that explores the worlds of family business, local enterprise, the rhythms and routines of work, various manifestations of exile and the negotiations women in particular make across the loaded and codified vocabulary. Even in that intimate setting she became a character rather than herself, as if the language she

Doppio Teatro, Preludes to an Exile

and of John Howard's romantic championships of the small business. Instead this production exposes some of the mythologies of this 'lucky country', asks us to consider the cultural and psychological impact of the migrant dream of a 'better life' that has carried so many people across so many seas and continents. Look how light, and what shit jobs, some of these first generation migrants have had to work! And as I'm pondering all this, Preludes to an Exile shifts tone and texture. This is, after all, not a realist expose of backroom assembly lines, nor simply a tale of immigrant hardship and dispossession. These people have both dreams and dignity, and I can't forscer the famous hamster door, where the rolling topography of the dancer's body provides dangerously shifting surfaces for a tiny clumping animal; a densely woven trio, the dancers barely break contact; the counter-tenor who consequently dance while we feel his distorted song, a harsh fight of diaphragm and throat for air, close to uncontrollable sobbing, leaving Noi Domini where dancers form a plaintive cantus firmus for the soloist's exhaustingly percussive rhythmical body slapping.

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Intimate challenges

Keith Gallash listens to Kronos, Larry Sitsky and Marshall Maguire in the Adelaide Festival's Tensile Structures series

Well away from the encircling crowds at the Elder Hall, the four musicians, beset by the waves of cultural curiosity at Red Square, the Elder Hall concerts offer tranquil respite. The mellow light lulls through Victorian windows. In the inspired space, the performers address you as intimates. It's a full house for Kronos and they don't have many. Sitsky's music is unique (no programs left). But their offerings are generous, culturally diverse and demanding. As the clarinetist Larry Sitsky clouds treatment through a frighteningly limyic of composers turned exile or drunken party hack by Sitsky, piano piece a moment of musical insight and vision caught before destroyed, beautiful in the hall's amber light. Marshall Maguire chats amicably about the harp repertoire, the attempts in the 20th century to "bash the nympha of the nineteenth" taking us from Berio's now familiar, and radical, departures to Donatoni's remarkably distinctive, even alien waves of lyricism. These performers are also devoted educators, creating in the Sitsky and Maguire concerts for the unforgivable absence of proper program notes. (Elder Hall also featured the klezmer clarinetist Itaora Feldman. Sydney theatre director Ros Horin reported virtuoso playing and, more seductively, an apparently restrained romance breaking into welling song at the slightest of prompting from the geriatric Fedman.)

A clarinet concert was like a trip through any number of their CDs—introductions to the new and the unfamiliar. How many of the audience were aware of the adventurousness of the American Larry Patric, his musical system built on unusual instruments he himself designed, and the neoclassical themes of the performances? His Two Ancient Greek Scales sounded oddly conventional adapted for modern orchestra, the presentation of a clear near romantic melody with the subsequent languid but still lyrical distortion of some similar, made you think they were working at keeping it all together before the notes slipped away.

P.Q. Phan is a Vietnamese composer living in the US. The Sydney Chamber Orchestra transformed oriental opera techniques and formulae into another curious string quartet, playing a work early on the program. Peking Opera faketto by string orchestra renderings of operatic themes. It was not unlike listening to the soundtrack of a movie you haven't seen, and as such was highly suggestive if totally lacking something of the richness of the originals.

Ken Benihou's elegiac Song of Twenty Shadows touched the audience mightily, hearing Debussy, Delius and, in the darker moments Bartok repertoire into said ballad, a prayer without an Amen. It also made Taverner's The Protecting Veil sound like a much bolder experiment than usually accords the select few. Selected lines from John Adams' Book of Alleged Dances, accompanied by soundtrack, prompted foot-tapping with its sharp rhythms and a perpetual guessing game about what dance you were dancing in your seat—Appalachian jigs, quadrille dances, cancan, the waltz and dance. These fictions, like something musical out of Calvino, concluded the concert with a reminder that music is always music, just as music is music now but is also at how far Kronos has taken their audience with them. It was not a young audience. Sadly, the encore was their popular instrumental Hanon's Lesson. His Haze, now beginning to sound like the "Hot Club out of Hell". Some of the audience welcomed the encore, some groaned "Not again", fearful of losing the intimacy and challenge of this twilight concert.

Sitsky's "Russian Composition" featured even less familiar names. He told us that these were composers working progressively on their own trajectories well outside the influence of Schoenberg inspired by Scriabin but even then finding their own way, some prefiguring Messiaen and late modernism. You could also hear in their music a determined voice of Rakhmaninov and the Polish Godzusky, all virtuosic composer-pianists. In one cycle Sitsky admires Beethoven. Constantly extended hands meant the pieces were almost unbearable. Polovinkin presented one of the most exquisitely played prepared piano, Lourie, now enjoying a revived reputation, offered five short works, Synquez, inspired by Italian Futurist Theatre. As Sitsky observed, if he hadn't told us when they were composed (1915), we might have thought the 70s or 80s. Being led into this ‘black hole of musical history,” as Sitsky called it, was sadly enlightening, another elegy. The second concert was held March 7. Sitsky challenges himself with this music but acquires with apparent ease.

A clarinet like Kronos, Marshall Maguire is the keen promoter of commissions both from Australia and overseas. Like Larry Sitsky he has a keen ear for musical history. This first of five concerts, like Kronos, was built briskly across musical cultures. Solbiati's Vecelay an emotional, and neat rhetorical response to a cathedra, played with the surfaces and tensions of the strings, yielding koto-ish twang and glides juxtaposing with more familiar string and sweet tinklings apparently inspired by light hitting the cathedral columns. Michael Fenlon's Touchkovsky V X Vl offered an accessible if heightened and neo-lyrical, dance-like and a relatively conservative companion to Franco Donatoni's driving Marches, the most idiosyncratic work on the program. Modernist influences are clear in a number of works—Carey's Century harp flourishes interrupted, isolated pizzicato bursts, a rhythmic-harmonics—sounding a familiar repertoire which Donatoni avoided almost altogether. The Australian Gordon Kenny made almost lyrical and Elliot Carter made beautiful, pastel, undercutting Morricone's captures with consistent use of the sustained pedal. Australian-based Elena Kat-Chernin's Chamber of Horrors was an intriguing deployment of many of the familiar suspense mystery and horror film and theatre music devices into a relationship that seemingly and eerily resolve. Like Donatoni's, though in a lighter vein, it is music that flows, placing you in it, taking you along, sometimes unwillingly, with it. The Sitsky and Maguire concerts are part of Barrie Kosky's Tensile Structures chamber music series, which has been held at the Town Hall, these were not all at clear in these two concerts and neither performer bothered to address the issue in any detail. Perhaps it went missing with the program notes. The connection between the Russian pianists and Conductors is not easy to see either, except at the level of innovation and political repression. Certainly in the harp program, Donatoni, and to a lesser degree Carter, make a remarkable play linking harp and far in and out, Maguire touching on astonishingly low but lucid volume levels. This is a toy, a library-worn copy of R.D. Laing's The Politics of Experience looked up, taken out of her book back into Elder Hall and, with the program notes, into the hall. The harp music is another. Like the Sitsky program this harp series is a rare experience, one to treasure.

Tensile Structures, Elder Hall: Kronos Quartet; Larry Sitsky, Russian Composition and the Solo piano; Marshall Maguire, Five meetings with Harp, Elder Hall.

The customer must be satisfied. Misunderstandings are ruled out.

Maryanne Lynch at Molecular Theatre's Facead Firm, The Space, Adelaide Festival
Energy as waste, desirous and deadly

Linda Marie Walker at the Slovenian dance company Betontanc's *Know Your Enemy*, Scott Theatre, Adelaide Festival

(To be another body)

Immediatly, one's own body is called by the sound of dancers in the dark, taking their places. Such a small, ordinary, and necessary thing. But this is to be the entire `work`, this internal leer, to be the body for another, for oneself. To be another body for me, say. To watch, and watch as it acts alone, always, even when together, being dead. To watch No longer ready made is to watch an unfolding that is, no matter how intense and wanted the movement, is unfolding that goes on, relentlessly, as unfolding, not revelation. The physicality of unfolding thought and its persistence in the body in a way, a method, is fundamentally subtle, desirous, devastating. That is, the body wants to know something, wants to know how to go on, even, even without end.

A man stands alone in a square of light, his head whipping violently side to side. Then his whole body shivering. As it was sussed, repulsed by a memory, a memory cutting loose perhaps, something, I can't know. The other three dancers wait in the background, two women and a man. The single interfering logic, a logic in flux, is `unreadiness`, this is a logic of detail. The detail that can never be `read made`, and is never `too long`, but always present. That's the trouble, that's the image in the body, of a stillness that creeps out of the pores.

There are moments of extreme passion in this work, of the complete and known separateness of beings, as creatures. As when a couple hante each other. The man, his hands held behind his back, pushes and kicks, and blocks every move the woman makes, yet she will not submit. The moves are precise. Each body knows just what the other will do, emotionally, I mean. It's the exhaustion of the body one feels. Then she's alone, with his coat on, going through the
pockets transferring debris from one to the other, finding nothing much. But not body is as desperate for that, emptying his life onto the stage.

Nothing at all soon, just her, with her clothes. What to do with a coat. How to be watched, to be in the presence of an audience, with `nothing`. And to gradually expose oneself, until overexposed, until as awkward as a cocoon. Until just a thing to hang other things on.

No longer ready made is shaped by details, some so small and funny they are almost imperceptible. Sometimes so large it takes a while to see them. It's this attention to detail that keeps one watching, as `work` happens everywhere at once (like on the street). In each bite, details congregate, and wait, and return. In the end, one man walks slowly from the back of the stage to the front, over the debris, while the others throw themselves around him (in unison), he doesn't see them, they don't see him. Then, with nowhere to go, he falls into the arms of another man, who carries him for some time, in different ways. This is a moving segment, bleak and intimate. Soon he is alone again, shaking and shivering. He is his body. A space.

Somewhere here I've lost the sequence, I'm not sure if this is the last image, or thus the two men, gently scratching on a door, a surface (the set is minimal, pragmatic and controlled). No urgency, but sound, the sound of a small part of the body (the finger nails against a border, a kind of recovery, a starting point) is called—is remembered again—by the sound of bodies in (`places`) unfolding.

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No dance we know

Richard Murphet experiences Meg Stuart's No One Is Watching at the Adelaide Festival

There are several days after a grand mal seizure in which you remain within the terrifying aura of the convulsion. During this period it is impossible to distinguish between the inner world emanating from your traumatised temporal lobes and the outer world upon which you appear to be droning. A mixture of shrouds I cannot quite decipher and an unbearably loud low-pitched hum. I look out the window and the actions not only of people but of traffic seem fragmented and lacking the comfort of cause and effect. Meg Stuart and Damaged Goods' No-One Is Watching takes place in such an epileptic world. The psyche, the society, the civilisation has been seized and is convulsing. Attempts are made by one or occasionally two of the figures within to connect with another, to express an emotion which has something to do with tenderness. Unfortunately, at the time, the intended receiver is not watching, possessed by a force that has little to do with love.
I came to No-One Is Watching with

Terrible trouble

Linda Marie Walker becomes an 'extra' in the violent space of La Fura dels Baus

For all ‘facts’, all ‘truths’ are relative, everything depends on what is told and how it is told. (Filmic brochure)
The Adelaide Royal Show pavilion is a great venue. The ferris wheel glowing white in the violet light. The dome of the other pavilions open, and teams of people building elaborate temporary patios, fountains, a set for a Gardening Show opening Thursday. This is a gently surreal entry and exit. The trouble with a performance like this, is that it’s ‘is’ trouble. Terrible trouble and trauma, that’s its premise. And so is the imaged portrayal of that trouble, the importance of that trouble to the witness to, and subjected to, this feverish impossibility. And one becomes feverish.

This is trouble with a huge cardboard capital ‘T’. Trouble light enough to carry, and solid enough to be contained. M.T.M. is about, is a bout of, power and terror, and everyone horribly doing and being done to. It’s probably about everything that we can do to ourselves and name of ‘cause’, ‘ideology’, ‘territory’. It is frenzy, frenzy from fever, and all that wasted energy, the extraordinary energy that wins in absence to be tapped by frenzy and (wasted) anyway.

This frenzy is a spectacle from go to who, to end moment to moment. And a lanu$
$

RealTime/RealSpace ... the Festival of Perth

Katie Lavers is transported by two site works

It is a strange and baffling phenomenon that in some ways, a city that you have lived in your whole life is suddenly invisible to you, more like a medium—like air or water—than an architectural or geographical entity. It takes some sort of jolt or the visit of a stranger to town who gives you the gift of re-seeing the town you live in. The Festival of Perth 1996 had such events that gave this gift of renewed sight wonderfully. Vis-À-Vis, the Dutch theatre group appearing at the Perth Festival for the second time, have this extraordinary ability to awaken you to the peculiar presence of Perth.

In 1994 they presented Toppadina, a quirky and quite wonderful work starring large numbers of Baby Fats, in a strange deserted wasteland under one of Perth’s busiest flyovers. The work was not only bizarre and amusing but also because of the site carefully chosen for the work, made you re-examine the omnipresence of the car in Perth and the ways in which, city planning arguably predicated on accommodating our cars as our main and inevitable mode of transport, carves up the space of the city creating strange wastelands and no-go zones—unused and unvisited by other cars or pedestrians.

Their new work Central Park performed at the 1996 Perth Festival was similarly powerful. The star of the show was undoubtably the set built to represent the vastness of a high rise office block. A technical disaster on a hot Friday afternoon leaves five people stranded for the weekend on the roof of a skyscraper.

This set and situation were set atop the eighth floor of a multi-story car park, in the city. The audience sat high in the centre of Perth in the middle of the CBD, surrounded by (nail) skyscrapers and office blocks. At night the tiny squares of light from the office block windows and the actions of cleaners and office workers doing overtime visible inside, perfectly the squares of light from the windows of the set and the activities of the actors inside. The experience was powerfully affecting in a physical way and gave a new bodily awareness of the city of Perth.

The other work that had this quality of giving a new view of Perth was MIMI by the Marrugeku Company exploring the stories of the Mimi figures in Aboriginal dreaming. The production was performed in the Boya Quarry in the Hills above Perth. Never having been there before and in the absence of any signs except a notice that said “no vehicles except those belonging to cast or crew beyond this point” and being rather late for the performance, I found myself

Meg Stuart / Damaged Goods

interesting when dance became representational and traded off the audience’s empathy with what was being represented. It is always hard to watch madness being acted.

This is not dance as we used to know it. It is cruder, less abstract and more directly metaphorical than that. More power to it.

No-One Is Watching, Meg Stuart and Damaged Goods (U.S.), The Space

running 2 kilometres along a dirt track with about thirty other people (and some performance) in the pitch black.

The dirt track was completely unlit and there were no buildings—the stars were absolutely breath-taking. Every time, when there was a break in the bushes on the right it became apparent that we were running along a dirt track on the side of a hill and there, right down below us, were the lights of the city and the same buildings that we had viewed from such a different perspective at the Vil-a-Vis performance.

We eventually came out into a car park and were directed up a steep path into the quarry. A huge semi-circular cut-out into the rock, the old quarry forms a wonderful amphitheatre with a rocky escarpment as the backdrop. Under the stars, the setting sun and the scent of the bushland, this extraordinary environment was a living presence and there could not have been a more perfect place for the dream images of the Mimi complemented by the unusual and extremely powerful costume designs.

These two performances were the highlight of the festival for me—the gift of a new RealTime/RealSpace experience of Perth.
A rich queer family

Brett Adam reports on Melbourne’s Midsumma

Midsumma is Melbourne’s month long gay and lesbian cultural festival and it reflects a strong, diverse and proud image of its community. While it can be said that gay liberation, visibility and acceptance have grown considerably over the past 25 years, many of us still experience oppression, discrimination and violence on a number of levels in our daily lives. A festival such as Midsumma is an opportunity for Melbourne’s queer community to celebrate their unique opportunity, both social and individual, and to see their lives and experiences acknowledged in a public forum.

The festival itself encompasses a variety of cultural events, exhibitions, performances, readings, forums, sporting events etc. But perhaps the most important if less obvious aspect of Midsumma, and one which harks back to the origins of Carnival and Saturnalia, is the fact that it allows for the temporary inversion of the social status quo and the transformation of space and body. Perhaps the most significant events in relation to this concept would have to be the four large weekend events which occurred throughout the festival month.

The first of these was the opening Street Party held in Fitzroy’s cafe and bookshop lined Brunswick Street. For seven hours the street opened from daily traffic, and played host to 50,000 gay men, lesbians and friends enjoying a variety of entertainment and performances. For one evening this usually busy thoroughfare became a relaxed, social environment where people wandered at will, stopping to chat with friends, eat and drink, or just party. Entertainment was provided by a number of Melbourne’s gay and lesbian social and cultural groups, as well as sneak previews of Festival performances.

On the second weekend the annual Red Raw Dance Party, held by the ALSO Foundation took place in Port Melbourne. This event, one of a number of such parties held throughout the year, was a much more intense event. The dance party is a phenomenon which I think deserves much more study, especially in relation to queer culture. The emphasis here is not so much on the transformation of space as of the queer body itself. Externally, bodies are shaved, waxed, plucked, pumped, adorned, made over for the night, a contrast in a variety of ways in public displays of identity and sexuality. Internally, a number of these same bodies undergo changes due to the intake of various chemicals as well as total immersion in such an intense aural and visual environment. These alterations can enable the experience of liberation which is so commonly held to be the cause of the use of such substances.

Weekend number three was the site for two new Midsumma events, Pride and Race. In addition to the traditional Pride March, a public assertion by 11,000 people of the existence and support of gay and lesbian identity, it was to become an annual event and this year overshadowed even the organisers in terms of the numbers of people attending either as observers or participants. However it is not intended that Pride develop into the same sort of event as Sydney’s Gay and Lesbian Mardi Grass. Rather it is seen as a simple yet powerful public expression of self-esteem.

The march was followed by Ride held at Luna Park, adjacent to the gardens. The capacity crowd of 2,000 was reached early and those lucky enough to get tickets were treated to six hours of rides, drag speakers and entertainment. Again, the notion of temporary reclamation of public, and in this case specifically, ‘family’ space is crucial to the appreciation of Midsumma’s importance in the queer psyche. Gay men and women are quite often expelled from such environments for ‘inappropriate’ behaviour or made to feel unwelcome or alienated, so the effect of the almost exclusive repurposing of such space cannot be underestimated.

The grand finale was the annual Midsumma Carnival in Alexandra Gardens. This event attracted 120,000 people throughout the day. The carnival draws on highlights of the previous month as well as special guests and performers. Dog shows, drag competitions, rides and displays compete for the crowds’ attentions. The laws along the Yarra (most famous for being the site for the annual Moomba Festival) are ringed by a huge number of stalls and tents housing Melbourne’s diverse gay and lesbian business, social, support, interest, sporting, media and cultural groups. To spend the afternoon in such an environment surrounded by friends and an amazingly diverse display of communal life can only serve to increase one’s pride and awareness of belonging to Melbourne’s rich queer family. It is also a fitting end to a festival dedicated to engendering a diverse and open society.

Spooky signs, twisted siblings

Tracey Parry unbuttoned some taut symbols of ‘evil’ at this year’s cLUB bEnt

The Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Grass Festival has at last acquired that essential element of a successful street party: a good dress up. Off the wall, late night cabaret venue, cLUB bEnt. The first cLUB bEnt in 1993 won the Gay & Lesbian Mardi Grass Special Festival Award and was a huge success with both audiences and critics. It developed from a desire to provide an open forum for the presentation of "the latest in hybrid queer culture", from the deadbeat of nightclubs performers to the most twisted of the gay community. In the company of the gay, the diverse, and the outlandish, cLUB bEnt 1996 was, however, not exempt from the usual controversy that surounds such events.

The diversity of performances at this year’s cLUB bEnt was impressive and the improved quality of the works did not require that rawness be sacrificed to perfectionism. There was the usual array of exposed pubes and a proliferation of bare bottoms, used in a fabulously gratuitous and artistic manner. Female performers, such as Barbara Karpinski, Azura Universe, and Moira Finucane offered works that were both intelligent and amusing. Those who think that the saucy queer crowd that cLUB bNT attracts are permanently uncool should think again. Arguably, it was the acts by local male performer Alister Grant that caused the most controversy at cLUB bNT. It wasn’t just the nudity that disturbed some spectators, but the genuine interest and importance the acts evoked. Alister Grant’s performances were not a fragmentation from some neo-Nazi rally but an act performed in an open, queer forum, a space that often fills the public space open to the queers, the diverse, and the outlandish.

The controversy centered on the obvious signifiers of Nazism and Fascism. Many saw the piece as a criticism of German culture and central to his strategy, "when you sing songs in another language people tend to concentrate more on the atmosphere of the piece, the music, the image, the movements. For example, the first song was a 30’s German song about war. It was more interesting to think of the atmosphere of the piece, the music, the image, the movements."

Oppression of the upper classes. Nina Simone later sings it with a ‘black slave’ twist. I wanted in Germany’s ‘penny’ area to show some political correctness, it is still possible to push too many buttons and boundaries. The singer faced figure enters the stage dressed in decidedly Berlinskite attire. Staggering in black stilettos and wearing a black silk slip, suspendent belt and stockings, he sings in German with a tortured reflection. Staggering and black eyes and lips reveal nothing from beneath the shadow of his face, but the upturned black eyelash are a sign of victimhood, much like the Star of David was imprinted on Jews or the pink triangle that those who refused to conform were given this symbol. Under this it is the mark of the oppressor that is depicted. Grant states that he deliberately smashed the song, the make up look more like blood, much like neo-Nazi’s way to make up on the victim’s flesh or the way Cultural values and after acts of oppression.

The Nazis knew full well to keep their images clearly visible and seductive psychosexual imagery, such as the aesthetics of beauty associated with the Aryan race. With sharp and impressive uniforms, they inserted this order with extra appeal. I wanted to construct the symbol and make the world of fascism and associated with fascim at show that they are not exclusively owned by that order. It is another reminder that the swastika was an originally a symbolic European symbol for life and progress prior to its appropriation by the Nazis. Grant chose his costume for a clear reason. In the thirties, cabaret functioned partially as a protest against the rise of fascism. Parts of the Nazi uniforms were combined in a satirical manner with costumery associated with cross-dressing and homosexuality, in order to undermine the power of the Nazi image. The white make-up and blacked-out eyes also purposely dehumanise the face in order to further emphasise the position of victimhood.

Grant employed such confrontational tactics in his second performance at cLUB bEnt. Wearing a leopardskin print dress, a Frida Kahlo mono-brow, ripped fishnets, and a high, black ‘Mexican prostitute wig’, Grant ‘sacrificed’ a ten year old boy on stage. The performance, says Grant, was an illustration of a song by Soft Cell called Suicide , which addresses aspects associated with the religion of Satanism, a voodoo-like mixture of Catholicism and West African beliefs popular in parts of Cuba and Mexico. Animal sacrifice is central to this religion and is considered as a valid form of ‘bargaining’ with the gods.

A mock shrive was erected at the back of the stage. Two zombies enter with candles after which the high priestess comes out as the demon mother cam madam. She sings a Soft Cell song as the zombies bring the child, who appears bruised and battered. They hood him. The high priestess sacrifices a rubber chicken over him, spilling fake blood before entering into a a drug-induced catastatic state.

In this instance Grant was drawing the connection between the darker aspects of North American culture and the mysteries associated with other religions. He highlights the situation of people with no identities or rights within American culture—such as Hispanic illegal immigrants—who remain affiliated with the so-called ‘dark practices’ of voodoo-like religions.

Grantforegrounds the types of ‘sacrifice’, such as child prostitution, that occur in cultures similar to our own. “The child was not brought into the piece as a symbol of erotic desire, but rather to ‘exemplify innocence and exploitation. Hopefully the lurid and curiously presented piece of the served to undermine any serious suggestion of the child as an erotic attraction for the audience,’ says Grant. Perhaps any negative and emotional reactions to Alister Grant’s performances at cLUB bENT serve to reveal more about the elements of ‘fascism’ and ‘aberrant erotic desire’ buried in our own culture, rather than leading the audience to safe judgments on the dark histories and secrets of other cultures.

Tracey Parry is a Sydney-based writer.
During my time there, the highlight of which was a complete retrospective of Martin
week period (a luxury that is apparently impossible here).

Smoking and drinking with a consummate ease that contradicted their Teutonic intensity
psyche. It was a pleasure to

the film medium there lies a chord that strikes to the heart of the Australian creative

Refracting Glasses

splendid

there were others which should have been included, but without internal funding. I could

crawling through material in Europe and North America).

David Perry's rarely screened masterpiece

(incorporating Kren, Blackout, Cristanell, Rosenberger, Hendrich and a recovering Adrian).

Deux

Did !?-fe Who Made The

Canopy;

In Australia, the celebration of

the centenary of cinema saw the demise of Filmsneus, the construction of screen based

organisational funding, and generally the airless wandering through so much imported

arthouse muck, silent Flecker nostalgia, and tacky multimedia sales pitches, that so many

feel relegated to be familiar with, in the absence of anything else. Perhaps one can

simply get too dispirited towards year's end— perhaps with the centenary I was expecting (at

the very least) Paul Winkler's retrospective screenings at the MCA, as well as Albie

Thomas' '52 Filmakers series at the AGNSW, to name but one, and within this sphere, it was only the Michael

Snow Filmworks exhibition that toured that toured. In

retrospect, had I known of the abysmal lack of interest in Mike's work here, it would have

been perhaps more 'cost effective' to take the

national audience to Toronto with me. It was with these thoughts that I crossed the 'pond'

last November to screen a series of Australian films in Austria (as a prelude to my annual

screening at the Oesterreichisches Filmmuseum. Kurbelka spoke passionately between films to the audience and, in thinly
disguised terms, equated the domesticity of pigs with the subservient creativity of

filmmakers domesticated by the grant system. I was fortunate to have Moucie Blackout interpret for me—no doubt I missed
out on many of the elaborate metaphors that Kurbelka adopted. Later, Kurbelka reiterated

many of these to me...

Kurt Kren, arguably the most important Austrian filmmaker in the post-war period had just completed a commissioned film for the 100 Years of Cinema Committee, a film titled

Tausendjahrekinoko (loosely translated in English Thousand Year Cinema). The film is primarily his association of the anniversary of cinematography with that of the Third Reich (which was to last a thousand years). With the recent publication of an extensive

book on Kren, and the exhibition of the film at the Vienna Secessio (complete with the

enlargement of every frame from it circumnavigating the large gallery space five times),

like cream, Kren has once again risen to the surface of the European avant-garde.

One of the more interesting exhibitions in Vienna while I was there was a project by

Gustav Deutsche—one hundred battery operated SB loop film viewers were

systematically handed out to one hundred cinema viewers sitting in a cinema with only white light being projected on the screen. All in all, the Austrian example of establishing a Centenary Committee with a generous amount of funds to screen, commission and publish throughout the year is a commendable one—one which can only highlight the importance that they place upon all aspects of their culture (past and present).

Comparative assessments can be easily made—equally, they can have little substance.

Suffice to say that Austria is similar only in population to Australia—on a per capita basis

their government allocates more than ten times the amount annually on 'cultural activities' that we do here.

London (as one has come to expect) was alive with a range of activity despite the bleak

weather and the guarded responsiveness of residual Thatcherism. The London

Filmmaker's Cooperative (LFMC), for so long one of the world's most important creative

'inurnaces', was in the process of closing its doors at Glouchester Avenue for a temporary

hiiatus before moving into the purpose built facility in Shoreditch late in 1996. This re-

location and construction has apparently been made possible through substantial

grants/investment from a number of sources, including the Arts Council of England and the

BFI. I can only suspect that the intelligence and foresight of David Curtis at the Arts

Council had much to do with this. Despite the confusion, the LFMC Cinema, workshops and
distribution remained operational through December at their usual hectic pace with the same organisational anarchy that it has

become known (and frustratingly, loved). For one of the world's finest collections of avant-garde and experimental film, and its history as a seething ground for advanced film
speculation since the late 1960s, it appears as if the LFMC is about to acquire a richly
deserved measure of stability and supportive funding for the future. Much of my time in

London was spent looking through the wealth of material located in the LFMC film collection. From Dunford and Raban to Leggett, Gidal and Le Grice to Sherwin, the collection at the

Copps contains some of the most interesting and important creative films ever made—some

of which are the only remaining copies. As is the case for many other such film works

around the world—if you want to see it, you have to go to it. 

* continued page 18
Over the pond, on the beach

*from page 17*

Sharing the physical facility with the LFMC in the future will be the newly named London Electronic Arts (previously known as the LVA) headed by Michael Mazierre—an organisation which continues to dominate the creative video scene in London. Although many have commented that the ‘marriage of convenience’ between the LFMC and the LVA was assisted by an annexation of one by the other, I feel that with the input of past members involved in the transition (such as Guy Sherwin from the Coop), the integrity and uniqueness of each will remain for some time yet.

One of the biggest danger facing independent creative film and video makers in England over the past decade has been the commissioning, acquisition and screening of Channel 4, and the relationship of these with Arts Council generative funding. Although in some ways linked, these organisations (whose policies were once again being re-negotiated while I was in London) have resisted the temptation to merge funding with a television ‘pre-sale’—confusing anticipated market need with that of cultural exploitation (as was suggested in an Australia 1984 that so termed ‘avant-garde’ films have either been commissioned or screened on television in the UK—including those of Guy Sherwin (Mile End Purgatorium), Lis Rhodes (Light Reading), William Raban (From Sixty Degrees North), and even Kurt Krien’s infamous 6/64 Mama Und Papa.

Perhaps one of the finest examples of this assimilation and/or relationship has been the television work of Malcolm Le Grice—one of the primary catalysts of (what has been termed) the English Structuralist-Materialist film project, and the ‘Godfather’ of the LFMC. Malcolm, (now a Professor at the University of Westminster) is as energetic and insightful as ever, completing a number of video-based commissioned projects which have screened nationally on British television over the past few years. The Chronos Project has consumed him for the past six years: Chronos Fragmented (one element of the British Library film that is screened most often, a number of others are held in the National Film Library, and filmmaker’s ink on the east coast) is presently negotiating to establish a complete archive of Stan Brown is arguably the most interesting—his persistent exploration of material and surface and media. The ‘alchemist’ work of Carl Venellan Blind becomes a cultural chemist, transforming silicon into thought, and perhaps ideas, economic elegance of a multi-sensory digitally mediated environment is created and people are put there. Her take on mm is also passionate, and distinguishes between what he terms ‘research art’ and art that feeds into the institutionalising herself, describing art as therapy but is she being ironic?—>. Here is a highly blasphemous take on multimedia, defying the legislators who would stamp the future technologies with classifications cloned from The Difference Engine.

I heard of the acquisition of all of Valie Export’s filmwork by a gallery; in London there was a reworking/ remodelling of the material that formed the base for his photographic piece Venice made for last year’s Biennale. Despite being only six minutes long (the shortest Snow film since the animated A Z in 1959), Venice is an intense and exhausting exercise in the most interesting developments around the world is the purchase of films and assorted material by large art galleries or institutions for preservation and posterity. In Vienna I heard of the acquisition of all of Valerie Export’s filmwork by a gallery; in London there was talk that the Take was looking into something similar. In Canada however, films have been acquired for some time by the National Gallery in Ottawa as well as the Art Bank at the Canada Council, and the Art Gallery of Ontario (which has long been an exhibitor of avant-garde film on the east coast) is presently negotiating to establish a complete archive of Malcolm Le Grice’s films, elements, and original writings. No doubt the establishment of such an environment is created and people are put there. Her take on mm is also passionate, and distinguishes between what he terms ‘research art’ and art that feeds into the institutionalising herself, describing art as therapy but is she being ironic?—>. Here is a highly blasphemous take on multimedia, defying the legislators who would stamp the future technologies with classifications cloned from The Difference Engine.

The artist or interface designer who can create an intuitive front-end looking the new work through the re-located Canadian Filmmakers Distribution Centre (CFMDC). Canada has a long and admirable tradition in ‘experimental film’, largely achieved through the wide scope of the Canada Council (providing grants for speculative projects even in film and video) as well as the once powerful (yet now defunct) Canada Council, and the Art Gallery of Ontario (which has long been an exhibitor of avant-garde film work). Although in some ways linked, these organisations (whose policies were once again being re-negotiated while I was in London) have resisted the temptation to merge funding with a television ‘pre-sale’—confusing anticipated market need with that of cultural exploitation (as was suggested in an Australia 1984 that so termed ‘avant-garde’ films have either been commissioned or screened on television in the UK—including those of Guy Sherwin (Mile End Purgatorium), Lis Rhodes (Light Reading), William Raban (From Sixty Degrees North), and even Kurt Krien’s infamous 6/64 Mama Und Papa.

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Great light in other, much more obscure, is a character called Crevalcare, who was working in the Ven to PG I think I've allowd him his pictorial head so to peak (laughs). I do know he tak s a Bunuel. R nai and Raul Ruiz.'

They are part and parcel of the debate which Sacha Viemey and I had about our visual style. Up to heaven and her neck rather discreetly cut. Again, they're rather obscure reference but dramatically lit interiors.

Working in Naples in about 1660, who specialised in the most extraordinary, extravagant, round about 1550. He specialised largly in decapitated heads. And the image of decapitation which looks as if he has seen stop-motion photography before it was invented. And the other products would be working in the Veneto round about 1550. He specialised largely in decapitated heads. And the images of decapitation at the time of the baby of Macon can be very uneven. There are some brilliant ones and those products could be made in any other form, which is something you can't say about 90 per cent of world cinema.

That brings us to the kind of 'image-commodity' that cinema has become. You're written about your reaction to Olivier Tocci. Could you tell me more?

Do you remember—I don't know whether it was the Australian experience, but in Great Britain and certainly in Europe—about six or eight years ago there were very large images for Benetton, the clothing manufacturer, of a young baby? People found the image extremely shocking. It was that sensitivity about shock which Tocci could manage and organise that I was very curious about.

Like the nun and priest kissing? And the AIDS victim?

They were later. For the moment here's this image of a newborn child, a state we all pass through, covered in mucus and blood, seconds out of the womb, in some cases, 30 metres wide, put up in all the high streets in England. There was a tremendous furore and they all had to come down. What is it about this image, which in some sense is so crucial, so vulnerable, but also so personal, an image of our total equality? You could imagine that a few seconds after that photograph was taken the child would...
Feature

Immaculate conceptions

• from page 19

have been wrapped up in a sheet or a blanket. At once we would have understood its position in the world in terms of the Third World and so on. So there’s a way in which politically, and certainly physically, the vulnerability was an image of extraordinary equality. Why were people so upset? There was a great elegance, in a way; and very witty that Benetton should have used such an image, because we’re all born naked into the world and sooner or later we’re going to need clothes. So why not use Benetton? That was also offensive to many people. It was just the rawness of that image that gave it power. Subsequently, as you rightly indicated, he expanded the hypocrisy of advertising. Advertising basically uses a very small percentage of human activity, where an aspirin cures all your ills, a packet of cornflakes satisfies all your desires. We’ve now brought pain, anxiety, death and all those negative sides of human experience into an area which is normally so flippan about them. I think this is a very interesting argument.

NP But it’s curious. Isn’t it, that people who would watch this or a De Palma original and gulp up the blood, should find your films offensive?

PG I was watching The Untouchables on BBC television a couple of weeks ago. You know the sequence where Sean Connery is slaughtered? The whole area is covered in blood from corner to corner for about ten minutes, it seems. If you look at that segment, it’s a justification, an emotional, heartstringing, violent pull on you in order to justify the murder of the admittedly evil assassin at the end of the film, so that you can absolve Kevin Costner. In other words, there’s a manipulation for very obscene moral reasons which people don’t even consider. The justification of blood is its revenge value. You’re so right.

NP De Palma himself won’t even admit what he’s doing now. I asked him last month whether he made any analysis of his use of violence and transvestism.

PG What was his reply?

NP He said “It’s just kind of scary.” I guess ‘child abuse’ is establishing itself as another term where thought must be suspended. The notion that there might be a pornography of sentimentality about children seems not to be considered. Is that something which you were also attacking in The Baby of Macon?

PG Yes. It has now become an apparently journalistically acceptable subject to discuss. But there’s so much hysteria and so much prurience involved in the gutter press in Great Britain, which has incredibly hypocritical views about it, exemplified in the libelous recording of the Woody Allen and the Michael Jackson cases. So public attitude, the journalistic attitude to it, is highly questionable. And I just wanted to discuss all these things, and the concept of the child as power-broker; an opportunity to satisfy ambition, to recreate the potentiality of wealth, to act as an accessory to fashion. All those phenomena are built into the argument of the film.

NP And the depiction of women’s complicity. This, as well as the rape scene, has already drawn hostility. The rape is deliberately prolonged. It’s a very long take, as I remember.

PG Yes. It’s as long as I could get out of one magazine: 10 minutes 25 seconds. The manufacturers reckon you can only get 10 minutes, but we managed to squeeze an extra 25 seconds.

NP From A Walk Through H onwards, you’ve always exaggerated the cinematic apparatus, with distortions of the text, or the body itself. You seem obsessed with proportion, but also with a wish to change the shape of the image or the text.

PG Well, that horrible sense of normalisation, straightforward narrative mainly. I prefer the organisation of objects or events into lists, catalogues, colours. It makes us think about those aspects of life which seem fantastic, out of the ordinary, but which are, in fact, the ordinary experience of all our lives.

NP I was puzzled by your setting the film in Macon, since I’ve been there, and as you must know the cathedral is actually ruined. What sort of distortion or association led you there?

PG Many years ago I was staying at Nevers. That’s quite cogent for me, because it’s the setting of Hiroshima Mon Amour. It was just a vacation with my daughters. And then by accident I came across the front cover of Elle while sitting beside the pool. It depicted one of Toscari’s images where he’d borrowed a Renaissance image of the Virgin and had turned it into a fashion design by creating a 14-year-old, presumably virginal, model, extremely beautifully dressed in a pseudo-renaissance costume, holding a child who patently wasn’t hers. So here we were playing with the idea of virgin birth as an accessory for attracting people’s attention towards buying clothes. Just the contemplation of this image and all it stood for fused with what I’d learned about Macon, where there had, in the fourth and fifth centuries, been apocryphal child martyrs constantly put to death in the cause of propaganda. It was also the area where the infamous 1212 Children’s Crusade started up. The Church had the extraordinary idea that where all the chivalry and knighthood of Europe could not succeed in Jerusalem, they would send over 50,000 children. Of course, they all miserably perished or were sold into prostitution and only about 400 of them ever made it. So much for societies who ‘care’ about children.

NP What do you have in mind now?

PG The next film is called The Pillow Book which is a modernised and considerably reworked version of a thousand-year-old Japanese journal by Sei Shonagon.

NP Will you set it historically?

PG There will be historical flashbacks. I’m not sure that Shonagon would recognise herself in the film, but I hope that’s legitimate, after all, that book is a classic. But it’s a catalogue movie again: another catalogue list. I’m rather familiar with that format. Since it’s a thousand years old, I’m going to set most of it in the hours approaching the 31st December 1999, for all sorts of parallels. And I want to play with calligraphy as being the ideal composer of the image. I admire the ability of the Japanese to contain, as it were, both the primacy of the image and the primacy of the text.

Peter Greenaway’s The Pillow Book will be released by Dendy Films in September.

Neil Paddison is an Adelaide writer and teaches film at Flinders University.
Sunny Salo

Colin Hood passed up the legal quagmire of new media classification for some tastier insights into an ongoing controversy.

My films have received much greater consensus in the Catholic world and have brought about many more conversions than all those cited in this absurd list. Such was Franco Zeffirelli's sly response to the Vatican's list of approved filmmakers which included Pier Paolo Pasolini, Liliana Cavani and Luis Buñuel.

Without having scrutinised the details of the Vatican's list, one could reasonably assume that approved filmmaker status would probably extend to the artist's entire oeuvre. This being the case, we might safely conclude that Salo—does a merry jig to the "Vatican Rag". Not a whiff of smoke has risen above that celestial city in recent days—and I have been furiously burrowing the net for updates—that might indicate a sudden change of heart.

It was in 1988 when John Dickie, a staffer in the Attorney General's department, found himself a hot but suitably upholstered seat as the man possessed of such common sense and delicate—enough scissor hands to enforce decency in communication and entertainment across a variety of media.

Unfortunately for those of us in the film community who are old enough and smart enough to sit through whatever's on offer (without becoming sociopaths or stomaching our causes of offence in relaying them to the public), Dickie is still, not surprisingly, "putting down" dissenters and sharpening the blade, but not with the suitable "wit" to read gratuitous violence and demeaning representation into complex narrative (or gassy)—egalitarian contexts.

If we shouldn't blame cinema proprietors and PR workers for lacking finesse in distinguishing film genres. I remember, for example, the Valhalla Cinema's advertisement for Andrei Zulawski's Possession (starring Isabel Adjani as a housewife possessed by a thoroughly correct devil—by medial standards anyway—a lizard-like multi-phallic, multi-officed stud, driving husband—Sam Neill—to despair, jealousy, desperation). "A Grand Guignol feast of blood and sex?" They could well have added an extra pitch to those readers of a deeper symbolicism (which comes to the surface occasionally in Eastern European theatre and film). But this common sense, borne on seats approach to distribution and advertising is not what really concerns me here.

The Office of Film and Literature Classification (now recast as the Classification Board) is a statutory authority which is granted considerable independence from political pressure—or so it might seem. Reading through the Hansard report from Monday, June 1, 1992, the "seemings" begins to unravel into the kind of mess depicted in Babe; and who can forget the glorious aftermath of the scrap between pussy and pig: painted, broken crockery, signs of domesticated animal violence all over the shop.

Four years ago, the Senate Select Committee on Community Standards relevant to the supply of services utilising telecommunications technology, headed by Margaret Reynolds, put some tricky questions to the Chief Censor. In this exchange between an enthusiastic Senator Brian Harradine and Mr. John Dickie, the long shadow of Jack Valenti (head of the Motion Picture Association of America) is cast upon the page.

Mr. Dickie—Yes, yes, it is.

Sen. Harradine—The letter is from you, Mr. Dickie, and it says: "The inclination seems to be slowing ebbing ... the roused passions spent ... Solo ... I assume Solo [sic] is a film, is it?"

Mr. Dickie—Yes, yes, it is.

Sen. Harradine—It continues: "Solo might now be laid in repose until some other deserving bastard lodges an application. I would not like it if I thought that I had made any judgement about the enclosed."

The next letter is from yourself to Mr. Haines and Mr. Greenberg. It states: "Without wishing to let my prejudices get hold of me, who else but a wanker senior lecturer from Latrobe would put such bullshit on paper. I suppose it would not be appropriate to point out to whosoever it is behind the tortured outlines at the end of the letter that George was able to pick up an illegal video. I think we should provide this bloke with the reasons, indicate that as the law stands we cannot change the previous decision. We could also point out what the law says about viewing refused material. What we can do for the poor deprived bastards at Latrobe whose whole life is likely to be changed by watching Solo I am not quite sure."

I will spare the faint-hearted readers of RealTime from any more excerpts from this readable and morally "depraved" document. But I would like to add a few words of support to those poor deprived bastards who have obviously failed to read that the man himself is tabled as evidence of a possible "no":

"absolute free speech" with child endangering "for profit media".

I must have the caught the bus to Miami by mistake—and died on the way—for there was—let me count them off:

no discussion of the classification problems raised by the crossed wires of new media
no discussion of the new fees for classification that were introduced on January 1 this year
no discussion of the re-routing of "EU Cristal" (already screened on Spanish TV) from "exempt for festival" status to prohibited import.

I don't mind being rude for a moment and I wouldn't trust the chief censor to mind my cat for half an hour let alone supervise the "simplification of administrative procedures" for federal importation laws for films, videos and computer games. If the management of media classification, public relations, and the ability to read the complexities of cinema; particularly for the purpose of protecting children and the 'community' is to 'really' advance into a new era, then perhaps Mr. Dickie might begin his re-education by tuning an ear to an alternative American voice.

You are terrified of your own children, since they are natives in a world where you will always be immigrants. Because you fear them, you entrust your bureaucracies with the parental responsibilities. You also cowerly too fear to confront yourselves. In our world, all the sentiments and expressions of humanity, from the debasing to the angelic, are part of a seamless whole, the global conversation of bits. We cannot separate the air that chokes from the air upon which wings beat...."
1 MAY, WEDNESDAY

5.30pm: Minyungbal Festival, Landscape Offices on Sydney Town Hall Mall, Sydney (NSW). Free event.


Thumb-pricking
canon in the short film form which
difference, rather than attempting to
Or Bruce Beresford. Or Rolf de Heer. Or
unified tertiary film education programs,
who have successfully manipulated limited
production partnerships, rotating crews,
‘a verageness’ as a location, its surface
\.riter·s block. With a long tradition of
Adelaide has often been compared to New
seaboard’s Hamlet. Supportive, yet
unsolved mysteries. undrinkable water and
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Virtual nation: want my Telstra

Boris Kelly considers the implications of the sale of Telstra in a new internet context

Anyone who uses on-line services as part of their daily work routine will understand the tremendous impact that the convergence between the value of patience and the lust for speed. Running a high performance modem and accessing the Internet is like using the latest model computer is no guarantee that transmitting the information will be a smooth, error-free and satisfactory experience. More like a stop-start traffic jam than a freeway cruise, the negotiation of virtual space can be frustrating, even infuriating, but there's the salt in the wound of commercial on-line rates to be endured as well. Touring the web for a day can cost almost as much as taking a guided tour of Sydney in a taxi. At this stage in its development the net, and particularly the web, is a place for people with money (presumably through some kind of employer subsidy in most cases); time, determination and patience and that is likely to be the case for some time to come as the technology struggles to keep pace with the needs and expectations of its users. Even so, although both Optus and Telstra are currently installing hybrid fibre coaxial cable systems to speed delivery, it is unlikely that the entire continent will be wired—either via cable or digital satellite delivery systems—before the end of the century.

Once the broadband infrastructure is in place, however, the nation will be able to pre-six with a high-capacity public telecommunications grid which will redefine the nature of space, place, community and identity. William J. Mitchell, for example, in his book 'City of Bits: Space, Place and the Infobahn' (1995) proposes a shift in the function of the city, from a single Australian design as it meets the needs of the information age:

In a world of ubiquitous computation and telecommunication, electronically augmented bodies, postinfobahn and hypermedia, the very idea of a city is challenged and must eventually be reconceived. Computer networks become functions of the virtual communication systems. Memory and screen space become valuable, sought-after real estate. Much of the economic, social, political, and cultural action shifts into cyberspace.

Mitchell, Australian-born, is Professor of Architecture and Media Arts and Sciences and Dean of the School of Architecture and Planning at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). Like his colleague, MIT Director Nicholas Negroponte, Mitchell writes in short, sharp essays which bring the historical with the futuristic. He sees architecture as needing to redefine itself as a discipline capable of embracing the reconfigured nature of space, place and time which result from changes in communications technology and which compel society and individuals to negotiate the uncertainties presented by the new electronic frontier. In cyberspace, Mitchell argues, the conceptual relationship between community and territory is displaced. The notion of a "living" space, a place between "the city in the interior of the people" and the "public" becomes a geographically and culturally disparate group of interweaving "networks" of common interest defined by access to the virtual space comprised of computer code, software deployment and electronic connectivity.

Although the 'information superhighway' metaphor is already rather tired it is useful in considering some of the political implications of these scenarios such as those presented by Mitchell, because of the curious relationship between transport and communications which Morin, Novalak allude to in his essay 'Transmitting Architecture' in the on-line journal C-Theory.

The history of invention alternates between advances of transport and advances of communication, that is to say from transmitting the subject to transmitting the sign and presence of the subject, establishing a symbiosis of vehicles and media that leads from antiquity all the way to the present.

Just as the promotion of the convenience and status of individual ownership of automobiles belied the consequences for nature and the community space, the primacy of a fossil global economy and negative environmental outcomes, so too is the information age being characterised by a muteness in respect to the true value and potential dangers of a new global information revolution. The construction of a virtual nation state existing within a corporatised, global superstructure is masked by the lure of by-products like cable television and net surfing. The inevitability and inherent goodness of change, is programmed by the individuals and corporations who have most to benefit from seeing it implemented and there is far too critical discourse in public discourse.

It is ironic that the purchase of Telstra as a complete entity is beyond the means of any single Australian design as it meets the needs of the information age:

The Coalition government will be able to level a compelling argument that the minor parties are being dishonest and hypocritical in preventing the development of a widely endorsed environmental package by their insincerity on the Telstra question. This could be the midpoint between a lock and hard place for the minor parties may result in a double dissolution. If so, the minor parties could be regarded by the electorate as obstructionist and could suffer irreparable damage at the ballot box resulting in a further consequence of the coalition's position: No doubt the Labour Party's awareness of this will determine their Senate vote on Telstra and the attendant political implications.

The sale of Telstra is that it will only invest in titles with potential on the international market. The Coalition government, meaning that creative material needs to be fashioned first and foremost to the tastes of the marketplace, is devolving the control of the public interest in the urban cultural and social values. The domestic market then becomes a secondary consideration. We have seen the confluence of the case with television in which Australian product has dominance in the distribution channels despite a lack of viewer preference for local product.

Rupert Murdoch would be the first to admit that control of the means of delivery means control of the market and if we, as a nation, surrender that control by selling Telstra at this critical juncture in our history, then we may be signing away the remaining vestiges of our cultural autonomy. As the virtual nation is superimposed on the existing material environment and as "soft cities" become the cyberspace alternatives to transport grids and communications technology, we are concerned that however owns the 'streets' of the future has the best interests of the country and its people at heart. As the Australian ownership of Telstra stands as an important national symbol signifying the resolve of our nation to maintain sovereignty over its culture as we enter the new millennium.

An important opportunity to interact with prominent national and international artists and producers who are leading the creative developments in:

- disc-based multimedia art
- interactive cinema
- on-line interactive works.

A conference for interactive media developers, writers, artists, designers, sound composers, filmmakers, educators, and other related professtials who wish to discuss CONTENT, currently the dominant issue in the new media arts

- interface metaphors • screen design
- branching structures • navigation
- the art of programming • point-of-view
- the screen in space
- webness • game language • sound
- time and duration

International presenters include: Glerisma Davenport (USA), Associate Professor of Media Technology, MIT, will discuss multi-threaded interactive movies; Osamu Sato (Japan). Outside Directors Company, will present a case study of his brilliant CD ROM Eastern Front; Chris Halsey, an active film artist, will explore the possibilities for temporal media with reference to his project The Twelve Least Significant Ones: Know registration brochure and information contact: Vicki Story, AFC Sydney tel (02) 9211 6816 or toll 1800 615 email vsowry@afc.gov.au

AUSTRALIAN FILM COMMISSION
MULTIMEDIA CONFERENCE

THE LANGUAGE OF INTERACTIVITY

AUDITEL CENTRE. 300 HOVIS ST. ULTIMO THURSDAY 11-SATURDAY 13 APRIL 1996

An important opportunity to interact with prominent national and international artists and producers who are leading the creative developments in:

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AUSTRALIAN NETWORK FOR ART AND TECHNOLOGY
ART AND TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCES AND WORKSHOPS FUND

The Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT) is an arts organisation with a national brief to support and promote contemporary art practices which use and explore science and technology and develop opportunities for artists to extend their practice.

The Art and Technology Conferences and Workshops Fund is a new quick response scheme which has been devolved to ANAT from the Australian Council to enable artists to attend and participate in forums dealing with art and technology.

Grants from $400 and up to $2000 are available to contribute towards registration fees and travel to attend conferences and workshops in Australia and overseas.

CONTACT ANAT FOR FURTHER DETAILS:

tel: (08) 231 9037 fax: (08)231 7323 e: anat@camtech.net.au

ANAT is assisted by the Australian Council

system priority, the Australian Multimedia Enterprise (AME) has made it clear that it will only invest in titles with potential on the international market. The Coalition government, meaning that creative material needs to be fashioned first and foremost to the tastes of the marketplace, is devolving the control of the public interest in the urban cultural and social values. The domestic market then becomes a secondary consideration. We have seen the confluence of the case with television in which Australian product has dominance in the distribution channels despite a lack of viewer preference for local product.
Review

How’s tricks?
Jane Goodall at Sydney Intermedia Network’s Matinaze

The morning after. After the election. After the Mardi Gras. The news is hang-over stuff. We’re all a bit stupified, sitting there in the halls dark in the Domain Theatre of the Art Gallery of NSW. A constituency, for sure, but what? The Labor party, having reinvented itself as the Liberal party has lost out to the Liberal party masquerading as the Labor party reinvigorated as the Liberal party. It’s a day for getting caught in ambiguities: for mixed signals, mediated voices, spluttering, and a kind of deadpan processed gaiety.

On a platform in the auditorium Stevie Wishart lightly torments a violin to get out of it a set of choked bow strokes, spasms and squeals; Amanda Stewart, whose instrument is a mouth, creates accompanying emissions in the form of pops and plopping lips, kisses. Result is a noise like a radio dial moving across a short wave band, occasionally finding a snatch of voice or music. Barbara Campbell comes in as the voice of Tokyo Rose, presenter of Zero Hour on Radio Tokyo as broadcast on August 14, 1944 to audiences of the Pacific. Campbell’s script of the complete original program comes up on screen, marking the time intermittently in minutes and seconds.

"Hello you fighting orphans of the Pacific! How’s tricks?" The ambiguities are multi-layered and hard to read: ‘Tokyo Rose’ was a generic name given by the troops to all the female announcers on Radio Tokyo and this particular Rose was Iva Toguri, a nisei (Japanese-American) whose dual nationality led her to getting stranded in Tokyo without a valid passport. From here she found her way into a situation of deeper ambiguity: she was picked to be trained as a radio announcer by Major Charles Cousins, a POW with radio experience who was forced to help in the making of propaganda programs on behalf of the Chinese and who proposed to subvert the propaganda effect through an obviously seductive tone in the announcer’s voice. Toguri had just the raw voice he wanted. She was coached to read his scripts word by word, with every pause and inflection chosen to disrupt the sense that this was a voice which meant what it said. The ambiguity was lost on the American court which tried her for treason in 1948 and found her guilty.

Were the GIs who heard the original programs more discerning than the American jury who convicted her? And how does a present day audience ‘read’ this voice, further mediated by Barbara Campbell? Announcements of soup songs and general ‘sumo boys patter are interspersed with news extracts. Some are about Churchill and Chiang Kai-shek. Some are about John Howard and Kim Beazley. Amanda Stewart reads the latter verbatim, unedited, from a bulletin that went to air half an hour before the performance. Campbell says the idea is to evoke in present day audiences some of the discomfort of Tokyo Rose’s original listeners, hanging out for the latest bulletin on the state of the war. It’s accident not design, apparently, that the performances have coincided with an election weekend, and that the twenty four hours between the first and the second performance are right at the high end of the nerve spectrum. People tell me that the mood of the audience in the first performance was in stark contrast to that in the second.

I’m increasingly fascinated by what makes an artist choose something to focus on. Why this episode, this individual voice and its embroiled little history, from amongst the vast array of recorded chattering from the past half century? Campbell has a fair for representing a figure and a history with an intensity of focus that burns into your brain. Selection is so much more direct a challenge than assemblage, which is what happens on the internet. The net is about options, not choices. Nothing is ever selected out; it’s the library of Babel in the making.

The websites featured in Matinaze are called galleries, museums, magazines, systems: they’re places of accumulation, and the net artist is always a curator, if not of other people’s work, then of his or her own. Urban Exile offers the most visually ambitious work in its Temple of the Third Millennium Exhibition, which reflects a tendency to the Gothic and the minimally texted art. Perhaps there’s something about the web page that evokes the illuminated manuscript, and realises the fantasy implicit in books of hours. That you could just fall into the scenes framed on the page and move through them. This is the exhibition technique used by Urban Exile, with each image allowing you to pass through to a selection of others. According to the curatorial statement, “the new age is non-linear, a matrix of infinite combinations and permutations”. System X offers simpler, more targeted projects. It’s a sampler for the work of a wide range of artists, some specialists in electronic media and some not. You can call up images of recent installations by Derek Kreckler, a VNS Matrix anthology, a white dress, shoes, bandaged limbs, a white dress, sheets, toilet bowls and sinks—intercuts images of an angular body with a heavily textured scar down the line of the shoulder blade. Alyson Bell’s work, too, concentrates on a subject for whom images and words diversify and chain themselves without ever moving towards coherence. Here I Sit presents dispersed words, sounds and complex layered collaged images whilst the voiceover tries to explain the schizophrenic experience. Back'n'Stroke, made in collaboration with Chris Newling, is a more contained exercise, based on the simple concept of words chaining associatively across the screen cueing a string of interpretive images. The collage approach quickly leads to overload for the viewer in an anthology program like this (by half way through it was in danger of coming across as just one goddamn collage after another) and there’s more impact in pieces that offer continuous footage of a well-chosen subject. Chain of Holes (Alice Kerrison) is a cameo documentary of a country rodeo with the riders of the bucking broncos also offering voiceover accounts of failing crops and bankruptcies. Very memorable. A fly buzzes as the credits roll.

Thanks to Sarah Waterston and Barbara Campbell for discussion and information. Matinaze, Domain Theate; Art Gallery of New South Wales, March 24 and 25. Jane Goodall lectures in the School of Humanities; University of Western Sydney, Hawkesbury and is the author of Artaud and the Gnostic Drama; O.U.P.
Tactical media

Ian Andrews reports on the Next 5 Minutes conference in Amsterdam

Amsterdam in January. It's minus 5 degrees and it's howling and a homeless black man desperately attempts to grab my attention. He asks me what kind of music I am listening to. I hand him the headphones which are keeping my ears warm and tell him that it is one of the local pirates, or at least semi-legal, public radio stations. "It used to be a D.J., I love music", he says, and goes on to tell me his sad recent history. It is at this moment that I realise that access to the internet than a question of access to even basic technologies such as radio.

This question of access to old and new technology, for individuals and groups from different economic and cultural circumstances, is one of the central themes of the second Next 5 Minutes: Tactical Media conference and exhibition (the main reason I am in Amsterdam freezing my butt off). The Next 5 Minutes is an ongoing project (the first Next 5 Minutes was held in 1993) which combines grassroots political activism with art practice, and explores the alternative applications of communications technology, drawing on a diverse series of critical discourses surrounding the net. This is "savagely" non-academic conference brought together people from over thirty countries providing examples of the way in which different groups and cultures are dealing with various media technologies. Particular emphasis was given to Eastern Europe (where a critical re-evaluation of Marxism is replacing a rejection of Communism), and the former Yugoslavia (where the most important agenda is peace).

The term 'tactical media' is probably unfamiliar to most people, or at least those outside of this particular nexus of theories and projects, so I will attempt a definition. Tactical media refers to non-hegemonic media practices performed by a conjunction of media artists and media activists operating on a tactical rather than a strategic level. In short, the aim of tactical media is to achieve concrete actions for specific aims. However, as David Garcia (from the Centre of Tactical Media in Amsterdam, one of the organizers of the Next 5 Minutes) points out, the number of individuals, groups and projects is growing along with the scale and range of these activities, and the activity has been going on long enough, to be considered a distinctive movement within contemporary culture: "a movement which some of us have chosen to call tactical media. Tactical media are works and a set of actions which is used to empower individuals and groups to make their own contributions via a variety of platforms including 24 hour live television and radio, electronic publishing, internet access, an extensive library and media archive, and a temporary autonomous zone in which visitors are able to schedule their own presentations. The mainstream of the conference, however, consisted mainly of presentations, performances and installations. Some of the issues and debates which from my perspective were particularly interesting, included the following:

Tactical media as tools or weapons

One of the most fruitful benefits of the new communications technologies seems to be the use of the net as an organising tool, bringing like-minded people together regardless of geographical distances, to form temporary alliances over specific actions. In this way, the net is being utilised to empower individuals and groups by creating shared workspaces which transcend national boundaries. Examples of this "many to many" communication were provided by DeeDee Halleck (Paper Tiger TV, New York), Rena Tangos (Zebrinus, Belgrad)

and Frannie Armstrong (One World of the Mac/Net Case, London), all of which use the internet along with older technologies to organize resistance, or increase public awareness of the undemocratic and socially harmful activities of specific corporations.

Copyright? Copyleft?

The encouragement of copyright legislation in many cases functions as a form of communication technologies, even in a wired world. In Amsterdam, less is a question of access to the internet than a question of access to even basic technologies such as radio.

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This question of access to old and new technology, for individuals and groups from different economic and cultural circumstances, is one of the central themes of the second Next 5 Minutes conference and exhibition (the main reason I am in Amsterdam freezing my butt off). The Next 5 Minutes is an ongoing project (the first Next 5 Minutes was held in 1993) which combines grassroots political activism with art practice, and explores the alternative applications of communications technology, drawing on a diverse series of critical discourses surrounding the net. This is "savagely" non-academic conference brought together people from over thirty countries providing examples of the way in which different groups and cultures are dealing with various media technologies. Particular emphasis was given to Eastern Europe (where a critical re-evaluation of Marxism is replacing a rejection of Communism), and the former Yugoslavia (where the most important agenda is peace).

The term 'tactical media' is probably unfamiliar to most people, or at least those outside of this particular nexus of theories and projects, so I will attempt a definition. Tactical media refers to non-hegemonic media practices performed by a conjunction of media artists and media activists operating on a tactical rather than a strategic level. In short, the aim of tactical media is to achieve concrete actions for specific aims. However, as David Garcia (from the Centre of Tactical Media in Amsterdam, one of the organizers of the Next 5 Minutes) points out, the number of individuals, groups and projects is growing along with the scale and range of these activities, and the activity has been going on long enough, to be considered a distinctive movement within contemporary culture: "a movement which some of us have chosen to call tactical media. Tactical media are works and a set of actions which is used to empower individuals and groups to make their own contributions via a variety of platforms including 24 hour live television and radio, electronic publishing, internet access, an extensive library and media archive, and a temporary autonomous zone in which visitors are able to schedule their own presentations. The mainstream of the conference, however, consisted mainly of presentations, performances and installations. Some of the issues and debates which from my perspective were particularly interesting, included the following:

Tactical media as tools or weapons

One of the most fruitful benefits of the new communications technologies seems to be the use of the net as an organising tool, bringing like-minded people together regardless of geographical distances, to form temporary alliances over specific actions. In this way, the net is being utilised to empower individuals and groups by creating shared workspaces which transcend national boundaries. Examples of this "many to many" communication were provided by DeeDee Halleck (Paper Tiger TV, New York), Rena Tangos (Zebrinus, Belgrad)

and Frannie Armstrong (One World of the Mac/Net Case, London), all of which use the internet along with older technologies to organize resistance, or increase public awareness of the undemocratic and socially harmful activities of specific corporations.
dominance of Hollywood, is an openness to all kinds of filmic forms, styles and topics from around the globe, of all which have their own value in meaning for different cultures.

There is clearly more emphasis on subject­ matter and thematic elaboration rather than on the formal and technical aspects of filmmaking. And as one commentator remarked, few films seriously explore the relationship between the two, among them Tim Robbins’ Mystic Lake, which impressed many critics.

Any serious discussions on the formal challenges of filmmaking and the cultural cargo would have taken place at the Vedeoest, running concurrently with the Berlinale. Like most film festivals these days, there are multimedia and interactive film and television, but being more interested in filmmaking than in new technology and the virtual reality, Berlinale can be seen as a real sense of global community. Often organisations will try to link up Raves between two different festivals. If you ask me or whatever they can basically get hold of, Mandala systems are starting to be used in Raves as a sort of play­ way in this way, we’re able to allow the audience to interact with the aesthetics, control them and play with them. EM: During your seminar you were saying that you originally declined the technology for use in performance art.

W: My first thoughts of doing something with computers actually came about from being involved in dance, music and video, but then not being a psychotherapist in art, I just thought it would be enough for university people where they were thinking about computers. This was before multimedia computer systems were put up. The first idea was to dance and create the music from the dancing, because when I was dancing I would hear the additional music in my head and that would make me want to pick up an instrument and play that music. EM: Would you describe Mandala Systems technology developed by the Vrid group?

W: It’s a new form of interface for the computer, a very hands­off kind of interface because you’re just stepping in and the computer is aware of both your movements and what you do with the video camera and then you’re inside the computer world with the virtual world.

The fact that we know­how people in means they’re able to put themselves in context with a surrounding world and treat it like a reality in the computer whilst trying to make the interaction as natural and as smooth as possible. Whether that’s an arts application, a sports simulation or a business presentation. By allowing the computer to know where the body is moving the person involved in a part of the environment, we’re able to allow them to interact with the aesthetics, control them and play with them. EM: During your seminar you were saying that you originally declined the technology for use in performance art.

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Book review

Seductive and timely
Wendy Haslem reads Laleen Jayamanne's collection
Kiss Me Deadly

It is dangerous, and the danger for us is that we might be induced by looking into contact with the ecstasy, by touching what is 'red hot'.

Lasley Stern

Kiss Me Deadly aims to benignify and feminise the cinema through the conjunction of feminism and the cinema. Historical contributors to the film are appropriated from Robert Aldrich's American crime drama Kiss Me Deadly. The book's title is borrowed from the mode of reference to the 1950s women's film noir.

The book is an untitled collection of essays and reviews on the conjunction of feminism with the cinema, and its capacity to renovate and rethink the film noir.

At times the images are so private that Tony is not even looking at the camera, spurred on to create something

As a contemporary collection of essays, Jayamanne's book is not only a contribution to the history of feminism and cultural studies, but a work of cinema and cultural critique. It is an essay of cinema and culture, and the compilation of sequences according to intuition. """"Kiss Me Deadly renders the provocations of feminism in the realm of cinematic discourse in a provoking manner."

The title is also intended to evoke some of the ambivalence that has been at the heart of the 'feminist film' debate in recent years. It is a provocation to the parameters of the cinematic discourse.

The Seductive and Timely introduces an introduction to the extensive and complex history of the conjunction of feminism and the cinema, something that was shrewdly underpinned by a moment of feminism when it became evident that the same theoretical discourse between feminism and cinema is the context in which we pursue the cinema.

The essays are by no means a simple reorientation of the politics of cinema, feminism and the cinema, but a different approach to a different forum.

Kiss Me Deadly is a book that has to be read for its provocation to the parameters of the cinematic discourse. It is a provocation to the parameters of the cinematic discourse in the way that it challenges the parameters of the cinematic discourse in a provoking manner.

FILM REVIEWS

Private Eye/Public Eye
Directed by Tony Woods
cafe baroehemian, Feb 25

This is not the same as the most prolific filmmakers in Australia today, about half a dozen new screens worked over the last 12 months. He does not work in Super 8 and, for the last three, composed the idea of an essay on some of the areas of the essay, with the compilation of sequences according to intuition. """"Kiss Me Deadly renders the provocations of feminism in the realm of cinematic discourse in a provoking manner."

Another middle-class, middle-aged angst film?—Araki in his latest piece to make it seems reality. It rolloleseos unstoppably from 'shoplifters will be punished' to 'cutlery'.

Another middle-class, middle-aged angst film?

""""Kiss Me Deadly renders the provocations of feminism in the realm of cinematic discourse in a provoking manner."

The film is like an odyssey trip. The first scene is set in a night club, and the second in an area of the city that is vibrant with life. The characters live in a world that is replete with life and colour. The film is a journey through the city, with the characters living in a world that is vibrant with life and colour.
**Film reviews**

**Video Fool for Love**

You should see this film because it’s rare attempt at making sense, in an American context, of a man’s desire to be loved. You might hate it; I hauled the attempt failed, that this man, the director Robert Gibson, lies way into self-justification. In a kind of a final treatment of his female partners with selective editing of his and their hand-held aids. If you want another total self-celebrating hero to see the film as male, you are a fool. I’ve seen my video far for less. It’s in its incompatibility, the staggering mix of insight and error, of naivete and calculation. This is not to say that if 50 per cent of the cast were to be cut, the film would be any better. For its best possible case for himself as an artist, and because good old documentary international is not part of its verbal technique, the world can stand to see how he gets the brass, and you believe for a second a line or two of money to him to the, it’s intriguing and psychologically demanding to try to fill the gaps that Gibson leaves us or refuses to. The heated number of discussions over the film I’ve heard so far may be too specific on this art of completing the narrative, deciding what he is really like, how objective, how egotistical, how oppressive. Putting your life on film and staring yourself at it is somehow much more damaging than the same art. Time also plays a role in heightening his apparent bad behavior. He is suddenly involved in a film shot for great drama (the appeal to portray George Miller) but it can also make Gibson look like a case study—a don’t know how many times I’ve heard viewers mention, "I could be a chain of women". He’s left behind emotionally damaged; I think it’s a film that provokes and divides viewers, raises issues of the limits of sympathy and the meaning of sympathy, and shows, thanks to excellent transfers, that the humble hand-held can produce work that looks precise and dynamic on the small screen without being its curious integrity.

**Newsread**

**Digital comedy**

Johnny Ice uses the resources of the web to track down sick-old clinkers, world-renowned, cybernauts, godfathers, and buddies without images. Artist Bill Do train uses the latest internet technologies. But it is available on the shorts comes with sound and music, oversized pages the reader explores by clicking, scroll down sound effects and animated images. The first episode of Johnny for Digital Comedy won the Best Animated Short award at the 2000 peak Festival and is part of the one-off Australian Multimedia Museum/Media House: www.mmm.com/au/sms/johnnyice

**Young luminaries**

**Winners**


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Catching the sixth Next Wave

Virginia Baxter previews the 1996 Next Wave program.

When he spoke to Natalie King (RT’95), Next Wave Festival Director Zane Trow anticipated a festival that was diverse, site- and contemporary and it looks like he’s pulled it off with an impressive assembly of emerging and experienced artists in all manner of multi-dimensional collaborations and intersections.

In the Performance program, choreographer Cazarrine Barry presents *Help*, merging visual art with high energy theatre and an original techno soundtrack by Ollie Olsen of Psy Harmonics. 3D projectionist Tao Weis has covered all bases in his collaboration with Ruth Round, creating images that tell the story of the city and its people and their relationship with the environment.

There are some nice tie-ins. A special edition of *Overland* will publish writers under 30, edited by writing students from Victorian tertiary education institutions. ABC Radio will feature young writers in their regular profile, short play, poetry and 30 minute fiction spots. Writer Herb Wharton takes up residence in Healesville Sanctuary where he will conduct creative writing workshops. Meanwhile, young writers will inhabit the emotional hothouse (in Wagga) of five airports across the country and run workshop with local writers, including secondary school students. There are workshops at the Victorian Writers Centre on Spoken Word, Science Fiction, Sports Journalism, Poetry Realism, Writings about and with Music, Writing for TV and radio, creating a fan-zine. Writers Weekend includes performances by writers Justine Elter, Michael Foster, Edwina Preston, Ben Sibley and others. In Electric Words Antoni Lach gives an introduction to CD-ROM Literature. There’s a forum on ‘Fear and the Other’ (Homophobia, Misogyny, Racism and the Writer); journalists discuss their writing; Show and Tell is an evening of spoken word, live bands and more live crossovers to New York performers.

The Next Wave Arts Program picks up the collaborative thread. At ACCA, *Eloidal Kids* features a show by four Sydney College artists curated by Neil Emmerson. While in *Flower Show* David Chesworth, Nomi Nixon, David Rosetzky create a human scale bouquet that plays at the borders of art and everyday life. In *First Floor* artists take on the idea of the Masterpiece. Three artists play a game of Chinese Whispers at the Chinese Museum. For *Working in Collaboration*, a series of eight exhibitions over four weeks, 30 artists have invited 24 non-artists to collaborate on the construction of an exhibition over one week with successive groups using the previous installation as a basis for their own. *Hypertrophy* focuses on the intention and installation of hybridized gymnasium and sports equipment. In *Reforming of Boxes* made from a variety of materials suggests other ways of thinking and doing. The exhibition *(some other) solutions for a small planet* is intended as an antidote to the particular set of cultural and historical norms that form the current definition of ‘technology’. *Chinoseries* takes another look at the academic practice of making copies of original works of art. Greg Pryor and 16 students from Melbourne art institutions respond to *Max Meldrum’s Chinoseries* (1928). What are the copies reveal? In *Evolve a group of printmaking graduates from University of New England explore the relationship between region and centre. 8 artists from linked Melbourne Area* examine questions of evolution.

In *RMI T Union Theatre* features four forums on the subject of Education and Contemporary Art in Australia. Artech ’96 brings together artists from across Australia and overseas who are working with new technologies: CD-ROM, artificial life, video installations, fax and photocopier combine with more familiar technologies like photography, painting and sculpture. The event incorporates *Perspective and Perception* and an international exhibition by artists working with familiar as well as mind-bending technologies at the Murdoch Gallery, NGV, *Be Your Best*, the Second New Wave Artech Symposium; *Lumens 3* at the CCP in which Dan Armstrong, Marion Harper and James Verdon will explore the use of light and mixed photo media.

Nothing Natural features work on technology and the biological imperative by, among others, Martine Corompt and Patricia Pecinato. At *Rabl 2.0* in the exhibition to launch the radically renovated RMIT Gallery, 13 artists (including Hewson/Walker, Calum Morton and Kathy Temin) present site-specific works which highlight the relationship between art, architecture and institutional space. And there’s a Colour laser Project/Photography Workshop where you can explore the potential of digital colour copying guided by experienced artists.

The Music program *Sing Song* is directed by David Bradley (Not Drowning Wave) and brings together musical cultures from across Australia, PNG and Torres Strait Islands celebrating the traditional and the contemporary. Ruby Hunter, Archie Roach, Frances Williams, Tj Dance Troupe and the Kawaii PNG performance group are performing. Not Drowning Wave will perform for the duration of the project for collaborations with Telek, Yothu Yindi drummer Ben Hadlats and flautist/vocalist Pusi Wasi (leader of the Kiwaisa performance group). Musicians will be joined by choreographers, lighting, visual and sound designers. Contemporary and traditional dance will be a strong element.

This is an ingenious program, daringly digital, serishing with hybrids, playful collaborations and confronting juxtapositions planned with careful consideration to the concerns of Australia’s emerging artists.
Identities with a vengeance

Brett Levine witnesses art as cultural negotiation at New Zealand's International Festival of the Arts

Spent any time at the New Zealand International Festival of the Arts in Wellington, and you are aware of the subtexts. In this year's festival this means cultural politics with a vengeance. Not surprising, given that Māori make up more than ten percent of the population and that Auckland to the north is one of the largest Polynesian cities in the world. But understanding the uniquely New Zealand approach to negotiating differences requires more than knowing that diverse communities are being represented. What is more necessary is understanding how New Zealanders represent themselves in the international arena and who those New Zealanders are. Ten days at the Festival gave me a few insights.

Many events focused closely on cultural identity. The Festival's only two specifically commissioned plays, Oscar Kightley and David Fane's A Frigate Bird Sings, and HouKoukau's Waiora, highlighted the differences felt by Samoan and Māori communities in New Zealand today. A Frigate Bird Sings tells the complex story of Vili, a fa'afafine in Auckland. Now the easiest way to define fa'afafine is transvestite, but it is really much more. In that role social and cultural role in which a male child, in families with no women, 'becomes' a woman. Transgender and culturally highly acceptable mode of living and being from Samoa to Auckland and imagine the implications. That the Festival committee would commission the play, and that it would have such a positive impact, is testament to the importance they place on Pacific Island cultures having adapted their cultural practices for New Zealand in the 90s.

HouKoukau's Waiora is set in a sixty South Island town. It explores the loss of language, of family and of two through relocation and the desire—now being rejected—for assimilation into Pakeha society. Koukau uses traditional Māori songs and dances and writes much of the dialogue in Māori to highlight Māori/Pakeha differences and to make bold statements concerning the effects of 'becoming Pakeha', a strategy adopted by urbanising Māori communities at the time but often rejected with vehemence both by children and subsequent generations. A New Zealand friend suggested that in the past, plays dealing strongly with cultural issues were generally found in the Fringe or Rainbow or, in the case of Waiora, show just how far cultural political practices have shifted in the past ten years.

Culturally specific visual arts exhibitions continued the approach of 'similar but different.' Patua, an exhibition by contemporary Māori artists at the City Gallery, was a demonstration of primarily traditional artistic practices. While tattooing, carving and weaving are one element of Māori visual arts, it was disturbing to find that Patua.had been less a non-traditional performance element, no multimedia, and no experimental film or video. Reading Wellington's Sunday Star Times it is possible to engage with the current debates on Māori visual arts, but unfortunately these issues do not come under close scrutiny in any Festival exhibition. New Zealand artists of Chinese origin appeared in the New China/New Zealand exhibition, a display of installations by two New Zealand artists and covers with photographs by artists from Hong Kong, mainland China and Taiwan. Here the question that wasn't asked was: 'Why New Zealand Chinese installation artists when no one else in the exhibition was a non-traditional performer, and not even one of the 27 artists represented by the Fringe?'"
Yearning for the real thing

Zane Trow at a rare Melbourne performance event

With little break from the monotony of literary performance culture in Melbourne, the Dancehouse venue, offers the potential for change. Melbourne audiences flock to performance art wherever it is produced in the city. Melbourne Fringe's New Work Works used to offer a space for different work, and Modern Image Makers have also produced 'performance' evenings as part of Experimenta. There is always a good audience, diverse in age and demographics, hungry to see work that isn't just actors talking to each other under lights. So, Expositions, an evening of performance art coordinated by Ballarat-based artist Michael Cook at Dancehouse, offered a rare chance in Victoria to see something that wasn't just 'dance'. As usual, it looked like another full house.

I could not help noticing firstly the fact that the installation component of Cook's Bringing Home the Gnomes looked as if it was about to burn down. This seemed unintentional; restful hot light bulbs on linoleum was not wise. The installation itself became a prequel, almost, to the later performances.

In the meantime, Stelarc began the evening with a fully developed technique of amplified body and an excellent, simple and effective soundscape and lighting rig. Great shadows. Stelarc always has an air of positive malevolence, rather like a good Robert Fripp chord progression. Nothing here that we had not seen before in Stelarc's work, but he has a genuine ability to twist time and space, and therefore the audience. He also had the professional courtesy to acknowledge his collaborator in sound Rainer Lutz.

Next up, Lloyd Jones and Ragaru Puru. While better than some of the following performances, it was held back by bad mark work and some rather cliched 70s imagery: sweeping the floor, throwing salt and throwing it, passing out water to the audience, and an attempt at controlled tension drawn from Puru's martial arts technique. Enveloping white costumes seemed to annoy both of them, and subtle movement seemed difficult. The whole thing reminded me of the work of HOH/Welfare State in Europe circa 1976.

Julie Drysdale and the vocal ensemble UQ performed a "butch/nob influenced" work. Nothing happened. The voices sounded like any first year acting student's voice warm up. Drysdale did all the classic stuff: the slow motion, the meaningful look. The beginning of the work had everyone rolling around in black bags growling.

Yoko Ono it was not!

Ray Woolard is a Ballarat visual artist, "returning to performance after a long absence". Powerglove Honeybear referenced both Stelarc and Goji Hamada in the dimly-lit program note provided to Dancehouse's summer newsletter. In performance Woolard paid homage to Bevly: a foolish, off-hand intensity, with no deference to theatre at all. He also wore masks, but completely unpretentiously. He scratched a treated violin. He carefully unscrewed a box containing small teddy bear, he filled it with honey, he screwed it back up again, he showed it to us. He scratched some more violin. He put a chocolate easter bunny on a stick, held it towards us and shouted "Hymage to Joseph Beuys!!". Then he went home. The real thing: simple, precise, humorous, and dangerously elegant.

Michael Cook concluded the evening with Bringing Home the Gnomes, a surrealistic fantasy. Covered in ceramic hands and wet fish he meditated in a deliberately hesitant jiggly accompanied by hand scratched vinyl and live percussion from two unnamed collaborators. His character was sustained through body precision far more effectively than Jones and Puru, but it was too long. We all knew he was going to smash that table full of garden gnomes, and he did. Then he got the stove light going for a while and then he let off a nuclear flare, covering the ceiling with hanging smoke and adding to the transformation of the space. Perhaps he did mean to burn the linoleum. It worked, and the image of his gentle gigling will stay with me.

In the end Stelarc and Woolard stood out as a solo not simply performing for the sake of something to do. Surprisingly for Melbourne there were no strong women artists here, no one with the technique of an Orr, Traylor or Spawd. Did Cook ask them? Further, if the evening had a curatorial premise it was not evident. There was no information to hand, nor acknowledgment of others involved, nothing. If resources were thin surely just a photocopied sheet would have done.

Some performance artists are now embarrassed to use the term, feeling it has been usurped by pretenders. Expositions had both the authentic and the pretend, and the difference was clear to see. I hope that the artists who know what the term 'performance art' can mean will reclaim their ground soon. Of course, this is complicated by Melbourne not having a PICA or a Performance Space. However it does have an audience, and options must be developed for the betterment of Melbourne based independent performance work. From this may also develop a critical debate that will hone the work. All power to Dancehouse if it becomes the site for such a process.

Expositions—An Evening of Performance Art, curated by Michael Cook, Dancehouse, Melbourne, 8pm, 24 February. Michael Cook; Bringing Home the Gnomes, Julie Drysdale with UQ. Dance with the Moon Bears, Lloyd Jones & Ragaru Puru. White on Black; Kath Pengelly, Objects In The Mirror Are Closer Than They Appear; Stelarc, Zone of ERasur—Absent Body/Ed劳务派遣; Ray Woolard, Powerglove Honeybear

Zane Trow is a composer/performer and currently Artistic Director of the Next Wave Festival and Chair of the Contemporary Music Events Company.

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The Maze

photo by Tanya Hart
Rococo/Zen

Roland Manderson worries at Splinter's Mysteries in Canberra

Mysteries has been touted as a step forward for Splinters, Canberra's home-grown theatre of spectacle, as a move, or return, to the theatre stage. Adapted from the famous Norwegian writer Knut Hamsun's novel of the same name, Mysteries was produced and directed by Patrick Troy, with Peter Haynes as dramaturg and Nigel Kellaway as choreographer.

Mysteries boasted a large, enthusiastic and disciplined cast featuring Virginia Anderson, Bradley Barnett, David Branson, Catherine Hassell, Nigel Kellaway, Jan McHenry, Renald Navily, Anna Reeves, Rebecca Rutter, Ian Sinclair, Jessie Tucker and Tim Wood. Rich tumbling, billowing costumes created by Imogen Keen, the quirky set by Stuart Vaskes, Gerard Murphy and Kaura Alfonso, and evocative lights and music by Ivan Smith and Kevin White respectively. All spoke of a substantial endeavour. It's a rare thing that so many professional theatre workers can come together on the one piece, and Splinters should be congratulated for making it possible.

Mysteries began as a satisfying spread of dressed-up, intense and obsessive characters, detailed and iconic, as an oil painting in a world filled with surreal furniture, hanging artefacts and distorted perspective. Bourgeois rococo? David Branson, in his very central character Johan Nagel, in a terrific yellow suit, arrived via the audience, and in the process described or invented his rationale for arriving, his view of everything and everyone, his regard for himself. Nagel was a fascinating disturbance for this already disturbed village. I was waiting for it all to happen.

And things did happen. But the parts were greater than the whole. Nagel impressing, pontificating, charming and deceiving everyone in an atmosphere of distorted strings, and menacing gloom. The well dressed middle class, variously vibrating or sighing on the same breath as they were connected with each other. Kellaway's capering, gawelling, live wire creation of the dwarf, Johannes Grogard, seemingly obliged to the glad handing outside. Renald Navily'sangular, precocious and comic self importance as the steward and Ian Sinclair's smugly beaming boorish doctor, both at work on being important. Catherine Hassell as an ex-lover comically abusing Nagel. A host of slowly moving umbrellas creating suspense and foreboding. Virginia Anderson's Dagny Kielland, full of flighty distress, and redundant passion and fascination for Nagel's egocentric generosity. And best of all, Jan McHenry's dignified and vulnerable Martha Goade, with Nagel's bizarre and irrational emotions. It was an interesting village when I think of it now.

For the audience on opening night however, Mysteries remained a mystery. Notes in the program told us it was chosen for its "timeless beauty, its raw power and its accurate depiction of the human condition". At the time, however, while the play was entertaining, tiring and confusing in turn, there was nothing within it that could affect us in this way. It seemed to be about a lot of people who were full of themselves, in a village by the sea.

I know that Mysteries is the story of Nagel. He arrives full of bullshit, upsets the repressed apple carts of small town life and then discovers there is nothing inside himself when, due to circumstances, he is forced to look. And that's the heart of it. What could be a more appropriate message lost in a piece of theatre of our time? Especially in Canberra. Especially from Splinter's. But I didn't get that when I saw the play. There was too much furniture revolving and slowly being moved with each other. Too many words by far, too many quivering responses and slow zen-like walks that, whilst very focused, powerful or funny, had no cumulative significance. More is not necessarily good. In their pursuit of a theatrical style Patrick Troy and team didn't make choices that would deliver the disturbing emptiness which Mysteries could have been about.

If Mysteries stayed in repertoire for five or ten years it might become a great show. But ensembles in our time depend on people working for nothing, inventing their own time, and hanging around. And they won't hang around forever. Splinters have had an ensemble of sorts thanks to the core group's commitment to working together, because they engage skilled professionals from across Australia, and through their variously praised and maligned capacity to incorporate and enlist the commitment and energy of a changing crowd of young actors that's an achievement, a luxury and an asset.

More than ever, I want Splinters to use that asset. To find something to say and think it through, before their continual investment of ideas and energy just tries them, as well as us, right out.

Roland Manderson is the artistic director of Canberra Youth Theatre.

Book review

Getting into the Act: Women Playwrights in London, 1776-1829

Ellen Donkin, Routledge 1994

In his play, The Female Dramatist (1782), George Colman the Elder cast a central character, Madame Metaphor, is to be cured of her passion for writing by a young nephew: "You shall see me transform her into a downright housewife—and by a Single Stroke of my Art, turn her pen into a Needle, and her Tragedies into thread papers." Donkin's study of women playwrights in Restoration London has many salutary lessons for today's women writers, for not only are there very real structural and economic obstacles which prevent women becoming playwrights but all the dealings of women with the theatre are inflected by the institutionalisation of gender. It is the diaprophase of a professional father in the case of Frances Burney, or the outright contempt for the theatrical manager Garrick of the independent Frances Brooke contrasted with Hannah More and Hannah Cowley's dependency on Garrick's patronage which make them both vulnerable to charges of plagiarism; a savaging of Joanna Baillie's theatrical manager Garrick of the independent disapproval of a professional father in the case of the intricacies of gender. Whether it is the Restoration London has many salutary lessons for Donkin's study of women playwrights in by her young nephew: "You shall see me transform her into a downright housewife—and by a Single Stroke of my Art, turn her pen into a Needle, and her Tragedies into thread papers." Donkin's study of women playwrights in Restoration London has many salutary lessons for today's women writers, for not only are there very real structural and economic obstacles which prevent women becoming playwrights but all the dealings of women with the theatre are inflected by the institutionalisation of gender. It is the diaprophase of a professional father in the case of Frances Burney, or the outright contempt for the theatrical manager Garrick of the independent Frances Brooke contrasted with Hannah More and Hannah Cowley's dependency on Garrick's patronage which make them both vulnerable to charges of plagiarism; a savaging of Joanna Baillie's theatrical manager Garrick of the independent disapproval of a professional father in the case of the intricacies of gender. Whether it is the

Autonomy and opportunity

On Pitt Street, opposite Sydney's Central Station you'll find the Actors College of Theatre and Television based in the buzzing St Laurence Arts Centre, home of the Sydney Youth Orchestra and the One Extra Company (its future now in doubt with the recent resignations of artistic directors Graeme Watson and Julie Anne Long). The thriving college is a private institution enjoying a recently announced N.S.W. government contract which will pay for a group of students to take on the College's full-time Performance Skills course. College director Lesley Watson says, "For the first time, people will be able to study here and have their tuition fees paid by the government in the same way as those studying at NIDA or TAFE." Watson thinks that this government contract will have the additional benefit of achieving a higher level of recognition for the college's graduates. As far as she knows, says Watson, the Actors College is the first independent acting school to achieve this kind of support for students who otherwise couldn't afford tuition fees. It will create twenty additional places for a one year intensive course with selection for positions focused on students who already have some background in performance. It's a foundation course certificate in performance skills with a strong physical base. After the course, the students can opt for an additional year's training to gain their diploma. Watson says that over and above rigorous acting training, the College's great strength is in teaching its students through proposal development and practical activity to create autonomous theatre projects. As for the future, Watson hopes that this first one-off government contract sets a precedent for more. Actors College of Theatre and Television 02 212 6000 RT
Accessing the performing body

Julia Postle looks into Brisbane’s Vulcana Women’s Circus and the Hereford Sisters

The two groups that feature in this account share performance space in many ways here, in my narration and reflections and, more significantly, in their common motivation to empower young women through physical activity. Both emerged within a year of each other and were the initiatives of spirited women committed to providing an avenue for the training and encouragement of female artists. Both manifest a respect for and valuing of women’s experiences, feelings, and related women’s issues, and both are Brisbane based. It is because of these connections that the Hereford Sisters and Vulcana Women’s Circus are considered here alongside (and in between and around) one another.

The Hereford Sisters began in 1993 through the then La Boice Youth Arts, now Backbone. Susan Ritcher grabbed the reigns and launched the process as she prefers to call it. A national survey conducted by the Gender Equity Unit of the Queensland Department of Education in 1992 had revealed what many may have considered self-evident; that even though the majority of students participating in the arts in secondary schools and at a tertiary level were girls, in terms of employment, women aren’t generally well-represented in the decision-making positions of management and control. Ritcher was looking for a means for young women to occupy those positions, instead of just doing the advocating, voluntary, and more low-profile work. In other words, she wanted employment in the arts to reflect the results of that survey. And so the Herefords were born.

Vulcana Women’s Circus had a less explicit rationale. Antonella Casella, who had performed with Rock ‘n Roll Circus and Street Arts, decided with Karenna Oates in 1994 to run circus training. They proved phenomenally successful. Casella and Oates both considered circus a particularly expressive medium, but also realised that there was a need for well-trained women in the industry. The enthusiastic response to the classes revealed that there were a lot of young women in Brisbane, from a variety of backgrounds, who were not only interested in the philosophy of the circus but also in its potential of the medium for exploring gendered performance. Essentially, then, the Herefords and Vulcana both manifest, from their inception, a validation of women’s experiences and a celebration of women’s presence in theatre; a presence which in these instances intermediates and challenges patriarchal representations of the performative female body.

At the first Vulcana training session for this year, Antonella leads the performers through a rigorous warm-up, followed by successive tumbling and balances. She is a highly skilled, strong and assertive artist, and as a teacher shows obvious respect for each individual; a quality which probably stems from her performance and the distance between her and the group. There’s a sense of comfort and easiness to the group, despite the fact that they are removing themselves for the first time from the comfort of an unfamiliar space—the Factory—which is atmospherically miles away from the loved and lost Princess Theatre. With two women rehearsing their repertoire of balances, I am mesmerised by the fluid transitions between each seemingly precarious stance, the risk transcended by the fun they are having. The weight-bearer is older; an experienced street and circus performer. Her partner is still at school but has similar performance ambitions. She throws herself into a difficult manoeuvre, balanced above the stronger woman momentarily and then turning rapidly to slide down her back for a dramatic landing. They can’t get it quite right, and keep repeating the sequence of movements. Antonella supervises.

From my position as observer, the events seem to embody the spirit of the group; novice or veteran, every individual has the ability to master the skills to perform, and through the process of training, learning and sharing in a non-competitive environment comes possible—even probable—self-empowerment. But this is not necessarily celebratory ‘all Woman’ theatre of the earth mother, goddess, or wild woman; Vulcana is more a physical process which concentrates on women’s experiences, and at the same time is neither unrequiting nor separate in its philosophy.

This is an aspect also reflected in the Herefords’ development. In their initial workshops, they examined different cultural rites of initiation and passage for young women, including initiations into feminism and the distance between ‘academic’ and ‘everyday’ feminism, and also a perceived generational distance between older and young feminists. The physical theatre incorporated issues such as how girls occupy space, or how they are conditioned to (not) take up space as well as how women are represented in the mass media. Theory and practice were consolidated, in the sense that feminisms were accessed and interrogated through performance. Later there was After Dark, a collaboration with SnosArts—a youth community cultural development organisation. Part of this cultural project was an exploration with several young Murri dancers, looking at issues for young women after dark.

Their most recent work, Love My Arsenal: Young women, romance and uncompromisingly extended the Hereford’s skills development. They worked with Wild Women—a group of young women with intellectual disabilities—under Susan Ritcher’s artistic direction. Nik Hills from Expressions Dance Company shared movement skills and ideas, Antonella Casella extended their physical skills in a different direction, the Dream Poppies assisted in their musical development, Louise Gough worked with them as dramaturg. The Herefords gained a full understanding of these various forms and processes, including video and design, in keeping with Ritcher’s incentive to provide young women with personal, practical skills to enter into the arts industry.

Since then the Herefords have moved into new stages, with the more experienced performers breaking off to establish their own framework for further exploration, called Glued. And as Glued has been formed, new young women have entered into the Hereford Sisters’ process, with Louise Hollingworth and Backbone. At the same time, Vulcana is sharpening, its focus to extend their community development wing; exploring the issue of young women and body image with the suburbs Logan, as well as continuing the more skills-based vocational training. What seems obvious about both processes is their realisation of a need for increased attention opportunities, training and support for young women in the arts. It will be interesting to follow their development and further impact upon the arts community here, for they have already enabled young women to move confidently out of wayfarin trip, and into the larger sphere and into the public performative sphere.
When you don't know what to say

Death Defying Theatre's Voice is a work created by five Australian artists Anu Alas-Karan. is a dancer and movement artist born in Armenia, who worked with Beijer in France and for thirteen years in Australia with companies such as Human Yeins and collaborated on her own solo works. She speaks four languages. Teresa Casu is a physical performer with a circus background (Flying Fruitfully Circus, Circus Oz) who followed her interest in percussion to Africa and has recently begun to trace her Romanian heritage. Deborah Leser is a movement artist who has worked independently and with En'act. Her Jewish background took her to Israel to find "home". Back home in Australia she is drawn to and torn by the traditions of Jewish culture. Michele St Anne is a relative newcomer to performance. She is Australian born but is often misread as an outsider because of her colour. Her father is Indian-Portuguese. Her mother is Italian-born but Michelle doesn't speak Hindi. Tanya Gentile's background is in both text and non-text performance with an emphasis on cross art-form collaborations with companies like SideTract. She is Australian born and worked for a long time in Europe. The lives of these artists and all their languages (verbal, cultural, psychological and performative) and the gaps between them are the materials of Anu's (an all-purpose Romanin word for hello, goodbye, cheers and when you don't know what to say). "What we've come up with", says director Tanya Gentile, "is four individual journeys which from time to time synchronise. I chose the performers for their ability to combine forms, to be lateral and literal, because I wanted to create a work that gave equal place to all performance languages. The process has not been easy by any means. Working together we've encountered all the problems in communication that you would expect from such diversity. Hopefully, we've come up with a creation which represents the reality of that experience".

Each performer's journey navigates the theatre space (from proscenium to audience and the perimeter). There is space for interaction. Spoken sections are sometimes improvised. The work is based on the experience of the performers and the texts (physical and vocal) are written by them. Tanya Gentile has helped to shape a landscape, a dream and memory space in which performers can dialogue with the audience and in which there are opportunities for their trajectories to intersect. "To some degree, all of us are lost in translation". The atmosphere is enhanced by a soundscape of voices, music and sounds by Liberty Kerr and design by Pierre Thibaut. Using screens, projections and broken glass. Opening at The Performance Space April 3 and touring to Newcastle University and University of Western Sydney in April.

Robert McFarlane

Sidetrack Performance Group's Plane Truth is strikingly site specific—a performance about the nightmarish politics of flight paths produced in the company's Studio Theatre beneath a thundering flight path across Marrickville. Director Don Mamouney makes two intriguing observations, the first that this work is a synthesis of early (socially committed) and late Sidetrack (contemporary performance, the politics of theatre); the second that Plane Truth pays witness to the death of democracy in Australia—the work "a comic requiem for democracy". Public protest and political lobbying have come to nothing over the flight path issue. Drawing on theorist Paul Virilio, Mamouney observes that the construction of the third runway was run like a military campaign—with the inevitable casualties. Mamouney, even sympathetic, to a degree, with the hyperpeers of politicians given the scale of the issue and what democracy has been subverted to—a massive public relations campaign that promised tourism needs and discounted any opposition whatsoever. The campaign, initiated by the Greiner government, was taken up by the tourism industry, the airlines and related industries not only over democracy but disregards Mamouney’s people’s suffering—80 decibels of noise was promoted as normal for living in the inner city. Plane Truth says Mamouney, will be a shock, but a pleasant one with 'hard edged humour', a multimedia performance with a big cast, a comic requiem: Protest with a smile? Hope?

Kagome, Kagome

Kagome, Kagome is a theatre/dance/music/techno work involving both set and improvisational elements. In the creative process musicians and dancers collaborate continuously to generate the performance material using improvisation as the starting point. The roles of ‘musician’ and ‘dancer’ overlap—dancers use vocal sounds and musicians use spatial movement and physical interaction. Historically ‘Kagome’ was the name given to a shamanistic ritual chant in a ceremony to communicate with ‘God’. Over time it became a children’s song. The lyrics are ambiguous and refer to a time when the gate to the supernatural world opens. In researching Kagome, Nadyoa explores the world of children and their perception of God. ‘Kagome’ is the Japanese word for woven basket and one kind of weaving is said to act as an amulet against evil. The visual image of the cage will be used to suggest that which both imprisons and protects. A fear of the unknown permeates the performance. ‘Me’ is the Japanese word for ‘woman’ so on another level the work follows the rites of passage of the female. Kagome opens at Theatreworks May 16. Season runs till May 25.


Lyn Pool

Kagome, Kagome

the bird in the cage
when will it meet/escape?
the sun rises at midnight
the flame and the tortoise slip
who is in front of behind?

Nadyoa is a music and dance ensemble working in Melbourne since 1993. Musicians Peter Neville (percussion), Satsuki Odamura (koto/traditional instruments), Anne Norman (shakuhachi/wind instruments) and dancers/choreographers Yumi Ussumani, Tony Yap, Lynn Santos with Michael Hearn (visual/interactive sound) are presenting a new work in May at Theatreworks. Kagome is a theatre/dance/music/techno work involving both set and improvisational elements. In the creative process musicians and dancers collaborate continuously to generate the performance material using improvisation as the starting point. The roles of ‘musician’ and ‘dancer’ overlap—dancers use vocal sounds and musicians use spatial movement and physical interaction. Historically ‘Kagome’ was the name given to a shamanistic ritual chant in a ceremony to communicate with God. Over time it became a children’s song. The lyrics are ambiguous and refer to a time when the gate to the supernatural world opens. In researching Kagome, Nadyoa explores the world of children and their perception of God. ‘Kagome’ is the Japanese word for woven basket and one kind of weaving is said to act as an amulet against evil. The visual image of the cage will be used to suggest that which both imprisons and protects. A fear of the unknown permeates the performance. ‘Me’ is the Japanese word for ‘woman’ so on another level the work follows the rites of passage of the female. Kagome opens at Theatreworks May 16. Season runs till May 25.

RT
Radio beaming

Rachell Fresham interviews Hybrid Arts Fellow Margaret Traill

Melbourne artist Margaret Traill, the first Hybrid Arts Fellow of the ABC (jointly funded by the ABC and the Australia Council), has just spent six months attached to The Listening Room. She chose to immerse herself in writing and producing a contemporary radio drama which went to air on 26 February as Beaming Jesus to the Planet of Death.

In the genre of cybermystery Beaming Jesus involved twelve actors around a micro-phone simulating life and death in the virtual space of a computer, an office, the heavens and a beach. After listening to this somewhat anarchic reconstruction of the Last Supper through sound, Rachell Fresham talked with Margaret about the project.

RF All of us make stories; but I was struck by the narrative flow of your tape.

MT I find myself adrift in work that is not structured in a narrative sense. So, I used the fellowship to learn about stories, in particular those from the Gospel. They are fantastic—fast-moving, so much going on. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are basically four different ways of telling the same story; sometimes they contradict each other and sometimes they create new stories.

There are no laborious transitions. They say, ...and then the sky became dark, ...and then the heavens parted, ...and then Christ was transfigured. I tried to keep up with that in my narrative, encouraging the actors to go with it as well. I wanted them to assume that you can slip between worlds at once.

RF How does that form of storytelling connect with your script?

MT Recent science fiction has multiple narratives progressing at the same time. And cyberspace has been increasingly identified as a means of moving between worlds. Radio is a voice that slips between worlds, coming from somewhere into your living room...or into your walkman, some private space somewhere. It can be a voice of comfort or separation. When radio first began, the idea that you might hear the voices of dead people or that aliens might seize your friends was perceived as demonic. Today it seems coy and dated and the net instead functions as the metaphor for our fears or desires. The disembodied voice, whether it comes from the radio or appears on your screen in aski text, can also reach out and comfort you, or underline your alienation.

I think these things correlate with our search through technological means for God. NASA used to send probes into space looking for intelligent life, and now the image of the web or the net seems to provide that same desire for meaning.

RF How else did you structure the script?

MT There were link moments mid-scene—...said the Moon or...Jesus slutt...—in which different narratives appeared. There was also a display with scenes moving through time from present to flash-back and towards a future as well as into the different worlds of the story, the computer environment, which may or may not be a digital environment, may or may not be the dream world of the dead, the office, or the beach. Each of these worlds had its own set of rules and I kept adding detail into them and looking at how one could move between them.

RF Why this Jesus story?

MT I wasn't brought up as a church-going person and wasn't familiar with the Bible but I think it contains myths of great importance to our culture that are embedded in the Western psyche: It is a fruitful store of images and stories for reflection. I had to dispense with gender and difficult distinctions between the sheep-like followers and the Christ-like individual leader. I made Jesus one of the team and fairly fallible. I also got rid of the combative distinctions between good and evil.

But if you change the power and gender relationships there remains an extraordinary human story. Everything goes wrong, there is every indication that Jesus loses it badly in the last few days. My theory on the raising of Lazarus is that he acts out of fear and brings Lazarus back as a test of his own faith. The disciples were quite confused by this act and the Pharisees said, "This has gone too far, he has got to go". You can see it as a mistake, "Let's hope we can bring him back and that there is a soul we can resurrect". Jesus' faith is really tested; he says to the disciples "Stay awake for an hour" and they all fall asleep. All this human crisis is the interest of the story and I wasn't interested in the Resurrection.

RF Okay, but why in relation to the technological myths of the present?

MT In science fiction writing, which is the place where the virtual world is being imagined and to which with extraordinary faithfulness we seem to turn, there seems to be a lack of morality and seriousness in dealing with ethical problems. We do that in the sphere of religion, even though it is completely devalued in our dominant culture. I believe we suppress it at our own peril.

There is every indication that if you believe life comprises what the rational mind can perceive and what your senses experience as pleasures, that you will leave aspects of the self submerged which might cause you damage. On a cultural scale, it is also important to be engaging with moral questions and giving value to the irrational and the unconscious.

RF So we need some other world?

MT In a culture which has turned its back on Christian narratives to explain the appearance of technological worlds, perhaps I am saying clumsily, remember these? Gawkily somewhat irrelevant images of the angels, the monsters, the poisons and the heavens, remember them?

RF That is different from the Eastern metaphysics which many other performance artists take up.

MT Of course, and these realms are hugely problematic, but I have been surprised—I mean people were worried when I locked myself in my room with pictures of Jesus and the little lambs and Mary all around the computer—at the amount of positive interest I have received from people about these stories. They deal with the agonising fact of being in a mortal body in a world in which everything changes. How do you get through when you lose everything? Whilst you can't condone the politics, they are the difficult and fundamental human questions.

RF So, where to now?

MT I was absolutely empty when I finished but I am starting to think about an installation which relates to images of navigation and the stars. It would be a shame if cyberspace became the only possible metaphor for other worlds and the favoured point of entry remained through the screen and fingertips.
Nicholas Gebhardt interviews Sydney’s electric string quartet Fourplay

With the Beatles once again charting, the time seems right for a young string quartet, electric by nature, to step in and turn things around; to take on both the power of the quartet as the archetypal western musical formation and, recently, as the ultimate point of cross over between classical music and the pop scene. From band competitions to the Byron Bay Festival to supporting Ute, violinist Lara Goodridge, viola players Tim Hollo and Chris Emerson and cello player Peter Hollo, are carving out an unusual corner that ties in the general shift towards the dissolution of formal musical categories with an uncanny sense of the absurd. The latest addition to the world of electrified string quartets, Fourplay have leapt into pop music as the only string quartet with two violas that cover a Jeff Buckley song and play a Ross Edwards piece in the same set, hoping to mark out a different kind of musical event that swings as much as it swoons, jams as much as it jokes.

NG. There are a lot of covers bands out there boring us all to tears, what can a string quartet do about that?

PH. We listen to a lot of pop music and alternative music, it’s what we listen to on the radio and go out and buy, and being musicians we wanted to play that sort of stuff, but being string instrumentists we had to invent a different form. And although we are not a Kronos or a Brodsky or a Balanescu quartet, there were probably some initiative from the things that these groups have done.

TH. One of the things we have in common is that we are trying to get the pop and alternative audience to listen to classical music and the classical audience to listen to pop music, because both have a lot to offer but unfortunately a lot of people think there is a distinct line between them, which there just isn’t, at least not any more.

PH. We are actually trying to create our own direction. We’re not writing art rock music but are coming from the classical field and so to some extent we’ve made it up as we’ve gone along. I like to call Fourplay a band not a string quartet.

LG. I suppose what we haven’t done yet as a band is really jam. We work out parts, which is not always what happens in a band where a song gets created, and then you jam and come up with a really great part and it sticks and other people don’t play the same thing each time. And we actually work much more like a classical quartet with quite formal arrangements.

PH. We want to keep the sense of the quartet, but at the same time it ends up being a lot like a band. We’ve got the rhythm elements in that the cello acts as the bass and the drums and sometimes there are percussive effects in the cello. Or the viola generally play guitar solos or one of the instruments plays the voice. So we’re really impressing the structure of a fairly straightforward rock group onto a string quartet.

NG. At some point, the novelty of playing “Metallica” or “Purple Haze” becomes a parody of itself?

LG. It’s got a novelty thing about it, obviously. That’s why I think the contemporary classical compositions are really interesting, the things people haven’t heard, instead of it just being a covers band.

TH. We’ve never intended to be a covers band, but it sort of happened that way. Each time we had to increase our repertoire, like with the Byron Festival, we’ve had to put it together in an enormous hurry. All of a sudden we’ve had to double our repertoire and its much easier for us to find rock songs to cover than to get up a contemporary classical piece, given that they are often extremely difficult.

PH I think we had a residual suspicion that it is playing the covers that gets people listening and it probably is. But interestingly, all the people who end up listening just as open minded to the originals.

CF. It’s funny, because you try and write a rock song and you come back to the classical structure. Because we’ve been trained classically, we try and write a verse and then a chorus then a verse then a chorus, and it just doesn’t work. It works out being ABA form or something from way back. You keep trying to make things interesting.

PH. Most of the music around is very conservative, but it is electronics, what I have to call technology because people automatically think of House, where the most radical music is being made. The electronic manipulation of our sound is the way we’d like to go. Samples, a MIDI, would be very interesting. I’m really interested in groups like The Art of Noise or The Future Sound of London who use the studio as an instrument.

TH. We want to explore our potential as a string quartet fully before we add other things.

NG. So how do you cut through the wash, how do you avoid being just another background effect?

FOURPLAY By being a string quartet, by being loud, by playing music which people recognise. We don’t have a Fourplay manifesto or an attitude because it’s really just about Fourplay in the end. We started as a joke and it’s meant to shake up people’s idea of music.

Jazzwatch

Detroit pianist/composer Kirk Lightsey on tour

Who’s that bare-chested man at the keyboards? That man in white shirt and red rose and a dangerous smile? A Detroit pianist with “a Bud Powell awareness, an Art Tatum styling, a bebop feeling and a pianistic approach”. That’s how Kirk Lightsey describes his musical self. He’s played professionally since he was nineteen and his first real jazz gig included a young saxophonist named Joe Henderson.

Soon after, Lightsey played in R & B revues with singers Della Reese, B.B. King and Fourplay. He’s worked with saxophonists like Delbert McClinton, a hep cat and a great person, who pushed him and helped him develop his sound.

He played with Dexter Gordon for four years from 1979 and subsequently with Chet Baker. Some of his current playing is with The Leaders, one of the most popular groups in the European circuit with each musician a band leader, composer and virtuoso instrumentalist: saxophonist Chico Freeman, Arthur Blythe, Nathan Davis, trumpeter Lester Bowie, bassist Cecil Mc Bee and drummer Famoudou Don Moye. Lightsey will arrive in Australia immediately after a two week season with The Leaders at Ronnie Scott’s in London.

With Kirk Lightsey on tour, hot on the heels of Gil Scott-Heron, the month of April promises a musically rich and mature autumn.

Kirk Lightsey: April 18, 23, 24 Strawberry Hills Hotel, Sydney; April 19, 20 Bennetts Lane Melbourne; 21 Pinnacles Festival, Bass Note, Brisbane; 23 Southern Cross Club, Canberra; 26 Kiama Jazz Club; 27 Armidale Jazz Society

Singer Sheila Jordan likely touring nationally in June; Eureka Jazz Festival Ballarat April 5-7; Grafton Easter
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Tone Dialing
1996 Sony C24 848-2
It is a difficult task to find the right language for contemporary music. Of course there has never been so much new music. Most of it however is either the result of a homogenised sound environment where what is defined as music is defined by what is accessible by improvised over a period of time and the idiotic loss of most of the concept of musical unit. Though the beats of the respective nor is there a general idea of the sound environment the music is played in. Whether you want to enter a radical art of sounds or to give music a frame where it fits into the social order, or so much deregulation that when the sound comes created by composers such as Varese and Cage has been dissolved into sound effects. As someone who could potentially reinvent a sound framing, Ornette Coleman is in an eminently position. As one of the liberators of jazz in the late 1950s, Coleman was moved from an absolute harmonic, melodic and rhythmic freedom to a concept of musical transformation that resides in a conceptual distancing of musical elements within a series of formal structures, songs, dances, blues, Coleman's saxophone playing, as usual, is striking, marking out vigorous cross-rhythms, arhythmic blocks of sound, shaping melodies that expand and contract across the frenetic movement of the drums and electric guitar. This is the kind of musical thinking that Pierre Boulez might easily characterise as 'a polyphony of polyphones'.

Jan Garabek
Visible World
1996 KCM 1464
Jan Garabek has one of the more beautiful soprano saxophone sounds you'll be likely to hear. Unfortunately, most of the pieces on Visible World are rare failures. You wish that someone of his talent would go back to Sidney Bechet and realise the degree to which this music deserves to end up in elevators that people can't wait to get out of. It makes you wonder: is the whole world turning into an easy listening soup or a gushing, inescapable after-dinner Esperanto? The concept of ambience, in itself, has an interesting musical potential as a reconfiguration of listening, but it seems that music is now defined by the composition of space itself. This brings on the overdetermination of reverberation, of desultory echoes, of drifting strings that creates the insipid wash of sheer sound surfaces. Desolate Mountains / If I are interesting for the delivery of Gabarek's playing and the interplay of piano and percussion; they seem least bound by the excesses of the synthesizer background, and gather a series of filtered through distortions and rapture in the movement between the different voicings. A subject of writing that reminds us of Gabarek's best work with Ralph Towner. The dominance of ECD producer Manfred Eicher's aesthetic, when the writing is lazy or uninspired, creates a sameness about the sound that is only overturned when the collaborations or the musicians have a musical conception that takes the sound's richness omnivorous space. NG

Jah Wobble
Heaven or Earth
1995 Island Records CID 8044/524 168-2
There are two post-punk survivor stories that stand out in musical terms. Malcolm McLaren has managed to build a career out of being "there" (where?). Jah Wobble, ex-P.I.L., is doing slightly more interesting things with his time. Most recently, Wobble produced a collaboration with Brian Eno. Spiner, and this time brings us a collection of songs with a bunch of world music/ambient luminaries. World music, like ambient music (and the relation between the two is by no means accidental and needs proper investigation) is a dubious notion, and tends to confound more than it describes. Historically, it's a marketing category that appeared in London in the late seventies to deal with pop music made by people (primarily from Africa) who didn't normally make pop music. Nowadays, it's become an aesthetic and political idea for music that defines itself through a combination of disparate "world" elements: a new musical form wrought from the traces of colonialism and commercialism that liberals not only the producer but the listener. Wobble's songs are heavily overworn, awash with string and synth sounds and his unmistakable ska bass. And they're decidedly easy listening. This is music that is utterly compliant with the rhythmic, harmonic and melodic order of things, melding and dissolving the difference of Chinese or Arabic localities into an innocuous bed of (con)fusion. The presence of harmonic, melodic and rhythmic freedom to a position. As one of the liberators of jazz in the late 1950s, Coleman has moved from an 'absolute' conception of an image freed from the constraints of a sound image. When the sound has been subjected to so much deregulation, Ornette Coleman is in an eminently position. As one of the liberators of jazz in the late 1950s, Coleman was moved from an absolute harmonic, melodic and rhythmic freedom to a concept of musical transformation that resides in a conceptual distancing of musical elements within a series of formal structures, songs, dances, blues, Coleman's saxophone playing, as usual, is striking, marking out vigorous cross-rhythms, arhythmic blocks of sound, shaping melodies that expand and contract across the frenetic movement of the drums and electric guitar. This is the kind of musical thinking that Pierre Boulez might easily characterise as 'a polyphony of polyphones'.

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Quietly
gothic

Edward Colless encounters Mutiny on the Docks in Hobart’s Summer Festival

‘Public art’ in a postmodern age is an awkward thing. Almost a self-defeating idea for cultural policy, it opens itself to caricature like the famous old-fashioned Gallic jibe at British culture embodied in the joke that ‘an English gentleman is a contradiction in its own terms. These days there seems little enthusiasm or justification for discrete works of ‘public art’, precisely because both words mock each other. At least, that is to say, there is little around in the form of art that not only wishes to address the greater public but that has the rhetorical command, patronage and purpose by which to do so. These prerequisites occur in social environments where money and power combine with taste in a spirit of civic identity, where power both advertises and embalms itself through the living urban body. The vision behind the public monuments in premodern or even modern cityscapes has narrowed these days to the scope of community-oriented art: scaled down to sub-cultural orders, geared to tactics of intervention or advocacy, community art is a functionalist, de-mythologised form of ritual practice. What has been built on the ruin of ‘public art’ is another type of monument, no less powerful and artistic but with a phoney sense of the city and civic pride: the theme park (a pseudo-city or pseudo-world).

Community art is a form of debased ritual, and yet its attempts to defy commerce (and the evident success of commerce in supplanting the ethical dimension of the public sphere) founders on the spectacular form of ritual which is that art’s inspiration and which relies on commerce: the festival. Perhaps because Hobart is a small city, and not just a parochial city but one still struggling with the imperatives of modernisation, the culture displayed and celebrated during its Summer Festival has the palpable residue of a rural harvest benefit. The focus of the Festival are the finish line theatrics of the Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race and the food orgy called ‘The Taste of Tasmania’. Both occur in the historic dock precincts, called Sullivan Cove. Sea and land merge symbolically in this arena, but the culture of this place is a physical culture developed by those who are surrounded by wild waters and who live off a land that is still, also, wild.

Late in 1995 the Hobart City Council in conjunction with the Salamanca Arts Centre proposed an exhibition of installation art, dotted around Sullivan Cove, as a component of this year’s Festival. It was a commendable initiative. A good opportunity for local artists—who have very little in the way of public or commercial exhibition venues—to strut their stuff. In remarkably short time the curator, Dan Armstrong, assembled five artists and found five sites (no easy job in the week before Christmas). While compromises and hardships showed up in the work and their sites, the outcome was interesting for the contradiction it posed to artists who, using a personal and gallery-oriented idiom, find themselves trying to answer the obligations of the public art in a milieu that is defined as tourist traffic.

Armstrong’s task was difficult, too: to arrange, with a minimal budget, five works that would be thematically linked to the Festival, would be easily accessible to the quarter of million visitors strolling around the area, and which would be responsive to the sites they occupied without appealing to gallery decorum.

As it turned out, only two of the works were placed in open public areas. Shelley Cheek’s sculpture has always shown a taste for adolescent grotesques: visceral, slimy, splatter-punk. Grauer, Smother. Other: Considered Dreamed, No Body Recovered was appropriately situated at the industrial end of the parkland strip of Salamanca Place, inside the grim compound of an electricity substation behind cyclone fencing, and covering beneath a set of gigantic grain silos. Mounted on a bare concrete wall, her work was a life-size, lurid indescent purple shark in tinfoil menacingly at head height through an oval opening at the centre of a long perspex panel. This panel was made of two large clear sheets that sandwiched a swirl of putrid, urine coloured oil. The effect—best at night when two diagonally placed ground lights threw fluoro bat-wing shadows off the shark’s head—was of a frozen, phallic eruption from a vaginal sewer. A death mask of adolescent sex.

Across town, in the glassed-in ground floor foyer of the Hydro-Electric Commission offices, SD Caney installed his large spindly steel children’s suburban swing, the seat of which was made of three softly glowing blue fluorescent tubes. This swing stood like an immense insect mother watching over her brood: over a hundred miniaature crows, each one the size of a Jaffa ball in its seat, were lined up in three files along the foyer and terminated at three more blue fluorescent tubes, standing like crenellations. Blood red cricket balls and gloves lay strewn along this “pitch”, as if the game had turned into a deadly ritual. Romeo in Waiting, said the sign, and we suspect that this scene may be a pastoral of love become a melancholy grayever. The three other works were housed in areas of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, Upstairs, in the ‘Pacific Gallery’ (devoted to indigenous art of the Pacific) Julie Gough’s Brown Sauce, a 20x15 foot billboard size piece showing a schematic map of a whaling voyage from 1825, rendered as if it resemble a Treasure Island children’s game. Bags of Mauritian Demerara brown sugar were provided for the viewer to hurl merrulously at three kirsch female Aboriginal heads, each one smiling out of a pothole. Gough is a fanatical archivist of things obscurely tangential to her own life, and this was a complex work which jockeyed with the colonial implications of the Museum’s collection as well as making difficult allusions to her own identity. One of Gough’s distant ancestors was, apparently, an interloper who is mentioned in the journal of such a whaling expedition, somehow linked to Mauritius: the pun in the work’s title was the opening to a labyrinthine personal memorial.

Ward Knight’s untitled installation was placed in the pebbled courtyard of the newly opened wing of the Museum, the refurbished Customs House. Brightly painted driftwood and old gas cylinders were assembled with a folk art literalism to make a life-size image of a yellow decaying jelly with, forcibly attached at its end, the stripped down bright blue ribs of a dinghy. As with Gough’s work, this was partly the expression of a private nostalgia, but whatever personal associations the image may have had for the artist, the picturesque effect of the materials suggested a skeletal hulk, beached dry by a devastating tidal drainage. This was another graveyard of the imagination, where blue water had turned into the flayed bones of a dead seafarer. Knight’s was possibly the most accessible to the memory of Hobart’s public face was easily read. And for that reason, it was the most schematic work.

Perhaps the most intriguing work in this ‘exhibition’, on the other hand, was the one that initially least resembled a work of art at all. In a darkened room inside the area of the Customs House given over to educational scientific displays, Poonkhn Khut built a large camera obscura. The room faces directly onto the docks, across a major and busy street. Restricted from interfering with the existing heritage decor of the room, the artist draped the room completely in black and hung a rear-projection screen in the middle of the space to the north. Presently there was a question of how it would look from the other side of the world. Any camera obscura will have a magical quality, but Poonkhn Khut’s had an almost indistinct, yet disturbing, added quality. Greens and blues turned into a Caribbean sunset, while the passing light outside floated upside down in a foggy veil within a claustrophobic tower.

It is not so unusual to find a gothic edge to Tasmanian art, and one could detect this in a varying degrees of construction and reflex throughout each of the works in Mutiny on the Docks. But it is a gothicism of memorials, not raving romanticism. Rebellion was barely the motivating force in this exhibition. If there was a mutiny of any kind here, it was against the public use of the Customs House: Poonkhn Khut’s camerawork obscured the iconic nature of this when it turned the public spectacle of the docks during the Summer Festival into a ghostly dream.
Making sense of the future

Suzanne Spunner on the new directions at The Museum & Gallery of NT

In 1993 a sperm whale was stranded on a Darwin beach and despite massive efforts, it died. The NT was in the grip of a labor government and the 1990s, an era of relative political and economic stability, was at its zenith. Meanwhile, across the world, the art and cultural scene was undergoing radical changes. This was a moment of transition, a time when traditional forms were being challenged and new possibilities were being explored. The Museum & Gallery of the Northern Territory (MAGNT) was established in 1984, and in 1993, the institution was poised to take a new direction.

MAGNT staff rallied to the task and were overwhelmed by the level of voluntary community support in the sometimes gruesome task of recovering the skeleton.

In October 1993, after years of inertia, months of uncertainty, barely controlled scandal and much speculation, Jackie Healy, formerly Director of Public Programs at the National Gallery of Victoria, was appointed as the new director of the NT Museum. Some years before Healy had lived and worked in the NT so local sceptics wouldn’t believe she wouldn’t go to water in her first Wet and when it was known she’d become a home owner and rate payer, anxieties lessened. People are both excited by and suspicious of outsiders, to wit Southerners, and high profile female CEOs bring their own worries. Two years later it is possible to look at the reforms and initiatives she has implemented.

Jackie Healy likes to tell the story that when she was asked by a colleague from Victoria what it was like to be living in a remote place, her disengaged reply was that she had never been there. Indeed she had not but he per. Said Healy, what people had never lived in one. But he per. That’s what a delight to see a bona fide studio-based work. (What a delight to see a bona fide studio-based work.)

The dinner party side which was sorely languishing has been revived with the appointment of Curators of Contemporary Art and Craft who previously there were none, and the creation of a designated Craft gallery. Major new sponsors have been won—Telstra for The National Aboriginal Art Award, and the Army for the George Gottesman national touring exhibition, Realm of Peace. The MAGNT is initiating significant national exhibitions and touring them within Australia and overseas, across a broad range—from the unexpected, Mambo’s Art Initiates Life which was curated in Darwin, to the more predictable—the forthcoming Crocodile national blockbuster shows, and because of sponsorship, the best of The Aboriginal Art Award can now be toured Australia.

In many ways a moribund institution has exploded in all directions. Healy talks of “setting a very high standard and a fast pace” and of the importance of welding a team from the “highly motivated individuals” on her staff who are part of the “resources available”. The power is the “synergy of the team”, and “activity is the tool for generating results. For museum consumers the results of the “activity level” are obvious and welcome. The only doubt is whether the pace can be sustained by the resources of the institution as these massive changes have happened without significant staff increases.

The criticisms one hears of Jackie Healy’s regime are classic—the pace is burning up her staff and she is never there/far away. To this Healy responds that this has been the set up story and that true consolidation can happen because the framework is clear. A major priority has been to “spread the message out that the Territory is not the received stereotype but a multi layered community and a place of opportunities. Now that the place has a great image, the public is coming back, attendance are up... people like being part of a successful organisation”. Indeed they do!
The law and the arts: accomplices

Jacqueline Millner previews an intriguing exhibition at Melbourne's ACCA

We all like a good hoax...so long as we're not the ones being had. To be seduced by the lie for a second, but in the next to prove ourselves wise to the seduction. Needless to say, those not directly charged with sniffing out frauds have delighted in the recent rash of hoaxes in the Australian literary scene, while many of those others have manically sought any means possible to salvage their reputation for connoiseury. Any means possible usually extends to that great punitive super ego, the law. Let's appeal to reason, to solid ground, to escape the mind-boggling 'anything goes' of artistic activity. Let's establish the truth, once and for all, to show those other pretenders out there that crime doesn't pay. Let's get them for fraud, for impersonation, for breach of copyright, for false pretences.

But, can the law deliver this vindication and hungered-for absoluteness? How disparate really are the law and the art? The two may be posited as antithetical, one authoritarian and final, the other endlessly playful and open to all possibilities. The law and its practitioners may be represented as the arbiters of reason, coolly following empirical method to ascertain the facts, and artists as precisely those who interrogate the legitimacy of reason and aim to create alternative fictional 'realities'.

But, is the law really concerned more with fact and truth than art? Might it not share art's fascination with, indeed dependence on, artifice and fiction? The law and art might not be in diachronic so much as in complicity, accomplices, co-conspirators, aiding and abetting each other for mutual benefit. Even their apparent dichotomy might be all for show.

Peter Hill adds to the scandals of his Museum of Contemporary Ideas with his mystery novel, The Art Fair Murders, which "reminds us of the popular identification of artists with criminals". The sole performance artist represented is Barbara Campbell, whose previous work with personae and historical personages makes her a logical inclusion here. Her performance, Galatea—after the sculpture made flesh in answer to sculptor Pygmalion's imporations to the gods—is partly informed by the predicament of Eliza Doolittle in Pygmalion, who, after exhaustive training in the speech of the British aristocracy, fails to convince a European language for she speaks English too perfectly to be English herself. How Say You? is an ingenuous and well- devised plot to cajole us into considering art and art works outside the confines of self-referentiality. By opening the door to this interloper, the law, it successfully inflects some hackneyed questions about authenticity, identity, and celebrity in the arts with a welcome vitality.

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Greg Creek Don Dunstan and the Elders (after Max Meldrum) / The Jury for Calumny oil on linen 1996
The death of (the) art (of) photography

The Art Gallery of Queensland’s The Power to Move, moves Peter Anderson to ask some big questions

In his turn of the century treatise, Pictures: Making a Story by W.H. Robinson gave advice which might seem quite odd in today’s world of the instant ‘point and shoot’ camera. He advised photographers, who would be ‘in the field’ to leave their camera at home. “A camera, of any size, is but an encumbrance the first time you inspect an unknown district in search of subjects. A note-book and pencil are much more appropriate; it is possible that a scientifically trained painter may be useful, but the camera is best left at home’ (Robinson 1902). For many artists working with photography, this rule still seems to apply. In spite of the infinite range of the field, these photographers make their pictures in the studio, the darkroom, and even the computer—for some of them, the camera now seems to be little more than a minor piece of out-dated technology, occasionally useful, but not central to the art-making process.

Similarly, for Robinson, photography that aspired to the status of art needed to be more than just a snapshot, more than a casually recorded moment. If a photograph was to be art, it must be a carefully staged aesthetically intense moment. ‘Art” might be full of wild moments of beauty or sadness, these were not to be snatched at random—the photographer’s view of a picture before it could be carefully taken. And to make this picture, a photographer required an “acquaintance with the rules of art”. While, “a picture by one ignorant of these rules may come right and be effective…he must not expect a series of such pictures to be artistic.”

What Robinson’s discussion clearly demonstrates is that the idea of photography as art is not a new one. However, what it also shows us is that the notion of photography as art is not built on qualities inherent within the photographic medium, but on existing rules for making a good picture. These days, of course, most photographs that are taken do not have the pretensions of art—perhaps the photograph as art has always been a rarity. For while there may be photographs that fix “the perfect moment” and fall into the realm of art, for most who wield a camera—and anyone can do these days—most photographs might be seen as a “Kodak moment”, the nostalgia of awkwardly framed “memories”.

The problem of photography is not that it is so frequently excluded from the realms of art, but that any discussion of its inclusion usually focuses on the medium, rather than quite specific examples. “Is photography art?” rather than “is this photograph art?” For example, while it is possible to imagine a work of art that makes use of the mechanical system used for the production of ID cards, for most of us, these images seem to lack even the most rudimentary artistic qualities—more often than not, they don’t even look like art. These are photographs that have a job to do, and in most cases they do it well. But who would want to claim them for art? Perhaps the notion that art necessarily has anything to do with pictures has had its day.

Whatever the status of photography as art, the collection of photographs by Australian art galleries is, in most cases, a relatively recent activity. At the Queensland Art Gallery, the bulk of the photography collection dates from the late 1970s, with the first collecting occurring in the early 1980s, with donations initially contributing significantly to holdings. In the catalogue for The Power to Move, which surveys the photograph as art through the holdings of the Gallery, the Gallery’s curator of Prints, Drawings and Photographs, Anne Kirker, notes that this period of active collecting—really only the last twenty-five years—coincides with the period when photography became recognised as an artform appropriate to a culture searching for a democratic alternative to the traditionalism of painting and sculpture’. But what she also notes is that a new generation of ‘artist-photographers’, who are “a breed distinct from the commercial photographers who had largely dominated the medium for half a century”.

Not surprisingly, The Power to Move, reflects a particular version of what photography is all about—perhaps a couple of versions. To a significant degree, the shape of the exhibition is a result of shifts in the use of photography within art practice, as much as any increasing acceptance of photography as art. For while photographs might enter into our lives on a daily basis, in the press, in advertising, on our security passes, in our police record, and as moments of our personal relationships—these sorts of photographs are mainly absent.

A substantial number of works in the exhibition, while they make use of the photographic medium, sit less within the traditional ‘art photography’ and more within a notion of art as a critical social practice, as a commentary on the construction of our visual world. From the point of view of photography, there are certainly “interventions” that upset the conventions of the fine print, the perfectly framed shot. But it could equally be argued that many of these photographs are the residue of a more conceptually based practice—an art practice which may well have more in common with all those other non-arts uses of photography, and with contemporary art that doesn’t use photography at all. Work by artists such as Tracy Moffatt, Marian Drew, Jude Rapg, Bonita Ely, Josephee Stairs, Robyn Stacey, Lehan Ramsay, Anne Zahalaka, Jacky Redgate, Geoff Krentel, Rose Farrell & George Parkin, Susan Fereday, and Jeff Gibson.

Photographs by artists involved in a sort of critical documentary practice, such as Sue Ford, Micky Allan and Ponch Hawkes, seems to provide a link across into one of the other main threads running through the exhibition—the photographer as a sort of artist/anthropologist. At its most simple, this sort of work almost slips into straight photo-journalism. In the Queensland Art Gallery’s collection, this work is substantially represented by images drawn from the 1988 commissioned project Journeys North. The exhibition also contains a fair number of works that fall within what might be seen as the tradition of ‘art photography’—work by Max Dupain, David Moore, Olive Cotton, Ruby Spowart, and Doug Spowart.

So a seminar held in conjunction with the exhibition, much was made of the difficulty of maintaining a space for photography within the context of the art museum, as if photography still played a subordinate role to more traditional art media. And yet, so much of the more contemporary work in The Power to Move is directed to debates in the artworld and the art museum. It could be argued that this work has been at the leading edge of contemporary art practice in recent times, rather than at the margins. The medium may be photography, but this is work that first saw the light of day in the contemporary artworld, and on the covers of contemporary art journals. Perhaps this is not photography as art, but art which uses photography—work made always with an eye to the art museum (as either reference point or final resting place).

Significantly, while The Power to Move generated some discussion of the place of photography in the art museum, it failed to engage with the other world of photography—at all. A major exhibition of commercial and magazine photography—the Fuji ACM Australian Photographer’s Collection—is held at the Brisbane City Gallery in the same month as the QAG show opened, with (I think) only one overlapping photographer (Doug Spowart).

While the art museum may well have accepted the noble traditions of the documentarist or photographer, and the technical and conceptual interventions of the avant-garde critical experimenter, those photographers who ply their trade, producing images that might have the power to move product, must remain outside—in mass circulation magazines, newspapers, and even on giant billboards. And as for the rest, you’ll find them crumpled and dog-eared in the experimental spaces of our back pockets, handbags, and shoe-boxes, or proudly preserved on mantelpieces and in photo albums with “Our Wedding” on the cover.

The Power to Move: Australian Art at the Queensland Art Gallery, February 16 - April 8
The aesthetics of abuse and the power of representation: some questions

Barbara Bolt

Situation 1: An Advertisement

A man hangs, amidst sides of beef, with a book tucked under his chin. It is a 'clear' image, no blood, no evidence of pain or struggle, only a slight bruising where the hook has entered its chest. It is an advertisement for Bees Knees Piercing. I am reminded of Rembrandt's and Soutine's hung carcasses and Peter Greenaway's film The Cook, my father and His Lover. I can argue aesthetically for the advertisement in terms of its formal qualities and its historical references. He looks dead, but of course we all know he has been paid to 'pose dead'. There is no other evidence to the contrary, and if you don't like it, the advertisement tells you that you can always get your piercing done elsewhere.

Situation 2: An Exhibition

Paul O'Connor's invitation to his recent exhibition Obsession (Freemante Arts Centre), features him stooled in a bottle of Calvados, clear enough to see his face firmly in place and O'Connor seems happy to smile through it all. Since I suffer from claustrophobias, I find this representation unnerving. I don't identify with O'Connor's cheerfulness at all.

Perhaps I am taking this image too literally. I am viewing it as if after some representation, a metaphor for the way consumers (in this case, gay) are obsessed by the images and icons of the mainstream. It could be argued that advertising has always operated on the principle that we can/will become the products we consume. The text made flesh.

The belief in the transformative potential of consumer goods is somewhat at odds with O'Connor's structuralist and post-structuralist arguments that suggest a representation is only ever a sign. This advice otherwise others the possibility that we both shape and are shaped by representation; that representation has real bodily effects. If this is so, what are the potential bodily effects of images such as Paul O'Connor's collages and manipulated images? The bottling of his own image and the collages of Kylie Minogue's head transplanted on to the bodies of male body builders present as Frankenstein's monster gone mad. There is obvious humour in the work and the hand stitched sutures which attach Kylie's head onto the male bodies suggests this is a playful and reverent transformation, but I wonder whether O'Connor would really want to be created in such a form. Does he really envisage this as an alternative conception for the human body?

Orlan's self transformations under the knife of plastic surgeons suggests that O'Connor's reworkings of the body do not just exist in the realms of play and fantasy. The question which it raises for me is an ethical one. If we shape and are shaped by representation, what responsibility do we have for the representations we make, whether it be an artist or a viewer? If we create Frankenstein's monster, do we have a responsibility for such creations, or is representation outside of responsibility.

Situation 3: An Exhibition

The Bill Henson exhibition opened, at the Lawrence Wilson Gallery at the University of WA, and the media coverage and publicity. The fact that Bill Henson represented Australia at the 46th Venice Bienale with the works in this exhibition, and that 123,000 people visited the exhibition during the Biennale provided the necessary preconditions for this exhibition to be well supported both in terms of audience and in the critical reviews which have followed.

The catalogue tells me that the Venice Bienale is the most important visual arts event in the world. A comparison is made with Cannes Film Festival. The gallery itself has been transformed for the exhibit. The modernist white cube has been transformed into the black cube of cinema.

I enter a cinematic space via black out curtains and experience the dislocation of walking into a movie late. In the moments before my eyes adjust to the dark gallery space, all I can make out are large disjointed white shapes around the room. My eyes adjust. At this distance I can't 'read' the image, only the interplay of the jagged white shapes in a rectangular frame. These shapes cut into the dark bluish surface, working their way diagonally, across the large screens. They are photographs, but they read like paintings or cinematic projections. The formal connections in the work are most apparent, yet I have a sense of unease and I don't know why.

The tight-trap entry propels me around the exhibition in an anti-clockwise fashion. I find myself in front of catalogue no 6. The framed image comes to life! Behind her, a young woman lies spread-eagled, blood running down her thighs, a cord around her neck, her head wrenched back. Behind her, the stitches of the floor of a pine forest littered with old car bodies and marked by the lightning shadows of a man with a machine gun. In the upper right hand corner, a naked child is carried by an adult. Their faces are blackened out and the adult carries something white or shiny in his hand as that holding the child. The jagged white shapes traversing the cut screen are precisely cut, taped and pinned.

I had been told it was a 'wonderful' show, yet I feel unnerved by what I am seeing. The brochure tells me that we can view in that space ultimately depends on our individual sensibilities. My viewing of the work is mediated by my experience as a parent in an Australian country town of 'parking' in Toranas, FJ Holdens and Monaros in the bush with guys much older than me. I am reminded once again that seduction relies on a degree of complicity. Henson 'paints' a very Australian scene, both in terms of landscape and a specific cultural adolescent experience. Yet his representations move beyond complicity to elicit images of coercion. It evokes memories of the Birnie murders, of young women abducted, raped, murdered and dumped in the Gnangara pine plantation, north of Perth, amidst the burnt out bodies of stolen cars. It is this scene of violation and violence that frames my viewing of this image. But do I alone experience the image as violence and how do I speak of this?

In a second image, catalogue No. 12, a young woman is dragged along by her hair. In her slcing and reassembly of the photographs, the artist has cut straight through her pubic area with his scalpel. In the opposite corner, another naked and soiled child/ woman is being carried out of the scene. The backdrop for this and many of the other thirteen images, is a moody cool sunset reminiscent of romantic paintings. The brochure and the catalogue claim that Bill Henson's figures remain "...essentially inviolate, apparently acting according to their own desires and needs." Through a process of identification, I experience abuse. The catalogue doesn't posit this as a possibility. It suggests that this is some arcane, some Romantic nether region between light and dark in which "young people...seem to strike up a conversation with a semi-conscious state dazed by sex, sleep or too much life".

I see the collage elements in the images as violent and perturbing others discuss the collage elements formally, how they operate in terms of composition, the meaning of having the back of the photographic paper revealed. The work seems to have a life of its own, without reference to 'reality'. The figure at the end of it all are, according to the brochure, expressing their own agency. Does Bill Henson have anything to do with it all? Of course I can refuse the positions presented in the flyer and in the catalogue essays, just as I can refuse the claims of advertising. However there is something in the aesthetic discourse that puts work such as Henson's beyond or outside of real lived experiences, outside of responsibility. Art gets talked about in terms of itself, in terms of its history, not in terms of what representation does to real people living life in the world. How might the work be received if exhibited in a women's refuge, rather than at a university? It is the writing, the discourse that surrounds the Bill Henson exhibition that creates a world for the work outside of lived experience. The reified debate that locates the work in art history, formally or in some dream world, allows it to operate beyond the debate of ethics and responsibility. An interesting comparison can be made between the framing of Bill Henson's exhibition and the framing of the Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in mid 1995. At the Robert Mapplethorpe exhibition, specific warnings—This may offend—were required to be displayed. When I went to Bill Henson, I was caught unawares, beguiled by a discourse about the confronting beauty of the images.

The confronting nature of the exhibition and the debate that it has provoked could be taken as a sign that it is powerful ('good') art. The power of art, it has been argued, is in its ability to confront, to provoke, to make viewers question their own cultural assumptions. The issue for me was that, rather than confronting my cultural assumptions, Bill Henson's exhibition merely confirmed women's position in the world, as next to nature, as the other of men's, or in this case, Henson's desire.

Even in this ruined Arcadia, the men remain active, the women passive and rather than abandoning their social selves, they appear to rework a narrative that seems to have been played before. In literature it is a fact that I had a complicated actor in this 'untold' narrative, this story of abuse, which like all such stories involves a silencing or gagging.

Samuel Weber - Illuminates a set of crucial themes in contemporary critical theory and cultural studies—representation, visual technics, mass media, and modernity—through exceptionally sophisticated and original readings of classic and twentieth-century texts, in aesthetics and philosophy. At the same time, the volume is a lucid exposition, defense, and exemplification of some of the most significant
An issue of scale
Eleanor Brickhill takes a close look at One Extra’s The Antwatchers

At the beginning of The Antwatchers reconstruction, the question about both the issues he wanted to deal with and the way he chose to treat them (RT11). The notions of surveillance he addressed then touched on a fundamental debate in a very personal way: Why are we, as in the way we are? Evidently the starting premise in the work is an image of humanity, caged, isolated and disarranged; the boundaries we live within only marginally compatible with personal integrity. This distortion shapes the very basis of our interaction, inevitably re-arranging the story, caging, bullied and humiliated into becoming beings whose integrity depends on learning to perpetrate these horrors for ourselves.

From birth we are held captive by dual expressions of love and power. A mother is bound to her child in ways she is compelled to acknowledge, whether it’s loving attentiveness or critical scrutiny. A child is likewise caged, and the cage is impenetrable. How these bonds are lived out shapes self-esteem, aspiration and achievement, from notions of what to wear, what to look like, what to see, hear and feel, to what we take to be the very nature of reality. We are all locked in the cage, the strength of both private and public scrutiny.

This big project which Watson has chosen to approach in quite literal, physical terms. The set consists of a series of cages, either babies’ playpens for the dancers or a suggestive and compelling metaphor for the musicians and their electronic equipment. We see the dancers through bars, curled up, teeth bared as in buying babies, the psychical, an attitude articulating more about maternal bonds than hysterical anxiety ever could. After a fast sequence where the dancers deliberately use as much effort as they can, the audience is invited to take their pulses. Either they need urgent tangible proof of life, or just another test of their own physical bounds. The closing image is a tortured silhouette lashed with camera flashlights, more like gunshots than snapshots.

Inventive talent and intuitive development in moving methodology was evident, but subtle detail seemed buried in the huge space, selective lighting and enveloping sound. I wanted to be closer, to see people not “dancers”, meaningful movement not dim, narrowly articulated tableaux. There was a disquieting conflict between the grandness of the sound and visual design and the intimacy of the human body. Although you could say that’s what it was about, aesthetic intentions seemed sometimes at cross purposes. Perhaps Watson’s vision might have been for something smaller, closer than the other designers had in mind.

The One Extra Company, The Antwatchers, choreography, Graeme Watson; design, Kameo D Arcy; lighting, Rory Dampaign; musical directors, Antony Parrott; costumes, Jacques Tchoban; dancers, Felicie Burns, Alison Dredge, Taryn Drummond, Lisa Frennch, Charlotte Moar, Rachel Roberts

Writing dancing right
Julia Postle reviews a new collection of essays on dance

Corporalities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power, edited by Susan Leigh Foster, Routledge 1995

As the author of Reading Dancing: Bodies and Meanings in American Choreography (1986), Susan Leigh Foster established herself as a new voice in dance studies. Now, in Corporalities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power, Foster acknowledges multiple, heretical voices from her position as editor of this Routledge anthology. This is a mixed bag in the best possible way, full a cornelli ground for each of the ten chapters about the body as site, or in Foster’s words, “physicality as a site of meaning-making”. For the reader, this is a fluctuating, fragmented journey through history, memory, gender and theory. Moving bodies are everywhere here, revealing and challenging stories in different ways and through many different methodologies. Ten individuals have contributed to this collection, seven of whom are Foster’s fellow University of California academics. In this brief ‘tasting’ I examine a selection of the texts; some exist in familiar territory, some are, for me, entirely new experiences.

Foster re-turns to an interpretation and analysis that is her own is my 19th Indiana University colleague, the Romantic ballet in her opening essay, “The ballerina’s phallic pointe”. By fixing her analysis on gender, and particularly femininity, Foster feels the notion of putting the female dancer in a male’s body is site, in Foster’s words, “physicality as a site of meaning-making”. For the reader, this is a fluctuating, fragmented journey through history, memory, gender and theory. Moving bodies are everywhere here, revealing and challenging stories in different ways and through many different methodologies. Ten individuals have contributed to this collection, seven of whom are Foster’s fellow University of California academics. In this brief ‘tasting’ I examine a selection of the texts; some exist in familiar territory, some are, for me, entirely new experiences.

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The Performance Space Open Season is an annual festival of Theatre, Dance, Music and Visual Arts that runs from June 24 to July 14. Week 1 in association with Metro TV will feature a series of video works, performed by local artists and critics. Week 2 will feature eight nights packed with performance. Proposals are invited for on- and off-site work from film and video makers, visual artists, writers and social scientists. All proposals for performance, production support and publicity will be provided by The Performance Space. There will be no charge for the venue and fees paid to performers. Proposals should be sent to Julianne Pierce at The Performance Space, PO Box 419 Strawberry Hills 2012 to arrive no later than Monday 15 April.

The Tasmanian Poetry and Dance Festival 1996 is also calling for proposals from dancers and artists in dance, theatre, performance art, music, film/video and hybrid art's to participate in a showcase alongside Tasdance and the Australian Dance Theatre. They will be housed in the Mad Love Centre in the heart of the city, with the Performance Laboratory, The New Music Venue and The Electronic Writing Research Ensemble. Mad Love facilitates and supports contemporary projects both within the space and off-site. The committee is inviting proposals from artists for its 1996 program. The festival opens on 24 April – 8 May will show work by Katie Moore, Le Salomone, Geoffrey C. Pivers (SA), Lisa Bellney (NT) and Ruth McDougall (NSW). A preliminary viewing of the space (3 April) will feature a set of works by J河son Wavron for further information contact Sonja Porcaro on 02 7102.

Northern Rivers Writers' Centre, based in Lismore recently launched its 1996 program and will set visits for the weeks in October. The company will provide venue, space, technical support, publicity. Artists will be responsible for creating their own works (no longer than 15 minutes), and will be required to provide a standard and ready to perform in the program. Information Joanna Putti 03 31 6844 or fax 03 31 6525

For those who remember the provacative work of Nightthistle at the Pram in the 70's or heard or seen at least a little of this work since then, a new opportunity for artists to present their work under the umbrella of the organization. Proposals are invited for on-site and off-site work from film and video makers, visual artists, writers and social scientists. The Shadows of Synapse Art Initiatives is offering a rigorous program of artists to arrive no later than April 1466 after 3pm. Look out for a week's worth of artists working on and off-site work from film and video makers, visual artists, writers and social scientists. The opening exhibition (2-4 April - 8 May) will show work by Katie Moore, Le Salomone, Geoffrey C. Pivers (SA), Lisa Bellney (NT) and Ruth McDougall (NSW). A preliminary viewing of the space (3 April) will feature a set of works by J тson Wavron for further information contact Sonja Porcaro on 02 7102.

The Australian Centre for Photography re-opened March 22 with an inheritance an exhibition curated by ten photographers who have had a connection with the Centre over the last two years. In this, the third year history (Sandy Edwards, Fiona Hall, Bill Henson, David Moore, Debra Phillips, Jon Rhodes, Lynne Roberts-Gordon, David Alexander, Maggie Beer, Susanib Batch, Saunders Nicholas, Lindy Phelps, Paul Saint and Daniel Thompson. The exhibition includes books and magazines along with an anonymous nineteenth century photography substantial work of painters. The new look ACP gallery is open Tuesday to Saturdays 12 to 5 pm. With Stills and Byron M_module, this completes Pottersfield's photo. museum.

Rehearsal Workshop Retreat in the bush. Big space, swimming and live in. Information Amberd 02 360 6745.

SPORT

TOOTH AND CLAW with Jack Rufus

The time is right for big changes to Australian sport. A new Government in Canberra, anxious to slash and burn, the code of Rugby League in disarray. Here's how we fix things. Everyone knows sport is a substantial vehicle of warfare—so let's package it into the open! A new Superimimy of Defence and Sport is called for, headed by Brendan Nelson.

Next, new rules for the beleaguered League. Wingers should be licensed to carry pistols, roaming wide and searching for a gap to the opposition defense. For the heavy-duty action in the middle of the rockard: armored vehicles. The full-back, last line of defense, should be equipped with a mousetrap, picking off any tank that may break through the front line.

To stop this? The winners of the Grand Final would go on to represent Australia in military maneuvers. First, war games to intimidate New Zealand. Then, send over chancers to the Gulf, dazzling Saddam's forces with clever break down lines and a concerted forward push. With sponsorship by Smith & Wesson, Canon and Armourgound, this new technosport interface will be the boost to the economy this country so badly needs.

TEE OFF with Vivienne Ichen

Since the depressing outcome of the thirteen-years-is-a-long-time-election, punjunds have been desperately seeking clues to the likely regiment of the new arts armament. Rising from the muck of the post-election mire, this month, I caught him nodding appallingly at the very corners of Kenneth Toms, Agricultural Director Hero Pro Forma. He enjoys the lifelong support of the Danish Government. An Australian National Living Treasures scheme to replace the Keatings? The Press is well informed. At the show at MCA the showed him the proper respect by giving over his speech and the microphone to the man. He is engaged to Miree Murphy, a singer, to play the role. At Australia Green and Pleasant last week, however, the atmosphere seemed more gravelly in the rocks and sharks in the waterfalls! Workshop agreements for the caddies will take them back to a dollar a day and all we can eat! No secondary strikes—you get one hit and that's it! The putting arm's length will get shorter and shorter. Regional Arts Centre, Casula, Casula, Street Level 560 4943. Write: Vivienne Ichen, Robin Hood Lane, God's Own Country, Tomsk, King's Trinket, 7456 5342. In reply send: Vivienne Ichen, Robin Hood Lane, God's Own Country, Tomsk, King's Trinket, 7456 5342.