

RealTime

Performance and the national arts
August–September 1996

OnScreen

ATTEMPTED MURDER

Government takes razor to the arts

ABC

ATSIC

Academia

ABC Orchestras

Australia Council

Australian National Library

CUT?

CUT?

CUT?

CUT?

CUT?

CUT?

The razor gang are coming to cut you up. A government is preparing to avenge itself on the culture that kept it out of office—until it lied its way in with Hands off the Australia Council, Hands off the ABC. We knew the sudden election campaign turnabout on the arts was political pragmatism. Once again, ever again and again, Australian artists have to defend themselves and our culture against the knife, to fight for the achievements of the last 20 years to be honoured and new work sustained and escalated.

In every projected cut, artists are the losers. Cuts to the ABC result in loss of work for composers, sound artists, playwrights, poets, filmmakers, performers, musicians and directors. Cuts to SBS, to be assumed as inevitable, would set innovative, cross-cultural Australian broadcasting back 20 years. Cuts to ATSIC mean inevitable cuts to indigenous art as funds for social

welfare must take priority. Cuts to universities mean cuts to already meagrely funded humanities departments—increasingly focusing on professional arts training to make themselves relevant and economically viable. Cuts to ABC orchestras mean loss of work for generations of musicians. Cuts to an already lean Australia Council, already victim to successive, suspicious Liberal and Labour Governments, must mean weakened administration and diminished funds to artists. Cuts to the National Library, already initiated but now increased by projected cuts, mean, as writers argue in *OnScreen* in this issue, the end of acquisition of new films, the end of the trusteeship of a film culture and the diminution of the quality of film education in universities.

The response has been swift, angry and organised. Some

• continued next page

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14

• from front cover

fifty indigenous arts organisations have protested publicly. Meetings between key national arts organisations to prepare joint strategies for attack have already begun. Pro-ABC campaigns and rallies have been briskly initiated by a number of groups. A campaign is being planned to defend the Australia Council from cuts, from the very strongly rumoured devolution of funds to the states for all artforms—but not Major Organisations Fund companies—and the withdrawal of triennial funding. Cuts to Creative Nation, again rumoured, seem predictable and easy. Although many artists disapproved of the kind of commercial spending and the absence of artists in large parts of that program, nonetheless to hack at it now threatens to wound areas where it has been effective, for example in the multimedia wing of the AFC.

Exploiting the new government's anxieties over the Australia Council, the old birds of prey ex-ACRA (Australia Council Reform Association) have announced "An Extraordinary Symposium: Beyond the Australia Council?" (September 13, prophetically after budget night.) In the debate over Creative Nation 'reforms' to the Australia Council last year ACRA was eclipsed by CDAC (Campaign for a Democratic Australia Council) as the fight to maintain artist representation and peer group assessment in the council was clearly won with the support of hundreds of artists of many and varied art forms, ages, cultural backgrounds and funding experiences. The symposium flyer claims, "Proceedings to be opened by the Right Honourable Minister for the Arts and Communications, Senator Richard Alston". *The Australian* (August 2) reported, "A spokesman for the minister swiftly distanced himself from the event...saying there was confusion as to what the minister had agreed to do". Beyond the Australia Council or behind Roger Woodward? The reforms ACRA came up with last year were self-serving and economically naive. In the current climate their complaints can only fuel the government's eagerness to cut. Let's hope Alston's good sense in distancing himself from the symposium holds firm.

Unless the government has second thoughts before budget night, it looks set to maim and disable the arts in this country. Even the smallest of cuts, say 2% sliced off the Australia Council instead of the widely rumoured 10%, would be severely wounding and has already provoked an Australia Council staff strike. Where Paul Keating and Michael Lee blundered seriously by inadequately consulting artists, Richard Alston is about to add injury to insult. Whereas in 1995 we waited patiently if anxiously to find out what was in store for the Australia Council, no one is waiting now. And the mood is not defensive, it is angry; it is localised and it is national; it is not tied to the fate of any one institution—it is driven by the pride in what we have achieved and the fear of its decimation at every level. One budget, one night of a thousand cuts, the wounding of a nation. Don't let it happen.

3-11 Arts festivals reports

Boris Kelly and Richard Murphet on performance at the Utrecht Festival; Matthew Ngui at Theatrework's *The Yang Family* at Singapore's *no, not the arts Festival*; Natalie King on the visual arts politics of the Singapore Arts Festival; Wendy Blacklock, Barbara Karpinski and artists on Manchester's *Queer Up North Festival*; David Cross, Rachel Fensham and Anna Dzenis at Melbourne's *Next Wave Festival*; Eleanor Brickhill on dance and writing at *Green Mill '96*

12-16 Tertiary arts education special

The principles of tertiary education in performance and media production training are examined by Peta Tait, Mark Minchinton, Anna Dzenis and Keith Gallasch. Courses in NSW and Victoria profiled and compared. More in *RealTime 15*

17-28 OnScreen

Tina Kaufman and Colin Hood articulate the anger brewing over proposed assaults on the National Film Library; John McConchie surveys the field of ANAT grant recipients; Virtual Artists provide an artist's perspective on the corporate big day out at the *JavaOne* software conference in San Francisco; Jo Law on Hong Kong action cinema; Barbra Luby considers Australian content at the Sydney Film Festival while John Conomos reviews the Rossellini retrospective; Nick Beames goes to Hawaii chasing the summer of multimedia; Francesca da Rimini profiles the international artists due at ANAT's *Virogenesis 2*.
Reviews plus Newsreel

29-31 Festival previews

Peter Anderson and Maryanne Lynch interview Brisbane Festival director Tony Gould; Keith Gallasch places his bets for the festival fields in Canberra, Melbourne and Brisbane; Julia Postle's sneak preview of Zen Zen Zo's *Cult of Dionysus* for the Brisbane Festival

32-37 Performance/Dance

Caitlin Newton-Broad selects from a crowded field at The Performance Space's *Open '96*; *RealTime@PICA* writers tackle *Putting on an Act* in Perth; Keith Gallasch reviews and previews new performance in Sydney from *Burn Sonata* to Sidetrack's *Contemporary Performance Week 7*; Jane Goodall crosses Sydney with *Compression 100*. In Melbourne Denise Varney reviews *WS:HDQ* and Margaret Traill tests new works at Dancehouse.

38 Sound/Music

Megan Wynne-Jones pitches gender and song at the *Word/ Voice/ Sound* Conference at Artspace.

39-42 Visual Arts

Linda-Marie Walker writes of loss in Adelaide in the wake of a continuing artist exodus; Suzanne Spinner on new directions emerging from the *Wijay Na?* arts conference in Darwin; Dianna Klaosen on venue issues in Tasmania; Maryanne Lynch at IMA's *Talk* in Brisbane.

43-44 Sports and Shorts

The Olympics push Jack Rufus and Vivienne Inch into feverish speculation

Correction

The response to Lyndal Jones' *Spitfire 1 2 3* in *RealTime 13* incorrectly listed Gillian Beer as the curator. The curator was Sonia Leber. She quoted Beer, an English academic and writer, in her curatorial essay.

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The Yang family at the Cutting Edge

Mathew Ngui collaborates with Singapore's Theatreworks

The Yang Family is a contemporary theatre work created by Theatreworks, the first Singaporean professional theatre company, in February/March 1996. *The Yang Family* was one of four works showcased by Theatreworks to form *The Cutting Edge* [no, not the Arts Festival...], an arts program which sat outside the Singapore Arts Festival, the latter being seen by some to be linked to an economics driven arts industry which is marketed as prestigious, cultured and international. Needless to say, it is also expensive.

In *The Cutting Edge* [no, not the Arts Festival...], Theatreworks featured performative works which it saw as uncompromising, challenging and new. First, there was *The Yang Family*, a site-specific sound-and-visual theatre piece about an immigrant woman, her daughter and six daughters-in-law and how as a family they manage financial, feudal and religious crises, modernisation and the dilution of their culture. Within the walls of the old shophouse, the sensorial experience touched constantly on the dynamics of tradition and change, male and female roles, decay and resurrection.

scene: The great leap forward

5 sections occurring simultaneously. A noisy 2-level kitchen scene with bickering about hierarchy, the loss of face and a change of name for the family business. A quite central space where Mrs Yang contemplates and receives representations from the family members who seek advice. This space is filled with video and slide imagery of the performers at rehearsals, marbles, a local temple and beautiful landscape. In the ante room, a large video

projection shows a documentary of the last functioning day of the Fuk Tat Chi Temple, a moving of Gods. One by one the performers come into this room, don ridiculous head gear (from a fish net to a plastic Christmas tree) and recite lines about Singaporean bad behaviour and prosperity from the local press. The scene explodes into high drama when the bickering ("monkeys' chattering") about the change of name infiltrates Mrs Yang's contemplation and she attempts to commit suicide (she runs into the upstairs kitchen and stands on the balustrade overlooking the airwell). The family stop her by agreeing to the proposed family business name and toast "to the great leap forward!" The audience gather round the component scenes and this main one, interrupting the projections and occupying spaces blocked out for the performers. The performers adapt.

Secondly, there were two performance art pieces, *Growing madness: the day after*, by Zai Kuning who preferred visual text and movement over the verbal, and Lee Wen's *Hand-Made Tales*, of which *Journey of a Yellow Man: annotated version of the story so far* is perhaps the best known. *The Morning Star Project* is a culmination of eight weeks of intense workshops in Kyoto, Japan, producing dance theatre incorporating Butoh, Thai Royal Dance and Chinese martial arts. This fourth piece involved a range of artists (architects to installation artists to photographers) and was performed in Kyoto, Tokyo, Bangkok and Singapore.

Through these works, Theatreworks, under the artistic direction of Ong Keng Sen, is attempting to elucidate new meaning and research the present through a multiplicity of means, methods and skills. Although collaboration, multi-disciplinary work and site-specificity are not new concepts, the specific contexts and the intended rationale for using these forms make the works unique. In this case, Singaporean society becomes the subject. It is the fertile interweaving of form, histories, customs and traditions coupled with national agendas and an emerging regional consciousness that drive these four bodies of work to form part of an important contemporary arts scene in Singapore. In so doing, they begin to fill the niche for a contemporary Singaporean aesthetic within performance-theatre-visual art.

It is within this context of new work and fresh identity that *The Yang Family* was staged. The play was originally entitled (and still is in scripted form) *Mrs Yang* and is written by Leow Puay Tin, a Malaysian playwright who has written other plays which have been directed by Keng Sen and performed by Theatreworks. In the preamble to the script, Puay Tin states that a chronological structure is unnecessary and at meetings prior to rehearsals was prepared for her script be experimented with through a series of editing, fracturing, overlaying and concurrent running with other audio and visual texts. The form, as it turned out, was like an exhibition, a large installation within which one could roam. Mobile phones attached to the audience's belts/within bags rang and were answered during the performance. 16 TV monitors, two video projectors, sound equipment and 10 slide projectors maintained a constant visual and audio text almost throughout the performance. Every two days, the internal projector lenses had to be cleaned of dust and soot.

scene: The introduction

The play is situated in a 3-level corner shophouse. The audience gather in the public carpark and directly outside the front door. At 8pm, Keng Sen steps out and goes through a few points with the audience: first, the audience decides the

sequence of the scenes for that evening's performance through tikam-tikam or a drawing of lots. Tonight's sequence: 2 widows, the great leap forward, modern men and women, mother and son reunion/bell, the storm, gender/memory, 8 widows, piggy-back, taking stock/our father in heaven. There are a few giggles. Secondly, each audience member is given a small Walkman which they can elect to listen to anytime during the play. The tapes contain Mrs Yang's monologue about her past and her life. Thirdly, the audience are told that they can take a breather from the one and three quarter hour long performance. Cold drinks are sold outside in the carpark. The shophouse is not air conditioned and normal temperatures around 29°C with 80-90% humidity prevail. They are also told not to block the narrow staircases and entrances into the rooms. In an odd but not unpleasant way, the building performs as the house containing the Yang family (and it does so brilliantly), yet the site-specific nature of the work negates acting and locates the work contemporaneously. The front door opens and the audience distribute themselves throughout the building.

Mrs Yang, a new immigrant from China to Singapore as a young bride, had six sons and a daughter. They all got married, had children and supported themselves through a kueh (sweet and savoury confectionery) business with the sons working in rubber plantations elsewhere. Her husband and sons die, leaving Mrs Yang, the matriarch, to organise her six daughters-in-law, one



Detail of the kitchen scene in *The Great Leap Forward*

daughter, their children and what will then become the Yang Business Empire.

scene: Modern men and women

The performers don red high heels and perform tai-chi, throughout the house and in unison. A video of a rat's maggot infested stomach is shown on the projectors and monitors. A pre-recorded argument within the family about loyalty, devotion, sexuality and religion fills the house. The old single lane staircase begins to creak under the weight of the audience.

The language used is English—more popularly called Singlish. Somehow, this was almost exaggerated in the performance as seems to be the case in most theatre pieces in Singapore. Of course, the nostalgic effect of a post colonial present has a certain kitschy charm but it is precisely this admission that provides a sometimes humorous undertaking that one is expressing a Singaporeanness. Particularly



Detail of the kitchen scene in *The Great Leap Forward*

interesting is how the works, though referring to a Singaporean identity, are no longer caught up in addressing its existence but rather, interested in its expression and definition. 'Mrs Yang', as spoken, is Mandarin whilst the family is supposedly Hokkien. 'Ah Bu', or mother in Hokkien, is used to refer to the matriarch, along with English. eg. "Ah Bu, don't jump!"

Puay Tin saw the play as referring to a story about women from a woman's perspective. In the processes of discussion and workshoping, gender issues were juxtaposed with memories of family incidents and objects. In the performance, men played the daughters-in-law whilst women played Mrs Yang and her daughter. They played their respective offspring as well.

scene: Gender / Memory

2 sections occurring, one upstairs, the other downstairs, similar in form. Upstairs: sociological and cultural theory texts about feminism and deconstruction are read out to the audience as audience. The performer records this and replays the 'lecture' in a variety of speeds, from low masculine through female medium and Mickey Mouse fast. A slide animated paint-stripping sequence which gradually reveals the past colours of a wall is used to illuminate the performer. In the adjacent room slides of the memory objects brought in by the performers during the workshop sessions are shown. These too are animated. A pipe, a wrist-watch, kueh-making pans, a wire egg container, etc., 'fly' across the room. These are juxtaposed with images of the performers themselves in the house, and of old and current Singapore.

The house seemed tired after the run of 20 performances.

Theatreworks has always had a practical approach to theatre and sees it as an evolving thing, constantly being influenced by different social, political and aesthetic contexts. It also seems that through an admission of 'western' ways of working and seeing, that a hypersensitivity to Singaporean culture is developed and in the case of *The Yang Family*, Chineseness—post colonial nostalgia for tradition or a new hybrid? To not reflect upon this is to suffer the myopia and confusion inflicting the many tourists to the island state who say "Singapore has lost its culture, it is completely Westernised, there are only international hotels and shopping centres, found in any other big city".

The Yang Family at The Cutting Edge [no, not the Arts Festival...] in Singapore, March 1996.

Matthew Ngui, a visual and performance artist who works between Australia and Singapore, was invited to collaborate with Ong Keng Sen, artistic director of Theatreworks, to develop, conceptualise and provide a visual text for *The Yang Family*.

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Rare space, other space

Natalie King at the Singapore Festival visual arts program

There is a pristine quality to the Singaporean social landscape; a strange sensibility that combines shopping in endless plazas, food courts and malls set in a luscious tropical environment. The cultural production that emerges from this consumerist society is diverse and sometimes difficult to locate. The visual arts industry in Singapore seems to have had a chequered history. Recent alternative practices have centred around two artist-run venues—Artists' Village and Fifth Passage—both of which have been closed.

Artists' Village used to occupy a converted chicken farm in Ulu Sembawang, where artist Tang Da Wu set up a communal studio in 1989 in which artists could work and exchange ideas. As the first artist-run alternative space in Singapore, the group was told to move out in March 1990 when the Government acquired the land.



Installation view of *Tour de Art Lab!*

Established in 1991, Fifth Passage focussed on the work of women artists and issues of gender and identity while supporting performance art. Members of the group have exhibited site-specific installations in different venues. Most notable was the project *Surrogate Desires* presented at four unleased shop spaces in the Pacific Plaza Shopping Centre which I viewed during my first visit to Singapore in 1994.

These energetic activities culminated abruptly in the banning of performance art in 1994 when Josef Ng and Sharon Tham performed as part of a twelve-hour New Year event. Ng's performance focused on the arrest and exposure in the press of twelve men for allegedly gay activities, six of whom pleaded guilty and were given jail and caning sentences. The local press covered the performances and as a result the Ministry for Information and the Arts withdrew funding from the group and the police commenced an investigation. (For a diary account of these events see Ray Langenbach, "Annotated Singapore Diary", *Art and Asia Pacific*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1994.)

These spaces, projects and events provide a brief outline of the cultural context of the visual and performing arts in Singapore and a backdrop to the Singapore Festival of Arts. I was involved in the Festival as curator and spectator. Having visited Singapore in October 1994, during the fervour of the performance art controversy, my recent visit was tempered by more moderate circumstances. Since my first visit, I have been liaising with artists, writers, curators and cultural organisations with a view to establishing a collaborative project based on joint decision making and a symmetry of ideas and input.

I developed a co-curated project called *Rapport* with Tay Swee Lin from the Singapore Art Museum involving an equal number of artists, joint funding and field trips by both curators to each country. An ongoing dialogue was established through the exchange of slides and written material in order to work through the curatorial rationale for the project. This procedure opened up my field of vision to different possibilities and combinations of artists as well as different readings of art works. Through this process of co-curating, *Rapport* has encouraged shared decision making and a synthesis of ideas and thoughts.

Eight artists were eventually selected for inclusion in the exhibition—four from Australia and four from Singapore—Baet Yeok Kuan, Amanda Heng, Salleh Japar, Matthew Ngui, Hany Armanious, Carolyn Eskdale, Christopher Langton and Nicola Loder. We were conscious of selecting artists who have not had the opportunity to exhibit abroad while seeking to set up a critical dialogue between practices that emerge from two different cultural environments. The exhibition consists predominantly of works by younger artists who are working across media including photography, inflatables and sculpture. The resulting installations negotiate personal issues such as childhood, coupling and spirituality that are pertinent to each artist's own cultural background.

Rapport was mounted at the premier cultural venue, the newly refurbished Singapore Art Museum (SAM). The first of a series of museums to be developed by the National Heritage Board in the new Arts and Heritage Precinct, SAM has 3,000 square metres of exhibition space spread over thirteen galleries of various sizes. Committed to cross-cultural dialogue, their charter embraces curatorial research and study while promoting modern and contemporary art of Singapore and South East Asia. SAM relocated to the old St Joseph's Institution, formerly a Christian Brothers' School. The building was originally designed by the French priest and architect Father Charles Benedict Nain. A baroque style classical building completed in 1867, the building was gazetted as a national monument in 1992, restoration and construction work began soon after.

In the renovation of the building, sheet glass has been used to enclose verandahs while revealing arches and columns. Ornamental plasterwork on the front facade and marble plaques listing names of benefactors has been maintained. Emerging from the galleries at the entrance, the visitor proceeds to the Glass Hall, where functions are held, and a sculpture courtyard with palm trees and a fountain. Officially opened by Singapore's Prime Minister, Mr Goh Chok Tong, on January 20 1996, the inaugural exhibition at SAM, *Modernity and Beyond*, incorporated component exhibitions, Themes in Southeast Asian Art and A Century of Art in Singapore, accompanied by scholarly publications.

The Singapore Festival of Arts runs for four weeks in late May and June with extensive coverage on television, computer kiosks at the airport and in the local newspapers. There is a nineteen year old history to the festival. For the 1996 Festival, the events spilled out to shopping malls, hotels, libraries and schools. The visual arts program comprised fifteen exhibitions some of which had a distinctly Australian focus. For example, *Indigenart* presented a commercial exhibition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art and craft at the lavish Raffles Hotel Arcade while *Delinquent Angel* presented Aboriginal and contemporary ceramics since the early 70s at Takashimaya department store.

At the conservative end of an eclectic program was the exhibition *Brunei*

Expressions. Mounted at the Substation, a multi-purpose venue, it showcased twenty abstract and realist paintings from Brunei Darussalam with conventional subject matter ranging from floral motifs to abstract expressionism. Substation contains a theatre and small exhibition space with a diverse program. A rental venue, Substation is located within close proximity to the Singapore Art Museum and the surrounding cultural precinct.

Tour de Art Lab! was the most experimental and lively project involving younger Singaporean artists who decked out a bus with site-specific installations. Sponsored by Motorola, fourteen artists—predominantly members of the Artists'

Village movement—participated in this innovative mobile art gallery. An ambitious concept that was skilfully realised, *Tour de Art Lab!* presented the viewer with flair and innovation.

In Singapore, space is expensive and scarce. Utopia, a newly established artist-run space, offers hope for alternative practices as the only existing alternative venue in Singapore in the basement of a shopping mall. Managed by artist Jason Lim, artists with vision and commitment to their practice, including new graduates, have the opportunity to present their work in a small shop front. Hopefully, future Festivals will foster alternative venues and practices so that spaces like Utopia can be integrated into a more experimental program.

Rapport: eight artists from Singapore and Australia will be on display at Monash University Gallery, Melbourne, September 3 to October 12.



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New contortions: Utrecht

Richard Murphet and Boris Kelly cycle through Utrecht's festival a/d Werf

The central Netherlands city of Utrecht has no wharf. Its annual festival derives its name from the canal-side walkways against which the barges moor as they let off the tourists or unload their wares. The network of serene canals winding through the town is flanked by former merchant houses designed to receive goods arriving by boat and then stored in the huge cellars beneath. Many of these sites have now been converted into restaurants, boutiques and galleries. The festival emanates from these and tentacles out into the city to the theatres and studios and halls of the inner town and its environs. With a population of 250,000 Utrecht is not a large city but it seems packed with cafes, bookshops and theatres. The dominant mode of transport is the bicycle and it is one of the joys of this city festival that you rush from one show to another of its packed schedule on your bike along the cobbled streets. The festival organisers have integrated their event beautifully into the rhythm of the city. The headquarters is an old high school converted by a group of artists into what is now known as The Utrecht School (but at which no teaching takes place).

This year's festival featured thirty theatre and visual arts projects. Festival Director Petra Blok provided an overview: "They (the artists) may focus on different themes, yet these are all based on the same questions. How does human consciousness work? How do we process the information we are fed every day? How do we look at the everyday things around us? What is still natural to us and what do we consider artificial? Is a work of art more capable of evoking a 'real' experience than the 'real' world outside it?"

The festival is, in other words, about art in the age of media. Sensibly, Blok doesn't

attempt to compete with the large capital city international festivals. Hers is a festival of alternative artists, privileging innovation and experimentation, and valuing the notion that art has a social and political function. We went to see as much as we could in the two weeks, missing out, unfortunately, on the visual arts but catching most of the main performances. What follows is festival a/d Werf—a brief survey of our experiences, hot, as it were, off the stage.

1. Leo Bassi comes from a long line of circus performers. His show *Cybercus* (trumpeted as the drawcard of the Festival!) attempts the ultimate balancing act by using the World Wide Web as the stuff of live performance. Performing in front of a camera going out to the web (as still images), ringmaster Bassi tries trick after cheap trick to engage his audience in what amounts to a limp, equivocal treatment of the new media as new circus. He is rarely funny, mostly brash and wholly defeated by his subject which, even when demonstrated by a bevy of expert, heavily armed technicians and a live video feed, struggles to be anything other than slow and dull. If Bassi's intention was to perform the less than spectacular reality behind the hype of the infobahn then he succeeded, but bucket loads of irony would never be enough to give this show the bite its publicity promised.

2. Clara Andermatt's choreography cuts to the bone as her dancers are subjected to the external vectors of a violent and stultifying society and jolted by the inner forces of a psyche struggling to find a centre. The voice erupts from the bodies of the dancers in sharp, staccato unisons punctuated by the dull thud of fists beating torsos in a visceral tangle of entranced zombies. In *Anomalias Magneticus* Andermatt creates gestures of pure emotional force framed by two doorways, two primal portals on a bare, desolate stage.

3. Alison Isadora provides a witty twist to chamber music by composing a piece for voice, tape effects and programmable washing machine performed by Janine Pranger. Unfortunately, *Hoofduas* is hampered by a far too literal mise en scene and a scenario which struggles to maintain interest. Watching it in a theatre provoked the thought that it may have been better served played in a laundromat or some other specifically wet site. Still, Pranger's fine voice and engaging stage presence keep a good idea alive to the last.

4. Cellist Tristan Honsinger heads an improvisatory ensemble of jazz musicians, a dancer, a chanteuse and a whacky American comic in *This That and the Other*. This show is mostly a high spirited display of shenanigans by a talented and disciplined group of experienced performers. Together they form a ramshackle orchestra led by a confused conductor in a show which slips from one routine to the next in a mostly seamless display of the difficult art of improvised performance. Unfortunately, the quality of the music was not matched by the other contributors which left *This and That* wobbling amongst the *Other*.

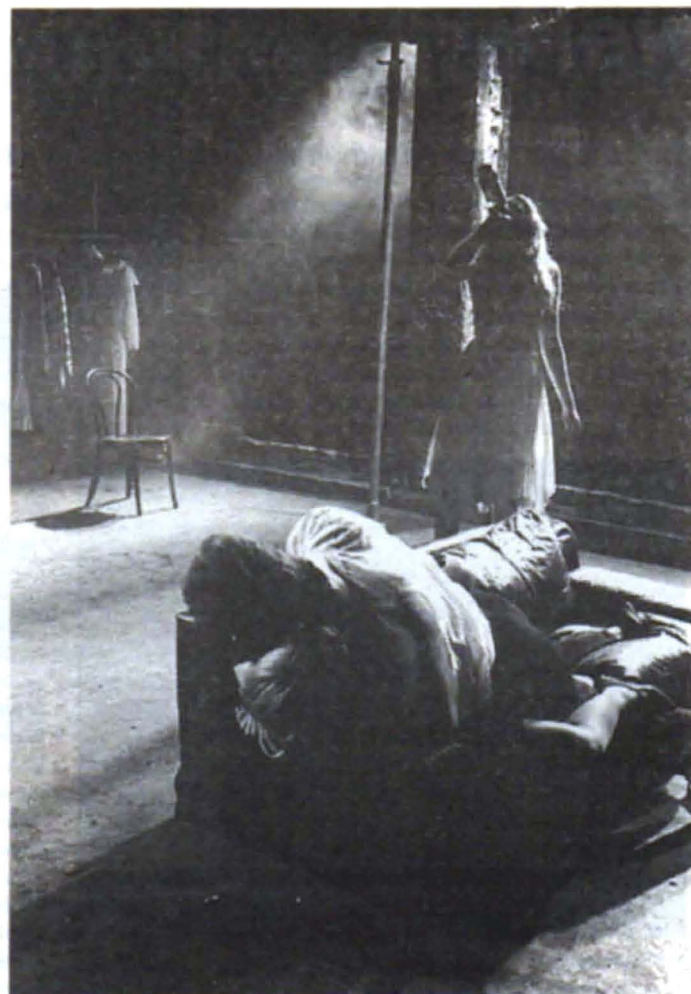
5. Mug Er De Gouden Tand ("Mosquito with the Golden Tooth") were a highlight. Their high octane performance *Co-Stars* was a triumph of chaos and highly skilled playing in a wickedly perceptive, satirical mode and what better subject to receive the lash of Dutch scorn than the trash electronic media. Loosely structured around the chat show format and with an appropriately grungy mise en scene the mosquito sinks its precious prong into the murky zone between 'reality' and the screen and manages to draw blood. The last twist comes with a dance solo based on the gestural language of a sequence from an episode of *Pot Black* which plays on three video screens placed behind the performer.

Virtuosity meets venom and the audience is left wanting more.

6. In *Andromache*, director Jerome Kriek revisits the heightened, closeted, white hot but somewhat overstated passions of Racine's version of the Greeks. He repositions all the angst for a postmodern sensibility by casting it with teenagers and setting it in an old warehouse filled with racks of clothes. In the playing space sit an old refrigerator filled with stubbies that are opened in gushing ejaculatory bursts every time sex is approached or avoided, and a beaten-up sofa on which negotiations take place, including one brutal nubile rape. The result of this mix is extraordinary. The regal passions of Racine are displayed as the immature posturings they so often are—and are thus, in a perverse way, grounded, brought down to earth. And conversely, the *Home and Away* laid-back teenage acting style (the show is subtitled "Een klassieke soap") is pushed to the limit to deal with the levels of trauma that Racine forces upon it.

7. At the start of *Sur Place* by the mime group De Daders, director and conceptualiser Jan Langedijk enters carefully with cupped hands and pours water on the forestage edge of the tiny wooden, raked room built in the centre of the playing space. He enters the room and tries to settle somewhere within it—to sit, to stand, to lie, to arrive. He is unable to do so. His body is out of alignment with the dimensions of the space and the objects in it. On one level, the exaggerated perspective of the room makes him too large for it—a gross, clumsy human form in this Escher-like space of odd angles and carefully placed objects which have their precariously perfect positions but which once moved are forever out of kilter. In a growing panic of vertiginous complexity Langedijk and his two fellow mimists attempt to re-order the room. In long sequences of exchange, cupboard, chairs, table, bed, vases, flowers etc are passed from hand to hand only to end up surprisingly but predictably almost where they began, with enough changes to put the room and the people in it more and more at odds. And then just as one is beginning to wonder where this can go, the impossible happens. Someone falls through a wall and the wall flies up out of skew into the flies. Bit by bit the whole edifice detaches itself from its moorings and floats free, hovering like a suspended explosion above its base. Langedijk re-enters from the wings with cupped hands and pours water on the edge of the now bare wooden platform.

8. *Het Vieruurtje* by the Flemish group, Los Cojones Del Toro & Tristan finally defeated me. The unmentioned fact behind all of the above reviews is that neither of us speaks Dutch (or Flemish) so that the more dependent upon the spoken word a performance was for communication the less we understood it. *Co-Stars* had many words but the sheer dynamic between the performers and their interaction with the video technology allowed enough for its power to be transmitted. Unfortunately, that was not the case with Los Cojones. An impressively organised series of miked monologues with live musical accompaniment (the group consisted of



Andromache

Gijs Haak

seven musicians and seven actors—how do the Europeans afford such large ensembles?), the piece was a visually static and verbally dense satire on the power politics of the war machine. It was based on the writings of the French absurdist Boris Vian. And beyond that I can say little, apart from the fact that the Dutch audience seemed as bemused as I was.

9. Finally and climactically, on a circular stage in a huge auditorium, ten solo contestants—finalists chosen from a series of preliminary heats—competed for the title of "Best Body Act". The atmosphere was charged, the audience bursting with expectation. The pieces were no more than ten minutes long, and varied enormously. About half of them were 15-17 year old bimbos and 17-19 year old bumboys performing quasi-erotic jazz dance numbers with costume supported themes ('the midnight cat', 'the harem boy', 'the slave virgin' etc). These were increasingly less interesting as the night progressed (unless you were as stoned as the guys behind me) but they culminated in a wonderful act of Dutch iconoclasm. A young woman in period dress and head attire, looking like a figure from a Rembrandt portrait proceeded to jump non stop for ten minutes to a piece of pop music until she streamed with sweat; her head piece was knocked awry and her beautiful white dress constantly threatened to slip off her bare shoulders under its own weight. Set within these numbers were the performance art works. In one, a jock strapped young lad proceeded to let bowling balls fall onto his bare stomach from a great height as he lay straddled between two chrome steel gym horses with flames licking at his back from beneath. Another—my vote for the trip to New York first prize—began with a suit case deposited on stage by two burly stage hands. Out of this case (I kid you not) appeared a hand, then an arm; the case was zipped open and out stepped a young man who for ten minutes went through the most amazing array of contortions I have ever seen. This man was rubber: he could revolve his clasped hands 360 degrees around his body; he could hug himself from behind; he could do a backward somersault inside out. His act was fast and funny and cleverly constructed. The Melbourne Comedy Festival should snap him up. In a festival full of surprises, Ruben van Eyl, "The Plastic Man", was simply the most astonishing act of them all.

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Queer package tour

Performing Lines' Wendy Blacklock returns to Manchester

There's a plethora of Festivals across the world. At the last count there were 1300 listed by the Australian Centre of the International Theatre Institute. As an arts administrator one spends too many days cramming in performances, films, exhibitions. Is it to make up for no longer being a performer, I ask myself? Or is it the challenge of keeping abreast of the new, the innovative, the cutting-edge?



Azaria Universe

had been born in nearby Altrincham, and I had last played at the Manchester Opera House in the 70s, with Yootha Joyce and Brian Murphy in *George and Mildred*. My father couldn't wait to migrate to Australia and the less said about the *George and Mildred* tour the better.

This time it wasn't a play about suburban domesticity where all the laughs were pre-programmed. I was setting off like a North Shore June Allyson but the bags were full of stilts, tutus, point shoes and trapezes plus five boxes of projectors and a large blow up love-heart. With me was a 'package' of Australian artists, initially the outcome of a collaboration between IQUN and The Performance Space, Sydney, but later receiving assistance from the Australia Council, The Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras, the British Council and Arts 21 Victoria. I believe it is the first time a package of gay and lesbian work has toured overseas, but it was so successful it certainly won't be the last.

And what a party it turned out to be. There was Club Swing in *Appetite*, building on their very successful season at the 1995 Edinburgh Fringe, where a Tory City

Councillor had called them "a dirty minded disgrace". The tongue in cheek show is billed as a spectacular feast of food, sex and orgasmic trapeze, but I think the raincoated gentlemen who I noticed positioned themselves in the front row on opening night were disappointed. Not a naked bod in sight, but some fantastic aerial work from the four clever ex-Circus Oz ladies and loads of laughs.

Then there was William Yang returning with the now famous photographic monologue *Sadness*. William had played Manchester after his successful London season at the London International Festival of Theatre last June, and had been invited to do several more performances while also doing a residency with British-Chinese choreographer Edwin Lung.

Last, there were the four cLUB bENT artists who joined a selection of British cabaret acts, playing to capacity houses. The British artists changed every performance and so did the running order. This kept Derek Porter, Azaria Universe (who customs officials quaintly referred to as Miss Universe, as they confiscated her toy cowboy gun), Dean Walsh and Moira Finucane on their proverbial toes. It was interesting to watch the different styles of work as the Australians tended towards performance art while the English opted for stand-up comedy.

The Festival ran for three weeks with international performers from Israel, Germany, and the USA, twelve world premieres and another six British premieres among the fifty events. It was exciting to see the first gay show ever presented in Israel; a series of short stories revealing the intimate details and dilemmas of Israeli life in and out

of the closet. Lois Weaver (of *Split Britches* fame) followed in her first solo show, mapping femininity and other natural disasters. Lois also does a mean reverse strip which proved to be a good opening for the second half of cLUB bENT.

The venues were theatres, art galleries and clubs conveniently located in Manchester's 'gay village' in the city centre. Through the centre runs the Rochdale Canal and this had been used by artists to show their creations of something new made from remains of the past: bridges, derelict buildings and landscaped areas had been transformed, and not only was this displayed on guided tours but the Canal was also the venue for the Festival finale.

Billed as a waterborne folly it was Manchester's answer to The Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras parade. Everyone enjoyed themselves tremendously and didn't seem to notice that it was raining; I felt it churlish to mention it or point out that a good dose of Harpic would have improved the Canal. I was, after all a visitor and had been very privileged to see some 20 shows, meet dozens of interesting artists and be there to co-ordinate and publicise the Australians.

My only regret was I wasn't able to do the drag king workshop—that could have changed my life. June Allyson does Charlie Chaplin.

Wendy Blacklock is the General Manager of Performing Lines, a company subsidised by the Australia Council to tour innovative Australian work nationally and internationally.

Playing away

Australia's *It's Queer Up North* performers talk to Barbara Karpinski

Filth and frivolity often gets you a long way, and for four cLUB bENT performers, all the way to Great Britain. In May, Azaria Universe, Derek Porter, Dean Walsh and Moira Finucane [directed by Jacqui Smith], travelled to Manchester's *It's Queer Up North Festival* and also to shows in London and Brighton. But how long does overseas fame really last for our home grown talent? Was *Queer Up North* just a momentary piece of glory before a return home to the bills and banality, or has a real and lasting cultural interchange been established?

Majestic diva, Moira Finucane comments, "The Australian work was very strong. I was proud to be part of an incredibly strong team. The type of work that The Performance Space has taken risks on and promoted internationally is very physical and multi-layered...The English work was much more cabaret-ish and verbal".

There are rumours afoot that some of the British Performers will come here for cLUB bENT 97. Can cLUB bENT's distinctive brand of off-the-wall art forms and askew cultural persuasions become a world-wide affair without losing its experimental edge? According to dancer from the dark side, Derek Porter, "It's called *Queer Up North*, but I still found it more mainstream oriented than our queer events. He remarked that some of the British shows dealt with "pretty run-of-the mill issues" like "demystifying gay culture, a drag queen's search for love, a stripper who can lipsynch and sing. I feel some of us went beyond what queer was expected to be".

Porter's portrayal of a character's chaotic change from gender dysphoric male to cat woman left London audiences in eerie silence. "Although they were hard to tame through some of the performances, there was a sinister silence through *Misfit*", he said

Porter's work explores the territory of androgyny in a style redolent of German cabaret. "I think transgenderism is still taboo," says Porter. "Transgender performance is different to drag. We are not popping on a frock and being frivolous."

Porter alludes to a sense of bleakness in postmodern Manchester, comparing it to postwar Berlin. "Every time I come back from o/s, my desire to be in Sydney is even stronger. The grass always seems to be greener back

home each time...There are more opportunities for queer performance here", says Porter.

Daddy's boy, Dean Walsh, has created a new drag form called "muscular drag". Wanting to keep his suitcase light, he took to the British stage in nothing but his high heels. When Dean whispers that his heart belongs to "DDDDaddy", to whom is he speaking? "Daddy to me personally is this strange intangible kind of character", says Walsh. "He's not daddy necessarily, he's not the father. He is a taboo lover."



Dean Walsh

Ian T. Tilton

What is muscular drag? "You can hold your muscles around your bones", says Walsh. "It's almost like dressing the flesh. You can release that and become quite feline...I wanted the male body to be exposed without big throbbing cock...I'm breaking the stereotypical male thing." Naked, boldly, Walsh goes into a headstand. "You have the male bum being shown, the anus being shown, the very vulnerable part of the male body. I'm opening that as wide as I possibly can while

I have my thighs held in strong masculinity", says Walsh.

In *Hardware*, Walsh moves fluidly between masculine and feminine bodily forms, capturing a realm of lost innocence through his newly created drag form. But some gay British skinheads felt short changed by its powerful simplicity. "These guys came and saw a show and said to me later, 'You fucking Australians need to get off your angst ridden arse! What about *Priscilla*? Where is *Priscilla*? What are you trying to fucking show us...Wipe that fucking Australian smile off your face. You've got a big attitude, haven't you?'" There was indeed an expectation amongst a small section of the British gay community for all Australian gays to be glitterama, high camp drag queens.

Azaria Universe, described as a "good-time showgirl drag queen trashy slam silver screen scene bustler", did not make it back home with the rest of the troupe. In a fax from London, she wrote she's "...been watching shows and performing constantly, which is heavenly". She has been invited to perform at several clubs and festivals as well as work with companies in future events. "They have all been very supportive", says Universe. In Brighton, she was invited to perform in an old Music Hall "where drag queen DJ's play Suzi Quatro tracks". Universe describes the British experience as "a strange combination of exhaustion and adrenalin, an awesome performance cocktail".

A reviewer described "Ms Universe" in Manchester as "sans clothes, pubic hair and some might say, talent". Finucane says, "That response doesn't surprise me, because she's young, she's beautiful and her work is extremely physical". Azaria belongs to "another generation", says Finucane, who do not question their right to "get their gear off in gay abandon". There is still an out-dated attitude that naked women with shaved pubic hair are merely playing to the fantasies of men. When Universe brings you her love from high upon crudely bandaged stilts, there is passion and power in the air.

Was the satiric tradition of British culture reflected in the queer works? "They're taking the piss out of their own society even more than we do as Australians", says Porter. Finucane was enamoured with the intimacy of traditional British theatre. "There is something very celebratory about that old fashioned theatre that contemporary theatre doesn't do. You are immediately surrounded by a sense of importance and luxury. It's very

intimate and beautiful being part of the audience. The world that those old theatres create is a world in the same way that cLUB bENT creates. It's very human".

Barbara Karpinski is a filmmaker, writer, performer. She has written for Capital Q, Black and White, Blue and Filmnews.

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Dancing in the dark

Rachel Fensham braves the black holes of Next Wave's dance program

Next Wave—a festival of manifestoes, words not spoken and visions splendid—occupies a place in the nightworld. Time spent in the darkness of travelling, waiting and watching. I sit until the shape-shifters emerge and shake, blur and stop; this nocturnal in-and-out is unsettling. It is meant to be.

When the organisers of Melbourne's biennial festival of young and emerging artists (born-again from a youth arts event) invited proposals for their performance program, apart from Brisbane's Kooemba Jdarra (not covered here), they ended up with dance collaborations. So my black nights were spent in the following black holes.

It began with *Character X*, asking its audience: "What sort of information do you need to make a place for something to happen?" (program notes). A character without narrative is a distinct possibility (let's not forget Pirandello) but what does a character "without context and meaning" look like? When five women arrive in Shelley Lasica's alien nowhere, they have become silver clones—I think of them as lunar worms—twisting through the hips a half turn and a hold. Later, when dressed in the extravagant pink and purple fake fur of designer Kathy Temin, they travel as a protean clump before becoming a series of jesters, clowning in bonnets, boas and booties. The comic possibilities of this costume disrupt the previously languorous dancing but I would have liked more. Between desultory solos and nurturing group exercises, the collective dynamic loses energy with the sparkling exception of Lasica and Sandra Parker becoming a polyp—a jelly of bodies cowering and covering itself with tentacular limbs. *Character X* evokes a longing for a vaguely feminine utopia.

In Josie Daw's *Downloading* the dance floor is an archaeological site; a place for

retrieving knowledges embedded in books as well as the formal logics of gestural repetition. The set is littered with piles and platforms of books, frames and pedestals of books and a wide armchair lovingly made of books. The performers traverse with their noses pressed to the page; silhouettes of steps become bookmarks; a Chinese whisper of personal signatures coils its way around the bindings; a duel is fought with books as swords. Codes accumulate in the clash of dance styles, literal objects and improvised sound but the messages don't transfer from one labouring body to another spectating.

At the door of *Help—Multi-Dimensional Performance Enhancer*, a lady in fluorescent tights gives me my 3D glasses and invites me to relax. Super-saturated landscapes illuminate horned androids whose plastic skins slide through fern gullies, oceans and psychedelia. There is a powerfully receding doorway—a gate into, a hallway, a courtyard, a corridor whose shadows hover at the edge of perception. These dancers are crystalline, bubbles of physical energy whose outlines dissolve into colour. For Cazerine Barry and Tao Weis et al 'the magnet of curiosity' resides in the kinetic arts of technology absorbing human materiality. In a majestic emerald rainforest where trees hover and glow, lines become zigzag and bodies climb into the picture. A harmonising of powers that reproduces another utopian, if more cosmic, vision.

I don't know whether *Grind* is quite the word for the onslaught of raw adolescent energy generated by Stompin Youth Dance Company in the concrete bowels of a decommissioned power station. This was the only performance one might seriously label 'youth' and for the two teenage girls accompanying me it was the ultimate expression of the desire to dance. Thirty blue and red corpuscles bump against walls



Help at the Gasworks Theatre

and slink through bursting arteries of human movement. The non-stop gang rhythms of running, shaking, posing, moshing, flipping, looking-in or looking-out displayed only passion and commitment. Jerril Rechter, the Launceston choreographer/co-ordinator has achieved the remarkable feat of disciplining techno culture for a refreshingly ordinary group of kids—guys in glasses, girls of all shapes and sizes—into an aesthetic event whose terrifying sexuality you can't help but latch on to, even if it does nearly land in your lap.

By way of contrast, *Rub the Angel* is an ethereal world of scrim and pale tarquette; suspended in a harness is Barbie, of blond hair and stiffened limbs. A bonanza of visual images melt into a wrap-around of clouds, waves and sunsets—nature still a favourite signifier of transcendence. The mannequin rocks back and forth until she drops close enough to the floor to begin crawling. The

video shows a child's nursery looking out from her cot, the arms reaching towards her, the handle of the closing door. The girl lets us know she wants to fly and fly she does, over the rooftops, over suburbia, into the playground where children throw tan bark at her, fleeing down an avenue of trees until nothing. Her hair is pulled off and she is flesh-coloured plastic all over. Human semblance gone, she jerks and slaps herself, fingers up her crotch, hand in mouth, legs pulled apart, doll's arms bent at the elbows, fondling and pushing hands away. A mother's skirt and hands appear reaching towards her and a blood-red light absorbs the image of her bed. Julia McDonald calls her dance-image-making 'flight paths' in which she wants to set her audience free with a metamorphosis. And whilst I travelled with this toy 'angel' into her bad dreams and fantasies—red velvet theatre seats, fairgrounds and knights in shining armour—something very strange happened when she decided there was nothing more to fear. From under the mat arrived a Man, who unwrapped her real hair, caressed her, climbed up ladders into the sky with her, fell into bed with her and then walked into the sunset with her. With Her, 'growing up' was a Hollywood romance and not the sordid terror of the girl-doll after all.

Black coat, cold night, black cat, night cat—we leave Next Wave and go for a drink where another dance event is happening, some Deakin graduates have initiated their own season in a night club. *Mafiosi* inhabit the underworld of violence and late-night bars, drinking and fast foot-work; watching the clock and greasing the palms. The five female gangsters enter—dropped shoulders, a curve in the lower spine, a shuffling walk—and move to the bar. There is the ritual of sitting down—slide the head to check out the room; brush off the stool, step to one side; bend back and land on the seat, lean on the counter, skol the drink, slide the head and scan the room again, laugh—it's their world. We sip red wine in the low lights and keep our eyes on the spiders crossing the floor. Has all this dance really been dangerous?

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Liminal spaces of becoming

Anna Dzenis encounters art and technology at Next Wave



Keith Piper, *Surveillances (Tagging the Other)* 1993

Art, which was previously so concerned with a finite product, a composed and ordered outcome, an aesthetic finality, a resolution or conclusion, reflecting a ready-made reality, is now almost totally preoccupied with processes of emergence and of coming-into-being.

Roy Ascott *Communications and Consciousness in the Cyberspace*

For some time now, there has been a shift taking place in art from object to process, from the tangible to the phantasmic. The observer of art is now in the centre of the creative process, not at the periphery looking in. Art is no longer a window onto the world but a doorway through which the observer enters a world of interaction and transformation. All of this raises many critical, theoretical and aesthetic questions. And it is these questions which were foregrounded by the 1996 Next Wave Festival's Art and Technology program. The theme of the festival's third biennial gathering of national and international work in Melbourne was 'perception and perspective'.

Curator Margaret Traill described this year's program as having shifted the focus from 'means' to 'meaning':

We no longer feel we have to wave the flag for the media: it's obvious computers have arrived and they're entering mainstream culture and we no longer have to say it's art. Now we have to say what sort of art is it? What does the art do? Hence, 'perception and perspective': we're saying it's not so much how the things are made ie computer generated, but what they do, how they affect our perception, and therefore how they affect our perspectives on the world, the values we have, the judgements we make...we're looking at what impact technologies have on the way people see the world and think about it, and therefore act in the world.

Five linked but quite individual exhibitions were spread across five different gallery spaces in Melbourne. The major exhibition of the program *Perception and Perspective* occupied the Murdoch court in the National Gallery of Victoria. The public were able to interact with Leon Cmielewski and Josephine Starrs' *User Unfriendly Interface*, a program designed to make you mistrust computers; step around Natasha Dwyer's bathroom scales as if they were stepping stones and follow the text directions they proffered; and be overwhelmed by Czaba Szamosy's commanding digitally collaged mural *Procumbere (and when you tell lies an angel dies)* dissolving, through its combination of image fragments, different moments in the history of art. John Tonkin's *Elective Physiognomies* used the face as a site to compare the enlightenment science of physiognomy and modern genetic research, generating multiple facial forms as still images and in an interactive program. Whereas for Keith Piper's *Surveillances (Tagging the Other)*—a 4 monitor video installation with 35mm slides—faces provided a target onto which the language, motifs and forms of surveillance technology could be layered. Patricia Piccinini's work was to be found in two gallery spaces. *Love me love my Lump* (digiprint photograph) is part of The Mutant

Genome Project series (TMGP)—an ongoing work discussing issues surrounding physical difference, as seen through the lens of genetic science and the Human Genome Initiative—a world-wide scientific project dedicated to cataloguing human genetic material with a view to being able to change it. The designer baby proposed by the TMGP corporation is called LUMP (Lifeform with Unevolved Mutant Properties). It has been genetically designed for maximum efficiency—disease free, intelligent, long living. Its striking garish plasticity in its many mutations confronts our very humanity.

Nothing Natural in the Basement Gallery exhibited the work of four artists who are all exploring the body in relation to popular culture's new technologies of games, interactivity, advertising and merchandising. Patricia Piccinini's images show Sophie Lee in pop art dream landscapes cradling her LUMP. Ian Haig's *Mighty Morphing Muscle Men* are digitally morphing figures produced in response to a hideously obsessive body culture. Haig's work conceives a de-evolution of the body at that very moment when modern medicine enables us to be artificially enhanced. Martine Corompt's *Activity Station* forms part of her *cute machine* project which examines our culture's obsessions with 'cute iconography' in relation to that imperative of 'user-friendly' which is currently determining developments in computer technology. Christopher Langton's *Ecowalker* is a hypothetical exercise machine—an art work which resembles a consumer item.

Ruins in Reverse at the RMIT gallery was a show conceived by curator Susan Fereday to tackle the relationship between art and architecture; in particular the predicament faced by art within the new gallery. In her catalogue essay, Fereday states:

(there) are spaces which direct attention to the present moment of exhibition before awareness of the gallery, while RMIT gallery is visible before anything else it contains or displays.

Thirteen artists were asked to contribute sculptural works in response to the space, and their mixed mediums included masonite, MDF, cardboard, concrete, vinyl, lurex and fake fur. Work varied from Chris Ulbrick's sound piece which incorporated the building's airconditioning, to Lauren Berkowitz's mountain of polystyrene fruit boxes stuffed into a corner, to Chris Langton's oversized PVC inflatables which drew attention to the confusing perspectives.

Issues of perspective in the show at Gallery 101—*Distant Relations*—were concerned with historical, temporal and spatial distances. Greg Malloyn's work tried to transcend time and specific cultural differences by evoking universal humanistic ideals such as democracy and beauty in his series based on Hellenistic art. Hou Leong's latest project is a series of digitally manipulated landscapes which collage clichéd geographical icons of Australian and Asian cultural identity into hallucinatory multicultural spaces. Heather Fernon, also working in allegorical mode, based her work on the Cerberus, the old warship which lies rusting in Half-Moon Bay. Its uneasy status as a deteriorating historical icon foregrounds our

own difficult relationship to the past as well as providing a focus for Fernon's own concerns about new technologies.

The exhibition that engaged me most was *Lumens 3* at the Centre for Contemporary Photography where three artists investigated light—the essence of their practice—as a kind of sublime metaphor in photographic processes. Dan Armstrong's installation *Displacement* deconstructed the lightbox to its component parts and these lined the walls and the floors of the gallery space. Amongst the steel frames and phosphorescent tubes I found a celluloid fragment of a face, losing its definition, strangely moving. Marion Harper's installation *Default* charted another kind of dematerialisation in bringing the underground to the surface. White moulded plastic boulders were strewn about the gallery; boulders

appeared in negative, CAD animated sequences projected across a curved screen; and lightboxes displayed vividly coloured gravity maps of underground forms. James Verdon's installation *Keening* was the most evocative—a floorplan of a 50s Australian rural cottage was drawn on to the gallery floor and its corridors were littered with memories. Window frames and photographic easels further reframed flashes from the past—a child on a swing, a certificate of merit, entry tickets, recalling events, textures and people, spasmodically illuminated by lightning flashes sparking behind strips of celluloid.

Be Your Best, 2nd Next Wave Artech Symposium provided a forum where practitioners, theorists and the public could meet and address many of the questions raised by the work in these exhibitions. It is clear there is much to be said. Just as the relationship between art and technology occupies a liminal space of becoming, more questions are raised than can be answered; this is evidence that the debate and the work it generates is vitally alive.

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Everything and nothing

David Cross surveys Next Wave's Visual Arts program

Melbourne's 1996 Next Wave Festival has again proved that it's serious about the visual arts. Unlike its counterparts the Melbourne International and Fringe Festivals, Next Wave has demonstrated an ongoing commitment to promoting and showcasing the work of young Australian artists and curators. This is not to be taken lightly when one considers the artistic philosophy of Victoria's Premier and art convert Jeff Kennett who in a recent interview professed that his vision for young artists was for them to meander the Southbank arts precinct as 'bohemians'. Fortunately Next Wave displayed no evidence of Brett Whitely try-hards executing tortured plein-air panoramas of Melbourne. Instead we were treated to a mixed bag of challenging, as well as tired, conceptually based art that attempted to do something interesting within an overly general theme.

West Space's *Working in Collaboration* project involved small groups of artists and non-artists working closely together to construct and exhibit installations each week for four weeks. This program sought to highlight the possibilities of education as a fluid non-prescriptive and subjective state. Although the results were not particularly startling, the emphasis on process and multi-skilling made for some interesting ideas. Gabrielle Carter, Tim Craker and Anthony Nelligan assembled their allocated materials to form the interior of a veterinary clinic complete with chemical stench and ridiculous animal sounds. Their dysfunctional sanitary environment using text around the walls seemed a grungier take on LA performance artist Bob Flanagan's installation, *Visiting Hours*. Annette Douglass, Josie Dujmovic, Fiona Harrison and Simone Slee extended the conceptual bent of the project by wrapping materials from three former shows into a

large wall sculpture. Again the object itself appeared provisional and was contingent upon the conceptual development of the entire project.

See *Spot Run* at Temple Gallery appeared to suggest that younger artists are no longer influenced by conventional postmodern theory. Rather than sourcing French theory to make art of slippery meanings, seven artists confessed their debt to two home grown theorists—John and Betty, featured in that seminal text for primary school *The Earliest Reader for the Little Ones*. For many, John and Betty were pioneering figures in the practices of Dematerialisation and Conceptual Art in Australia. Victoria Cattoni paid homage to their scatter art with her floor piece *Daily Mess* pushing detritus in all



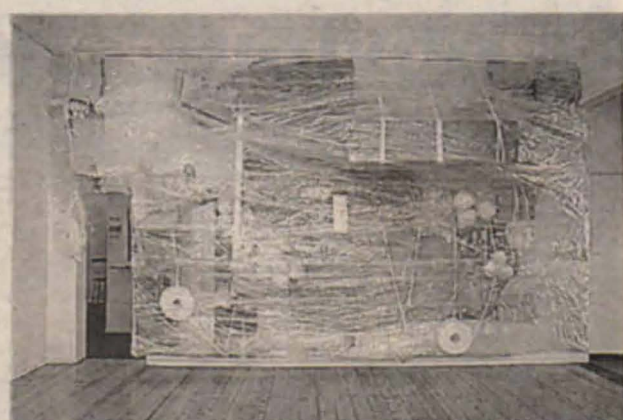
Stephen Haley, *Formation (See)* 1996

directions. Anna White quoted their "matter-of-fact nature" with her monochrome abstractions and Stephen Haley collapsed the modernist logic of "Betty can run-John can run" with his mirrored piece *Formation*.

A more highbrow Australian icon was the focus of *Chinoiserie* at Sutton Gallery. Max Meldrum's early 20th century painting of the same name was 'copied' by students from a number of Melbourne art schools. The purpose of this, according to curators Kim Donaldson and Jane Trengrove was to see what would be revealed, lost and found. Little was revealed except that some students could belt out a reasonable likeness and that most remained true to the original. More interesting were the catalogue statements, one of which Easton, lambasted the original for the model's pose as "offensive Chinoiserie had the bourgeois amidst a psychedelic background in an ode to 90s style motifs".

The glamour show of the festival was *Ruins in Reverse* at RMIT's newly refurbished Storey Hall Gallery. Curator Susan Fereday invited 13 well known artists to respond, or more accurately compete against, Ashton Raggatt McDougall's foray into the world of architectural excess. In an hysterical reaction to the white cube, the architects have designed a gallery that is overloaded with colour, jagged architectural embellishments, and semiotic references. In their attempts at an unassailable building, the architects have relegated its function as art gallery to a peripheral position.

Most of the work in *Ruins in Reverse*, although clearly engaging with the space, seemed somehow quaint and overwhelmed. Subtle statements by Colin Duncan and Adam Boyd struggled for attention. Even more maximal pieces such as



Annette Douglass, Simone Slee, Josie Dujmovic, Fiona Harrison
Working in Collaboration 1996

Deborah Ostrow's brothel photographs which drew a wry comparison with Storey Hall and Constanze Zikos' Glo-mesh icon, could not compete in the gaudy stakes. The most successful work eschewed the possibilities of colour or surface and focused instead on scale and sound. Lauren Berkowitz *upped the ante* by totally covering a corner of the space in polystyrene crates thereby disguising the room's interior. Rose Nolan brilliantly down-scaled her installation in order to reveal the pretentious window trappings and seat at the other end of the same space. And Chris Ulbrich's *Dissolves* cleverly taunted the building by percolating white noise.

Education is a thoroughly solid premise for a government funded festival devoted to the work of new and emerging artists. The trouble is it's so general and obvious that it encapsulates everything and nothing. The artists in this year's Next Wave Festival Visual Arts Program have manoeuvred around this problem by either exploring the conceptual possibilities of collaboration and dialogue or by ignoring the theme altogether. Both responses produced some lively work with Melbourne's alternative art spaces—Temple, Platform and Westspace once again leading the way.

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As obvious and forgettable as gravity

Eleanor Brickhill looks at bodies and tradition at Green Mill

Susan Leigh Foster recently published an essay *Choreographing History* in which she contemplates the intimate partnership between writing and moving bodies which lies at the foundations of revealed history, both inscribers of and inscribed by culture. Many performances at World Dance '96 conference *New Dance From Old Cultures* vividly showed that dancers are historical bodies, people whose traditions are deeply etched in their own present personal mobility. Sometimes however, there was an uneasy relationship between individual dancers and the traditions they sought to acknowledge. It's not as if dancers slide effortlessly through time just by an act of will. More often there is difficulty and loss in the passage. More formal, choreographed references to older traditions sometimes seemed laboured, unformed, or superficial.

Performances by two groups of Aboriginal artists, Bangarra Dance Theatre (*Ochres*) and the Yawalyu Women of Lajamanu (Tracks Dance Collective, *The Opportunity of Distance*) threw into relief this problematic relationship. We watched the Yawalyu Women in a congenial group, painting each other's bodies, in slow preparation. Unhurriedly, they shuffled through short phrases of small hitched jumps, their feet shifting as if through dust, not over bare floor boards. They often broke the passages while waiting for each other or the accompanying chants to begin. I had an unusual feeling of never having seen this before, something genuinely 'authentic', unlike my experience of *Ochres*. The two groups seem engaged in very different enterprises.

You might imagine the dancers' movement in *Ochres* being like an archaeological reconstruction. Tiny washed and polished fragments of material arranged in order, then plastered together with an expanse of late 20th century rendering. The dancers' bodies bear no similarity to those of the Yawalyu Women, having cultivated all the nuances of western dance deportment, and seem like observers of the culture from which the fragments come. Any desire for authenticity on our part could only be hung uneasily on the central *Ochres* Spirit character, played by Djakapurra Munyarryun who carried the weight of the piece. His cultural responsibility seemed onerous, unlike that of the Yawalyu Women.



Martinus Miroto performing *Penumbra and Incarnation*

Two forums for Asian Pacific performers included International Soloists (Korean Nam Jeong-Ho, Japanese Kazuko Takemoto, Indonesian Martinus Miroto and Australian Sue Healey) and Showcase, highlighting work from six tertiary dance schools, three white Australian, one black Australian, one from Hong Kong and one from Taiwan. If it was momentarily unclear

whether the institutions' works were selected for their differences or similarities (perhaps in some ill-conceived gesture towards multicultural exchange), the fairly blah choreography seemed indisputably a product of identically constructed European syllabuses. It produced a bland, easily practised, homogenised, institutional kind of dance, which managed to asphyxiate most cultural differences.

The four solos I saw out of six from the International Soloists moved in another direction. Four dancers' individual histories claimed our focus, their bodies telling very different stories of cultural affiliation and personal growth. Takemoto's *Peace of Mind* and Healey's *Zella* were both conceived through deeply excavated remembering. Healey's story of three women, different generations, grew from past to present, her light physical style slipping easily from there to here. "My muscles were talking in tongues, my cells thinking, my skin remembering about something it knew a long time ago..." Takemoto's trajectory was less linear, moving deliberately, her thoughts visible



Lily Nungarrayi Hargraves, Liddy Miller Nampinjinpa and July Napaljarri Waller (Lajamanu School) celebrating Aboriginal Day

and palpable, as she seemed to painstakingly carve herself out of the dense cultural air she breathed. She defined herself as poised, wired, subtle, and very clear. Nam Jeong-Ho's *Kasiri* was made of softer stuff, a little fog-bound and drifting, but still there was a sense of a journey somewhere, small, inconsequential jobs done, people changing, and time passing. In Miroto's *Penumbra*, change was more galvanic. With tiny steps, his body swayed, strong and controlled, to a drum beat. Finger and hand gestures had an undulating, spider-like intensity. His feet and legs seemed deeply rooted in the ground. He removed a mask to reveal his own fragile being, but the mask retained its independent persona, something to be reckoned with.

I remember Danceworks' *Descansos*—resting places as visually stark, and much more than a simple duet (Helen Herbertson and Trevor Patrick). The work created a profound sense of place, given body and depth by the very specifically sculpted and tiered areas. The audience looked down into a dark field where thoughts floated, isolated, disembodied; across a gap into a dim room where a presence wandered. The light fell in certain special ways, passing headlights through a window, sharp-edged slabs lying like a grave, oblique beams, isolated pools perhaps falling on the slow small shifts in a single dancer's face or body. Together with lighting designer Ben Cobham, and sculptor Simon Barley, Jenny Kemp has distilled these rarefied images, waking dreams live in these places of meditation.

The imagery of Douglas Wright's *Buried Venus* is at first strong and startling, the dancers conveying a pace and tone at once fluid, plaintive, passionate and dangerous. They build a kind of visual anthology of human relationships with many images



Trevor Patrick and Helen Herbertson of Danceworks performing *Descansos*

David B. Simmonds

from other times and other dances. But eventually the theme falls apart under the weight of jumbled associations.

Sexed—Legitimate Images by Bryan Smith also piles up images, ubiquitous and highly cultivated, drawn from every Hollywood movie, soapie and American nightclub fantasy you can think of. Shelley Lasica pouts, draws, and saunters, long-legged and red lipped, across the stage, dragging classic *Monroe/Melrose Place* lines in her wake. In the dimly lit territory behind the scrim, a chorus line of disco dolls

dance with the demeanour and dress expected at every dance club in town. *Sexed* says our humanness, from the most

profound and fundamental expressions of love and intimacy, is allowed to exist only via narrowly defined precepts formed by the glossed and fired imaginations of a few image-makers. But these legitimate images risk creating the same dead-endedness and predictability which Smith seeks to expose. Unless you already know Smith's agenda, his commentary might be hard to decipher.

There were many other performances in the Green Mill program, some 'successful', others not. But all of them together illuminate us as a cultural species, a fact which is simultaneously as obvious and as forgettable as gravity. Sometimes, however, we are fortunate enough to notice that our perception of reality, even co-existent different realities, our capacity to believe certain things and not others, our judgements, even who and what we love, are all effected through an accumulation of cultural images and texting, from histories present and past, remembered and imagined.

Green Mill Project, Melbourne, July 1-20, 1996



Marilyn Opperman

Liverpool Migrant Resource Centre, which resources the publishers of the quarterly multicultural magazine, *Ambitious Friends*, has received some extra funding from the Community Cultural Development Fund and the NSW Ministry for the Arts to publish a 1997 women and the arts calendar, to be launched at the Museum of Sydney in October. The calendar, designed by the Multicultural Arts project team which includes Arts Officer Rosarela Meza, Project Officer Mira Martic and photographer-visual artist Victor Cabello, showcases over 30 female artists working in a range of art forms chosen from the recommendations of multicultural arts officers statewide. Included are prominent as well as up-and-coming artists some of whom may be well-known in the city while others are better known outside it. The calendar flips from dancers Suanne Williams and Bernadette Walong to El Duende Flamenco Company; from Chinese opera singer Shu-Chen Yu to blues and folk singers Trude Aspling and Jeannie Lewis; visual artist Judy Watson, designer of the striking floor installations at the Casula Powerhouse and more recently at Liverpool Library, is followed by Marilyn Opperman, visual artist and co-ordinator of the community arts program at Liverpool and Bankstown Hospitals. There's film-maker Pauline Chan, puppeteer Maddy Slabacu, dancer Padma Menon, company Gente en Teatro and many more. For the director of the project, Rosarela Meza, choosing

from the possible range of artists has been difficult. For her, although ethnicity will always be an important part of an artist's work, it's important that we move away from tokenism and maintaining ethno-specific groups without any consideration of the context and quality of that work. The calendar showcases a small selection of the large number of highly skilled women who are now contributing to Australia's contemporary culture. The trick has been to squeeze in as many as possible. As well as the major photographs, the calendar will feature nine other artists, including performer-writers Anna Maria Monticelli and Stavroula (*A Coma Is Not A Full Stop*), Lucia Salinas Briones filmmaker and cultural attaché to the Chilean Embassy, photographer Effie Alexakis, painter Stephanie Jakovac from Albury and, hopefully, Notoriuz Sistaz (rappers from Death Defying Theatre's *HipHopera*). As well there'll be helpful information on arts resources, funding organisations and forthcoming events. For Rosarela Meza the latter has been the most difficult information to gather for the calendar. Multicultural arts is still in a precarious position in Australia and most individual artists, companies and events organisers are not in a position to plan very far ahead. To get your life in order and celebrate the achievements of women in the arts order your copy of the calendar by calling Rosarela or Mira on 02 9601 3788 fax: 02 9601 1398.

Watching the aliens

Eleanor Brickhill enrolls in Deborah Jowitt's Dance Critics' Workshop at Green Mill

Green Mill's World Dance '96 conference, *New Dance from Old Cultures* aimed for a broad agenda. Issues clustered, sometimes ambiguously, around the participants' endlessly diverse perspectives, and there was a variety of presentation formats in which to address them. A week of papers, hosted by the World Dance Alliance Congress and 20 days of performances largely by Pacific rim artists presented by Green Mill, fed the discussions and writing generated in the eight day Dance Critics' Workshop led by Deborah Jowitt, writer for *The Village Voice*.

An immediately interesting feature of the Dance Critics' Workshop was the attendance list, and speculation on the twists of fate which brought 14 professional Australian dance writers together, from the rear guard to the avant garde, to recognise some common ground. Yes, well, we know it's dance, but one might think the ground is likely to end pretty much right there, with the word barely uttered.

However, one couldn't forget Deborah's comment that, as a critic looking at a group of people on stage, it's important to know the difference between who you'd like to take home with you and who is the best dancer—a simple statement, but its complexity needs a little unpacking. We discussed at length a slightly contentious idea that the way you move is the way you write. I don't think she meant that someone who is physically limited is also limited in the way they write, but that one's perceptions and responses might have the same indigenous quality which, in terms of the etching of an image, whether by pen or gesture, imply a unified self.

She invited us to be anthropologists, watching a dance as an alien world, working out the rules. We toyed with notions of spontaneity, 'natural' movement, space, form, colour and tone, time and tempo, narrative, qualities, subtext. We made dances from word lists then found words to describe those dances. We wrote and read papers and criticised each other's work. Mostly, however, we played with language, grammar, sentence structure, and discussed (*ad nauseam*) the minutiae of giving a truthful, accurate and readable account of a work in 250 words.

Initially, focusing on these writing basics—punctuation, which words to use, and in what order—seemed surprising. Later, someone remarked, "By the end, I marvelled at the skill and delicacy needed to effectively communicate a movement with words. Simple in a way, but probably the strongest thing I've come away with." For me, it provided a close-up spot from which to examine the terrain, how the industry of journalism impinges on the field of dance, and the composite texture of the dance agenda in Australia. My own territory became clearer. For instance, continually reiterating how frightful, restrictive and terminally hierarchical the ballet world is, doesn't really go anywhere these days. Not that the issues have gone away, but more recent discussion has highlighted new complexities and one can become impatient with the simplistic rhetoric which tends to obscure other views of the terrain.

It also became clear that the philosophical and social issues some of us are so fond of analysing, like gender, embodiment and performance, seemed rather too grand to be apprehended directly

that week. Someone else commented that "[the workshops] reminded me to keep looking at the dancing, and while it's a really obvious statement to make, and one always does look at the dancing and write about it at least a bit, you can spend a lot of time writing not about the dancing but about everything else." By repeatedly coming back to the movement together with the mechanics of language, inevitably you draw your material from those same philosophical streams. It was this focus on description which satisfied both the immediate language concerns of the group, and also provided philosophical fodder for those so inclined, functioning as a bridge to political poles, and an effective platform on which to discuss our endless diversity of direction and agenda.

Sally Gardner, in her paper *New Dance from Old Cultures: Of Memory and Forgetting*, discussed what might be old about the culture of modern dance, which has always valued "localised, highly specific, incommensurably different kinds of dancing...a genuine elaboration of [the] moving body in ways that seemed indigenous to it". An infant's polymorphous bodily experience is not erased during socialisation, but repressed. Her subtitle indicates a process of learning to dance, as bodies transmit sensibilities and skills one to another, from one culture to another, over time and distance. We bring to mind some movements and not others, practising the ones we remember to be part of the dance, forgetting others which don't seem to fit.

Similarly, our verbal descriptions are based on how and what we perceive and remember. That which escapes our attention, for whatever reason, still lurks somewhere, providing as we write a sense that the descriptive process is no trivial undertaking. Embedded within our remembering is not 'the' image of a dance but 'an' image of it, and includes conscious and unconscious choices about what feels important to emphasise or ignore. Recognising this allows a certain freedom because instead of writing from a hollow position of 'knower', a critic can drop that particular masquerade and adopt a more open ended, inviting and questioning stance.

Along with that, of course, we were continually brought back to the idea of accuracy of description, as if we should be writing towards some kind of objective reality. While we love the idea that our own subjective experience is gloriously and powerfully implicated in creating the reality of a work, somewhere along the line you can't help noticing that some words are consensually more accurate in describing a particular movement than others. So you look back at the dance, do another kind of reality check, ask yourself whether you have described the work as it is, or as you want it to be. Has your knowledge of the choreographer's honesty, seriousness, potential and situational restraints thrown a blanket over her possible errors of artistic judgement? Have you romanticised, sentimentalised an ideal? If so, what kind of disservice does this do to the general perception of the dance?

Nobody has ever come up to me and said "What (on earth) were you looking at when you saw that piece?" It's a question I asked myself and others quite seriously, and it's a profitable one provided the question itself is not meant or interpreted as a kind of personal challenge.

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Thinking through performance

Peta Tait on theatre/performance tensions in tertiary education

Australian artists using performance forms to explore current theoretical and cultural frameworks within a broadly defined category of theatrical performance would seem to be curiously under-represented within courses on Australian theatre. Debates about postmodernity, staging an embodied presence versus representing subjectivity, and the hybridisation of form, should be as commonplace among students of theatre as they are among performance practitioners. This does not seem to be the case at present. While performance as a mode of academic research is extensively discussed by theatre academics without being widely practised, its connection to existing performance practice seems tenuous. Is it acceptable for the marginalisation of contemporary Australian performance forms to be justified with claims of competing interests, prescriptive courses and/or a lack of resources? A decade of landmark performance works by, for example, Sydney Front, Open City or Jenny Kemp, indicate that an Australian genre of non-narrative collaborative texts orientated to visual imagery is well-established and merits orthodox academic study of its ideas. Importantly, these works have not sprung up in isolation but have evolved out of the preceding twenty years of innovations in Australian theatre. Moreover, practitioners influence each other through their work. Academic approaches should be leading the effort to trace the continuities of this intellectual movement, its interconnections, its national and international contexts in order to find out why these particular developments have happened. The theoretical implications of performance forms must be addressed if the study of theatre is to remain connected to contemporary intellectual practice.

Admittedly, the study of theatre in most Australian academic institutions has only recently emerged from its subordinate position within English departments as 'drama', which may partly explain the continuing over-reliance on the written play in courses on theatre. The inclusion of contemporary plays from outside the male-dominated canon is even more recent. But conventional models of theatre-making that focus on notions of 'craft' rather than philosophical frameworks predominate even in workshop-based courses and in the academic analysis of theatrical (unwritten) texts. The work of Australian performance practitioners is largely studied as an ad hoc consequence of an individual lecturer's interests and exposure to this work rather than as a vital field in theatre curricula. An invitation for a performance practitioner to talk about their work, or student reviews of a production can hardly redress this imbalance. Why is the conceptual work of Australian performance marginalised in academic courses? Is this because such work is deemed geographically localised and even venue-specific?

While practitioners operate within specialised theoretical frameworks, exploring complex philosophies and social beliefs (not issues), students are more likely to be familiar with, for example, the approaches of literary or feminist theory to the text. These derive from discourses outside performance which can be grafted onto written critiques of an innovative production. Despite the conjunction of cultural discourses, the ways in which philosophical ideas might have already been reinterpreted by practitioners through the performance medium is overlooked. This is not to denigrate the position of the literary reader but to point out that it is not interchangeable with that of the performance spectator and to question why processes from

other disciplines dominate the study of philosophical discourses in theatre. This sets up an anomalous schism in theatrical study where most students are to some extent also semi-practitioners in that they engage in the making of theatre. Theoretical understandings need to be developed within the context of their related Australian milieu and, if possible, explored via the performative modes which generate the work.

Certainly, in the history of theatre, the theoretical approaches of key practitioners from Meyerhold to Grotowski are routinely consulted; many of these artists, it should be noted, worked in localised and venue-specific contexts. The precedent for studying the approach of an informed practitioner, therefore, is embedded in the theatre discipline. But the practice of students recreating performance in particular modes remains largely historical. It appears that the theoretical explorations of Australian performance practitioners might only become valued when they become 'history'.

Is the problematic position of recent Australian performance in theatre study, in part, attributable to the way its practices subvert the paradigm of theatre? It might be argued that performance which takes place in 'real time' sabotages the accumulation of spectatorial habits and cultural memories. Theatre, however, repeatedly reproduces in the present the known text which has been written in the past. If twentieth-century avant-garde works also evoked the past through their rejection of it, forms which use postmodern referencing assume a knowledge of 'past' that remains fundamentally theatrical. Perhaps the forms produced by contemporary performance remain contentious because, for example, site-specific work does not clearly mark the performer and is perceived to happen in the moment. Similarly, works which reverse the roles of spectator and performer are specific to that performance rather than merging into a generalised predictable theatrical experience. Does the paradoxical immediacy of forms of recent performance confuse its study? Performance that plays with time and revokes the boundaries between staged and actual assumes the appearance of a continuous present at least for the spectator. Yet from the perspective of practitioners, it remains a rehearsed process developed from within past experiences. This deliberately constructed disjuncture between the experience of the practitioner and that of the spectator is one of a number of entry points for studying the production of meaning in performance forms. Without a sense of what has passed, knowledge from the present will stall and the achievements of a generation of Australian performance groups will be lost.

Last year at the US Association for Theatre in Higher Education Conference, I witnessed the horrified reactions of a number of North American academics to Richard Schechner's proposal (*The Drama Review*, vol. 39, 1995) that hundreds of theatre departments in North American universities should be replaced by Performance Studies departments of which there are currently two. Schechner's argument is that US Theatre departments are misleading students by training them for nonexistent opportunities to work professionally. Instead, he says that students should be intellectually equipped to enter a range of professions, which is probably closer to our intention in Australia. The point is not that Theatre Studies have been superseded, as Schechner infers, but rather, I would argue, that a discipline which is inclusive of theatre but underscored by more recent theoretical frameworks produced by new performance forms suggests other possibilities. If Schechner's realm of Performance Studies can encompass everything from cave tourism to church liturgy, from the shopping centre as

spectacle to his own experiments with Chekhov's plays, it would seem to be addressing a much wider field of study than theatrical representation of social identity per se but also inclusive of it. Underlying this broader field are the knowledges arising from twentieth century performance forms which suggest how social identity is constituted in its performativity.

I am not advocating an exclusion of other theoretical discourses but an expansion of notions of theatrical performance as a discursive medium. As Gay McAuley, director of Australia's only Centre for Performance Studies at Sydney University, has already astutely pointed out, theatre is absent from virtually all those postmodern discourses which repeatedly co-opt theatrical metaphors (*Australasian Drama Studies*, 28, 1996.)

Further to McAuley's arguments, which refer to Johannes Birringer's defence of theatricality (*Theatre, Theory, Postmodernism*, 1993), I note with dismay how Judith Butler's claim that the performative act is not primary theatrical (*Bodies that Matter*, 1993) would seem to allow for the absence of epistemologies developed by theatrical performance from such relevant philosophical thinking. McAuley's point that theatre texts avoid closure more explicitly than all other textual modes suggests the possibilities for rethinking theatre as a discursive field. I would agree with Gay McAuley but would add, however, that the theoretical approaches produced by recent performance forms must be included in order for the wider theoretical implications of studying theatre to become apparent.

While Schechner's proposal aroused outrage and accusations of obscurantism, it also produced some interesting questions about the significance of the *live* in contemporary intellectual discourse and its conceptual knowledges. Given that theatre is experienced in a state of chaotic *live* but largely studied in university as an object, the whole question of where to locate the *live* of recent Australian performance raises some provocative challenges to 'thinking through performance'. The response that meaning can remain alive through its reinvention, if not the actual performance, certainly invigorates studies of the written text but neatly circumvents the need for accommodating recent forms of performance. To state the obvious, theatre/performance is the one field of inquiry in which the *live* or experiences of a lived body predominate.

This is not an argument for avoiding the written word or removing the writer from live art, but a demand that the diversity of textual production and its theoretical imperatives evident in recent Australian work be recognised. (In a parallel discourse pertaining to performance collaborations, I note that, because writing has become an invisible process, some performance work has unwittingly obliterated functions related to writing which produce conceptual weaknesses in the work.) I believe it is possible to study performance where the writer or the director has been relocated into a different working process because, importantly, the text opens up discursive spaces beyond the limitation of dependence on the written word. Given that theatre is already, in part, taught as an experiential mode concerned with process, it requires a reordering of value around what is conceptually significant in the field of performance. There is a well-established culture of performance in Australia that rivals the comparable world of play production. As the collaborative work of Australian performance has long breached the boundaries around performed and lived experience, so too must its conceptual study.

Peta Tait is author of *Converging Realities: Feminism in Australian Theatre (Currency)* and has recently taken up a position in the Theatre and Drama Department at La Trobe University.

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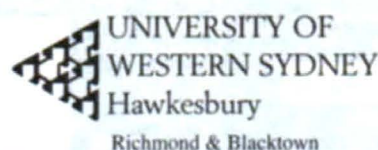
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The Faculty of Art and Design at RMIT offers a diverse range of programs at undergraduate and postgraduate level to serve a local and international market. The Faculty has a strong research and consultancy focus. Short courses are offered in a range of disciplines at both Higher Education and Vocational Education and Training levels.

The Department of Fine Art conducts programs in the discipline areas of Painting, Printmaking, Ceramics, Sculpture and Gold & Silversmithing. A range of postgraduate research and coursework programs is available.

The Department of Communication Studies offers programs in Media Studies, Public Relations and Journalism. The Bachelor of Arts in Professional Communications is available to international students. A range of postgraduate research and coursework programs is offered.

The Department of Fashion and Textile Design conducts undergraduate and postgraduate studies in Textile Design and Fashion, including streams in Fashion Design and Fashion Design with Merchandising.

The Department of Visual Communication offers undergraduate and postgraduate programs in Advertising, Photography (Scientific and Illustrative), Media Arts (Film, Video, Sound, Fine Art Imaging and Animation/Multimedia), Graphic Design and Animation/Interactive Multimedia (postgraduate only).

The Vocational Education and Training component provides courses and programs in a range of visual arts and media disciplines to Diploma level through the departments of Creative Media, Visual Arts and Display, Print, Machining and Finishing, and Pre-press and Screen Printing.

There are four Faculty Galleries, three on the City campus and one on the Bundoora campus. These hold year-round exhibitions focussing on student work from all disciplines. The University Gallery at Storey Hall is a world-class exhibiting venue for the University and the City of Melbourne.

The Department of Visual Communication is home to the International New Media Centre, which brings together 75 universities with the major hardware and software suppliers in an alliance to foster education, research and development, and information dissemination goals. RMIT is one of four universities outside North America to be admitted to this prestigious group. Within the Centre is the Short Course unit and the New Media Information Unit.

The centre for Animation and Interactive Media (AIM) has also been established in the Department of Visual Communication. It offers postgraduate professional development programs for creative content developers - writers, authors, producers and directors specialising in the new media arts and technologies such as interactive multimedia or motion picture animation production.

The Textile Resource Collection of the Department of Fashion and Textile Design has been established to focus on the work of 20th Century designers for the textile industry. It provides programs of lectures and exhibitions and is open to students, researchers and the general public. It aims to form research-based relationships with industry and other educational institutions.

The Works is a Graphic and Information Design professional studio set up to provide postgraduate students with first-hand experience of design and business management. They accept briefs from within and outside the University and run the Works as a professional design and consultancy studio.

The Faculty publishes the contemporary art magazine *Agenda*, and *Publishing Studies* is published by the Department of Communication Studies.



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Performance acts, performance studies

Mark Minchinton surveys performance courses in Victorian universities

Anyone who follows academic journals knows there has been worldwide debate over the shape, direction, and even name of performance studies within institutions. These debates are active in Australia, and are reflected in the range of courses available. The centres, schools, departments, and divisions that teach dance, drama, and performance in Australian universities carry many different names and pursue very different agendas which makes direct comparison between courses and institutions difficult.

Performance related studies have always been a problem for universities: dismissed by traditional academics as insufficiently rigorous, they are perennially popular with students who imagine them as a step towards professional work or as relief from the rigours of real subjects; and unless contented exclusively with the analysis of texts or videotapes, performance studies of all sorts require lots of expensive flat floor space.

The anxiety performance causes within the traditional academy pressures departments to follow essentially conservative views of performance, drama, and dance. Drama studies probably managed to prosper initially because (embarrassingly) they could lay claim to Shakespeare, and have traditionally grown out of English departments or Faculties of Arts dominated by textual paradigms and unsympathetic to the notion of and need for physical thought; dance studies are even more embarrassing because the textuality of their study is more complicated, the body more visible. Dance, drama, and performance departments are required to tread a fine line between appealing to notions that they are preparing students for professional work, challenging traditional academic paradigms of performance and research, and trying to gain respectability through (con)textualising and objectifying their objects of study.

The take-up of metaphors of performance within critical and cultural studies suggests that understanding contemporary performance is crucial to such work, but as Gay McAuley, amongst others, has recently said: the image of theatre that dominates the academic unconscious seems to be rooted in a nineteenth century proscenium arch mode of representation...bear[ing] little relation to contemporary performance practice.

Changes over the last few years in the attitude to students increases the anxiety: seeing students as clients constrains staff as they attempt to reconcile what they want to teach and research with what they think should be taught and researched, what students want, and what can be taught within increasingly tight budgets. There is sometimes considerable distance between the stated aims of the courses and the real interests of both staff and students.

Performance-based studies at tertiary institutions in Australia can be divided into three main categories:

- training actors and directors, dancers and choreographers for professional work;
- training future dance and drama teachers for employment in education;
- the study of canonical texts, historical periods, genres, and styles.

Any individual institution will cross over these categories; and no matter what the institution's agenda might be, in my experience, most students essentially want to be actors or dancers in companies—just what all those years of dance and drama lessons at school have been preparing them for.

Most vocational institutions offer stand-alone degrees or equivalents, while most non-vocational departments offer their studies as part of a general arts degree with perhaps a special intake of students who will do a stand-alone degree in dance, drama, or performance studies. But the range and focus of studies is wide. Excluding the TAFE sector, the following courses currently operate in Melbourne:

Deakin: the School of Visual, Performing & Media Arts offers a BA and a BABT (teaching) degree in dance and/or drama; students take one or two subjects in dance and/or drama at first and second year levels and can major in either while taking other subjects from within the School or from the Faculty of Arts; students

learn theatre and dance skills, scene work, and performance making; honours and postgraduate programs are being developed—performance is accepted as research, but a discursive exegesis is required.

La Trobe: the Department of Theatre and Drama offers an arts degree (in conjunction with other subjects in the Faculty of Arts) majoring in drama studies; students can take two half-units in first year, then undertake drama production and studies in Australian, Elizabethan, or Japanese theatre, or opera and music theatre in later years; postgraduates can undertake course work, a thesis, or a combination of thesis and performance.

Melbourne: the University of Melbourne, through its take-over of the VCA and the Ballarat Institute, now hosts a number of performance courses.

The VCA Schools of Dance and Drama are vocational training schools preparing actors and dancers for careers; entrance is by audition and is highly competitive. The School of Dance offers an MA in choreography requiring a small written component. The School of Drama's most innovative offerings are its courses in writing, directing, and animating; in 1997 the drama school will offer a Graduate Diploma in directing, and in 1998 a Graduate Diploma in writing; the dance and drama schools are planning to offer a Graduate Diploma in animating. These diplomas will be able to be converted to the first year of an MA by performance and thesis.

At the old MCAE building on the university's main campus, a BA in Visual & Performing Arts is offered at what is now the VCA School of Studies in Creative Arts. Students undertake a common first year, then specialise in later years in subjects based around the research interests of the staff. Postgraduate studies are just beginning: students may present a thesis or a combination of thesis and performance, the performance allowing a 30% reduction in the thesis.

Monash: through its Centre for Drama and Theatre Studies, offers two overlapping programs at undergraduate level and postgraduate degrees by research. There are about 25 students per year taken into a Bachelor of Performing Arts and around 350 overall who take drama and theatre studies as part of a general arts degree. The BPA students can major in dance, drama, music, or cultural studies; BA students share some subjects with the BPA students. All students undertake a combination of traditional textual analysis, some production work, and contemporary performance theory. There are a number of Masters students, and the opportunity exists for practically-based postgraduate degrees.

Victoria University: the Performance Studies division within the Department of Human Movement, Recreation, and Performance Studies offers an autonomous Bachelor of Arts Performance Studies. All subjects which cover contemporary performance and performance making techniques and performance theory are taught and administered through the department. The degree concentrates on contemporary performance and, because of historical connection with a department based in movement and its location outside the Faculty of Arts, is not saddled with (what I see as) the burden of the textual paradigm. Role-based drama is not taught; students are engaged in thinking through performance in solo and group based projects. Postgraduate degrees are offered by performance, thesis, or some combination of the two.

The fate of these courses after the upcoming Federal Budget cannot be known.

Now I'll come clean. Like many people, I first got involved in performance at university but it was an informal involvement. Then I became a professional performer augmenting my meagre salaries with teaching jobs in many institutions. I'm now a Senior Lecturer at Victoria University, Melbourne. I continue to perform, but I don't depend on it for a living. Talking to other performers, I've learnt that many wanted to be performers from a very young age. I never wanted to be a performer. My interest in performance grew from the compelling knowledge that I was

unqualified for anything else. I did it because I could do it, people paid me to do it, and I wasn't interested in doing anything else apart from workshops with other practitioners, and, until my postgraduate studies I never trained in drama, theatre, or performance. This peculiar history perhaps accounts for the distance I feel from academic accounts of performance, and the even greater bemusement I feel at still doing, writing about, and, above all, teaching performance.

Teaching, performing, writing courses, articles, and performances, I continually ask why am I doing all this? Particularly, what am I educating, training students to do and to be? I find it difficult to answer this in the vocational and competence driven terms that increasingly threaten the universities. More

and more I see the strength of performance related studies being their potential as a site for the exploration of ethical relations outside the majoritarian discourses of the academy, a place for active de-territorialisation. I'm concerned that performance institutions be productive: fostering new connections, new ways of doing and thinking, not simply reproducing or tracing the old. I'm with Levinas when he says that Western philosophy can be defined as the subordination of any act to knowledge that one may have of that act, and I think performance studies is an area where that hierarchy can be, should be, reversed. As long as staff are forced, or are content, to reproduce, to objectify and textualise performance, that hierarchy will remain.

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Arts education as performance

Keith Gallasch surveys approaches to performance at The University of Sydney, the Hawkesbury and Nepean campuses of the University of Western Sydney, and the University of NSW

As Peta Tait argues in this issue, there is a palpable tension over the status of theatre and of performance as fields of knowledge and practice in tertiary education. This tension is revealed, even resolved, in some fascinating ways in courses on offer in NSW by teaching methodologies, regardless of whether the student is there to learn about the performing arts or to practise them.

The Centre for Performance Studies at the University of Sydney writes that "collaboration with practising artists across all performance genres" is essential. "In our projects it is not the students who perform: their task is rather to observe, document, analyse and theorise about the performance practices of professional theatre artists. In shifting the focus of the work from textual residue to the oral meaning-making processes of performance itself, from theatre history to theatre practice, and indeed from product to process, the crucial factor has been finding theatre practitioners who are willing to open up their work process to scrutiny. We provide them with rehearsal space (and sometimes a small amount of funding) in return for the opportunity to observe and document the work process and resulting performances.

"It is important for students of theatre to have a solid grounding in theatre history; however, our theoretical framework derives not from traditional textual criticism and historiography, but rather from semiotics, phenomenology, sociology and in particular from anthropology—since the tasks involved in observing and documenting rehearsal practice are akin to those of the ethnographer: hands-on experience with documentation of both process and performance, the detailed analysis of performance (both live and recorded), casebook writing and reportage."

In its departure from performance as text analysis, on the one hand, and the training of the performer on the other, the Centre creates a third way, seeing itself as overcoming a tradition inherited from "the moralists of the European intellectual tradition" which execrated performance-makers, and the academic fear that actual play-making "does not look like 'proper research'".

The Centre for Performance Studies admits of a broad spectrum of performance and enjoys a busy schedule of visiting artists making good use of the excellently equipped Rex Cramphorn Studio.

Jane Goodall of the new School of Humanities at the Hawkesbury campus of the University of Western Sydney, writes that this school is looking to developing performance courses, but "also at developing performance in courses so that it becomes a teaching and learning medium in a range of subject areas. We have a unique degree program called Postmodern Studies that is about cultural directions. Generally, we are taking a cross disciplinary and experimental approach to curriculum". An example of this is a very attractive course on creativity which explores "different ways of reasoning, different ways of organising ideas and images", "different ways of seeing", of discovering "new approaches to observation and perception". Practical classes in performance or creative writing are part of the course; a record is kept of ideas and quotations about colour, texture, line and scale; an essay combined with original work by the student in another medium (video, photography, sound performance) is submitted. The fascinating list of readings includes Edward de Bono, Kathy Acker, Greil Marcus, Barry Humphries, Antonin Artaud, Hélène Cixous, Leonardo da Vinci and Annie Dillard. The combination of traditional intellectual demands alongside practical (and theoretical) course components emphasising the student's experience of art as observer and practitioner has much to recommend it.

It's interesting that both the courses cited so far give prominence to observation, and both, in their distinctive ways, to understanding the artist's practice and to interrogating the scholar's preconceptions—about performance, about creativity, about process.

The Nepean campus of the University of Western Sydney offers training in dance, theatre, music, and visual arts. Anne Graham writes, "In the Bachelor of Visual Arts students are not restricted to an area of specialisation, they are encouraged to work in an interdisciplinary way. They have the option of taking up elective subjects in Theatre, Dance, Music, Design or Art History and Criticism. This has resulted in the development of multi-skilled students who can operate across a

range of areas of expression. For example it is possible for a student to work predominantly in sculpture but to combine this with electives in Music and Sound Theory. This would obviously be useful for a student interested in Performance Art." Anne also writes, "We are in the process of building a new Centre for Performance Studies".

The Theatre Department at Nepean says, on their website, "Graduates are self-sufficient theatre workers, well-suited to take their place in a demanding industry and capable of developing their own work in a range of styles. They understand that Theatre (performance) takes place not only in theatres but in many other contexts...including museums, galleries, urban and rural sites, and a huge variety of community, social and commercial contexts." Again, performance in a context beyond text and the traditional theatre site is increasingly the focus of these often interdisciplinary courses, opening up not only different employment but also artistic possibilities.

The School of Theatre and Film Studies at the University of NSW runs a combination of film and theatre courses with a considerable range of topics. As reported in an interview with Lesley Stern (*RealTime* 9 Oct-Nov 1995), "Theatre and film studies aren't often brought together. That's what makes our school particularly interesting. We see it as very much interdisciplinary". There are also opportunities for practical work in dramaturgy, script writing, and the basics of film and video production. As well there are "a lot of courses that are critical, historical, theoretical whatever. But they also have workshop components and project strands. So for instance, I teach a course called 'Performing Bodies' with Margaret Williams, and that has a practical component looking at the range of possibilities for performance".

The terms observation, perception, process, the practical and the interdisciplinary recur across these courses and their universities signifying a shift not only of content, from theatre to a broader and richer concept of the performative, but also of teaching concerns and methodology, placing the performer, the student and the audience, not just the finished art work, in the grid of critical, historical and theoretical investigations.

Charles Sturt University's Riverina Campus has announced a new degree course, a BA Design for Theatre and Television. The university already offers popular BA Acting for Screen and Stage and BA Television Production courses. The new course provides vocational training in design, technical production and stage / production management for theatre and television. Enquiries to Ray Goodless, Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga. 069 332 472. Email rgoodless@csu.edu.au

Adelaide's Helpmann Academy for the Visual and Performing Arts, named after the ballet dancer and choreographer Robert Helpmann, was formed in 1994, "unifying the skills and resources of its eight partner schools from South Australia's universities and TAFE". The focus is on training for students seeking professional careers in the arts. The Academy offers grants to students, graduates and academics, holds an annual visual arts exhibition featuring artists from the University of South Australia and TAFE (the inaugural 1995 show toured to Yogyakarta and Jakarta; the 1996 show featured work in jewellery); and has introduced the Maria Iwanow Art Lectures series in conjunction with the North Adelaide and Adelaide Central Schools of Art (speakers have included Deanna Petheridge, Heri Dono and Richard Humphreys). Scheduled for November 1996, is the first Helpmann Academy Festival, to be held for a week at the Adelaide Festival Centre and displaying the skills of student actors, singers, dancers, musicians and visual artists from the academy's partner schools.

The Centre for the Performing Arts is one such associate school. The school has formed a successful on-going relationship with playwright Stephen Sewell. A cast of over 60 actors, singers and musicians from the CPA and the Elder Conservatorium of Music will perform Sewell's *Anger's Love* in Adelaide and Canberra (during the National Playwrights' Conference). Theatre '62, Adelaide, September 13-16; Street Theatre, Canberra, September 24-26. Enquiries: 08 8308 3692.

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A projected education

Anna Dzenis surveys tertiary film and media courses in Victoria

In these dark times of economic rationalisation and forced amalgamations, there are still some creatively configured tertiary film and media courses in Victoria for interested students to choose from. It is, in fact, possible to study film and media at an academic level at all Victorian universities. What distinguishes the courses are the departments within which they are housed and the breadth and extent of their programs.

The School of Arts and Media at La Trobe University is the home of the Department of Cinema Studies and the Department of Media Studies. One of the first programs of its kind in Australia, it still offers the broadest range of programs in film history, film theory, film criticism and visual culture in the state at an undergraduate and postgraduate level. Over thirty different Cinema Studies subjects are available to undergraduate students—these range from Film Criticism to Modernity and the Cinema, Australian Film to Soviet Cinema Between the Wars, Feminist Film Theory to Surrealism and the Cinema. The Department also provides a wide range of course work and research-based Fourth Year and Postgraduate programs, with subjects as diverse as Beyond Heterosexuality: film and sexual politics, Ethnographic Film, and Film and Interpretation—amongst others on offer. Some limited scope for production work exists—Introduction to Video Practice is available as a half-unit and it is also possible to submit a 'creative thesis' for the Honours degree. However the focus of the program is primarily academic.

Like Cinema Studies, the Department of Media Studies at La Trobe is also a pioneering course. It was originally established in the School of Education to study an area which had been neglected in other tertiary institutions in Australia. The Media Studies course is not intended as professional training in media production, though some introductory study of production is included. Subjects available from undergraduate to postgraduate level include Australian film and television history, policy and analysis, the representation of women in film and television, popular culture, policies and program strategies in Australian radio, radio audiences, radio drama, radio program production, sociological issues pertaining to the media, and audience studies. At La Trobe it is possible to complete a degree which combines Cinema Studies and Media Studies.

The film studies courses offered at Monash and Melbourne University are part of Art History programs. At Monash University, Film and Television Studies is taught in the Department of Visual Arts. Students are able to take historical and critical studies in art history and theory and film and television studies. A full major is also offered in film and television studies and it is possible to do an honours course and undertake graduate work at diploma, MA and PhD level. Courses are predominantly critical, historical and theoretical. The spectrum of courses is designed to introduce students to methods of analysis and a range of issues regarding Australian film and television, contemporary popular film from the USA, film history, European and Asian cinema and film from the Third World.

At Melbourne University an extensive Cinema Studies program from undergraduate to postgraduate levels is offered in the Department of Fine Art. This program is concerned with interpreting and analysing the visual media and its function in contemporary culture. The courses involve a study of visual media, in particular the cinema, but also include television, new technologies and print media. Their focus is on film movements, genres, film history, developments in film theory and methods for

interpreting visual media, the analysis of the social and ideological implications of media, and the study of approaches to understanding the relationship between the film image and the spectator.

There are a number of Departments of Communications across the state which also offer a range of Media Studies courses. At Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT), the Department of Communication Studies offers the following courses—Communication studies, Media studies including some film, television and radio production subjects, and Cinema studies. Similarly at Swinburne University of Technology, Media Studies is one of the majors offered in the Bachelor of Arts program where students are able to incorporate a wide range of academic and production subjects. Ballarat University also offers Film and Media Courses in the School of Behavioural and Social Sciences and Humanities. Deakin University has campuses at Burwood, Geelong, Rusden, Toorak and Warrnambool. They offer undergraduate, postgraduate, professional training and industry-based programs through on-campus and off-campus courses in a range of film and media studies. A School of Visual, Performing and Media Arts has also recently been formed at Rusden.

The desire to undertake training in professional production has been facilitated in Victoria by two major teaching institutions—the Victorian College of the Arts and the Department of Visual Communications at RMIT—who both offer very distinctive programs. The Victorian College of the Arts (VCA) has five faculties—Art, Dance, Drama, Film and Television, Music, and Studies in Creative Arts. The VCA School of Film and Television offers both a Bachelor of Film and Television and a Graduate Diploma in Film and Television. The Bachelor of Film and Television is a three year full-time course which fosters talent and develops craft skills applicable to careers in the motion picture industry. The major area of study each year is Assigned Projects in which students write, direct and edit their own productions and crew on other students' films. Studies are practically focused. Both film and video production is covered and students can specialise in selected areas. The one year Graduate Diploma in Film and Television is divided into two streams: Film and Video or Animation. The course introduces students to all facets of film and video or animation sufficient to enable them to realise their major production in the medium of their choice. The VCA School of Studies in Creative Arts also offers a Bachelor of Visual and Performing Arts. The emphasis of this course is on theoretical studies supported by practical work across the four discipline areas: Creative Writing, Media Arts, Theatre Studies and Visual Arts. Media Arts includes studies in Theory and Production, Photography, Film-making, TV Production, and Sound Production.

The Department of Visual Communication at RMIT houses both the Media Arts course and The Centre for New Media Arts. Media Arts at RMIT offers a three year full-time degree course, and MA and PhD research degrees in the fields of Fine Art Imaging, Digital Imaging, Film, Video, Sound, Animation/Interactive Media, Audio Production, New Media, and Media Arts History and Theory. The course is based on an inter-disciplinary approach to the practical, theoretical and historical elements involved in the technology-based arts. It is focused on studio work concerned with the development of creative, practical and conceptual skills, supported by related theoretical and historical studies. This encourages a cultural, philosophical and historical setting for contemporary artistic

practice in the Media Arts. The Media Arts course aims to develop multi-skilled artists capable of creatively contributing to the diverse industries associated with the Media Arts. Students can specialise in just one discipline area or explore a wide range of options across a number of disciplines.

The Centre for the New Media Arts, formerly known as the AIM Centre and based at Swinburne University, moved to RMIT in 1995. It is a postgraduate Research Centre focused on animation and interactive multimedia. It facilitates the training of personnel for the creative roles of writers, authors, producers and directors, and provides a base for industry and research consultancy. It offers a Graduate Diploma in Animation and Interactive Multimedia which is a one year full-time practical production course for writers, authors and directors covering a broad spectrum of motion picture animation and interactive multimedia production skills. MA and PhD research degrees are also offered.

For students unable to win a place in these highly competitive courses there are many alternative courses offered by the TAFE sector. The Advanced Certificate of Corporate Video Production is available at the RMIT, Collingwood and Footscray campuses. The Advanced Certificate in Sound Production is available at RMIT TAFE City Campus. The Advanced Certificate in Media is available at Holmesglen TAFE. The Footscray City Secondary College also offers a course with excellent production facilities providing students with technical training and the opportunity to develop material for folios.

The range and diversity of courses on offer evidences a very healthy and culturally aware community of scholars and practitioners. We can only hope that sanity prevails at State and Federal levels so that this innovative and visionary work being done by staff and students is adequately resourced.

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OnScreen

film, media & techno-arts

Feature

Slash and burn

Tina Kaufman reports on the response to the National Library's moves to decimate the National Film and Video Lending Service

Hidden away in the bowels of the National Library of Australia (metaphorically speaking, at least) there is a collection of films and videos that is exceptional, invaluable, and, suddenly, endangered. Acquired over nearly fifty years, at first rather spasmodically, but more recently with great care, intelligence, and foresight, this is the National Film and Video Lending Service of the NLA; a national treasury of films that forms the backbone of film and media courses throughout Australia, as well as providing the bulk of specialist and retrospective screenings at film societies, film events and festivals, and the National Cinematheque.

But in these times of savage budget cuts, of drastic threats to the ABC and SBS, and of the rise of the user-pays mentality, a collection of over fifteen thousand films and videos that is accessible, affordable, and part of the public library system has suddenly become something that in the eyes of a beleaguered NLA could be used to ameliorate the savage financial squeeze the Library is already experiencing in its mainly print-based resources and services. The NLA has recently directed much attention to its problems by deciding to no longer collect European and American books and journals, and to rely on the internet to provide access to these areas; this action has brought it severe condemnation from much of its user base.

Ever since the National Film and Sound Archive was separated from the NLA to become an autonomous government-funded body in 1984, the Film Lending Service has been in a rather uncomfortable position, as it didn't logically fall into any of the NLA's various departments. The NLA is in the process of overhauling and revising its areas of activity, with what it sees as wide consultation with its stakeholders, although the public outcry on some of its decisions would tend to contradict this. A review and assessment of the role of the FLS within the Library had been planned as part of this process, but since the new Coalition government came to power, and given its two percent across-the-board cuts with more expected in the budget, the NLA began to implement the most severe of the five FLS management options that had been prepared for consideration. This was a maintenance-only position to be used as a short-term option for the duration of the review process; the NLA seized on it as a longer-term strategy, and then decided that as this option included no acquisition program, the position of Manager, Film and Video Lending Service, would be abolished. And feelers were also put out to find an organisation interested in taking over the collection, preferably without its budget support.

Urgent questions asked

As rumours of the drastic action being planned by the NLA began to circulate, increasingly urgent questions began to be asked; people involved in film and media studies and representatives of film societies wrote letters requesting official confirmation or denial of what they were hearing. But it was only after several items appeared in the press on the issue that the NLA's Director General, Warren Horton, wrote to those making enquiries. Raising the issue of a decline in usage of some areas of the FLS, the Director General confirmed that further material would not be acquired for the General Collection, but did backtrack by saying that the Screen Studies Collection would be developed "to some extent" during 1996/7. No mention was made of the position of Manager, but he did say that "In recent months the National Library has also met with other parties to discuss possible alternative arrangements for the distribution of film and video material in Australia."

At an urgently convened meeting in Sydney late in July, a wide representation of users of the FLS met, and elected a steering committee to present their position, enlist further support, and enter into any necessary lobbying and negotiation. Representatives of film and communications courses from a wide range of tertiary institutions, film societies, screening groups and festivals, and government and independent film organisations met with film and cultural activists and media representatives and decided on several stipulations which should be put very forcefully by the users of the FLS, primarily that the collection should remain accessible, affordable, and within a public library. They were also adamant that the FLS, as a national collection, should remain within a national organisation, that users should be consulted in any review of its future, and that the FLS should remain a fully staffed and funded entity.

The National Film and Video Lending Service has been acquired over the last 50 years to form a national resource of enormous and continuing value to media and cinema studies courses, to film societies, to the National Cinematheque, to the Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane Film Festivals, and to film culture generally. It's also the main location for Australian features, documentaries, and short films, once they are out of general release; often the only way new and returning viewers can see these films is to borrow them from the Lending Service. Over the years two distinct collections have emerged: the Screen Studies Collection, catering mainly for universities and film societies, and the General Collection—titles covering a broad range of subjects, including medical, ethnographic, and management, with Australian production given priority—which is used by schools, government departments, business and industry, public libraries, hospitals. Adapting acquisition policies to the needs of film culture in Australia as it has evolved through the growth of the film societies in the 50s and 60s, the expansion of screen and media studies in the 70s and 80s, and the needs of screening groups, festivals and the national cinematheque, the Screen Studies Collection now holds over six thousand titles, supplementing a widely representative sample of popular classics and contemporary features and short films with avant-garde and experimental work, a fine selection of documentaries, and an impressive cross section of silent cinema. (The decline in use highlighted by the NLA is almost entirely in the General Collection, which has been affected by the growth of in-house collections based on the low cost of videos and the availability of user-friendly video equipment.)

A global resource

Peter Mudie, lecturer in Fine Arts at the University of Western Australia, has been so concerned about the threat to the Screen Studies Collection that he has decided to contact filmmakers, critics, curators and film culture organisations both locally and overseas, hoping that their responses will convey to the NLA the vital importance of what he calls a "global resource of considerable magnitude." The first response he received was from David Curtis, Senior Film and Video Officer of the Arts Council of England, who describes the collection as impressive, one of perhaps only three similar national collections in the world, and regrets that there is nothing to compare with it in Britain.

Having lived and worked in Canada, the US, England, and Austria as well as Australia, and particularly having been a member of filmmaker and screen-based organisations in all those countries, Peter Mudie is convinced that very few such collections have been acquired and assembled with the same breadth and scope as the Screen Studies Collection, particularly in his interest area, the Experimental Film and Video Art component.

He also argues that the present Manager of the FLS, Bruce Hodsdon, as the curator of the Collection, "has a love of and dedication to film that transcends all genre definitions and forms" and "has initiated acquisitions that clearly demonstrate the breadth of his knowledge and his invaluable regard for the Collection itself." This is an opinion that would be echoed throughout user groups, where Bruce is recognised as a living national treasure, and a resource within the FLS second only to the films. His wide knowledge of film from an aesthetic and critical viewpoint is balanced by an equally encyclopaedic knowledge of the location, anywhere in the world, and condition of the most obscure and hard to find films.

In his letter to concerned parties, NLA Director-General Warren Horton states that a survey is currently being undertaken by a joint working part of the National Film and Sound Archive and the NLA, to assess the present and future needs for non-commercial distribution of film in Australia. He says that he intends after the Budget to bring together a wide range of other parties interested in these issues, and that "the Library has no intention of taking any precipitate action prior to such wide-ranging consultation." It is to be hoped that the concerns expressed by local user groups and by those overseas with similar interests, and the offers of support and involvement by the Sydney steering committee, will lead to a process that will have the best result for both this marvellous collection of films and the users who depend on it.

Last picture show?

Colin Hood puts the teacher's case for the National Film Library

The last time I saw Jon Jost's *Last Chance For a Slow Dance* (experimental ode to serial killer/mass murderer Gary Gilmore) was in 1981. The venue was a ramshackle CBD annex of Alexander Mackie College of Advanced Education (now University of NSW College of Fine Arts). At the time I felt reasonably confident that I would see the film again, soon, in some public and/or educational venue. Jost's later films appeared, along with works by contemporary 'experimentalists', in what was then the alternative section of the Sydney Film Festival.

When the alternative section (of the Sydney Festival) was axed, the AFI's cinemathèque program became the sole provider (outside of 'school') for choice retrospectives and rare outings for difficult filmmakers (Syberberg's *Hitler*, a film from Germany being my most memorable 'stick in the eye'). I have already documented, somewhat naively in *RealTime* 8, the slow demise of cinemathèque culture—a community initiative succeeded by under-committed AFI management selling out to private sector celluloid cowboys (with a penchant for films mostly noir).

These days I get the distinct impression—no I'm not getting sentimental, just simply pissed off—that most local audiences (and sadly, many journalists) mistake experimental (or avant-garde) film for the apprenticeship fumbblings of wannabe feature film directors.

When I began university (art school) teaching in 1989—and for the next five years—I found continued 'curricular' justification for screening the work of Michael Snow, Hollis Frampton, Jean-Luc Godard, Alexander Kluge, Raul Ruiz, Alan Schneider, Stan Brackage, Robert Breer, and a number of European and American directors (in experimental and modernist narrative genres). I showed these (mostly 16mm film) works to students studying film history, art history, post war European and American culture, new media, performance and popular culture.

These films were not just precious, specialised teaching aids. They represent, still, the very best of artistic achievement across film, literature and art: exploration of the plastic and chromatic potential of celluloid; confabulation of cinematic story times; interrogating and re-structuring documentary forms, and so on. I sometimes wonder how anyone could teach the history of twentieth century modernist culture without drawing on at least one of these works in the course of a semester's teaching.

The National Film Library has always been the principle source and lending agency for teaching and public screening presentations. Unlike slide reproductions of artworks, the films appear both as unique artefacts, and products of a techno-culture (or mind-set) that assumes easy replication, exhibition and dissemination. Unlike rare books however, most of these films are in fact more durable than some of the video formats that are now turning up on university library shelves.

The National Film Library has produced statistics indicating a downturn in demand for what is regarded as a world-class film collection. Even if these statistics were accurate (which they almost certainly are not), they must not be used to justify any cut-backs in purchasing, servicing or conservation of the collection. This is a working collection for the benefit of all who care about the history and future of cinema (a concept now spanning celluloid, video, laser disc and www transmission).

It is imperative now that the "all who care" stand up and bang on a can of celluloid—even if their tastes run more to digital than analogue. An upturn in demand for celluloid was generated in the US recently by setting up a huge travelling show of 'archival' films. Great idea and good for user statistics. We also require a negotiated collection development policy, open and creative consultative mechanisms, and a stronger commitment to public exhibition of film, video and laser disc through a variety of 'good looking' delivery platforms.

The "film into art" theme is running hot at this year's Biennale, fine time for you media and art people to make a show of your 'elite' cinematic passions, either by writing to Warren Horton, Director-General, National Library of Australia, Parkes Place Canberra, ACT 2600, by performing in public with as many cranky 16mm projectors as possible, or by engaging in whatever cinema consumer activism you feel is appropriate.

Give it to me one more time: Jon Jost's *Last chance for a slow dance* on high definition video if that's the future practical, negotiated alternative. But give me (also) a comfortable seat and a drink in the bar at interval before I settle into Warhol's *Chelsea Girls*, on the original, double, celluloid roll.

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Preview

ANAT and onward

John McConchie on ANAT's 1996 Art Research And Development Fund

There is an analogy I like to use when discussing the arts and digital technology: primitive cinema. It too was an artform born of an industrial age, dependent on technology. Its inception gave no indication of what it would become, the greatest narrative machine of the twentieth century. Cinema's existence in an industrial form only became possible through a period of intense experimentation, trial and error, an extraordinary confabulation of artists, business and a fascinated public. It borrowed from all of the pre-existing art forms that it would eventually exceed—theatre, the novel, the visual arts, symphonic music—until, resisting all other possible paths, it claimed its current domain and colonised the world. So we sit amidst our visionaries, versions of Méliès, the Lumière Brothers and Porter, wondering where it's all going.

As usual, any close scrutiny will support the analogy and show where it disintegrates. Such is the case with ANAT's small funds for art and technology projects, comparative peanuts strategically thrown to the cutting edge. In this case that edge is so multi-faceted it puts good postmodernists to shame. This is best illustrated in the diversity of projects selected for funding, possibly a reflection of the applications rather than their assessors' agenda. At best they capture the concept of boundary pushing—addressing the tension between creativity and technology—with just a hint of a time where the arts and sciences can inhabit the same field. This renaissance whiff is reflected in the diversity of the projects; in sound, websites, performance, exhibition and installations, fusions with established artforms and more, and in ANAT's strategy which emphasises the conceptual work over realisation and outcome. So despite the booming technology and infrastructure, despite the fact that digital media seems unlikely to homogenise content in the way the cinema did, we are clearly in uncharted lands seeking the face of the next century. And ANAT is at the forefront of the all important terrain of content development.

A one-off increase from the Australia Council (doubling last year's grant) provided \$80,000 to fund twenty proposals. ANAT has selected a mix of established artists, from those not necessarily known for their work with technology to those who have established their practices in digitally generated work. Prominent in the former category is Juan Davila, who continues to experiment with computer enhanced 3D images. If this is an extension of his previous work exhibited in Adelaide two years ago (large wall mounted pieces viewed with 3D glasses), he will use this technology to enhance his characteristically wide palette of tones and moods. This technology added an entirely new dimension to his signature of sensuous brutality, giving some of the images the feel of a hagiography for the next century.

Other established artists to attract funds include NSW's Greg Schiemer working on non-score based forms of music resulting from emerging technologies. SA's Junction Theatre will be able to fund a consultancy on incorporating video and multimedia into more traditional performance modes. In the area of performance art, Arthur Wicks is also being encouraged to explore the web's potential for virtual events. Like many other past and present recipients, his proposal is as much about exploring the relationship between the virtual and the physical. This seems fundamental to the fund overall. Most 'art' currently available on the web is basically treating the technology simply as a new way of disseminating pre-existing forms, like those early films which basically used the medium to record theatrically arranged events. Few funds address the context this immediately poses: the language of digital media itself and the transformations that are inevitable when pre-existing art forms collide with it.

Urban Exile for example, have utilised a gallery presence for their collaborative efforts, but cite the simultaneous use of the internet as the reason for the success of the 'hard' exhibitions. Their permanent presence is now on the net, with new exhibitions added to the site regularly no doubt contributing to the high number of on-line hits, about 100,000 for each exhibition. They have been funded for *TOOL 02*, a collaborative project which is again intended to have both hard and virtual counterparts. Urban Exile's current work can be found in www.matra.com.au/~exile/ which also provides access to previous exhibitions. At heart, it's not just their popularity that makes Urban Exile interesting. It is the conceptual frame behind the work. One of the starting points for *TOOL 02* is Gilles Deleuze's notion of subjective machines, an extension of the post-structuralist conceptualisation of identity as the product of fragmented experiences, the place where often contradictory or conflicting influences intersect. This seems to me more than a perfect metaphor for the web, and the kind of thinking that is as important as the execution itself which can be clumsy or constrained as often as it is successful. It is also indicative of the criteria ANAT has set for itself in determining funding.

Other artists have also adopted the web as their prime means of exploration and expression. Lloyd Sharp's beautifully enigmatic web site has secured funding for further development, again for both his conceptual approach as well as access to appropriate technology. His current work at the opalm site was easily the most lyrical of those I visited in researching this article, and is found at www.ozemail.com.au/~opalm or www.ozemail.com.au/~mcool. Agent All-Black are to stage a two day 'multimedia extravaganza' which will also then move onto the web. Some of their current work is to be found on the Electronic Media Group's site, www.world.net/~quiffy/emg/emg.html. Amanda King is likewise linking an outdoor exhibition/installation with her virtual work. The difference here is that where the above sites originate in Sydney, King operates out of rural Queensland, a reminder that actual location is simply irrelevant when it comes to the virtual world.

Other projects have an intriguing community involvement, such as producer Sharon Flindell's proposal to distribute DAT recorders to Aboriginal people in the Kimberley, and present the results in a sound installation in conjunction with the Festival of Perth and Aboriginal cultural and media centres. The Victorian College of the Arts have funds to contribute towards a residency for Stelarc which will include a collaborative project for students as well as the vital opportunity to relocate one of our most important artists back into the country, at least for a while. The true beauty of Stelarc, and the reason he is an important artist, is precisely his distinction from the virtual. He brings technology back to the body itself, a corporeal testament to the subjective machine. Links here with perhaps my favourite project, computer artist Richard Stanford's collaboration with forensic anatomist Meiya Sutisno to develop a prototype for the facial reconstruction of an unidentified human skull. Not far behind is Stevie Wishart's work in creating a virtual instrument based on, among other things, the hurdy-gurdy.

Other projects not mentioned (for lack of space, I assure you) extend existing work like Mutley Media's *Booth*, and collect work produced for ABC's *Art Rage* for regional and public gallery distribution. In another project, Brendan Palmer will produce an anthology of young composers working with experimental electronic music. ANAT's selection of a nationally-derived assessment committee with combined experience in a variety of cross artforms has done them proud.

Report

In nerd paradise

Dave Sag and Jesse Reynolds at *JavaOne*, San Francisco

In May this year we packed our bags and shunted off to *JavaOne* in San Francisco. More than 6000 nerdy men and a few women were there to learn everything they could about Sun's new programming language, Java. The conference sold out, even at registration prices of AUD\$1250. It wasn't hard to see what they'd spent their \$7.5 million on. Lights, cameras, carpet, coffee and special gifts such as the very useful *JavaOne* backpack (more advertising, less relevant material) and the purple *JavaOne* Maglight torch.

"We've spent more money promoting Java than Sun has spent on marketing since we began!", James Gosling, the 'father of Java', proudly announced. Although we were in the same room, it was easier to see Him in one of the numerous overhead video screens. In real life Gosling was a speck on a stage a hundred metres away, with its purple and red *Java One* logo carpets and ribbons strung all over the place. At first glance the event was reminiscent of an Amway convention.

At the opening keynote address Gosling took to the podium and basked, reminiscing about the team of six people who worked, tucked away at Sun, for five years on a device control language called Java. He demonstrated a gadget called the Star Seven (*7), a hand-held, colour, palm-top computer with a very high speed (256kbps) wireless internet connection. It was the first proper Java machine, built almost six years ago using what Gosling referred to as Hammer technology. "You know, you take a hammer and smash apart the things other people have built to get at the bits you need." He cited the forced removal of range sensors from Polaroid cameras as an example.

The *7 is amazing. The only interface to it is your finger on its pressure sensitive colour screen. You navigate by sliding your finger around, pointing, dragging and pushing components of the scene to navigate from one 'space' to another. Cartoon as interface!

Elsewhere people could be found in the Hackers' Lab, 60 or so high powered Sun Ultra Sparcs, SGI Indis, PowerMacs and Pentium machines connected to the net at a screaming rate for attendees to play with. We principally used them to check our email and show off our work back home to any audience we could attract. In the corner a laidback band played world music. At lunch time airline food was chummed out for the very hungry.

"When you come to the next *JavaOne* (*JavaOne II*) we won't be giving away backpacks and torches, we'll be giving you PDAs (Personal Digital Assistants)." Lines like this throughout the keynote addresses made spines tingle. Java was only announced to the public around 12 months ago and in that short space of time it has spawned an entire industry. Everyone from major multinationals to hobbyists are embracing Java.

Java is an 'object oriented' language which essentially means that information comes bundled with the necessary 'code' to act upon that information. For example, a photograph would also come bundled with the appropriate software to display or scale that photograph. The photo can then be used anywhere and collections of photos can be all sent messages like 'draw yourself' and they would all know how to respond.

Java is platform independent. It will run on any computer capable of running the Java Virtual Machine (a computer running in software within another computer). There are JVMs for Macintosh, PC and Unix machines freely available now from java.sun.com and many companies are releasing chips which support the JVM inherently.

Java is a network language. As most people who have used the web would be aware, the information you get is quite static. With Java, however, the user's computer actually runs small applications (applets) written in Java which come off the network. These applets can be as simple as a fancier button, or as complex as a video conferencing solution.

During the Adelaide Fringe Festival (www.va.com.au/af/af/af/) we used Java to control the motion of a robot surveillance camera sited 40 metres above the main Fringe Precinct. This meant people could pan, tilt, and zoom the camera from a web page. Our next project calls for much more sophisticated behavioural modelling of both real and virtual robots, and the promise of Java chips running a universal programming language was too intriguing to ignore.

There were several significant announcements made at *JavaOne*. Adobe (inventors of Postscript, Photoshop and Premiere, among others) announced the licensing of their font and path technology to form part of the standard free Java distribution. This lets developers use specific fonts and curves in on-line environments. If an on-line gallery relies on the presence of the font 'Grunge Update', the Java applet displaying it will look first on your local hard disk, and if it's not there, will fetch it from an on-line fontbank.

Other Java libraries announced include database access tools; a general set of media tools providing 2D, 3D, video and audio; commerce tools like the Java wallet (digital cash); encryption and security tools; and remote object tools which allow one Java program to call another and interact. There are tools for building servers, browsers, and hardware controllers.

Java chips which execute Java 'byte-code' directly run Java software much faster. Mitsubishi displayed a chip the size of a thumbnail and the Government of Taiwan announced that they have licensed Java for development by all of their regional microchip factories. These chips will be in everything. Mobile phone companies announced support for Java chips and Nortel even had diagrams of their new phones.

Network Computers (general purpose computers which have no hard disk, but instead get all their software off the network) are set to do to the personal computer industry what PCs did to the mini and mainframe market. Early critics see this as a return to an age when great big mainframes served information out to dumb terminals, but Network Computers are much more than that. Based on Java chips, these devices are super fast, super smart and able to get exactly what they need off a global network to the user. Most importantly they will begin retailing this year for under US\$500.

There are many new artforms arising out of this new networked world. Ed Stastny whose *Sito* (www.sito.org) and *Hy-Grid* projects won him an honourable mention last year and a distinction at this year's Ars Electronica is taking network art into its next stage of evolution. *Sito* challenges the notion that artworks can exist on their own and encourages people from the world over to create works designed specifically to be manipulated by other artists. Annette Loudon from Construct (www.construct.net; a company based in San Francisco developing internet sites using VRML, the Virtual Reality Modelling Language) has gathered a loyal band of contributors with her *Stratus* project—an interactive 3D environment where artists can host and display their work.

There are challenges for artists working with a global, all pervasive network where the computers themselves are peripherals hanging off the network. We must assume that processors themselves will become smaller, faster and more numerous. Advances in network speeds and wireless communications will provide a soup of micro devices each with access to this global network.

Dave Sag & Jesse Reynolds are directors of Virtual Artists Pty Ltd., Adelaide.

Gender, nationalism and reversion

Jo Law reports on a Hong Kong action cinema conference

As the political de-territorialisation of Hong Kong gathers turbulence, its home grown film industry is being 'reproduced' for a Hollywood spectatorship. The political and economic contentions behind such transgressions of conventional cultural and geographical boundaries were the central focus of the second annual symposium of Edith Cowan University's Centre for Asian Communication, Media and Cultural Studies: *Masculinity/Speed/Violence—Deterritorialising Hong Kong Action Movies* (PICA, June 28-30).

The first symposium paper was delivered by Rod Webb, Network Programmer for SBS. His paper focused primarily on the politics and economics of reproducing specific cinema for broadcast industry consumption. At times unnecessarily elaborate, his insightful understanding of transnational cultural economics nevertheless provided substantial grounds for contextualising the recent ascent of Hong Kong cinema in the world economy. While the bureaucratic control of media in the form of censorship and restricted screening times (particularly in reference to sex and violence) remain the immediate battle fronts for marginal cinemas, he emphasised the importance of technical aspects of transnational cinema, such as diversity of languages, appropriate broadcast screen formats and subtitling, which underlie the understanding of the specific cinematic languages.

The discourse of contemporary Hong Kong cinema cannot bypass the subject of cinema in translation, with Hollywood actively subsuming the marginal cinemas of Jackie Chan and John Woo. The screening of *Project—A Part II* (directed by and starring Jackie Chan) unsurprisingly induced discussions on intercultural translation. Yao Souchou (The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies in Singapore) began his argument by opposing Jackie Chan's pastiche collaging of individual promotion. His paper, "Pistol, Scalpel and 'No Shadow Kick': Violence and Chinese Modernity in Tsui Hark's *Once upon a Time in China—Part II*", focused on the cultural formations and re-presentations of history within Tsui Hark's filmic philosophy. The collapse of historical spaces in relation to 'real' time is prominent in Hong Kong cinema. This imagined space is essential in the filmic inventions of history, the purpose of which is to consolidate Hong Kong's cultural and political identity. Tsui Hark's filmic construction of identity using the 'east/west' dichotomy and his subsequent undermining of such positions, Yao argued, epitomise the conflicts of Chinese modernity. The paper, however, would benefit greatly by addressing the ambiguous position of Hong Kong as simultaneous spectator and spectacle, since Hark's serial film *Once upon a Time in China* is fundamentally about the conflicting complexities of postmodern Hong Kong rather than Chinese modernity per se.

Tan See Kam's (Department of English and Cultural Studies, University of Melbourne) detailed paper, titled "Killing Masculinity in John Woo's films", did not limit its contextualisation of Woo's works to an historical and cultural understanding of Hong Kong cinema. By particularising John Woo's early career and his friendship with Tsui Hark, Tan provided a reading of Woo's central portrayals of male bonding, brotherhood, and the conditions of friendships as articulations of Woo's personal experiences in the industry. The timelessness in Woo's filmic creation of conflated space can be described by the term 'jiang wu'. Literally, it means 'river-lake' and is conventionally used in period drama and the kung fu genre to denote the generic socio-historical juncture within which the story takes place. This space is fluid, unconfined by laws and orders.

This chaotic space-time continuum in modern film drama delineates an underground social space, within which Woo's dysfunctional romantic heroes are trapped. This timelessness quality is further emphasised by Woo's deliberate freeze framing and slow motions. Woo's transcendental heroes seek to rise above disorder and injustice but remain caught in moral dilemmas at a time of superficial prosperity and economic wealth. Tan contextualised this expression of emasculation as an historical consequence of the post-second world war society. The search for idealised codes of masculinity and its (re)construction in Woo's cinema functions as a form of empowerment in the healing of wounded masculinity.

The tensions amongst fluid gender codes were elaborated in Szeto May Mirana's (Department of Comparative Literature, University of Hong Kong) paper, "Rethinking Modernity and Community through 'Hong Kong Identity' as a Commodity: the Bao-Er-Nai phenomenon, the Mr. Smart phenomenon, the film *From Beijing with Love* and the Music of Lo Ta Yu". Her argument focused on the cultural commodification perpetuated by Hong Kong media representations of gender and nationalism.

The phrase 'Bao-Er-Nai' describes social situations where married Hong Kong men take on a second wife in mainland China. Media representations of this phenomenon feminise the PRC, inscribing its social identity as passive, second-place and dependent. This scenario of sexual conquest reflects the economic control Hong Kong exerts on the PRC and the socio-economic burden the PRC increasingly poses for Hong Kong. The Bao-Er-Nai phenomenon hence reverses the controlling power that the PRC will gain over Hong Kong after the 1997 'reunification'. The figure of Mr. Smart, on the other hand, expresses post-industrialised Hong Kong's economic power as a form of compensation for the cultural humiliation and inferiority brought about by British colonisation.

Using the film *From Beijing with Love* (a Chinese-made 007 starring Stephen Chow), Szeto contemporisised an identity discourse that contradicts John Woo's suffering heroes. The mythical anti-hero who opposes the James Bond persona in every way—he is ordinary, sleazy, comic—embodies cultural ideals that are unheroic, unromantic yet full of wit. The De Vinic character in the film—inventor of a solar-powered torch, and a hairdryer that is also a razor—represents western (technological) enlightenment. The blatant disinterest in obsolete technology and distrust in traditions that are redundant epitomise a situation born out of the integration of 'east' and 'west'. At the end of the day, the anti-hero makes love to his woman, who alone remains the symbol of an archetypal survivor of postmodernity. Szeto concluded that the romanticised notion of being caught between 'east' and 'west' is no longer relevant, as contemporary Hong Kong culture rejects both ideological aspirations but, at the same time, is unwilling to occupy another position. Hong Kong cinema's (and media's) commodification of socio-cultural phenomena reduces its political stance to consumerist banalities and in the end produces indifference and apathy.

The concluding discussion of the symposium posed many questions on political translation of Hong Kong cinema, in particular, Jameson's notion of the allegorical quality of 'third world' cinema. Both Szeto May Mirana and Yao Souchou emphasised that the equation of filmic contents and the society within which they are produced is reductive. It has to be kept in mind that the economies of Hong Kong cinema are not only culturally critical; at the same time it functions as spectacle, as adrenalin stimulant, and as financial investment.

The formal and thematic speed of Hong Kong cinema is specific in its configurations and significations. The selected films therefore would have served the purpose of the symposium better had they been of a more diverse range in the action genres demonstrating the complexities of Hong Kong cinema and its contemporary discourse.

The symposium drew to a close on June 30, precisely a year before the 'reversion' of Hong Kong's sovereignty. The corresponding issue of *Time* magazine bears the blatant subtitle, "365 shopping days left in Hong Kong" illustrating the prevalence of simplistic intercultural political readings which fail to ask exactly whose is this fear of 'the end', dominant in the discourse of post-97 Hong Kong. What constitutes these fears? What do they represent? Similarly, the act of reading Hong Kong cinema must also be interrogative in its necessary transgressions of cultures, be these geographical, political, local, global or diasporic.

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Review

Fictions and myths

Karen Ades on the work of three women filmmakers in South Australia

A naked male model positioned on the floor is strewn with purple irises. Only his torso and genitals are framed. I can't help it; at this point I think to myself "now that's a small fiction". Tee hee. "Typical", the model exclaims, as if aware of my initial response, promptly challenging the reading of the film as a mere reversal of the subject/object relations operating between men and women in cinema and the wider media.

Jenni Robertson's *Small Fictions* (1996) explores the myths surrounding the privileged, revered position of the male form represented in western art, revealing the banalities, the imperfect realities of photographic subjects. Stella, the central character, arranges her subjects precisely, adorning them with fur, bandages, feathery wings. Implicit in the gaze exercised over each of her subjects is the notion of spectacle. Robertson ensures the audience's continued interest in the progression of the small fictions of the narrative and also succeeds in drawing our attention to the act of looking by having characters literally invade the space of the studio. We are privy neither to the view through the camera lens nor the final product—a 'perfect' moment captured in less than a second. Rather we watch as a Renaissance-like model fishes a clump of wax from his ear and Ralph's sparklers fizzle out as he laments another failed relationship. "She said I was boring."

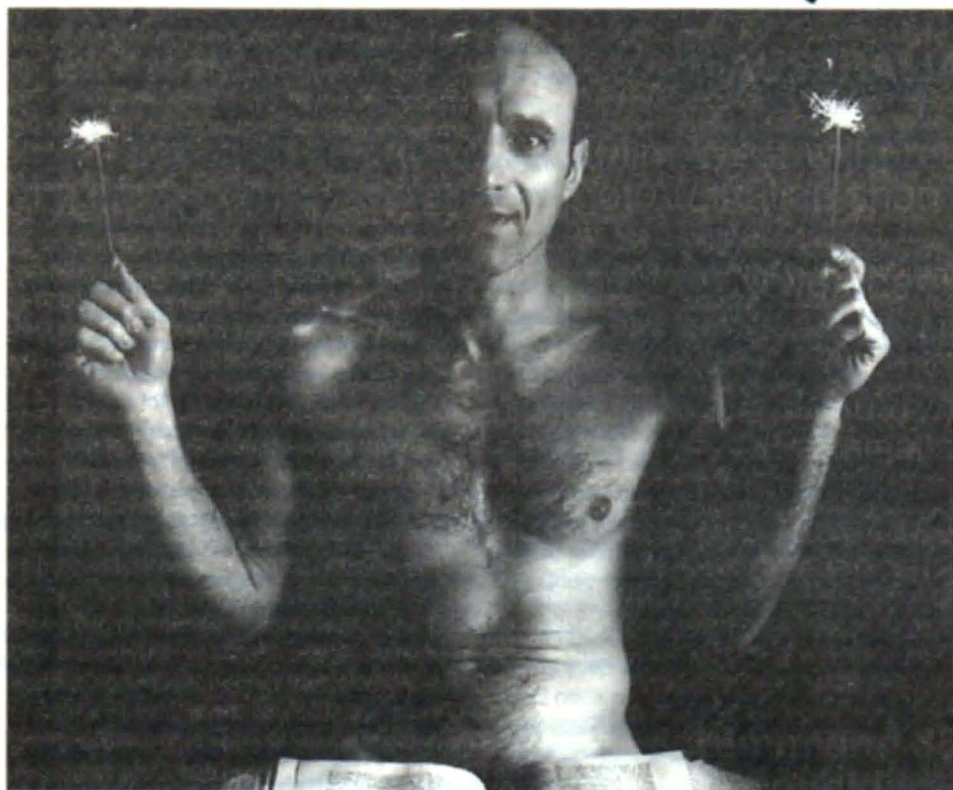
This concern with the fictions and myths that characterise the facets of our lives is the thread that links these South Australian filmmakers and their films. Whilst there is clearly no feminist formula that lumps these women together, the shared concern can loosely be summed up by the character of Josie in *Small Fictions*: "There is always such a large gap between what you want something to be and what it actually is".

For filmmakers Patricia Balfour and Joya Stevens this investigation has been literal in their film *Atavistic Traces* (1994) and in their current project *The Sinking of Icarus*. *Atavistic* tells the story of the recently deceased Pilar. According to Latin American legend the dead must "collect their footsteps", revisiting vital moments in life before the journey to heaven can be achieved. Pilar's transcendental journey involves not the revisiting of 'actual' moments but an exploration of the folk tales that have been told to her and that she has passed on to others.

Crucially, however, these stories have been transplanted physically and culturally, from one continent to another, one environment to another and one generation to another. The stunning opening shot of *Atavistic* tracks back from a superb ocean view, through the window and finally comes to rest above Pilar's body. Laid out formally on the bed and surrounded by family, the absolute abject is contained by the enactment of ritual, creating a tone that floods the entire film. The notion of myth and ritual migrating to the Australian continent underlies *Atavistic Traces*. Further emphasised is the integration of myth upon myth as the narrative progresses. We see the tale of Fernando, bewitched and seduced by Claudia. A beautifully choreographed dance sequence interrupts this story illustrating the unconscious desire of the 'hero' and the fictional creation of woman as temptress.

In contrast to the visual form under scrutiny in Robertson's film, Balfour and Stevens deal with oral tradition: *Small Fictions* explores the role of the pictorial artist and the relationship between image and ideology (a vital concern for the film maker) and *Atavistic* explores the function of the storyteller and the connection between oral mythology and ideology (equally vital to the process of writing and film making).

While Robertson's and Balfour/Stevens' investigations encompass broader issues of the fabrication of fictions and mythologies, Nicola Mills' comedy deals with the construction of roles and role-playing in relationships. *A Fair Game* uses the game of pool as a metaphor and narrative tool to illustrate the posturing, power plays and strategies that characterise the protagonist's romance. As Bec lines up a shot, she squints through either eye, hopelessly trying to gain the correct perspective. Her vision however, is distorted. As she prepares to snooker the ball, boyfriend Simon informs her that she can consider herself "dropped." The cue ball flies off the table leaving Bec well and truly out of the game: the gap between her idea of romance and what it actually is, is considerable.



David Grybowski as Ralph in *Small Fictions*

After wallowing in self-pity, chocolate and ice cream, Bec decides that her role as jilted girlfriend should include a little game of revenge too. Inviting herself into Simon's house she proceeds on a manic course of destruction of property; stretching the front of Simon's jocks and cleaning the toilet with his toothbrush in a pathetic (but amusing) attempt to win back some pride. Of course our heroine triumphs, clinching the snooker



Atavistic Traces

tournament title from her ex with technique that would make Paul Newman in *The Colour of Money* envious. Ostensibly a straightforward narrative film, *A Fair Game* succeeds in representing artificial codes and 'rules' of behaviour by making fun of them.

A discussion of these films prompts consideration of the advantages and problems of film culture in South Australia. Clearly the cheaper cost of living is the one unarguable plus. For Nicola Mills the small size of the independent film community "has had its advantages in its relative unity and the willingness of others to share information and experience".

Crucially however, there is (as always) the conflict between the support structures and the funds available; screening opportunities and the market for short films; and the artistic endeavours of the filmmakers. Robertson, Stevens and Balfour all independently expressed the desire to make films of a type not currently being made or seen.

The fickle and sometimes disposable nature of current film culture has recently favoured the quirky style blasted to popularity by the success of directors such as Lynch and Tarantino. Further, the successful urban-horror genre explored predominantly by male filmmakers in South Australia is not reflected in the work of women writer-directors here. The films discussed do, to a varying degree however, examine 'darker' forces, such as Bec's sublimated desire to physically punish Simon by slashing his clothes.

Importantly, stylistic and thematic uniformity is not apparent in the work currently undertaken by these women. The diversity is immediately apparent in the varying narrative styles: fragmented (*Small Fictions*), intensely poetic (*Atavistic Traces*) and conventional (*A Fair Game*).

Future projects for Balfour and Stevens (in addition to *The Sinking of Icarus*) include a documentary, a form also of interest to Mills. Robertson is exploring, among other things, the different narrative skills and style necessary for writing feature film.

Small Fictions' success has been formally recognised with a recent award for cinematography at the Exposure Film Festival in Brisbane and in the Best Director award in New Adelaide Films. In addition the film was screened with the Coen brothers' *Fargo* (although economic factors forced a shorter than planned run due to the necessity of an increased number of feature length sessions). Ironically, the problem of limited screening illustrates "the large gap between what you want something to be and what it actually is". In the future, the establishment of an arthouse cinema in the East End will increase opportunities for local filmmakers and further the commitment initiated by the Mercury Cinema to supporting and programming under-screened alternative cinema in South Australia.

Renaissance, again?

Barbra Luby takes in the Australian films featured at this year's Sydney Film Festival

This year's Sydney Film Festival was notable for the abundance of new Australian features and for the fact that the majority of them were made by women—a first, perhaps, for local film culture. That two debut features had just won prestigious prizes at Cannes was obviously a bonus. While this year's Festival didn't break any new ground, the continuing popularity of the Pitt Centre's 'alternative' program, screening mainly documentaries, retrospectives and/or quirkier special interest features, proved yet again that there is an audience for other than Hollywood and minor foreign product. Perhaps even for a comprehensive, themed National Cinematheque program, as evidenced by the appreciative crowds at the Roberto Rossellini retrospective and the two-part program of *Short Films/Major Directors* where the queues were out of the cinema and round the block! Although theatrical exhibition for documentary is often not financially viable, the burgeoning Pay-TV market may lead to an exhibition renaissance.

The Australian features at this year's Festival seems to be united by an underlying theme—a connecting thread of differing interpretations of 'family'. My personal favourites—*What I Have Written*, *Life* and *Parklands*—share a certain elliptical style which challenges one to take an active role in reading the text. Unselfconsciously 'arty' in the best sense of the word, the directors and cinematographers also obviously share a delight in creating a new visual aesthetic, strikingly different to the high camp over-the-top style of Australian cinema seen in the last few years.

Surprisingly, it was that stunningly beautiful artiness that seemed to polarise the Festival audience, *Life* even causing a few walkouts among gay men of my acquaintance. That both films are dealing primarily with desire, in an unashamedly erotic and mature way, seemed not to be the problem. Rather, in the case of *Life*, it was the depiction of HIV+ men in an unconventional way. Most of the characters, crims in a jail's isolation ward, claim to be straight. In Lawrence Johnston's film, adapted by John Brumpton from his play, the notion of a metaphorical containment within a different code of masculinity and within the confines of the jail is explored. Even if *Life* does not fit into the mould of the new AIDS awareness and 'celebration of life' film genre, it still seems to have something particularly important and very moving to say about the way we support each other in times of need, and not only in the gay community. Beautifully filmed in a series of high resolution sequences, *Life*'s theatricality successfully adds an interesting tension to the film form.

What I Have Written is also distinguished by its innovative experimental use of still photographs and leached colours, reminiscent of the early work of Bill Henson, from baroque French locales to lush Melbourne interiors. It was shot by rising young star of Australian cinematography Dion Beebe, whose other credits include Margot Nash's *Vacant Possession* and Clara Law's *floating life*. Beebe is developing a signature style—different but coherent approaches to matching the look of the film to the story. *What I Have Written* is characterised by its strong sense of place, evoked by the sensuous early sequences of a French provincial spa resort and scenes set in Paris. The film reminded me, fleetingly, of Resnais' *Last Year in Marienbad*, not only for its imagery, but also its elegant, complex, yet ultimately transparent narrative structure. A story told mainly in voiceover has to be compelling to induce an audience to persevere, but the rewards for those who take the journey of discovery with the wife, who may or may not have been betrayed, are considerable. The blurry line between memory, fantasy and fiction is sustained almost to the somewhat operatic finale, which is let down slightly by a few clunky moments, but this shouldn't detract from the film's remarkable achievements.

Parklands' narrative structure is also full of gaps, absences in which to imagine personal histories. Like *What I have Written* and *Life*, it is almost minimal in its spare self-contained vignettes, evoking the remembered past through its use of 'other' visual

material: old TV footage of Adelaide suburban summer rituals (dragging the TV onto the lawn on hot summer nights) and unexplained, but not inexplicable, memories of Rosie's times spent with her dad. Returning to Adelaide after his death, she tries to make sense of his suicide and his last years. This quest drives the film, but falters when, after some potentially intriguing developments, the film suddenly ends, the mystery unresolved. I had some difficulty in trying to work out what had happened—it was almost as if a reel was missing.

Totally different in tone is *Love and other Catastrophes*, the much lauded Cannes winner (see box for reviews of the other, Shirley Barrett's *Love Serenade*) made by 23 year old Emma-Kate Croghan. This modest and cheery little film is completely successful in achieving what it sets out to do. On paper it may seem slight—two girls look for a new flatmate, check out some guys (and girls), change courses at uni and throw a party—but the performances are uniformly good, and the writing is fresh, honest, and funny. This slice of tribal life is not peculiar to Melbourne, but to a particular moment in the evolution of feminism which presents diverse sexualities unproblematically in mainstream film culture. Look out though for the peculiarly Melbourne ritual at the end which neatly encapsulates all the film's major themes.

Nowhere near as much fun, well not any really, but impressive in its own way is Rolf De Heer's *The Quiet Room*, about a nuclear family where the child has stopped speaking because her parents are always fighting. Told entirely from the child's point of view, and shot almost entirely indoors with very little screen activity, this film could have been excruciating. That it is not is a tribute to De Heer's restrained and sensitive direction, superior screenplay, and the compelling presence of young Chloe Ferguson. De Heer, famous for the grotesque but highly acclaimed *Bad Boy Bubby*, and the unreleased *Epsilon* (a film which would have made much more sense with subtitles), has this time made a beautiful film that should be mandatory viewing for all parents.

Dion Beebe's cinematography once again adds an extra dimension to Clara Law's *floating life*, a clear festival audience favourite; the empty suburban landscape and unrelenting brightness of Australia's light oppressing a Hong Kong family who have migrated here. Although this story has been told before, mainly in American versions by Wayne Wang, Ang Lee and Amy Tan, the Australian environment seems extraordinarily alienating to the new arrivals. The nature of the contemporary Chinese diaspora is presented in an accessible, sometimes painful, sometimes humorous way, enriched by the performances of Cecilia Lee as the mother and Annette Shun Wah as the daughter living in Germany.

This year's Sydney Film Festival provided a wonderful opportunity to catch up on the state of Australian filmmaking. I may be biased, but seeing all these new films in the context of new product from the rest of the world was a heartening experience, demonstrating an Australian-ness that is quite unique and not at all jingoistic (there was hardly a koala, an Opera House or a caricatured working class eccentric in sight)! The films all showed an assurance of direction and a mature approach which, building on the successes of the past few years, may herald a new confidence in our own stories.

What I Have Written and *Love and Other Catastrophes* are currently screening nationally. *floating life* will be released later this year. *Parklands* at the Brisbane Film Festival, *Life* and *The Quiet Room* are due for release later this year.

Barbra Luby is a Sydney based film reviewer and writer.

Ear/Shot: Listening to Films

Sydney Film Festival 1996

A major innovation at this year's Sydney Film Festival was *Ear/Shot: Listening to Films*, two sessions on soundtrack in cinema presented by sound designer, writer and lecturer Paul Charlier. Despite competition, (*Ear/Shot*, at the Pitt Centre, was programmed concurrently with *The Gate of Heavenly Peace* and a special screening of the silent *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* at the State) the sessions attracted near full houses of buffs interested in exploring this neglected aspect of cinema history and aesthetics. Charlier's engaging anecdotal presentations—pitched perfectly for a generalist audience which may have had little previous exposure to considerations of soundtrack—negotiated the fluid relationships between music, voice, silence and effects in (primarily) US cinema from

the advent of sound film in the twenties to contemporary cinema: the musicalisation of the soundtrack in the 30s, the use of modernist scores by composers such as Ligeti and Penderecki in mainstream cinema from the late 60s to the 80s; the facility of dissonant sound and noise to underscore characters' psychoses; the use of sound actualities, the sounds of the city, of war—a kind of musique concrete—in contemporary cinema. These sessions were a much needed corrective to the historically endemic privileging of the visual in film studies, redressing the silencing of this aspect of film culture in popular and scholarly discourse. From the audience response, it would seem that further attention to sound in cinema would be more than welcome at future SFFs. AMJ

floating life

directed by Clara Law

written by Eddie L.C. Fong and Clara Law, Globe Distribution, Release TBA

floating life is one of those films that starts out lightly, seductively, almost satirically, then grabs you, with sudden anger, intense sexuality, intense interiority. The arrival of an ageing Hong Kong couple with their youngest sons in a sterile expensive home on the edge of suburbia, is rich in the comedy of pathos. Second Sister, Bing, a neurotic business woman already settled in Australia terrorises them with tales of burglars, melanomas and pit bull terriers. They become prisoners, their sentence extended by inadequate public transport. The deadpan sunglare cinematography of the suburb captures the subjectivity of the migrants. Bing is cruel and a cruel stereotype, but soon Law pushes her from neurosis to psychosis to liberation, suggesting a complexity behind the angry facade.

"The happier I am in Germany", laments elder daughter Yen, "the more it hurts". She's feeling the emotional weight of familial obligation over not being with her parents. The first symptom is a maddeningly itching back which she attributes to bad feng-shui. She re-arranges the house, but Australia

beckons and furious confrontation with Second Sister is inevitable.

Their brother, Gar Ming, arrives from Hong Kong, burdened not by familial responsibility but by the unexpected and overwhelming guilt of complicity in an abortion and, presumably, of the loss of a family that might have been. Although the film is about the 'floating life' of the migrant, migration is a problem in itself but also a trigger that precipitates existing family tensions and all of them to do with obligation, age, respect, and reproduction.

With a remarkable economy of mis en scene, entailing the facility to keep all the members of this large family in emotional focus, with camera work (Dion Beebe) that often looks simply naturalistic but which angles its way into the emotional states of the characters (all excellent performances), and with a thematic consistency at once witty and psychological, *floating life* is an engaging and disturbing film. Although the ending is a touch pat and the sexual politics narrow, the sense of a fable completed is satisfying. KG

Essay

The rigours of realism

Shelley Kay muses on a conversation with Mike Leigh

Everybody you look at has a story. There's really no answer to the question how do I get from one story to the next. Naked is about things that worry me and in a way so is Secrets and Lies. They are about what we are in our identity. These two films in particular are a specific function of some particular plot, some worry. Mike Leigh

Certainly, Mike Leigh is occasionally given over to fury when confronted by stupidity; an artist who sees the publicity trail as "this hell" of journalists asking uninformed questions. I had the pleasure of infuriating him with a question about his method; for a few moments I saw the Johnny character from *Naked*; the bloke completely disgusted by others' stupidity, their lack of irony and their failure to have done their homework. With the tantrum in the background, the confession that selling the film and holding its hand at film festivals is "this hell", we could begin a reasonable and enjoyable discussion of such things as the art of storytelling, Ken Loach, and the character of Johnny in *Naked*.

We massaged the delicate intersection between tragedy and comedy, laughing our way to tragicomedy, and reflected on the worrisome humours underlying the frail human condition. I worried him endlessly with frightful statements about characterisation, realisation, rehearsal and realism. He is not a willing subject; he only becomes loose when you give. By the time I learnt this he had to go.



Mike Leigh's *Secrets and Lies*

Leigh might have a questionable reputation among journalists but he is essentially a generous man and this is the core of his success. Hard work and a filmmaking method he doesn't really like discussing (except in acceptable frameworks like student workshops) maintain his prolific stature. Beneath the cantankerous media personality is an artist whose humanism is profound: Leigh believes everybody has an

interesting story; he does not discriminate even with journalists. Leigh has the ability to bring out people's stories, to make his inquisitor his captive, so they give a bit back after he's given so much.

Leigh openly enjoys the speculation that if he'd been born in another era, a non-filmmaking era, he'd have been a painter. God knows how he'd have fitted his need for realist narrative into such a framework but it isn't hard to mentally montage the Mike Leigh scenario on canvas—a cross between Bacon and Annie Liebowitz. But Leigh's realism is a product of a love of life and a faithfulness to the truth. We learn that *Truth*, his original title for the film, doesn't readily translate into French, a pre-requisite for CIBY 2000, the co-production company. The truth is his concern, the focus of his constant brooding on the nature of existence. The quest for truth in *Secrets and Lies* opens up a wound in the English-cum-British psychology.

The secret to *Secrets and Lies* lies in its essential ordinariness. A middle class black girl seeks her birth mother after the death of her adoptive mother. The complexity of the film derives from the full frontal focus on a white British family with a working class background. *Secrets and Lies* tells us more about the mood of racial tolerance and cultural guilt prevalent amongst the English middle class than all the newspapers and TV news stories ever could. If you want to criticise the British let Mike Leigh do it for you—the film resolves a number of issues, but the secrets remain (we never learn who Hortense's father was). Middle class Hortense happily accommodates her working class relatives—she learns to live with the secret, making her complicit in another form of lying. Fundamentally, in *Secrets and Lies*, as in all his work, human society and interaction are Mike Leigh's preoccupations. Everything else serves the storytelling on this level. The home of Monica—the infertile sister-in-law of Hortense's birth mother—takes on a profound significance without overwhelming the plot; essentially the overdecorated house with its many bedrooms and toilets is merely a symbol of Monica's barrenness. The realism in a Mike Leigh movie lends itself to academic symbolism—he's a main course at a film studies banquet.

But generalist audiences also like Leigh's films because of his intensive, confident auteurship. Leigh takes realism to its limits, seeking brilliant acting (he is an actors' director), a driven plot, ample characterisation, and a keen delivery of visual, audio and psycho-sensory material. Leigh spent five months making investigations for *Secrets and Lies*, writing and rehearsing, working side by side with his actors creating their characters full to the brim with ripeness. Shakespearean in depth, Hitchcockian in the sense that the film is completely worked out before production begins, Mike Leigh films are character driven; his characters suffer psychological trauma, they try to present glib truths with fresh insight (which always falls back on some other tradition whether tragedy or comedy or both). Studying a Mike Leigh film shows us how distinct the crafts of script writing, acting and directing are because even if his films are not to your taste they are always well made, and well made films always teach. It is the middle of the road numbers that give you nothing; bad films, like really well made ones, give more. A good film about ordinary people (*Naked*, *Secrets and Lies*) is better than an average film about exceptional people (*Tom and Viv*); *Clueless* is more in the spirit of Jane Austen than *Persuasion*.

Leigh's approach was illustrated to me in his simple comparison of his technique with Ken Loach: "Ken Loach and I share a hopeful bemusement because many people around the world seem to think we make similar movies. As far as we're concerned our films are diametrically opposed. We have mutual respect for one another's films. Ken makes films that are overtly politically motivated. My films categorically are not. For Ken, going into rehearsal and being with actors would, quote, just about finish me off. He hates using actors, he likes real people; he can't stand rehearsal; he likes the light to come from outside with the cameras turning in the room; he doesn't like the crew around, he likes to make the film without the unit there at all. In all those ways he's a whole different ball game."

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Solitude and the immanence of things

John Conomos relishes the Rossellini retrospective at the Sydney Film Festival

This year's Sydney Film Festival featured an invaluable partial retrospective of Roberto Rossellini's enduring, humanist films—an oeuvre which has had a patchy exhibition history in this country.

Rossellini's fictionalised documentary cinema of spontaneity, non-professional actors, and finely modulated, ethically charged observations about humans and the material world paved the way (along with Cocteau and Bergman) for the *Cahiers du Cinema* critics-turned-auteurs—Godard, Rivette, Truffaut and Rohmer. To Godard, Rossellini's work resembled the poetic, free cinema of an "intuitive artist". For Rivette, in his exceptionally eloquent essay "Letter on Rossellini" (1955), Rossellini's neo-realist non-literary cinema constituted a benchmark achievement in modernist cinema because of its Matisse-like fluency of audiovisual composition (see Jim Hillier ed, *Cahiers du Cinema: The 1950s*, Routledge, 1985). Rivette depicts Rossellini as one of the key modern exemplars of world cinema, a view grounded in the realisation that Rossellini's films were notable for their modern non-academic photographic style, understated economy of expression, and moral concerns. Rivette also enthusiastically endorsed Rossellini's phenomenological realism: "No doubt these hurried films, improvised out of very slender means...contain the only real portrait of our times; and these times are a draft too. How could one fail to suddenly to recognise, quintessentially sketched, ill-composed, incomplete, the semblance of our daily existence?"

Although Rossellini questioned the more facile, vague usage of the ambiguous term 'neo-realist' to characterise his films, they do exhibit the moral perspective of that particular movement in Italian cinema. For Rossellini eschewed the prevailing fetishistic deployment of visual effects graphically evident in the Italian 'white-phone melodramas' of the 30s and 40s, and the French academic literary cinema of the same period.

Rossellini's long-take, improvised films are primarily concerned with the basic conception of the cinema as a medium of ideas. As Rossellini once put it to Rohmer and Truffaut: "What matters are the ideas, not the images". From his early neo-realist trilogy films—*Open City* (1945), *Paisan* (1946) and *Germany, Year Zero* (1947)—through his so-called Bergman period—*Stromboli* (1949), *Europa '51* (1952), *Voyage in Italy* (1953), through *India* (1958), his long documentaries about processes and people—*The Iron Age* (1964), *The Rise of Louis XIV* (1966)—and the subsequent TV films—*Socrates* (1970), *St. Augustine* (1972) and *The Medici Family* (1973)—Rossellini was always concerned with articulating a personal, impassive cinema where everything takes place on the same scale, and where ideas about the individual, history and society take a critical precedence over visual style.

At the centre of Rossellini's cinema (including his later didactic television work) is his cardinal concern with the human solitude and the immanence of things in everyday life. The aesthetic and moral gravity of Rossellini's moving cinema resides in the director's ethical project of addressing "the impossibility of understanding one another" (Rossellini in Hillier). Thus, drawing on Andre Bazin's influential writings on neo-realism, Amedee Ayfre's characterisation of Rossellini's cinema as embodying the conceptual and ethical interests of "phenomenological description" resonates across his entire oeuvre (see Ayfre in Hillier).

Rossellini, who came from a well-to-do background, was a keen movie goer as a young man: King Vidor's *The Crowd* (1928) and *Hallelujah* (1929) made a strong impression on him. He began his filmmaking career by creating a few shorts out of a makeshift studio set up in a family villa. These shorts demonstrated Rossellini's subsequent concern with the poetic immediacy of natural observation. Influenced by the documentary filmmaking theories of Alessandro Blasetti and Francesco de Robertis (the latter was the director of the government endorsed Centro Cinematografico de Marine), Rossellini joined the Centro where he made three features before the acclaimed neo-realist classic *Open City*.

It is apt to note how the eleven films chosen capture some of the more controversial aesthetic, historical and personal configurations of the filmmaker's art and career. From the time when Rossellini cast aside the more stringent precepts of neo-realism just as the movement itself was gaining international recognition, and embarked on making a series of extraordinary films with the Hollywood star Ingrid Bergman (who wrote a fan letter to the director before they met and married), the filmmaker's work polarised many right-wing Catholic, leftist and Marxist critics. Audiences in Italy stayed away from his movies. But thanks to French critics, especially the *Cahiers du Cinema* group, Rossellini's cinema was given its proper critical status.

The Festival's program opened with Rossellini's third Bergman film, the exquisitely nuanced *Voyage in Italy*, a work which Rivette, in one of his more intoxicating moments, argued had opened up a breach which all future cinema must pass through. The film's subtle essayistic tone and rhythms avoid cosy pictorial conventions; it explores the modern marriage of an English couple located in Naples amongst museums, social functions and a landscape drenched in the silence of antiquities. *Voyage in Italy* is one of postwar cinema's finest explorations of the existential dimensions of marriage, solitude and reconciliation.

The first of the Bergman collaborations, the lyrical and moving *Stromboli*, was also included in the program, and it amplified Rossellini's thematic preoccupation with the impossibility of human communication: an egoistical female protagonist finds herself married to a simple Italian fisherman situated in the harsh mineral landscape of Stromboli, an island which is under the shadow of an active volcano. Bergman's plight is based on the inhospitable landscape, a people who can not comprehend her, and her own cosmic struggle with religion.

Aside from the more accessible films like *Open City*, the program contained a few of the rarer Rossellini works like the resonantly humorous *Where is Liberty* (1953), which looks at the impossibility of Salvatore (Toto) readjusting to civilian life after twenty years of confinement, and *Love* (1948), a highly revolutionary visual work consisting of two brief films, one of which is an adaptation of a Cocteau play with Anna Magnani delivering a tour de force telephone monologue to a lover who has jilted her for another woman, and the other story depicting the pregnancy of a disturbed shepherdess.

Then there was Rossellini's equally experimental adaptation of Honegger's and Claudel's oratorio (*Jeanne au bucher*) in *Joan of Arc* (1954), Bergman's final work with Rossellini before she returned to Hollywood. Rossellini experiments with many different cinematic techniques, creating a remarkably ethereal work in a non-Hollywood visual style that avoids the predictable canons of Hollywood acting and dramatic storytelling. This film, with the rarer film *India* (which to my knowledge has not been publicly screened in this country) was one of the program's highlights.

India is Rossellini's most moving example of his theoretical approach to filmmaking. Its fictionalised documentary concerns, textures and spaces suggest the director's attempt to mix four stories with the documentary form. What is impressive about this magisterial work is its subtle mise-en-scene of streets, people, and everyday activities told with the director's non-moralising approach to observing the ongoing narrative life. Rossellini films humans, animals and objects of all descriptions with a non-dramatic poetic eye. *India* is Rossellini's attempt to contribute something new to the field of knowledge through the medium of cinema. It is also an hypnotic investigation of a country that (at that moment) was emerging from its colonialist past.

Though the Rossellini program was not complete in itself, it was a much appreciated, informative entry into Rossellini's exemplary cinema—a cinema which, for many of us, has over the years been a source of enchantment and moral engagement.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 31 AND SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 1, 1996

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THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN ASSISTED BY THE COMMONWEALTH GOVERNMENT THROUGH THE AUSTRALIA COUNCIL, ITS ARTS FUNDING AND ADVISORY BODY. THE MEDIA, ENTERTAINMENT AND ARTS ALLIANCE ACKNOWLEDGES THE FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE OF THE AUSTRALIAN FILM COMMISSION, THE NEW SOUTH WALES FILM AND TELEVISION OFFICE, AUSTRALIAN MULTIMEDIA ENTERPRISES LIMITED, THE DEPARTMENT OF INDUSTRY, SCIENCE AND TOURISM AND THE DEPARTMENT OF COMMUNICATION AND THE ARTS.

film
WEST

CALL FOR ENTRIES
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AUSTRALIAN SHORT FILMS

Film West will present its second season of Australian short films in western Sydney

November/December 1996
(Liverpool)
&
January/February 1997
(Parramatta & Campbelltown)

VHS preview tapes should be submitted to: PO Box 153, Milperra NSW 2214 by 21st October.

16mm and 35mm works will be considered for screening.

For further information:
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Tardis variations

MutleyMedia producers Kathryn Bird, James Verdon and Grant Hilliard get into their Booth, with some prodding from David Varga

This exchange was conducted by e-mail with three people in two states talking back to one another on a project which roves over distance, time, interpretation and single-project status.

DV Booth—a definition, please! A travelling cinema space? Prototype for future new media exhibition and distribution?

GH It's best understood as a highly modified photobooth.

JV For me primarily, it's two things; a site specific new media installation—

KB —purpose made for the screening of short interactives—

JV —and a customised venue for the exhibition of linear and non-linear film, video, sound, and desktop authored art work.

GH And through the process of using it, its visitors have the opportunity to contribute to and access a companion Boothsite on the web.

KB It might actually be considered as the physical incarnation of a web site.

GH As an object it honours the form and function of the 'classic' black & white photo booth, preserving the contract of the vending machine; \$4 in the slot for a strip of four different portraits.

KB So you get this familiar token made strange; a photostrip which is—as always—a photo-souvenir of a sequence of moments, but is in this case one which also souvenirs a particular, customised, screening experience. Consider then that it is the filmmaker who gets to determine the exact points within the screening of their work in which the Booth will take its photos of its mini-audience. Photos the visitor might then choose to see pasted into our Boothsite photo album—a cumulative record of all who sit in it, all over the country.

DV Your call for entries will be announced soon. What are the selection criteria?

KB We're opening a national call for entries for short, time-based, purpose-made work to screen in Booth. Work can be produced in any format in the span from super or high-8 to high-end desktop generation and will then be pressed and accessed to a series of CD-ROMs, each containing a curated 'season' of around an hour of material—or around 20 works.

GH We will be asking each program maker to structure their three minute piece around four designated cut points; each point is both a literal trigger for the Booth's camera eye to take its portrait of the viewer, and a potential cut point between any one work on the CD-ROM and any other. Booth works as a kind of editing suite, offering each visitor the

option of editing together sections of the contributed works into amalgam 'films' in various improvisatory ways.

DV To what extent will artists need to design their ideas around it's sonic/physical space?

KB To a great extent. For all the things it is and all the ways it works, it is primarily a venue. We were interested in this notion of a 'film' production practice which could also be site-specific.

JV It's a chance to redress some of the disempowering aspects of exhibition for work of this nature. To take an example, desktop work is often exhibited either on a videotape loop if linear, or on a desktop machine if non-linear; often time sharing with other works, unoptimised for any pieces with regards to navigational access and calibration of hardware, and with no independent technical support to ensure the work will in fact be displayed or interacted with as the artist intended for the duration of that show. Booth can target specific works and treat them in the best way possible.

KB Booth sets out to lock down a series of knowns for contributors to riff around. In configuring the environment, we've artificially extended those aspects of the screening situation which always lose out—like sound.

GH It was important that sound not be

an afterthought to vision; a true stereo field is produced by speakers inside the Booth, as well as a separate speaker system in the equipment cavity of the box that gives a 'voice' to the Booth.

DV What outside participation will be possible for web browsers?

JV Via the Boothsite, the remote visitor can rifle through the archive of photostrips of all Booth visitors, access the evolving soundscape, check information on touring, on contributing artists, on ways to contribute to the curated CD-ROMs, as well as being linked very directly into the physical Booth via a (broadcast delayed) live video feed signal from the Booth itself.

DV Tell us about the video postcard. Are there any other ways the Booth will 'archive' its travels and the presences of the people who visit it?

GH We'll be asking people to bring along 30 second VHS video postcards of their town which can be fed directly into the Booth via a VHS slot, digitised, and posted to the web site.

KB If we're going to have some representation on the Boothsite of where the Booth literally is, we want it to come filtered through local versions, shot on domestic equipment, edited in camera, and contributed direct-to-Booth. The total Booth experience is shot through with various plays between what a visitor might 'put in' to the Booth (like their image, their voice) and what they might take away.

JV A visitor gets to manipulate his or her own image before taking away the 'hard copy' record of the session in the edition of the photostrip, but also to upload their strip to the Boothsite to join other portraits in an online photo album, or send an email from the Booth—their photo portrait plus a short message.

DV How soon before the box in question hits the highway? And where will it go? What are the logistical problems of getting the booth on-line in remote areas ...does this limit the booth frontier?

GH The Booth is set to begin its tour in force at the start of next year, looking towards a Perth launch. Obviously there are still vast areas of Australia that have no local access to the internet, even though diverse groups are agitating for change. The National Farmers Federation, for instance, is active in trying to ensure on-line access for its members. The map of local service provision could be very different by mid-'97, but it is crucial for the Booth's success in remote areas that we can tap into the shifting ground of local access. It is a situation that redefines 'remote' and 'local' in Australia. You can be living only a couple of hundred kilometres from Sydney and still have to dial STD to be on-line; the touring Booth serves to underline such anomalies. In developing the Booth we have been guided by two central questions; who is it that has access and to what?

Get the small print via <http://www.magna.com.au-mutley>, email mutley@magna.com.au, phone 02 9314 2936, and watch for the flyer.

YOUNG FILMMAKERS FUND

The State Government has established a fund for the encouragement of young filmmakers. The Fund will be administered by the New South Wales Film & Television Office. Eligible projects will be mainly short fiction films, documentaries or experimental films.

- The Fund will be open to individuals or teams of individuals between the ages of 18 and 35 years who are NSW residents
- The Fund will make direct grants towards production and post production costs only
- Projects must demonstrate cultural and economic benefit to NSW and be entirely produced in NSW using NSW-based service providers
- Each project's principal photography must begin within six months of approval and the project must be completed within twelve months of approval
- There will be no restriction on the format (film or tape), subject matter or type of film
- The maximum grant will be in the range of \$20,000 to \$25,000, but the assessment committee may recommend a larger grant for a proposal of exceptional merit
- There will be three funding rounds in a full year closing on: 9 August, 8 November and 28 March.

Guidelines and applications for the Young Filmmakers Fund must be used and are now available from:

Level 6, 1 Francis Street
EAST SYDNEY NSW 2010
Ph: (02) 9380-5599
Fax: (02) 9360-1095



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Preview

Squatting, scanning, jamming

Curator Francesca da Rimini previews tours by three techno-anarchist artists

••• Information wants to be free •••

In September/October 1996 the Australian Network for Art And Technology (ANAT) is co-ordinating *Virogenesis 2*, the second cultural infection of the Australian body. Replicating and mutating the touring template of *Virogenesis 1* (Graham Harwood, September/October 1995), euro-data deviants Fuller (UK), Gomma (Italy) and Scanner (UK) will present talks, workshops, gigs and informal exchanges in Adelaide, Sydney, Canberra, Brisbane, Perth and Melbourne.

The great demographics of Web users—according to a recent A.C. Nielsen study, the 17.6 million people using the Web in the U.S. and Canada tend to be young, upscale, educated professionals with a household income over \$80,000. Also, approximately a third of all Internet users are women.

www company 'X'

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The three artists/activists work with old and new media anarchically, creating hybrid forms, slick grunge, dirty code, infiltrating mainstream and underground zones. Agent Gomma aka E. 'Gomma' Guameri has been deeply involved in the cultural and existential underground since his early teens. In 1985 he managed the punk section in the Calusca bookshop (opened in 1972 in Milano on the model of the San Franciscan City Lights bookstore). In 1987 he founded the cyberpunk magazine *DECODER* which brought to the project diverse cultural and political experience: anarchists, punks, communists, liberals and autonomists, all working in the field of communication—music, video, radio, graphics, literature, computers, photocopying and mail art. In 1988 he founded the *SHAKE* cooperative, a publishing house which translates into Italian significant works from the cultural front, including Donna Haraway, Hakim Bey, J.G. Ballard and *Re-Search*. Gomma writes for the daily newspaper *il manifesto* on technology and society, directs a series for Feltrinelli and uses the internet as a site for political activism. His distinctive aberrant poetic style and anarchic attitude permeate the *DECODER/SHAKE* media projects and disturb the authorities. This is cultural production continually in a state of tension—disruptive, egalitarian, heretic. Stuff you can be imprisoned for in Italy.

*We're like many Frankensteins, composed of human members and artificial elements created by technology. I've seen one whose hand had three fingers, with the thumb and index finger substituted by a pair of pliers and functioning like a crooked beak. A small antenna came out of his mouth and he spoke in megahertz to a woman who had no ears, but instead two parabolic dishes to capture television messages. Not being able to comprehend each other, the two made love, in such a way that it excited my pity, now with clogged movement from the wheels on his feet, now facilitated by her tongue, magnetic-tape-made, sixty minutes long, while following the rhythm of the electronic drum that beat in their chests. From this incest, *DECODER* was born, the son of communication, of diversity, and of provocation. It has no more mutations like man, it's completely technological. A small automaton, self composed by many*

means of communication, assembled anthropomorphic ally of speaking a universal language.

Gomma

The phenomenal growth of the Web—the Net is adding new users, new Web sites, and new capabilities at an incredible rate. Hembrecht & Quist, a leading investment firm, forecasts 200 million Web users by the year 2000.

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Agent Scanner aka Robin Rimbaud began his musical explorations at age 11 when having been exposed to the work of composer John Cage at school he took to the family piano with nails and screws and hung a tape recorder inside to record the reverberations. He later formed the band *Dau AI Set* and compiled *Peyrere*, a cassette av 'zine which featured new material by the prime movers of the industrial music scene including Test Department, Coil, Lydia Lunch and Derek Jarmen.

One day he chanced upon a tiny mobile radio receiver called a scanner and saw the creative possibilities. Discovering that it could surf through the airwaves and intercept personal telephone calls he began mixing it live into the four track recordings he'd written. The first Scanner CD was issued in 1992 followed by *Scanner 2* and offers of commissions for compilation albums, including *Artificial Intelligence 2* for *Warp*, *Trance Europe Express 2* and *Types* from *Kudos*. He set up and still runs *The Electronic Lounge* monthly at the Institute of Contemporary Art in London with DJs including Mixmaster Morris, Locust, Psychick Warriors Ov Gaia, David Toop and Paul Schutze/Uzect Plaush.

In the 1994 Terminal Futures conference at the ICA Scanner ran a workshop on scanning. He completed writing the soundtrack for the *Fuse* exhibition entitled *Fuse* at the Royal College of Art in association with graphic designer Neville Brody and has remixed, amongst others, *Immersion* (Swim), *As One* (New Electronica), *Scorn* (Earache) and *Oval* (Mille Plateaux). *Spore*, his double album on New Electronica, was released in 1995. He is currently creating radio works and participating in numerous European performances and installations. Scanner's recent collaborations have included Icelandic singer Bjork and American film/tv maker David Lynch.

I believe that there is no such thing as real privacy anymore. Video cameras survey [us] in the streets, the underground, the buses, the shops. We are all featured on countless home videos without consent. There is this paradox of privacy and invasion that interests me. What I use is simply available on open access in the shops, but what else exists? What do higher authorities have access to? How much are we being watched without our knowledge. My work is partly about taking technology and finding an alternative use for it so that it becomes relevant to society. These kinds of [surveillance] machines are developed to help those in power keep us at arm's length. In some ways I feel that my use of it subverts that. Then again consider—why does someone invent and commercially market a device such as this?

Scanner

The ability to shorten the distance between advertising, information gathering,

and sales—[our company] offers instant gratification. Your customer sees your ad, clicks on it to get more information, and your information immediately pops up on his screen. Then, he can click on options to receive more info, ask to be contacted by you, send you an inquiry, order your product, whatever is appropriate.

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Agent Fuller is on the editorial group of *Underground*, an artists' free mass-circulation newspaper focusing on critical cyberculture. He is editor of the interactive disk and internet based magazine of fiction and art, *I/O/D*. Fuller is completing a hyperfictional novel *Automated Telling Machine* and has published two previous books, *Flyposter Frenzy*—posters from the anticopyright network and *Unnatural*, techno-theory for a contaminated culture. He is a contributing editor to the excellent *Alternative X* web site (www.altx.com).

[I'm interested in] the wider dynamics of information movement and the intersection of what is in the abstract an open system, with manners of speech, cultural poise and economics that mitigate against it being such. It might even be possible that the totalising metaphor of the 'community' and the false warmth from its hearth both masks a wider and more radical conflagration and fails in its supposed task of providing people with the tools to negotiate the increasing subsumption of the networks with the imaginary, and the attenuating dynamics of the market. The internet constitutes a bifurcation in information dynamics. As an event it is exemplarily complex and cannot be reduced to the sum of the factors that make it possible. A politics of the networks

therefore, will of necessity be just as seething with what George Bataille called, 'those linked series of deceptions, exploitations and manias that give a temporal order to the apparent unreason of history'. On with the road rage.

Matt Fuller

In most cases [our company] is able to ascertain from your network address which organisation you belong to or the service provider you are using. Once we determine your organisation, we are able to better determine information about your organisation such as size, type, and location. We do record your interests, which are determined only by [our company's] member Web sites you visit. However, we only summarise this information and do not retain logs of your specific visits to these sites.

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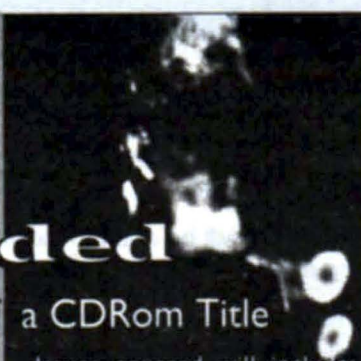
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Virogenesis 2, curated by Francesca da Rimini, has been funded by the Australia Council (New Media Arts and Community Cultural Development Funds), and is presented in association with participating parties including United Trades and Labor Council of SA, Ngpartji Co-operative Multimedia Centre, Experimental Art Foundation, Carnivale, Art Gallery of New South Wales, The Performance Space, Artspace, Street Level Inc, University of Western Sydney—Nepean (Department of Design), Zonar Records, Australian National University (Canberra School of Art), Institute of Modern Art, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art and Experimenta.

Full touring details will be available from ANAT later in August.

Email: anat@camtech.net.au

Tel: +61 8 231 9037



The Dame
was
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The Making of a CD Rom Title

IMAGO (Multimedia Centre) Ltd in association with ArtsWA presents "The Dame Was Loaded" - the Making of a CD-ROM Title. During the course of a day-long seminar on August 21, 1996, David Giles of Beam Software, the producer, and Mark Morrison, the writer, will cover a range of issues relating to the creation, production and distribution of the Philips CD Rom title "The Dame Was Loaded".

Cost for the seminar, including lunch and morning and afternoon tea, is \$50, or \$25 for students.


Issues covered will include: writing narrative for the interactive context; using film in a CD context; raising finance; securing a distribution deal; problems and solutions in production; design issues; the role of artists in production.

This represents a unique opportunity to find out the inside story on the making of a major CD Rom game.

To attend this unique, one-day seminar at the IMAGO Multimedia Centre (140 Royal Street, East Perth, WA) phone or fax IMAGO for booking details and a registration form.

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Less clichés for the millennium

Nic Beames at a recent multimedia conference in Hawaii

If asked where the island of Kauai is located, could you pinpoint its location at the centre of the circle we commonly describe as the Pacific Rim? If you could, then your geography is better than mine. In the last week of April I was fortunate enough to travel to the County of Kauai, northernmost island of Hawaii, to attend a conference and workshop series entitled *Story Telling for the New Millennium*. This conference was touted as focusing uniquely on the role of the artist in the new technology, drawing together strands from filmmaking, new media, graphic design, music and sound design, website publishing and 'the story'.

I had only just absorbed the contents of the Australian Film Commission's *Language and Interactivity*, after more than a year's supply of multimedia gab-fests. On the flight to Kauai I had to ask myself how many more multimedia clichés I could bear?

Surprisingly, *Story Telling for the New Millennium* was, as described in the advance publicity, indeed a unique occasion.

To start with, on offer was a series of hands-on workshops. One stream offered three-day intensive workshops

in writing and assembling narrative for interactive media, while another was a practical smorgasbord of inside tips on graphics, video and audio software, primarily for experienced new media artists and practitioners. Unable to secure a place in the first stream, I was more than compensated in taking five workshops from the second. What was so valuable about these hands-on sessions in Photoshop, After Effects, and digital audio design was that we were shown secrets by the people who made the software. As a practitioner, I got inestimable value from techniques and features that 'never made it into the manuals'.

Thanks to the ubiquitous web, speakers' papers and interviews were made available almost the moment they were uttered. Their words survive them at www.filmkauai.com/cafe/live.html. If you want an insight into some great new media minds the website is well worth a look.

Among the speakers who really shone was keynote Peter Bergman, whose *Radio Free Oz* website (www.rfo.com)—'the funnybone of the internet'—makes the web seem as natural as radio.

Michael Nash and Rebekah Behrendt, pioneers of interactive publisher iNSCAPE (*The Dark Eye*, *Bad Day on the Midway*), told how they preferred to work with artists, alternating story point-of-view and plotlines. CEO Nash was formerly a respected fine arts critic, and reflected that the reason so many multimedia titles suck is that too many are the products of solely market-driven business plans.

Linda Stone of Microsoft demonstrated that company's foray into virtual worlds. V-Chat is unabashedly derivative of Neal Stephenson's SF epic *Snowcrash*, where people connect on-line, meeting as avatars in the metaverse. V-Chat is, for now, a Microsoft Network only service, with no projected release on the web. For those lucky enough to connect via V-Chat, the worlds are (for on-line chat environments) richly detailed and personalised.

Tom Reilly, founder of Digital Queers, is currently president of Planet Out (www.planetout.com), a network catering to gay and lesbian net users. Among its services, Planet Out operates a V-Chat world, where users' avatars can freely flirt

and pick each other up.

Other memorable presentations came from former pop icon and now multimedia sound producer, Thomas Dolby (www.headspace.com), and from the producer of *From Alice to Ocean*, Rick Smolan, whose *24 hours in cyberspace* is perhaps the most visible community art event the net has yet seen (www.24hrs.com). Many of the American audience were there from the film and television standpoint. The event was co-hosted by the American Film Institute and Kauai Institute for Communications Media. Judy Drost, Director of KICM, showed how a four years young organisation can ably attract enormous support for a worthwhile event.

Nick Beames is a new media artist, currently producing two multimedia titles. Formerly working out of Perth, in August he joins the Australian Multimedia Enterprise as Technical Manager. His visit was supported by the AFC, Arts West, Screen West and Imago Ltd.

Interview

The Corman agenda

David Varga interviews Robert Alcock, director of Newcastle's *Cinessential '96*, a premiere festival of low budget film featuring special guest Roger Corman

DV Is the curatorial policy conceived on budget alone or is the idea of 'survival film' more philosophical than simply dollars per frame?

RA The program will run with a mix of films with selection criteria for features being 'under a million dollars'. We will celebrate the low budget achievement, congratulating producers for working in a culturally sophisticated 'low budget cinema' arena. These films may or may not be calling cards for bigger budget films. What is more important is that through this festival, Australian audiences will be alerted to an emerging culture of 'survival films', films that will dictate a new and important cinema language. The philosophy of this year's theme, *Cinessential '96*, is flavoured with Roger Corman's view on 'survival'...a 50/50 mix of art and commerce where compromise is not considered a dirty word and the short films will be selected with this in mind.

Cinessential '96 focuses on the low budget context. The short films will be viewed in an environment where audiences are thinking 'how does this film fit a low budget filmmaking culture? Does it reflect a need to further the career of the filmmaker alone, or does it try to excite our sense of cinema craft? Are there clues to production methodology that shatter conventional production formulae? Is there a new style emerging? What surprises have been unleashed out of necessity?

DV Have you had much response nationally with entries for the

Cinessential program? Do you expect people will travel to the festival?

RA This is our first festival and our resources are limited so we wanted to keep the festival small and punchy. The national response has been adequate with representation from most states. Requests for entry forms have come from far and wide, country and urban. The actual entries though have been mostly urban. I'm not sure what this means. About responses from afar, since we have the Australian Film and TV School eager to sponsor us, I certainly hope to see a lot of the film brats hitting the freeway.

DV The presence of Roger Corman will be a highlight.

RA Roger Corman is an inspiration to old and new. He sets an agenda that I believe every filmmaker must be excited by.

DV What films will be in the Corman program?

RA Though exploitation was his main game, we are searching the globe for a print of *The Intruder* his only commercial flop. Yes, a flop...the only 'art' film he dared to risk his last dime on. Produced and directed by Corman in 1961, it stars William Shatner and is compelling viewing...an opening night must-see on September 11. We have synchronised Friday September 13 to become 'Corman's Black Friday', a mix of his comic-horror genre with screen appearances by a young Jack Nicholson.

On standby we have *Little Shop of Horrors*, *Bucket of Blood*, *Attack of the Crab Monsters*, *The Fall of the House of Usher* and *The Man With X-Ray Eyes*.

DV And other feature length productions, what can we expect? Are there any other 'names' in attendance during the festival?

RA I am in discussion with Rod Bishop, Robert Connolly, David Elwick, Rolf de Heer, George Mannix, Wayne Groom, Brendan Walls and others regarding past and present low budget features. I am being retrospective in my approach to the different models of low budget film. I hope some of these 'flickers' will be able to attend. I have also spoken to New Vision regarding the recent *Love and Other Catastrophes* success story and hope to attract the producer Stavros Efthymiou. Unfortunately, Robert (Video Fool for Love) Gibson is going to be out of the country. There will be those 'unknown filmmakers' who still have a low profile, making films with their own cash. Essentially, it will be a festival for producers/directors who believe they are filmmakers, passionate about celebrating craft, and ultra-low budget 'ferals' celebrating survival.

Open City Film Festival, *Cinessential '96*, September 11-14, Lyrique Cinema, Newcastle. Symposium venue to be announced. For further details contact Robert Alcock, tel: 049 21 6382, fax: 049 21 6944.

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Review

Love Serenade

directed by Shirley Barrett

I wanted to like *Love Serenade*. Its reputation preceded it—director Shirley Barrett won the prestigious Camera d'Or for first features at this year's Cannes—and expectations ran high. Two cretinous, romance-starved small town naïfs—sisters Vicky Ann and Dimity—vie for the affections of hangdog-faced DJ Ken Sherry, who washes up in nowhereville in the Victorian wheatbelt to run the local radio station, a shotgun shack on the edge of town. The oleaginous sleaze bewitches the pathetic sisters with his pop philosophical homilies (he recites the *Desiderata* on air daily) and plays them off against each other until he gets his comeuppance in the surprise denouement. Anodyne stuff. But Barrett, for reasons that remain deeply inscrutable, introduces a fish motif as a kind of conceptual axis (don't ask me...). Barrett's bizarrely ill-judged stab at the surreal leaves the viewer with an enigmatic question: was Ken really a transgenic Murray River cod?

The film is troubling on a number of counts. First, its surreal premise bombs. Second, *Love Serenade* is an index of the intractability of the 'quirky', dumb and dumber genre of Australian film that plays to overdetermined stereotypes of antipodean grotesquerie. The wide open spaces of the Australia of the European mythos—there are plenty of panoramic vistas of the sunburnt country—are a kind of metonym for the vacuum inside the ditsy female characters' heads (see Muriel, Fran in *Strictly Ballroom* and to a lesser extent the 'girls' in *Priscilla*). In a scene that owes more than a little to the trannies' clamour up a shimmering Uluru in *Priscilla*, the jilted, suicidal Vicky Ann, a poodle-permed, pink-clad female drag artiste, ascends Sunray's monolithic wheat silo in a preposterous bridal gown. The characters and mise-en-scene are less than caricatures and archetypes that confirm Australia's place in the European filmic imagination as a repository for fettered tropes of culturally inferior otherness: antipodean idiosyncrasy, poverty of mind, the dominance of landscape, eccentric vacuity. It's perfectly apposite that *Love Serenade* won the Camera d'Or. See it for the Barry White soundtrack. Annemarie Jonson

Dance night at the club, from *The Coolbaroo Club*The Coolbaroo Club
directed by Roger Scholes
A Ronin Film release

From 1946 to 1960 the Aboriginal community in East Perth ran the organisation from which this extremely timely documentary takes its name. The Club held a regular Friday night dance, a focus for the local community, and established a newspaper which advocated social equity for Aboriginal people. Through interviews with former club members, archival footage and wonderful reconstructions of the weekly dance, Roger Scholes' film evokes an Australian post-war milieu in which the systematic oppression of the owners of this land—indeed, an antipodean version of apartheid—was official policy.

The policies illuminated by this film are deeply disturbing, not least for the fact that they were in effect so recently—we're not talking last century here. Aboriginal people in Perth were subjected to unremitting police harassment. They were forced to carry identity cards. They were prohibited from owning land and real estate and were subject to systematic discrimination if they tried to rent: many lived in camps by the railway line. The people were legally prohibited from entering a demarcation zone encompassing Perth city after curfew hour. Aborigines judged by the Chief Protector to be worthy of human subjecthood were granted exemption from the curfew—but only on the condition that they renounce all ties with their families and the Aboriginal community. Helena Clarke, a key Club activist, now a community elder, remembers half a century later the extraordinary indignity of being offered such an exemption—effectively a negation of her racial specificity, a renunciation that would, paradoxically, have been the pre-requisite for her free passage through her own land.

The film captures the pre-'67 climate; that is, pre the referendum that, within the profoundly perverse logic of invasion and colonisation, granted citizenship to Aboriginal people. With the odds so overwhelmingly against them, the efforts of the Club in organising an effective community-based resistance and lobbying movement are all the more remarkable. Coolbaroo can be seen as a kind of early microcosm of the broader political activism that has characterised the ongoing Aboriginal struggle for self-determination in its contemporary manifestations.

I had the remarkable opportunity to be there for Paul Keating's epochal Redfern Park speech in 1993. To hear, at last, a Australian political leader publicly state "we took you in. we took your children, we tried to decimate your culture" was extraordinary. Precisely three years later, a

Lois Olney as Gladys and Ken Bynder in *The Coolbaroo Club*

reactionary and racist government threatens to reverse the gains made by Aboriginal people in their fight for social justice over many decades. The Native Title Act is under threat. Aboriginal deaths in custody escalate. John Herron, putative Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, has the breathtaking ignorance to advocate assimilation—the colonial equivalent to the final solution—the very policy sanctioned by the Chief Protector for Aborigines in the latter period of the Coolbaroo Club's existence. "Even though they are black we have no doubt they can be useful members of our Australian society. There is no reason why the aborigine (sic) cannot be socially, culturally and economically absorbed".

This film, a timely corrective to the Herron—and Hansonisation of race relations in this country, should be compulsory viewing.

An Elephant and a Bicycle
directed by Juan Carlos Tabio

When you look at a cloud, what do you see? An elephant? A bicycle? Both perhaps? A school mistress's question to her pupils becomes a metaphor for the conundrum of interpretation. Here is a film that is child-like, naive, but which has a profound philosophical resonance.

At first it appears to be a simple charming fable in which our hero, returning from a spell of unjust imprisonment, finds his sweetheart pregnant to the dastardly tyrant who dominates the village. Known only as 'the islander', the hero has brought with him a primitive projector and a print of *Robin Hood*. For the oppressed villagers, the experience of watching the movie is so intense that the film and everyday life begin to merge into a new world of imagination and possibility. With repeated viewings this world transforms and expands. A despot may be overthrown, a lost love may be recovered, the dead may return to help us.

An Elephant and a Bicycle takes us on a nostalgic journey through the quixotic world of Cuban cinema, echoing such classics as *Lucia*, to a place where people believe in the power of art to transform lives. It is at once a fairy tale and social realism, a love story and a communist propaganda film. While the fishwives in the market engage in a cogent discussion of that perennial question: Should film entertain or educate? The sceptic cannot understand why the whole village is bewitched by this tedious nonsense.

Fables are simple stories that become most potent in times of oppression, when people cannot give explicit voice to their thoughts. Their simplicity, the cloudiness of their form, can also transport us, with the agility of a bicycle and the weight of an elephant. They cannot be both! Someone has stayed behind to object, someone stubborn. Annemarie Lopez

Unzipped

directed by Douglas Kieve
A Dendy Films Release

Currently screening nationally

Celebrated American fashion designer, Isaac Mizrahi sits on his bed watching a video of *Nanook of the North*. He is particularly taken with Nanook's pants. If he had his way, we'd all be dressing in furry jump suits worn with hush puppies and the right dog. But, as he says, women don't want to look like cows so he modifies his vision to something more wearable.

After months of frustration and doubt, he finally presents his collection of '50s cheesecake meets eskimo' against a transparent scrim behind which the models change. It is an inspired piece of staging that simultaneously provides the audience with the exquisite final product on the catwalk and the construction of this image amid the chaos backstage.

The scrim acts as a metaphor for the film as a whole. Kieve's access-all-areas camera gives the impression that what we are seeing is an authentic account of how the fashion industry operates. There is no pretence that the designer is an artist working outside market forces. Mizrahi's last collection was poorly received and as a precaution against another failure he seeks advice from a passing parade of influential fashion editors who speak in headlines, his mum and the ouija board. We also see into the creative impulse as he explains the sources of his inspiration—TV, Hollywood and a snippet of fashion history.

Despite this air of authenticity, being fashion it is all performance. Mizrahi is a great mimic and not only his collection but his whole life is imbued with quotation. Kieve makes the most of this by intercutting Mizrahi's recital of a conversation, film or event with the original. Supported by a cast of eccentric characters, *Unzipped* succeeds, where other attempts have failed, in making the ultimate fashion statement.

Unzipped: Isaac Mizrahi's baggy pants. Karen de Perthuis

Newsreel

Spielberg by Baxter

Film historian and writer John Baxter is in town, speaking about the subject of his forthcoming pic-bio, Stanley Kubrick at the Brisbane Film Festival's Kubrick retrospective and in Sydney launching his unauthorised biography of Stephen Spielberg. You can hear him dish the dirt at Berkelouw Bookdealers, 19 Oxford Street Paddington on August 11 at 7 pm. \$5.00, wine and refreshments included. Bookings 02 9360 3200

Turbulence

Jon McCormack's extraordinary works have been described as affecting 'a kind of multimedia sublime'. One of the most highly acclaimed computer artists in the world, he has exhibited widely throughout the United States, Europe and Japan. His multi-award winning interactive installation *Turbulence* will have its Sydney premiere at the Art Gallery of NSW in October. Essentially a philosophical work which questions definitions of materialisation, *Turbulence* explores the virtual world of imaginary life—unique forms of exploding colour, intricate complexity and overwhelming beauty which were 'evolved' by the computer itself over a three-year period. "My work is not the same as painting or sculpting, or any other traditional art practice", explains McCormack. "I don't create the work directly, I use the computer like a 'virtual garden' to grow shapes and forms and select their survival based on aesthetic criteria. I use software that parodies evolution, but rather than survival of the fittest it's survival of the most beautiful or aesthetically interesting. The result is something that would be impossible to create explicitly: it's a synergetic relationship between myself and the machine." *Turbulence: an interactive museum of unnatural history*, Level 2, Art Gallery of NSW, October 5-20.

Elastic Light

Coinciding with the exhibition of *Turbulence*, the Sydney Intermedia Network in conjunction with the Art Gallery of NSW will present a retrospective of international computer animation art sure to distort perceptions of time and space. This specially curated program will feature *Experiments in Motion Graphics*, a short documentary on the 'visionary' pre-computer animation artist John Whitney Sr, whose explorations of how 'motion patterns time' influenced many of the prominent computer artists whose works will also be screened, among them: *Outside In* by Silvio Levy and Tamara Munzner (USA), *The Garden* by Tomasz Waliczky (Germany), *Brain Massage* and *Robo-Insects* by Satoshi Koreki (Japan/USA), *Astro Turf* by Ian Haig (Australia) and *Liberation* (Pet Shop Boys) by Ian Bird (UK). A rare screening of these and other works not to be missed. The session on Saturday 5 October will be introduced by Jon McCormack. Enquiries: Sydney Intermedia Network Tel: (02) 9264 7225, SIN website: <http://www.ozemail.com.au/~sinsite>. *Elastic Light* curated by Jon McCormack Domain Theatre, Level 1, Art Gallery of NSW, 2pm Saturdays October 5 and 12.

Burning the Interface

A touring exhibition of interactive CD-Rom works curated by Mike Leggett and Linda Michael for the MCA Sydney (see *RealTime* #13 for detailed review). Confirmed dates are: Niparte CMC, Adelaide, Sept 12 - October 5; *Experimenta*, CCP Gallery, Melbourne, November 7-23; Perth International Festival, PICA, Perth, Feb 12 - March 9; Brisbane City Art Gallery and Museum, March 27-May 3. See the exhibition website <http://www.mca.com.au/>

Festivals Festivals Festivals

Venice Film Festival

Monica Pellizzari, winner of the Baby Lion best short film award at Venice 1994 for *Just Desserts*, has had her first feature film, *Fistful of Flies* accepted for the Venice Film Festival's *Fast Lane* program.

The 11th Videobrasil International Festival of Electronic Art

The festival aims to acknowledge 30 years of video art as well as supporting new, innovative video works. Curators of a Southern Hemisphere competitive show are now calling for entries from artists from Latin America, Africa, Oceania, Australia and Indonesia. Video works can be produced in any format with no time limit. Sao Paulo Brazil November 12-17. For further details contact John Gillies on 02 9385 0649.

Melbourne Fringe Festival, October

Two programs on offer, one featuring local and national short film and video works titled *Access Denied* (October 5 - 6), and a second film program highlighting new underground works from South East Asia (October 14 - 15). Entry deadline for *Access Denied*: September 5, Tel: 03 9534 0722, Fax: 9534 0733.

The 9th Melbourne International Super-8 Film Festival, October

Organisers hope to curate an international program of film works which also reflects local Super-8 film culture. Entry deadline: August. Contact Mikael Brain on 03 9417 3402 or write to PO Box 2033, Fitzroy, 3065.

Watch My Shorts (VIC), September

Entry deadline: August. Tel: 03 9349 4441 Fax: 03 9349 4443

National Student Film Festival, Chauvel Cinema, Sydney, October

Film and video works sought from student film makers

nationally (not AFTRS).

Entry deadline: October 1, Tel: 02 9563 6161; Fax: 02 9563 6109.

Frames Film Festival (SA), October

Entry deadline: August. Tel: 08 410 0979 Fax: 08 410 1787

Festival of Perth, December

Entry deadline: August. Tel: 09 386 7977, Fax: 09 386 2763

The Brain Project

Consciousness aficionado Stephen Jones presents an intimate live-in week of talks, recorded video interviews, books, research papers and graphics to dip into and a web connection (http://www.merlin.com.au/brain_proj/...). Inspired by his visit to the recent *Towards a Science of Consciousness* conference in Tucson, Arizona (April 6 - 13, 1996), Stephen is bringing it all back home to you at The Performance Space Studio. Video-ed speakers include Robert Kirk, David Chambers, Susan Greenfield, Bernie Baars, Michael J. Lockwood, Henry Stapp, and Paul Davies, Stephen writes, "This is a physical hypertext show, a physical and virtual system of informational files, performed in the process of thinking about and discussing consciousness. As your hypertext processor, I will introduce and present video-ed talks from some of the speakers. All the video will be available for playback, each segment logged on a dAVE digital disk recorder acting as our video server for quick access to material for points of discussion". The Performance Space Studio, Weekdays 2-7pm (open discussion, web access, reading), 7-10pm (video talks and discussion); Weekend, 2-4pm (open discussion etc), 4-8pm (video talks etc); Wednesday 14 - Sunday 18 August.

Contact for detailed program: email: sjones@real.com.au Tel: 02 9281 7554 (ah), 02 9211 1561 (wk).

The Northern Lights Film Festival

It's the Manpower Season of Contemporary Canadian Cinema with seven feature films, two documentaries and four shorts. The subject matter is impressively regional and cross cultural and a number of the directors are first timers. Writer Don McKellar (*Roadkill*) turns director with a 22 minute short, *Blue*, starring David Cronenberg as "a porn-afficionado cum businessman". Atom Egoyan offers the four minute *A Portrait of Arshile* about Armenian artist Arshile Gorky and "the connections between diary and history and between family and art". Presented by the Australian Film Institute in association with the Government of Canada. Brisbane: The Hoyts Regent, August 5 - 10; Sydney: Chauvel Cinemas, August 15 - 22; Melbourne: Capitol Theatre, August 23 - September 1; Perth: Cinema Paradiso, August 27 - September 1.

Taking the Byte: women and new technologies

This conference will bring to Australia Beth Kennedy (Kaizen Heron Group, Los Angeles, developers of interactive multimedia software) and Sadie Plant (UK), expert on cyberfeminism and cyberculture. The conference will tour to Brisbane, Sydney and Adelaide after opening in Melbourne as be part of AIIA's Creative Exports Conference (October 25 - 28). For further dates and details: WIFT 02 9332 2408

Interactive ARTRAGE

On October 5 an interactive cyber-art exhibition will be held in conjunction with ARTRAGE '96 (Perth's fringe arts festival) to celebrate cyber-artwork produced in Australia, to enable cyber-artists and the public to interact in real time, to archive the works on an interactive CD-ROM. Many artists and universities are participating. As a lead up to the festival, a serial available on www will be updated in 16 weekly episodes and is currently available (<http://house.curtin.edu.au>) to visit. It examines the lives of six fictional characters living in the hOUSE in a Perth-like cyber city. Contributors welcome through the web-site. The hOUSE, Curtin University of Technology. Contacts: Pierre Van Osselaer 09 384 4145, Nick King 015 988 511; email eking2@cc.curtin.edu.au

The performer and the New Media

This is a timely and unique conference presented by the Media and Entertainment Alliance and the Australian Film, Television and Radio School for actors and other performers faced with the contractual and craft demands of the new media. The two day gathering will include addresses, practitioner panels and live demonstrations. Craft issues include delivering performances for projects with non-linear storylines, motion capture and blue screen. Free for financial Equity members, \$50 for non-members. On-line coverage during the conference will be available on the AFTRS web site (www.aftrs.edu.au). Venue: AFTRS, Epping Road (cnr. Bolaclova Rd), North Ryde. Bookings and enquiries: Helen Stanwix 02 9333 0923, fax 029 9333 0933.

Script Typing

Anyone wanting to avail themselves of an experienced script typing service—at very reasonable rates—should contact Gabrielle Godard (of Word Service) who is in the business as WPO on Macintosh. Experience in and knowledge of the film industry, going way back, lends more to the mastery than the mere mechanical. For information about the place, the price and the potential phone 02 9360 9650.

Canberra by a nose

With telling programming, festivals in Brisbane, Canberra and Melbourne are nervously at the starting gate

The race is about to start and Leo Schofield scares the horses by petulantly accusing critics of his conservative Melbourne Festival of behaving like an "arts gun lobby". Run that by me again, Leo. Presumably some locals are envious of Barrie Kosky's Adelaide Festival which redefined what a festival can be in this country and confirmed the conservatism of the other festivals, particularly Melbourne's—though now Brisbane can vie for the gurnsey. Innovative Australian performance played a significant if not always comfortable role in the Adelaide Festival. However, it was the National Festival of Australian Theatre in Canberra, initially programmed by Anthony Steel and given its continuing identity by Robyn Archer, that put Australian performing artists centre stage over recent years, focusing on eminently tourable, innovative solo acts and small scale group shows. The groups that Canberra has shown are now creeping into the big, international festivals, both here and overseas. The combination of this festival with the Australia Council's Arts Market means that visiting international festival directors and programmers get to see at a glance a collection of artists they'd be hard put to see otherwise.

Rob Brookman's National Festival of Australian Theatre closely continues Robyn Archer's successful formula with a selection from the impressively growing repertoire of tourable physical and visual performance works. Director Gail Kelly's many years of experience in directing this kind of work, beginning with the Canberra Youth Theatre in the early 80s, is starting to pay off with the very successful internationally touring *Appetite* (Club Swing) and now Rock 'n' Roll Circus' *The Dark* which features in both Melbourne and Canberra festivals as well as touring to Adelaide. Perth's skadada, combining story, song, movement and interactive technology has had a faster ride to the festival front. Gideon Obarzanek's Chunky Move is now on the circuit after premiering at the 1995 Melbourne Festival and moving on to Sydney's Performance Space. So is Kooemba Jdarra's *7 Stages of Grieving*. All of these works have had their gestation in the creative development and performance project grants of the Australia Council through the Performing Arts and Hybrid Arts (now New Media Arts) funds. These works were often devised and rehearsed over brief periods and shown to small audiences. Festivals like this give them the chance to grow and be seen by wider audiences who are willing to see such works...during festivals. The wisdom of the Australia Council's investment in this area is clearly paying off.

Brookman's theatre program includes Beatrix Christian's *Blue Murder*, Sarah Cathcart and Andrea Lemon's *Tiger Country*, Nick Enright's *Blackrock* and Handspan's *Daze of Our Lives* inspired by the works of Mary Leung. Again, some of these works will enjoy a new life or another chance, a situation barely imaginable even a few years ago.

There are a few premieres in this festival, which probably explains the polite tussle between Rob Brookman and Leo Schofield over who had sired Jimmy Chi's *Corrugation Road*. As Adelaide showed, premieres are a risky but worthy business, if given enough nurturing. Circus Oz's *Aqua Profonda* premieres, as does Paige Gordon & Performance Group's *Shed: A Place a Man Can Dance*. There's William Yang's *The North* (also for Melbourne). *Faust: The Heat of Knowledge* is a new work from Canberra's Splinters with music by Larry Sitsky. Sally Sussman directs Jigsaw Theatre Company's new work *Oracle Bones* which "weaves classic Australian images with the dazzling skills of Peking Opera". Canberra Youth Theatre are mounting a new

production of John Romeril's all singing and dancing *The Kelly Dance*.

Brookman appears to have played safe, going for continuity rather than stamping his own identity on the event. As his underrated 1992 Adelaide Festival showed, he's certainly capable of dramatic programming gestures with his response to the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the assertion of local identity. His brochure rhetoric about "a festival that works in Canberra—one that celebrates a city" doesn't match the program content. After Kosky, if you say it, you have to mean it. Perhaps it could be an issue in future festivals.

Gorman House's Festival of Contemporary Arts, juxtaposing local Canberra talent against the touring nationals, begins two days before the National Festival of Australian Theatre and features artists in the visual, performing and film arts. It markets itself as complementary to the National Festival: it extends it by moving beyond the performing arts. The visual arts program this year will include *Breath of Life*, a work by Eleanor Williams and Kevin Gilbert at Canberra Contemporary Art Space and *In the Cube*, an installation by Bronwyn Coupe. The performing arts program will include the "cyberpunk cult hit" *Silicon Spies* and Sydney performers Annette Tesoriero and Nigel Kellaway in *Choux Choux Baguette Remembers*. Canberra's Tango 160 present *Bad Blood-Mauvais Sang*, a collaborative work with Renald Navilly, Carl Looper and musician Kevin White. There's a new outdoor work by Full Tilt. *Reel-Art* is a program of short films and some premiere features.

Tony Gould's Brisbane Festival has got off to a proudly conservative start, pragmatic, populist and sensible but with pockets of provocation and a reasonable spread of local talent.

The modest range of raunchy contemporary performance content (*Volt*, curated by Maree Cunningham) is unfortunately slotted into the "community" program (see Tony Gould interview page 30). Presumably Gould would put much of Brookman's festival in that category too. In Canberra and elsewhere, even Melbourne, contemporary theatre and performance are allowed to stand on their own feet.

In the main Brisbane program, royalty leads with Nicholas Johnson (former principal dancer with the Royal Ballet) and his version of tormented genius in *Nijinsky—Death of a Faun* and *Dealer's Choice* from the UK's Royal National Theatre dealing with cards as well as masculine rituals and father-son relationships. *The Winds of God* comes from Japan via Sydney's Asian Theatre Festival while local Zen Zen Zo play Butoh with Euripides in *The Cult of Dionysus*. A tale under the stars is called *The King and the Corpse* performed by Matrix Theatre. *Snapshots from Home* is music-theatre developed by Margery Forde from the recollections of people who stayed at home during WWII, directed by Jim Vilé. There's a new production of Jack Davis' *The Dreamers* with Bradley Byquar, Lefe Charlton and Sam Conway directed by Wesley Enoch for Kooemba Jdarra. It's time for a re-assessment of Davis, and who better to do it than Kooemba Jdarra.

Featured in the dance program will be director and "prodigious, Promethean genius" Graeme Murphy's own dance marathon, *Free Radicals* performed with onstage percussion by Michael Askill, Alison Eddington and Alison Low Choy. He's also programmed the Americans Momix and the Parsons Dance Company performing their "sexy, exuberant, intelligent" work which includes a photo-flashlit solo by choreographer David Parsons walking on air. Meryl Tankard's *Furioso* is "gravity-defying".

The music program is not exciting (sunset serenades and *Carmina Burana*) except for a

rare opportunity to hear Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess* in concert with an all black cast, pianist David "Shine" Helfgott and Brisbane City Opera's production of Menotti's *The Consul* conducted by David Banney. No competition for the Brisbane Biennial here. But what can be said about an evening with the irksome nationalist Macca (with gum leaf and spoon playing) and a massive International Tattoo (with no Ex de Medici). Hot Banana Morgan has found a chink and snuck into the official program under World Music, just after the roving Calabrians. Is he also behind the *Sh...ShBango!*—"a spectacle of live music, performance and uncategorisable actions"?

Volt—the New Performance program focuses on cross-disciplinary, cross-gender, cross-media projects. The androgynous Moira Finucane performs *Parlour Volatile*. *Ghost in the Machine*, a computer interactive performance brings together the work of choreographer Hellen Sky from Melbourne's Dancehouse and multimedia artist Jon McCormack. Maryanne Lynch's *Pyjama Girl* interrogates a murder mystery from Australia in the 1930s. In *Volt—the Symposium*, practitioners, curators and academics (including Rod Wissler, Jill Orr, Luke Roberts, Anne Graham, Tracey Benson, Nicholas Zurbrugg, Tony Bond, Dale Frank, Arthur Wicks and Prudence Cumes) compare performance practices. The *Volt* visual arts program includes Anne Graham's outdoor performance/installation *Chain of Chambers*; a performance by Jill Orr with music by Margaret Wade called *Sound, Silence and Light* and painter-performance artist Dale Frank's *Disco (Behavioralism)*. Be on the alert for George Pinn's *Surge* (body, technology and water) and *Peak Hour Apparition*, in which a performer and a cellist erupt from city buildings and peak hour pedestrian traffic. *The Milling Tower* is sound and light in an old building once used for radio and television transmission; in fact it's Brisbane's oldest building—the Old Tower Mill, originally a treadmill for grinding maize. *Volt* is the bright light in the midst of a moderately attractive Brisbane program.

Among the few Festival commissions is Janis Balodis' play *Double Take* performed by students at QUT. There's the ubiquitous Club and Comedy Festival and for the community program, *Volt* director Maree Cunningham revives her *The Secret Fire* seen at last year's National Festival of Australian Theatre in Canberra. In the same program, La Boite theatre company offers a "real" time cyber experience in *Housewives' Home Page*.

Melbourne Festival passes on the customary warm-hearted/angsty Irish play in favour of Welsh "nihilism, black humour" and "compelling physicality" in *Song from a Forgotten City* presented by Y Cwmni. William Yang continues the exploration of his life in *The North*, this time with live accompaniment from another successful festival circuiter Colin Offord. Netherlands Dans Theater offers a Melbourne 'exclusive' with Jiri Kylian choreographing to Arvo Pärt, Steve Reich and Lukas Foss along with two works choreographed by Hans van Manen.

Barbara Kruger will confront Melbourne with a Festival initiated multi-media installation at the Heide Gallery along with major city billboards. Perhaps "God said it, I believe it, that settles it" would be nice outside Kennett's parliament on Spring Street. Berkoff and Bell will do-over *Coriolanus* while Rock 'n' Roll Circus delve into *The Dark*. Jimmy Chi's *Corrugation Road* is one of the very few works commissioned by Leo Schofield and is sold here as "a deeper work than *Bran Nue Dae*", the writer drawing on his experience as a schizophrenic.

The offer of twentieth century opera is always tempting in a country which treats it like plague and here once again in a festival, huge crowds will line up for and will enjoy Richard Strauss' sublime and demanding lament over the human losses of WWI, *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, and then that same audience will forget that anything happened. Strauss' "Woman without a shadow" will be

conducted by Simone Young with an imported design by David Hockney. Many will be eager to see what Richard Mills, composer, and Peter Goldsworthy, librettist, will do with Ray Lawler's *The Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* as the opera *The Doll*.

Twentieth century music pleasures persist with Janacek's monumental *Glagolitic Mass*. A rare contemporary music pleasure will be the visit of Frankfurt-based Ensemble Modern, a chamber orchestra of twenty soloists here performing new works as well as Ligeti, Lachenmann, Nancarrow and Mikhashoff. One concert with the Ensemble and Australia's Elision will feature works by Liza Lim and Adam Yee. Michael Keiran Harvey plays Liszt's *Etudes d'execution transcendante* and American George Crumb's mighty *Makrokosmos. I and II*—24 preludes for amplified piano. And a real treat will be the Australian Chamber Orchestra's unusually adventurous concert featuring Elena Katz Chernin's remarkable *Clocks*, Minoru Miki's *Spring* (Australian premiere) and Richard Tognetti's arrangement of George Crumb's quartet *Black Angels*.

Right up the back of the program, after the Writers Festival—which lists guest writers in order: 1. International 2. Returning Australians. 3. Australians—and tucked under a half-grinning Clive James ("public intellectual") is *Lenz* based on Georg Büchner's short story, a production from the Mene Mene company whose *Excavation* created such excitement at the Adelaide Festival. The script is by Alison Croggon, original music by Michael Smetanin, direction by Michael Kantor. Croggon and Smetanin previously collaborated on *The Burrow*.

In a promising departure from the visual arts dullness of previous Melbourne Festivals, there's a welcome focus on photography at the festival. As well as the already touring Annie Liebovitz exhibition, and the Sydney Biennale's Yasumasa Morimura (with additional works), the program includes new works from Australian artists Bill Henson, William Yang, Rose Farrell and George Parkin. The *Leica Magic* exhibition featuring 47 favourite photographs taken with the Leica M camera by the likes of Bresson, Salgado, Eisenstaedt, Mary-ellen Mark. Selling Barbara Kruger as a maverick seems inappropriate given she's almost an institution these days. Not that it won't be good to see the new works she's creating for the installation at Heide, but...

So what beckons you to the track? Surely not the same old rhetoric of entertainment and challenge that festival directors dutifully trot out. Where is the vision, where are the over-arching metaphors that show the brain at work, the engagement with the track—a city's identity? Do these directors know what they're riding as they jockey for position, for audiences—a single superb beast or a horse of many uncoordinated parts? Adelaide provided the perfect track, and except for an overcrowded field, you could comfortably place bet after bet and be guaranteed winners. In Canberra, it's the contemporary theatre and performance stakes, pretty safe track records plus some real favourites.

In Melbourne and Canberra don't bet on every race. You could go for quinella or better in the dance stakes at Brisbane—Murphy, Momix, Parsons, Tankard, Zen Zen Zo and Nijinsky. In Melbourne there's a trifecta to be had with *Die Frau ohne Schatten*, *The Doll* and *Lenz*. And another in Melbourne's contemporary music fieldings. Although placed as rank outsiders in the Brisbane Festival, the performance works offer better than even money. For the rest, you might as well have a flutter, a jab with a pin poised over the brochure; there's quality scattered across the form. Unlike Adelaide, no Melbourne Cup field at either track, but in Canberra there's a consistent selection and some new Australian champions. KG & VB

Meeting the man (behind the scenes)

Peter Anderson and Maryanne Lynch interview Tony Gould, director of the Brisbane Festival

As manager of the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Gould has a secure job independent of, though related to, his festival directorship. His soft speaking tone fits with his 'behind the scenes' managerial style. What effect, RT wonders, do these factors have on the 'face' and the vision of the festival—both difficult to pin down?

ML What was your personal objective in setting up the festival?

TG I've been here as QPAC manager for 16 years and was here six years before it opened. And even before it opened, there was talk about having a Brisbane Festival. Basically, this had always been intended to take over from the Warana festival which, by its nature, was not dissimilar to Moomba in Melbourne and the old Waratah festival in Sydney, and they were both fine. But now cities all around Australia are looking for something more, a high arts component as well as a community-based and street arts component.

ML I'm not quite sure what 'community-based' means.

Gould then discussed the 'community' component of the Brisbane Festival. In this category are the usual stilt-walking types, comics, jazz, a play for children, but also the likes of performance artist Jill Orr and performers Moira Finucane, Hot Banana Morgan, Maree Cunningham and choreographer Hellen Sky working with media artist Jon McCormack. This confusion of community and experimental arts has led to considerable head-scratching from sections of the local and national arts populations.

TG We've referred to them as community

events because in essence they do flow from the community. Community events are not companies that one buys in. They are put together for a specific purpose. They are also, to an extent, the more formal style of community theatre, for instance, *The Dreamers*, which is an Aboriginal production, by Jack Davis. This time we are going to put it into a performance space, and we are promoting it quite differently from how we would promote the Royal National Theatre. We are trying to get to a different segment of the community. So the word 'community' has two meanings in so far as our definition is concerned.

It's also important to realise that the free activities for the community comprise about half the actual program funding for the festival. In other words, it is not as though we simply pushed for the high arts. And that is very much a philosophy of mine; I didn't want to throw the baby out with the bathwater.

PA The 'high art' stuff might be more popular than the 'community' component. Is there a tension in the program?

TG I never use expressions like 'community arts'...I really can't tell the difference. It's not something that I use by choice. I mean, here at the Performing Arts Complex we have a lot of programs which are called 'community'; programs for the disabled, programs for the elderly, our educational programs for children and our Out of the Box festival for children. Virtually all our subsidy that we get to run this place is spent on the community activities, and we're talking millions of dollars. The QPAC philosophy is also one that we have for the festival and that is that we have a very real commitment to our place in the community

and providing arts of whatever form to the community...to the local population and people who are not necessarily in a high socio-economic situation.

PA I get a sense that in some other contexts it might be a lot easier to call the community bit an experimental art program, and that immediately implies something. Calling it the 'Community Program' seems to mask what a lot of the work is about.

TG At the word 'experimental', audiences fade away to nothing. These programs are accessible and they are at the cutting edge. I would never be disposed to a marketing campaign that used expressions like 'experimental'.

ML Who is the target for most of Volt, the experimental performance component of the community program? Not a traditional 'community theatre' audience?

TG Well, I'll tell you. Whatever we're doing, we're doing the right thing because bookings are extraordinarily heavy. Ultimately, one has to judge—not wholly—on how many people come, how many tickets are sold. But I take your point.

PA What about co-ordination of the Brisbane Festival with the Film Festival, the Asia-Pacific Triennial, and also the Brisbane Biennial?

TG We all have to look for corporate money, and it would be very unwise for the Brisbane Biennial and the Brisbane Festival to be held in the same year because of the corporate dollar. Because the same people are supporting us. We're raising almost \$5.5 million in sponsorship. So it's the corporate

angle we have to address, because more and more—as we all know—government funds are getting less and less in real terms.

The 'poor cousin' status of visual arts in Australian festivals is made more poignant in Brisbane by the close timing of the festival & the Asia Pacific Triennial, the difference in timing being a matter of weeks. There has been no overlap between these two major events.

ML What's your ideal festival?

TG Well, it should be accessible. I do believe that the level of success has to be the number of people that come, not necessarily how much money the box office takes, although that's important too.

We cite Barrie Kosky in Adelaide successfully doing, it seems, just what he wanted. Gould worries about that Festival's financial loss and the responsibilities entailed in public funding.

RealTime quickly speculates on the possibility of Tony Gould doing the weather on TV, and just as quickly dismisses the thought. Do the two men represent different faces of the same marketing emphasis, or is there something else going on? (The difference in jobs seems relevant here.) The \$650,000 or so Adelaide deficit may be a small price to pay for an exciting festival. Or should a festival take fewer risks and, perhaps, make a profit?

TG People ask me, 'What's your philosophy of the festival?', and I don't have one. I just want to put on good shows. That's my philosophy of being a producer of anything. I want to put on exciting theatre, and hopefully have a lot of people come to it, and that really is my philosophy.



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Integration and excess

Julia Postle sees Zen Zen Zo's Brisbane Festival showing in rehearsal

Theatre of excess? Well, if not excess, then certainly indulgence of the most wicked kind. *The Cult of Dionysus* is local company Zen Zen Zo's offering at the inaugural Brisbane Festival, and where the Greek god Dionysus is involved, visual and aural intoxication is on the cards. Dionysus is 'god of the vine', 'of nature', and hero of the masses. Derived from Euripides' *The Bacchae*, *The Cult of Dionysus* fixes the ancient in the contemporary, and uses a butoh movement to illuminate the text.

effectively; he becomes what he despises—the feminine.

There will also be an interesting dialogue between Pentheus and Cadmus, for which Lynne Bradley has created a meshing of physical and non-physical connections through her choreography. They stand apart, but the space between them fills with energy. The grandfather rests his hand on Pentheus' shoulder, and the moment seems somehow charged. It could be because of the simple contrast of Pentheus' solidity and uprightness against



Zen Zen Zo, *The Cult of Dionysus*

The Bacchae is celebratory, decadent ritual, full of tensions. Playwright and drama historian Wole Soyinka focuses on these tensions, referring to this—one of Euripides' final plays—as "life and death, womb and destroyer, order and chaos...ecstasy and serenity, hubris and humility, the visceral and the formalist". I see it as at once beautiful and disgusting; indeed, *The Bacchae* presents humanity at its most divine and most terrible. Butoh seems like the most appropriate movement form to explore this aspect of the play, with its deliberate distortions of the human body sometimes serene, even lovely, and at other times odious and monstrous.

Director Simon Woods has drawn from a number of versions of Euripides' text, and has also made his own adaptations. Pentheus' grandfather, Cadmus, is one such reworking, carrying the responsibility of narrator in Zen Zen Zo's interpretation. He will often speak directly to the audience, helping to elucidate aspects of the plot. Also, there's the exclusion of Euripides' Tiresias, a Theban prophet, and Cadmus takes on some of the wisdom of this character. So Cadmus is grandfather, narrator, story-teller, and pseudo-prophet—the embodiment of the performer-audience connection.

The set will be relatively simple in design. A path of sand will stretch down the middle of the stage, with shafts of side-lighting crossing this performance corridor. Pentheus, King of Thebes, moving with intent towards the audience, eyes steady, is played as a resolute monarch, seemingly beyond the reach of Dionysus (and the proletariat). He is a force of rigid morality and masculinity, disdainful of Dionysian ritual. Later, Pentheus will be a Dionysian drag queen, complete with leopard-skin and pink feather boa—more *Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* than Thebes in 405BC? It may seem a curious revising of Euripides, but it aims to illustrate Pentheus' transformation

Cadmus' bent frame. Perhaps it is the use of voice—one forceful, the other a wretched, but still purposeful, hissing. Maybe it is the use of space: between the arms, held out from the body but also enclosing the body; between people within the performance space as a whole. The company's Suzuki-influenced training promotes a sense of the individual performer in the space, and his/her spatial relationship to other performers.

This conceptualisation of space will be most evident in the movement of the chorus. In one scene, five women, followers of Dionysus, with their bodies grouped tightly together, crouching, spit words. I don't even hear their words for I am too struck by their writhing, contorted dance. Is this the power of the Greek chorus in action? The actors become an angry, vengeful mob, more like evil gargoyles than people. When the chorus perform their Herdsmen chant, they stomp from side to side with hips shoving the air abruptly, faces screwed up, eyes glaring through the twisted expressions. This promises a rich relationship between text and image.

In *The Cult of Dionysus*, Zen Zen Zo aim to integrate classical Greek drama, the Suzuki actor training method, and the twentieth century Japanese dance form of butoh. A strange combination? Maybe. To me, it seems altogether in keeping with the postmodern emphasis on quotation, appropriation, eclecticism, fragmentation and historical reference. This is contemporary theatre, looking to the past in its rethinking of performance, and ultimately locating its drama in the physical.

Zen Zen Zo, *The Cult of Dionysus*, Princess Theatre, Brisbane Festival, from August 28.

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Spectacle, ducks and misses

Caitlin Newton-Broad at *Open Week '96*, The Performance Space, Sydney

Some may say that a performance open season requires of the spectator the same tenacity, the same tough-minded endurance as a wetlands blood-sport. Prepare your kit, slick your instrument and wade up to the Performance Space to spot seven nights of new work in an open program which announces that no curatorial direction is prescribed, all proposals are accepted. Couched in the dark, I take aim at the generous, the foolish and the sublime. Duck.

Open 96 at The Performance Space is one of Sydney's forums for unearthing new performance work. Retrospectively, out of all the foyer prophecies of a gloomy horizon ("Where is the next generation?"), there began to emerge lines of conversation between pieces. Despite the lack of rigorous technique in much of the work, certain gems from this vicariously arranged collection managed to engage the contemporary world; a place where performance grapples to find new configurations and old roots in the body, text, image, its relations to technology, to politics and to narrativising the self.

Wednesday opened with a night of sound and pop opera. The audience was tuned in and enduring. The most performative listening happened during Swizelstick's Rossini feline cantata. Everyone craned to catch the resonance between tiny video monitors picking up live audience, the lashings of techno kitsch and the lush spectacle. The hard 'head-wear' listening combination came from Sub Bass Snarl who mixed *Apocalypse Now* footage and soundtrack with an armageddon



Megan Elliott

Heidrun Löhr

of thick-dub sound. An association sprang to mind for me, of Blanchot's *Unavowable Community*, where grief and absence reside in the docile bodies of the audience as witness/listener.

Thursday and Friday nights served up layered text and storytelling. The frozen image of girls from the bush, lolling across a train line which stretches on forever, seemed incommensurate with the suave, busty lady who sauntered on stage. Megan Elliott, aka *Beatrice II*, knows her French, her product bias, her sensual powers. She wove a beautiful string of words and images together to fuck with structuralist and sensualist Roland Barthes and turn the chops over at the same time. It was the coming of age of a female persona; flanked on one side by statistics and suburban protocol and on the other by the choking desires of a girl who knows there is more to life than perpetual motion. Other memorable pieces were Annie Greenwood's *Fairy Cakes*, her cake-making ability perfectly timed to punctuate a long fable of greed, jealousy and betrayal, mimicking the time frame of domestic (feminine) deferral. Silicon Spies vamped up the era of techno obsession and the paranoid 60s intelligence genre, as they cornered the vixen-in-rubber market. *China*, a travel story, was my query of the Friday evening. Certainly a contentious highlight, this performance pricked my interest for the ambitious mix of discursive and formal decisions that the writer-performer



Charles (Carlos) Russell

Heidrun Löhr

Stefan Markworth had made. The choice not to use the body as performer but instead the body as model or vessel for narrative, and to layer text and pre-recorded image was an interesting start; and the final simultaneity of the body on stage exiting with the body on screen had clear cinematic references (cf Robbe-Grillet). Unfortunately, the text suffered from the 70's propensity for documentary as male confession. Historically, this "male weepie" combined an unconscious balance of hormones and naivety with difficult cultural politics (the sensitive man's Albie Mangel). Markworth could have drawn out the ambivalence of quite an interesting pickup/tourist tale to reveal the inherent *vulturism* in his story but took the soft option, accounting for his textual philandering as an existential bi-product of wanderlust. He should read his Trinh, take a deep look into his trouser pocket and keep making work.

On Saturday night the best work was driven by body impulses. "I am Betty," he said, "Betty L." And with gorgeous precision, Joel Markham unravelled a disturbing account of how a 40s waitress lost her foot, shot off by a gunhappy American soldier. *Betty's Foot* was a simple step forward, one at a time, like a wedding march. Markham's Betty was pink faced, glowing with kindness, rectitude, and deep shock. She looked as if she had been slapped into consciousness as the tale pulled us through real life horror with infinite grace. *Affect* from Level Crossing Youth Theatre gave us stylised camp, awarding the audience's voyeurism with tight smiles from a row of young performers. The performers unveil an uncomfortable double-edge, when, as if coerced by an invisible director, they become complicit in random acts of violence on each other. The 'affect' reminded me of a fifteen second *Salò*. The viewer is, of course, the elaborator/collaborator, and in this instance I unveil myself. Then came a beautiful movement piece from Skinners. An elliptical voice-over was furnished with hysterical, elastic, concentrated bodies. This piece built a unique muscular code which resonated long after the performance. *D Block*, à la the Department for Finding Out, were highlights from the undiscovered theatre of private obsession. A bunch of twenty sculpture students from Canberra Art School, they constructed a mad Kafkaesque space with fervent investigation into human body hair, telecommunications, private office erotica, nursing and measuring.

Sunday night highlights included *Mother's Ruin*, a dark little offering from Alicia Talbot. Cloaked in the slap and tickle of the Broadway musical delivery, she confronted the audience with tales of excess, and presented discreet articles and documents in place of her 'sex'. A blowup doll is foil for the unconscious drunken daughter, a polaroid of her cunt is set to dry, and her knickers, once lost in the fold of someone's alcoholic memory, are divvied

up for mending. Those terrifying adolescent blackholes persisted in my imagination, mixed with a medicinal dose of exposure and humiliation. *Skin-deep@Home* by Perth artist Matthew Ngui explored cultural identity, but the fractured pace unhinged the connections to end up as a set of abstract relations. Dabbling in duration can be interesting in itself, but endurance was running a bit high on this particular evening.

Wednesday and Thursday of the next week were peppered with comic gems and glam farce. Comedy does not translate so easily on the page but Frumpus were very funny. Seven tracksuited girls crawled onto stage, matching choreography and moustaches with theme tunes; and exiting to a rousing version of the late night favourite *Throw Your Arms Around Me* by Hunters and Collectors. Heyup! *The Five Adagio Brothers* from Throttle were an excellent foursome. The four surviving Adagio Brothers played half-cocked circus tricks, invoking a fifth Adagio Brother who died alas, only moments before the performance in a tragic accident. The circus pomp was seriously and hysterically impaired. Heyup! Victoria Spence spun her *Monologue* for a buck. Spence was involuntarily trapped in the mind set of a method actor. She does Marlboro ads, outdoor sports, Marlon Brando and HERSELF to crack open the actor's psychic 'scene'. Her mock vulnerability struck deep in the heart of all aspiring performers, treading that fine line between compromise, inventing the self and delusions of 'making it'. Katia Molino's *Words-in-search-of-an-action* cast another shadow over the illusion of performance. Her performance invoked a live performance that she describes but in fact does not perform, the audience baying like sheep, as the virtual acts of brilliance and revelation are worded out by this beguiling trickster.

I must confess right now, Open Season was the marathon I lost. Gail Priest, consummate performer/singer was my third eye and conduit for the final Friday evening which was full of enticements. These are her impressions: "By far, the highlight of my open season was Brian Fingerton's *Bum Puppets*. Four anally fixated boys drew faces over their other cheeks and forced food up an incorrect orifice. Beautifully executed, this spectacle caused an horrific hilarity rivalled only by the notorious creamcake from Sydney Front days. There was a murmur in the foyer that their next gig is to be *Red Faces*. In *Cabaret Abyss* by Tony Osborne, the audience was taken on, I assume, a fairly improvised journey entering à la Tom Waits/Butoh Master/Marcelle Marceau. The performer constantly teetered on the edge of brilliance and failure. There was foyer debate as to whether this strategy worked or not, but I believe that on this particular evening it did, thanks greatly to the hysterical woman in the front row who gave the performer lots of opportunities for audience engagement. Rivetted by the balance, I questioned whether or not the performer was aware of the thin line he was walking; if he was, one would have to conclude that he was a very brave man indeed. *Neville Anderson Wonders* by Charles (Carlos) Russell began with a television blaring the Friday night football on a caster chair being spun round in ever decreasing circles until our hero, Neville Anderson—a man in slippers, cardigan and comb over wig—was essentially immobilised. He then proceeded to pose a number of domestic existential questions—sublimely inane and hysterically ponderous: "Is a television good...or bad?". The delivery was humble, producing a mini-masterpiece of subtlety, timing, simplicity and eccentricity."

The report was of a good night mixed with loopy performance from Katia Molino and the Panty Clan and Nikki Heywood's vocal score. Martin del Amo gave a treasure to his audience, set simply to the ubiquitous opera number *Oh my beloved father*. Monsters sang, the audience roared and everyone left exhausted and captured in the net of open energy, open mouths, yawns and laughter. Left to anticipate something of the NEXT generation, every hardcore spectator of this event came away with a bag of rare birds as reward.

Writing up an act

RealTime at PICA's showing of new works

In July *RealTime* took up residence in Perth with Keith Gallasch and Virginia Baxter working with nine WA writers on their responses to PICA's annual season of new performances, *Putting on an Act*. During the week, the nine writers balanced their experience of the work on show with the urge to judge, and co-edited two editions of *RealTime@PICA* for distribution at the event. Their participation required endurance—5 nights watching performances of varying quality and type, five days of fast writing and debate. Often the performances felt too familiar (poets reading, men in dresses, empty gestures). Sometimes it felt like community service (quaint family circuses). Sometimes, as with Rocky Bay Insomniacs, wheelchair performers, we were truly surprised and impressed.

PICA Director Sarah Miller worries at the concept of such open seasons, the risks involved in staging incomplete works by inexperienced performers balanced against the need to provide public space for independent and emerging artists. She is acutely aware of the need for more workshops in which collaborative works are developed with experienced artists. Whatever the best solution, Sarah Miller and her team at PICA are working hard at building a performance milieu in a city that hasn't really had one and the expertly managed season was sold out most nights. Following are responses to some of the performances from the *RealTime@PICA* team:



Lucas Ihlein

Stephen Smith

Cornflakes, presented by Lucas Ihlein

The table is set by two stage hands. Tablecloth, bowl, spoon, milk, sugar, cornflakes. The performer moves from the audience, sits down at the table, serves himself and eats a bowl of Cornflakes, then returns to the audience.

Jiminy Cricket!! No existential dilemmas here. Blokes come forward to eat. Simple as that. Betcha I can anticipate your moves! First look. Waxy inserts disappeared down cardboard sleeve. He unfolds. Rolls it up. Crinkles right. Stops moths breeding. Never had that problem in our house. Packet didn't go right back in again. If you took it out, searching for some gun or horse to race other plastic horses your brother collected to see who crossed the table top first. Upend packet. Into bowl. Fuller than I would have done. No pony fruit on top. That's right. Hey, wait a minute. You don't have milk in fuckin' jugs. Where I come from it's carton or nothing. And you don't take the spoon out if it's already in. To put sugar on. Sugar bowl's OK, I suppose. And a tablecloth? Nice touch, but a red gingham tablecloth? Funny, I'd have picked him for a two sugar man. It'd have been funnier if you'd kept piling the sugar on. Tablespoon after tablespoon after tablespoon. Like Buster Keaton. My Mum did for my Dad. Killed him in the end, you know. Now, the milk doesn't have to go round the same configurations as the sugar. As the sun. Push down with your spoon! Sounds right. Now eat. Great big spoonfuls. Spoon's full. Open wide. Lockjaw. Remove spoon. Crunch! Spoons are the only eating utensil allowed in that cavity. You put those things inside your mouth in the 1950s. Read the packet.

• continued page 33

Writing up an act

• from page 32

Thiamine, Riboflavin, Niacin, Iron, Protein, Fat, Carbohydrate, Sugars. Sugar? Turn the packet around again in a wider configuration. Read the back. How nowadays you stand to win a car. The real thing. Come to think of it, wasn't Kellogg some sort of paedophile or something? Perhaps that's the answer. And didn't the world war machine keep on supplying Pol Pot with cornflakes, guns—into the 1990s? There's nothing to say popular culture must be original. Better if it isn't really. Like the Marlboro man you smoke for the same taste each time. Killed you in the end. It killed him. Tilting of the bowl. Spooning up the last of the milk. Will there be a Cornflakes Man of the future? Doing counter ads on prime time TV? This is what Cornflakes did for me. Look away. Cutaway. Stomach. Shot. To bits of ant-like pincers putting us in stitches. You don't think so? And wasn't the ending a little too pat? Peremptory? The world war machine didn't keep supplying Pol Pot with Cornflakes into the 1990s. You deserve to flee. Escape. Your addiction. I mean back to the audience. Me. I'd have, I'd have savoured the moment. Gone. For another bowl.

Dennis Garvey



Vivienne Rogis, *Rotations*

Rotations, Dancer Vivienne Rogis, Choreographer Tamara Kerr
Marilyn: The building I work in rises tall and white like an elongated rib cage. So deep is the curve of ribs to sternum, it is, even more, an enormous longline bra. This building also has legs—stocky but sharply tapered—and between them, marking the entrance are flounced canopies of perspex. Each morning as I pass beneath her skirts, my mind turns to Marilyn Monroe.

Vivienne: She is standing in a circle of bright light and first from one joint, then from another and another, and then from all of them at once, the body of Vivienne Rogis is rotating. It seems less an ordinary body which has learned extraordinary movements than an extraordinary body performing movements which, to it, are ordinary. An up-turned hand turns at ground level and her whole weight arcs across the space. A roll which begins precisely in one vertebra sends flesh in waves across her abdomen and chest. This body is pliant as putty. It has drive to more than match the synthesised accompaniment. She is a girl-machine moving not as rectilinear robot but with the fluid dynamics of fractals.

Tamara: Tamara Kerr who worked with Vivienne Rogis on *Rotations* is part of a company called Physical Architecture. She has plans to use computer images to track the movements of a skeleton in rotation and to project these up beside the same rotating body in the flesh. I ask Tamara if she knows what Vivienne is thinking about when she dances and she tells me she is focussed on each rotating joint. I think of Marilyn and how much goes on under the skin and behind the eyes. I think of Vivienne and how exciting it is to see the strange ways her bones and muscles work.

Fiona MacLean

One Full Moon, Sandy Mujadi, Susan Allwood; **Bumpkin Babes**, Clare Christie, Samson Zaharkiv and another
Rash. I'm sick of men in frocks, even beautiful ones. Men? Frocks? It seems so easy. Shock? No. But a beautiful man playing a woman in a beautiful frock next to a woman? What is she, a wound? What's she doing, writhing, rolling, picking at herself like a giant scab. Like she's got some kind of rash. And she's pure soap. "How can I survive?" she says with a hump and she starts her slow, strange dance. Picking at herself

while he says—another he, not the he/she of the frock—while he says on the telephone, "Fucking useless bitch, you bitch, answer the phone. I know you're there. I want the dog back!"

No. I can't believe it's happening—Patsy Cline in slo-mo. Three performers, a man in a frock (no surprises here) two girls (ho hum, no surprise either, they're in frocks too). No cheap one gag for them, they'll have to try harder than that and they do. It's painful to watch. Another scab lifts. He's so funny, look at him in white face, grimacing, playing with his dress (yes, it's a dress, I'm a man and I'm wearing a dress. It's funny, isn't it? Isn't it? Isn't it?). He's in the spotlight. The audience laughs and laughs and laughs. The girls work around him, bitchily trying to outdo each other. I am hysterical. Hysterically angry. Hysterically bored. Hysterically saddened. One of the girls teases her hair, drops her comb. The other smears lipstick on her face. While he lip-synchs to a brain-damaged Patsy. The girls face the audience, then face each other, competing. One turns her back, pulls her dress down to her waist. I see her black bra strap. Is she going to strip? This is bad. How far will she go? The other mimics her. This is pathetic. They keep their clothes on. I am disappointed. Something almost happened. Something horrible. Something to inspire pity, not terror, but the terrible.

Erin Hefferon

Terror, tour 1, devised and performed by David Fussell

We're getting used to him now. Installed, almost in the Hay Street Mall, him in his wheelchair, in his facial muscles, neck and arms that twitch in a continuum of unpredictability that could be sustained only by permanent neurological damage. This is not pretty. This man is a performer, a professional busker. A small keyboard placed across the arms of his chair, some vocals but no

words I can decipher, no tune I can make out. The busker in the wheelchair confronts our expectations—his mumbled cacophony, his disability on display.

David Fussell's performance has all the decorations of title, of occasion, executed in the safety of an indoor art-space. He does not attempt to play at music—he stands awkwardly, begins to speak, breaks off. He doesn't know...he isn't sure. I know how he feels. His gestures are not unlike the busker's but David is privileged by an audience held captive by theatre walls and conventions. Is he the real thing? A person who has suffered some sort of breakdown? The bulk of the audience trusts not, they laugh shamelessly during his painful pauses. Through a layering of repeated phrases, artifice emerges. This is an act. I relax somewhat but I still don't laugh. Is David with shoelaces untied, being cruel, doing a piss-take of a damaged person? He's certainly getting the laughs. I'm suspicious and yet held by my uncertainty.

In the middle, the piece gains intensity, the timing steadies as words are delivered in bursts that seem to take the greatest summoning of courage to issue. More and more I am drawn in, not out of sympathy, but in sympathy with the performance. Because, really, I'm not sure either. I too really don't know though I'm pretty sure I don't know much. Like David Fussell, I'm not really sure what I want and this is why, like him, I don't really do anything. Because I don't know much. The one thing David does know is that, so far, this has worked for him.

That's okay for him, but I'm going to try something else for a while. I think of the busker, of the Hay Street Mall, of trying to make something of my own.

Fiona Kranenbroek

Stillness/Panic, Peter Toy

A man? Naked? On his back. On a table. Under a spotlight. Wrapped in the plastic you'd use to wrap your lunch to keep it fresh. But Peter Toy didn't look fresh. He looked to be on the edge of death.

I feared at first that he wasn't breathing. Then, that he was overheating. Then, even if either or both were true, how would we know? Would he tell us if he could? I was



Peter Toy, *Stillness / Panic*

Stephen Smith

afraid that we would be accomplices in his death and even imagined us all being arrested and tried for complicity. I wonder if the Third World (assuming that we are actually the First) could hire a good enough lawyer? Would it find us guilty of standing by as it starved to death? I felt a callous bystander at a terrible accident. Is that what you meant, Peter? Does our voyeurism prevent us from acting, from doing something? Are we all armchair experts on the world we live in? When nothing much is happening on the stage—but the little that is happening is remarkable—the brain goes on terrific flights of fancy.

Eventually his arms and legs succumbed to gravity, or perhaps his resolve waned. How long could you keep it up? Did you get bored? Or was the timing just right. It was just right for me, though I desperately wanted to peel you out of your synthetic sarcophagus, pour you a cold one and ask you what you were thinking.

Paul O'Sullivan

Living Dolls, performed by Marlene O'Dea, directed by Sian Phillips

A woman stands in a spotlight. She is dressed like an aberrant jewellery box doll. The clothes are right but the hair makes her look like Rod Stewart. She makes the right movements and speaks: "I'm Clare. I like you". I'm reminded of Rachel Romano (*Glory Box*) on Thursday night, as again we are confronted by a middle-aged woman questioning her achievements and oppression. "What are you doing?" "Don't leave me!" Classic dependence stuff. The



Marlene O'Dea, *Living Dolls*

Stephen Smith

movements become jerky. It seems someone has wound her up too tight. Eventually she moves on. She changes costume to Geisha Girl. At the insistence of a bell, she performs, waving her yellow fan, tossing it in the air with precision and then catching it. The action is repeated until like the actions in the jewellery box, it too becomes taut and aggressive. She is letting herself be manipulated. She begins to resent it, drops the fan, disrobes. This is where *Living Dolls* begins to live. She grabs a drill, mimes sexual actions—the power drill purrs to her command. She is finally taking control. Singing *Mean to Me* she saws wood/phallus in two then moves to a grinder and begins to hone a metal rod. It might have been interesting if Marlene O'Dea had finished there. But she continues. She moves downstage and begins to run on the spot. New Age music floods the space as she spends several minutes in "free"

movement. Where does this fit? It's curiously out of synch with the rest. The performer in her attempt to comment on her "epic journey through the facets of love" has meandered off on to another journey altogether, somewhere after the tools.

Helena Grehan

Can't Sleep in my Dreams, Written and performed by Rocky Bay Insomniacs, with playwright Jan Teagle-Kapetas; director, Simone Bateman
Works in progress: words and images that show there is a distance to go, give explicitly the message that attention is being applied to the making of this work. Questions, interrogations, things to learn.

Friday night. Another full house, this time uncomfortably so. Spill-over audience sitting on the stage and most didn't wear the right clothes for it.

Getting them all in has taken some time, and all of those nine wheelchairs on stage are occupied. Hope the performers are patient. The opening is dramatic: seven wheelchairs upstage, backs to us, a chair coming on the stage with a woman draped across its occupant. They present stories, these performers: the sort I like—fragments, unfinished, provisional utterances. Sometimes they come directly from the teller, sometimes one of the three floating 'assistants' gives their story in parallel. Slow-moving, considered, sometimes tentative, sometimes I couldn't hear the words but could understand the passion. My sense was that many of these performers had not told these stories, or even been listened to much before, certainly not in such a formal and highly valued way. Personal stories, some private, some of them dreams. The combination of dramatic intensity, this presentation, the austerity and self-containment, and the bodies with their voices, their struggle towards the articulations we understand made this work my highlight, the most fully realised work in the week's program. I appreciated the spare space, the gaps evident, the integrity of the voices and the shape of the stories. The little moments of pleasure: getting seven electric chairs around in a tight circle in the confined space; the turning on of the spotlight torches hanging above the bodies on the chairs, how that lighting design made drama. And the moment for me: which was felt, sentimental as anything but authentic. "Do you want to know the song I requested? Do you?" he asks. Finally, he answers himself. Roberta Flack singing *Killing me softly* and the able-bodied woman helps him out of his chair and holds him and they dance close. His pride and pleasure. Her love and care. The catalogue of items lost, movements no longer possible, memories forgotten or mislaid. Right through our lives. Finding, or re-finding your voice and using it.

Terri-ann White

The How To Series #1, devised and performed by Paul Gazzola

On the home stretch after chancing the open cauldron of a 100 km wind on the long bridge over the river, arms rigid on the steering wheel, I stopped for a man on the side of the road. I don't normally stop for hitchhikers but on such a night, with such a wind...He swayed against it, barely able to stand.

"Not a night to be out", I said, swallowing against the strange, rich smell of a body too long in the same clothes.

"I like being out. But I don't like to walk too much. I got a bung foot. Hit and run 'bout a year ago. Police see me walkin' funny. Pull me up. Reckon I'm drunk."

"I reckon", I thought.

But how do we know a movement for what it is? How do we read a gesture's truth?

This is what Paul Gazzola asks standing before the audience, a portable gramophone at his feet, at the end of his right arm held perpendicular to his body, a tiny plastic owl, its minute parts articulated. The owl performs the most delicate of movements. And a split second later, the performer mirrors its moves. The record provides accompaniment: "Hello", it says, repeated perkily with the oblique intonation of an alien or a machine. It becomes a chant. Exquisite miniature gestures. Repeated and amplified. Paul is attentive, a small frown of concentration furrows his brow. Suddenly the owl drops its wings and throws back its head. A moment of

• continued page 43

An unmapped festival

Keith Gallasch surveys recent and forthcoming performance seasons in Sydney

Variasians, *In The Event Of Amnesia*, *Nightshift*, *Kinetic Energy*, *C.P.W.7*, *sit.com*, *Burn Sonata*, *Hungry*

Performance in Sydney is currently at its most vigorous, rigorous and prolific—the concentration of works now and over the next two months suggests a festival. In fact, the August-September season opens with *Variasians*, the 1996 Sydney Asian Theatre Festival, and closes and climaxes with Sidetrack's C.P.W.7 (Contemporary Performance Week 7), a veritable festival of some of Sydney's best in workshops, forums and a great array of performances. The C.P.W.7 bonus is *Sites Unheard*, a sound event and yet another indication of a burgeoning soundculture in Sydney (cf EAR, SOUNDcheck, *Essays in Sound*, Soundsite) and its alliance with performance.

Something to celebrate was the recent staging of Melbourne playwright Phil Motherwell's *Fitzroy Crossing* (director, Lindzee Smith) at Sidetrack. It was a potent reminder of a Melbourne acting style rarely seen in Sydney and of the original Nightshift's capacity to unnerve—a curious mix of virtuosity, charisma, stark geometric choreography and a real roughness which at its best has the scary immediacy of improvisation. This is acting in the moment, the power of states of being rather than of organic Stanislavskian evolution, stark and iconic, gestural and poetic, and Motherwell the perfect writer for it: "My blood ran cold with fear from another planet." "I had eaten the best part of a bat." "Another casualty of method acting." "Another big day in the Disneyland of Despair." I caught *Fitzroy Crossing* late in the season and everything was working, and the audience, tucked in close to the sweat and spit, was with the desperately self-aware junkie protagonists all the way. Paranoia, male bonding by default, the traps of dependence. Let's hope that Smith can keep this team together and shape its potential—with Australian writing.

The decline and fall of ensembles in Australian theatre and performance is often lamented. Sometimes it's self-destruct, more often the funds (and funding policies) are inadequate to sustain on-going employment. In Sydney this year you can enjoy Gravity Feed, Nightshift and Nikki Heywood's team in *Burn Sonata* and you want their work to evolve and mature, especially amidst the plethora of, albeit very good, solo works and one-off partnerships. Nikki Heywood's *Burn Sonata* is very good, the transfer of physical and emotional states from performer to performer in an almost literal family scenario bespeaks the terrors of both empathy and hostility. Allowed the chance to go beyond its five week gestation and first season, allowed dramaturgical assistance with its rather obvious spoken text, allowed further development of the father role, *Burn Sonata* could go beyond its current powerful realisation.

Already, the design, the richly detailed performances and their spatial shaping (a great yawning chartreuse suburban kitchen, claustrophobic for all its risky openness) and the sound are excellent. Garry Bradbury's player piano/electronic score—alternating with a silence that insistently amplifies the performers' bodies—offers (on the pianola roll) a stuttering scary unpredictability and (electronically) the frightening symmetry of ritual family tension. Textured into the score are animal and bird cries, just as in the physical performance a rapid build of tension can unleash a furious monkey chatter of words and sounds and a matching dance of lunges and eye contact evasions. For me, the pleasure of *Burn Sonata* is in the line it

treads (or the new line it writes) between the literal and the abstract, between the unfolding scenario of domestic violence enacted by a set of characters and the dancing investigation and amplification of the states generated by violence, the unspoken transmission of sadism and sympathy, the unconscious complicity of family members in their father's violence.

Claire Hague, Dean Walsh, Benjamin Grieve, Tony Osborne and Clare Grant make a palpable family at odds, locked inescapably together. In a Sydney full of predictable dance, this movement work offers many passages of sheer invention and alarming insights. No one ever hit anyone in my family, though the threat of the raised hand and the snapping wet tea towel was always there. I still recognised this violence as my family's own.

In The Event Of Amnesia The City Will Recall has been playing, earlier this month, in my mailbox (an alarming fake fine for a traffic offence), in the personal column of the local paper (an offer to have myself watched), on Channel 10 in brief grabs after midnight and in the streets. Ex-Post Arrivist/ex Gravity Feed, Denis Beaubois has been "treating the city as a living entity and in the process been baffling several Sydney-siders with an unusual arsenal of conceptual materials". Yes, it's another gig about surveillance—"Warning. You may be photographed reading this sign." And yes, this is an intriguing performance of the everyday that you never saw...perhaps you were in it. Did you catch yourself on Channel 10? More later.

Variasians, The Sydney Asian Theatre Festival opens at Belvoir Street Theatre Downstairs on August 6 with Mémé Thorne's *Burying Mother*, directed by Jai McHenry. The richly delicate and disturbing prototype for this work about "the complexities involved in exorcising the 'bad mother'" was performed at C.P.W. last year: its promise is considerable. Ta Duy Bihn's *Conversations with Charlie* (director, Bruce Keller), in which a Vietnamese artist conjures up Charlie Chaplin "to help him confront his past and come to terms with himself and his relationship with Australian landscape and society", is the premiere production for City Moon, the Vietnamese-Australian Contemporary Theatre Company (opens August 20). The United Performers' Studio from Tokyo are playing Masuyaki Imai's *The Winds of God*: "Two young aspiring comedians are involved in an accident and are thrown into a time warp, taking them back to 1945 and the realisation that they are in their former incarnations as suicidal Kamikaze ('winds of god') pilots," (opens August 13, Upstairs Theatre). From August 6 - 11 in the early evenings, Asian Open House will host ten short original works.

This is the fourth Asian Theatre Festival and looks set to attract bigger audiences than in the past. The attraction is doubled by the participation of the Australian Institute of Eastern Music with its own rich program featuring Riley Lee, Satsuki Odamura, Indian dance and music, Ashok Roy, the Raman Suman Dance Company, Sekehe Gong Dharma Bali Gamelan as well as classes and a symposium with Jaslyn Hall, Jill Sykes, Yasmine Gooneratne, Rik Tanaka, Tony Lewis and festival guests. (Tickets: Belvoir 9699 3444).

Hungry is a long awaited solo multimedia performance from Deborah Leiser, one time member of the Entr'acte ensemble (*The Memory Room*, *Possessed/Dispossessed*). The work draws on Deborah's sense of spiritual exclusion from religious ritual, a traditional and conservative denial of participation experienced by Jewish women in Australia. Asked what drives her persona in the performance Deborah replies, "It's desire, appetite, hunger. It's not anger. It's also driven by knowing that in the US, for example, the situation for Jewish women is better than here. The performance is partly structured around a letter from America. This device also makes some of the rituals, the

ideas and issues more intelligible for Australians who don't know much about Jewish culture". The music for the performance is by Elena Katz-Chernin and also includes the chanting of Australia's only female cantor, Janice Cohen.

But is desire enough to achieve change? "In the performance I enter the Torah—a human scale version created by designer Tim Moore—and using aspects of the Yom Kippur ceremony I enact female participation in ritual. I show what can be done." After a long period of intensive research, of personal reflection on growing up Jewish in Sydney, and meetings with a group of like Jewish women, Deborah went in search of a performance language. Playworks set up a relationship with performer/director Tanya Gerstle out of which came a brief but powerful work-in-progress performance suggesting the two had hit it off. Given the richness and complexity of the material, Deborah is insistent on accessibility, working with language in both naturalistic and stylised modes, searching for a relationship between body and text in performance, especially in one about ritual.



Claire Hague, Dean Walsh, Benjamin Grieve, *Burn Sonata*

Heidrun Löhr

"There are three elements in *Hungry* working in equal parts—projected computer imagery by Michael Strum, Elena's music and me on stage physically and vocally. I also appear in Michael's images, for example, as a falling angel." Asked who her audience will be, Deborah answers, "The performance scene, visual artists, people interested in Elena's music and in cultural issues, and the Jewish community, especially women and young people". The content of the show has already prompted conservative reactions to which Deborah says she retorts, "Judaism is based on discussion and interpretation, isn't it?". (The Performance Space, Sydney, August 8-18. Bookings 9319 5091 or Ticketek 9266 4800.)

Kinetic Energy, at The Edge theatre laboratory in Newtown, are presenting a new work *Undiscovered Land—Voyage 1* (from August 28, bookings: 516 1954), designed and performed by Graham Jones and Jepke Goudsmit with an electronic score by Roger Dean. "The puzzling question of human behaviour may involve more than heredity and environment—perhaps it is scripted by our past selves and directed by destiny's uncertainty...The modern day psycho/therapist is used as a linchpin,

unlocking the repressed memories and past lives of the patient. The characters thus emerging tell a series of fascinating and interconnected stories of power struggles through the ages."

A re-worked *sit.com*, created by Derek Kreckler for Sidetrack, with Rolando Ramos, Jai McHenry, Regina Heilmann, and Brigid Kitchin replacing Mémé Thorne (see *Variasians*), is a welcome revival building on the considerable strengths of that company's long-lived, but sadly no longer full-time ensemble. In a surprising verbal departure for Sidetrack, Kreckler and collaborators generated a careful, ethereally paced RSL Club encounter through a hypernaturalistically delivered set of exchanges and 'personal' tales. It's an engagingly clever show about language, everyday talk and the lines and beats in between, and, for such a physical company, relies on a charged stillness for the other meanings and tensions it displays. Chris Ryan plays an enigmatic barman and Jason Gee of System-X contributes visual slices evoking imaginal spaces between the words.

Contemporary Performance Week has become an established part of Sydney performance culture and is an excellent guide to the range of current work and preoccupations. As with The Performance Space's Open Week, the focus is on short works, but with C.P.W., this year in particular, most of the works are by established performers and emerging artists already making their mark. Participants include Joel Markham, Dean Walsh, Gravity Feed, Kinetic Energy, Etcetera, Katia Molino, Cirfunkus, Denis Beaubois, Bernadette Walong (ex-Bangarra), Azaria Universe, Rod Nash and Vicki Spence. Gail Kelly and Death Defying Theatre will present their new work, *D.D.T. In Danger*, and Sidetrack Performance Group will show an excerpt from their new work, *The Kingdom of Ends*. P. Harness, labelled those "cultural icons of Canberra", will close the week. *Sites Unheard*, C.P.W.7's sound program, features Rik Rue (whose sound designs for Gravity Feed have awesomely filled suburban space in recent years at this event), Julian Knowles, Shane Fahey, John Jacobs and Ian Andrews.

Workshops include Mémé Thorne's *Hot Heels Suzuki*, Don Mamouny's *How to become a great actor*, Jeannie Lewis and Annette Tesoriero's *Voice Play*, Bernadette Walong's *Cross Dance*, Tanya Lester and Alan Fowler's *CIRFUNKUS...human pyramids, balances, aerial techniques*, and Suzanne Kenny's *Administer yourself*, an introduction to how to manage and administer your grant and your artistic practice. Overseas guest in the workshops is Hilary Westlake, artistic director of the renowned UK performance group Lumiere & Son (founded 1973). Westlake will focus on site specific performance, taking the participants from first principles through to a performance at the end of the week. C.P.W.7 is a rich, packed program of talent, training and debate spread over five performance intensive days and nights. (Sidetrack, 142 Addison Rd., Marrickville ph 02 9560 1255) A very good year for performance in Sydney is about to become even better, a festive celebration of the riches of an expanding and influential performance community.

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Strange attractors: shared perversity

Jane Goodall surveys De Quincey/Lynch performances across Sydney

Compression 100 :100 performances in different venues and sites around Sydney during May; artists Tess de Quincey and Stuart Lynch performing with a wide variety of collaborators, from dancers to writers to musicians to visual artists.



Parramatta Road

Mark Rogers

True to its name, *Compression 100* was actually 111 performances. The first and last days (May 1 and 31) began on Compression Highway—Parramatta Road—the most loaded space in Sydney. I live just off Parramatta Road and commute on it every day, trying not to think about it. Since May, though, I feel differently towards it. I've moved from dissociation to mild fixation. I've developed a perverse sense of attachment to this roaring, ugly, clashing, hot, polluted environment. I've taken to walking along it, sometimes for

two hours at a time, to writing about it and to driving down it in preference to using the freeway. Now this is perverse and *Compression 100* was, amongst other things, a shared exercise in sustained perversity. Its legacies are likely to be

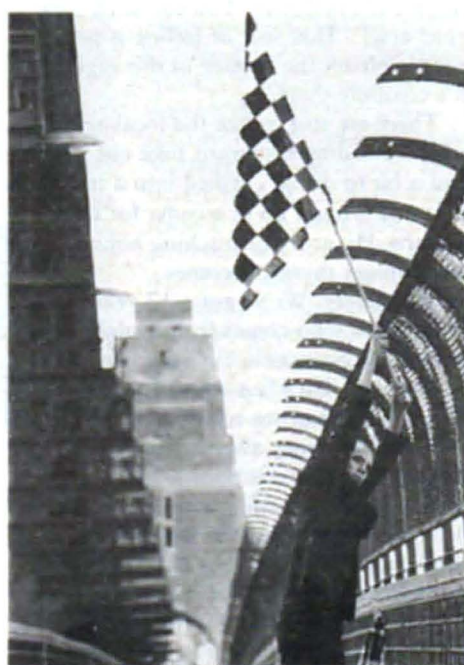
random and widely dispersed. Perhaps all over Sydney there are people who are experiencing altered relations with particular spaces.

As an exercise in perversity, *Compression 100* is firmly in the tradition of performance art where endurance and purposelessness and risk have worked together to effects that criticism has been at a loss to define. Not for want

of trying, of course, which is part of the sport. To do several performances a day, every day for a month, with dozens of different collaborators, some of whom you have never met before, in places where you will have little and sometimes no control over the conditions, to audiences gathering at random who will sometimes not have a clue what to make of whatever it is you are doing, begs a lot of questions. And the questions came like some kind of inflamed outbreak, a virus that everyone caught. What is it? What's it for? Who are they? Who do they think they are? What are they doing? Why? Occasionally, some stray explanatory statement would be in amongst them. They're making a commercial. He's a fruit. Must be for TV. It's a witch, mum. They should be in the zoo.

Compression 100 did go to the zoo, and of all the places it went—including the cemetery, the Opera House, the dog pound, the jail, the top of Centre Point, Observatory Hill, and an assortment of tunnels—that was where it seemed most to belong, amidst an array of strangely

determined behaviours, all on show for an audience. Everywhere else, the performances looked liked pieces of escaped behaviour, serving to generate awareness, perhaps, of the extent to which behaviour is category confined: related to gainful employment, the fulfilment of need, or the pursuit of identifiable forms of leisure. A version of behaviour labelled "performance" has wide currency, but this is conditional on its conformity with established categories. Audiences at the Opera House, well trained to tune into performance, responded readily to something that looked like it, happening on the steps outside. But this was escaped performance: not performance of anything, just the performance principle gone feral and hyperbolic amongst a group of people apparently possessed by it, posturing in derangements of operatic costume. "Is it Butoh?" someone asked me, his face almost aglow with the pleasure of catchment.



Martin del Amo, Sydney Harbour Bridge Mark Rogers

As performance, most of *Compression 100* was exploratory and erratic, but there were emergent moments that created an intensity of attention sufficient to kill the question virus stone dead. Lynch and de Quincey take off into pure virtuosity improvising movements to a sound track made by John Gillies—a collage of rhythms from traffic and instrumental percussion, that just keeps on producing inspired shifts in direction. Nikki Heywood, barely visible and standing in several inches of water in



De Quincey/Lynch, Kingsford Smith Airport Mark Rogers

the tunnel at St. James railway station, generates stray bursts of sound and movement which fuse quite suddenly into miraculous familiarity as the cadences of *Che Faro*...from Gluck's *Orpheo*. The idea of producing the voice takes on an uncanny meaning. The line of the melody is breathtaking, the voice swells into it, and then it's gone again, perversely, like some kind of apparition that you know won't come back. Isn't this what the opera is about? Maybe we heard the definitive performance of *Orpheo*.

Compression 100 had a mixed reception. That's a cliché, and how could anything else have been expected? There was a lot of discussion and some agonising about reactions to the performances throughout the series. But much more interesting than what people thought of it was what it made them do, by serving as a strange attractor, drawing them away from their regular business, into unfamiliar parts of the city at weird times of the day and night. How do you get three office-bound workaholics to find their way onto Bondi Beach in the middle of a weekday afternoon and stay there until the light fades? How do you get a bunch of performance artists to the Opera House? What if you walk the Parramatta Road, the whole way, from Parramatta to Sydney? The perversity principle is a catalyst which has most effect when generated within strictly designed parameters. It's only the most experienced and disciplined artists who can get it going, set it loose and leave it to reverberate. I'd credit de Quincey and Lynch with that.

Found in Translation



- Language at
Cultural Borders

is a weekend workshop exploring
'languages' in performance.

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The confirmed speakers include Paul Monaghan (Theatreworks/Hildegard, VIC.); Teresa Crea (Doppio Teatro, SA); Gillian Minervini & Mike Canfield (Theatre of the Deaf); Filipino writer Merlinda Bobis; Harley Stumm, producer of *Hiphopera* (Death Defying Theatre) plus a performance of DDT's latest project *Danger*.

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The power of 'Shakespeare' is that companies who engage with the texts, whether on a deconstructive or conservationist basis, find themselves sharing the same discursive territory. For the performance group Not Yet It's Difficult, it's the problem of escaping Shakespeare even as they stay connected.

Their production *WS:HDQ* resolves this problem through a montage form and distinctive performance style which places textual fragments—uttered with enjoyment and power—next to narratives about the performers' experiences of the Shakespeare regime which undercut that joy. These include sardonic commentaries on actor training methods and auditions as well as parodic interludes in which 'bardolatry' is exposed as a messianic system of beliefs and cultural practices.

One of the most multi-layered scenes was performed by Vietnamese actor Kha Tran Viet whose non-anglo Australianness enables him to question the way in which Shakespeare is deified in contemporary Australian culture. His "Shakespeare invented..." attributes the invention of time and John Bell to Shakespeare and leads into one of the most dramatically staged fight scenes I have ever seen. Holding a martial arts sword in hand, Kha announces that Shakespeare also invented violence, and with Paul Bongiorno, he vigorously crosses stage and floor space, swaps swords for bamboo poles and pauses for a few lines of verse, all within inches of the spectators. The metatheatrical discourse underpinning the fight sequence reveals and revels in the staginess of traditional Shakespearian performance.

In another scene, performer Maude Davey embodies Cicely Berry's actor and her text; Shakespeare speaks through her and soon she's put the book between her legs. She loves William Shakespeare. The other performers follow her in an hilarious sequence where the relationship between actor and text, actor and Shakespeare is shown to be a strangely private one of desire and lack, of showing off, clever artistry and infinitely repeatable actions.

WS:HDQ is a collaborative work in which director David Pledger, dramaturg Peter Eckersall and the performers adapt European and Asian performance techniques to their own particular spatial and textual requirements. The style, both eclectic and local, offers a new way of working with very old texts.

Denise Varney

william shakespeare—hung, drawn and quartered IRAA theatre, Alphonston, May 28-June 8

In the Star Court

Lyndon Terracini and Keith Gallasch discuss regional arts issues in Lismore at the opening of NORPA's new theatre

We're in the lighting box (formerly cinema projection booth) of the Star Court Theatre in Lismore, northern New South Wales. It's opening night for the re-furnished 1921 cinema, this time as a theatre operated by Northern Rivers Performing Arts. NORPA is an ambitious and adventurous undertaking initiated and directed by opera singer Lyndon Terracini. It's an instructive model of regional performing arts management, combining innovative works involving local talent and the programming of touring productions: the result is year round contemporary arts. Tonight there'll be champagne, fireworks, a band, the ticket of benefactor Florian Volpato will be taken by Mrs Kit Piper, one of the theatre's usherettes in the 20s, and the crowded theatre will open with American clown Gale LaJoye's Snowflake—in the tradition of the Chaplin films once shown at the Star Court.

LT This was a 420 seat country cinema renovated in 1963 and as you can see it's in very good condition, leather seats and the rest. NORPA tried to buy it last year but it was too difficult. Then a prominent local businessman, Florian Volpato who has also been responsible for restoring the New Italy Museum in Woodburne just south of here, just leapt in and bought the Star Court Theatre and offered us a ten year lease. Then, of course, we had to raise the money to put in a decent stage and a lighting rig. We still don't have any proper dressing rooms for the actors but that's on the way.

In the arcade below is our ticket centre where we handle the bookings for all our shows. We have fifteen productions this year. And we also sell tickets for people like John Williams. We're producing that concert in association with Clifford Hocking, David Vigo and Brashes. So we do a few co-productions, as well as bringing productions in and doing our own shows.

KG How do you nurture local talent?

LT Each region has its own identity and we need to foster that and encourage the artists who live here to express what they feel about the region. The next show I'm doing, called *Faces in the Street*, is about people who live here. Rather than impose a production on them, I've imposed an idea. We called for auditions and what I wanted was to see what people did best and then try to fashion a show around

that. There are fire eaters, people who swallow razor blades, actors, dancers, musicians. I didn't care whether the actors had ever acted before. I wanted them to tell their stories. The playwright Janis Balodis, who lives here now, agreed to be dramaturg. We had workshops and developed the stories. And it's working very well.

There's a large hippy-feral community here and the resentment felt by some of these people is reflected in lines from a Meatloaf song we're using, *Life's a Lemon And I Want My Money Back*: "What about the town? It's defective. It's a useless dead-end street. What about the future? It's defective. You can stick it up your arse!" That sort of feeling is perhaps not visible on the surface in this region but it's certainly there.

There are stories like the local actor who was riding his motor bike one night, had a bit to drink, crashed into a telegraph pole and wound up in a coma for three months. His story of teaching himself to do ordinary things, becomes extraordinary. We've got a 17 year old drag queen who comes from Gulgong, worked in Newcastle but now lives and works here. There's a woman who talks about her disastrous relationships with men and how they always seem to end up in domestic violence. This fellow was choking her to death and finally when he decided to leave, he took her car. She thinks well he's taken my car but I feel a lot better now. Then she meets him again at a re-birthing session—which is very north coast. He interests her because he's got the right sort of numerology.

KG So is this a kind of community theatre?

LT It is, the difference being that the dancers and some of the actors are playing themselves. What I've tried to do is to take away the artifice of acting by going back to real stories that they tell themselves. Then I say, okay now let's start using some acting and dance techniques. It's not enough just because you've done some kung fu to kick the shop window in. Let's use that but with some technique. Some of the performers will work with us again and develop professional skills, so it's not just community involvement.

KG Are you in a position to challenge your audience?

LT We do a lot of shows here. We've

brought Tap Dogs and the Australian Chamber Orchestra. People enjoy these shows, they feel happy at the end but they're not challenged by issues. I've always felt it's important for us to also do pieces where we do say this is a nice place to live, a lovely environment, great climate but there's some nasty stuff going on. This year we have 400 subscribers, up from 200 from last year. We use City Hall for bigger shows. We brought in some football tiered seating for Tap Dogs so people could get a better view. The big shows where we need a big auditorium to make some money, we do there. *Faces in the Street* will have nine performances in this theatre. That's the most we've had. We had seven or eight in the street when we did *The Cars That Ate Paris* but that was a spectacle piece.

So with *Faces in the Street*, while I'm trying to create a piece that people in this community will absolutely relate to, I'm still trying to get away from giving them a bedtime story narrative. It's a book of short stories I suppose but it's certainly not your usual theatre piece.

The amazing thing is that a music group like Elision might play to 70 in a concert in Melbourne but they'll get 200 here. We have Riley Lee and Satsuki Odamura coming soon. With our subscription series, people can see ten shows for \$16 a ticket. So they'll see Tap Dogs and then they'll see something else because they've already bought the ticket and discover they actually like it.

KG What's the role of theatre here?

LT There are a couple of amateur companies and we're bringing in the Sydney Theatre Company's production of Arthur Miller's *Broken Glass*. Janis Balodis directed his *Too Young for Ghosts* which we presented on the banks of the river because most of the play is set outside. That was terrific but generally it's more difficult for us to get audiences for plays here. Regional theatre companies have had a really difficult time. People here talked about starting up a theatre company and I said I just don't see there's a future in it. We can only end up going broke. When I started thinking about a regional organisation I thought about the German model where you have a ballet company, a theatre company, an opera company and an orchestra all under one umbrella. So an audience can see an opera one night, a play the next. Okay, so we're not going to do heritage ballet and opera in Lismore but we do dance and we do music-

theatre. So it's similar but it's more relevant to our culture rather than blindly adopting a British model which may have worked once but is not working any more. Our program is really a festival of contemporary arts but if I called it that, nobody would come.

Of course, our approach is also partly influenced by the region with its strange mix of university population, ferals, rednecks, yuppies from Byron Bay, and retired people from Ballina.

KG There's been a promise from the Liberal government of more money for regional arts.

LT I read that fairly carefully and it seems to me that it means there'll be more money to bring shows in rather than to mount them. That's great but we're wrong to believe that the culture of Australia comes from capital cities. That's not to suggest that the standard of performances in regional areas is any higher. Often it's not. However, it is a very different voice that needs to be fostered so that the standard of performance will match this different voice. And it can but it needs to have money spent on it. Just as money was put into the arts in the 1970s, it now needs to be put into regional Australia.

KG Is there any real regional arts policy that you're aware of?

LT There's not. And another problem I've found is that if you're doing a production in regional Australia you're paying Equity rates but you can only charge \$25 a ticket. You're paying the same rates as in Sydney where you can charge at least twice that. We can't do that. No-one would come. We have a much smaller audience base to draw on. The STC has 20,000 subscribers. It's more a performing arts organisation than just a theatre company. That's what I've tried to do here so we can survive. Fortunately, it seems to be working. But I must say the new Australia Council handbook worries me. An organisation or an individual can only apply to two funds. We need to be able to apply to a variety of funds, otherwise we'll be packaged down like a regional theatre company and we'll go broke. If we can sort this out and continue to convince our audience that contemporary art is enjoyable, we'll be doing well. I'd like to have 600 subscribers next year. By the end of this year we won't have a deficit and I'll have my house back, so hey!

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Between representation
and the realMargaret Traill enjoys and worries at *Mixed Metaphor 96*

Mixed Metaphor 96 at Dancehouse presents "new collaborative works blurring the boundaries between movement, text, image and sound."

Week One. I take my seat. A woman appears to be asleep on a pile of mattresses. Princess and the pea? But then the lights go down. In *Now I lay me...* Rochelle Carmichael and Kerrie Murphy evoke the thousand moments of a single night; the conscious, dreaming and twilight states as well as the nightmare of sleeplessness. Carmichael's dance is at moments contorted, animal-like, a St Vitus' dance displaying the ritual behaviours of autism. My fascination with this psychosis however is repeatedly interrupted by the need to make sense of narrative signs, such as, when Carmichael caricatures frustration. Thereafter the dancer becomes a character and I flounder in the attempt to force other images into the service of a story—and fail.

Upstairs to *Tongue Fence* by Entropy Productions. Ushered along a corridor towards a hideous cacophony and smoke. I love the terror/wonder when conventions of entering the theatre are altered. Around and through a rough assemblage of black plastic screens mayhem can be glimpsed. The noise is glorious. Instruments career across the room, a cellist shrieks, dancers move past in formation, a digital clock blinks, a TV hisses. I am wide awake and listening, what does this chaos mean in 1996?

My eye is drawn by emerging patterns—I notice the noise makers with one exception are male, the dancers mostly female; the young men's faces are unpainted, the young women's nicely made up and hair gelled. My euphoria deflates. Given the evidence of such marked and traditional theatrical conventions, I doubt a radical performance analysis is at work. The challenge of this event begins to look merely like performers' pleasure. Disappointed, I was ready to participate but am left feeling a witness, a mother.

Back downstairs, in *An-Alice-ist* by Strange Arrangements, the unconscious unfolds again. This time in homage to the great explorers of that realm: Freud, the surrealists and Charles Dodgson (Lewis Carroll). Nigel Luck and Janet Lee, doll-like automata inhabit a space of shadows and eerie projections. They speak in monologues, using linguistic and conceptual trickery to illuminate relationships between concrete logic and the unconscious. I feel as if I am looking at a picture box containing revelations quaintly dated by this mode of narration, and better suited to a time now gutted by two world wars and television.

Week Two. *The Last Gasp* directed by Rinske Ginsberg, affectionately investigates popular culture of the nineteen forties, especially the place of the cigarette. All those lovely gestures, the inhalation and the ex, the

very breath, the heaving bosom and the manly chest; camp in their consummate heterosexuality. The smoke is the only fluid sign in an otherwise controlled and vertical physicality. Snippets of film dialogue and popular song move in and out of synch with the human interactions. I am happiest in the disconnected moments. The multifaceted images are perfectly observed, slipping me to some other, darker, sweating place, inside a tiny puff, a slow blow or a hooded glance (surely, straight at me).

In *Holiday on Death Row* by Stride, text by Roger McGough, a heterosexual theme continues in a different style. Moving fluidly between dance and word sequences, Nicky Smith has skilfully directed this tawdry evocation of sexual frustration. The confident acting of Justin Ratcliffe and Emma Stend brings with it the attendant problem of the 'is it believable?' kind. Increasingly I struggle with the premise that these young, perfectly formed bodies are mired in a hopeless suburban scenario where husband wants a root, wife wants a life. The final sequence is like a realtime Calvin Klein ad and although a delicious spectacle, I cannot reconcile it with the text. My tentative belief that dysfunctional heterosexuality is a problem of the suburban middle class is scuppered. Or am I being asked to consider the reified sexuality of advertising as a transcendence of the old brutalities of heterosexual sex?

From het-glamour through het-horror we swing into the home straight for *Elemental*. *Part One*, a gambolling dance about life in a group house. Probably Carlton in one of those big terraces with about forty leaking rooms. The dance is loose and weighty, choreographed sequences moving from rough coherence to pleasant and jumbly. I have lived in houses where we moved like that. In the moments of not-dancing, the performers seem shy and hesitant and I lose focus or watch the sustained concentration of the musicians. I wonder why they include these moments? Perhaps the acting genie appeared in rehearsal and the performers nervously obeyed her commands?

I am struck by the role of acting in all six works, which seems to have appeared as a result of formal decisions rather than as primary mode of expression. In experienced hands, as in *The Last Gasp*, this can be revelatory, where acting marks a weird place between representation and the real. But elsewhere the acting genie's henchpixies—character, narrative, suspension of disbelief—have thrown down the gauntlet to these artists who dared to summon them in the powerful spell of blurring boundaries.

Mixed Metaphor 96, Dancehouse, Centre for Moving Arts, Melbourne, June 20-30

Home, tongue and hand—
rediscovered in translation

Playworks, the National Centre for Women Performance Writers offers a radical program of workshops for writers for theatre and performance. In July, film-maker-author Ross Gibson ran a weekend seminar on narrative structures and their potential for mediation by technology. In November writer-performer Keith Gallasch will run a day workshop for writers and dramaturgs on how performance texts are visualised and heard, how conventional critical and dramaturgical language shapes our expectations of plays. Later in November writer/director Jenny Kemp will hold intensive 15 hour and 20 hour sessions on the way in which kinaesthetic engagements with space can work as a stimulus for writing. And in September during Carnivale, Playworks will host a weekend workshop titled *Found in Translation: Language at Cultural Borders*. How is it to land and not land, my wings re-arranging themselves for home and not home?

Merinda Bobis, *Border Lover*
Found in Translation focuses on the theatrical potential of translation in cross-cultural experience. What is found in the process of translating languages for performance? How do we write new languages? How do the tongue and the body translate impulses across traditional and contemporary forms? This workshop will draw on the

experiences of theatre-makers working in a range of multi-lingual and cross-cultural performance throughout Australia and will incorporate practical sessions as well as discussion, uncovering and illuminating the processes that writers use, creating openings for new languages. *Found in Translation* will showcase a range of practitioners whose work features translation in the most expansive sense of the word, artists who move between languages, forms and methodologies. Speakers confirmed so far include: Paul Monaghan (Theatreworks/Hildegard Ensemble, Victoria); Teresa Crea (Doppio Teatro, South Australia); Gillian Minervini and Mike Canfield (Theatre of the Deaf, NSW) Filipino-Australian writer Merinda Bobis; Harley Strumm (producer *HipOpera*, Death Defying Theatre, NSW). The weekend will also feature a performance of DDT's latest project, *Danger*, an audio-visual manual for survival directed by Gail Kelly. Playworks has plans to extend the *Found in Translation* project nationally during 1997. In September they will also launch *Telling the Time*, papers from the tenth anniversary *Playing With Time* festival which brought so many writers together from all over the country in October last year. Meanwhile *Playing With Time*, Playworks' recent national survey of women's writing for theatre and performance over the last decade is selling fast. Tel 02 9264 8414 Fax 02 9264 8449 RT



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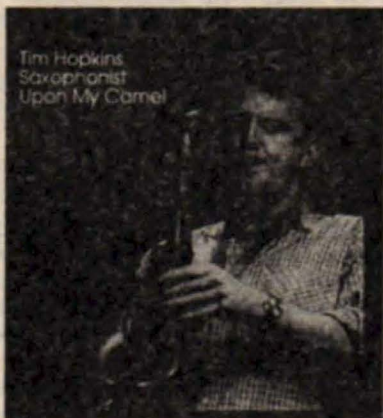
13 Ten Part Invention

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Sounds unfettered and free

Megan Wynne-Jones reports on *Word/Voice/Sound*

This was both an inspiring and a provocative event. It was inspiring to be made aware of the strength and tenacity of women working in music and sound, and to realise that in spite of the struggle to be heard there is a vigorous voice that is articulating the female experience in a way that sounds unfettered and free.

The performances were a testimony to this. They had been planned to coincide with tea-breaks or at the end of the day, therefore perhaps given less weight than the critical analyses, but I found the 'between-papers' atmosphere conducive to relaxation and enjoyment. What a wealth of fresh, direct voice: ArThEaRY's innovative interpretation of Gertrude Stein's writings, the vivacious Gaelic *waulking songs* from Tursuchan, the liberated oscillations of Amanda Stewart, the chillingly beautiful performance of Michael Atherton's piece. I came out in goose bumps several times. I wanted more.

Inspiration was there and so was provocation. At a conference with a focus on feminist analyses, most of the papers were of the linear, logical and completed argument type, in a fairly dense academic style, delivered at a physical distance from the audience in a fast-paced manner which allowed for little dialogue. A construction handed to us by men and one we possibly need to re-invent. Perhaps 'papers-in-process' would allow for a more open-ended and accessible style of conference, where there is room for ambiguity and uncertainty, and time for sensation—the slowed but alert passivity required to really listen.

So I welcomed the papers which offered a different mode of presentation and hence of hearing. Annette Tesoriero's was one. In a manner that was both chatty and direct, she created a recipe of ideas about the portrayal of women in opera, and threw it around. This felt messy and interesting. What was going to happen next? She stopped talking and started singing, moved away from the lectern. Tension in the audience. And it was the women who copped it, as she exhorted us impolitely to express the power of our own articulated desire: "it takes muf muscle, baby" and "take your cunt for a walk". Tension in the audience.

Nola Farnam's paper had its own authority too. This was a quietly delivered account of the use of sound in her various installations, accompanied by slides, diagrams and recordings. As she talked of her large scale outdoor pieces I was there

with her, earthy and feeling damp. Was that an anorak she had on? I was impressed by the length and effort of the process in her works, and enjoyed the fact that the obvious depth of meaning was left inferred.

There were moments in other papers which served as de-constructions of the archetypal 'paper'. Sally Macarthur offered us an amusing re-enactment of the Australian Music Examinations Board exam procedure. Both amusing and an indictment of our musical education system which force-feeds children exclusively on music composed by dead white males, and perpetuates a distrust of anything either contemporary, Australian or written by a woman. The sung performances of Therese Radic's work provided us with a different tone of paper, too, interspersed as they were between lively accounts of her work and her attempt to 'find a haunting in the re-incarnation of history on stage'. They were haunting songs, simple heartfelt expressions of the emotional complexities of women's relationships.

And Michael Atherton's exploration of "rhythmspeak" was delivered in a warmly anecdotal manner which in no way belied its content. An interesting phenomenon, possibly a new genre, that raises questions about meaning in the crossover between speech and song, a form that has been used historically world-wide, and is being used by contemporary performers also. So that's a name for the language my son uses in the bath every night.

The keynote speakers of the conference, Susan McClary and Robert Walser, both from UCLA, struck a dissonant chord for me. With reference to the concept of interiority in music, they propounded that our cultural straitjackets prevent us from responding in any but a limited way to music. We can only be manipulated by it and everything we feel is second-hand, always located in a cultural context. The idea that emotion is subjective needs to be interrogated and we need to analyse its cultural underpinnings. This is all very well, but in a world where cultural relativism rules is there no such thing then as an authentic emotional response? Apparently not. To me this decries the subtlety of music and its unique ability to convey and arouse. And it feels like a denigration of the feminine as a force, which in my understanding, is located in the body be it female or male, and is a bodily response to universal feeling. I felt alarmed and alienated by their words.

This issue of a lack of corporeal integrity was referred to by Fran Dyson in her paper. In the post-human world of recording, sound has become a pseudo-object, tied more to technology than to place or body. Recorded sound is in danger of becoming nothing more than sonic squirts, a constant beepscape of tone-data. Yet, "Sound is always on the inside", she said. "It becomes part of us like smell or pain". We need to allow sound to return to its intimate relationship with the body, to re-align the ear with the body.

And we need to learn how to 'hearken', how to listen from a space of silence, suggested Deborah Durie, quoting from the work of David Levin. Hers was an interesting examination of the work of sound artists Joan Brassil and Joyce Hinterding, drawing a parallel with the way they transmute energy into sound and the alchemical process. Perhaps hearing the dreams of the artists during the process of their work would have amplified this connection.

I wondered if the conference itself could be likened to the alchemical 'vas' within which a kind of brewing or cooking takes place. A mixture of sounds and ideas, connections and cross-overs, discussions of meanings, similarities, difference, a stew of music and critical theory. And the transformation? Perhaps as yet unregistered.

I wondered too if women's outrage at being silenced has become disbelief. There was a note of this. It is still hard for women to be heard, as composers, musicians, performers, artists, writers and broadcasters and yet I was convinced by this event of a sense of a growing and authentic feminine voice. All in all it was a couple of days I wanted to rewind and play again, slowly.

Word/Voice/Sound: Interactions around musics at Artspace, Sydney, July 7-8; presented by the University of Western Sydney Nepean.

Nicholas Gebhardt's visit to SoundCulture '96 in San Francisco as reported in RealTime 13 was supported by the Australian Film Commission.

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SOUNDcheck. If you couldn't get to San Francisco for SoundCulture 1996, or you were intrigued by Nicholas Gebhardt's account in RealTime 13 and you want more, then SOUNDcheck.one is definitely for your ears. It's the first of "a series of topical forums for the discussion and audition of sound art (theories, practices, histories, technologies), and its status in and propagation through the hybrid arts". To these ends SOUNDcheck.one is titled *SoundCulture 1996: critical distance, reverberant* and features sound luminaries Andrew McLennan (chair), Nigel Helyer (sound and installation artist), Norie Neumark (radio/sound artist) and Yuji Sone (performance artist). In future SOUNDchecks, "acoustic phenomena, the topographies of sound, and perspectives for listening" will be explored. Convenor: Alessio Cavallaro 02 9671 2751. Theatre Level 4, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Saturday, August 3, 1.30pm.

Making talk space

Maryanne Lynch listens around an IMA initiative in Brisbane

1. Late on a Friday afternoon the intersection of Gipps and Ann Streets, Brisbane thunders into third gear as everyone tries to get somewhere else in order for their weekend to officially begin. This is the time for that last spot of shopping in Chinatown, or some listening to the radio in the car queue to get over the Storey Bridge, or an early drink as you avoid the rush. This is also the site of the Institute of Modern Art, and of its latest venture: a series of short one-handers pitched to that in-between moment (a video or dinner?) when punters and commuters haven't clearly distinguished themselves from each other.

Friday, June 15: Roderick Bunter—first artist up. I had another engagement already pencilled in: the choice is made for me.

2. Michael Snelling, director of the IMA, was watching an Alain Tanner movie some years ago called *Jonah Who Will Be 25 in the Year 2000*. One scene had the history teacher bring a butcher into his class, who then proceeded to slice up an enormous Polish sausage as a way of explaining time, history and social relations. This, Snelling says, is a key inspiration for the series, *Talk* being the second round. In other words: taking people from one context and putting them in another in order to locate new personal and cultural meanings, or different perspectives, on the familiar and the everyday.

Friday, June 21: Peter Anderson. A Vapo Drop in hand, Human League assaulting the ear and the Writer at his desk. A piece soaked in nostalgia, Pine-o-clean and cigar scent.

3. The brief is no less than five minutes and no more than thirty. Nil or minimal props. Future plans: in a bar or a pub or some place where elbows slide onto tables. At present: in the highest reaches of the large IMA premises, a giant

wooden-floored space with windows and doors going everywhere. This series (in conjunction with the now deceased Isn't Gallery) is "about talk but [that] doesn't necessarily mean there will be any". As it happens, there's both much and little talk. Mostly, there's Performance Art (perhaps a Nicholas Tsoutas legacy), which results in the exploration of the everyday being subverted to performance/art conventions.

Friday, June 28: Prudence Cumes. The marketing and sale of a kiss. The audience as stockbuyers/suckers. Pru signs a dud cheque for the lucky volunteer.

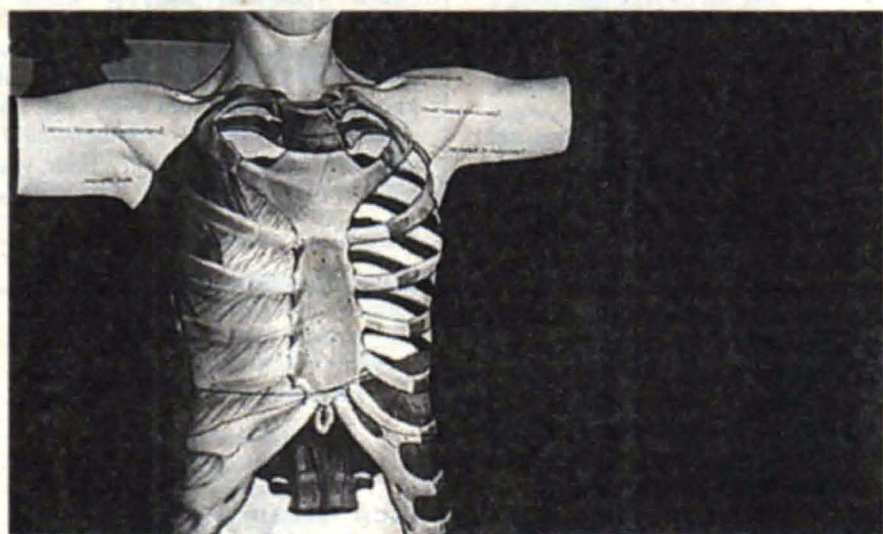
4. Snelling, as director of the Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, tried something similar, as *Art on Tap*. Every week for nearly a year artists could stand up, sit down, do whatever, in a pub setting, interacting with whoever happened to be there. The IMA initiative is a smaller, more compact project, still striving to move out of the Art ghetto and yet carry artists with it. Who's the audience? At the moment, other artists. Planned is a broader assembly and a forum which may or may not privilege artistic media. "It'll happen on the night."

Friday, July 5: Mark Eades. The Secret Life of the Perfect Husband. Sweaty desire and repetitive gesture in 'I'm home, lovey' uneasy co-existence.

5. I can't hear what's being said but that doesn't seem to matter.

Talk, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane

Maryanne Lynch writes and directs work at the intersection of theatre and performance art.



Kate Campbell-Pope and Claire Bailey

Art, Medicine and the Body, August 1 - September 1 at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, has 27 artists "working in a wide range of media from painting and sculpture, to photography, film, installation and performance". A one day forum, Saturday August 10, 10am - 6pm, features the prolific and accessible body theorist and social scientist Bryan S. Turner, and Jane Goodall, leading commentator on Australian performance, where, of course, the body has long been the focus of investigations into movement, cross cultural skills and various body states including the limits of endurance. Promised in the exhibition is a rich list of subjects and themes including: dreaming and the immune system, waterworks—the body's plumbing, terminal illness, Cartesian mind/body split, body scarring and memories, the somatic unconscious, the aging body, medicine and the spiritual connection.
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5ft, Flabby & Unfit: portrait of a supermodel?

A new concept in the fashion world...a modelling agency in Melbourne asking for short, round, old and 'real' people—especially those with money upfront. Journalist Jessica Nicholas was talent scouted by the agency. She decided to rise to the challenge—armed with a microphone.

8.20PM AUG 4

The Light and Darkness War

Gerry Gable has spent most of his life exposing the activities of the far right, within the pages of the magazine he edits, *SEARCHLIGHT*—the international anti-fascist monthly. Radio Eye profiles Gable and the price he's paid for his work.

AUG 11 8.20PM

The Case of the Corporate Corpse

A budget week special. Staff from all echelons, sleuths, auditors and others join an investigation into the complex anatomy of a large organisation. Perhaps you'll be able to solve the mystery...or perhaps the logic of corporate life will forever remain obscure.

AUG 18 8.20PM

Talanoa—Taka

Stories from sea-crossing people of the South Pacific.

8.20PM AUG 25

Lili Tuwai presents her father's story—a Fijian who migrated to New Zealand in search of a different life. After 34 years he has now returned to his 'home' in the Lau group of islands. Three generations of song, myth and legend.

Northern Endeavour

Earlier this year the Australian Army Reserve sent a field hospital, a surgical team and reservists to Bathurst Island, north of Darwin. The aim was to set up a functional field hospital in a remote location and address the health problems of the local Tiwi Islands population.

SEPT 1 8.20PM

Brut Force

The first of two programmes marking the centenary of the birth of Antonin Artaud, the originator of the 'Theatre of Cruelty'. Works from poets and artists otherwise defined as medicated: a tour of the institutions: fragments from other people's stories.

SEPT 8 8.20PM

From the Killing Room Floor

Speakers and performance from two international conference events exploring the continuing influence of Antonin Artaud on contemporary performance and art.

8.20PM SEPT 15

Soccer Legends Never Die

The changing significance of soccer on community life in the black South African township of Alexander, the personal stories of four very different soccer 'legends'.

SEPT 22 8.20PM

Great Ocean

A celebration of voices and performance from the Pacific. A red-hot mix of Pacific cultures, drawing on the rich and diverse communities of Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere.

8.20PM SEPT 29

Global Voice

Personal essays from around the world, conveying a strong sense of place.

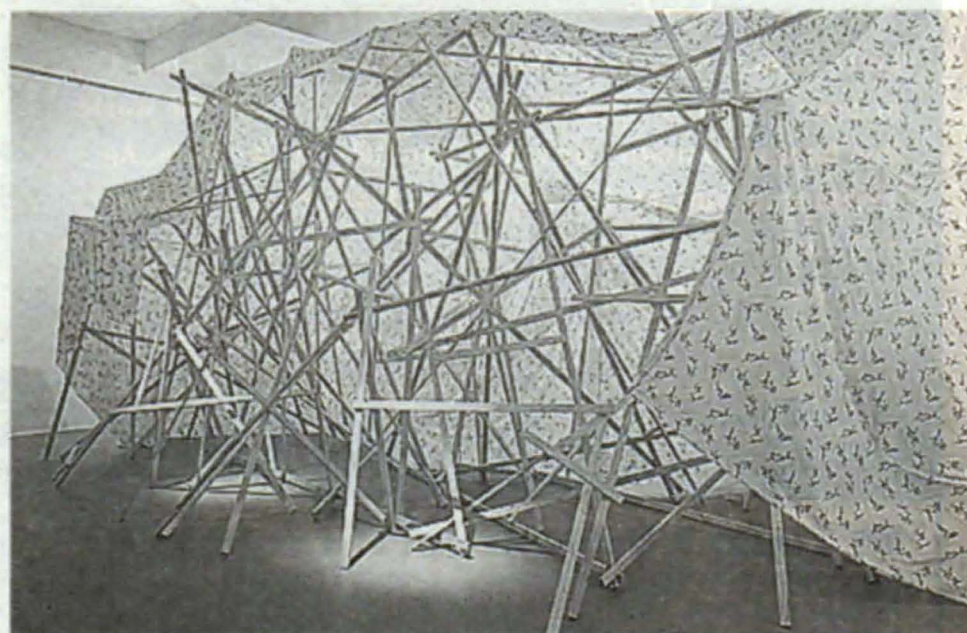
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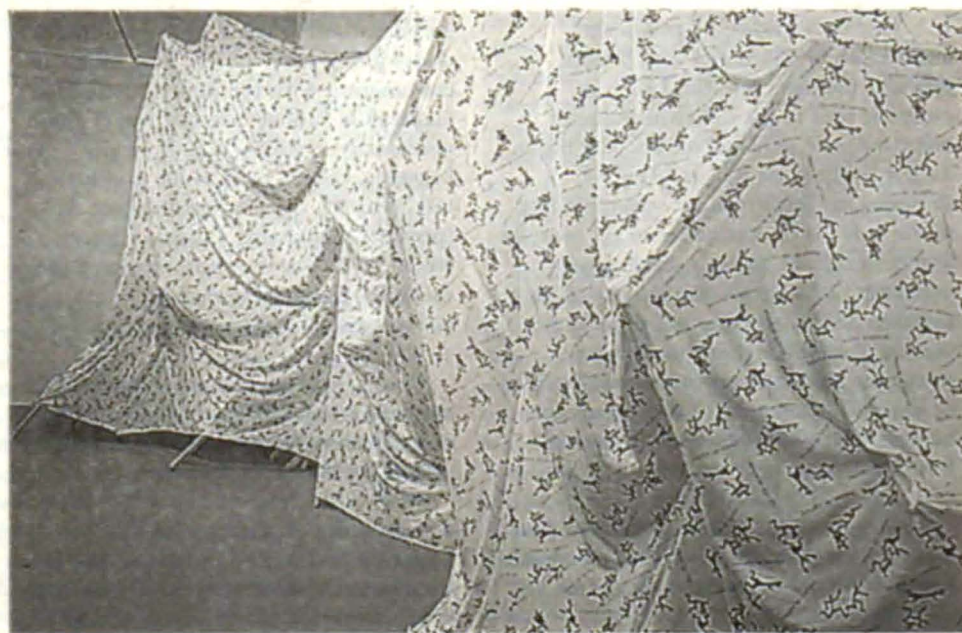
Adelaide 729AM Brisbane 792AM Canberra 846AM
Darwin 657AM Hobart 585AM Melbourne 621AM
Newcastle 1512AM Perth 810AM Sydney 576AM

On the site of an old story—a lament

Linda Marie Walker



Shaun Kirby, *International Headache Congress*, 1996



Alan Cruickshank

Shaun Kirby, *International Headache Congress*, 1996

Alan Cruickshank

Memory is the epic faculty par excellence.

Walter Benjamin

There is a steady departure from Adelaide of young and established visual artists. At last count, the number was around thirty, gone and going. And there are others with plans, dreams.

This article is about dismay and sadness, and the acknowledging of both, in their smallness really, their ordinary grip on everyday life. And about an impossible question: why, why are my friends leaving? As, it is obvious, and elusive, and anyway, a question well formed risks an easy answer. Consequently it's a question raised over and over; clumsily, drunkenly, and answered this way and that and within a wider environment which has displayed, sometimes, a reluctance to touch or even enjoy this dismay/sadness as it comes about; and is poignant, excessive, and difficult. Silence is never silent, and one can pretend, whatever: all is well. And well all might be, finally. Departures have happened before, and major ones too. Still, there are recriminations, and repercussions, specific (personal) and general (communal). And there is mourning. I've just been to the fourth farewell for one young artist leaving tomorrow. And so there is pleasure too. Her return, like the others, is unlikely.

Alan Cruickshank has also written on this 'topic' (*Broadsheet*, August) and he asked what tack I'd take, and I mumbled something (mostly about sadness), until I said: I don't know. I said I'd read a small 'Thumbs Down' comment in *The Advertiser's* 'Arts Monthly' supplement (July), and thought it strangely cold:

It is tragic many of our excellent artists still struggle to find regular work. Everything within our power must be done to turn this situation around.

What? what must be done? They're going, still, now.

To draw attention and debate to this loss Richard Grayson, Director of the Experimental Art Foundation, curated an exhibition titled *Out of Adelaide* (May/June). It involved 17 artists (and there were others who could/would not participate). There are good reasons to leave, like employment and gallery opportunities. Part-time teaching for artists is an economic reality, and good for all concerned. There is little available, and it is often exploitative. Spaces in which to exhibit are limited. Especially as artist projects are rare again. Grayson wrote in his *Out of Adelaide* essay:

It's very difficult for an artist to get past or beyond a certain economic or career point in Adelaide if they focus solely on what the city can provide. If the work's not here, obviously you go elsewhere. You can only do a certain number of artist initiatives in the same town without losing the will to live, there's a limit as to how often you can (or want) to show at the EAF or CAC. You get tired signing on the dole. In the Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide has a dynamic commercial space that also represents some less established artists, but if you can show there, you can't show that often, so you also need to show interstate. A market can only support so much (and the SA market has little ability to support much of the type of work to be found in Out of Adelaide), a State Gallery has a limit on its purchases.

Sure, this might be an intensified moment in the ebb and flow of a city. However, we, the ones staying put, sense a crisis; we hear of the next move and are caught between excitement (for them) and sorrow (for us). That is, we miss them, immediately. Not just their company and work, but their energy, ideas, criticism, body—in sum, their voice.

There's a project here, called *Adelaide 21*. Its aim is "to re-define the future role of the city centre and to shape a strategy to position Adelaide for the rapidly changing world of the 2000s". The steering committee consists of people from the private sector and the three levels of government. Recently they brought Charles Landry of the British cultural consultancy, Comedia, to Adelaide as a key adviser. He said in an interview: "People are leaving [Adelaide] because they can't meet their aspirations here. There's not enough critical mass." In his "Adelaide Issues Paper: First Impressions" he identified the lack of density in the CBD as the core issue. He wrote: "Could there have been other ways to spend the subsidy of \$20 million on the Art Gallery to increase critical mass and therefore density and activity? In my view this analysis would have led one to invest instead in student accommodation...the result would be 1000 students permanently living in the CBD and thus generating...spin offs. In the longer term this would then have created the justification to spend the \$20 million on the art gallery at a later stage."

An Adelaide 21 'Interim Report' has named "proposed strategic themes", and one of them is: "City of the Creative Imagination". There is little about artists, even though: "Ultimately all cities are

primarily dependent on the potential skills, talents, imagination and creativity of their people". And: "Adelaide already has a large number of creative people, but many of the things they do are not known, under publicised and thus not celebrated, and many are leaving...without encouragement and support, talent will be lost to Adelaide unnecessarily."

In the visual arts it is people whose talents are known and appreciated and loved who are leaving. They are artists who developed their practice here, and who helped form a rigorous climate, because of, and in spite of, this city's distance and size, and because of their persistence, dedication, and generosity. The export of their work interstate has not been a priority. Now they are exporting themselves.

I sent Landry a fax, which was probably stupid, or probably sounded stupid, and he didn't reply. In part I wrote: "In terms of the type of work you are called to do, it interests me who you are given to talk to...who is it that informs you, because it wasn't me, it wasn't 'sadness' that you addressed. It wasn't loss, mourning, etc. Who tells you who to talk to, do you ever ask questions about that. Do you inquire about the 'aspect' of your information. Does this make a difference to evaluation...it wasn't until you left that people I know knew you were here. And that by the newspapers." I rambled on. He was right not to answer, sadness is personal, and I was presumptuous.

When someone leaves, we, 'the left',

retain what we know of them, in our own way. And share them in conversation, as part of our life, as unforgettable:

For storytelling is always the art of repeating stories ...

Walter Benjamin

I don't know: perhaps this writing should have remained oral, as gossip, rumour, worry, wonder. And should (anyway, hopefully) remain dark, as story, as Walter Benjamin wrote in *The Storyteller*, to unfold over and over, because it is epic:

It is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it...the most extraordinary things, marvellous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks.

The *Out of Adelaide* exhibition did this. And I'm reminded of the Shaun Kirby work, *next to nothing* (in his solo exhibition *International Headache Congress*, EAF, April/May), here pictured, large, awkward, uncomfortable, and definitely, lightly, there, no mistake, taking up space, like a memory-creature that knows you cannot embrace it, and knows, even as you turn away, that you cannot not see it. And, although you'll walk behind and see how it's built, you'll still not understand 'why'. And Kirby's gone too.



GALLERY

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Cross cultural conferenceville

Suzanne Spinner at *Wijay Na?* in Darwin

DIANNE



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This conference was originally entitled "Representation on the Cultural Interface", but the convenors ultimately plumped for their catchier, *Wijay Na?* which means "Which Way Now?" in Kriol. Kriol titles have suddenly become very smart, they are poetic and concise. However it had a safer, almost apologetic subtitle: "Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Art and Artists' Forum". *Wijay Na?* took place at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory in Darwin over the weekend of June 15-16 and was convened by 24 HR ART. It was conceived by Steve Fox and Thelma Hoahn in close collaboration with Marcia Langton, the head of the Faculty of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Studies at Northern Territory University.

I have always enjoyed the drama of conferences (*vide* Frank Moorhouse, *Conferenceville*, 1976) and, like Frank, I am all for them and *Wijay Na?* did not disappoint. Frank gives awards and ratings for things which did and did not happen at The Conference. He says, "the first thing I look for is trouble. Where is the trouble going to come from. I don't mind trouble, it usually brings out what the conference is about". At *Wijay Na?* trouble was personified almost to the point of self-proclamation by Tracey Moffat. Tracey said she doesn't usually go to things like this but her good friend Marcia, "who I call sister, big sister", said she had to come and so here she was. If there was any doubt about the agendas not coming out, inviting Tracey along assured their coming out.

The not-turning-up award was equally shared by two Larrakia artists, June Gunluckis Mills, who was to open the conference with a traditional welcome and



Brian Nyinwanga, *Shopping at Casuarina*

close it with a farewell, and Gary Lee, who was to speak on the representation of the male black body; but neither showed up, and we were none the wiser. The High Profile award went to Marcia Langton and the high-low-profile award went to Chips Mackinoly who did not utter a word until the very end when he was chosen by Marcia as one of the people to sum up the proceedings.

The assassinating allegation and the assassinating words at *Wijay Na?* were "collaboration" and "copycatting". Concern was expressed about "the hegemony of the dot" and an innocent conferee suggested at one point that a university of the dreaming was needed where we would/could all go and learn what Aboriginal art was about. In relation to collaboration, Marcia made the point that it was sad if we have to ask if there are genuine friendships between people, and even sadder if we assume there can't be. Mundine countered by saying that the art of friendship was invariably overshadowed by the elephant of appropriation.

140 people packed into the Museum Theatre and listened to some 25 speakers who talked about their work and we all argued solidly for the two days but there were no walk-outs and no full-on shouting matches. At times the atmosphere was tense (especially before Miss Moffat spoke) but it was all very lively and unconstrained. The diversity of the audience ensured things never got stuck in one groove—be it academic, ideological or even earnestly precious. It was by turns infuriating, provocative, and informative, and even occasionally funny. A genuine exchange of ideas happened; lots of slides and videos interspersed the talk, so it was always stimulating.

With the notable exceptions of Djon Mundine from the MCA (formerly art adviser at Ramminging) and Vincent Megaw, Professor of Visual arts & Archaeology at Flinders University, the speakers were all practicing artists. They were either Aboriginal artists or white artists who worked with Aboriginal people. Among the Aboriginal artists there was great diversity of practice including traditional Arnhemland men, Gawirrin Guman, a senior artist and bark painter and Brian Nyinwanga, a bark painter who now also works in acrylics and does contemporary urban subjects in a bark painting style, and from Yuendumu, Dolly Nampijinpa Daniels, a dot painter who does collaborative installations with Anne Mosey.

There were a range of urban Aboriginal artists—Julie Dowling, Koorji Raymond, Julie Gough and Tracey Moffat who work mostly in contemporary media—photography, video, film, installation and only rarely paint; plus Shirley McNamara from outside Mt. Isa who is neither traditional nor urban and paints scenes of cattle station life and sculpts in spinifex grass. The local white artists included Anne

Mosey, Pam Lofts, Rod Moss, all from Alice Springs, and Annie Franklin and Peter Adsett from Darwin. Melbourne based traditional Chinese artist, Zhou Xiaping was the real maverick. He has worked extensively with people in remote communities and has depicted Aboriginal people and landscape ever since he spent time at NTU.

Djon Mundine's presentation on the curatorial issues relating to the exhibition *Tyerabarrbowaryaou—I shall never become*, set the parameters for the conference. Mundine began with his international conference party piece where he shows a map of Australia superimposed over a map of Europe or a map of Asia and points out the vastness of Australia and the range of sources of Aboriginal art so that his audience can see that just as there is not one thing which is European or Asian art, there is not one Aboriginal Art. He has been asked, "Do you speak Aboriginal?" and replies, "No, do you speak Europeanish?" He argued that *Tyerabarrbowaryaou* exemplified as many ways of doing Aboriginal art as there were Aboriginal artists and that no one way was *the way*.

Mundine was followed by Vincent Megaw who gave an historical perspective on both the range of Aboriginal art and the range of responses to representations of Aboriginal people by white Australian artists. Mundine and Megaw were sandwiched between the two extremes of Aboriginal art practice, being preceded by Gawirrin Guman and followed by Tracey Moffat who represented, in turn, both the ultra-conservatism of tradition and the wholesale piracy of postmodernism. So that by lunchtime on day one the field was well and truly opened up and it took the rest of the weekend to fill in the ground in between so that the optimum number of controversies and contradictions were animated.

This order of events created a rich field and a full context in which to place the attitudes and work of each of the artists who followed and allowed them to speak about their own work in great detail. The issues which generated the most heat were collaboration between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal artists; the depiction of Aboriginal people by non-Aboriginal artists and the question of the use of Aboriginal imagery and motif. Various speakers came under fire and were attacked and defended from the floor and vigorously argued and asserted their freedom to pursue particular collaborations and ways of showing Aboriginal people. Opinions still vary as to which way was promulgated but it was certain that now no one way, but rather many different ways—forward, through and around the ground—were acknowledged and their problematics ventilated.

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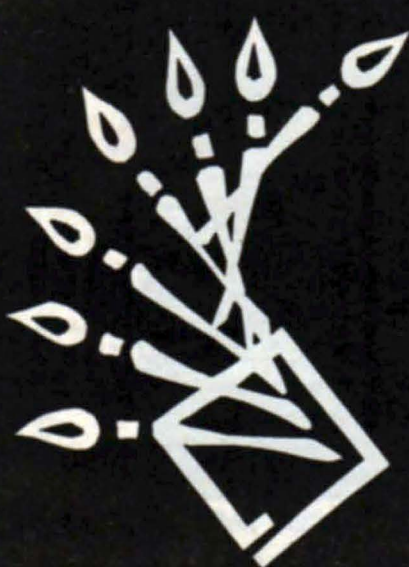
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Venue hungry Hobart

Diana Klaosen reports on the fate of Hobart's Couch Culture

Early this year, in what must be seen as recognition of its contribution to the local art scene, Couch Culture Contemporary Artspace was successful in its application for an Arts Tasmania grant to renovate and upgrade its existing exhibition space and facilities. At the time, things augured well for Hobart's only independent experimental art venue. But recent developments have been disappointing.



Justin Henderson, *Between Us (part 1)*, detail

Couch Culture Art Space originally opened less than two years ago as part of a specialist youth-oriented pop culture and clothing store in a somewhat bohemian stretch of Elizabeth Street, on the northern edge of Hobart's CBD. With the complex housed in one of the tiny, terraced store fronts that line the area, the original gallery space was a kind of afterthought located upstairs in what would originally have been residential quarters. Nevertheless it soon established a reputation as an unconventional, innovative venue with a stimulating atmosphere, interesting stock in its retail section, friendly young staff members and a well-balanced exhibition program that consistently provided something to surprise, intrigue and delight.

With a co-ordinating committee that included a number of current students and recent graduates of the Hobart Centre for the Arts it is not surprising that many early exhibitors also had connections to the Centre for the Arts and many of the exhibited pieces were works such as installation and video—which are eminently suitable and very popular for exploration by students or emerging artists, but which do not normally translate well to the commercial gallery situation. There are, indeed, very few outlets in Hobart for this type of more experimental work and it was part of Couch Culture's intention to provide such a niche in the local art scene, that is, an accessible, commission-free venue for emerging artists.

A new space was completed early in 1996 in an extension to the Couch Culture premises on the upgraded first-floor section, complete with artificial lighting, increased wall area and an expanded gallery committee. It provided a very real—and virtually unique—service to the emerging-artist community in Hobart. The upgraded program provided increased scope for the involvement of guest curators, for committee members to curate shows and for the organisation of 'crossover events' between different elements of the emerging arts community, including the Tasmanian Conservatorium of Music—itsself recently expanded—and the School of Art as well as artist groups and cooperatives.

The first show to open in the newly renovated gallery was *Blue, Baby, Blue*, a two person show, featuring sculpturesque 3-D figures by Centre for the Arts Honours student Sally Rees and 'automatic portraits' executed whilst blindfolded, by recent graduate Matt Warren. Next, in April this year, was Justin Henderson's multi-media, changing (two-part) installation, *Between Us*.

Henderson's aim is to set up "a dialogue between objects, subjects and the viewer". Essentially, he works with disparate found objects, images and media, combining and recontextualizing them to create whimsical,

evocative environments, scenarios whose configurations, appearance and ambience are the unique products of the artists' imagination, reflecting nothing existing in the 'real' world, provoking "an imagined space...a potential field where the imaginary can be let loose".

The first part of *Between Us*, called *Blowing*, is a free-wheeling, colourful, over-the-top visual celebration. Lime-green diamond shapes and stylised daisies are stencilled onto the gallery walls, whilst dozens of small silver balls are randomly suspended from the ceiling, on virtually invisible thread so that they appear to float, like a myriad of kitsch miniature mirror-balls. If the combined effect is rather reminiscent of the psychedelic 60s, other elements have less clear associations. There is a foam-covered, floor-to-ceiling pole in one corner; a

close-up shot of a dugong in a Japanese aquarium is tucked into a corner of one wall; a pink and white fabric 'unidentified object' rests on the floor; a television on a foam 'T.V. table' plays almost static footage of ocean waves. Each viewer will have his/her own reading. Its ambience is one of 'busy-ness' and its energy seems to draw in the sights and sounds from the city street beyond the open gallery windows and the visual chaos of the recycled clothing on display in the adjoining room.

The animated *Blowing* is replaced by the sobriety and stillness of *Travelling*. Gallery walls are now half-panelled in plain brown cardboard, above which a few stencilled decorations from *Blowing* are visible, though they seem to fade into insignificance in this context. Three small slots in the cardboard panels reveal competent but unexceptional wilderness photographs; a cardboard and foam concave object on the floor is unidentifiable and, therefore, rather distracting, though its unadorned aesthetic is perfectly in keeping with the rest of the piece. The ocean waves are still screening but the TV stand has been enveloped in cardboard. No other elements of the first installation remain. The effect is minimal, contemplative and harmonious, a strong contrast to *Blowing*. It is quite a remarkable achievement that one person, working in the same space, with inexpensive and/or found materials can create two such discrete environments, two such different atmospheres.

With this kind of work, Couch Culture was a venue that seemed to have a very real role and considerable future in expanding the arts arena in Hobart and Tasmania. However, in what has come as a surprise move, as of June 1996 it was decided to close down Couch Culture's operations both retail and art-based. The closure took effect as of July. The gallery committee, to their credit, immediately began exploring the possibility of finding a new exhibition space.

However, the gallery's closure, so soon after the much-vaunted up-grading and expansion, not only implies organisational and administrative problems at Couch Culture but also points to the continued difficulty of the independent art scene in Tasmania. The state—and Hobart in particular—prides itself on the talent and diversity of its artist/designer/maker community, a group larger, on a pro-rata basis, than in most interstate centres. The Tasmanian School of Art is acknowledged to have some of the best facilities in the world. Yet the necessary support network for the visual arts is full of holes. Small venues open spasmodically and—despite best intentions—soon close. Couch Culture's closure comes hard on the heels of the demise of the only other comparable independent, experimental

arts/cultural venue in Hobart. Lucid Space was a short-lived venture, a multi-purpose meeting place that was just beginning to establish itself with performances, exhibitions, talks and lectures, meetings and classes when it suddenly closed this autumn.

Indeed, since the early 90s there has been in Hobart no permanent professionally-run, contemporary artspace. Whilst the arts community is enthusiastic, if sometimes self-congratulatory, the profile of and support for the arts within the wider community is limited. Whilst Hobart is a capital city, it is hardly a financial nerve centre and corporate involvement in the arts is, at the best of times, considerably less than in sport.

Contemporary Art Services Tasmania (CAST) is the state's only professional, funded arts promotion organisation with a mission to "promote contemporary visual art and crafts...practice throughout Tasmania". It directs funding to developing curatorial projects, assists in touring exhibitions and acts as a networking facility for artists, curators, critics and other arts personnel.

Happily, it has just been announced that, if only as an interim measure, CAST will undertake to provide a home for Couch Culture's exhibition program, allocating the reception area of its offices in Hobart's arts precinct, Salamanca Place. This potentially mutually beneficial arrangement will also go some way to remedy the anomalous situation wherein CAST, Tasmania's peak arts promotion body, currently has no gallery space to operate full-time in its own right.

The new Director of CAST is David O'Halloran. Many observers are hoping that, as well as continuing and consolidating CAST's entrepreneurial and administrative initiatives, the new management will be able to establish a large and permanent gallery space under the auspices of CAST. Certainly the need is becoming ever more urgent.

The winning printout

Fremantle Print Award to be announced, debated and toured

The Fremantle Print Award was initiated by Fremantle Arts Centre in 1976 to encourage the growing number of print artists in Western Australia at the time. Over its 21 year history the number and range of entries and the geographical spread of the artists has expanded such that this year the Centre has taken delivery of more than 400 entries from print artist around Australia, some using traditional techniques, others pushing the print medium towards new definitions. With the support of major sponsor Shell Australia, the acquisitive winner (the work is purchased) will receive \$5,000 and the non-acquisitive winner \$2,500.

Print artist Neil Emerson whose unconventional work explores sexuality and the homoerotic is guest judge. Others are curator John Stringer, artist Eveline Kotai and printmaker Harry Hummerston. Fremantle Arts Centre has a strong commitment to involving their community (artists and general public) in aesthetic questions. Therefore to coincide with the award presentation they'll host a public discussion with all the judges entitled *When Is A Print a Print and Who Says?* As well, a national exhibition tour, *From Silkscreen to Computer Screen*, is scheduled for 1996-97 showcasing works from winners over the past 20 years including David Rose (NSW, 1978), Richard Hook (Tasmania, 1981), Karen Turnbull (QLD, 1987), Helen Ling (SA, 1989) and Bevan Honey (WA) whose winning 1993 entry *Memory and Location* was printed on steel and perspex. The 1996 Shell Fremantle Print Award will honour the 21st winner on opening night of the exhibition at Fremantle Arts Centre on Friday August 30. The exhibition runs until October 6.

Information 09 335 8244.

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Tess Horwitz, MA (Research) 1996, Installation 'Seeding Clouds', plastic, metal, wool wood, paper, variable dimensions, CCAS Gallery 1995

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ANU OPEN DAY, SATURDAY SEPTEMBER 14

Writing up an act

• from page 33

exultation, abandon, surrender. Paul follows suit. Someone in the audience gasps. We hold together. Performer, owl, audience, rapt.

The end comes suddenly when the record moves on to "How Are You?" The audience laughs. We are meant to ignore this bit. But for me it is the moment which encapsulates all. We learn through repetition, through mimicry, we learn by watching others. We become ourselves, human or owl, a collection of habits, movements, gestures. On the basis of these, assumptions are made.

Jimmy asked me for train fare for the following day. I hesitated, then told him no. He said thanks anyway and...by the way, he'd been puzzling over this, "Which finger is the wedding ring worn on?" I held out my hand and pointed, "That one, I think". "Ah, so you're not married then?" "No". He laughed. "Don't worry, I'm not a rapist or a murderer or nothin'." He got out and closed the door. "Thanks for the lift, bub. See ya round."

I drove away, arms rigid on the steering wheel, heart beating fast. Senseless acts of kindness. What a night. I thought of Lear, stripped of artifice and made to see. I'd been kind hadn't I? fearless? open minded? But underneath it...well, Jimmy could tell.

Jane Cousins

Civic Poems, John Mateer

To John Mateer

You stand in the arc of light
pressed in the microphone
Poet in Jewish and English
and Polish and Irish
and Tristan da Cunha and Scottish
and unknown
exile

Unknown?

In the silence
your ancestors stand behind you
fanning out against the black cyclorama
observing you
the audience
the work

The words stick in your throat
you eat them like that devil the dingo
while the hyena stands behind you
lips curled into a snarl of laughter

Civic poems
the word seems curiously arcane
Civic?

So this the space you metered out
the territory you now occupy
while the spectres of
Alan Bond and Ned Kelly
Mudrooroo and Arne Naess
spin
in the desert
of the psyche?

You are and are not
you walk in the line in elevated places
you know the abyss
and it is from here
the voice on the wire sings.

White praise singer
sing your song
Sangoma
dance between
Your voice is sweet
Use your cultural weapons
machete the silence
and let the ancestors
speak

Jenny Silburn

Shorts

• from page 44

club and other deadly and unseen surprises. Young artists are invited to submit proposals for consideration by August 30. Proposal forms are available from **Carclew Youth Arts Centre** Tel 08 267 5111 Fx 08 239 0689

In August Goethe hosts **Sky of the World** at the **Australian Centre for Photography**, a multimedia installation based on photographs of the sky taken on May 8 1995 (the 50th anniversary of VE Day) by German artist **Yvonne Lee Schultz** August 9-31. And composer and performer **Robert Lloyd** presents two concerts at the **Goethe Institut** in Sydney on September 13 and 14. The performances include the world premiere of *Fold* for three keyboards and percussion based on techniques of folding plus the first Sydney performance of *Nullarbor* for three percussionists (Molissa Fenley choreographed a recent work to this piece) and premieres of *Inside is Outside* plus the full ensemble version of *Telling Time by Passing Clouds*, originally written for Open City's performance work *All That Flows*.

"We were outrageous back then. We rebelled against the dreariness of Melbourne in the 1940s. I was a bit hard to miss. If I was out I wore a homburg and carried a silver-topped cane. An Italian tailor made me beautiful suits...I got away with it because I wasn't intimidated. If I'd shown any sign of doubt I would have copped it". (Val) "All us butch girls worked as bread carters in the 50s and 60s. That way we could wear jeans instead of frocks" (Jan). **Forbidden Love: Bold Passion** is an exhibition exploring 90 years of lifestyles and attitudes of lesbian women in Australia. It plays on the image of the closet door, the invisibility of lesbian and gay culture. Curated by **Ruth Ford, Lyn**

Isaac and Rebecca Jones, the project has been developed by History Inverted in conjunction with the Australian **Lesbian and Gay Archives**. Touring regional museums and state libraries in Newcastle, Albury, Melbourne, Hobart then Adelaide, Canberra, Brisbane, Penrith, Sydney and Perth. In every region, local women will have the opportunity to contribute material and stories for a local panel, thus adding to the collection.

The **Song Company** sings in two of Sydney's major galleries during September. On Tuesday September 10 at 6.30 pm, **Sherman Gallery** 1 Hargrave Street Paddington: a capella works by Ton De Leeuw, Andrée Greenwell and Andrew Schultz. Wednesday September 18 6.30 pm **Access Contemporary Art Gallery** 38 Boronia Street Redfern: amplified works by Marcellino, Nuyts, Bright, Wesley-Smith and Witicker. Champagne and canapes Tel 02 9364 9457.

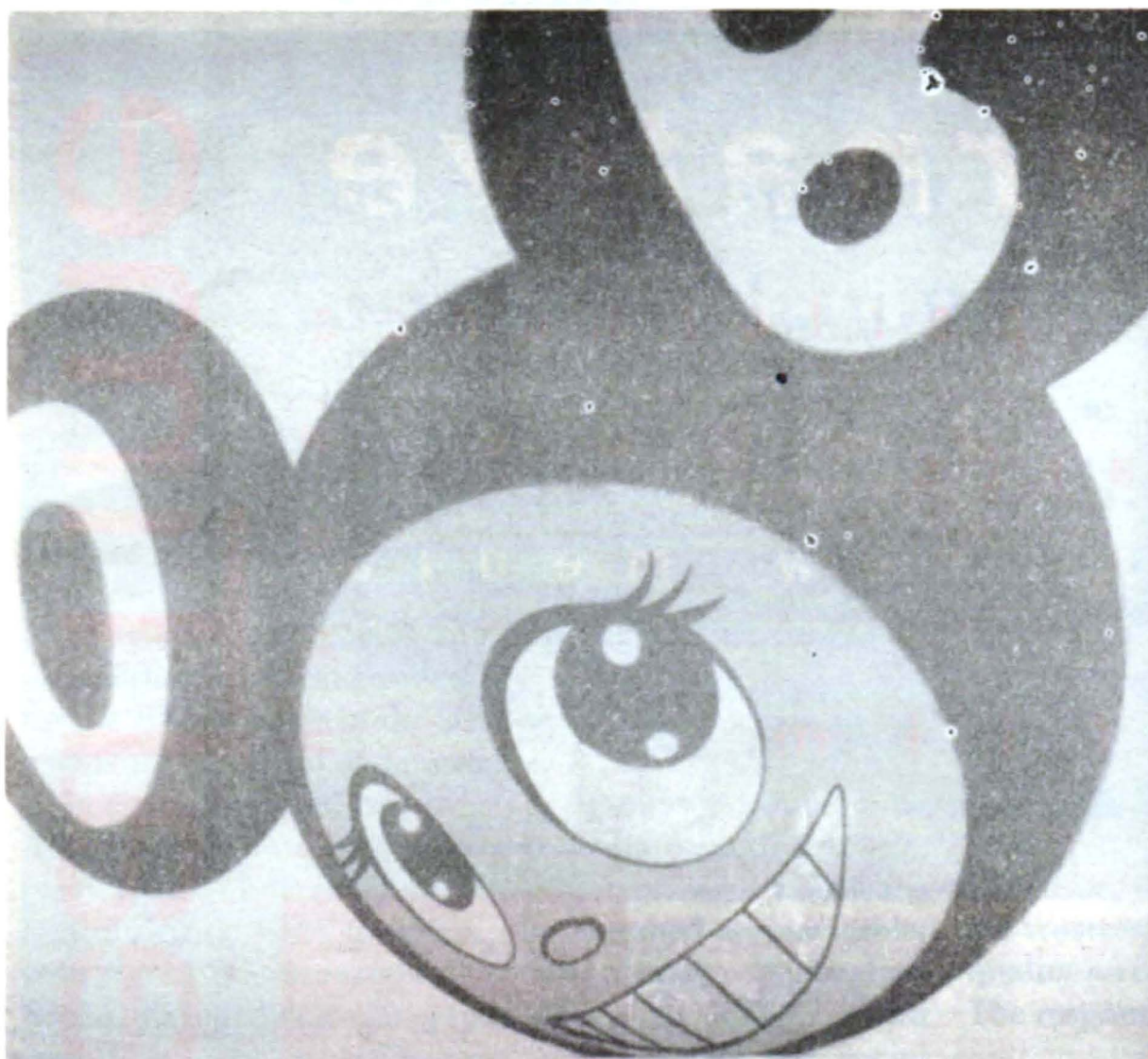
Two Carnivale Events

Rights, Freedom and Survival: It's Our Home Page is an international poster exhibition promoting the struggle for human rights throughout the world. This is Art that is Analogue: Art that is Political. Co-ordinated by **APHEDA**, the overseas aid agency of the Australian Trade Union Movement providing skills training for workers in developing countries.

Downing Centre Showcase Windows, Cnr Liverpool and Elizabeth Streets, Sydney September 7-29 Info 02 9264 9343

Re Affiliations is an exhibition by 8 contemporary women artists exploring their relationships with their mothers and their experiences as migrants. This installation, curated within a domestic setting, reveals the private and personal resonances of family.

Susannah Place, 58-62 Gloucester Street, The Rocks Sydney September 7-29 Info 02 92411893



THE SECOND ASIA-PACIFIC OF CONTEMPORARY ART TRIENNIAL BRISBANE AUSTRALIA 1996

CONFERENCE: PRESENT ENCOUNTERS

27-29 September

Brisbane Convention and Exhibition Centre

Registration enquiries Tel (07) 3875 7916 Fax (07) 3875 7956

ARTISTS' PERFORMANCES

Thursday 26 September - Sunday 29 September
at various times

ARTISTS' TALKS

Friday 27 September - Sunday 29 September
at various times

DRAGON OR RAINBOW SERPENT (FIRE DRAGON)

A gunpowder explosion event by artist Cai Guo Qiang

Saturday 28 September, 5.45pm.

Brisbane River, South Bank Parklands

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Takashi Murakami *And then and then and then and then and then* 1994
Acrylic on canvas 280x300cm

QUEENSLAND ART GALLERY

27 September 1996 - 19 January 1997

Admission Free. Open Daily 10am-5pm. Information (07) 3840 7303

Web address <http://www.slg.qld.gov.au.qag>

Shorts

Who said vinyl is dead?

After a decade of photographing musicians and artists, **Pam Kleemann** has discovered a unique medium on which to imprint the intangible essence of live music performance: recycled vinyl discs. Painting an emulsion of liquid light directly onto the vinyl, the photographic image comes alive in gritty, textured layers. Her exhibition of photo portraits include Manu Dibango, Marianne Faithfull, Jimmy Cliff, Ruby Hunter, Sierra Maestra, Jajek Fashek, Stephen Cummings and many more. At Melbourne's world music store **Blue Moon** 30 Johnston Street Fitzroy until August 21. Tel 03 9419 7327 or 03 9419 8071

National Performance Conference 1-3 November at the **CUB Malthouse Theatre Complex** in Melbourne. Conference includes information sessions as well as classes, workshops and performances. Information Sarah Bartak 03 9686 7166

Publications

Issue 6 of *Siglo* charts the theme *Crossing the Water* with contributions by Greg Denning, Cassandra Pybus, Bea Maddock, Nicolette Stasko, Jane Sloan, Mark O'Flynn, Susan Schultz and Louise Oxley, with images from Peter Dombrovskis, Barbie Kjar and Kim Kerze among others, and a page from the manuscript score of Peter Sculthorpe's latest composition Port Arthur: In Memoriam. Issue 7 *Writing Borders* looks at indigeneity in Australia and North America and features fiction by Barry Lopez and images from IHOS's forthcoming industrial opera *Pulp* which will open at the **Burnie Paper Mill** in September. 002 202 859. Email siglo@tuu.utas.edu.au www.utas.edu.au/docs/siglo

W/Edge promotes cutting edge fiction, poetry and performance writing and texts that creatively engage with the wild poetics of theory or bring us sharp up against new and unexpected re-framing of contemporary culture. Issue 2 of *W/Edge* includes works by Hazel Smith, Pamela Brown, Louise Katz, Belinda Chayko, Jill Farrar, Christine Evans, Kurt Brereton, George Alexander, Tristan Wills, Lew Stanley Rassaby, Lynda Hawryluk, Samantha Miles, designed by Peter Charuk and a team of young visual artists. Information: Sabrina Achilles Tel 02 9665 1655 Fx 02 9665 7596

Photofile 48 Digital Static: New Media Unplugged will be launched August 8 during the opening functions for the ACP's Biennale Satellite exhibitions. In the words of the editors Annemarie Jonson and Jacqueline Millner the issue begins to unravel and critically examine the tangled wires of so much popular and scholarly digitalk surrounding new media practices and theory. Scott McQuire provides an insightful overview of digital media theory in revisiting recent new media conferences; John Potts questions radical utopic constructions around new media; Linda Williams considers artists featured in the current Biennale of Sydney in light of relationships between new media forms, subjectivity and space; and Darren Tofts and Linda Wallace review the recent MCA *Burning the Interface* exhibition teasing out a diverse range of engagements with CD-ROM. Information **Australian Centre for Photography** Tel 02 9332 1455 Fx 02 9331 6887

According to MTC dramaturg **Peter Matheson**, *Life of the Party* by James Higgins is a play that rings a little too strongly of the truth. Serious allegations are made against a government leader; retaliation is extreme; image consultations ruin careers; radio hosts are ruthlessly manipulated to destroy political figures and individuals take advantage of the confusion to further their own ambitions. *Life of the Party* will be staged at the new **Performance Complex, Monash University**, August 24-31. Tel 03 9532 7991

Though we knew it was coming, it is nevertheless sad to realise that **Wolfgang Meisner** is leaving the **Goethe Institut** this month. Wolfgang will be sadly missed by the arts community, especially in Sydney where his support for local artists has been creative and always convivial. His work in encouraging dynamic cultural exchanges between German and Australian artists will be continued by Countess Ute von Baudissin. Wolfgang Meisner will take up a post in Hungary with the Goethe Institut. Farewell Wolfgang.

1st Site, the multi-arts event within the **Australian Festival for Young People** that focuses on premiering new work made, curated, created and driven by people aged 18-26 years. 1st Site 97 (*Unseen and Deadly*), will include performance, writing, spoken word, visual art, installation, fashion, outdoor theatre, physical theatre, cabaret, design, new technology, a

• continued page 43

Sport

TEE OFF

with Vivienne Inch

Artists who probably won't admit it, have swallowed their pride, turned a blind eye to nationalism and schmalz to wallow in Olympics hype with everybody else this month. I did think, seeing the very first Games featured a drama competition with medals for best performances of the classics, that we might see an international display of performers sweating it out in this centenary Olympics. But no. It occurred to me at half time in the beach volleyball one morning that a number of our own performance artists might be well placed to bring art back into the arena with the introduction of some new events for Sydney 2000. Speed Dancing for one. The likes of Chunky Move and Pearlman and Allen could compete against the Frankfurt Ballet and Molissa Fenley. God knows a level of interpretation would be a welcome addition to those peculiar callisthenics displays with ribbons and balls—why not Interpretive Movement? Sydney Dance Company would be strong contenders here. A Performance Marathon would give some of our time-based performers (Nigel Kellaway, Linda Sproul, De Quincey/ Lynch, Jill Orr) a chance to test their skills in the endurance stakes. Gravity Feed could contest the Weight Lifting. Much needed meaning could be added to the Boxing by teams dealing creatively with violence like Legs on the Wall and the *Burn Sonata* crew. In Gymnastics we are crawling with talent—think Circus Oz, Rock n Roll, Club Swing. Prepare for the

vibrations of mass Suzuki stomping as our teams go into training. Watch out for terrorism from the likes of Splinters, disruptive displays from Hot Banana Morgan and Denis Beaubois and some problems should definitely be anticipated in the tetchy area of gender certification in the very athletic and rude gay performance scene already competing internationally.

TOOTH AND CLAW

with Jack Rufus

People keep saying the Olympics is the biggest cultural event in the world—but how can that be? Bizarre sports like trapshoot and shot-putt have zero following; only the braying of jingoistic media generates any enthusiasm at all. No, the biggest cultural event in the world is still two years away: the next soccer World Cup. Which means we have two years to find a replacement for the despised penalty shoot-out after drawn games.

The recent Euro 96 tournament was corroded by shoot-out after shoot-out. Everyone says there must be something better—but what? The best proposal so far is that teams have their numbers reduced—to 9 players, then 7, until a result. This could produce a whole new game, with teams ultimately reduced to one player each. Goalkeeper and striker fused into one, with the whole field to cover: the fans would love it.

If this unsettles the purists, there are other solutions. Players could be made to wear flippers, or stand on one leg. Areas of the field could be turned into quicksand. There are countless ways to increase the degree of difficulty. Blindfolds, stilts, clown shoes—take your pick, and a goal is sure to come.



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